

Confidentiality Policy

Introduction

The trustees, board, staff, volunteers and others who work at Healthwatch Reading must respect the need for confidentiality of information held about anyone who comes into contact with the organisation, and about any organisation business. This is expected to continue even when contact has ceased with this person, and when the trustee, board member, volunteer or staff member no longer works for Healthwatch Reading.

The data covered by the confidentiality policy includes:

- Information about the organisation, for example, its plans or finances
- Information about other organisations
- Information about individuals

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Healthwatch Reading Data Protection Policy.

Information about individuals

Healthwatch Reading is committed to ensuring confidential services to all individuals. The confidentiality is between the individual and the organisation, not the members of staff delivering a particular service.

Confidential information will not be sought unless necessary for the delivery of the service or expressly in the interests of that person, i.e. to enable a better service delivery.

Information will only be passed to another agency or to other individuals outside of the organisation with the consent of the person, where possible this will be with written consent. If a member of staff or volunteer intends to get information from another agency to help the person or to refer them to another agency then this must be explained to the person and their permission given.

No personal information about staff, volunteers or people will be given to any third party including a member of their family, without the consent of the person. Information will only be divulged on a "need to know" basis. Information will be treated in confidence and will not be divulged to anyone outside the organisation except where extenuating circumstances exist (see below). However, in order that we can provide the best possible help to people it may be necessary to share information with a manager or colleagues within Healthwatch Reading.

All customers and persons are entitled to privacy and will be made aware that they can specifically request to be seen in private. In no circumstances should details of a person be discussed by anyone outside of the organisation or in an open plan area in such a manner that it is possible to identify the person. Staff and volunteers should take due care and attention when speaking to people and using the telephone or. No person should be able to hear a conversation or personal details of another service user.

Use of person information for publicity, reporting or training purposes

Healthwatch Reading does need to be able to give information where appropriate about the impact of our services. If one of our services has an outcome which would provide useful material for publicity, reporting or training purposes, then wherever possible the permission of the person will be sought in writing before the story is told to anyone else. If permission cannot be obtained then any details that would enable identification of the person to be made will be changed.

Limits to person confidentiality

In certain circumstances Healthwatch Reading reserves the right to break confidentiality should this be deemed necessary. These circumstances include:

- If a member of staff believes that a person could cause danger to themselves or to others
- If a member of staff suspects abuse or has knowledge of abuse
- If the person gives information which indicates that a crime has been committed
- If disclosure is required by law, for example, by the police
- If a person is felt to lack the mental capacity to make a decision. In such cases staff or volunteers will discuss with a manager and they will only act in the person's best interest
- If the person gives information which indicates a possible terrorist threat

The decision on whether to break confidentiality will be decided on a case by case basis and always in conjunction with a manager.

Access to data

This Policy operates on a "need to know" basis and apart from staff and volunteers in the office of Healthwatch Reading; no-one will have access to person or organisational information unless it is relevant to the service or their work.

All persons and customers have the right to request access to all information stored about them, and have a right to see a copy of this confidentiality policy on request. If any party concerned has a sensory or physical impairment, efforts will be made to ensure that all aspects of this policy and exchanges between parties are understood. Significant breaches of this policy will be handled under the Healthwatch Reading disciplinary procedures.

Evaluation and Monitoring

All trustees, board members, staff and volunteers will be given a copy of the policy when they join Healthwatch Reading and will sign the confidentiality statement that they will abide by this policy. Healthwatch Reading will ensure that sufficient training is provided in the application of this policy.

Policy Breach

A breach of the confidentiality policy is considered gross misconduct and will be dealt with appropriately. Please refer to disciplinary and grievance policy.

Confidentiality Statement

When working for Healthwatch Reading, you will often need to have access to confidential information which may include, for example:

- Personal information about individuals who are persons or otherwise involved in the activities organised by Healthwatch Reading
- Information about the internal business of Healthwatch Reading
- Information not yet in the public domain that Healthwatch Reading has been given access to and requested to keep confidential
- Personal information about staff or volunteers or members working for Healthwatch Reading.

Healthwatch Reading is committed to keeping this information confidential, in order to protect people and Healthwatch Reading itself. 'Confidential' means that all access to information must be on a "need to know" basis and properly authorised basis. You must use only the information you have been authorised to use, and for purposes that have been authorised. You should also be aware that under the Data Protection Act, unauthorised access to data about individuals is a criminal offence.

You must assume that information is confidential unless you know that it is intended by Healthwatch Reading to be made public. Passing information between Healthwatch Reading and a mailing house, or *vice versa* does not count as making it public, but passing information to another organisation does count.

You must also be particularly careful not to disclose confidential information to unauthorized people or cause a breach of security. In particular you must:

- not compromise or seek to evade security measures (including computer passwords)
- be particularly careful when sending information to other agencies and organisations
- not gossip about confidential information, either with colleagues or people outside Healthwatch Reading
- Not disclose information – especially over the telephone – unless you are sure that you know who you are disclosing it to, and that they are authorised to have it

If you are in doubt about whether to disclose information or not, do not guess. Withhold the information while you check with an appropriate person (usually a line manager) whether the disclosure is appropriate.

Your confidentiality obligations continue to apply indefinitely after you have stopped working or volunteering for Healthwatch Reading.

I have read and understand the above statement and the Confidentiality Policy. I accept my responsibilities regarding confidentiality.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Please Note: This document is under constant review and therefore subject to change