

Decision making: policy and procedures for all staff, board and volunteers

Policy statement

Healthwatch Northumberland makes its decisions in an open and transparent way and ensures the interests of the people of Northumberland are always put first. This policy and associated procedures outline the steps taken to ensure decisions are evidence based and lead to substantive impact in the community.

The governing regulations and standards are:

- The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 – referred to as Regulation 40 throughout this document
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

This policy applies to all relevant decisions made by Healthwatch Northumberland.

Relevant decisions

Regulation 40 requires Healthwatch Northumberland to have in place and publish procedures for making relevant decisions. Relevant decisions include:

- How to undertake our activities
- Which health and care services we are looking at covering with our activities
- The amounts we will spend on our activities
- Whether to request information
- Whether to make a report or a recommendation
- Which premises to Enter and View and when those premises are to be visited
- Whether to refer a matter to Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Whether to report a matter concerning our activities to another person
- Any decisions about sub-contracting

Relevant decisions do not include day-to-day activity that may be required to carry out exploratory work prior to making a relevant decision.

Who may make such decisions?

The Healthwatch Northumberland Board, will be responsible for making relevant decisions. The board will have the power to delegate some of the relevant decision making to the Project Coordinator (Lead Officer) of Healthwatch Northumberland, for example, small pieces of work which do not have a substantive impact on staff or financial resources.

All relevant decisions, including those delegated to the Lead Officer, will be recorded in the minutes of the board meeting at which the decision was made. The minutes of all Board meetings are published on Healthwatch Northumberland's website once they have been agreed by the Board as being a correct record of the meeting concerned.

Once a decision has been made, the staff team is responsible for implementation and delivery, with an agreed reporting process to Board.

The Board of Healthwatch Northumberland will reconsider a decision where new data has become available, or if circumstances change, which might prompt it to reach a different decision, or where there is evidence that this decision making process was not followed.

Healthwatch Northumberland is delivered by Adapt North East , which ultimately holds accountability for the delivery of the contract. Under the joint Healthwatch/ Adapt North East Operating Agreement, delegated authority for decision making is given to the Healthwatch Northumberland Board, whose membership comprises of volunteers who live in or have a vested interest in Northumberland and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations operating in the county around health, social care and community development.

Involving lay persons or volunteers in such decisions

Healthwatch Northumberland's Board is composed partly of lay persons (a person who is not a health or social care professional) and volunteers (a person who is not a paid employee of Healthwatch). Healthwatch Northumberland intends to secure broad based views on its activities wherever possible, and involves others, particularly lay people and volunteers in its decision making.

How are decisions made?

The potential scope of the work of Healthwatch Northumberland is vast – it has a responsibility for health and social care services for all adults, children and young people in Northumberland, including those who are most vulnerable or may be excluded. This means we must prioritise the issues we focus on. The main sources to inform our work programme are likely to come from:

- People's experiences of health and social care services that they share with us.
- Evidence we proactively collect about specific areas of concern through the stories and enquiries we hear directly, including deliberative research, public surveys and polls.
- National and local data sets that evidence issues affecting large numbers of the local population and the most excluded.

This list is not exhaustive and other relevant sources of data will be considered.

In order to prioritise, Healthwatch Northumberland's Board carefully consider a range of sources of information and decide where it can add most value. Areas to be considered include but are not limited to:

- That the issues fit with our organisational role and responsibilities, ensuring Healthwatch Northumberland delivers to its statutory remit.
- How much the issue matters to local people, it must be something they care about as we are here to be the voice of people in health and social care.
- Enables marginalised communities to voice their experiences and concerns and actively participate in shaping changes that address health inequalities.
- How much change Healthwatch Northumberland can bring about. This enables us to make sure we are choosing areas where we can have the greatest impact. This is important to deliver the greatest return for our budget, maintain our independence and ensure we bring issues to the attention of the health and care system.
- Does the change need to come from Healthwatch Northumberland – so we aren't focusing on things that others can do more easily and effectively?

Finally, the Board of Healthwatch Northumberland will consider our work as a full set of priorities, as together they need to have the greatest impact for people using health and social care services.

Board meetings are open to the public, and minutes recording decisions will be available via Healthwatch Northumberland's website.

Dealing with breaches of any procedure referred to in this policy document, including circumstances in which a breach would be referred to the local authority.

If a decision is taken in the name of Healthwatch Northumberland without authorisation in the manner set out in this policy document, the board will determine what action is needed. This may be to either approve the decision retrospectively, or to reverse the decision.

If the breach of the agreed procedure is considered to have also breached the contract between Healthwatch Northumberland and Northumberland County Council (the local authority), it will be reported to the Local Authority and further action agreed between the Local Authority and Healthwatch Northumberland.

In each eventuality, actions will be minuted and published on Healthwatch Northumberland's website.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion statement

Healthwatch Northumberland is committed to ensuring all decisions made are free from any form of discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Healthwatch Northumberland will monitor this policy in order to identify whether it is having an adverse impact on any group of individuals and act accordingly.

Review of policy document

The Board of Healthwatch Northumberland will review the effectiveness of the decision making policy and procedures set out in this document every two years. Any amendments to this policy and the procedures governing the making of relevant decisions will require a simple majority of Board members voting in favour.

The amended policy document will be published on the website of Healthwatch Northumberland as soon as is practicable.

Procedures

Healthwatch Northumberland undertakes to carry out the following procedures:

- Publish Healthwatch Northumberland's most up to date policy document on Healthwatch Northumberland's website
- Review and obtain board approval to Healthwatch Northumberland's decision making policy every three years
- Ensure all Healthwatch Northumberland staff are familiar with the policy and refresh their understanding and awareness of the need for open and transparent decision making by reading the policy on a regular basis, at a minimum after review by the board
- Publish minutes from board meetings where decisions are made in a timely manner on Healthwatch Northumberland's website. Where decisions are made outside of board meetings, they will be ratified at the subsequent board meeting.

Date approved May 2025

Review date May 2027