

22 June 2022

Our Ref: RFI 42584

Dear

**Freedom of Information Act 2000
Information in Relation to Hospital Visitation rights of Birthing Partners**

I am writing to confirm that the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (the Trust) has now completed its search for information relating to above which you requested on 12 January 2022. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to your request. Thank you for your understanding and forbearance.

A response to each of the questions raised has been provided by the Hospital Service 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) 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

**Rebecca Manning
Information Governance Assistant**

Q1. The updated maternity visitation rules introduced on 11/01/2021.

- A1. The Trust takes direction from the Department of Health (DoH) in relation to visitation guidance and restrictions in relation to COVID-19. On 11 January 2022 changes to maternity visitation guidance were implemented as a result of an increase in the incidence of COVID-19 both in the pregnant population and in the number of healthcare staff testing positive for the virus.

The guidance has since been revised with a relaxation of the restrictions. Partners can now attend for all antenatal appointments and scans. Birth partners can attend for the duration of labour and for 2-3 hours after the birth. A daily visit can be arranged for partners postnatal in an allotted time slot to reduce overcrowding in the confined space of the maternity ward.

Q2. The minutes from the meeting where the decision was made.

- A2. No minutes were taken of discussions relating to implementing DoH guidelines.

Q3. The scientific evidence this decision was based on.**Q4. The equality impact assessment that considers the rights of birthing partners to attend scans, particularly the rights of males.****Q5. The consideration given to vaccinated birthing partners and the option for them to carry out LFD tests to attend scans.****Q6. The full risk assessment used to make the decision at all locations within the Trust.**

- A3-6. All visiting guidelines are developed by the DoH and implemented as required by the Trust.

Q7. The risk assessment used at the Ulster Hospital particularly where it was decided that it was safe for expectant mothers and partners to fully populate the external waiting room but not attend the scan.

- A7. Birth partners are able to attend, booking, early pregnancy, growth and abnormality scans. When the external waiting room becomes overcrowded, partners will be asked to wait outside to help maintain social distancing. Pregnant woman will be advised to phone their partners so that they can come into the clinic to attend the appointment at the agreed time.