

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria ICB\  
FOI ICB 25–479

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By Email

9 March 2026

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 19 February 2026 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 would like information for people with hearing loss in Sunderland (principally adults to begin with). Central to that will be the need for accurate information on current health and social care provision in Sunderland.

Please note, I have the links to Sunderland' s secondary care services i.e. Audiology and ENT audiology:

<https://www.stsft.nhs.uk/services/audiology>

<https://www.stsft.nhs.uk/services/ear-nose-and-throat-ent-services>

Clearly for any specialised need the care pathway would be a referral from primary care to ENT or audiology. I really would like a description of the "bread and butter" processes for:

1. How do you get a hearing test?
2. How do you get a hearing aid?
3. How do you get earwax removed?

In response to questions 1 to 3, I wonder if your description could include answers to the following:

- a. Do people have to go to their GP first for a referral for a hearing test or aid i.e. can people self-refer for anything?
- b. What happens after a hearing test typically?
- c. Is there still an AQP service for over 50s through Scrivens? I have found a contract page but nothing on any public site that says it's there. And will it continue for 2026/27? Is Scrivens the only provider of this service or are there others too?
- d. Is there an equivalent service for under 50s?
- e. Are the Hearing Aid choices at these services the same as for the NHS?
- f. What hearing choice i.e. provider and type of fitting on NHS?
- g. Are there Bluetooth enabled hearing aids on the NHS?
- h. Are hearing aids all batteries or are there rechargeable models?

#### 4. Ear wax removal:

- a. How do you get earwax removed?
- b. What if anything is provided in Primary Care? Is it likely to be irrigation rather than microsuction?
- c. Is it down to individual practices – or are there any Primary Care Network arrangements for instance for earwax removal in Sunderland?
- d. Is earwax no longer considered a primary care function/service?
- e. What about people who have additional needs that take them outside the remit of most private practitioners e.g. Tympanoplasty

I am also seeking clarity re hearing therapy services.

I was referred by Sunderland ENT to a hearing therapy service. I learned there is no hearing therapy service as such in Sunderland.

Google AI notes a typical hearing therapy service would provide “a rehabilitative, counselling-based service for adults with hearing loss, [tinnitus](#), or [hyperacusis](#) (sound sensitivity). It aims to improve quality of life by providing psychological support, developing active listening, training on assistive devices, and offering communication strategies. It helps individuals manage hearing loss, reduce associated stress, and regain independence.

#### Key Components of Hearing Therapy:

- *Counselling*: Emotional support to manage the psychological impact of hearing loss.
- *Tinnitus & Hyperacusis Management*: Techniques to reduce the impact of, and sensitivity to, sounds.
- *Communication Training*: Strategies to improve listening in different environments, including advice on lip-reading.
- *Assistive Technology*: Advice on and management of hearing aids and additional assistive listening devices (e.g., TV listeners, amplified phones).
- *Rehabilitation*: Providing practical solutions for everyday social and work life to improve communication.

#### 5. Accessing Service:

Hearing therapy is typically provided by specialised audiologists or therapists, often accessible through referrals from a GP or audiologist. I note that Newcastle does have a named service:

<https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/audiology/hearing-therapy>.

- a. Do you commission a specific hearing therapy service for Sunderland?
- b. If not, has one ever been considered?

- c. I appreciate this might be a question more suited for the trust, but their ENT page mentions hearing/tinnitus therapy. If you don't provide a named service as such are there still any aspects provided as part of the core audiology /ENT service?

## 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.

1. The process of obtaining a hearing test is detailed below:
  - a. In Sunderland there is a AQP Adult Hearing Service, which people can access through self-referral and also be referred by a GP. This service is available for people who are aged 50 or over
  - b. The Adult Hearing Service consists of:
    - Hearing needs assessment.
    - Development and implementation of an individual management plan (IMP).
    - Provision and fitting of hearing aids, where clinically appropriate and agreed with the service user.
    - Information on and signposting to any relevant communication/social support services.
    - Follow-up appointment to assess whether needs have been met and to review the individual management plan (IMP)
    - Aftercare services including advice, maintenance and reviews as required.
    - Provision of new aids if a patient's needs change significantly.
    - Discharge from hearing assessment and fitting pathway where appropriate (with ongoing aftercare).
    - Provision for service user complaints and feedback to the Provider.
    - Education on the management of ear wax and direction to alternative services such as community pharmacy where required/clinically appropriate.
    - Battery, tips, domes, wax filters, and tube replacement service.
    - Annual aftercare and review after 3-year pathway, where required.
  - c. Yes, there is an AQP service for over 50s through Scrivens. The current providers are Specsavers, Scrivens and South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust.
  - d. There is no equivalent service for under 50s.
  - e. The Hearing Aid choices are the same; they are NHS commissioned services.
  - f. Please refer to the providers noted in response to question 1c. NENC ICB does not hold details of hearing aid type, please redirect your question to the providers.

In accordance with our duty under s.16 of the FOIA to provide reasonable advice and assistance to an individual requesting information, we have provided the FOI contact for South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust – [stsft@infreemation.co.uk](mailto:stsft@infreemation.co.uk) – to make your request.

- g. There are no Bluetooth enabled hearing aids on the NHS.
  - h. Hearing aids are battery hearing aids.
2. Please refer to the response to question 1.
  3. Please refer to the response to questions 1 and 4.
  4. Ear wax removal:
    - a. Patients can contact their GP practice and, if following clinical examination, the clinician thinks it is appropriate for ear wax to be removed, the GP practice team will arrange for the

patient to see a member of their staff for ear wax removal. Some patients however may need to be referred to specialist clinics in the hospital for ear wax removal.

- b. Practices offer ear irrigation.
  - c. Ear wax removal is commissioned from GP practices individually and not at PCN level.
  - d. In Sunderland it is considered to be a general practice service and is commissioned accordingly.
  - e. Patients with complex needs, or difficult irrigations can still be referred to ENT as they provide a microsuction service.
5. In terms of accessing the service:
- a. NENC ICB does not commission a specific hearing therapy service for Sunderland.
  - b. No, a specific hearing therapy service for Sunderland has not been considered.
  - c. South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust do not have any hearing therapists but do offer a tinnitus and sound sensitivity service run by audiologists.

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, Wycliff House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF or [www.ico.org.uk](http://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](http://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**