



## **Information Sharing Protocol for Practitioners working with Children and Adults with needs for Care and Support**

**January 2023**

## Version Control

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## Contents

Number	Section Title	Page(s)
1	Introduction	4
2	Purpose	4-5
3	What Is Information Sharing?	6
4	Legal Basis for Information Sharing	7-8
5	Information Relating to A Deceased Person	9
6	The Principles of Information Sharing	9-10
7	Information Sharing and Consent in Safeguarding	10-11
8	Caldicott Principles	11
9	Sharing Information Appropriately and Securely	12
10	Methods of Requesting and Transferring Information	12
11	Storage of Information	12
12	Individual Rights	12-13
13	Freedom of Information Requests	13
14	Data Breaches	13
15	Escalation Policy	13
16	Additional Information and Contacts	14
17	Safeguarding Partnership Contact Details	14
Appendix 1	The Seven Golden Rules for Information Sharing	15
Appendix 2	Flow Chart of Key Questions for Information Sharing	16
Appendix 3	Signatories	17

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 To work well in Partnership, we all need to share information, including sensitive personal data, between individuals, practitioners and organisations – including public, private and voluntary sector organisations. Effective sharing of information is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to safeguard children and adults with needs for care and support. Case Reviews have consistently highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of and share information in a timely manner can have serious consequences for the safety and welfare of children and adults at risk.
- 1.2 Darlington Safeguarding Partnership delivers an integrated and joined up service which embraces the “Think Family” approach. It is essential that collaborative working and good information sharing is established throughout agencies, at all levels, which is then embedded through effective safeguarding practice.
- 1.3 The purpose of this protocol is to set out a framework for partner organisations and their staff to manage, process and share personal and sensitive personal information on a lawful, fair and transparent basis with the purpose of enabling them to meet their statutory obligations. This protocol has been developed to address information sharing both at strategic and operational level within the arenas of Safeguarding Children and Adult Safeguarding. All organisations have a role in supporting the sharing of information between and within organisations and address any barriers to information sharing to ensure that a culture of appropriate information sharing is developed and supported. It is intended that agencies with the potential to be involved in safeguarding investigations will sign up to the use of this protocol. This protocol is agreed with the purpose of ensuring compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Human Rights Act 1998.

## **2. PURPOSE**

- 2.1 Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children and adults with needs for care and support, whether this is when problems are first emerging or whether the child or adult is already known to services. Information sharing is also essential for the identification of patterns of behaviour when a child or vulnerable adult has gone missing, when multiple children appear to be associated with the same context or location of risk, or in relation to children or adults in care settings where there may be multiple local authorities involved in the care of the children or adults.
- 2.2 This protocol has been developed to:
  - promote effective multi-agency working to support the work of all providers across Darlington and to ensure the safety and promote the welfare of children and adults with needs for care and support.
  - ensure legislation and government guidelines are followed for effective and lawful sharing of information by all practitioners.

- 2.3 This document should be read in conjunction with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership's [Multi Agency Safeguarding Child Protection Procedures](#) and [Multi Agency Safeguarding Adult Procedures](#) and the Multi Agency Information Sharing Protocol, North East and North Cumbria Region.
- 2.4 Effective communication and information sharing is essential to safeguarding children and adults with needs for care and support. [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 Statutory Guidance](#) (pages 18-19), states effective sharing of information between practitioners and local agencies is essential for the effective identification of children and adults at risk of abuse and neglect, assessment and service provision and recent case reviews have highlighted ineffective information sharing as a factor in cases where children and adults have been placed at risk. Other guidance to consider when sharing information is the Caldicott Principles.

[The Care Act 2014](#) and the [Health and Care Act 2022](#) enshrine in law the need for organisations to share information to make sure adults with needs for care and support receive the best possible care and support. It also sets out a 'duty to cooperate' to ensure organisations share information where there are concerns about a vulnerable adult at risk of harm. The legislation emphasises the need to empower people, to balance choice and control for individuals against preventing harm and reducing risk, and to respond proportionately to safeguarding concerns.

- 2.5 Early sharing of information is the key to providing effective early help where there are emerging problems.
- 2.6 **Fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to promote the welfare and protect the safety of children and adults.** The seventh Caldicott principle states: The duty to share information can be as important as the duty to protect patient confidentiality.
- 2.7 Professional duty of care is now seen to encompass both adults and children who are vulnerable not just to harm but also to their welfare being adversely affected without the provision of services.
- 2.8 To ensure effective safeguarding arrangements:
- All organisations should have arrangements in place which set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information internally. In addition, these arrangements should cover sharing information with other organisations and practitioners, including third party providers.
  - Practitioners should not assume that someone else will pass on information which they think may be critical to keeping a child or adult safe. If a practitioner has concerns about a child or an adult's welfare and believes they are suffering or likely to suffer harm, then information should be shared with the relevant Social Care Team and/or the Police.
  - Practitioners should be particularly alert to the importance of sharing information when a child or adult moves from one local authority area to another.

### 3 WHAT IS INFORMATION SHARING?

3.1 Information sharing should take place in circumstances where there is a clear need for the exchange of information (legitimate relationship) to take place and there are legal powers which permit agencies to do so. The information shared should be relevant and proportionate to the purpose concerned. Information sharing can take place in a number of ways:

- **Disclosure** – an agency acknowledges that it possesses relevant data. It may make that data accessible to a requesting agency or individual but retains ownership and responsibility.
- **Sharing** – in which agencies pool available data and maintain single service-based records. A Data Protection Agreement between parties would be required, this would cover all sharing for these purposes which would also detail legal basis for sharing and remove any misconceptions.
- **Exchange** – in which one agency provides one or more other agencies with relevant data. Ownership and responsibility passes to the new agency which may amend or update the record to meet further requirements.
- **Reporting** – an agency provides statistical data for an agreed reporting mechanism which may be reported to local and national groups.

3.2 There are three types of information public sector agencies manage and may share:

- **Organisational material** - plans, policies, guidelines, minutes of meetings. This is generally freely available or can be made available under the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 subject to specific exemptions where the material concerned can be considered commercially sensitive or otherwise exempt from disclosure. However, Darlington Safeguarding Partnership is currently exempt from the FOI legislation and is not legally required to respond to requests for information. Public authorities which make up the partnership are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and have their own procedures for responding to FOI requests.
- **Statistical material** – aggregated or anonymised data including relevant analysis. Exchange often involves the provision of raw data sets which the receiving agency may combine with other data to provide more detailed analysis. This kind of data is usually structured to avoid the identification of specific individuals.
- **Personal data** - (as defined by the Data Protection Act 2018) is:
  - any information which may identify a living individual, whether that individual is a service user, an employee or any other relevant person; for example, a name, address, customer reference number, photograph or CCTV image.
  - Any information which can clearly identify a living individual when combined with any other data.
  - Aggregate information which may contain information about a group of individuals from which a single individual can be identified.

## 4. LEGAL BASIS FOR INFORMATION SHARING

- 4.1 When deciding whether to share personal data for the purpose of safeguarding adults or children, practitioners must first establish whether there is a legal basis to share the information.
- 4.2 The four main areas of law that relate to the disclosure and sharing of information are:
- The Common Law Duty of Confidentiality
  - The Human Rights Act 1998
  - The UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
  - The Data Protection Act 2018
- 4.3 Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights gives everyone a right to respect for family life, home and correspondence. Authorities can only interfere with these rights if the practitioner is acting lawfully and pursuing a legitimate aim (including the protection of health and the rights of others) and the action is no more than is needed.
- 4.4 The implementation of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR broadened the scope of the legislation to incorporate the processing of personal data for safeguarding purposes within organisations. This is 'special category data' which relates to personal information of subjects which is especially sensitive and personal, the exposure of which could significantly impact the rights and freedoms of data subjects.

Where practitioners need to share special category personal data, they should be aware that the Data Protection Act 2018 includes the 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' as a condition that allows practitioners to share information without consent and can be used for the purposes of:

- protecting an individual from neglect or physical, mental or emotional harm or
- protecting the physical, mental or emotional wellbeing of an individual.

Where there is clear risk of significant harm to a child or harm to adults, the basis on which you can share information including sensitive information is therefore clear.

- 4.5 All information shared between agencies must have a defined and justifiable purpose and the information shared must be accurate and necessary for the purpose for which it is being shared; the information must be proportionate, shared securely and shared only with those who need to see it.
- 4.6 **Safeguarding and promoting the safety and welfare of children and adults with needs for care and support is the prime consideration in all decision making about sharing information.**
- 4.7 Below is a list of the legislation and guidance that may need to be taken into consideration in the context of children's and adult safeguarding and information sharing:

- Health and Care Act 2022
- The Care Act 2014
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act 1996
- Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- Criminal Justice Act 2003
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- The Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Children and Social Work Act 2017
- Human Rights Act 2000
- Crime and Security Act 2010

- 4.8 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 requires the Statutory Safeguarding Partners to set out how they will work together and with any relevant agencies, ensure that children are safeguarded, and their welfare promoted. When selected by the Statutory Safeguarding Partners to be part of the local safeguarding arrangements relevant agencies must act in accordance with the arrangements. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners can require an individual or body to comply with a request for information, as outlined in section 14B of the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017) for the purpose of enabling it to perform its functions.

The Care Act 2014 and the Health and Care Act 2022 require that the Statutory Safeguarding Partners establish Safeguarding Partnership arrangements to ensure that adults with needs for care and support are protected and their welfare is promoted. Each relevant partner must cooperate with the Safeguarding Partnership. Clause 45 of the Care Act 2014 relates to the 'supply of information' and the responsibilities of others to comply with requests for information from the Safeguarding Partners.

The functions of the Safeguarding Partners include quality assurance practice involving joint audits of case files and case reviews involving practitioners for the purpose of identifying lessons learned. The legislation supports information sharing and allows for the multi-agency data to be shared for these purposes. Any request for information about individuals should be necessary and proportionate to the reason for the request.

- 4.9 Any person may disclose information to a relevant authority under S 115 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 'where disclosure is necessary or expedient for the purposes of the Act (reduction and prevention of crime and disorder)'. Relevant Authorities are the Police, Local authorities, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and the Probation Service.

## 5. INFORMATION RELATING TO A DECEASED PERSON

The Data Protection Act 2018 does not apply to deceased individuals. When considering disclosing information in relation to a deceased person the Access to Health Act 1990 and the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality must be considered.

## 6. THE PRINCIPLES OF INFORMATION SHARING

6.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR are not barriers to collating and sharing information but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately. The Common Law Duty of Confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 do not prevent the sharing of personal information. This can be because it is in the data subject's interests for the information to be disclosed or that public interest would justify the disclosure of the information.

6.2 The bullet points below are key principles of the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 and are intended to help practitioners working with children, young people, adults with needs for care and support and parents and carers to share information between organisations:

- **Adequate** - information should be adequate for its purpose. Information should be of the right quality to ensure that it can be understood and relied upon.
- **Relevant** - only information that is relevant to the purpose should be shared with those who need it. This should be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner.
- **Limited** - when taking decisions about what information to share practitioners should first consider how much information needs to be released (minimisation principle). Only sharing data that is adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary is a key principle of the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 and practitioners should consider the impact of disclosing information about the data subject and any third parties. Information must be proportionate to the need and level of risk.
- **Accurate** - information should be accurate and kept up to date and clearly distinguish between fact and opinion. Information can be requested to be erased or rectified as part of the processing.
- **Timely** - information should be shared in a timely fashion to reduce the risk of missed opportunities to offer support and protect children and adults at risk. The information must not be stored for longer period than is necessary, retention periods must be applied to all information.
- **Secure** - information should be shared securely and practitioners must always follow their organisation's policy on security for handling personal information. The information should be securely managed to prevent from any accidental loss, destruction or damage and protected against any unauthorised access.
- **Record** - information sharing decisions should be recorded regardless of whether the decision is made to share or not. This record should include the rationale for the decision what information has been shared and with whom in line with organisational procedures. If the decision is not to share the reasons should be recorded. In line with each organisation's retention policy, the

information should not be kept any longer than necessary. In some cases, this may be indefinitely.

- 6.3 Practitioners should use their judgement when making decisions about what information to share and should follow their own organisational procedures. **The most important consideration is whether sharing information is likely to support the safeguarding and protection of a child or adult including others who may be at risk.**

See **Appendix 1** for the Seven Golden Rules of Information Sharing  
See **Appendix 2** for information sharing flowchart.

- 6.4 Remember that using **professional curiosity** can help to prevent risk. If there are concerns that a child or an adult may be at risk of serious harm, then practitioners have a duty to follow safeguarding procedures without delay. If a practitioner is uncertain about what to do at any stage, advice should be sought, and the outcome of the discussion should be recorded.

## 7. INFORMATION SHARING AND CONSENT IN SAFEGUARDING

- 7.1 Information which is relevant to safeguarding is often data which is considered to be 'special category data' meaning that it is sensitive and personal. The Data Protection Act 2018 includes exemptions relating to 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' as a condition that allows practitioners to share information **without consent** (schedule 3).
- 7.2 **In most cases it will be lawful to share information without consent.** Consent does not need to be sought where the processing of people's personal data is based on any UK GDPR, Article 6 condition other than 6) 1. (a) consent - for example the public interest condition or the health and social care condition and any GDPR, Article 9 other 9) 2. (a) explicit consent. All Article 6 conditions provide an equal legitimate basis for processing personal data. Where there is special category information being shared Article 9 conditions must also be considered and justified.
- 7.3 Practitioners should proactively inform children and adults when they first engage with the service about the organisation's Privacy Notice on how information is shared and the basis (Data Protection Act 2018/UK GDPR) upon which their personal data is being processed.
- 7.4 **Information may be shared without consent, if a practitioner has reason to believe that there are grounds to do so and that the sharing of the information will enhance the safeguarding of the child or adult with needs for care and support in a timely manner.**
- 7.5 Consent should **not** be sought if doing so would:
- place a person (the individual, family member, staff or a third party) at increased risk of significant harm (child) or serious harm (adult) or
  - prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime
  - lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult

- demonstrate an imbalance of power – for example in a policing context. Consent is rarely sought in policing, as the Article 6 public Interest or providing health and care conditions are applicable in most policing scenarios. Consent means giving people genuine choice and control over how an organisation use and share their data. Valid consent means people must be able to refuse consent to processing (for example, sharing personal data) without detriment and must also be able to freely withdraw consent at any time. The UK GDPR expressly states that where there is an imbalance of power in a business context/relationship, consent will not be a valid condition for using data.

7.6 When deciding whether to share confidential information the practitioner must judge on the facts of the case whether the sharing of the information is a necessary and proportionate response to the need to protect the child, the adult or the wider public from serious harm.

7.7 Sharing confidential information without consent will normally be justified in the public or vital interest when:

- there is evidence or reasonable cause to believe a child is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm or
- to prevent significant harm to a child or serious harm to an adult including the wider public including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of a serious crime
- where there is an imbalance of power between the parties.

7.8 Where there is a clear risk of significant harm to a child or serious harm to adults the public interest test will almost certainly be satisfied.

7.9 Consent should not be sought when there is a requirement by law to share information through a statutory duty or by a court order.

## 8. CALDICOTT PRINCIPLES

8.1 The Caldicott Principles and [HM Government advice](#) for practitioners on 7 Golden Rules are helpful in considering the justification for the sharing of information.

8.2 The Caldicott Principles 2020 support the safe and appropriate sharing of information in the interests of the individual's direct care should be the rule not the exception. This includes Caldicott Principles:

- *That the duty to share personal confidential data can be as important as the duty to respect service user confidentiality.*
- *Inform patients and service users about how their confidential information is used. A range of steps should be taken to ensure no surprises for patients and service users, so they can have clear expectations about how and why their confidential information is used, and what choices they have about this. These steps will vary depending on the use: as a minimum, this should include providing accessible, relevant and appropriate information - in some cases, greater engagement will be required.*

## 9. SHARING INFORMATION APPROPRIATELY AND SECURELY

Practitioners must have due regard to the relevant data protection principles which allow them to share information as outlined in the Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). To share information effectively practitioners should:

- be confident of the processing conditions under the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR which allow the storage and sharing of information for safeguarding purposes, including information which is sensitive and personal and should be treated as a 'special category personal data'.
- in respect of special category data be aware that the Data Protection Act 2018 contains some exemptions for 'safeguarding of children and individuals at risk' as a processing condition that allows practitioners to share information. This includes allowing practitioners to share information without consent if it is not possible to gain consent, it cannot be reasonably expected that a practitioner gains consent or gaining consent would place a child or adult at risk. Where sharing under these exemptions, the specific sections of the Act will need to be justified.

## 10. METHODS OF REQUESTING AND TRANSFERRING INFORMATION

Information will normally be exchanged electronically by secure encrypted email. The Darlington Safeguarding Partnership's Business Unit email is [DSP@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:DSP@darlington.gov.uk)

## 11. STORAGE OF INFORMATION

Each signatory to this protocol:

- will ensure storage of all paper and electronic records adheres to the requirements of the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 and local and national information governance policy.
- will ensure that all information is transmitted safely and securely in compliance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- is responsible for protecting the personal and confidential data meeting the requirements of the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- must have in place governance agreements which comply with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.
- must ensure all staff complete Information Governance/ Data Security and Protection training and abide by all aspects of data protection legislation and the relevant sections of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- will adhere to the common law duty of confidentiality.

## 12. INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

**Data Rights of Access under UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018** - Each organisation will follow its own procedures for Data Subject rights of access requests. Each organisation will consult, where necessary with others, in relation to any source supplied personal data to establish any applicable non-disclosure exemption. The rights include access to personal data, the right to rectify, object or erase personal

data and processing of their data. An Information Rights Request to the Darlington Safeguarding Partners should be forwarded to Darlington Borough Council's Data Protection Officer [dataprotection@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@darlington.gov.uk)

### 13. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS

- 13.1 Darlington Safeguarding Partners is a statutory partnership established under the Care Act 2014 and it is not a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The partnership is therefore exempt from the duty to provide information, though it will consider requests on an individual basis.
- 13.2 In all instances, no records of meetings will be produced or shared without the express permission of the Statutory Safeguarding Partners/Independent Scrutineer/Chair. All requests should be submitted to the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit via email - [DSP@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:DSP@darlington.gov.uk)

### 14. DATA BREACH INCIDENTS

- 14.1 Data protection related breaches will be handled in accordance with the relevant data protection legislation and the regulator Information Commissioners Office (ICO) or reportable incidents and in accordance with the policies and procedures of each organisation which are signatories to this protocol.
- 14.2 Any data breaches must be dealt with by the lead organisation in which the data breach took place and reportable incidents must be reported to the ICO within 72 hours of the identified data breach. Where the data breach involves data from another partner organisation the investigating officer should inform and consult the relevant organisation.
- 14.3 The relevant Data Protection Officers for each organisation should be informed and discuss the data breach and be the points of contact for subsequent investigations.

### 15. ESCALATION POLICY

If a practitioner encounters any issues or disputes in relation to the sharing of information then they should refer to the [Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Professional Challenge Protocol](#).

## 16. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [HM Government Information Sharing: Advice for Practitioners Providing Safeguarding Services to Children, Young People, Parents and Carers \(2018\).](#)  
This guidance relates to practitioners working with children but may be relevant to adult safeguarding practitioners working with adults with children who may be in need of services. This document outlines the 7 Golden Rules for sharing information.
- [NHS England-Safeguarding Adults](#) for further guidance on information sharing. This document outlines the 7 Golden Rules for sharing information.
- [HM Government \(2018\) - Information sharing-Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#)
- [Centre for Excellence on Information Sharing](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 Statutory Guidance](#)
- [Keeping Children Safe in Education 2015](#)
- [What to do if you are worried a child is being abused 2015](#)
- [Care Act 2014](#)
- [Health and Care Act 2022](#)

## 17. CONTACT DETAILS

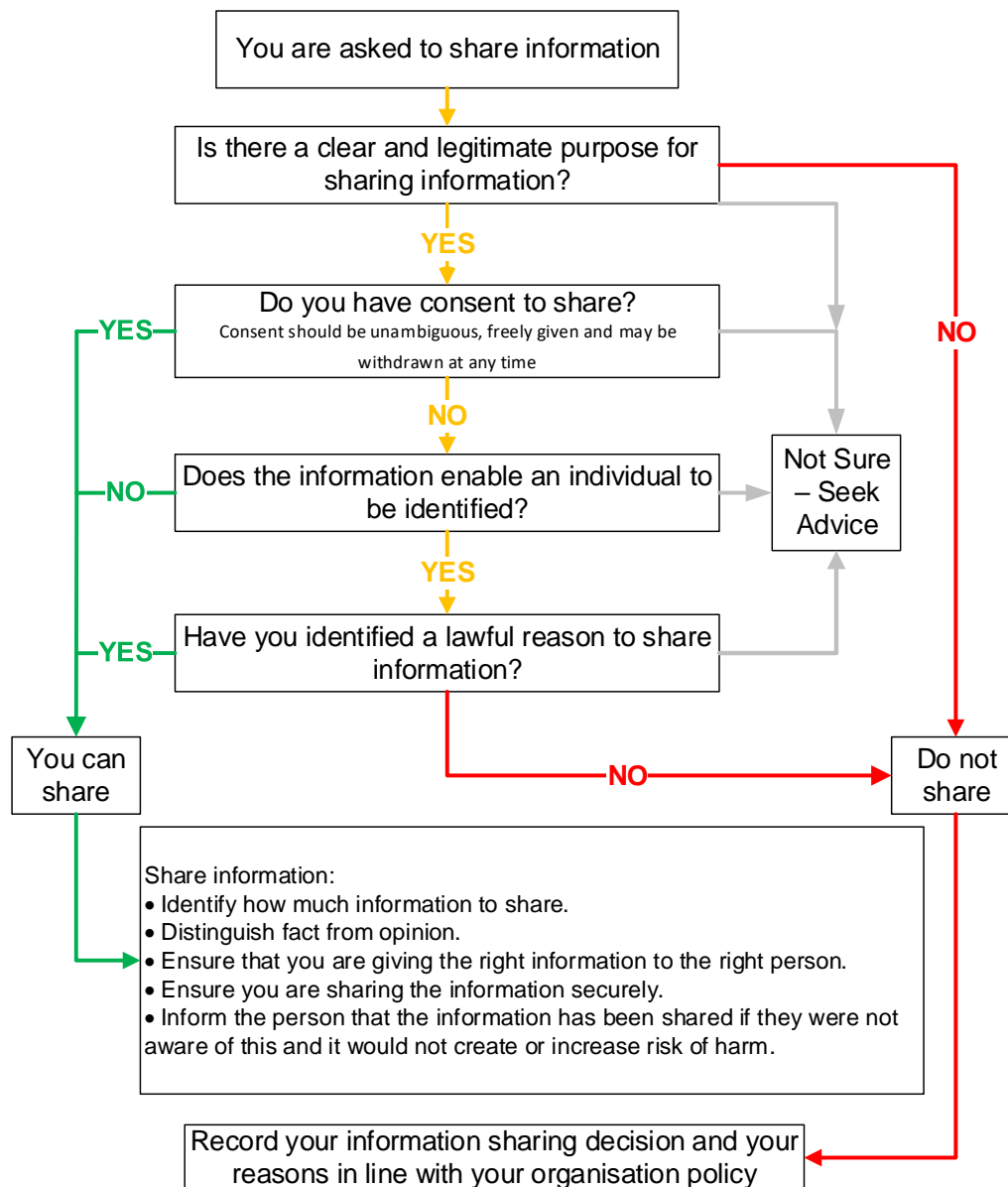
If you have any questions or comments about this document, please email the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership's Business Unit: [DSP@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:DSP@darlington.gov.uk)

## SEVEN GOLDEN RULES FOR INFORMATION SHARING<sup>1</sup>

1. **Remember** that the Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Human Rights Act 1998 are not barriers to justified information sharing but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living persons is shared appropriately.
2. **Be open and honest** with the person (and/or their family where appropriate) from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will, or could be shared, and seek their agreement, unless it is unsafe or inappropriate to do so.
3. **Seek advice** from other practitioners if you are in any doubt about sharing the information concerned, without disclosing the identity of the individual where possible.
4. Where possible **share information with consent**. Under the GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 you may share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is a lawful basis to do so, such as where safety may be at risk. You will need to base your judgement on the facts of the case. When you are sharing or requesting personal information from someone, be certain of the basis upon which you are doing so. Where you have consent, be mindful that an individual might not expect information to be shared.
5. **Consider safety and well-being:** Base your information sharing decisions on considerations of the safety and well-being of the individual and others who may be affected by their actions.
6. **Necessary, proportionate, relevant, adequate, accurate, timely and secure:** Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those people who need to have it, is accurate and up to date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.
7. **Keep a record** of your decision and the reasons for it – whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose ([Haringey Judgement 2013](#))

<sup>1</sup> HM Government Guidance (July 2018)- [Information sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#)

### Flowchart of when and how to share information



If there are concerns that a child is in need, suffering harm or likely to suffer harm or that adult with care and support needs is at risk of or experiencing abuse, follow the relevant procedure without delay. Seek advice if unsure what to do at any stage and ensure that the outcome of the discussion is recorded.

Note: Flowchart adapted from [HM Government \(2018\) Information sharing. Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#)

**SIGNATORIES TO THIS PROTOCOL**

Organisation	Name	Position
<b>Statutory Safeguarding Partners</b>		
Darlington Borough Council	James Stroyan	Group Director of People
North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board	Jean Golightly	Director of Nursing
Durham Constabulary	David Ashton	Detective Chief Superintendent
<b>Independent Scrutineer/Chair</b>		
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership	Ann Baxter	Independent Scrutineer/Chair
<b>Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Relevant Agencies</b>		
<p>All Statutory and Relevant Agencies have been asked to sign up to this protocol, they have not been individually listed, however if you wish to enquire as to which agencies have signed up, please contact the business unit. Email: <a href="mailto:DSP@darlington.gov.uk">DSP@darlington.gov.uk</a></p>		