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Sheffield Mind Ltd

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## **Communication and Information Policy**

### **Purpose of this policy**

The following policy has been produced to ensure that Sheffield Mind holds accurate and relevant data; maintains records to meet the organisation's operational needs; ensures data is accessible to those who need it; archives and/or destroys records that are no longer required; protects records; and complies with all relevant legislation.

### **Definitions**

The terms information, records and data are used interchangeably in this policy to mean any data that is held (either electronically or in paper form) by Sheffield Mind. This includes data that is collected (e.g. client, staff, volunteer and member contact details), created (e.g. counselling case notes, newsletters, policies, minutes), or simply stored.

### **Other relevant policies**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Information and Communication (ICT) policy, the ICT Acceptable Use policy, the Backup policy, the Data Protection policy and the Confidentiality policy. These can be viewed in the policies folder on the sever.

### **Legal considerations**

1. The Data Protection Act 1998 applies to all stored information (and its processing) that is either 'personal' or 'sensitive personal' data. Sheffield Mind has obligations to ensure such data is accurate, that it is relevant/necessary to hold such data, that it is kept secure, and that it is not disclosed to third parties.
  2. BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) requirements as set out in the ethical framework (revised 2009).
- The Computer Misuse Act 1990 makes it a criminal offence to obtain unauthorised access to any computer (including workstations and PCs) or to modify its contents. If you don't have access to information resources you feel you need, contact your supervisor.

### **Training and awareness**

Training and awareness on Sheffield Mind's communication and information policy and procedures is incorporated into the staff and volunteer inductions. It is also addressed through supervisions.

### **What records Sheffield Mind keeps**

- Client information

Clients of Sheffield Mind's counselling and psychotherapy service are entitled to know what information we keep, where it is kept and for how long. The counselling and psychotherapy service keeps minimal notes and records. However, it is often in a client's interest that we have a record of the process in case it is needed later and also so that counsellors and Sheffield Mind can be accountable for their/its work. To this end, we keep several types of information:

1. Contact information: client's name, address, contact number, date of birth and GP's name and



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address.

2. Background information: Such as whether a client is off sick, on medication, who referred them and any other details which may be relevant to the counselling process.

3. The client's signed contract with Sheffield Mind.

4. Case notes: written details of the main focus of the session and any important information, which needs to be recorded such as referrals or any additional support that was suggested, any information that demonstrates good practice in our work and any other relevant information.

**NB.** This information is held in a confidential file within the counselling and psychotherapy service, separate from any details that could identify the client (i.e. it is anonymized).

5. Process notes: Some counsellors keep their own notes about their work in the counselling sessions. This is intended to help them to hold onto important issues between sessions and to identify areas they want to look at in supervision. These notes are hand written and are shredded at the completion of a client's sessions.

6. Information needed for statistical purposes: non-identifiable statistics are gathered annually to provide details of any general trends or patterns to inform our practice, ensure we are meeting targets set by funders, and influence the provision of services within Sheffield Mind.

- Staff information

Sheffield Mind holds information on staff that it needs for operational and legal reasons. This can include bank account details for paying salaries, contact details (including next of kin), reference letters, supervision notes, etc.

- Volunteer information

Sheffield Mind holds information on volunteers that it needs for operational and legal reasons. This can include contact details (including next of kin), reference letters, supervision notes, etc.

- Member information

Sheffield Mind holds information on members that it needs for operational and legal reasons. This can include contact details, details of donations made, etc.

### **Information use**

Sheffield Mind might use for the information it holds on clients, staff, volunteers and members in a variety of operational or legal ways. This can include contacting clients if sessions are cancelled; notifying members (by email, post or telephone) about an event such as the AGM; collating statistics on clients to measure performance against targets set by funders; complying with data protection requests; fulfilling legal obligations such as filing end of year employer returns with HM Revenue and Customs; etc.

### **Information storage**

All confidential information is kept at Lawton Tonge House. Hard copy information is stored in cabinets which are routinely locked. Electronic information is stored on the server either in



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password-protected folders and/or is only accessible by authorised persons (more information on this can be found in the ICT policy). Archived information is kept securely in locked cupboards. No one can accidentally access confidential information and it is available only to authorised persons.

### **Information accessibility**

Confidential information is accessible only by authorised persons. Logical systems for filing information (hard copy and electronically) are used to ensure efficient information retrieval and to aid with reviewing records for archiving or destruction.

Any person can of course make a request under the Data Protection Act to see what information we hold on them.

### **Information protection**

Sensitive personal information (e.g. case notes) held on clients is anonymized using a numerical coding system before filing.

### **Information security**

This is covered in greater detail in the ICT policy. In summary, all hard copy confidential information is kept in cabinets that are routinely locked or else it is archived in locked cupboards on the premises. Confidential electronic information is stored on the server and secured through the use of password-protected folders and/or the server's inbuilt user authentication which restricts access to authorised persons only.

### **Information communication**

Requirements of the Data Protection Act and other legislation (e.g. employer related regulations) may necessitate the communication of confidential information by Sheffield Mind.

### **Information updating**

Where it becomes known that confidential information held is inaccurate that information will be updated as soon as possible. Requests for information to be updated (whether or not under the specific provisions in the Data Protection Act) should be made in writing as follows:

1. By email either to [office@sheffieldmind.co.uk](mailto:office@sheffieldmind.co.uk) or to a specific individual if their email address is known.
2. By post, marked private and confidential, to:

Office Manager  
Sheffield Mind Ltd  
Lawton Tonge House  
57 Wostenholm Road  
Sheffield  
S7 1LE

### **Information reviewing, archiving and destruction**

Information is reviewed, archived and destroyed in accordance with the retention schedule set out in Appendix 1 of this policy.



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## Appendix 1 – Sheffield Mind retention schedule

Record	Term	Action
Personnel records (contact details, supervision notes, appraisals, disciplinary, finance-related records)	6 years (min.)	Archive (hard copy and electronic) 1 year following cessation of employment.
Financial records (bank statements, invoices, receipts, PAYE, pension, insurance, contracts, etc.)	6 years (min. legal requirement)	Archive (hard copy) after 1 year; destroy after min. 6 years
Client records (contact details, client notes, etc.)	7 years (BACP requirement)	Archive (hard copy and electronic) 1 year following completion of sessions; destroy after min. 7 years.
Member's records	6 years (min.)	Archive after 1 year (hard copy and electronic); destroy after min. 6 years.
Health and safety records (risk assessments, copies of maintenance/inspection reports, accident records/reports, etc.)	6 years (min.)	Archive (hard copy and electronically) after 1 year.
Property title documents	Permanent	Retain in active files.
Minutes of meetings	6 years (min.)	Retain on server but organise into year-specific folders.
Policies, documented procedures and other operational information.	Permanent	Retain on server but organise into year-specific folders.