

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria ICB\
FOI ICB 25–375

North East and North Cumbria ICB
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By Email

19 December 2025

Dear Applicant

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Request for Information – NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB)

Thank you for your request received on 11 December 2025 for information held by NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (the ICB) under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The ICB covers the areas of County Durham, Newcastle Gateshead, North Cumbria, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside, Sunderland, and Tees Valley.

Please find the information you requested on behalf of the ICB as follows.

Your Request

I'd like to request the following records under the Freedom of Information Act. By way of context, the requested records detailed below relate to the list of 16 national medicines optimisation opportunities published by NHS England each financial year since the summer of 2023. The current page is here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/national-medicines-optimisation-opportunities-2023-24/>

1. A list of the national priorities you have been pursuing in 2025-26.
2. A list of any local priorities you have been working on in 2025-26, as distinct from those in point 1 above.
3. A list of any national priorities you will be pursuing in 2026-27.
4. A list of any local priorities you will be pursuing in 2026-27, as distinct from those in point 3 above.

Our Response

We can confirm, as per Section 1(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the ICB holds some of the information you have requested.

Please find our response below. Unless otherwise stated, all information relates to NENC ICB and includes activities inherited from predecessor Clinical Commissioning Groups where relevant.

1. In 2025-26, NENC ICB has been pursuing the national medicines optimisation opportunities published by NHS England, which set out system-wide priorities to improve quality, safety, value and sustainability of prescribing.

Delivery in NENC ICB has included:

- Respiratory optimisation, including reduction of short-acting beta-agonist (SABA) inhaler overuse and optimisation of COPD inhaler therapy (including triple therapy inhalers)
- Antimicrobial stewardship, including reduction in total antibacterial prescribing volume
- Optimisation of high-risk medicines, including opioids and gabapentinoids
- Reduction of high-dose proton pump inhibitor (PPI) prescribing
- Best-value use of direct oral anticoagulants (DOACs), in line with NHS England commissioning recommendations
- Reduction of low-value or ineffective prescribing (e.g. bath and shower emollients, inappropriate vitamin D prescribing, lidocaine patches outside licensed indications)
- Medicines safety and overprescribing reduction, including work on oversupply
- Increased use of generics and biosimilars where clinically appropriate

These activities align with the NHS England national medicines optimisation opportunities, which are publicly available and accessible. NHS England guidance:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/medicines-optimisation-opportunities-for-2023-24/>

2. In addition to national priorities, NENC ICB has pursued a range of locally agreed medicines optimisation priorities in 2025–26, reflecting local prescribing patterns, cost pressures, and patient safety considerations.

Local priorities include:

- Formulary-led switching programmes (e.g. mesalazine preparations, riluzole formulations)
- Review and reduction of prescribing for medicines with local safety or cost concerns (e.g. dicycloverine, gluten-free foods)
- Optimisation of oral nutritional supplement (ONS) prescribing following the introduction of new regional guidance
- Review of high-cost liquid formulations (e.g. omeprazole suspension)
- Optimisation of medical devices and consumables (e.g. safety needles and safety lancets)
- Identification and action on locally identified generic prescribing opportunities
- Implementation and use of digital prescribing support tools (e.g. OptimiseRx and AnalyseRx)

Local priorities are developed and delivered through established governance routes, including the ICB medicines optimisation function, formulary processes, and regional advisory groups.

3. At the time of this response, NHS England has not yet published the national medicines optimisation opportunities for the 2026-27 financial year.

As such, NENC ICB is unable to confirm a definitive list of national priorities for 2026-27. Once published, NENC ICB will consider and implement these priorities in line with national guidance.

4. Local medicines optimisation priorities for 2026-27 are not yet finalised. Future local priorities will be informed by:

- NHS England national priorities once published
- The NENC ICB Medicines Strategy 2025-2030
- Prescribing data, safety intelligence, and financial considerations
- Engagement with system partners and clinical stakeholders

The NENC ICB Medicines Strategy 2025–2030 is publicly available and can be accessed here: <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/about-us/corporate-information/strategies/medicines-strategy/>

Strategy document (PDF): <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/media/45ehkr3c/medicines-strategy-2025-2030.pdf>

In accordance with the Information Commissioner's directive on the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 your request will form part of our disclosure log. Therefore, a version of our response which will protect your anonymity will be posted on the NHS ICB website <https://northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/>.

If you have any queries or wish to discuss the information supplied, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above telephone number or at the above address.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, you should write to the Information Governance Manager using the contact details at the top of this letter quoting the appropriate reference number.

If you are not content with the outcome your review, you do have the right of complaint to the Information Commissioner as established by section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Generally, the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the ICB's complaints procedure.

The Information Commissioner can be contacted at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or www.ico.org.uk.

Any information we provide following your request under the Freedom of Information Act will not confer an automatic right for you to re-use that information, for example to publish it. If you wish to re-use the information that we provide and you do not specify this in your initial application for information then you must make a further request for its re-use as per the Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 www.legislation.gov.uk. This will not affect your initial information request.

Yours faithfully

Information Governance Support Officer

**Information Governance Support Officer
North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board**