# Sharing well

## A guide to sharing and receiving information to assist individuals who seek our help

## Introduction: what is Changing Futures?

*Changing Futures* *Cambridgeshire & Peterborough* is about improving outcomes for people with multiple disadvantage. Multiple disadvantage means someone experiencing three of five of homelessness, mental health issues, substance misuse, domestic abuse and offending behaviour, at any one time. Changing Futures does this by encouraging involvement of people with lived experience at all stages of our system and service design and looking at how our partnerships affect people.

This note sets out guidance on “sharing well” to help people across the system understand and deal with information and data, so we can all share well and without fear.

## A guide to sharing and receiving information to assist individuals who seek our help

Most organisations share the same common purpose: to provide services and support to people who need them or may benefit from them.

Most also share the same ambitions in how they achieve this, wanting to provide a service of real value in as simple a way as possible, both for us and for the individual.

Despite this, the prospect of working with other organisations can often result in barriers and complications. Few activities demonstrate this better than information sharing, but with guidance and support this does not need to be the case.

## An enabler not a barrier

The UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018, and the Common Law Duty of Confidentiality form the main legal framework to information sharing.

None of these stop us sharing information when we need to do so, such as if we believe it is in the best interests of the person concerned. In fact, they exist because providing services and support relies on good information sharing.

Remember, sharing well also requires us to act appropriately when we receive information that may impact on an individual’s health, social or other needs

## What we all need

Providing a good service relies on having access to information that is up-to-date, that you can trust and is available when you need it.

We need to understand the challenges a person is facing so that we can consider how best to support them.

We then need to pass on relevant details to other organisations when they are best placed to help.

We need those organisations to be confident in using the information and feel empowered to act on it.

We also need those organisations to share information in return so that a joined-up service can be provided to the individual.

## Being confident

The legislation isn’t there to stop us, it’s there to enable us by setting out core principles to follow so that we can share information with confidence. However, it’s often a lack of confidence, or a fear of doing the wrong thing, that can lead people into being overly cautious.

We have therefore provided some guidance on the key principles to follow when sharing information to help in overcoming any concerns.

## The key principles for information sharing

Information sharing decisions broadly involve considering what is being asked of you, who is asking and why they are doing so. It’s important to think of this as an evolving process rather than an ordered checklist. All three parts impact on each other, so the best approach is to consider all three and then go around again as required, every step along the way.

## Taking reasonable steps

This approach to information sharing is based on the way real-life situations develop. Rarely will we have every piece of relevant information to hand when we’re first contacted.

We should never lose sight of the fact that sometimes the people who most need our support are also the people who face the most challenges in fitting in with organisational policies and administrative procedures (knowing who to contact, being able to complete application forms, providing copies of documents, being able to articulate their situation etc).

That doesn’t mean we should simply refuse to act; far from it. Instead, we take reasonable initial steps based on what we know and then adjust our course of action as we gain more knowledge.

**For example** - An individual was evicted from temporary accommodation; however this information was not shared with other agencies supporting that person who were working with him around his health needs. As a result, the individual could not be located by services and did not attend vital health appointments. He later passed away as a result health complications that were exacerbated by lack of intervention.

## Complying with the legislation (Data Protection, Duty of Confidentiality)

The legislation that governs how we use information doesn’t explicitly state whether sharing is right or wrong in any particular case. It requires you to ensure that it has been thought through and a reasonable decision has been made.

This is an important message because people often lack the confidence to share information due to fearing that they may get into trouble for getting it wrong.

The way to get it right is as follows:

**For example:** You may start with a contact from a community member that the individual in question trusts or has chosen to approach with their problem or issue. Given the ‘What’ and the ‘Why’, accepting that information and acting upon it may be entirely the correct approach to start the process of getting them the support they need.

As things develop, you may reach a stage where you feel the next level of activity does need some direct involvement with the individual. That doesn’t mean you’ve done anything wrong by not involving them previously. You’ve taken a considered approach in deciding what was reasonable and evolved the information sharing to reflect what’s appropriate for the next stage.

## Acting reasonably with the best interests of the person in mind

The legislation is not there to be complied with rigidly for its own sake. It’s designed to ensure that organisations manage information in a considered way, within the person’s expectations and with their best interests in mind. An overly prescriptive approach disproportionately affects the people who need our support the most.

This is illustrated perfectly in the Caldicott Principles[[1]](#footnote-2). These were established in 1997 as part of national guidelines for handling confidential information appropriately and have formed the bedrock of good information sharing within health and social care ever since.

However, when they were revised in 2013 one of the most important changes was to introduce a new principle:

The national review determined that the principles needed to include an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of sharing information.

Too often it was found that, unless a request neatly fitted into a pre-existing process or format, people defaulted to an approach in which “If I say ‘no’ then I can’t be wrong”. The problem with that approach is that a decision not to share information, or not to act on information that has been shared, can be hugely detrimental to the person whose rights you are aiming to protect.

**For example** - I was notified that an individual had been admitted to hospital and would be discharged in 2 days’ time. The person was residing in temporary accommodation provided by the local authority, which was at risk of being withdrawn as he had not stayed there for the previous 2 nights. I was able to confidently inform the local authority that the person was in hospital and the date of planned discharge. This meant the room was kept open for him and he was not discharged from hospital with nowhere to go.

Whilst the Caldicott Principles specifically relate to health and social care information, they are a good framework for the sharing of any types of information about people.

## Remember

## To find out more about Changing Futures

You can e-mail the team at [changingfutures@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:changingfutures@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) or visit our [web page](https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/changing-futures-cp/)

1. This link takes you to a page where you can read more about the [Eight Caldicott Principles](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fcf9b92d3bf7f5d0bb8bb13/Eight_Caldicott_Principles_08.12.20.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)