

Access to Online Services Policy

Purpose

This policy sets out how The Guildhall & Barrow Surgery provides patients with safe, fair, and effective access to GP services through online systems. It ensures compliance with NHS contractual requirements, information governance standards, and safeguarding obligations, while supporting patient choice and accessibility.

Scope

This policy applies to:

- All registered patients of The Guildhall & Barrow Surgery
- All staff, clinicians, and contractors involved in providing or managing online services
- All online systems used by the practice, including the NHS App and practice-approved third-party platforms

Online Services Provided

The practice offers the following online services (subject to eligibility and system availability):

- E-consult: Appointment booking, cancellation, or request submission
- NHS App, SystmOne Online, E-consult: Repeat prescription requests
- E-Consult: Online consultation requests for clinical and administrative queries
- Practice Website, NHS Register with a GP: Online registrations
- Access to GP health records (including medications, test results, and consultations)
- Secure messaging and communications from the practice

Patient Registration and Identity Verification

- Patients must be registered with the practice to use online services.
- Identity verification is required, usually through **NHS Login**.
- Support will be offered to patients who have trouble registering or accessing online services.
- Patients may opt out of online services at any time.

Access to Online Health Records

Eligibility

- Patients aged **16 years and over** are provided with online access to their prospective GP health record by default.
- Access may be restricted or withheld where there are:

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Reviewed by: RS Practice manager

- Safeguarding concerns
- Risks of serious harm or distress
- Third-party confidentiality issues

Safeguarding

- Clinicians may limit or review access on an individual basis.
- Patients will be informed where access is restricted, unless this would increase risk.
- Staff follow NHS guidance on safeguarding vulnerable patients.

Online Consultations

- Online consultation tools are available during **core practice hours (8:00am – 6:30pm, Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays)**.
- Online requests are triaged by appropriate clinical or administrative staff.
- Use of online services does not replace the option of telephone or face-to-face contact.
- Response times are communicated clearly to patients.

Equality, Accessibility, and Inclusion

The practice is committed to ensuring that:

- Online services do not disadvantage patients who are digitally excluded.
- Alternative access routes (telephone, in-person) remain available.
- Reasonable adjustments are made for patients with disabilities, language barriers, or additional needs.
- Staff support patients who need help using online systems

Information Governance and Data Security

- All online services comply with **UK GDPR**, the **Data Protection Act 2018**, and NHS information governance requirements.
- Patient data is accessed only by authorised staff.
- Secure systems and passwords must be used at all times.
- Any data breaches or concerns are reported in line with practice policy.

Staff Roles and Responsibilities

- **Practice Manager:** Overall responsibility for implementation and review of this policy.
- **Clinical Staff:** Ensure safe clinical use of online systems and manage record access appropriately.
- **Administrative Staff:** Support patient access, registration, and general enquiries.
- **All Staff:** Adhere to confidentiality, safeguarding, and data protection requirements.

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Patient Responsibilities

Patients using online services are expected to:

- Keep login details secure
- Use online services appropriately
- Contact the practice by telephone or attend in person for urgent or emergency issues
- Inform the practice if they believe their account has been accessed without permission

Monitoring and Review

- This policy will be reviewed **annually** or sooner if guidance or contractual requirements change.
- Patient feedback and system performance will inform service improvements.