

Information sharing
vision statement

Information sharing vision statement



Foreword

This Government wants to deliver the best possible support to people in need. We can only do this with the right information about people's circumstances. We are determined that information sharing helps us better target support to the most disadvantaged in our society. The Social Exclusion Action Plan shows how Government will achieve this through agencies working together to focus on the unique needs of any one person or family. The information needed to make this happen already exists but it is not always being shared.

That is why Government is committed to more information sharing between public sector organisations and service providers. This statement sets out our vision for better, more customer-focused services supported by greater information sharing which will protect and support individuals and society as a whole.

We recognise that the more we share information, the more important it is that people are confident that their personal data is kept safe and secure. This Government has an excellent track record of strengthening individuals' rights to privacy and the legislative framework, provided by the Data Protection and Human Rights Acts, offer a robust statutory framework to maintain those rights whilst sharing information to deliver better services.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine M. Ashton".

Catherine Ashton
The Rt Hon Baroness Ashton of Upholland
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department for Constitutional Affairs

Benefits of information sharing - what Government is already doing...

1. We are already using information to deliver better public services - both to the benefit of the individual and society at large:
2. **Improve opportunities for the most disadvantaged**

Through early identification of those at risk, the Government has been able to begin to address the problems which can cause homelessness. The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every Local Authority to carry out a homelessness review and to produce a homelessness strategy working with other agencies to plan services and share information between them. This initiative has resulted in a decline in the level of homelessness and created cost savings of around £21 million nationwide. These initiatives have also made major progress in tackling the worst forms of homelessness by reducing rough sleeping by 75% since 1998 and ending long-term use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children.¹
3. **Reducing crime and increasing individual's safety and security**

The 'Greater Manchester Against Crime' (GMAC) programme is an example of an efficient system for partnership working and the joining-up of local services. Statistical information from a range of partners, including the health service, police, fire and transport, probation service, community safety and local authorities is used quickly and efficiently to identify and map crime hotspots and determine how best to target resources across partner agencies. GMAC statistical analysis has been fundamental in helping to reduce crime, for example it has led to a 75% reduction in arson in some areas of Greater Manchester.²
4. **Reducing fraud**

Sharing information on suspected fraud is essential to prevent others from becoming victims and in protecting the public purse. The National Fraud Initiative (NFI), run by the Audit Commission is a biennial data matching exercise to help 'detect fraudulent and erroneous payments from the public purse'. It gathers staff employment information from local government and the NHS to identify fraud and error. The type of data used includes housing benefit and employment records from the bodies audited by the Audit Commission. The estimated value of fraud and overpayments detected by 1,300 bodies taking part in the NFI in 2004/5 exceeded £111m.³ Being able to make savings and reduce these losses is a considerable benefit to the community at large.

1 For further information on the National Homeless Strategy http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/784/SustainableCommunitiesSettledHomesChangingLivesPDF796Kb_id1149784.pdf

2 Further information on the GMAC programme available at <http://www.gmac.org.uk>

3 Further information on the National Fraud Initiative can be found at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nfi/>

5. **Customer focused public services**

Since 2004, DVLA has offered electronic re-licensing and off-road notifications for individual vehicles through the Internet and by telephone. The customer uses the renewal reminder sent by DVLA, or the reference number from the car's logbook and the vehicle registration number to identify the vehicle. DVLA links to the Motor Insurance Database, run by the Motor Insurers Information Centre to check that the vehicle is insured and to the computerised MOT Test Certificate Database where necessary. This is a simple-to-use system that uses the same information, but provides a convenient alternative to postal and face-to-face channels. It currently applies to all vehicle groups and applicants can pay by debit or credit card.⁴

6. **Reducing the burden on business**

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and business.gov are jointly working to reduce the burden on businesses through the International Trade Single Window (ITSW) project. This will reduce the burden on UK businesses who trade internationally. The aim is that UK businesses will be able to provide standardised information once and for the ITSW online service to then share this information with the main Government departments involved in authorising exports and imports. This helps to remove the need for traders to deal with multiple departments.

The initial phase of this project, due for launch in November 2006, is estimated to save time and money for more than 150,000 small and medium-sized businesses and will hopefully encourage many more businesses to begin trading internationally for the first time.

7. **Better, more effective and targeted policy implementation**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) identified that there were a significant number of people over the age of 60 who were not claiming Pension Credit but who might be entitled to do so. By using HMRC income and capital information, DWP were able to concentrate their efforts on contacting those people who could potentially claim Pension Credit. This targeted approach has enabled DWP to avoid contacting a large number of people who would not qualify, improving efficiencies while ensuring that those most in need of Pension Credit were able to receive it.⁵

⁴ Further information on this service can be found at www.vehiclelicencence.gov.uk

⁵ Further information about Pension Credit can be found at <http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/pensioncredit/home.asp>.

Government's vision for information sharing in the future

8. There are enormous benefits to sharing information. As these examples show there is already a lot of information being shared within the present legal framework - but within existing law we can and must do more. We must, of course, properly use the provisions in the Data Protection Act as a safeguard to protect privacy and confidentiality but it must not be used to justify unnecessary barriers to sharing information. Our vision is to ensure that information will be shared to expand opportunities for the most disadvantaged, fight crime and provide better public services for citizens and business, and in other instances where it is in the public interest.

Stronger safeguards and transparency

9. This doesn't mean that those delivering public services will see your personal information where there is no reason to do so. The existing law ensures that appropriate safeguards will be maintained on the sharing of medical, taxpayer and criminal records information in particular. But within that law, it is possible for there to be greater information sharing than currently occurs - and this can be combined with proper respect for the individual's privacy. Both aims are supported by ensuring the security and integrity of personal information both before and after it has been shared.
10. Government is committed to maintaining appropriate safeguards. The NHS Care Record Guarantee is a good example of best practice in Government providing both transparency and reassurance on information sharing within the health sector, and DWP's Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) established an independent ethics committee to monitor the study's use of information.
11. DCA will work with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to encourage the use of Codes of Practice to ensure that personal information is kept safe and secure, and in compliance with the Data Protection Act. The aim of Codes of Practice will be to facilitate information sharing, not to add a burden to the data sharing process. The NFI for example, is already guided by a Code of Practice agreed with the ICO⁶ and the use and disclosure of confidential medical data is regulated by a Code developed with and endorsed by the Information Commissioner.⁷
12. The Information Commissioner is developing guidelines against which information sharing proposals involving personal data might be assessed, and a framework Code of Practice which will help public sector organisations ensure that their sharing of personal information respects personal privacy. We recognise that it is important that Government and regulator continue to work together on these issues.

⁶ Code of Data Matching Practice 2006 (Audit Commission May 2006)

⁷ Confidentiality: NHS Code of Practice (Department of Health 2003)

13. We are committed to ensuring the security of personal information, as demonstrated by DCA's recent consultation on amending the DPA to allow for custodial sentences where access to information has been wilfully and deliberately misused. Furthermore, work to develop an identity management framework in the public sector will reduce the small number of occasions where, due to mistaken identification, individuals are given the wrong advice or services.
14. The Data Protection Act already gives individuals a right of access to information about them (with limited exceptions.) DCA needs to ensure that the rights people have in relation to this information are fully respected and that it is easier to exercise these rights.
15. DCA will be promoting better understanding of the DPA through better support and guidance so that front line practitioners in particular, fully understand that the DPA is not a barrier to appropriate information sharing.
16. As Government moves to more joined-up working, and the information sharing that is needed to support this, we will be exploring how we might provide citizens with more information about which public sector bodies hold information and what they use it for. This acts both to reassure citizens and to support public service effectiveness in enabling people to play their part in ensuring that information held about them is accurate and up-to-date.

Information sharing in the future

- **Greater convenience in a citizen's everyday life.** The DWP is developing an approach that will automatically gather information to help identify entitlement to Council Tax Benefit amongst customers claiming Pension Credit. This proposed process will be much simpler, easier and quicker for the customer as they will not need to provide the same information separately for Council Tax Benefit. The Pension Service will gather information for Council Tax Benefit from customers when they claim Pension Credit. For those customers who receive Pension Credit, the relevant local authority will be notified of the decision and will be passed relevant Council Tax Benefit supplementary information. The local authority will then check for council tax liability and verify any relevant additional information before making an assessment and award of Council Tax Benefit. Legislation may be needed to enable these changes.

- **Sharing across silo groups to expand opportunities for the most disadvantaged.** There are a small but significant number of adults who have chaotic lives and multiple needs. Supporting these people requires intervention from a number of different public bodies. One aim of the Social Exclusion Action Plan is to develop a system that better manages those multiple interactions. This will require better information sharing to identify those with chaotic lives and multiple needs and then manage the provision of services to them.

A programme of pilots will explore alternative approaches to improving outcomes for those with multiple needs. This will allow Government a better understanding of what information needs to be shared (such as police, housing and employment information), the best way in which this can be achieved and what barriers exist to the effective sharing of information to benefit this group of people.

- **Protecting against fraud.** The Fraud Review⁸ refers to the work of the Identity Fraud Steering Committee⁹ who have identified the need to increase the sharing of information on deceased persons. Delay in transmitting this information to the public and private sectors can result in fraud, errors in payment and bad debt where criminals hijack the identities of the deceased. Providing this information more swiftly and to a wider range of organisations than at present will result in savings to both the public and private sectors and will also save families the trauma of realising a deceased relative's details have been misused. In May 2006, the Government introduced an amendment to the Police and Justice Bill to allow information on the recently deceased to be shared more readily with appropriate organisations for the purposes of the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of offences.
- **Exploring greater information sharing with the private sector.** The recent consultation paper, New Powers against Organised Crime and Financial Crime¹⁰ set out proposals for allowing public sector membership of CIFAS (the UK's fraud prevention service, a not-for-profit body that facilitates the matching of information on suspected fraud in the private sector). Both the private and public sectors have their own methods for detecting and preventing fraud, but neither routinely shares information on suspected or known fraudsters.

Public sector membership of CIFAS would allow for information sharing on fraud between the private sector and the public sector. The savings to the public purse have been estimated to be between approximately £137m-£273m every year.

Some public sector bodies may need legislative changes to allow them to disclose information to CIFAS. Legislative changes may also be required to enable CIFAS to process Government information. The Government hopes to be able to introduce any necessary legislation as soon as Parliamentary time allows.

8 Fraud Review Final Report (Attorney General's Office July 2006)

9 Further information available www.identity-theft.org.uk

10 New Powers Against Organised and Financial Crime (Home Office July 2006)

- **Reducing the burden on business.** Business has told Government that information sharing would reduce the need for them to provide the same data repeatedly to different public sector bodies.¹¹ The Hampton Review recommended that a principle should be established to ensure that businesses do not need to give the same piece of information twice.¹² This principle will form part of a new statutory Code of Practice for regulators, which will be consulted on in 2007.

The Review also recommended that the sharing of information could improve risk assessment profiling of business. For example, if the Environment Agency were able better to use information gathered by the Health and Safety Executive on the compliance of regulated firms, they could better target their enforcement action. The Cabinet Office is now looking into how these recommendations can be realised.

17. The above cases demonstrate how the Government's vision for the better use of information across the public sector supports the aims of expanding opportunities for the most disadvantaged, fighting crime and providing better public services to citizens and business.
18. Delivering customer-focused, efficient public services is an essential priority for this Government. That is why Sir David Varney's work on Service Transformation will consider the role of information sharing in improving the quality of service provided to citizens and businesses, and result in efficiency savings for government where duplication can be reduced or removed.
19. Likewise, Treasury and the Cabinet Office are working together on the implementation of the Hampton Review recommendations to reduce administrative burdens on business which includes increasing information sharing to reduce burdens on business and to enhance risk management.
20. The plan, which we will publish in April 2007, will set out the barriers that need to be overcome to achieve this vision; the actions that need to be taken to deliver it and how we will develop the safeguards that we have outlined above.
21. Information sharing is key to the Government's goal of better public services - delivering better outcomes for citizens, for businesses and for society as a whole. The Data Protection Act provides the framework that ensures the sharing can take place in a way that respects individuals rights to privacy and keeps their personal information secure from abuse.

¹¹ 60% of businesses responding to the Hampton review of regulatory inspection and enforcement's first consultation said that "there was significant overlap in the information requested by different regulators." [para 3.29, Philip Hampton, March 2005].

¹² Reducing Administrative Burdens; Inspection and Enforcement, (Philip Hampton March 2005)

Annex A Glossary

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| CIFAS | UK's Fraud Prevention Service |
| DEFRA | Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| DTI | Department for Trade and Industry |
| DVLA | Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency |
| DWP | Department for Work and Pensions |
| Fraud Review | Interdepartmental review into the detection, investigation and prosecution of fraud published 24 July 2006 |
| FSA | Food Standards Agency |
| ITSW | International Trade Single Window |
| GP | General Practitioner |
| SOCA | Serious Organised Crime Agency |
| HMRC | HM Revenue and Customs |
| Hampton Review | Treasury led review of regulatory inspections and enforcement, final report published 16 March 2005 |
| NFI | National Fraud Initiative (run by the Audit Commission) |
| NHS | National Health Service |

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