

Age Assessment Information Sharing for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children: explanation and guidance

This guidance note, model information sharing proforma and information sharing consent form have been drafted by the ADCS Asylum Taskforce in consultation with the Home Office and other stakeholders.

It is in addition to the new *Joint Working Guidance* (JWG) April 2015 which replaces the original 2005 protocol, in use until now. They also supplement new practice guidance to be published later in 2015.

These documents are offered as supporting practice, by way of assistance to local authorities and their partners. The use of the proforma and consent form are considered by the Taskforce to be preferred practice, although not binding on local authorities.

The Information Sharing Proforma (Point 1 below) relates specifically to section 3 of the JWG (April 2015)

1 Information Sharing Proforma:

- 1.1 This deals with sharing the contents of the report and provides an update in line with current practice and has been agreed by the Home Office, after wide consultation.
- 1.2 The Information Sharing Proforma introduces an 'abridged' or 'summary' version of the substantive report. It is set out much more like a witness statement than the substantive report. It **replaces the single sheet 'back page'** used to notify the Home Office of the outcome of an age assessment and will be sufficient, in most instances. It also requires a supervising manager's signature.
- 1.3 The 'single page' is no longer regarded as meeting the agreed requirements under the JWG (April 2015) for Home Office decision makers to be assured that an age assessment has been carried out in a thorough and lawful way (Merton compliant).
- 1.4 This should prevent the debate that has often arisen between Home Office staff and social workers. It should enable the requirements of both parties to be met by Local Authorities sharing sufficient information, without including aspects which may touch on credibility, for example, or raise other issues of data protection.
- 1.5 This proforma has become well established over the last three years and has been shown to be a welcome initiative in this complex area of practice for Local Authority social workers and Home Office staff

2 Information Sharing Consent Form

- 2.1 This form reflects the requirements of case law to ensure that persons undergoing age assessments have the process explained

- to them and as far as possible develop an understanding of its purpose and significance.
- 2.2 One of the requirements is for an *appropriate adult* (sometimes referred to as a *responsible adult* or an *independent observer*) to be present. It is expected that assessing social workers will be able to assist with arranging this. If the person undergoing assessment decides to go ahead without this facility, the reasons should be clearly stated.
- 2.3 Some councils will use their advocacy service for looked after children or make specific arrangements for age assessments.
- 2.4 The appropriate adult role is defined as follows:
- *Provides support, advice and assistance during interview process*
 - *Ensures fairness and to point it out if they think this is not happening*
 - *Not an interpreter but should form a view on whether effective communication is taking place*
 - *Ensures the person understands the process and what is happening to them.*
- 2.5 The form should assist practitioners in establishing a sound basis at the outset of an age assessment.
- 2.6 It is also suggested that this should form part of the record surrounding an age assessment and may also be shared with the Home Office.

Both documents are in a Word format which will enable them to be copied and saved as required.