

Freedom of Information Policy

Introduction

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) gives rights of public access to recorded information held by public authorities (such as Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD)). The FOIA is intended to promote a culture of openness and accountability amongst public sector bodies, and therefore facilitate a better understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties; make decisions and spend public money. One way in which the FOIA achieves this is by requiring public authorities to make information about itself and its activities routinely available to the public. The purpose of this guide is to describe the information that HWCD makes routinely available and how to find it.

HWCD has adopted the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) 'Model Publication Scheme'. Under the scheme, HWCD is committed to:

- Proactively publish, or otherwise make available as a matter of routine, information that falls within the 'classes of information', sections 1 – 7 (see below)
- Specify the information that it holds, and which falls within those 'classes of information'
- Publish guidance on how this information is made available, so that it can be easily identified and accessed by members of the public
- Review and update, on a regular basis, the types of information it makes available
- Publish information on any fees that may be charged for this information, and
- Make this publication scheme available to the public

Publication of Information

Healthwatch County Durham uses its website as the principal means of disseminating information about itself and its activities. In most cases, this information can be located using the 'search' facility on the site. A guide to the 'classes of information' that we routinely publish is included in sections 1 - 7.

Information falling into the following categories will not, generally, be made routinely available:

- Information in draft form

- Information which would be impractical or resource intensive to prepare for routine release
- Information which is no longer readily available because it is archived or its retrieval would be difficult, impractical or resource intensive to prepare for routine release
- Information whose release is prohibited by law, or exempt under the FOIA or is otherwise considered to be protected from disclosure.

Making a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

If the information you need is not in the publication scheme you can also contact us to request information under the FOI Act. Please email your requests to healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net. You can also write to

Healthwatch County Durham
Whitfield House
St Johns Road
Meadowfield Industrial Estate
Durham
DH7 8XL

We will usually respond to your request within 20 working days following receipt of your request. However, this deadline may be extended if we need to seek clarification of your request from you, or if (in very rare circumstances) we need to consider complex issues of public interest in deciding whether to provide certain information. We will tell you if we need to extend the deadline and will explain the reason why.

Some information might be exempt from disclosure under FOI; however we will usually tell you if we are withholding information. We will also explain why we consider that it is appropriate to apply the exemption. In some cases, the FOI Act allows us to refuse to confirm or deny holding certain information.

For example, we can use exemptions under FOI to refuse to disclose confidential personal information, or to refuse to make disclosures that would make it difficult for us to carry out our regulatory role.

We may need to consult with other people or organisations before providing you with requested information. This usually happens where you have requested information that was provided to HWCD by another organisation.

Unhappy with our response?

If you are unhappy with the response you received from us relating to your FOIA request please let us know, giving your reasons. We will respond to you in writing.

If you remain dissatisfied following your appeal, you can contact the Information Commissioner at the address below:

The Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Tel: 01625 545 745

Classes of Information

We routinely publish information within the following classifications:

1. Who we are and what we do

Information about what Healthwatch is, how we work, how we are set up, board members and staff members is available on our About us page.

Information about our location and contact details is available on our Contact page.

Information about what we do is available on our What we do and Enter & View pages.

2. What we spend and how we spend it

This information will become available from now on at quarterly Board meetings held in public. The Board meeting minutes are available on our Documents page.

3. What are our priorities and how are we doing

The forward plans will be publically available at the first public Board meeting of the new financial year and subsequently in the Board papers available on our Documents page.

4. How we make decisions

Our Decision Making Procedure is available on our Documents page.

Minutes from our public Board meetings are published on our Documents page.

Terms of reference for all subcommittees of the HWCD Board are also available on our Documents page.

We publish information about our public consultations on our Consultations & surveys page.

5. Our policies and procedures

Current written protocols, policies and procedures for delivering our services and responsibilities are published on our Documents page.

6. Lists and registers

Information we are currently required to hold in publicly available registers. Names of our Enter & View Authorised Representatives are available on our Enter & View page.

7. The services we offer

Information about services we offer is available on our What we do and Enter & View pages.

Keeping this Publication Scheme up to date

The Information Officer is responsible for ensuring that this Publication Scheme is kept up to date.

The Publication Scheme will be reviewed annually, or whenever there is a significant change to the way we work, the types of information we publish, or the way in which we make that information available.