



HINTS & TIPS 8

Freedom of Information (FOI)

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What do you need to know?

Is there something you want to know? Perhaps there's information you would like from a public body, to help you understand why a decision was taken, or why public money was spent in a certain way?

If so, freedom of information – FOI for short – could be just what you need.

What is FOI?

FOI gives people a right to information from public bodies – if there is something you want to know; ask. Just make a request to the Council, the NHS, the police, or the housing association in writing and, within 20 working days, you should be sent the information you need.

FOI applies to organisations that deliver public services: from the Scottish Government to local councils, the NHS, and the police; along with bodies like the Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Water. And, since November 2019, it also covers Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), meaning that information about the public functions carried out by housing associations now falls under FOI.

Can all information be accessed from these organisations?

Information can sometimes be withheld – but only in some circumstances (e.g. if it is someone else’s personal information), and only if FOI law allows it. Remember, if you are unhappy with a response, you have a right of appeal – to the independent Scottish Information Commissioner.

So, what do you want to know?

Whether it is information on housing repairs from a social landlord, hygiene standards in your local hospital or safety in your children’s school, FOI could be just what you need.

Find out more about using your FOI rights at: www.itspublicknowledge.info/yourrights

FOI in brief:	
	FOI covers public bodies, like the Scottish Government, local councils, the NHS, housing associations and the police
	Requests must be made in a recordable format (e.g. email, letter, or audio file)
	FOI gives you a right to recorded information – info must be recorded in some way (e.g. a minute, email, report, or spreadsheet)
	Organisations have a duty to help people access their information
	Requests must be responded to within 20 working days
	Requests can only be refused in certain circumstances
	Most requests result in information being provided
	If you are unhappy, you can appeal