



Code of Conduct Policy

Policy Statement

This code of conduct sets out the expectations Healthwatch South Tyneside 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 this document.

The title of Volunteer Supporter used in this document refers to the named contact in Healthwatch South Tyneside who supports our team of volunteers. Everyone who represents Healthwatch South Tyneside is expected to behave professionally and in support of our values outlined below.

Our values

In Healthwatch South Tyneside we adopt the Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

Compliance with law

All those who represent Healthwatch South Tyneside 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 when dealing with company finances, the services we deliver, partnership and collaborative working and public image. Representatives will inform the Healthwatch South Tyneside Chair or Operations Manager immediately of any possible or actual infringement.

Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking

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

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted during working hours.

Representatives of Healthwatch South Tyneside 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.

Conflict of interest

Representatives will complete a declaration of interest form when they join Healthwatch South Tyneside, 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**.

Dress code

All representatives of Healthwatch South Tyneside should be neat and tidy in

appearance and dress in a way that inspires confidence in a professional service.

Duty of confidentiality

Healthwatch South Tyneside will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, other organisations, financial matters, or pertaining to its own business matters. Representatives of Healthwatch South Tyneside will respect confidentiality and not divulge third party information without the agreement of the third party, or a legal requirement to do so.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

We are committed to understanding, accepting, and appreciating individual differences. 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 (including bribery and corruption)

It is not normally acceptable for representatives of Healthwatch South Tyneside 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.

'Bribery' is a financial or other advantage offered, promised, requested, or given to induce a person to perform a relevant function or activity improperly, or to reward them for doing so. 'Corruption' is the misuse of office or power for private gain. All forms of bribery and corruption are strictly prohibited. If any member of staff, volunteer or board member is unsure about whether a particular act constitutes bribery they should raise it with their line manager, volunteer supporter or Chair of the board.

Representing Healthwatch South Tyneside

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 South Tyneside 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 South Tyneside Board members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by Healthwatch South Tyneside'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 South Tyneside attend meetings whether in person or by virtual means, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch South Tyneside, representatives will reflect on the priorities and policies of Healthwatch South Tyneside, 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 South Tyneside 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 an 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 Operations Manager or Chair of the Board.

In respect of media communications, the Chair / Operations Manager will be the official spokesperson of Healthwatch South Tyneside, 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 South Tyneside 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.

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.

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 South Tyneside is a politically neutral and independent organisation.

Use of public funds

Representatives of Healthwatch South Tyneside 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 South Tyneside uses resources efficiently, economically, and effectively, avoiding waste and extravagance.

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,

Operations Manager, Volunteer Supporter, Board Member or Chair. If the concern remains unresolved, reference should be made to our **Grievance Procedure**, or the problem-solving process for volunteers.

Members of the public who wish to report a breach in our code of conduct can raise their concern directly with the Chair or Operations Manager.

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 from our employees and volunteers.

Whistleblowing policy: raising a concern

The board, staff members and volunteers at Healthwatch South Tyneside are bound by the Nolan Principles to act with the highest standards of integrity and honesty in all that we do.

If you have a genuine concern about something Healthwatch South Tyneside is not doing right, for example, something that might compromise our reputation, a breach of our code of conduct, a breach of health and safety rules or any other legal obligations, dishonesty, or criminal behaviour such as fraud, it is vital you raise your suspicions with your line manager, or the Operations Manager, or a member of the board.

Your concerns will be taken seriously and where appropriate investigated further. As far as possible your confidentiality will be protected in line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

The important thing is not to ignore a concern in the hope it will go away. If something is wrong, it can be looked into and put right if you speak out.

Failure to comply

Breaches of our code of conduct will be treated consistently and fairly by the Healthwatch South Tyneside Chair and governing board.

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 South Tyneside. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

Review of policy document

The Board of Healthwatch South Tyneside will review the effectiveness of the code of conduct policy set out in this document every three years.

Any amendments to this policy governing our 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 South Tyneside as soon as is practicable.

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Updated:	
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Next review date:	September 2026
Culture Portfolio Lead:	Chair
Culture Policy Lead:	Operations Manager