

FOI REF: 25/478

25th July 2025

Tel: 0300 131 4500
Website: www.esht.nhs.uk

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

I am responding to your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act. The answers to your specific questions are as follows:

I am writing to request information concerning the handling and storage of deceased persons at your hospital's mortuary.

- **This request is being made to all NHS hospitals with mortuary facilities located in the UK. I would be grateful if you could provide the following information for your hospital for the most recent 24-month period available:**

[The information provided by the Trust is for July 2023 to June 2025 \(the most recent 24-month period available.\)](#)

- 1) **The average length of time deceased individuals are kept in your hospital mortuary prior to release for burial or cremation.**

[14.1 days \(Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea\).](#)

[14.0 days \(East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust\).](#)

- 2) **The minimum and maximum duration any deceased individual was retained in your mortuary during that period.**

[The minimum duration for both mortuaries was 0 days \(the deceased individual was admitted and released on the same day\).](#)

[377 days \(maximum duration at Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea\).](#)

[415 days \(maximum duration at Eastbourne District General Hospital\).](#)

Cont.../

3) The total number of deceased released from your mortuary, broken down by:

a) Online funeral directors (those primarily operating through online platforms).

154 (Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea).

160 (Eastbourne District General Hospital).

314 (Total).

b) Local/traditional funeral directors (those with a physical local presence).

2,389 (Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea).

2,291 (Eastbourne District General Hospital).

4,680 (Total).

4) The average duration of stay in your mortuary for deceased individuals handled by:

a) Online funeral directors.

18.3 days (Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea).

17.7 days (Eastbourne District General Hospital).

b) Local funeral directors.

13.9 days (Conquest Hospital, St. Leonards-on-Sea).

13.7 days (Eastbourne District General Hospital).

5) The total number of requests for jewellery to be removed, broken down by:

a) Online funeral directors (those primarily operating through online platforms).

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust does not centrally record the information that has been requested. To enable the Trust to provide this information will require a manual review of approximately 6,000 patients' records to establish if we hold this information, which we estimate would take in excess of 18 hours. We are therefore applying Section 12(1) to this part of your request.

Section 12(1) of the Act allows a public authority to refuse to comply with a request for information if the authority estimates that the cost of compliance would exceed the 'appropriate limit', as defined by the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 (the Regulations). These state that this cost limit is £450 for public authorities which are not part of central government or the armed forces.

Cont.../

The costs are calculated at £25 per hour per person regardless of the rate of pay, which means that the limit will be exceeded if the work involved would exceed 18 hours. The Trust estimates that the cost of complying with this request would significantly exceed the above limit.

b) Local/traditional funeral directors (those with a physical local presence)

Please see the response to question 5a.

6) The total number of requests for the deceased to be dressed for viewing in the mortuary, broken down by:

a) Online funeral directors (those primarily operating through online platforms).

Please see the response to question 5a.

b) Local/traditional funeral directors (those with a physical local presence).

Please see the response to question 5a.

7) If applicable, I would also appreciate it if you could share any internal protocols or policy documents regarding the standard retention period for deceased individuals in your care.

There are no internal protocols or policy documents available regarding the standard retention period for deceased individuals in the Trust's care. Standard retention is the process of the deceased individual's admittance to the mortuary and processes undertaken by the Bereavement Office, the Medical Examiner's Office and the Coroner's Office before the release of the deceased individual to the funeral director which has been chosen to undertake the funeral. All the processes must be completed prior to the deceased individual being collected by the funeral director and leaving the Trust's care. There are many variables which cause the timescales for the completion of the processes to vary, which means that the retention period for deceased individuals in the Trust's care varies.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Should you be dissatisfied with the Trust's response to your request, you have the right to request an internal review. Please write to the Freedom of Information Department (esh-tr.foi@nhs.net), quoting the above reference, within 40 working days. The Trust is not obliged to accept an internal review after this date.

Should you still be dissatisfied with your FOI request, you have the right of complaint to the Information Commissioner at the following address:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Department
esh-tr.foi@nhs.net