

## Code of conduct policy

### Policy statement

This code of conduct sets out the expectations Healthwatch Darlington 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 Community and Volunteer Officer used in this document refers to the named contact in Healthwatch Darlington who supports our team of volunteers.

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

### Our values

Healthwatch Darlington values its reputation as an open, fair, independent corporate body operating as a social enterprise with a high standard of integrity and commitment to its aims and objectives. This reputation is dependent on the conduct of its representatives as they carry out their agreed duties and responsibilities.

Healthwatch Darlington representatives are expected to uphold the Nolan Principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

It is important that representatives are aware of and understand the Healthwatch Darlington governance arrangements to be found at the Healthwatch Darlington office.

### Compliance with law

All those who represent Healthwatch Darlington 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 Darlington Chair or Chief Executive Officer immediately of any possible or actual infringement.

### Conflict of interest

Representatives will complete a declaration of interest form when they join Healthwatch Darlington, 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 Community and Volunteer Officer. Healthwatch Darlington is a politically neutral and independent organisation.

### Use of public funds

Representatives of Healthwatch Darlington 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 Darlington 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 Darlington

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 Darlington 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 Darlington board members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by Healthwatch Darlington'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 Darlington attend meetings whether in person or virtual means, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of Healthwatch Darlington, representatives will reflect the priorities and policies of Healthwatch Darlington, 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 Darlington 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 Chief Executive Officer or Chair of the Board. In respect of media communications, the Chief Executive Officer will be the official spokesperson of Healthwatch Darlington, 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 Darlington 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 Darlington will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, organisations or financial matters. Representatives of Healthwatch Darlington 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 Darlington 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, Community and Volunteer Officer 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 Darlington premises, or within the premises where Healthwatch Darlington work is being undertaken.

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted during working hours. Representatives of Healthwatch Darlington 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 Community and Volunteer Officer.

## Dress code

All representatives of Healthwatch Darlington 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, Chief Executive Officer, Community and Volunteer Officer, 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 Chief Executive 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 Darlington Chair and Healthwatch Darlington 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 Darlington. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

### Review of policy document

The Board of Healthwatch Darlington will review the effectiveness of the code of conduct policy set out in this document every three 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 Darlington as soon as is practicable.

Code of conduct policy	
Version	3.0
Author	Michelle Thompson B.E.M., Chief Executive Officer
Approved by	Board of Healthwatch Darlington
Date approved	13/03/2024
Effective date	13/03/2024
Review date	01/01/2024