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NHS South East London Integrated Care Board

Public Information Access and Re-Use (including Freedom of Information Act) Policy (CG11) v1.1

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1.0 Introduction

Policy statement and aim

NHS South East London Integrated Care Board (hereafter referred to as 'SEL ICB') is committed to openness and transparency in the conduct of all of its business. It has a duty to comply with all aspects of the following legislation;

- Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI(A)). The FOIA deals with access to recorded information held by public bodies, primarily corporate information.
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). EIR provides access to environmental information. These are similar to the FOIA but have subtle legal differences as detailed in this policy.
- The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 (POF(A)) introduced requirements relating to the proactive publication and availability of data sets.
- The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 (RPSI(R)). RPSIR is about permitting re-use of information and how it is made available. It is not about accessing information, which is dealt with under the FOIA and EIR.

The FOIA, EIR, POFA, and RPSIR are also referred to hereafter as information access and reuse legislation.

Information access legislation supplements and complements the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation, hereafter referred to as data protection legislation, which gives individuals access to their personal information held by organisations. For further information about access to personal data or health records please see information management policy.

Information access legislation gives access to all other information (non-personal data) and as such has a broader remit than data protection legislation. However, together data protection legislation and information access legislation will enable public access to most records held by SEL ICB.

Information access legislation states that any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled to:

- Be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request; and
- If that is the case, to have that information communicated to them within 20 working days.

Re-use means using public sector information for a purpose other than the initial public task it was produced for.

Typically, this would mean an individual, a company or other organisation taking information you have produced and republishing it or using it to produce a new product or resource, often by combining it with additional information. This is sometimes, though not always, on a commercial basis. RPSI is intended to encourage re-use of public sector information.

Information access and re-use legislation also specifies a number of exemptions or exceptions (see Appendix 2) which can be claimed by public authorities when denying a request. These fall into two main types: Absolute and Qualified. Qualified exemptions are subject to the Public Interest Test, whereas absolute exemptions are not.

The objective of this policy is to set out the main features of information access legislation, along with the responsibilities of departments and individuals to ensure SEL ICB deals with requests for information within statutory obligations and guidelines, in a consistent manner and which deliver quality responses.

The aim of this policy is to:

- Ensure all information access and re-use requests are dealt with consistently and receive a high-quality response, however and wherever the contact is made;
- Ensure that NHS SEL ICB complies with all relevant regulations, laws and guidance;
- Provide clear routes for members of the public to make contact with SEL ICB so that they can appropriately request information;
- Ensure the SEL ICB 'Publication Scheme' is up to date in order to provide access to information and to lessen the number of written requests the public have to make;
- Ensure that the necessary internal structures are in place for information access and re-use legislation to be complied with;
- Ensure staff at all levels are aware of their responsibilities;
- Ensure statutory timescales are met; and
- Ensure the Board of SEL ICB is fully informed on the operation of this policy and its implications for the organisation.

Principles

The policy supports the principle that openness and not secrecy should be the norm in public life. SEL ICB also believes that people have rights to privacy and confidentiality. This policy will not overturn existing rights under common law, or data protection legislation. SEL ICB also considers that, to discharge its function effectively, specific information will be exempt from disclosure.

SEL ICB recognises the importance of information access legislation and, in order to assist organisational compliance with these requirements, SEL ICB will endeavour to ensure that information is available on request within 20 working days.

If the information requested is subject to a qualified exemption, SEL ICB will undertake the public interest test and where applicable, the prejudice test as defined by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to determine whether the information can be released.

Scope

This policy applies to SEL ICB's statutory obligation under the information access legislation and how it meets these obligations. The policy will apply to all SEL ICB staff and those for whom the SEL ICB has legal responsibility (including interim, agency and consultancy staff working for SEL ICB). For those staff covered by a letter of authority/honorary contract or work experience, the organisation's policies are also applicable while undertaking duties for or on behalf of SEL ICB.

Furthermore, this policy applies to all third parties and others authorised to undertake work on behalf of SEL ICB. The policy will provide a framework within which the organisation will ensure compliance with the requirements of all information access legislation. The policy will underpin any operational procedures and activities connected with the implementation of information access and re-use legislation.

This policy covers all information and records created in the course of the business by SEL ICB while undertaking its public task, i.e. corporate documents which are also public records under the terms of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967. This includes drafts, emails, notes, recordings of telephone conversations and CCTV recordings and other electronic and paper records. It is not limited to information SEL ICB creates, so it also covers, for example, letters received from members of the public or other organisations, although there may be a good reason not to release them.

Equality

NHS South East London ICB is committed to equality of opportunity for its employees and members and does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of their 'protected characteristics' as defined by the [Equality Act 2010](#) – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Additionally, our organisation also focuses on digital inclusion, carers, and socio-economic status/deprivation to address broader equality concerns.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for this policy (Appendix 4). If members or employees have any concerns or issues with the contents of this policy or have difficulty understanding how this policy relates to their role, they are advised to contact the Associate Director of Corporate Operations.

2.0 Governance

Roles and Responsibilities

Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

The Chief Executive Officer has overall responsibility for SEL ICB's information access programme and ensuring that this operates effectively. They are also SEL ICB's appropriate 'qualified person' for the application of section 36 (effective conduct of public affairs) exemption.

Chief of Staff (CoS)

The Chief of Staff is the policy owner and responsible for the information access strategy within SEL ICB and will liaise with other senior members of SEL ICB as required.

Directors

The Directors of SEL ICB are responsible for overseeing information access activities within their directorates/teams, in accordance with SEL ICB's information access policies and procedures and advising the Chief of Staff on risk issues in relation to information access requests.

Director of Corporate Operations

The Director of Corporate Operations has strategic oversight and accountability for the management of the FOI service. They are responsible for advising on complex or contentious requests and conducting internal reviews in line with ICO guidance and best practice.

Head of Complaints and Patient Experience

The Head of Complaints and Patient Experience has line management responsibility for the management of all aspects relating to the information access legislation.

FOI Officer

The FOI Officer is the point of contact for SEL ICB staff who have been designated responsibility for providing information in response to a request which has been received. They are SEL ICB's point of contact with applicants in relation to information access requests.

Managers

All managers are to ensure that the staff they are responsible for are both aware of and adhere to the policy. They are also responsible for ensuring that all staff are updated with regards to any changes in the policy.

All Staff

All staff are responsible for familiarising themselves periodically with the latest version and for complying with policy requirements at all times. All staff across SEL ICB have a responsibility to ensure they comply with SEL ICB's statutory obligation under information access and re-use legislation, and any policies and procedures laid down to ensure compliance. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. Staff are not to correspond directly with applicants regarding their request.

Information Governance Sub-Committee (IGSC)

The Information Governance Sub-Committee is responsible for reviewing all aspects of information access and reporting any associated risks to the ICB Board, via Executive Committee

Information Access and Re-use Requests

For a request to be valid under the Freedom of Information Act it must be in writing, but applicants do not have to mention any enactment or direct their request to a designated member of staff. SEL ICB staff cannot ignore or refuse a request simply because it is addressed to any member of staff other than the FOI Team. Any letter or email to SEL ICB asking for information is a request for recorded information under the Act.

However, not every enquiry will be treated formally as a request under the Act. It will often be most sensible and provide better customer service to deal with it as a normal customer enquiry, for example, if a member of the public wants to know how to make a complaint or when the next meeting in public of the ICB is expected to occur. The provisions of the Act need to come into force only if:

- you cannot provide the requested information straight away;
- there are concerns over the release of the information; or
- the applicant makes it clear that they expect a response under the Act.

At the same time, an individual asking for information and saying “this is not an FOI request” does not mean that it is not. If any doubt exists over whether a question is an information access request under statutory legislation, the FOI Team should be contacted immediately via the dedicated email address foi@selondonics.nhs.uk for advice on the best course of action.

Requests from individuals for details of their own health records come under data protection legislation and should not be dealt with under this policy. Information on how these types of requests should be handled is included in the SEL ICB Information Governance policy and Subject Access Request procedure. However, if an applicant has specifically said that they want personal information under the FOIA, the request must still be forwarded to the FOI Team to log and respond, exempting the information in most situations.

Under the FOIA, requests can be received in writing via email, fax, social media or a letter. FOI requests must contain a contact name, email address or postal address and describe the information the applicant wishes to receive. They do not have to provide a reason for wanting the information or specifically state they are requesting information under the Act. SEL ICB will make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 where an applicant is unable to make a request in writing. It should be noted that SEL ICB no longer has fax facilities to receive an FOI by this means.

The EIR regulations have the same requirements as the FOIA, however it does permit requests to be received verbally.

The RPSIR requires that people who want to make a request for re-use must submit the request in writing, with their name and address for correspondence, and specify the information they want to re-use and the purpose they intend to use it for.

Requests for information or re-use should be promptly forwarded to the FOI team at foi@selondonics.nhs.uk.

The SEL ICB FOI team will manage all requests for information submitted under information access and re-use legislation and comply with other legal requirements such as data protection legislation.

SEL ICB has a requirement to comply with all requests for information except where information requested is subject to certain regulations and exemptions. These exemptions will be applied by the FOI Team. Repeated or vexatious requests may also be refused. Further details on exemptions can be found in Appendix 2.

Publication Scheme

SEL ICB has a duty under the FOIA to adopt and maintain the ICO model publication scheme to assist the public in finding information already published.

The scheme sets out SEL ICB's commitment to make certain classes of information routinely available, such as policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, annual reports and financial information. The seven classes of information SEL ICB publish are broad and include headings like 'Who we are and what we do' and 'The services we offer'. The classes cover all the more formal types of information SEL ICB holds, such as information about the structure of the organisation, minutes of meetings, contracts, reports, plan.

[The publication scheme can be found on SEL ICB's website](#) (hyperlink).

Timescales for Responding to Requests

In line with good practice, all information access and re-use requests will be acknowledged by the FOI team and where possible, this will be done within two working days.

SEL ICB has a statutory requirement to respond to all requests promptly and no later than 20 working days. The 20 days start on the day SEL ICB receives a request, not when the FOI team receives the request.

If SEL ICB requires clarification of a request in order to locate or identify the information, or if a fee for the information is applicable, the 20-day rule is suspended until SEL ICB receive the clarification or fee.

SEL ICB nominated FOI leads (experts within SEL ICB who will answer questions for their subject area) must respond to all requests for information from the FOI team

within 10 working days to ensure adequate time for any queries to be resolved and for the approval process to be completed where applicable. Where the FOI team have a concern that information will not be provided in time to avoid a breach, they should flag this with the SEL ICB's AD for Corporate Operations for internal escalation.

Internal Reviews (Complaints)

Although a public body is not legally required to have an internal review procedure, FOIA Section 45 Code of Practice makes clear that it is good practice to have a review procedure in place. The internal review procedure will ensure applicants are able to ask SEL ICB for an internal review if they are dissatisfied with the response to a request or the handling of a request. SEL ICB will conduct internal reviews where an applicant has expressed their dissatisfaction with a response received to an information access or re-use request. SEL ICB has a formal complaints policy in place which details the process for dealing with any external complaint received. The process detailed below is specifically in relation to complaints received concerning the processing or outcome of an FOI request but is consistent with SEL ICB overarching complaints process.

Where possible, internal reviews will be conducted by a person who was not party to the original decision on whether to release the information requested. The review must be a fair and impartial examination of the decisions made during the original request of whether to release the information.

The person conducting the review must consider the information released against the information requested and undertake a full review of the papers associated with the original application.

It is best practice that the internal reviewer discusses the decisions made with the staff member, or members, who dealt with the original application in order to build a full picture as to how decisions were made.

The circumstances relating to the original decision may have changed between the time SEL ICB made its decision about a request and the time it undertakes an internal review. The ICO guidance states that public bodies should reconsider the exemption and the public interest test on the basis of the circumstances as they existed at the time of the request, or at least within the agreed time frames. The FOIA does not stipulate a time limit for completion of an internal review but the Section 45 Code states that they should be dealt with in a reasonable time, and the ICO recommends that:

- Reviews should be completed within 20 working days of receiving the complaint;
- For complex complaints, or where it is necessary to reconsider the public interest test – reviews should be completed within 40 working days of receipt; and
- If it appears that the deadline will not be met, then the applicant must be advised as soon as possible, and a second deadline set by which a response will be sent.

The internal review can have three outcomes:

- The original decision is reversed;
- The original decision is partially upheld; or
- The original decision is upheld.

Where the original decision is reversed the applicant must be told and made aware of when they can expect the information originally requested to be provided. Where the original decision is upheld the applicant must be informed and made aware of their further right of appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office. The outcome of the internal review must be recorded.

Requests for an internal review should be sent to –

Email: foi@selondonics.nhs.uk
Post: FOI Team
160 Tooley Street
London
SE1 2TZ

The Appropriate Limit (Fees)

The Fees Regulations (Section 12) of the FOIA provides an exemption from SEL ICB's obligation to comply with a request for information where the cost of compliance is estimated to exceed the appropriate limit. The Fees Regulations state this is £450 for SEL ICB's as a public authority. SEL ICB must still confirm or deny whether SEL ICB holds the information requested, unless the cost of this alone would exceed the appropriate limit.

In estimating whether responding to a request would exceed the appropriate limit, SEL ICB may only consider the costs it would reasonably expect to incur in:

- Determining whether the information is held;
- Locating the information;
- Retrieving the information; and
- Extracting the information.

Costs are calculated at £25 per hour per person. The Information Commissioners Office guidance clarifies that the measure of limitation is a cost of £450 or more to SEL ICB; therefore, based on the hourly rate this equates to 18 hours of activity. The figure of £450 relates only to the appropriate limit and not to the fees that may be charged.

Where a reasonable estimate has been made that the appropriate limit may be exceeded, there is no requirement for SEL ICB to undertake work up to the limit. However, the applicant will be invited to resubmit a request which requires a more limited response if they wish, which will come below the cost/time limit.

SEL ICB will not charge for the majority of requests, however SEL ICB is entitled to charge a fee for the photocopying and postage of information, although the charge will not be made if the cost of raising and processing an invoice is greater. If the request exceeds the appropriate time limit SEL ICB have the right to make a charge or refuse the request.

Advice and Assistance to Applicants or Potential Applicants

SEL ICB, via the FOI team, will always endeavour to provide advice and assistance in all aspects of a request but particularly:

- To clarify unclear requests;
- To provide the information requested in an acceptable format;
- To narrow responses which exceed the appropriate limit;
- Where information is readily accessible to the applicant; and
- When a request is transferred to another public authority because the information is held by it, and not by us.

Vexatious/Repeated Requests

SEL ICB will not comply with a request for information if the request is deemed vexatious. A vexatious request is where one or more of the following conditions are met:

- Abusive or aggressive language;
- Burden on the Authority;
- Personal grudges;
- Unreasonable persistence;
- Unfounded accusations;
- Intransigence;
- Frequent or overlapping requests;
- Deliberate intention to cause annoyance;
- Scattergun approach;
- Disproportionate effort;
- No obvious intent to obtain information;
- Futile requests; and/or
- Frivolous requests.

For a request to be deemed vexatious, the Chief of Staff and the Director of Corporate Operations must agree that one or more of the above conditions have been met. The handling of vexatious complainants is covered in more detail in SEL ICB's Complaints policy and persistent and unreasonable contacts policy and procedure.

Where SEL ICB has previously complied with a request for information which was made by any person, it is not obliged to comply with a subsequent identical or substantially similar request from that person unless a reasonable interval has

elapsed between compliance with the previous request and the making of the current request.

What is a reasonable interval will largely depend on the circumstances, including:

- How likely the information is to change;
- How often records are updated; and
- Any advice previously given to the requester (e.g. on when new information is likely to be available).

Taking into account the circumstances given above, SEL ICB deems this period to be three months.

Applying Exemptions

An applicant may ask for any information that is held by SEL ICB. However, this does not mean SEL ICB is always obliged to provide the information. In some cases, there will be a good reason why SEL ICB should not make public some or all of the information requested.

The FOIA and EIR contain a number of exemptions and exceptions that allow SEL ICB to withhold information from an applicant. Details of these exemptions can be found in Appendix 2.

Please note that if an exemption or redaction is used, the manager using the exemption should be aware that they may need to substantiate their decision if challenged by the Information Commissioner's Office. It is therefore advisable to document and date all decisions made in relation to using exemptions.

Redacting

Where information is considered exempt under any one or more exemptions or exceptions, SEL ICB employees should redact this information in line with the ICO's guidance, how to disclose information safely¹. Guidance on redacting documents is available on SEL ICB's staff intranet under the Information Governance section. Advice can also be sought from SEL ICB data protection officer or information governance officers. The need to redact information suggests this may be sensitive or personal information, so this process must be carried out with reference to information governance guidelines and staff must ensure they only have access to information to which they are permitted.

Audit and monitoring criteria

Monitoring of compliance

The Executive Committee will annually evaluate the effectiveness of the Freedom of Information process. This review mechanism will be supported by:

- The Data Security and Protection Toolkit annual submissions;
- Quarterly reports on information requests received;

- Information access and re-use complaints; and
- Audits and reviews.

Implementation and dissemination of document

This policy will be available to staff via SEL ICB's intranet.

Review

Review of this policy will take place on the first anniversary of adoption and subsequently every three years until rescinded or superseded.

Latest Version

The audience of this document should be aware that a physical copy may not be the latest version. The latest version, which supersedes all previous versions, is available at the location indicated in the document control section.

Public interest test

The public interest test assesses whether withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The starting point whenever considering the balance of the public interest is that there is a general public interest in disclosure. In contrast, there is no general public interest in public authorities withholding information. However, the right to access information must be balanced against the need to facilitate effective government and public services. Therefore, for each qualified exemption, and the disclosure of any particular piece of information falling within it, there may be specific reasons in favour of refusing the request.

When considering a request for information that falls under one of the qualified exemptions, SEL ICB must weigh the public interest considerations in favour of releasing the information against the prejudice which may be caused by its disclosure.

The requirements of the public procurement regime also need to be taken into account in relation to the possible disclosure of information. The EC Public Procurement Directives, implemented in the Public Works Contracts Regulations 1991, the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993 and the Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995, recognise that the interest of suppliers in sensitive information supplied by them in a procurement must be respected and that both the interest of suppliers and the public interest may mean that certain information relating to a contract award is withheld from publication.

The Consolidated Public Procurement Directive (2004/18/EC) continues to recognise these interests and prohibits the disclosure of information, which suppliers have designated as confidential in a procurement, except as provided by the Directive and by national law.

Each individual case will need to be considered on its own merits. In more difficult cases there is likely to be a complex mix of conflicting factors that will have to be weighed in deciding where the balance of the public interest lies. It is therefore vital that where a decision is taken to withhold information, there are clear reasons for refusing to disclose information, which is capable of standing up to scrutiny by the Information Commissioner and Information Tribunal. Determining the balance of the public interest will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis and may, in difficult cases, require legal advice.

Re-use regulations and copyright

Publishing information or issuing copies may be subject to the provisions of the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 and requires permission of SEL ICB and may also incur a fee. Release of information under information access legislation does not affect copyright.

If there are concerns about information reaching a wider audience without sufficient briefing relating to the circumstances surrounding its production or context. The SEL ICB FOI Team will be able to advise on the restriction for re-use to the applicant, so it cannot be re-used or reproduced in any format without the consent of SEL ICB. Under information access legislation, a response to a single applicant is not a release to a specific person but considered to be a disclosure to the world at large.

Information supplied under information access legislation continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (CDPA) 1988. The supply of information in response to an information access request does not confer an automatic right to re-use of the information. Under UK copyright law applicants can use any information supplied for the purposes of private study and non-commercial research without requiring permission. Similarly, information supplied can also be re-used for the purposes of news reporting, an exception to this is photographs.

If the copyright is identified as belonging to another organisation, SEL ICB will not permit re-use.

Protection of Freedoms Act 2012

Section 102 of the Protections of Freedoms Act 2012 adds new provisions to FOI regarding datasets. They are about the re-use of datasets that SEL ICB provides in response to a request, or under a publication scheme. There is no new duty to provide any information in response to an FOI or EIR request that was not previously accessible.

A dataset is a collection of factual information in electronic form to do with the services and functions of public authorities that is neither the product of analysis or interpretation, nor an official statistic and has not been materially altered.

If SEL ICB provides information that constitutes a dataset and the applicant expresses a preference to receive the information in electronic form, SEL ICB must provide the information in a re-usable form.

If the dataset is relevant copyright work, SEL ICB must provide it under the terms of a specified licence. A relevant copyright work is one for which SEL ICB owns the copyright and the database rights.

SEL ICB may charge a fee for communicating the information and a fee for making the dataset available for re-use. There are new fees regulations dealing with making the dataset available for re-use.

Where information is not provided due to an exemption, exception or other lawful reason, SEL ICB are not required to provide this in a re-usable format.

Under the publication scheme, SEL ICB is obliged to publish datasets that have been requested and any updated versions it holds unless it is satisfied that it is not appropriate to do so.

When dealing with a request involving a dataset, SEL ICB should first consider whether the information is exempt from disclosure under any FOI exemption. Particular care should be taken to ensure that personal data is not disclosed. The ICO's *Anonymisation: managing data protection risk code of practice*¹ must be followed.

¹ <https://ico.org.uk/media/1061/anonymisation-code.pdf>

References

[General Data Protection Regulation](#) (Hyperlink)

[Data Protection Act 2018](#) (Hyperlink)

[Freedom of Information Act 2000](#) (Hyperlink)

[The Environmental Information Regulations 2004](#) (Hyperlink)

[The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015](#) (Hyperlink)

[Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988](#) (Hyperlink)

[Anonymisation: Managing Data Protection Risk Code of Practice](#) (Hyperlink, PDF)

[Records Management Code of Practice for Health and Social Care 2016](#) (Hyperlink)

[The Freedom of Information and Data Protection \(Appropriate Limit and Fees\) Regulations 2004](#) (Hyperlink)

<https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/how-to-disclose-information-safely-removing-personal-data-from-information-requests-and-datasets/2013958/how-to-disclose-information-safely.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Process

FOI, EIR and RPSIR Request Procedure

1. All new information requests received by staff of SEL ICB must be sent to the FOI Team immediately. The FOI Team will log each request on the database. The FOI team will allocate a unique reference number and create electronic folders for each request.
2. All applicants will be sent a standard FOI acknowledgment, where possible within two working days of receipt of a request.
3. All information requests received will be assessed to ascertain whether:
 - It is a valid FOI, EIR or RPSIR request;
 - The request is clear, if not, the applicant will be asked to clarify their request;
 - The estimate of time needed to comply with the request will exceed the appropriate time limit, if this is the case, the applicant will be asked if they wish to redefine their request;
 - Part or all of the information requested falls under one of the exemptions or exceptions contained within the FOIA or EIR;
 - The information requested can be found on the SEL ICB publication scheme or website; and/or
 - The information has been requested previously.
4. Once the request has been assessed, it will be sent to the appropriate service lead at the relevant department to gather the information requested. The name of the applicant and their contact details will be removed prior to sending to ensure that the applicant's personal data is protected under the data protection legislation. In some cases, it will be necessary for these details to be disclosed to staff outside of the FOI department where specific exemptions or exceptions apply, for example where a request is vexatious.
5. SEL ICB staff will acknowledge to the FOI team that they have received the request. If the request is not relevant to their area or not for their team, they will notify the FOI Team immediately and advise this.
6. All media requests, and requests that have a potential reputational impact on SEL ICB will be notified to the Director of Communications and Engagement or Associate Director of Communications.
7. SEL ICB staff will have 10 working days in which to comply with requests for information from the FOI team. A reminder will be sent to staff by the FOI team if the information is not received back by the 10th working day.

8. It is the responsibility of the service leads to ensure that the director of the department has cleared the response before returning the information to the FOI Team within the time limit of 10 working days. This is to allow time for queries, amendments and the drafting of the response by the FOI Team and for the approval process to be completed.
9. The service lead is responsible for identifying any concerns over the release of information, and where required, seek advice from the FOI team.
10. Once the information has been returned to the FOI staff, it will be considered against the original request and where applicable, exemptions and/or exceptions may be considered. Providing the information has been agreed by the service director or the Chief Executive Officer where applicable, the FOI staff will use the data provided to write a response.
11. All final responses must be provided within 20 working days. If this isn't possible, and before the deadline expires, a further communication must be sent to the applicant by the FOI team advising of this, along with an expected response date.
12. The FOI Database must be updated when a request is completed. Electronic responses are filed in the applicant's file within the FOI team's folder for compliance and audit purposes. Paper copies will be scanned into the system.
13. Case files will be held in line with the NHS Retention Schedule.³

³ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/looking-after-information/data-security-and-information-governance/codes-of-practice-for-handling-information-in-health-and-care/records-management-code-of-practice-for-health-and-social-care-2016>

Appendix 2: FOI Exemptions

Although SEL ICB will try to comply with all requests for information, there are a number of exemptions and provisions within the Act that can be considered. The exemptions are split into two main categories:

Absolute Exemptions - where the public interest test does not apply.

- S21 - Information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means
- S23 - Information supplied by or relating to security bodies
- S32 - Information contained in court records
- S34 - Parliamentary privilege
- S36 - Effective conduct of public affairs (absolute for the government only)
- S40 - Personal information (on occasion may also be a qualified exemption)
- S41 - Information provided in confidence
- S44 - Prohibitions on disclosure

Qualified Exemptions - where the public interest test applies.

- S22 - Information intended for future publication
- S24 - The national security exemption
- S26 - Defence
- S27 - International relations
- S28 - Relations within the UK
- S29 - Economy
- S30 - Investigations
- S31 - Law enforcement
- S33 - Public audit
- S35 - Government policy formulation
- S36 - Effective conduct of public affairs
- S37 - Communication with Her Majesty and the awarding of honours
- S39 - Environmental information (falls under EIR)
- S40 - Personal information (majority would fall under an absolute exemption)
- S42 - Legal professional privilege
- S43 - Defined areas of commercial interest

In addition, the following provisions allow SEL ICB not to comply with a request for information:

- S12 - Where the cost of collating the evidence is excessive
- S14 - Repeated or vexatious requests

Appendix 3: Definitions

‘A legitimate request’ In order for a request to fall under the auspices of the FOIA or RPSIR it must fulfil certain criteria: it must be in writing (letter, email, fax) or under EIR be verbal; it must state the name of the applicant and provide an address for correspondence (an email address is sufficient); and, it must describe the information requested. Note, a request does not need to mention the FOIA, EIR or RPSIR in order to be classed as a legitimate request. In addition to the above, a request for re-use must include how they intend to use the information.

‘Advice and assistance’ Section 16 of the FOIA requires that all public authorities provide advice and assistance, so far as it would be reasonable to expect the authority to do so, to persons who propose to make, or have made, requests for information to it.

The provision of advice and assistance can be seen as the means by which SEL ICB engages with the applicant in order to establish what it is that the applicant wants and, where possible, assists them in obtaining this, maintaining a dialogue with the applicant throughout the process.

‘Business as usual’ Routine requests for information that can be provided without question and do not fall under information access legislation, for example: recruitment brochures, press releases, leaflets.

‘DPA’ is an acronym for the Data Protection Act 2018.

‘Data Protection Act 2018’ The Data Protection Act updates our data protection laws for the digital age. It received Royal Assent on 23 May 2018.

‘Duty to confirm or deny’ under Section 1 of the FOIA public authorities have a duty to inform the person requesting information (“the applicant”) whether or not the information they have requested is held by the authority. (In some cases, however it may be appropriate (under the FOIA) to neither confirm nor deny whether the information is held because to do so would itself communicate sensitive and potentially damaging information, to the detriment of the public good).

‘Effective Conduct of Public Affairs’ Section 36 of the FOIA sets out an exemption from the right to know if the disclosure of information, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person, would prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs through:

- Prejudice or likely prejudice to the maintenance of the convention of collective responsibility of Ministers of the Crown, the work of the Executive Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly or the work of the executive committee of the National Assembly for Wales;
- Inhibition or likely inhibition of the free and frank provision of advice or exchange of views; or
- Any other prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs

For information (other than ‘statistical information’) to be exempt under Section 36, it must in the ‘reasonable opinion of a qualified person’ (in our organisation this person

is the Senior Information Risk Officer) be capable of either prejudicing or inhibiting the matters listed above.

‘EIR’ is an acronym for the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. These regulations are similar to FOIA, but specifically relate to information held by public authorities that relates to the state of the environment.

‘Exemption’ These are provisions within the FOIA that define particular types of information that public bodies are not obliged to disclose. Exemptions can be either absolute or qualified.

‘FOI’ is an acronym for Freedom of Information.

‘FOIA’ is an acronym for the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

‘ICO’ is an acronym for the Information Commissioner’s Office. This is the UK’s independent authority set up to promote access to official information and to protect personal information. The ICO covers Data Protection, FOI, Privacy and Electronic Communications, Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations, and the Environmental Information Regulations.

‘Information’ means any recorded information we hold in any form. This includes documents, plans, and all other types of recorded information that are not personal information.

Individuals can ask to see any information we hold but the FOIA does exclude access to some information. (One of the exemptions is access to personal information).

‘POFA’ is an acronym for The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. This has requirements relating to the proactive publication and availability of data sets.

‘Publication Scheme’ SEL ICB has a legal duty to compile and to make available a list of documents that it has in its possession and that it will routinely and proactively provide to the public. A Publication Scheme is an agreement by SEL ICB to supply this information.

‘Public Interest Test’ The test a public body must apply if it feels the information requested falls under a qualified exemption.

‘Records Management’ Section 46 of the FOIA refers to the Code of Practice on Records Management and it is Part 1 of this code that SEL ICB must comply with, by implementing records management policies. The SEL ICB Records Management Policy is available on the staff intranet.

‘RPSIR’ is an acronym for The Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015. RPSIR is about permitting re-use of information and how it is made available. It is not about accessing information, which is dealt with under the FOIA and EIR.

Appendix 4

Equality Impact Assessment: Screening Form

1. Please fill in the requested information below. For each question (1-5), refer to the definitions of "likelihood" and "consequence" provided on the next page. In the columns provided (below), note down the terms such as "likely" (for likelihood) or "medium impact" (for consequence). This will help you decide the overall category for the likelihood and consequence. Please review the tables below prior to starting your Equality Impact Assessment form.
2. At the end, you'll need to determine the overall likelihood and consequence. Multiply these together (likelihood x consequence) to get a score. This score will show whether you need to complete a full Equality Impact Assessment form.
3. The overall score in the table below is not a total of all the individual points. Instead, you should decide on an overall rating for both the likelihood and consequence. For example, likelihood could be "likely (4)", and consequence could be "medium impact (4)."
4. To decide if you only need to complete this screening form or a full Equality Impact Assessment, use the overall score. For instance, if the score is 4 (likelihood) x 4 (consequence) = 16, this score is in the red zone, meaning a Full Equality Impact Assessment is required.
5. For each question, please take into consideration how significant the impact will be on the service user/workforce/organisation or the organisation.
6. Please note: The term "project" includes Policies, Practices, Strategies, Plans, Planning, Commissioning, Procurement, Service Provision/Delivery, Decommission Services/Phasing out Policies, and Frameworks and Training.

The following protected characteristics need to be considered for any negative impacts:

Protected Characteristics		
Age	Pregnancy/Maternity	Marriage/Civil Partnership (employment only)
Disability	Race	Socio-economic / Deprivation
Sex	Religion/Belief	Carers
Gender reassignment	Sexual orientation	Digital Inclusion

Equality Impact Assessment: Screening Form

Name (project lead)	Simon Beard		
Job title	Associate Director for Corporate Operations		
Organisation	SEL ICB		
Name of Project	ICB Public Access and Information Re-use Policy - review		
Engagement/Data gather	This policy has been reviewed on its anniversary date, with very minor changes to committee references. Much of the policy is driven by legislation.		
Aim/Purpose of the project/decision	To confirm the Policy has been considered to ensure it does not disadvantage any individuals with protected characteristics in its application.		
Date it will be going to committee/ SMT/ SLT for approval	Anticipated date to Policy Review Group: 9 December 2024 Anticipated date to Executive Committee: 18 December 2024		
Project Lead signature	Simon Beard	Date:	29/10/24
ED team signature	<i>Louis French</i>	Date:	13/11/24
EDI team comments	<p>Happy with it being a screening form as there are minimal potential impacts. Comments made above which may be relevant (Halima).</p> <p>Feedback and comments reviewed – all outstanding queries have been addressed. No disproportionate impacts to those with Protected Characteristics have been identified. (Louis)</p>		

No.	Please answer the following questions, using any data/intelligence you have available right now.	Likelihood	Consequence	Comments
1.	Does this project affect people with protected characteristics, and to what extent does it impact access, experience, and outcomes?	1	2	FOI requests can be made through various means – including by post – therefore no-one should be digitally excluded. There is a slight disadvantage for those in lower socio-economic environments who may be excluded from being able to pay the fee for requests which exceed 18 hours completion. However these are rare.
2.	Has your data and/or engagement identified that there will be an impact on Protected Characteristics?	1	1	All FOI requests will be treated equally.
3.	Are adjustments/mitigating actions required to ensure the project is accessible and what will the Impact be on protected characteristics?	2	2	FOI scheme information is principally advertised via the ICB website. However requests can be made via phone into the ICB for details of the process.
4.	Are significant health inequalities associated with this project and what will the affect be on people with protected characteristics?	1	1	
5.	If any impact is identified, how likely will there be mitigating actions and how will these be reviewed?	1	1	
	Overall	1	2	Low likelihood of impact – FOIs should be accessible to all with limited digital inclusion impact.

Likelihood:

Score	Likelihood	Description
1	Rare	Occurrence is rare/measures are in place to ensure that no adverse impact will occur to patients or staff with protected characteristics. There is sufficient data to make a decision and relevant engagement has been undertaken.
2	Unlikely	It is unlikely to occur/ measures are in place to ensure that no adverse impact will occur to patients or staff with protected characteristics/ there is sufficient data to make a decision and engagement has been undertaken.
3	Possible	There is a 50/50 possibility for it to occur/no measures in place for any adverse impact if it was to occur/ there is insufficient data to make a decision or engagement has not been undertaken.
4	Likely	There is a high chance of inequalities to occur more likely/no measures are in place any adverse impact/ there is insufficient data to make a decision or engagement has not been undertaken.
5	Almost certain	It is almost certain to cause inequalities with this project/ there are no measures in place for any adverse impact/ there is insufficient data to make a decision or engagement has not been undertaken.

Consequence:

Score	Consequence	Description
1	No impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No impact any of the protected characteristics or the organisation/no adverse impact likely. No engagement is required/there is enough data from previous engagement undertaken No adjustments needed to make the proposal accessible. No health inequalities associated with this project No monitoring of mitigated actions required as no impact/mitigating reasons e.g. Legal obligations/for a certain protected characteristics. Equality Analysis Screening form to be completed only.
2	Minor impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor impact any of the protected characteristics or the organisation/adverse impact is unlikely. No/minor engagement is required/there is enough data from previous engagement undertaken No/minor adjustments needed to make the proposal accessible. No/minor health inequalities associated with this project

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No monitoring of mitigated actions required as no impact/mitigating reasons e.g. legal obligations/for a certain protected characteristics. Measures are in place to ensure there is no adverse impact that will occur • Equality Analysis Screening form to be completed only.
3	(Low) medium impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a medium impact any of the protected characteristics or the organisation/adverse impact is likely. • There is a requirement for engagement is required/there is insufficient data to make a decision on impact on protected characteristics • Adjustments are needed to make the proposal accessible. • There is a medium impact health inequalities associated with this project • monitoring of mitigated actions required as there is a medium impact / Measures/mitigations are not yet in place to ensure negative impact does not occur. • Will most likely require a full Equality Analysis to be completed.
4	Medium Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant to critical impact to any of the protected characteristics or the organisation/adverse impact is likely. • There is a requirement for engagement /there is insufficient data to make a decision on impact on protected characteristics/There is a fair amount of evidence that some groups are (or could be) differently affected by it. • There is evidence to suggest that adjustments are needed to make the proposal accessible. • There is a significant to critical impact on health inequalities associated with this project/ leads to non-compliance with legislation and could therefore be an organisation risk • Monitoring of mitigated actions required as there is a significant to critical impact / Measures/mitigations are not yet in place to ensure negative impact does not occur. • Requires a full Equality Analysis to be completed.
5	High impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical to Major impact to any of the protected characteristics or the organisation/adverse impact is highly likely. • There is a requirement for engagement /there is insufficient data to make a decision on impact on protected characteristics/There is a fair amount of evidence that some groups are (or could be) differently affected by it. • There is substantial amount of evidence to suggest that adjustments are needed to make the proposal accessible. • There is a critical to major impact on health inequalities associated with this project/ leads to non-compliance with legislation and could therefore be an organisation risk • Monitoring of mitigated actions required as there is a critical to major impact / Measures/mitigations are not yet in place to ensure negative impact does not occur. • Requires a full Equality Analysis to be completed.

- To determine if you need to complete a full Equality Impact Assessment form, use the overall score from the table above.
- Calculate the score by multiplying Likelihood and Consequence (L X C).
- Use the following key to interpret your score:
 - **Green:** Only the screening form needs to be completed.
 - **Amber:** Complete the screening form; a full Equality Impact Assessment may be needed after review by the EDI team.
 - **Red:** A full Equality Impact Assessment form must be completed.

Equality Impact Assessment Matrix

		Likelihood					
		Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost Certain	
		1	2	3	4	5	
Consequence	High impact	5	5	10	15	20	25
	Medium Impact	4	4	8	12	16	20
	(Low) medium impact	3	3	6	9	12	15
	Minor impact	2	2	4	6	8	10
	No Impact	1	1	2	3	4	5