

27th July 2021

By Email

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Ref: FOI 1510

Dear [REDACTED],

I am writing to you in response to your Freedom of Information request received by the Patient and Client Council (PCC) on 18th June 2021 in which you requested information relating to the Department of Health consultations, number of investigations, online survey results and conclusions and PPI Panel monitoring.

1) How many consultation schemes did the Department of Health (DoH) consult the Patient and Client Council regarding prior to the said Department's granting of approval in 2017, 2018 and 2019?

You provided the following clarification: My reference to the term "consultation schemes" refers to a situation where the Northern Ireland Minister of Health requests the Patient and Client Council (PCC) to engage in active dialogue with all interested parties to a particular serious incident in health and social care terms e.g. the PCC report on their engagement with current and former patients, families and carers into Muckamore Abbey Hospital. I am specifically requesting how many similar types of investigations the PCC were requested to undertake during 2017, 2018 and 2019 or between 2017 and 2019.

To the best of our knowledge, taking account of the clarification provided, the PCC are not aware of any consultation schemes the Department of Health (DoH) consulted the PCC regarding prior to the said Department's granting of approval in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

2) The total yearly number of investigations and representations undertaken by the Patient and Client Council on behalf of service users, carers and the public in 2017, 2018 and 2019?

You provided the following clarification: *Your recently revamped and more comprehensive website in content terms now provides the information on the subject matter and for the requested years.*

Thank you for your clarification and confirmation that the PCC website now provides the information on the subject matter and for the requested years.

3) With specific reference to the Patient and Client Council's online survey launched in early 2021 seeking the views of the public as to how the pandemic had affected the public's healthcare or social care, and how appropriate and effective was Health and Social Care (HSC) response to COVID-19 how many people in total responded to the aforementioned online survey?

A total of 1,056 people contributed their views and opinions on health and social care during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Ireland in this year's People's Priorities project. 1008 completed the survey and 48 took part in focus groups lasting c. 90-120 minutes with our Involvement Team.

4) What conclusions were able to be drawn from the immediately aforementioned online survey results?

The conclusions drawn from this online survey and People's Priorities work is currently in draft report format with PCC Sponsor Branch as all PCC reports must be approved via certain governance procedures prior to publication.

As this is not an approved report, I consider this to be currently exempt from disclosure under Section 22 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

22 Information intended for future publication

(1) Information is exempt information if—

(a) The information is held by the public authority with a view to its publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date (whether determined or not),

(b) The information was already held with a view to such publication at the time when the request for information was made, and

(c) It is reasonable in all the circumstances that the information should be withheld from disclosure until the date referred to in paragraph (a).

(2) The duty to confirm or deny does not arise if, or to the extent that, compliance with section 1(1) (a) would involve the disclosure of any information (whether or not already recorded) which falls within subsection (1)

Section 22 allows for circumstances when it is reasonable for public authorities to delay the provision of information until it is made generally available through publication. Section 22 is a qualified exemption and as such is subject to a public interest test, under which I have considered the public interest in disclosing the information prior to approval by the necessary governance structures including PCC Sponsor Branch.

In considering this public interest, I note the public interest in transparency being demonstrated by releasing the information with this reply. Further I note that there is a public interest in public bodies providing information they hold that falls within the scope of an FOI request as quickly as possible.

However, this needs to be balanced with the public interest in such a public body ensuring the maximum cost effectiveness and sharing accurate information. I am of the view that provision of this information in response to an FOI request prior to publication is not the most cost effective way of placing this information in the public domain, when it may yet be subject to further amendments and the final version will be published in due course.

Under the exemption cited, it must be reasonable in all the circumstances to withhold the information until the intended date of publication. Given the potential for further modification and indeed the imminence of the report being finalised, I have concluded that the public interest in withholding this information outweighs the public interest in releasing it prior to its intended approval. However, I can confirm that once this report is finalised, it will be made available on PCC's website.

5) The Patient and Client Council' monitoring reports for 2017, 2018 and 2019 pertaining to the activities of each of the Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Panels operating within each of the 5 Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland.

You provided the following clarification: Operational within each of the 5 Trusts there are groups of service users, carers and individuals who are involved in the planning, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of the health and social care services they receive. The Department of Health in 2007 introduced the term Public and Personal Involvement (PPI) Panels to describe such a collection of people however, different Trusts use different titles e.g. service user groups, panels, focus groups, forums, carer groups, hubs etc. In order to ensure that the best interests of the public are being served as well as their meaningful involvement in health and social care planning and delivery the PCC is legally empowered to undertake an annual review of each Trust's related activities.

An integral and important component of each Trust's annual appraisal could possibly be recommendations by the PCC, or its representative, as to how certain activities already undertaken should be modified and/or improved and/or the introduction of new procedures. Consequently I am requesting to see and read the content of these appraisal/monitoring reports for each of the 5 Trusts for 2017, 2018 and 2019.

To the best of our knowledge, taking account of the clarification provided, the PCC are not aware of any appraisal/monitoring reports produced by the PCC for 2017, 2018 and 2019 pertaining to the activities of each of the Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) Panels operating within each of the 5 Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts in Northern Ireland.

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to The Business Services Organisation (BSO), which provides an Information Governance service on our behalf:

Post: Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ

Email: foi.bso@hscni.net

If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the BSO has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can contact Information Commissioner at:

Website: www.ico.org.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Email: icocasework@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office
3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,



Meadhbha Monaghan
Head of Operations, PCC