

Healthwatch North Somerset Code of Conduct

February 2025

Code of Conduct Policy

This code of conduct sets out the expectations Healthwatch North Somerset 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 Engagement Officer used in this document refers to the named contact in Healthwatch North Somerset who supports our team of volunteers.

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

Our values

We are inclusive, transparent, non-judgemental, independent, have integrity, work in co-production, have a mindset of continual improvement and adhere to the Nolan Principles of Public Life.

Compliance with law

All those who represent Healthwatch North Somerset are required to abide by relevant laws and regulations, including those relating to health and safety, discrimination, disability and employment and the environment. 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 North Somerset Chief Executive or Chair of Trustees immediately of any possible or actual infringement.

Conflict of interest

Representatives will complete a Register of Interests form when they join Healthwatch North Somerset, and ensure it is up to date. Representatives are expected to maintain professional boundaries in their relationships with each other, and external parties such as commissioners and providers.

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 most appropriate member of staff who holds line management responsibilities.

Use of public funds

Representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 North Somerset 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 office space, and of virtual meetings or events will all be regarded as 'the workplace'. We will not allow any kind of discriminatory behaviour, harassment, or victimisation.

Representing Healthwatch North Somerset

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 North Somerset 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 North Somerset Local Advisory Group members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by Healthwatch North Somerset's **Decision Making Guidance**. When a decision is made, all Board members are bound by that decision and should publicly support it.

Where representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset attend meetings whether in person or virtual, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch North Somerset, representatives will reflect the values, priorities and policies of Healthwatch North Somerset. 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 North Somerset 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 avoid 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 Senior Business Manager or the Chief Executive of TCF. They will be official spokespersons of Healthwatch North Somerset, in respect of media communications, and no other staff or volunteer should commit to media interviews without first consulting and gaining the approval of them.

All staff and volunteers must be politically impartial in their public role. Healthwatch North Somerset or Healthwatch England will sometimes initiate or ask us to 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 North Somerset will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, organisations or occasionally financial matters. Representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 and Privacy Policies**.

Equality, diversity, equity 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, Equity and Inclusion Policy**.

Gifts and hospitality

It is not acceptable for representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 or the Volunteer Engagement Officer must be informed, and will determine the action to be taken.

Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking

Smoking is not permitted in the Healthwatch North Somerset office, or within any premises where Healthwatch North Somerset work is being undertaken.

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted during working hours. Representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 the Volunteer Engagement Officer.

Dress code

All representatives of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 most appropriate reporting manager, the concern remains unresolved, reference should be made to our Employee handbook **Grievance procedure**, or **Whistleblowing**.

Members of the public who wish to report a breach in our code of conduct can raise the concern directly with the Chief Operating Officer. Alternatively, if it is more appropriate, they can raise a complaint in accordance with our **Complaints Policy**.

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 North Somerset.

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 a problem-solving process for volunteers, which can include termination of the volunteer agreement and relationship.

Data protection (GDPR)

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 North Somerset. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

Review of policy document

The Board of Trustees of Healthwatch North Somerset 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 North Somerset as soon as is practicable.
