

# Information Sharing Protocols

This guide is produced and published by the:

Dorset Data Protection Working Group. 'Working in Partnership' for  
Borough of Poole, Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council,  
Dorset County Council, East Dorset District Council, North Dorset District Council,  
Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council and  
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council.



**Good practice, experience and research** demonstrate that information sharing helps to improve service delivery and protect vulnerable members of the community and others. It also helps to achieve statutory and local initiatives designed to prevent crime and disorder, where partnerships have this focus.

The sharing of information is not something to be afraid of and it is fundamental to the success of any partnership initiatives. You simply need to share information within the limits of the law and, believe it or not, there is a logical sequence you can follow to help you through the legal maze.

Protocols developed for information sharing initiatives do not have any legal standing, but they are a helpful way to ensure good practice in information sharing between all the agencies that may be involved in partnership working. Remember, if you are in doubt about disclosing information take advice from your line manager or your Data Protection Officer.

### **Aren't there legal restrictions to sharing information?**

**Yes.** Briefly the restrictions are a combination of the common law duty of confidentiality, Human Rights and Data Protection.

The main thing to be aware of is the need to be open and fair. You may or may not require consent to share information, but in most circumstances you **must** tell people who is responsible for their personal information, why you need it and who you may need to share it with.

Sometimes you may need to disclose information without the individual knowing. You will be able to do this by using the relevant exemptions; for more information you will need to read the protocol.

### **Why do we have to have protocols?**

Different agencies need to know how to talk to each other lawfully to do their work. We all need to 'sing from the same song sheet' to make sure that any partnership working we are involved in is as secure as we can make it with regard to the disclosure of personal information and that there are no major discrepancies between agencies.

Protocols help '*joined up working*'; they are the sort of glue that binds policy, procedure and practice together across agencies and help to develop a common understanding of what we can and can't do.

Large print version available from your Council's  
Data Protection Officer

## So what is the over-arching information sharing protocol (OAISP) and what do I need to know about it?

The Council's OAISP is designed to be the main component of an agreement to work in partnership with other agencies. All Dorset local authorities have adopted this model. It will of course need to be agreed and accepted by non-Dorset local authority members of Partnership Working Project Groups, but it should save everyone a lot of time and effort.

It covers the issues that are common to information sharing within partnership arrangements and broadly sets the standards that all partners should try to work to.

## What is a Personal Data Exchange Agreement (PDEA)?

It is the document that goes with the OAISP and provides the specific details about a particular partnership arrangement.

There is only a sample framework available for a PDEA. This is because Multi-agency or Partnership-Working Project Groups need to develop and agree the content of PDEAs themselves.

The PDEA should not be difficult to complete or too long, since the OAISP covers all the generic principles and standards that are required for information sharing arrangements.

## Why do we need lots of separate Personal Data Exchange Agreements (PDEAs)?

Well, there are lots of different partnerships involving lots of different agencies for a start. Each partnership will also have a different purpose with its own aims & objectives, target a different customer or client group and have different data sharing requirements – although there may be a bit of overlap. So we do need to have specific agreements for specific partnerships.

## Am I always going to know for sure that it is safe for me to disclose information?

**No!** Some information sharing is really straightforward and you will be able to 'tick the boxes' on your mental checklist quickly and easily. Other situations can be more complex and you may be faced with quite difficult judgement calls where there is a requirement to balance an individual's privacy against a potential risk, either to themselves or others. Remember, when you do have doubts it is probably best to err on the side of caution.

If you develop a basic understanding of the legal framework, adhere to the protocol and relevant data exchange agreements and share information in good faith you will receive the backing of your organisation, even if it goes a bit wrong!

### Anything else I need to know?

Well, there is one more thing. **Record your disclosure decisions.** It is a matter of good practice and could be very important if you have to rely on your records to explain your actions one day.

