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# Code of conduct guidance

January 2021

# About this guidance

This guidance is for lead officers, chairs and board members.

Throughout this document:

* Reference to volunteers will include both operational and board level volunteers.
* Reference to Board will include governing body trustees and advisory boards in hosted structures.
* Volunteer Supporter has been used throughout to refer to the volunteer equivalent of a Line Manager role.

# Why do we need a code of conduct policy?

How staff, board and volunteers conduct themselves is key to your Healthwatch reputation and implicit in the terms of the Healthwatch Trademark Licence; a code of conduct policy sets out the standards of behaviour expected.

It helps you articulate the values of your organisation to anyone interested in becoming involved with your Healthwatch and will be especially helpful as a set of standards if you encounter inappropriate behaviours that are not aligned to your values.

For it to be effective the code of conduct should reflect the concerns and wishes of the people who work and volunteer in your organisation. A template is provided here for you to use, but it is important that you should take some time to write your own code of conduct, reflecting your organisational values.

# How do I ensure our policy is relevant, regularly used and protects our brand and reputation?

All members of staff and volunteers should adhere to the principles set out in your code of conduct.

Your policy should be reviewed on a regular basis by your Board, noted in board minutes and any amendments published on your website as soon as is practicable. Industry good practice suggests reviews should be no longer than three years apart.

In addition, you may wish to use the Trustee Agreement for your Trustees to sign when they join the organisation. For those teams who are hosted this can be adapted to suit your committee / advisory board structure.

All staff and volunteers should be aware of your code of conduct too. In addition to the policy being part of induction training, it is good practice for staff and volunteers to read the policy regularly to refresh their knowledge, as a minimum following review by your Board.

In addition, you will have a volunteer agreement which your volunteers will sign when they join the organisation, which commits them to adhering to your policies – so be sure to include the code of conduct policy in their induction training and volunteer handbook.

Your code of conduct policy should be published on your website, serving as a public statement of what you stand for and your commitment to high standards and conduct. It should include details of how someone can report a breach, or potential breach to the code, including members of staff and members of the public.

# What happens if I identify a breach in our code of conduct?

This will depend on the severity of the breach and could range from a private one-to-one chat, to instant dismissal. Take care to follow your own governance, whether formal disciplinary procedures for employees or informal problem-solving procedures for volunteers, including your governance protocols for Trustees. You may need to obtain external advice for more complex breaches where employment law may have implications on how you manage the breach.

Significant breaches should be reported to Healthwatch England who will work with local Healthwatch, particularly where there may be potential media interest or possible breaches of your trademark licence.

You will also want to discuss significant breaches with your local authority commissioning team.

If in doubt, speak to your [Regional Manager](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/our-staff) who will provide support and advice.

# Do I have to use the template policy document?

The important thing is you have a code of conduct policy that is open and transparent, and accepted by your staff and volunteer team. If you already have a policy that does this and you want to keep it, you can.

If not, use this template as your base and talk to your team about what your code of conduct will look like.

You may wish to have separate policies for staff, board members and/or volunteers. The culture within your local Healthwatch will inform whether this is appropriate. The principles for each will be the same, but there may be distinctions as informed by your governance framework.

# How does this fit in to the Quality Framework?

The Healthwatch [Quality Framework](https://network.healthwatch.co.uk/guidance/2019-10-15/quality-framework) sets out the key ingredients for running an effective Healthwatch. Your code of conduct underpins everything you do and is especially relevant to the:

* **Leadership and Decision Making** domain, which recognises the importance of operating with integrity.
* **People** domain, which focuses on your culture, values and behaviours.

# How does this fit in with our commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?

Equality, diversity and inclusion should cut across all activity of Healthwatch and those involved in carrying out that activity. Your code of conduct will help you to monitor and demonstrate that you do not disproportionately affect people with protected characteristics or create or perpetuate inequality.

Take care to assess each area of your code of conduct to ensure you are not discriminating or excluding any individual in your team or potential member of your team and are acting in an inclusive manner.

# Code of conduct policy

## Policy statement

This code of conduct sets out the expectations Healthwatch xxx has of all those who work or carry out activities for it, in a voluntary or paid capacity, including trustees, employees, students and volunteers. For ease of reference, these parties will be called representatives throughout the rest of the document.

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

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

### Our values

Each local Healthwatch will have its own set of values and behaviours or may adopt the Nolan Principles. Whatever you use, insert them here. For example:

Selflessness: Our representatives will act only in the public interest.

### Compliance with law

All those who represent Healthwatch xxx 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 xxx 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 xxx, 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 xxx is a politically neutral and independent organisation.

### Use of public funds

Representatives of Healthwatch xxx 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 xxx 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 xxx

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 xxx 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 xxx board members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by Healthwatch xxx’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 xxx attend meetings whether in person or virtual means, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch xxx, representatives will reflect the priorities and policies of Healthwatch xxx, 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 xxx 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 Chair/Lead Officer (delete as per your own needs) will be the official spokesperson of Healthwatch xxx, and no other staff or volunteer should commit to media interviews without first consulting and gaining the approval of the Chair.

All staff and volunteers must be politically impartial in their public role. Healthwatch xxx 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 xxx will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, organisations or financial matters. Representatives of Healthwatch xxx 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 our **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 our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy**.

### Gifts and hospitality

It is not normally acceptable for representatives of Healthwatch xxx 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, your Line Manager, Volunteer Supporter or Chair must be informed, and will determine the action to be taken. Your Gifts and Hospitality Register must be completed.

### Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking

Smoking is not permitted on Healthwatch xxx premises, or within the premises where Healthwatch xxx work is being undertaken.

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

Incapacity for work through the misuse of drink, drugs or other substances is a disciplinary matter for staff and will be addressed through the problem-solving process for volunteers. Where representatives are prescribed medication that may affect their mood or ability to carry out their role, they should bring this to the attention of their line manager or volunteer supporter.

### Dress code

All representatives of Healthwatch xxx should be neat and tidy in appearance and dress in a way that inspires confidence in a professional service.

### 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, do 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 our **Grievance procedure**, the problem-solving process for volunteers, or our **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 our code of conduct will be treated consistently and fairly by the Healthwatch xxx Chair and Governing / Advisory board or host organisation (delete as necessary).

Failure to comply with the principles and underlying policies in this document may result in disciplinary action for paid employees which can include termination of employment, or commencing the problem-solving process for volunteers, which can include termination of the volunteer agreement and relationship.

### 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 xxx. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

### Review of policy document

The Board of Healthwatch xxx will review the effectiveness of the code of conduct policy set out in this document every (one/two/three years) delete as appropriate.

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 xxx as soon as is practicable.

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| Code of conduct policy |
| Version | 1.0 |
| Author | Insert name here |
| Approved by | Board of Healthwatch xxx |
| Date approved | Insert |
| Effective date | appropriate dates |
| Review date | here |