



16 March 2026

Email:

Dear

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Request No: 45975-26
Subject: NI Audit Office Recommendation 3 (Value for Money)
Date Received: 06/01/2026

Thank you for your request for information received on 6th January 2026 which was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

We also refer to your email of 20th February 2026 requesting an internal review due to the length of time taken to respond to your original request. Please accept our sincerest apologies for the delay in responding.

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Health and Social Care Trust has now completed its search for the information you requested and that is detailed below.

FOI QUESTION(S)

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I request the following information in relation to Recommendation 3 of the Northern Ireland Audit Office report "Ambulance Handovers in Northern Ireland" (published March 2025):

"Given the significant ongoing reliance and associated expenditure on deploying the private ambulance sector, it is important that NIAS assesses if this represents best value for money or whether building additional in-house capacity would represent a better and more sustainable use of resources."

1. Please confirm what actions the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust (NIAS) has taken to date to comply with Recommendation 3.
2. For any actions identified, please state:
 - a) the date such work commenced; and
 - b) whether the work is ongoing, completed, or pending.
3. Please confirm whether any scoping papers, internal reports, draft or final analyses, briefing papers, or correspondence exist in relation to Recommendation 3, and if so, please provide copies.
4. Please describe the methodology used, or proposed to be used, by NIAS to assess value for money between:
 - a) NIAS in-house non-emergency ambulance provision; and
 - b) Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) provision.



5. Please confirm whether the methodology:

- a) uses the same unit of measurement for in-house and IAS provision;
- b) distinguishes between availability and completed patient movements;
- c) takes into account booked-on but non-deployed time, and how such time is costed, categorised, and attributed within any value-for-money analysis;
- d) accounts for bookings declined or refused;
- e) includes the cost implications of secondary or alternative bookings arising where bookings are declined or refused;
- f) adjusts for differences in booking or journey mix and complexity;
- g) takes into account all labour cost variations and non-productive staff time, including but not limited to overtime, statutory holiday pay, unsociable hours allowances, compensatory rest, employer pension contributions, sickness absence, restricted or “light duties”, phased returns to work, and any other circumstances in which NIAS staff are not fully deployable but continue to incur cost, and confirms how such costs are treated where they are not attributable to Independent Ambulance Service (IAS) provision;

- h) includes downstream costs arising from reduced ambulance availability, consistent with the headline findings of the Northern Ireland Audit Office, including where such reduced availability is linked to delayed or uncompleted patient movements;

- i) includes system-wide operational impacts identified by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, including effects on Emergency Department offloads, ambulance queuing or stacking, hospital bed occupancy, and the cancellation or delay of appointments, treatments, or procedures;

- j) includes the time-based escalation and outcome impacts of such delays, including delays to patient care, effects on patient outcomes, the duration and persistence of delays, and any associated financial or service delivery costs, and confirms whether the methodology distinguishes between avoidable downstream impacts and unavoidable system demand.

6. Please confirm whether the Department of Health and/or the Business Services Organisation (BSO) has been involved in developing or reviewing this assessment, and whether the Northern Ireland Audit Office has been informed of progress.

ANSWER(S)

NI Ambulance HSC Trust (NIAS) has carefully considered your questions asked and conducted a search of our records. We also refer to your email of 23rd February 2026 clarifying your request for an internal review based on the delayed response breaching the statutory time limit.

We have concluded that the report was completed by The NI Audit Office (NIAO) and recommendations referred to have been compiled by the NIAO and not by NIAS, therefore the information is not held by NIAS.

To date NIAS has not assessed Recommendation 3 of the NIAO report “Ambulance Handovers in Northern Ireland” (published March 2025), therefore NIAS answer to your request is that under section 1 (1) of the FOIA of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

(FOIA) which entitles individuals to request information from public authorities, mandating that they:

- (a) confirm in writing if they hold the information requested, and
- (b) communicate that information is held

we do not hold this information requested therefore we are unable to comply with your request.

However Section 16 FOIA of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) mandates that public authorities provide advice and assistance to anyone proposing to make, or who has made, an information request. This duty requires helping requesters refine, clarify, or narrow down requests, particularly when dealing with cost limits, to ensure, where reasonable, they receive the information sought.

NIAS aim to provide advice and assistance where possible and would advise that according to the NIAO website, this states that the results of such an audit is reported to the NI Ireland Assembly namely the Public Accounts Committee where follow up is progressed between the NIAO, Executive and the Committee. Please see the link below for ease of access to this information where this may be the more appropriate route to seek further information.

[Our Work | Northern Ireland Audit Office \(niauditoffice.gov.uk\)](http://niauditoffice.gov.uk)

If you would like to reformulate your request for NIAS information not generated by the report specified that NIAS may possibly hold, please submit a new FOI request which can be processed and treated accordingly where the 20 working days limit will begin again.

I hope the above assists you.

Please note that, under the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations, if you wish to publish or otherwise use this information besides for your own means, you will need to seek our permission to do so.

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.

If you require an internal review to be undertaken, please request this via the email address: information.governance@nias.hscni.net

Or submit via

Director of Planning, Performance and Corporate Services, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) HSC Trust, Site 30, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8SG.

If following an internal review, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the Trust has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Email: ni@ico.org.uk

Website: [ICO Website](#)

Post: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF

Telephone: 028 9027 8757 or 0303 123 1114 (Belfast based Office)

Please be advised that NIAS replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ <https://nias.hscni.net> Personal details in respect of your request will have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.

Yours sincerely

(not signed – issued by email)

Information Governance Team

This response has been prepared for disclosure log publication. Only minor editorial or redaction amendments have been made for clarity and compliance with data protection legislation. The substantive content is identical to that provided to the requestor and the original issued version remains the authoritative record.