

Our Reference North East and North Cumbria ICB\
FOI ICB 25–406

North East and North Cumbria ICB
Pemberton House
Colima Avenue
Sunderland Enterprise Park
Sunderland
SR5 3XB

Tel: 0191 512 8484
E-mail: nencicb.foi@nhs.net

By Email

30 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

Please provide the following information relating to the procurement, contracting, and tendering of the Out of Hours (OOH) primary care service in Newcastle for the year 2025:

1. All documents relating to the tendering process, including:
 - Procurement strategy documents
 - Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents
 - Evaluation criteria and scoring methodology
 - Bidder questions and answers
 - Supplier shortlisting records
 - Minutes of procurement panel meetings
2. Details of all bids received, including:
 - Names of all bidders
 - Evaluation scores per bidder
 - Reasons for acceptance or rejection
3. Copies of any decision-making reports, including business cases, option appraisals, decision notices, and board or committee papers.

4. Copies of the final awarded contract(s) for the OOH service covering 2025.

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. We can confirm, as per Section 1(1) of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000, the ICB does hold some of the requested information. However, on this occasion, it is not possible to satisfy all elements of your request.

NENC ICB is able to provide the following documents:

- Procurement Selection Strategy (PSS NECS508 V1.00)
- 'Invitation to Tender (ITT) documents' to include the evaluation criteria and scoring methodology
- We understand the Bidder Questions and Answers to be the clarification questions raised by bidders and subsequent ICB responses. These are published to all bidders during time when the tender is published. The 'Clarification Log' has therefore been attached.

There were no minutes taken of the procurement panel meetings. Procurement Panel meetings and information were conducted in line with the ICB's Standard Operating Procedure.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 contains a number of exemptions that allow a public authority to withhold certain information from release. Some of the requested information is exempt under s.43(2) of the FOIA2000 as disclosure is likely to prejudice the commercial interests of a person as defined by the Act.

The s.43(2) exemption applies to question 2 and 3 in their entirety, and part of question 1 (supplier shortlisting records).

We have applied a section 43(2) exemption at this time as the procurement exercise is being undertaken and it was our belief that release of this information would prejudice the commercial interests of the ICB and those third parties who applied for the tender framework.

To successfully compete for goods and services, the ICB must ensure that information which could harm its commercial activities is not placed into the public domain. Release of such information could potentially compromise the ICB's ability to effectively carry out their procurement function which enables them to compete on an equal playing field when tendering services. The ICB's position may have been severely compromised if that information were to be released into the public domain which under FOI is to the world at large.

The procurement of any service is undoubtedly a commercial activity which is carried out in a competitive environment. External companies are competing to deliver the required services at a competitive and cost-effective price. Those companies who completed the ICB's invitation to tender were all competing to secure the contract with us.

The ICB work to ensure that services are procured efficiently, effectively and in accordance with the appropriate frameworks to get the best possible price bearing in mind that public money is being used. FOI responses are considered as mentioned above to be a release to

the world at large and not to one applicant. By disclosing the specific details of the contract during the tender process could seriously undermine the trust and confidence which suppliers may have in our ability to effectively procure such services and may lose confidence in the ICB that their operational information may be comprised, and their information will not be secure throughout the process and not shared with third parties. This may deter businesses from competing and less likely to bid for public sector contracts if they believe the live procurement process could be prejudiced by sharing commercially sensitive information. It is important for the conduct of such tendering exercises to not disadvantage those businesses by making their information publicly available until after the contract has been awarded.

The application of this exemption requires an examination of the public interest in disclosure in comparison as opposed to that in non-disclosure.

The factors in favour of disclosure would include:

- Increasing public understanding of the tendering and procurement process and the types of suppliers who bid for services.
- Enhancing the transparency and openness of the tendering process.
- Increasing public confidence in the integrity and probity of the tendering process.
- There is significant public interest in suppliers who are unsuccessful when bidding for contracts.

Factors in favour of withholding the information are largely laid out in the explanation for the use of the exemption above but would include:

- Ensuring there is fair competition for public sector contracts.
- Protecting the ability of bidders to compete on a level playing field.
- Preventing a distortion of the procurement process that would have the potential effect of raising costs to the public sector and/or reducing the quality of services procured.

After consideration of the above factors, we believe, on balance, the public interest lies in maintaining the exemption.

2. Please refer to the response to question 1.
3. Please refer to the response to question 1.
4. NENC ICB does not hold a final contract with Vocare due to change in management, further due diligence work is in progress.

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**