**Freedom of Information Policy**

Date: July 2023 v 1.0

Review: July 2024 v1.1

Update and review: July 2025

Written and adapted for the partners of Riverside Surgery

**Introduction**

This Freedom of Information (FOI) policy outlines the procedures and guidelines for Riverside Surgery's compliance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). Riverside Surgery is committed to promoting transparency and openness, ensuring that individuals have access to information held by the surgery, and facilitating the exercise of their rights under the Act.

**Scope**

This policy applies to all employees, contractors, and agents of Riverside Surgery. It covers all recorded information held by the surgery, regardless of format or medium, including electronic, paper, and audio-visual records.

**Objectives**

Riverside Surgery's FOI policy aims to achieve the following objectives:

a. To proactively publish and make available information that is of public interest and relevance.

b. To respond promptly and effectively to requests for information from individuals.

c. To ensure compliance with the statutory obligations under the Act.

d. To maintain confidentiality and protect personal and sensitive information in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

**4.1. FOI Officer**

Riverside Surgery shall designate a FOI Officer responsible for overseeing the implementation and administration of the FOI policy. The FOI Officer's responsibilities include:

a. Ensuring compliance with the Act and associated regulations.

b. Managing and coordinating responses to FOI requests.

c. Providing guidance and training to staff on FOI matters.

d. Reviewing and updating the FOI policy as necessary.

**4.2. Staff**

All staff members are responsible for:

a. Identifying and preserving records that may be subject to an FOI request.

b. Cooperating with the FOI Officer in responding to requests and providing accurate and complete information.

c. Reporting any potential FOI request to the FOI Officer promptly.

**Proactive Publication**

Riverside Surgery will proactively publish and make available information that is of public interest and relevance. This may include:

a. Publication of a guide to information held by Riverside Surgery, outlining the types of information available and the process for accessing it.

b. Publication of annual reports, policies, procedures, and other relevant documents on Riverside Surgery's website or through other appropriate channels.

c. Regular updates to ensure that published information remains accurate and current.

**Handling FOI Requests**

6.1. Receipt of Requests

Riverside Surgery will ensure that requests for information under the Act are received promptly and efficiently. Requests can be submitted in writing, by email, or through the designated FOI request form available on Riverside Surgery's website.

**6.2. Processing of Requests**

Upon receipt of an FOI request, the FOI Officer will:

a. Acknowledge receipt of the request within the statutory timeframe.

b. Review the request to determine its validity and scope.

c. Conduct searches and gather relevant information to respond to the request.

d. Consult with relevant departments or individuals, if necessary, to ensure an accurate and comprehensive response.

e. Prepare a response within the statutory timeframe, providing the requested information or valid reasons for any refusal or redaction.

f. Notify the requester of the decision and their rights to appeal if dissatisfied.

**6.3. Exemptions and Redactions**

Where an exemption under the Act applies to requested information, Riverside Surgery may withhold or redact the information in accordance with the law. Exemptions may include, but are not limited to, personal data, confidential commercial information, national security, or legal privilege. Riverside Surgery will provide reasons for any exemptions or redactions made.

**Review and Complaints**

7.1. Internal Review

If a requester is dissatisfied with Riverside Surgery's response to an FOI request, they have the right to request an internal review. The request for review should be submitted to the FOI Officer within 40 working days of receiving the response. The FOI Officer, who has not been involved in the original decision, will conduct a thorough review and provide a response within the statutory timeframe.

**7.2. Complaints to the Information Commissioner**

If a requester remains dissatisfied following the internal review, they have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Riverside Surgery will provide the necessary information and cooperate fully with the ICO's investigation.

**Records Management and Retention**

Riverside Surgery will establish and maintain appropriate records management practices to ensure compliance with the Act and associated regulations. This includes:

a. Identifying, classifying, and indexing records in a manner that facilitates their retrieval.

b. Implementing measures to protect records from loss, damage, or unauthorized access.

c. Establishing retention schedules to determine the appropriate period for retaining records in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements.

**Training and Awareness**

Riverside Surgery will provide appropriate training and guidance to staff on their responsibilities under the FOI policy. This may include training sessions, information bulletins, and regular updates on FOI-related matters.

**Policy Review**

This FOI policy will be reviewed regularly by the FOI Officer to ensure its ongoing relevance and effectiveness. Any necessary updates or amendments will be made in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

**Conclusion**

This Freedom of Information Policy outlines Riverside Surgery's commitment to transparency, openness, and compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. By implementing this policy, Riverside Surgery aims to facilitate access to information, protect personal and sensitive data, and promote accountability in the delivery of healthcare services.