Lothian NHS Board

NHS Lothian Headquarters

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Date 6 November 2026
Your Ref
Our Ref 12026R

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Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REVIEW – PLASTIC SURGERY COMPLICATIONS

I write in response to your request for review of NHS Lothian's response to your Freedom of Information request about information in relation privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery. Having discussed your request and our response of 8 October 2026, I can respond as follows:

Original Request and Response:
Question:
I would like to request anonymised statistical information regarding patients who have required unplanned NHS Lothian assessment, treatment and/or admission following complications arising after privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery.

For each of the calendar years 2024, 2025 and 2026 to date, please provide:
1. The total number of patients who required unplanned assessment and/or treatment from NHS Lothian following privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery.

I would be grateful if this is not limited solely to Emergency Department attendances. Where recorded, please include patients who:
- attended an Emergency Department;
- were transferred or referred from a private hospital/provider;
- were referred directly to, admitted under, or assessed by Plastic Surgery, General Surgery or another relevant surgical/specialist team;
- were reviewed by an NHS surgeon or plastic surgeon in relation to a postoperative complication;
- attended a surgical assessment unit, ward or other NHS service;
- or otherwise required unplanned NHS assessment or treatment relating to a complication following privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery.

2. Of these patients, the number who required admission to an NHS Lothian hospital.

3. Where recorded, please provide a breakdown of the number of patients who required:
   - emergency or unplanned surgery/re-operation;
   - treatment for postoperative haemorrhage or haematoma;
   - treatment for postoperative infection;
   - treatment for wound complications;
   - blood transfusion;
   - inpatient admission or observation following the complication.

4. Where available, please provide a breakdown by the NHS hospital or service which provided the assessment or treatment, including St John's Hospital, Livingston.
5. Where the treating specialty is recorded, please provide a breakdown by specialty, particularly Plastic Surgery and General Surgery.

6. Where the type of original private procedure is recorded, please provide a breakdown by procedure or category of procedure.
   In particular, I would be grateful for any figures held relating to complications following breast surgery, including:
   - breast reduction;
   - breast augmentation;
   - mastopexy/breast uplift;
   - or other cosmetic breast procedures.

7. For the cases included within the figures above, where the originating private hospital/provider is recorded and can be disclosed without identifying an individual patient, please provide the name of the private hospital/provider associated with each case or reported category.

   For example, where a case involved postoperative haemorrhage/haematoma, infection, wound complication, hospital admission or emergency re-operation, I would be grateful if the originating private provider could also be shown alongside that information where held and where disclosure is permitted.

   I am not requesting any information capable of identifying the individual patient. I am seeking only the name of the private healthcare provider at which the original privately funded procedure was undertaken.

   If providing provider information at individual case level would create a risk of patient identification due to small numbers, please instead provide the information grouped by private provider, showing for each provider, where held:
   - number of patients requiring NHS assessment or treatment;
   - nature/category of complication;
   - number requiring NHS admission;

- number requiring emergency or unplanned surgery/re-operation;
- type/category of original private procedure;
- NHS hospital/service providing treatment;
- and treating specialty.

Within this information, please specifically include St Ellen's Hospital, Livingston and/or Cosmedicare where they are recorded as the originating private provider.

8. If NHS Lothian cannot provide a complete provider breakdown, please confirm whether St Ellen's Hospital and/or Cosmedicare can nevertheless be identified within the information held and, if so, please provide the relevant aggregate figures for 2024, 2025 and 2026 to date.

9. Please confirm whether NHS Lothian routinely records the originating private hospital/provider when a patient requires NHS assessment or treatment for a complication following privately funded surgery.
   If so, please confirm how this information is recorded or coded.
   If the originating provider is not held as a discrete or routinely reportable field, please confirm whether it may instead be identifiable through routinely recorded information such as:
   - referral source;
   - transfer source;
   - treating specialty;
   - provider information;
   - onward referral;
   - discharge destination;
   - or follow-up arrangements.

10. Where recorded, please provide the number of patients who, following NHS Lothian assessment, treatment and/or admission for a complication of privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery, were discharged or referred back to their original private hospital/provider for ongoing postoperative care or follow-up.

    Where the destination provider can be identified, I would specifically request that the private provider is named alongside the aggregate information where disclosure is possible, including St Ellen's Hospital and/or Cosmedicare where applicable.

    If a numerical figure cannot be provided, please confirm whether onward referral, discharge or return to a named private provider is held as a searchable or reportable field.

11. Where NHS Lothian holds information regarding the financial cost of providing unplanned or emergency NHS treatment for complications arising following privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery, please provide any available aggregate figures for 2024, 2025 and 2026 to date.

Where provider-specific cost information is held, please provide the aggregate costs associated with each private provider where disclosure is possible, including any costs associated with NHS treatment following procedures undertaken at St Ellen's Hospital/Cosmedicare.

If costs cannot be identified by individual private provider, I would be grateful for any broader figures held regarding the cost to NHS Lothian of assessing and treating complications arising from privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery.

For clarity, I am requesting aggregate statistical information only. I do not require names, dates of birth, addresses, CHI numbers, medical-record numbers, exact dates of individual treatment or any other information capable of identifying individual patients.

I appreciate that where numbers are very small, disclosure controls may be necessary. If exact figures or case-level provider information cannot be disclosed for this reason, I would be grateful if the information could instead be provided in an appropriately suppressed or grouped format, for example "fewer than five", where possible.

I also appreciate that some of the requested information may not be held as discrete or routinely reportable data fields. I am not requesting that NHS Lothian manually review individual patient records where doing so would exceed the applicable cost limit. Rather, I would be grateful for all information that can reasonably be extracted from existing records and an explanation of which elements cannot be identified or reported.

If NHS Lothian does not hold some of the requested information, please identify which elements are held and, where possible, advise whether another public authority may hold the remaining information.

Answer:

This information is not held in a centrally extractable format due to the lack of coding. It would require us to look through all attendances within Emergency Department and Plastics and even then, this would not produce accurate information. There are no non-surgical aesthetic procedures carried out by independent practitioner with the plastic surgery unit the Lothian wide plastic service.

Under the Freedom of Information Act NHS Lothian is not required to create new records to enable it to respond to your enquiry. This information is not collated or held in aggregate form and it would be necessary to review all case files relating to patients over the period you have requested to assemble the information you seek. Even if NHS Lothian did this – and there would be significant cost implications in doing so – it would be unable to respond in full to your request. The information requested is therefore exempt under section 12.1 – Cost.

It is also not possible to provide further assistance as there is no way to reduce the scope of your request and produce meaningful and accurate data.

If we were to manually examine Emergency Department records (because not coded) the total cost of answering this request would be: £937,500. This sum has been calculated as follows: Estimated number of records to be located and reviewed based on number of attendances at the Emergency Department per year of 125,000 times 3 years is a total of 375,000. Estimated time to review each record is 10 minutes which equates to 62,500 hours work at £15.00 per hour for a member of staff to carry out the review. This does not take into account presentations within Plastics (which might also be duplicates).

Review Request:

- My original request specifically acknowledged that some information might not be centrally coded and expressly stated that I was not requesting a manual review of individual patient records where doing so would exceed the applicable cost limit.

  I am therefore particularly concerned by the statement that there is no way to reduce the scope of my request and produce meaningful and accurate data. I would like the internal review to consider whether the following information could be identified through existing NHS Lothian records:

  1. The number of patients referred or transferred to the Plastic Surgery service at St John's Hospital, Livingston, following complications arising from privately funded cosmetic or plastic surgery.

  2. Whether existing Plastic Surgery referral records, admission records, theatre activity records, service audits or other routinely held information could identify patients who required emergency NHS treatment following privately funded procedures.

  3. Whether the originating private hospital or provider is recorded within referral or transfer information, particularly where patients were referred directly to a specialist surgical team rather than presenting through a standard Emergency Department pathway.

  4. Whether existing records identify patients who were discharged or referred back to their original private hospital or provider for ongoing postoperative care following NHS treatment.
  5. Whether any existing reports, audits or statistical information identify referrals or admissions originating from St Ellen's Hospital/Cosmedicare specifically.

  6. Whether a request restricted to St John's Hospital, the Plastic Surgery service or a shorter reporting period could be answered within the applicable cost limit.

  7. I would also like to ask whether narrowing the request to one specific private hospital would make the information more accessible.

For example, would it be possible to identify patients referred or transferred from St Ellen's

Hospital/Cosmedicare to St John's Hospital, Livingston, following complications of privately funded surgery?

I appreciate that this information may not be recorded under a specific diagnostic code. However, I would be interested to establish whether the originating hospital could be identified through existing referral records, transfer information, Plastic Surgery admissions or other routinely recorded data.

If this narrower approach would make the request more manageable, I would be happy to consider restricting its scope accordingly.

I would appreciate guidance on whether this would bring the request within the statutory cost limit, rather than receiving a further refusal without exploring whether a more targeted search is possible.

I am not asking NHS Lothian to create information which does not exist or undertake an extensive manual examination of patient records.

Rather, I am seeking clarification of whether relevant specialist services and existing information sources were considered before concluding that no meaningful data could be provided.

I would also appreciate confirmation of which departments, services or information systems were consulted when preparing the original response.

If NHS Lothian maintains that no narrower request could be answered, I would be grateful for a clear explanation of why existing Plastic Surgery referral, admission or theatre information cannot provide any relevant figures.

I would also ask that the internal review considers NHS Lothian's duty to provide advice and assistance under section 15 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, particularly in identifying whether a more focused request could be formulated.

Review Response:

1.	I am advised that there is no coding or record book etc. that could be used to identify and separate patients presenting with complications from private cosmetic surgery from any other patient. Therefore despite the fact that the number of such patients is low, we could identify them retrospectively without examining each individual record.
2.	As above. Whilst the clinical records will have documented the history of the

	presentation and likely the involvement of private practice and aesthetic surgery, this detail is not then coded or recorded in a log anywhere that would allow retrospective identification of these patients.
3.	Without having a prospective audit available, the best "guess" would be that the previous surgery and the fact that it was done privately and in which country, would be recorded in the Electronic Patient Record (EPR), but the identity of the surgeon and the private practice is unlikely to have been recorded consistently.
4.	Only the individual patient records will hold discharge information. It would be very rare for patients to be referred back to the private sector for ongoing wound care after corrective treatment in the NHS, although some patients would have been advised to seek private review if they wanted further aesthetic surgery. For example, when dealing with breast implant infections, the NHS will remove the implant and treat the patient appropriately when the private sector will not, but the NHS will not replace the implant. In such cases, patients are advised to contact their original private provider. Again, there is no easy way of extracting this information from the patient EPR unless we were able to identify all of these patient, which we are not.
5.	No. Maybe you could approach St Ellens about how many of their patients have been referred to the NHS? As stated above this is not information we can extract without looking through individual records and even if recorded is is likely to be incomplete and inaccurate.
6.	No. It would simply be to difficult and time consuming to try to identify patients who possibly fall into this group and then trawl through their notes to see if they do and then extract the requested information.
7.	It is not possible to reduce the scope of the request as the information is not held in a centrally extractable format. As advised we would need to search through individual records inorder to identify if they fell within the scope of the request. If we were to manually examine Plastic Surgery records (because not coded), St Johns only the total cost of answering this request would be: £37,500. This sum has been calculated as follows: Estimated number of records to be located and reviewed based on number of attendances at the Plastic Surgery Department per year of 5,000 times 3 years is a total of 15,000. Estimated time to review each record is 10 minutes which equates to 2,500 hours work at £15.00 per hour for a member of staff to carry out the review. Even if we were to reduce this to a single year the total would still be £12,500.

If you are not satisfied with this response you still have the right to make a formal complaint to the Scottish Information Commissioner who you can contact at the address below or using the Scottish Information Commissioner's Office online appeals service at https://www.foi.scot/appeal. If you remain dissatisfied with the Commissioner's response you then have the option to appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law.

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Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Reviewer/
NHS Lothian
cc: Executive Nurse Director