

Confidentiality policy

1. Introduction

The collection of data and contact with sensitive personal information is central to the function of Healthwatch Sutton. This will include information about services, covering both invited and formal feedback, as well as a certain amount of information about the people who use our services, as well as our directors, staff and volunteers. Our confidentiality policy aims to safeguard privacy and ensure appropriate access to information. We respect people's rights to confidentiality and do not, except in special circumstances (set out below) disclose information to third parties.

The processing of information is governed by the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as the Human Rights Act 1998. This confidentiality policy is compatible with this legislation. Directors, staff and volunteers should ensure that they are familiar with the legal framework and the Healthwatch Sutton [Data Protection Policy](#). Our [Protecting Adults at Risk](#) and [Safeguarding Children](#) policies should also be taken into account in considering how we maintain confidentiality.

As set out in the Data Protection Policy, HWS has a [privacy statement](#), setting out how personal information will be collected, stored and used. This is available on request, and is also published on our website. Staff and volunteers are required to sign a short [statement indicating that they have been made aware of their confidentiality responsibilities](#).

2. Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure we collect, store, maintain and if necessary share information about individuals in a way that is proportionate and safe.

3. Principles

- We will inform people of our confidentiality policy as often as needed and in clear language, so that they are fully informed of their right to privacy.
- We will collect only information that is needed to fulfil our legal duties and to safeguard staff, volunteers and clients.
- All hard copy personal information will be kept in a locked cabinet and will be accessible only to those who need to see it.
- All electronic information will be kept in designated folders and protected by passwords and firewalls, as appropriate.
- Personal information will only be kept on mobile devices i.e. laptops, phones, tablets or external drives, with appropriate security/encryption.
- Information will be accurate and up to date.
- Permissions, where appropriate, will be sought from individuals regarding the use of their data and that data will only ever be used for that specified purpose.
- We will not keep personal information any longer than needed.
- Information that is no longer needed will be shredded or deleted.
- It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that confidentiality is maintained both inside and outside work.

- Where it is necessary to transmit personal information electronically only secure communications methods will be used.

4. Reports and case studies

Reports or case studies concerning individuals must not name the individual and should retain anonymity. In cases where this is not possible, information is given with the strictest confidence, with the client consent.

We ask all 'Enter and View' volunteer not to take home any notes that contain confidential, personal or identifiable information after a visit, and to return them to a member of staff promptly after the visit.

5. Membership

Information relating to HWS membership will be held securely on the CiviCRM database.

6. Attending meetings where confidential information is discussed

HWS staff, directors and volunteers may attend meetings where confidential information is discussed. Anyone working for HWS, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity, will respect the bounds of confidentiality of that meeting, whether this be regarding an individual, commissioning or services.

6.1. Board meetings

Any confidential items will be discussed in a closed session at the end of the meeting. Appropriate staff and speakers will be asked to leave accordingly.

Documents prepared for the closed session of the Board meeting will be marked as confidential and on coloured paper. These should be handed back to HWS for shredding at the end of the meeting.

The minutes of confidential agenda items will be kept separate from the main body and advice should be taken from the chairperson as to how this part of the meeting will be recorded. This will normally be a list of decisions made.

6.2. Representation

Staff, directors and volunteers representing HWS will respect the requirement not to divulge or feedback confidential information which they are party to through attendance at such meetings.

7. Volunteers

HWS staff, directors and volunteers are supported by Community Action Sutton, whilst working for HWS, so are subject to Community Action Sutton's confidentiality policy. The main points relating to volunteer confidentiality are set out below:

- Volunteers should be aware when taking telephone calls that the conversation may be over heard. Any confidential calls should be taken in a private room.

- Personal information regarding individuals, families, staff, management, homes and hospitals should not be discussed in open places or with friends and family.
- All discarded confidential documents and papers must be shredded.

7.1. Recruitment

When recruiting for new volunteers, all papers relating to applicants will be held confidentially by staff. Once the appointment has been made, the papers will be held for the required period of time as stated in Community Action Sutton's Recruitment and Selection Policy.

All volunteers will receive regular support as required. All matters discussed within support meetings are confidential to the member of staff providing the support.

All hard copy personnel records are kept in a locked filing cabinet, and all electronic copy of personnel records are kept in designated folders are protected by passwords. Access to these records is only by arrangement with the Chief Executive or their deputy.

Documentation relating to volunteers will be retained for a 7 year period after they leave, in a secure location, after which time they will be shredded.

Matters discussed at meetings are to be considered confidential to the organisation unless otherwise agreed.

7.2. DBS

HWS complies fully with the [DBS Code of Practice](#).

- Disclosure information is always kept separately, in secure storage with access limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties. It is a **criminal offence** to pass this information to anyone who is entitled to receive it.
- Documents will be kept for a year, and then destroyed by secure means. Photocopies will not be kept. However, HWS may keep a record of the date of issue of a Disclosure, the name and date of birth of the subject, the type of Disclosure requested, the position for which the Disclosure was requested, the unique reference number of the Disclosure and the details of the recruitment decision taken.
- HWS will use the subject's name, date of birth and unique reference number of the Disclosure to check the status of their DBS certificate on an annual basis, with the volunteer's consent.

8. Training

HWS staff, directors and volunteers will receive briefings and training to ensure that everyone is aware of the principles and ways of working so that Healthwatch Sutton meet the required standard.

9. Requests by a client, staff member or volunteer to see their personal information

Please refer to Healthwatch Sutton's [Data Protection Policy](#).

10. Requests for information by external organisations

In general, information about an individual is not given to a third party. Staff should **never** give out phone numbers or email or postal addresses of individuals. If there is a request for information it is important to find out why the information is required. In such a situation, details need to be taken and passed on to the individual concerned.

All staff need to be aware of the potential misuse of potential data, especially people who are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Information will be passed on with the consent of an individual when required by a potential employer.

11. When confidentiality cannot be guaranteed

The appropriate safeguarding body will be informed if it is believed that a child or a vulnerable person may be at risk. Refer to Healthwatch Sutton's [safeguarding policies](#) for details of procedures and principles.

We will co-operate with other agencies in the event of an investigation into suspected abuse.

The police will be informed if there is a crime or a serious incident such as actual or threatened violence or substance abuse.

Emergency services will be informed in the event of a serious injury or illness. Information should only be given in the best interest of the parties involved.

Before any breach of confidentiality, staff should always try to discuss the issue with the individual.

12. Breaches of confidentiality

Breaches often occur as a result of thoughtlessness and lack of awareness of the potential consequences of inappropriate disclosure. The effects, whether intentional or accidental, are the same.

All breaches will be taken seriously and are potentially a disciplinary issue.

Approved by Healthwatch Sutton Board of Directors: 09/03/2020

To be reviewed: 09/03/2023

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Sutton

**Confidentiality & Data Protection Agreement for Healthwatch Sutton
Directors and Volunteers**

This agreement is to be signed by anyone working as a director or volunteer with Healthwatch Sutton.

In working with Healthwatch Sutton you will often deal with information which is of a confidential or sensitive nature. This may be of a personal nature or to do with the work of a group or an organisation. It is important that everyone we work with feels confident that they can speak freely in their dealings with us and it is therefore essential that you understand the importance of confidentiality. It is essential that you do not pass on any information that you receive from or about our services to anyone outside of Healthwatch Sutton.

Healthwatch Sutton will provide guidance on the types of information which must be kept confidential and which information should or should not be disclosed. We will also discuss the use of a home computer and what you can and cannot save on a personal device (e.g. personal details of someone you have spoken to during an Enter and View visit).

If you are in any doubt about whether to share information and with whom to share it, you should always check with the Communications, Engagement and Projects Officer or the Chief Executive of Healthwatch Sutton.

I have read and understood the Confidentiality Policy. I agree to hold confidential, anything I hear or see relating to individuals, to the service or to a fellow volunteer and to restrict discussion about members of the public to within the work area. I agree that all such discussions should be purposeful and never frivolous. Furthermore, I understand that any breach of this agreement will lead to a disciplinary procedure, as outlined in the Volunteer Policy and may result in being asked to leave Healthwatch Sutton.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____