

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Confidentiality Policy

Introduction

The collection of data and contact with sensitive personal information is central to the function of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This will include information about services, covering both invited and informal 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 circumstance (set out below) disclose information to third parties.

The processing of information is governed by the Data Protection Act 2018 (UK 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 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Data Protection Policy. Our Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Safeguarding Children policies should also be taken into account in considering how we maintain confidentiality.

As set out in our Data Protection Policy, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough 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.

Aim

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

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.

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.

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

Please refer to the Data Protection Policy.

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 personal 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.

Training

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board Members, volunteers and staff will receive briefings and training appropriate to their level of responsibility to ensure that everyone is aware of the principles and ways of working so that Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough meet the required standard.

Attending meetings where confidential information is discussed

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board Members, volunteers and staff may attend meetings where confidential information is discussed. Anyone working for Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity, will respect the bounds of confidentiality of that meeting, whether this be regarding individuals, commissioning or services.

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. Staff will refer to Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough safeguarding policies for detail 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. Except in instances where safeguarding policy indicates that an alleged perpetrator should not be alerted to the disclosure.

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. Refer to the data protection policy for actions required in the event of a data breach.

Approved by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Board of Directors

Date: December 2022

For review

Date: December 2024

Responsible Officer

Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough