

Information Governance

8 October 2021

**Our Ref:** RFI 40272

Dear

**Freedom of Information Act 2000  
Information in Relation to policies within South Eastern Health and Social  
Care Trust Care Homes**

I am writing to confirm that the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (the Trust) has now completed its search for information relating to the above which you requested on 3 August 2021.

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to your correspondence as the Information Governance Department is dealing with a large number of requests for information, including a backlog of requests as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which had a major impact across services.

A response to each of the questions raised has been provided by the Nursing, Primary Care and Older People Directorate and is attached in Appendix A.

If you are unhappy as to how this request has been handled, you have the right to seek a review within the Trust in the first instance. You should write to the Information Governance Department, Lough House, Ards Community Hospital ([informationgovernance@setrust.hscni.net](mailto:informationgovernance@setrust.hscni.net)) within two months of the date of this response and your complaint will be considered and a response provided, within 20 working days of receipt.

If, after receiving a response, you remain unhappy, you can refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner at The Information Commissioner's Office –Northern Ireland, 3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place, Belfast, BT7 2JB. It is important to note that if you refer any matter to the Information Commissioner, you will need to show evidence of having gone through the Trust's internal review procedure to try to resolve the matter with the Trust in the first instance.

If you have any queries about this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

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**Cathryn Hedley  
Acting Information Governance Manager**

***My mother, with advanced Alzheimer's, is a resident in a Care Home run by the SEHSCT. I have discovered recently, by accident not design, that visiting rights have been made available to, in my mother's case, Elders from the Presbyterian Church NI, without any notification or consultation with my family or myself.***

***I have been advised by the Care Home Management that this change has been introduced as a result of a directive/policy/notification from the NI Executive and /or SEHSCT in the context of "spiritual well-being."***

***Under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) I would request responses to the following:-***

***Q1. Confirmation that the summary above is factual or clarification regarding any misinterpretation.***

A1. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, is unable at this time to confirm or otherwise in relation to the accuracy of the information in the first paragraph of the above statement. The Trust may be in a position to comment further if details in relation to the identity of the resident and care home are provided.

The Trust has 6 statutory residential homes for older people within the Trust area and commissions beds in a further 95 homes. The Trust can confirm, in relation to the statutory care homes in the Trust area, it is compliant with Department of Health's Covid 19 guidance in relation to visiting in care settings.

On initial investigation of the Trust statutory residential homes no evidence has been found that visiting rights have been made available to Elders from the Presbyterian Church without notification or consultation of residents and/or their families were this would be indicated.

***Q2. Copies of any and all copies of correspondence between SEHSCT/DOH/OFDFM in relation to any such directive/policy/notification as regards SEHSCT Care Homes and "spiritual"/non-familial visiting access rights.***

A2. As outlined in the response to point 1. The Trust is compliant with Department of Health's Covid 19 guidance in relation to visiting in care settings. Please see below link to this guidance for your reference:

[COVID-19: Visiting in Care Settings in Northern Ireland | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/information-governance/covid-19-visiting-in-care-settings-in-northern-ireland)

**Q3. If 1. and 2. be true, or partially true - what /is was: -**

**(a) The rationale and context for any such directive/policy notification?**

**(b) The explanation for the failure to consult/notify families of SEHSCT Care Home Residents?**

**(c) The reasoning to prioritise "spiritual" visits ahead of extended visiting access rights for family members.**

**(d) The reasoning to expose vulnerable adults, such as my mother, to absolute strangers visiting per se, or, at any rate, absolute strangers to her, given her health condition.**

A3. Please refer to A1&A2.