

Healthwatch North Tyneside policies and procedures

Confidentiality

July 2026

Introduction

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers and trustees of Healthwatch North Tyneside (HWNT). The data covered by this policy includes:

- Personal information about individuals
- Information about the HWNT – reports, finances and plans that are not in the public domain
- Information about other organisations

All those involved in HWNT must respect the need for confidentiality of information held about anyone who comes into contact with HWNT and about HWNT business. This policy should be read in conjunction with HWNT's Data Protection policy.

HWNT representatives will often receive written, oral and computerised information which is of a confidential nature. They must be aware which information in HWNT's possession is classed as confidential and act accordingly. Information which is classed as confidential must not be disclosed except where there is a legitimate reason to do so and not otherwise, unless specific approval has been given by the Director.

HWNT staff, board members and volunteers should take care not to openly discuss confidential matters, for example in corridors, and ensure that confidential material is not accidentally disclosed, for example by leaving files open and unattended on a desk or displayed on a computer screen.

When representing HWNT in any meeting or activity, including public forums, or in dealing with the media, employees should take care not to disclose confidential or commercially sensitive information.

1. Personal Information

HWNT is committed to ensuring confidential services to all individuals. The confidentiality is between the individual and the organisation not the member of HWNT delivering a particular service. Where confidential information needs to be shared internally, GDPR principles and best practice must be followed.

Confidential information will only be sought from an individual when it is necessary to deliver a service.

No personal information about staff, volunteers or members of the public will be given to any third party including a member of their family, without consent unless we have a legal obligation to do so or where other organisations are acting on the instructions of HWNT.

Confidential or personal information will only be shared with another agency or individuals outside of HWNT with the consent of the individual. For example, if a member of HWNT intends to share information about a member of the public with another agency in order to make a referral to that agency.

2. Record Keeping and access

Employees are responsible for making accurate and relevant records of their dealings with service users and others. Apart from staff and volunteers in the office of HWNT, no-one will have access to information unless it is relevant to the work of HWNT.

All members of the public, staff and volunteers have the right to request access to all information stored about them and have a right to see a copy of this policy.

Significant breaches of this policy may be considered gross misconduct and will be dealt with under HWNT's disciplinary policy. It may also be a criminal offence and lead to criminal proceedings during and potentially after the employee's employment has ended.

All documents and other information is the property of HWNT. Employees are responsible for the security, retention and disposal of all information which they hold and this must be supplied to HWNT on request. If removed from HWNT premises, employees must ensure that all confidential and personal information is kept secure at all times and is returned to HWNT premises for retention and disposal. In order to prevent a continuing liability, on leaving employment with HWNT, employees must return all confidential and personal information to the Director.

All documents and data should have a useful life assigned to them, taking into account any statutory requirements, such as apply to financial records. At the end of their useful life documents and data should be discarded, using confidential waste procedures where appropriate.

3. Information security

Employees must positively prevent information misuse and ensure the accuracy of information by:

- Complying with HWNT's privacy statement, published on its website, and its data protection policy
- Protecting information against unauthorised access
- Assuring the confidentiality of stored information
- Maintaining the integrity of information
- Meeting all current regulatory, legislative and HWNT Policy requirements in relation to Information Governance
- Ensuring that safe remote access procedures are followed when undertaking mobile/home working
- Producing, maintaining and testing business continuity plans or facilitating such actions where not their direct responsibility but requested to assist
- Providing and making available relevant information and security training for other employees or assisting with such actions where it is not their direct responsibility but are requested to assist
- Preventing improper use of office equipment
- Limiting the use of electronic mail and internet to those uses permitted by the HWNT's related policies and procedures

- Not sending confidential information by unencrypted email. Sending password protected material is acceptable where passwords are secure.

4. Limits to clients' confidentiality

If an individual tells us something which leads us to believe them, or another person, may be at risk of serious harm or abuse, or assisting a serious criminal offence, HWNT reserves the right to break confidentiality if necessary. This could include a safeguarding issue or a request from the police.

Staff or volunteers must immediately alert the Director or Chair of HWNT. The decision to break confidentiality will be decided on a case by case basis and always in conjunction with a senior member of HWNT, but the expectation is that where risk of serious harm is suspected then authorities will be alerted as individuals should be made aware of this.

5. Photography

No photographs at an event or meeting should be taken without seeking the permission of those present. The HWNT consent form should be used and retained to meet this requirement.

Photographs of the HWNT Team, volunteers, staff or board members should not be displayed on HWNT or other websites without their permission and everyone should be made aware that their consent can be withdrawn at any time, although withdrawal of consent cannot be made retrospectively.

6. Enter and view visits

Any information relating to individual's personal experiences gained during visits is confidential and must not be discussed outside HWNT without the expressed consent of the individual concerned.

7. Board meetings

Meetings of the Board are open to the public and to the press. However, such persons attending are excluded from any confidential discussion by

the Board. The agenda for Board meetings will be published in advance of meetings on the HWNT website. Similarly, the minutes of meetings, except for any confidential items, will be published on the website once ratified.

8. Attending meetings where confidential information is discussed

HWNT representatives may attend meetings where confidential information is discussed. They must respect the bounds of confidentiality of that meeting whether this be regarding individuals, commissioning or services.

9. Awareness

All staff, volunteers and Board Members will be given a copy of this policy and will sign a confidentiality statement below and training will be provided as necessary.

During the course of your activities, you may have access to information of a confidential nature. This could relate to members of the public, the Healthwatch Board, Staff or volunteers or one of our partner organisations. When someone shares any confidential information with Healthwatch North Tyneside they need to know that we will not pass this to anyone outside our organisation without their permission. All staff and volunteers will respect confidentiality at all times. The only circumstances in which a breach of confidentiality may be justified are when there is a perceived danger to the individual or others or when not to do so would be breaking the law.

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