

Healthwatch North Tyneside policies and procedures

Comments, complaints and compliments policy and procedure

March 2024

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish general standards for the handling of comments, complaints or compliments about Healthwatch North Tyneside (HWNT), both setting out the process for their handling and to outline the various responsibilities for the implementation between the board of trustees, the Director and other employees.

2. Policy statement

Healthwatch North Tyneside is committed to ensuring high standards of quality in all aspects of its work. This includes transparency about the decisions taken and the provision of opportunities for people to make suggestions, raise concerns, complain or give compliments about our work. HWNT takes any complaints very seriously. Comments, complaints and compliments made about the services of HWNT offer opportunities to learn and to improve practice.

The Board of Trustees requires the Director to ensure that the following policy is implemented and to report annually on the policy effectiveness in:

- Promotion of the opportunity to comment on the standard of services by HWNT.
- Proper recording of comments about service quality.
- Proper handling of comments from acknowledgement, investigation, communicating outcomes and handling appeals.
- Proper reporting of comments received in compliance with the safeguarding obligations (see safeguarding policies) and with contractual and legal obligations.

- Ensuring learning from comments about service quality.
- This policy is available on our website:
<https://healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk/aboutus/policies>
- Everyone using the service will be given the opportunity to feedback on their satisfaction.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Disciplinary Policy, Volunteer Policy, Adult and Children's Safeguarding policies, Equalities and Diversity and Health and Safety policy.

3. Scope

This policy covers the handling of comments, complaints and compliments received by Healthwatch North Tyneside in relation to issues raised about the services provided by HWNT.

4. Definition of terms

Complaints

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission or decision of HWNT. This may be either verbal or written and requires investigation, response and, if appropriate, redress.

Compliment

A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about an act, omission or decision of HWNT. This may be verbal or written and requires response.

Comment

A comment may be a suggestion for improvement or a general comment regarding HWNT that is neither a complaint or compliment.

5. Who can make a comment, complaint or compliment?

A comment, complaint or compliment may be made by the person(s) who is affected by the action or represents them – this includes:

- a consumer of HWNT services;
- someone who cares for the consumer;
- someone who has been given consent by the consumer to act on their behalf (such as an advocate);
- a representative of providers of health and social care services or commissioning bodies; and

- partner organisations or suppliers acting on behalf of consumers

6. How to make a comment, compliment or complaint

HWNT will accept comments, compliments or complaints verbally (in person or by phone) or in writing (by mail, email and via social media channels).

Process for suggestions, general comments or compliments

All suggestions, comments and compliments will be acknowledged no later than five working days after the day of receipt for all correspondence methods.

Acknowledgement will be made using the appropriate medium, including using the letter in Appendix 1 as a template, but may be made verbally if more appropriate.

The respondent can expect that:

- The comment or compliment will be recorded on HWNT database or online feedback centre
- Report to the board, twice yearly, considering how to learn from good practice, or to discuss the implications of a suggestion for improvement
- If a suggestion is taken forward a further response to the originator with information about any change of practice
- If appropriate highlighted through our e-news and/or annual report

7. HWNT complaints process

HWNT will strive to resolve any complaints as quickly as possible through discussion with the complainant to rectify any concerns or clarify any misunderstandings. Informal complaints will be recorded on the database.

Where this is not possible or where a complainant prefers, issues will be handled as formal complaints as set out below.

Formal Complaints Procedure

The complaint will initially be reviewed by the Director to understand the nature of the complaint, urgency, risk and who is involved.

An investigator will be appointed to look into the issue. The Director will normally act as investigator. Where a complaint relates to the Director of HWNT the Chair of the Board will normally investigate at the first level.

Where a complaint relates to a Board Member, the Chair of the Board will conduct the investigation or, where a complaint relates to the Chair of the Board, all other Trustees will be required to participate in a vote to appoint a Board member to investigate.

In general all formal complaints will be acknowledged no later than five working days after the day the complaint is received using the most appropriate means and the letter in Appendix 2 as a template setting out the timescale and process for responding and giving information about independent advocacy services in their local area.

The investigator, along with an appointed note taker if necessary, will interview the complainant, and any relevant people involved in the issue, to gather further information and evidence, if appropriate.

An investigation report will be produced stating the outcome of the complaint and any action taken as a result of the complaint within 28 days.

HWNT will send a formal response in writing to the complainant. This will state:

- A summary of the main issues covered in the complaint
- An explanation of how the complaint was investigated
- If the complaint is (in part or in full) upheld or viewed to be unfounded and the reasons for this
- An apology if appropriate
- Any remedial action that HWNT have taken
- Any lessons learnt
- Information about how to appeal

Where a complaint relates to the conduct or performance of a member of staff or a Trustee or Volunteer with HWNT, action taken will be in line with the relevant HWNT policies and the duty of confidentiality will be maintained within the response to the complainant.

If at any time the complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint this can be done in writing and an acknowledgement will be sent by HWNT.

The complainant can expect

HWNT will set out a clear timescale to handle the complaint

- Identify the complainant's expectations and desired outcome
- Provide Information about support available to the complainant

- An investigation will be carried out to gather information and the response given will be based on facts.
- Outline any action to be taken.
- That the complaint has been recorded on HWNT database
- Reported to the board to consider how to learn from the incident
- Reported to commissioners of HWNT services within the annual report

8. Where to get support to complain

If you need support to make a complaint then you can request advocacy support from Independent Advocacy North East www.iane.org.uk, or a request can be made for Healthwatch North Tyneside to find a mutually agreed independent body to support the complaint (such as North Tyneside Council, or other local Healthwatch).

Should the complainant wish, they could make a complaint through the local authority. Details of this can be found online:

<https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/308/contact-council>

9. How to appeal the outcome of a complaint.

If the complainant wishes to appeal the outcome of the complaint they may lodge an appeal within 5 working days.

The Chair of Healthwatch will assemble an Appeal Panel within 10 working days of receipt of the appeal letter consisting of the Chair and one other Board member.

On mutual agreement HWNT may arrange for mediation or local resolution through an outside body.

The complainant will be given at least three days written notice of this meeting and will be given the opportunity to state their case.

The decision of the Appeal Panel will be final.

If you would like to contact North Tyneside Council about your complaint please contact Karina Williamson – Karina.williamson@northtyneside.gov.uk

10. Policy review

This policy will be reviewed as it is deemed appropriate, but in line with any new or changed legislation, regulations or business practices but no less frequently than every three years.

Policy review will be undertaken by the Information Governance Group and presented to the Board for approval.

Document classification	Public	Document reference	
Document category		Policy introduced	April 2015
Author	J Scott	Date last updated	January 2024
Reviewed by	P Jones	Date approved	March 2024
Approved by	Board	Review date	January 2027

APPENDIX 1

<DATE>

Dear <NAME>

Your compliment about Healthwatch North Tyneside

I am writing to thank you for the feedback about our service, received on <DATE>. We try very hard to provide a good service to local people and to try to influence positive change in health and social care services locally.

We are happy to hear that <DETAILS OF COMPLIMENT>. We will pass this onto our staff, the board and the commissioners of our service to make sure that we are able to learn from this. We may also include anonymous quotes on our website or in publications.

We do hope you will continue to feedback to us on your health and social care experiences locally and of course what you think about Healthwatch North Tyneside.

Yours sincerely

Director

APPENDIX 2

<DATE>

Dear <NAME>

Your complaint about Healthwatch North Tyneside

Thank you for contacting us to raise your concerns about <DETAILS OF COMPLAINT>, which we received on <DATE>. I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your complaint and explain the next stage of the process.

Your complaint will be investigated by <NAME> and responded to within 28 days. The investigating officer will be meeting and / or discussing your complaint with all relevant people in the coming weeks and will be in contact with you to arrange a discussion. They will be accompanied by a note taker in all formal meetings.

We wish to reassure you that we feel strongly about the need to provide good quality services to local people and as such take seriously any complaints made. Some people require support to complain and as such we are happy to work with people who you have given consent to act on your behalf. For details about local advocacy services you can visit: <http://www.iane.org.uk/>
Please don't hesitate to contact us at any stage to give more information or with any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely

<Recipient of complaint>