

**The Cabinet – 31 October 2007**

**Report of the Director of Children's Services**

**Establishing a Framework for Information Sharing**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To agree a framework for sharing information in order to support joint working initiatives both across Directorates and with the Council's partners.

**Background**

2. Information sharing needs to be managed. Failure to do so can create confusion and uncertainty in front line staff, along with the potential for disproportionate or irrelevant exposure of information and potential breaches of the law. This is particularly the case when considering sharing personal and sensitive data.
3. The use of an Information Sharing Framework is essential for continued multi-agency service development.
4. Information sharing needs to be managed effectively at all levels and consistently across a range of organisations, from high level strategic perspective, through managerial policies and down to easy to follow day to day operational procedures and guidance.
5. A number of Joint Information Sharing Protocols already exist within the organisation. For example: between Health and Social Care and between multiple agencies for crime prevention and anti drug work. This work has generally resulted in the production of large unwieldy documents, often with no links to the operational process. The maintenance of these documents is time consuming and complex. In many cases they have not been reviewed or updated since their initial development, and they no longer reflect current requirements.

6. The Government, in Every Child Matters, made a commitment to produce clear guidance for all children's services practitioners on information sharing.
7. In keeping with the guidance developed and by looking at best practice elsewhere. Officers of the Council, in conjunction with some of its partners, have drawn together a framework consisting of an:
  - Information Sharing Protocol
  - Data Exchange Agreement
  - Information Sharing Policy
8. The documents aim to represent an overarching Information Sharing Protocol that provides a framework for information sharing agreements to be developed at strategic, managerial and operational levels.
9. It is initially aimed at moving forward the Children's Services agenda but it can be utilised as a framework overarching all information sharing initiatives in any organisation. Its development and recommended use encourages a consistent approach to the management of information sharing processes.
10. The fact that it is multi layered means that the appropriate staff only see the layer that relates to them. For example, front line staff will have simple, easy to use guidance on what can and cannot be shared and with whom, without being bothered with the legal aspects.
11. The concept suggested is already in use in other regions. For example, over 40 organisations are signed up to it in the Leicestershire County Council region. In addition, we have already successfully piloted the use of the Data Exchange Agreement with the Children's Centres project.
12. If agreed it is planned to accompany the framework with brief guidance to staff, training, awareness and promotional activities.

### **Finance**

13. There is not envisaged to be any additional resource required. Any training and awareness work will be incorporated into the existing work undertaken by the Council's Information Governance Unit. A

corporate, unified approach to development of Information Sharing initiatives may identify savings by removing the duplication of effort.

### **Law**

14. The Children's Act 2004, Local Government Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998.

### **Equality Impact**

15. The acceptance of the Information Sharing Framework is likely to have a positive impact on all equality issues. In terms of service delivery it should enable a better managed and unified approach to the use of information for those services that are multi agency operated.
16. Acceptance of the Information Sharing Framework will support the work of the DfCSF and the Government in proceeding with the Children's Index and taking forward the concept of Every Child Matters.

### **Recommendation**

17. That the Cabinet agrees that the framework should be accepted as an acceptable model for the Council to utilise in all of its Information Sharing initiatives and to promote with partners.



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### **List of Background Papers**

Establishing a Framework for Information Sharing, A structured approach:  
Local E-govt Standards Body. Version 1.1. March 2006