NHS
North East and North Cumbria

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria ICB\ FOI ICB 26–313

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By Email

12 October 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 21 September 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

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, please provide the following information for the Sunderland area (including all NHS dental practices in the Sunderland local authority area / Sunderland place-based partnership) for the period 1 March 2020 to 31 December 2022 and from 31 December 2022 to 21 September 2026, unless stated otherwise:

1. How many complaints has the ICB (or its predecessor, the Sunderland CCG, or NHS England as the previous commissioner, if the ICB holds these records) received from Sunderland patients who say they were removed from an NHS dental practice's list or told they could no longer be seen?
2. How many of those complaints said the patient received no letter or written notice from the practice?
3. How many of those complaints related to appointments that were cancelled, postponed or changed by the practice during Covid restrictions and then recorded as missed, failed or "did not attend" by the patient?
4. What guidance did the ICB, or its predecessor commissioner, give practices during 2020 to 2022 on how to record appointments cancelled or postponed by the practice because of Covid, and on whether these could be counted against patients when deciding whether to keep seeing them?

5. Did the ICB or its predecessor commissioner issue any guidance or instruction on whether practices could stop seeing patients who missed appointments during Covid restrictions? If so, please provide it.
6. Does the ICB hold any data, audit findings or intelligence on patients being removed or no longer seen because of appointments that were not accurately recorded during Covid? If so, please provide it.
7. What is the ICB's policy or guidance on whether a practice must give written notice before it stops seeing an NHS patient?
8. How many NHS dental practices in Sunderland have reduced or handed back their NHS contract since March 2020?
9. How many complaints has the ICB received from Sunderland patients who say they were told they could only be seen privately, or were pressured, encouraged or offered private treatment after being refused NHS treatment?
10. Does the ICB hold any data or intelligence on Sunderland practices that have moved wholly or partly to private-only care since March 2020? If so, please provide the number of practices and the dates.
11. What guidance does the ICB give practices on offering private treatment to existing NHS patients, and what action, if any, has the ICB taken where practices were found to be doing this?
12. How many NHS dental patients in Sunderland were seen each year from 2019 to date, so I can see the change in access since Covid?
13. If any of this information is not held at Sunderland level, please provide it at the widest level you do hold (for example North East and North Cumbria) and tell me which parts are not held.

Please reply by email in an accessible format such as a spreadsheet or PDF.

Our Response

Please note that for questions 1 to 3, the information held by the ICB will not provide a complete picture of complaints relating to NHS dental services. During the period covered by this request, complaints concerning the actions of individual dental practices would ordinarily have been directed to, and investigated by, the provider concerned under the NHS Complaints Procedure. As a result, many complaints may have been managed directly by dental practices and not investigated by the ICB. The figures provided therefore represent only those complaints recorded by the ICB and should not be interpreted as the total number of complaints relating to these issues across Sunderland dental practices.

Furthermore, as the ICB did not investigate complaints handled directly by providers, it does not hold the level of detailed case information necessary to identify specific circumstances, themes, outcomes, or allegations to the extent requested. Information relating to the detailed content of complaints investigated by individual dental practices is not held by the ICB and would need to be requested from the relevant provider. Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the ICB can only provide information that it holds.

In addition, due to a change in the complaints management system, the ICB is only able to provide limited complaint information for the period 15 September 2025 to 21 September 2026. Information available for this period is restricted to the data retained within the current system and may not contain the level of detail required to answer all aspects of the request. Consequently, the ICB may be unable to fully identify, categorise, or analyse complaints against all of the criteria specified, and any information provided for this period should be considered a partial record based on the information held by the ICB at the time.

1. NENC ICB does hold the from 15 September 2025 to 21 September 2026 which specifically relate to Sunderland Dental Practices and being removed from the dental practice. However, the number of individuals is fewer than five, so the figure has been suppressed. This is because disclosure of very small numbers may increase the risk of identifying individuals, particularly when combined with other information that may already be available. The information is therefore exempt from disclosure under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, as disclosure would constitute the release of personal data and would be contrary to the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).
2. Please refer to the response to question 1. The number of complaints that said the patient received no letter or written notice from the practice is fewer than five, so the figure has been suppressed.
3. Please refer to the response to question 1. The number of complaints relating to appointments cancelled, postposed or changed by the practice is fewer than five, so the figure has been suppressed.
4. During the COVID response period NHS England via the Office of the Chief Dental Officer issued a range of pandemic response standard operating procedures for NHS Dental contractors to follow during and post lock down. These may be available separately from NHS England (NHSE) or the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). Links to these public authority websites and FOI contacts are noted below:

Organisation	Website	Email
DHSC	DHSC – GOV.UK	foirequests@dhsc.gov.uk
NHSE	NHS England	england.contactus@nhs.net (Please write "Freedom of Information" in the subject line)

NHS Dentistry provision since 2006 has and continues to be governed by national NHS England and Department of Health regulation and policy. Local ICB Commissioners and historical predecessors are responsible for ensuring that national policy and regulation compliance is secured at a local level by NHS Dentistry contractors. Local ICB Commissioners are not responsible for setting National NHS Dentistry regulation and policy.

5. Please refer to the response to question 4.
6. Please refer to the response to question 4.

In addition, please note that under the National Dental Regulation that has been in operation since 2006 there is no form of patient registration with an NHS Dental contractor. This is very different to what patients experience within General Medical Practice contracting arrangements.

The 2006 National Dental Regulations operate on a demand led basis, which means that an NHS Dental contractor is only responsible for an NHS Patient during the provision of an active banded course of treatment that is signed for and where patient charges or exemption certificate evidencing has been applied as part of the separate National Dental Charge Regulations 2005.

7. As outlined in the responses above, the ICB does not have any local policies. The ICB follows National Dental Regulation and Policy issued by NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care.

The 2006 National Dental Regulations operate on a demand led basis, which means that an NHS Dental contractor is only responsible for an NHS Patient during the provision of an active

banded course of treatment. Once that course of NHS banded treatment is complete the practice no longer holds an NHS contracting relationship with that patient.

Patients are therefore free to secure NHS Treatment from any NHS Dental contractor locally or nationally for treatment based on their advised clinical recall interval.

Many patients however perceive 'NHS registration' with a practice as many believe NHS Dentistry operates within similar national governance arrangements to General Medical Practice, which is incorrect.

8. A total of seven (7) NHS dental practices in Sunderland that have either handed back NHS Contracts or alternatively formally requested a reduction in their NHS contract since March 2020.
9. The ICB has received zero complaints from Sunderland patients who say they were told they could only be seen privately, or were pressured, encouraged or offered private treatment after being refused NHS treatment.
10. All high street dental practices are privately owned and operated corporate or small to medium sized business entities. They are not NHS owned and operated.

    The Care Quality Commission operate as the regulator for registration and operation of high street dental practices.

    High street practices who offer NHS Dentistry as part of their overall private business operating model choose to do so by holding an NHS Dentistry contract for an agreed amount of capacity.

    National and local NHS Dentistry commissioners do not have any control or influence over high street dental practice business operating models and as such do not collect or hold this information. We only hold information regarding any high street dental businesses delivering NHS provision in relation to that specific contract.

    NENC ICB does hold information on the number of high street dental private businesses that have handed back or ceased provision of NHS Dentistry during the period outlined. This was information was provided in response to question 8.

11. We expect all High street practices who offer NHS Dentistry as part of their overall private business operating model to offer choice to patients as to whether they would prefer to receive NHS Dental or Private Dental care.

    Where a patient chooses to receive NHS Dental care, we would expect that NHS contract holder to offer that provision where they have NHS capacity to do so or where this is not possible to support signposting to other local NHS contracted practices that may be able to accommodate access.

    A patient should only accept private dentistry offers where they choose to do so.

12. This information from 2006 to 2023 is publicly available via this link: NHS Dental Statistics – NHS England Digital. Information from 2023 onwards is similarly publicly available via this link: Dental – England | NHSBSA. Therefore, the ICB considers this element of your request exempt from disclosure by way of s.21 as the information is readily accessible by other means.
13. Please refer to the response to question 12.

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, 4th Floor, No. 3 Circle Square, 5 Hawkshaw Street, Manchester, M1 7BL 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