

FOI 3738

11th May 2026

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 – INFORMATION REQUEST

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust's policies and procedures for communicating appointment information to patients who are blind or visually impaired.

Please provide:

- 1. Any policies, protocols, or guidance relating specifically to communication with blind or visually impaired patients.**

Response: The Regional Sensory Policy (Please see attachment 1) in conjunction with the RNIB Clear Print Standards (Please refer to attachment 2) recommends that all written information is produced in Arial font, size 14 and printed on yellow paper. This colour contrast is recognised as best practice and is intended to enhance accessibility for service users with visual impairment. (Please refer to Attachment 3).

The RNIB Clear Print Standards set out established accessibility guidelines designed to make printed and digital information easier to read for people with sight loss. These standards are widely adopted across health and social care services and are regarded as best practice for the provision of accessible information.

- 2. The formats in which appointment information can be provided (e.g. braille, large print, audio, email, SMS).**

Response: To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we can provide information in alternative formats on request. If this cannot be facilitated the Trust will advise of the reasons for this and provide a new estimated response timescale.

Alternative formats may include easy read, Braille, audio formats, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

The Trust liaises with representative and advocacy groups and takes account of existing and developing good practice in terms of providing accessible information.

3. Whether the Trust records patients' communication needs and how this is used when issuing appointment notifications.

Response: Currently, the patient record system is equipped to record service user information such as first language, sign language user etc however, whilst it is not mandatory to record service users preferred communication format this information can be recorded where necessary.

Central Booking Centre

There is the option to record visual impairment diagnosis within EPIC however, there is currently no specific large-print appointment confirmation letter linked to this recording. This issue is being addressed regionally with the aim of large print letters being automatically produced for those registered on the system as visually impaired.

The Central Booking Service will send appointment reminders by text message 7 days and 1 day prior to the appointment for all patients.

4. Any staff guidance or training materials on meeting the communication needs of visually impaired patients.

Response: The Trust has a regional guide for staff entitled - Making communication accessible for all (a guide for health and social care staff). Please refer to Attachment 4.

This guide is a regional resource for Health and Social Care staff aimed at assisting staff and practitioners to communicate effectively with service users, patients and carers who have a disability or a communication need.

The guide has been co-designed with colleagues from disability representative groups and is available in hard copy and online via the internal intranet and has been disseminated across the Trust.

The guidance gives practical advice and support to staff by signposting. It assists staff to think about the many ways to communicate effectively i.e. - speaking, writing, sign language, photographs, pictures, symbols, objects, electronic aids, as well as non-verbal communications such as facial expressions, body language, sounds and gestures.

The SHSCT provides mandatory training for all staff on Equality, Good Relations and Human Rights, with refresher training required every three years. The SHSCT promotes optional Sensory Awareness training via the HSC e-learn platform training module. The Sensory Awareness training module is designed for front line staff, which is available to all Health and Social Care (HSC) staff.

On request the Sensory Team will deliver Sensory Awareness training to front-line staff across acute services, community services, domiciliary care, and independent providers upon request. The Sensory Team awareness training is tailored to meet the specific and bespoke needs of the requesting service.

The Trust also provides Here to Help Volunteers in both Craigavon Area Hospital and Daisy Hill Hospital. These volunteers will support any patients in need of assistance within the hospital environment.

5. Any audits, reports, or evaluations of how effectively the Trust meets these communication needs.

Response: The Sensory Team communicates with service users in accordance with recorded preferred methods of communication; however, this process is not subject to routine audit.

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