

## Code of Conduct

### Policy statement

This code of conduct sets out the expectations Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) has of all those who work or carry out activities for it, in a voluntary or paid capacity, including board members, employees, students and volunteers. For ease of reference, these parties will be called representatives throughout the rest of the document. As Healthwatch County Durham is a hosted organisation (this means the organisation that holds the contract with the Local Authority for the delivery of Healthwatch County Durham) their policies and procedures must also be adhered to whilst representatives are carrying out activities on behalf of HWCD.

The title of Volunteer Supporter used in this document refers to the named contact in Healthwatch County Durham who supports our team of volunteers.

Everyone who represents Healthwatch County Durham is expected to behave professionally and in support of our values outlined below.

### Our values

The values of Healthwatch and our host organisation, underpin everything we do. Their values are detailed in their Value Statement.

Healthwatch County Durham expects all members and those acting on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham to be committed to the Nolan Principles of Public Life

### Respect

Respect and uphold the good reputation of Healthwatch County Durham and treat everyone they come into contact with through Healthwatch County Durham with equal respect and courtesy.

### Openness and accountability

Conduct themselves fairly and openly when involved in Healthwatch County Durham activities and be accountable to Healthwatch County Durham for any decisions and actions taken on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham.

### Honesty

Conduct themselves honestly and withdraw from involvement in any business of Healthwatch County Durham where they have, or could be seen to have, a conflict of interest, whether personal, professional, financial or other. In particular, make known any interest in any matter under consideration by Healthwatch County Durham which

- either creates a real danger of bias - that is, the interest affects him/her, or a member of his/her organisation or household, more than others affected by the decision;
- or which might reasonably cause others to think it could influence the decision

In the above situation, they should declare the nature of the interest and withdraw from a meeting or discussion, unless the remaining members agree otherwise.

### Best interests and objectivity

Act in the best interests of Healthwatch County Durham at all times, taking any decisions on merit and promoting public confidence in Healthwatch County Durham. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham, accurately represent the collective views of those they are representing on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham and provide timely and accurate feedback to Healthwatch County Durham and those they are representing.

### Integrity

Conduct themselves in a manner which does not damage or undermine the good reputation of Healthwatch County Durham or place them under any financial or other obligation to any person or organisation that may attempt to influence any decision or action taken on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham.

### Leadership

Lead by example, supporting these principles in order to maintain and strengthen public trust and confidence in the business of Healthwatch County Durham.

### Compliance with law

All those who represent Healthwatch County Durham are required to abide by relevant laws and regulations, including those relating to the environment, health and safety, discrimination, disability and employment. Representatives will be ethical and responsible whenever dealing with company finances, the services we deliver, partnership and collaborative working and public image. Representatives will inform the Healthwatch County Durham Chair or Lead Officer immediately of any possible or actual infringement.

### Conflict of interest

Representatives will complete a declaration of interest form when they join Healthwatch county Durham, and ensure it is kept up to date. Representatives are expected to maintain professional boundaries in their relationships with each other, and external parties such as commissioners and providers. Full details can be found in our **Conflict of Interest policy**.

### Serving the public

Representatives will always perform their duties to the highest standard and treat members of the public with dignity and respect, taking account of their individual needs. Representatives will actively promote equality, diversity and social inclusion and encourage all the community to participate in engagement activities. Representatives will be honest and impartial when conducting Healthwatch activity, regardless of personal views and will discuss any conflict with the appropriate line manager or Volunteer Supporter. Healthwatch County Durham is a politically neutral and independent organisation.

### Use of public funds

Representatives of Healthwatch County Durham have a duty to ensure the safeguarding of public money and proper care of assets which have been publicly funded. Representatives will carry out these obligations responsibly and take appropriate measures to ensure that Healthwatch County Durham uses resources efficiently, economically and effectively, avoiding waste and extravagance.

### Respect in the workplace

Our aim is to create a positive environment within which individuals and organisations with an interest in our work can contribute freely, equally and openly. Use of technology for virtual meetings and events will

also be regarded as 'the workplace'. We will not allow any kind of discriminatory behaviour, harassment or victimisation.

### Representing Healthwatch County Durham

Staff and volunteers including board members are accountable to the public for their actions and the way they carry out their responsibilities. They should always behave in a manner which does not bring Healthwatch County Durham into disrepute or damage our relationship with the public, service providers or other stakeholders. Representatives must be respectful and offer constructive criticism which does not seek to undermine an individual.

Healthwatch County Durham board members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by Healthwatch County Durham's **Decision Making policy**. When a decision is made, all Board members are bound by that decision and should publicly support it.

Where representatives of Healthwatch County Durham attend meetings whether in person or virtual means, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch County Durham, representatives will reflect the priorities and policies of Healthwatch County Durham, even if they differ from personal views. If they are there in a personal capacity or a capacity connected with another role they undertake, they should always be explicit if they are expressing their own personal views. When participating in meetings or other activities, in person or online, Healthwatch County Durham representatives agree to:

- Attend on time and be prepared
- Send apologies if unable to attend
- Listen to, respect and value the opinions of others
- Speak one at a time through the Chair or meeting facilitator
- Be clear and keep to the point, using plain English and avoiding the use of jargon and acronyms
- Ask for more information or explanation if necessary
- Declare an interest where one exists or may be perceived to exist
- Work positively with Healthwatch representatives
- Provide feedback to those they represent
- Respect the authority of the role of the Chair or meeting facilitator and accept a majority vote, where needed, as decisive

Approaches to representatives by third parties for information or views, including contact with the media must be referred to the Lead Office or Chair of the Board. In respect of media communications, the Lead Officer will be the official spokesperson of Healthwatch County Durham, and no other staff or volunteer should commit to media interviews without first consulting and gaining the approval. Any press releases will also need to be authorised by the host organisation in line with their processes.

All staff and volunteers must be politically impartial in their public role. Healthwatch County Durham will sometimes initiate or participate in campaigning about an issue. Care must be taken to ensure that, in doing so, the principle of political neutrality is always maintained and that nothing is done that could be interpreted as partisan in nature or suggests support for a specific party-political view.

### Duty of confidentiality

Healthwatch County Durham will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, organisations or financial matters. Representatives of Healthwatch County Durham

will respect confidentiality and not divulge third party information without the agreement of the third party, or a legal requirement to do so, and operate according to the host organisation's **Confidentiality policy**.

### Equality, diversity and inclusion

We are committed to understanding, accepting and appreciating individual difference. In practice, this means treating others with dignity and respect, recognising the value of each individual and their experience. We will not tolerate discrimination against others based on, but not limited to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation, in accordance with the host organisation's **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy**.

### Gifts and hospitality

It is not normally acceptable for representatives of Healthwatch County Durham to accept a gift, reward or favour from others for work done in an official capacity. This does not include gifts of minor value such as pens or calendars.

If gifts are offered, the guidance in the host organisation's **Receipt of Gifts & Hospitality Procedure** must be followed.

### Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking

Smoking is not permitted on Healthwatch County Durham premises, or within the premises where Healthwatch County Durham work is being undertaken. Guidance can be found in the host organisation's **Smoke Free Policy**

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted during working hours. Representatives of Healthwatch County Durham must not be under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs or other substances during working hours.

The host organisation's **Alcohol and Substance Misuse Procedure** requires employees/volunteers to come to work free from the effects of alcohol and drugs. Working under the influence of alcohol or drugs will always be considered as unacceptable behaviour. Employees/volunteers found in possession of illegal drugs or using illegal drugs at work will be reported to the police. They operate a zero tolerance approach to illegal drugs.

### Dress code

All representatives of Healthwatch County Durham should be neat and tidy in appearance and dress in a way that inspires confidence in a professional service. There is a host organisation **Dress Code Procedure** for guidance

### Reporting misconduct

If any employee or volunteer has a question or concern, or feels that an employee, volunteer, or the organisation is not meeting the commitment outlined in this document, they should not stay silent. Contact your Line Manager, Lead Officer, Volunteer Supporter, Board Member or Chair. If the concern remains unresolved, reference should be made to the host organisation's **Grievance procedure**, the problem-solving process for volunteers, or **Whistleblowing policy**.

Members of the public who wish to report a breach in our code of conduct can raise the concern directly with the Chair or Lead Officer. Alternatively, if it is more appropriate, they can raise a complaint in

accordance with our **Complaints policy** which is also available on our website, and upon request from any member of our team.

We take our Code of Conduct seriously and expect the same of our employees and volunteers.

### Failure to comply

Breaches of this Code of Conduct by anyone who carries out activities for Healthwatch County Durham will be handled consistently and fairly by the Healthwatch County Durham Chair and Board with support and advice where required from the host organisation.

Breaches of this Code of Conduct by staff and those providing support and services to Healthwatch County Durham via a formal arrangement with the host organisation will be dealt with through their policies and procedures.

### Data protection

Any personal information provided in connection with this policy will be processed in accordance with data protection principles and will only be processed to ensure that individuals act in the best interests of Healthwatch County Durham. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

### Review of policy document

The Board of Healthwatch County Durham will review the effectiveness of the code of conduct policy set out in this document every two years.

Any amendments to this policy governing code of conduct will require a simple majority of board members voting in favour.

The amended policy document will be published on the website of Healthwatch County Durham as soon as is practicable.

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