



## **Warrington Safeguarding Children Board Information Sharing Protocol**



***“Every child and young person in Warrington should be able to grow up safe from maltreatment, neglect, bullying, discrimination and crime -receiving help when they need it in a timely and effective manner”***

**Our Vision: “To ensure that every child and young person in Warrington is safe and has the opportunity to reach their potential.”**

## **1. Introduction**

The Warrington Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) expects information sharing between partners (practitioners and managers) will take place. We recognises that “Information sharing is vital to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. A key factor identified in many serious case reviews (SCRs) has been a failure by practitioners to record information, to share it, to understand its significance and then take appropriate action” (Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers March 2015). Partners need to be aware that the consequences of not sharing information can be very serious In addition, the WSCB can ask partners or bodies for information that it needs in order to be able to carry out its statutory functions. Usually this will be in the form of reports to the Board or to one of the Sub Groups.

In order to inform effective information sharing Warrington Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) is pleased to present the **Information Sharing Protocol** which supports improved speed and efficiency of information sharing between professionals, local agencies and members of the Board. This ensures children and young people receive the services they need in a timely manner, safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

We recognise that families living in Warrington need to be confident that their confidential information is kept safe and secure and only shared in an appropriate manner and in the right circumstances. This Information Sharing Protocol provides clarity to ensure both professionals and families can be confident about what information is shared, when and why, including with and without consent.

This Information Sharing Protocol must be read in conjunction with “The Warrington Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) Threshold Document”, which provides partner agencies with clear criteria for taking action and providing the right help at the right time to children and young people and their families in order to effectively meet their needs.

This Information Sharing Protocol must also be read in conjunction with “The Warrington Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) Escalation Policy for resolving Professional disagreements between workers when working with children and families”, which provides partner agencies with a quick and straightforward means of resolving professional differences of view in specific cases.

This Information Sharing Protocol must be read in conjunction with the Warrington Information Sharing Framework published by the Warrington Health and Wellbeing Board and the Warrington Partnership. The framework includes Information Sharing Agreements that support the effective sharing of information across the partnership.

## 2. Creating a culture of support

Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers March 2015 states that all practitioners should be alert to the signs and triggers of

- child abuse,
- children being sexually exploited for money, power or status
- neglect.

Abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) and neglect can present in many different forms. Indicators of abuse and neglect may be difficult to spot. Children may disclose abuse, in which case the decision to share information is clear. In other cases, for example, neglect, the indicators may be more subtle and appear over time.

Each organisation within the partnership is responsible for creating a culture of support to ensure that good practice in information sharing is encouraged and maintained. Practitioners and local agencies have a responsibility to share information appropriately to keep children and young people safe. They should also therefore support the culture of support keeping managers and strategic managers aware of any difficulties or concerns when sharing information. This culture will include:

- a systematic approach to explaining to all children (as appropriate), young people and their families when they first contact agencies for assessment and support, what information may be shared with others, when and how this will be done.
- the creation of a culture within each organisation that enables practitioners and managers share information with other organisations and within their organisation by having clear policies and procedures which are supported by single and multi-agency training and
- The use of supervision including opportunities for reflective practice to ensure that practitioners remain alert to risks of harm to children and young people and the need to share information to ensure children and young people are kept safe.
- the use of clear systems, standards and procedures for ensuring the security of information and for information sharing.
- an infrastructure and systems to support secure information sharing including access to secure email or online information systems.
- ensuring staff understand how to identify and resolve potential issues
- systems for monitoring and auditing information sharing practice and
- recognition of the importance of professional judgement in information sharing at the front line.

## 3. Principles

Practitioners, agencies and services will apply the following underlying principles when sharing information:

- The Data Protection Act 1998 is not a barrier for sharing information
- Fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stop practitioners promoting the welfare and protecting the safety of children and young people
- Information should be shared with consent when appropriate, but we must be clear that information can be shared without consent if it this will safeguard children and young people.
- Ensure that the information being shared is necessary, proportionate, relevant, accurate,

timely and secure and that it will support the purpose for which practitioners, local agencies and members of the board are sharing it and it is shared only with those people who need to know

- A record is kept of any decision to share or not to share information, including who which practitioners, local agencies and members of the board have shared the information with and the reasons for doing so.
- No professional should assume that someone else will pass on information that is critical to keeping a child or young person safe

#### 4. Guidance for Practitioners

The safety and the welfare of the child or young person should be the guiding principle for all situations in which practitioners consider whether to share information or not. If possible the parent, young person or if appropriate the child's consent should be obtained, but if consent is not given or there are concerns that seeking consent would be harmful to the child or young person, this must not prevent practitioners sharing information in order to protect children or young people.

**SETTING UP CLARITY WITH CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES:** Right from the first time you meet children, young people and their families in your professional capacity, make it clear that information shared with you may have to be shared with other professionals, even without their consent if it is about the safety of a child or young person.

**REMEMBER THAT THE DATA PROTECTION ACT IS NOT A BARRIER TO SHARING INFORMATION:** Remember that the Data Protection Act 1998 and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing, but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately.

##### **Is there a clear and legitimate purpose for sharing information?**

- Why do you or the other person want the information?
- What is the outcome you are trying to achieve?
- Could the aims be achieved without sharing the information?
- Do not assume that you need to share the whole case file
- Different agencies may have different processes for sharing information. You will need to be guided for your agency's policies and procedures and, where applicable, by your professional code

**BE OPEN AND HONEST:** Be open and honest with the individual (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.

**SEEK ADVICE IF IN ANY DOUBT:** 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.

**SHARE WITH INFORMED CONSENT WHERE APPROPRIATE:** Share with informed consent where appropriate and, where possible, respect the wishes of those who do not

consent to share confidential information. You may still share information without consent if, in your judgement, there is good reason 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.

**CONSIDER SAFETY AND WELL-BEING:** 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.

**NECESSARY, PROPORTIONATE, RELEVANT, ACCURATE, TIMELY AND SECURE:** 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 individuals who need to have it, is accurate and up-to-date, is shared in a timely fashion, and is shared securely.

**KEEP A RECORD OF YOUR DECISION AND THE REASON FOR IT:** 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.

#### **4.1. Sharing confidential information without consent:**

Sharing of Information is essential to ensure effective child protection services are put in place. Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers March 2015 states that “fears about sharing information cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at risk of abuse or neglect.” Information can be shared without consent if the information is critical to keeping a child or young person safe. This may include:

- Where there is evidence that the child or young person is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm
- Where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person may be suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm
- To prevent significant harm arising to children and young, including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime
- To prevent children being sexually exploited for money, power or status. All individuals must adopt an open and inquiring mind to what could be underlying reasons for behaviour changes in children of all ages

#### **4.2. Sharing information in the case of sexual activity of under 16 year olds**

- Assessment of the sexual activity of all children and young people under 16 years of age should always consider the risks to the young person and regard this as a safeguarding issue.
- All children under the age of 13 years of age where there is evidence of sexual activity to be referred to children’s social care and/or police in line with child protection procedures

- Where there are concerns of child sexual exploitation it is important to share information about the child or young person and sexual partner/partners in compliance with the Pan Cheshire LSCB Missing from Home Protocol and Pan Cheshire Child Sexual Exploitation and Trafficked Procedures

### **4.3. Early Help: When to share information**

Early sharing of information is the key to providing effective help when problems are emerging.

Research and evidence all emphasise the importance of children and young getting the right help at the right time including early help services. Practitioners are encouraged to use whole family or CAF assessments when working with families and to involve other partners as appropriate when undertaking these assessments and developing plans. It will be usual in these situations to obtain consent from families or young people to share information for the purposes of assessments or at planning meetings when more than one partner attends.

If consent cannot be obtained then practitioners must consider the issue of proportionality in relation to safeguarding the child and young person when deciding to share information without consent. By proportionality we mean how serious is the concern? Check this out with your manager if you are not sure.