

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria ICB\
FOI ICB 25–409

North East and North Cumbria ICB
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By Email

19 January 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 6 January 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 am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 regarding access to NHS Talking Therapies for Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users within your Integrated Care Board (ICB) area.

It has now been ten months since responsibility for commissioning specialist BSL Talking Therapies transferred from NHSE to ICB's under the 'Who Pays' guidance. During this period, Deaf BSL users have experienced ongoing delays and barriers to accessing clinically appropriate care, with patients remaining on waiting lists or declining mainstream Talking Therapies due to the known clinical limitations of interpreter-mediated therapy.

The NHS Talking Therapies Manual states: "The provider will ensure the patient has access to a British Sign Language signer when necessary." For Deaf BSL-first patients, patient choice of direct BSL-delivered therapy is a key factor in establishing this necessity. In this context, please provide the following recorded information:

1. Unmet need and short-term commissioning action

Please confirm how your ICB intends to address and fund the current unmet need of the [11] Deaf BSL patients currently waiting for NHS Talking Therapies (refusing to use mainstream with interpreter), including any recorded short-term or interim arrangements, for example:

- Individual Funding Requests (IFRs);
- urgent or temporary direct award contracts;
- other interim commissioning mechanisms intended to prevent further delay or harm.

2. Medium and long-term financial planning

Please provide any recorded information showing how specialist BSL Talking Therapies will be incorporated into your 2026–27 budget envelope and subsequent annual commissioning plans.

3. Reliance on interpreter-mediated Talking Therapies

If your ICB relies, or intends to rely, on mainstream Talking Therapies delivered with third-party interpreter support for Deaf BSL users, please provide the following recorded information:

- the clinical impact or risk assessments undertaken;
- the equality impact assessments relevant to this decision;
- evidence of consultation with Deaf community representatives or organisations;
- the recorded commissioning rationale for using a pathway where evidence indicates poorer clinical outcomes for Deaf BSL users, including any recorded explanation of how the ICB believes compliance is met with its duties under the Equality Act 2010, the NHS Accessible Information Standard, and current NHS policy commitments to patient choice and personalised care.
- any recorded consideration of the ICB’s responsibilities for safe commissioning and accountability for patient outcomes since the transfer of commissioning responsibility, including how the impact of delayed access, continued unmet need, and extended waiting times for Deaf BSL users has been assessed.

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 ICB is currently not aware of any unmet need that has been identified to us by our commissioned talking therapy providers (in reference of the 11 individuals in the question posed).
2. On this occasion it is not possible to provide the requested information. In line with your rights under section 1(1)(a) of the Act to be informed whether information is held, we confirm the ICB does not hold any of the information requested.
3. Please refer to the response to question 2.

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**