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Information Commissioner's Office



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**From the Minister for Local Government and Communities and the Information Commissioner**

Ein cyf/Our ref CS/4787/12

To: Local Authority Chief Executives  
LHB Chief Executives  
NHS Trust Chief Executives  
Police Chief Constables  
Chief Fire Officers  
Chief Executive, WCVA  
Chief Executive, National Resources Wales

cc: Leader, Welsh Local Government Association  
Chair, Solace  
General Secretary, TUC  
Auditor General for Wales  
Permanent Secretary, Welsh Government

9 December 2012

## Protecting people and protecting information

Information is increasingly at the heart of what public service organisations and their partners do, from information about performance and accountability through to sensitive information about individuals who are receiving care or support from their local authority.

The importance of using this information in delivering effective services has been raised consistently by public service leaders, including at Leading Delivery events, as have the challenges in making it happen.

If our public services are going to make the difference to people's lives that they want them to, we need to work closely together, safely sharing the information we hold on the people we serve with our partners.

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The foundations have been laid through the Sharing Personal Information Programme, which is making good progress in promoting safe, confident and legal practice. But a step change is needed to move the default position of public service organisations from 'not sharing' to 'safe sharing'.

Such information needs to be shared in the proper way – we are dealing with people's personal data and very often their sensitive personal data. We have a duty to protect it, to ensure that it is kept, and shared, safely and securely and to tell those whose information we share what we are doing with it.

However this should not, and does not, prevent us from sharing personal information with our partners where it will improve the services we deliver and help to protect vulnerable people. Our default position should always be safe sharing.

Discussions with public service leaders, including at the Public Service Leadership Group, reinforce the fact that this requires a cultural change in organisations based on clear, consistent, leadership. As public service leaders we need to set out a strong message that we expect our staff to share appropriately and that we will support them to do so properly.

At the same time, we need to ensure that personal information is properly handled, processed and secured. None of us wants to see Welsh public service organisations losing public confidence or incurring financial penalty over data protection.

Many of you have already signed up to the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI). This is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment and send a shared message, a collective leadership commitment which we all sign up to making a reality. We urge you to **sign and return** the attached and cascade it within your organisation.

The Information Commissioner's Office is keen to work with organisations to help this work in practice and will be seeking to engage with organisations on a regional basis through the regional collaboration leads in the coming months.

Reluctance to share information, even in appropriate circumstances, is one of the biggest challenges facing the public service today and is one which we need to tackle together.



<p><b>Christopher Graham</b> Comisiynydd Gwybodaeth Information Commissioner</p>	<p><b>Carl Sargeant AC / AM</b> Y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau Minister for Local Government and Communities</p>
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## **Our commitment to sharing information....**

As public service leaders we are committed to serve and protect the people of Wales, particularly the most vulnerable in our society who depend on our services.

We recognise that we cannot achieve this in isolation – we need to work closely and effectively together and this can only happen if we actively and safely share the information we hold.

It is important that we protect people's personal information, but vital that we do not let this prevent us from providing the joined up services that people expect, or stand in the way of protecting people from harm.

We are committed to creating an environment in our organisations where staff feel encouraged and supported to share information proactively and appropriately with partners to improve public services and protect vulnerable people across Wales.

At the same time, we are committed to respecting citizen's rights under the Data Protection Act through the secure and fair processing of our clients' data by our staff.

Accordingly, we will ensure that personal information is shared by our staff, and shared legally, safely and with confidence, as a matter of course.

We are committed to using the Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information as the framework for doing this.

This is our collective commitment, as leaders of public services in Wales.

[insert your signature and organisation letterhead here]

