

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

1. General Policy Statement

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all who live in, receive care in, or who care for someone who lives or receives care in, Central Bedfordshire.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recognises that Central Bedfordshire is socially and culturally diverse and believes its work is enriched by the varying qualities and experience brought by people from Central Bedfordshire's communities to their work as directors, employees or volunteers. This diversity is recognised, respected and valued.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire seeks to ensure that its work programme, services and advocacy reflects the perspectives of, and that its personnel composition is representative of, Central Bedfordshire's communities. Where under representation is identified every effort will be made to attract, encourage and support participation and application by that sector of the community.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is aware of individual, institutional and cultural discrimination, which can be direct and indirect, through lack of awareness, stereotyping, prejudice, victimisation, harassment, marginalisation, exclusion or oppression, and of the impact this has on discriminated groups or individuals.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, and all services managed by it, is fully committed to social justice, equality of opportunity and the elimination of all forms of discrimination as a fundamental principle of its work. It seeks to prevent discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services, in its employment practices, and in its dealings with others. It is committed to ensuring that no individual or group of people is less favourably treated or denied opportunities because of their:

- age
- disability
- colour, 'race' and ethnic or cultural origin
- nationality (or statelessness)
- religion, faith or belief *
- gender or gender reassignment
- sexuality
- marital status and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- social or economic background
- locality (within Central Bedfordshire)
- health condition or recovery from mental illness
- employment status
- caring responsibilities
- HIV status
- unrelated criminal conviction
- association with others who experience the above

* Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will discriminate on the grounds of a person's belief where this is contrary to the values of the organisation, as expressed in this policy.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will work to achieve policies and practices that ensure both existing and potential employees, directors and volunteers are positively encouraged and that all individuals have their needs considered and, wherever practically appropriate, support needs provided. It will also work to achieve equality of opportunity for the people and organisations it exists to serve.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire demonstrates its commitment to this policy by adopting a code of practice, which gives guidance on employment practices, service provision and the general work of the organisation.

2. Purpose and Scope

This policy applies to staff, volunteers and directors employed by or working for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. Aspects of this policy also apply to consultants, researchers, trainers and service providers engaged by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, to members and to clients. The purpose of this policy is to enable staff, volunteers, directors and others to act positively in relation to equality and diversity and to eliminate and prevent all forms of discrimination.

CODE OF PRACTICE

3. Employment

- 3.1 Within the framework of employment law and this policy Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire works to ensure equality in all areas of employment including recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion, conditions and benefits of service, employment procedures, health and safety, and cessation of employment. In particular it aims to ensure there is no unfair discrimination in employment practices.
- 3.2 The role of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is to provide effective services to health and social care consumers in Central Bedfordshire and therefore recruits and develops staff on the basis of their suitability for this role. All employees and applicants for employment will therefore be treated according to their relevant merits and abilities in delivering these services.
- 3.3 The conditions of service offered to part-time employees will be comparable to those offered to full-time employees.
- 3.4 As far as is practicable within the constraints of providing a service to our members/clients, flexible working arrangements (e.g. part-time work, job share, hours of work, time off work) will be considered across all types of jobs to meet individual requirements.
- 3.5 Employees will have their right to maternity leave, paternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave and to time off for dependants set out in their terms and conditions of employment and the relevant employment policies.
- 3.6 Conditions of service and employment policies and procedures will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are non-discriminatory and that there is consistency of approach.

4. Recruitment and Selection

- 4.1 Job descriptions and person specifications will be produced, provided to potential applicants and used throughout the recruitment and selection process as objective criteria for measuring applicants' relevant aptitudes, potential, skills, knowledge and experience.
- 4.2 Job Descriptions will include the statement: *Supporting the development of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire as an organisation that is fully committed to equality and diversity and to addressing health inequalities.*
- 4.3 Person Specifications will include the requirement for applicants to have an *Understanding of, and commitment to, equality and diversity.*
- 4.4 Advertisements will contain a statement that *Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is committed to equality and diversity and welcomes applications from all sectors of society.* They will also be worded in such a way that no in-built prejudice is contained in the wording.

- 4.5 Except where there is a need to re-deploy existing staff or there is a Genuine Occupational Qualification, all jobs are open to those with the relevant skills, knowledge and experience.
- 4.6 Job advertisements will be displayed internally and employees encouraged to apply, where appropriate. Short listing and interview will depend solely on their suitability for the post.
- 4.7 Non-temporary vacancies will initially be advertised in appropriate national, local and ethnic minority press, dependent upon the nature of the post and the available resources. Where practical, vacancies will also be advertised in our newsletter and on our website.
- 4.8 Application forms should not provide the potential to discriminate at the point of application, by revealing details of age, disability, nationality or ethnic origin, gender, marital status, dependants, religion or sexuality.
- 4.9 Recruitment monitoring forms will be used for all vacancies to collect data on the ethnic origin, age, gender and disability status of applicants. Such data will be kept separately and used for monitoring purposes only.
- 4.10 Due regard will be paid to the gender bias of any panel and the effect that it may have on short listing and interview proceedings.
- 4.11 Staff, directors and others involved in recruitment and selection will be encouraged to undertake training on, and will receive written guidelines covering, equality and diversity issues in interview preparation, questioning techniques, systematic assessment and decision-making.
- 4.12 Short listing and interview assessment forms based on the Person Specification should be completed by all panel members for all candidates and retained on file. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire should be able to justify any decision made through written documentation.
- 4.13 Selection criteria and procedures are regularly reviewed to eliminate references to non-essential experience and qualifications that might discriminate against some candidates.

5. Training and Development

- 5.1 All directors, staff and volunteers will be given equal opportunity and access to training and development to enable them to progress both within and outside the organisation. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will also facilitate training and development opportunities for/with members and clients.
- 5.2 Equality and diversity will be an integral part of the training and development of all directors, staff and volunteers.
- 5.3 To assist staff in their own professional development provision will, where possible, be made for staff to receive non-managerial support or supervision from peers of their own gender and/or culture.
- 5.4 Part-time staff participating in training and professional development opportunities that fall outside their contracted hours will be eligible to include these within their working time.
- 5.5 Training and development policies and practices will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are non-discriminatory.

6. Volunteering

- 6.1 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire believes that voluntary activity, active community involvement and self help is an option that should be open to everyone irrespective of their background, and that they have the right to volunteer without experiencing discrimination.
- 6.2 Role descriptions and person specifications will be produced, provided to potential volunteers and used as the basis for the recruitment and selection of volunteers working within Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. The acceptance of individuals will be solely on the person's ability to fulfil the criteria of the role.
- 6.3 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is committed to promoting volunteering to people who are not traditionally seen as being volunteers. It will also promote volunteering to people who face difficulties getting involved or who are from underrepresented groups.
- 6.4 Volunteers will be offered volunteering opportunities based on an objective assessment of their skills, knowledge, experience, interests and self development needs. They will not be offered opportunities based on stereotypical roles.
- 6.5 Careful attention will be paid to finding volunteering opportunities that match the special needs of volunteers with disabilities. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will adopt imaginative ways of involving volunteers with disabilities, with due consideration being given to volunteer assignments and their working environment.
- 6.6 Volunteering policies and practices will be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are non-discriminatory.

7. Client and Member Services

- 7.1 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will work towards equality of opportunity and access in matters related to health and social care and other issues associated with people's quality of life and wellbeing, whether in urban or rural localities.
- 7.2 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that its activities and services are culturally sensitive, appropriate to the diverse needs of clients and flexible enough to meet the requirements of different people.
- 7.3 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will seek to raise awareness on cultural diversity, equality and anti-discrimination policy and practice by undertaking and publishing research; the provision of information, advice and guidance; designing, promoting and delivering networking opportunities and seminars; and by working in partnership with other agencies.
- 7.4 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire encourages applications for membership from individuals and organisations irrespective of their background and may target those that are under-represented in its membership.
- 7.5 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will develop and promote services that do not reinforce gender, sexual, disability or racial stereotyping. It will avoid language and illustrations of such stereotypes in its promotional material, publications and communications. Where possible, gender non-specific language will be used, along with positive images of people from minority ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities, young people and older people as appropriate.
- 7.6 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will develop and promote services that recognise the particular needs of rural localities and address inequalities arising from isolation, access to resources, higher service delivery costs, false assumptions about the needs of people living in

rural areas and traditional expectations.

- 7.7 Material received for publication will be considered on its merits and monitored to ensure that it is non-discriminatory.
- 7.8 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that its advocacy and work programme activities reflects the perspectives and experiences of different groups, especially those who are seldom heard, affected by health inequalities or vulnerable to discrimination.
- 7.9 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that its research, consultative and delivery methods are sensitive and relevant to the diverse needs of its members and clients.
- 7.10 Where a client requires additional communication support (e.g. where English is not their first language or they require information in a different format) Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will liaise with any provider or referring agency to ensure that those communication needs are addressed.
- 7.11 Resources will be allocated on the basis of need and may, where resources are limited, be prioritised or targeted at particular (types of) groups, services or work.
- 7.12 Wherever possible the provision of food, including vegetarian food, at meetings, conferences and training events will reflect the needs and diversity of local communities.
- 7.13 The timing of meetings, conferences and events will, where possible, take account of carers' responsibilities, volunteers' availability, religious festivals/observance and participants' travel needs.
- 7.14 No one should be deterred from taking a full part in any meeting, seminar or workshop commissioned, organised or delivered by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. *Ground Rules for Participants, Speakers and Trainers* will be provided prior to each event.
- 7.15 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will seek to ensure that the appointment of directors; and the election or appointment of representatives to committees, consultative bodies and other fora; is representative of its membership and the social diversity of Central Bedfordshire; and that the processes/procedures used are non-discriminatory.
- 7.16 Where discrimination, harassment and victimisation is identified in and/or by organisations delivering services on its behalf, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will offer appropriate support and training to directors, staff and volunteers so that these important issues can be addressed.
- 7.17 Client use will be monitored to ensure that services reach all sectors of the community, especially those who are seldom heard, affected by health inequalities or vulnerable to discrimination. Ethnic monitoring data will be collected in line with national census and/or other categories (e.g. required by Healthwatch England or funders).

8. Premises

- 8.1 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will endeavour, as far as possible, to ensure that its office premises are suitable for people with disabilities and for visitors and users with young children.
- 8.2 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will deal with, as a priority, the removal of any racist, sexist or other offensive graffiti found in or on premises owned or managed by it.
- 8.3 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will endeavour, as far as possible, to ensure that all premises used by the organisation for meetings, conferences and events will be accessible by wheelchair

users and have adequate facilities for people with disabilities. Where this is not possible in particular circumstances alternative arrangements should be made to ensure that all members/clients who wish to are able to access the premises being used.

- 8.4 Promotional material for meetings, conferences and events will clearly state whether (or not) the premises are accessible to people with disabilities. Application forms will seek information on participants' access requirements.

9. Behaviour and Professional Conduct

- 9.1 In all its work and all its published material, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and its directors, staff and volunteers will exercise care to act in a manner which displays respect for all people.

- 9.2 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire respects people's right to dress appropriately to their culture and will seek not to set conditions that are discriminatory in this regard.

- 9.3 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will provide a working environment that is free from harassment and inappropriate divisions of labour or responsibility. It is opposed to bullying and harassment in any form and, in particular, on grounds related to a person's ethnic or racial origin, gender, sexuality or disability. The experience of any such behaviour is regarded as valid grounds for grievance and/or disciplinary action.

- 9.4 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire expects its members and clients to act in a non-discriminatory way towards its directors, staff and volunteers. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will challenge discriminatory practices or expressed views, whether by clients, members, partner organisations or others. Consultants/trainers will also be expected to challenge any discrimination that occurs during meetings, conferences and events that they run on behalf of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire.

10. Implementation

- 10.1 Responsibility for the overall effectiveness of this policy rests with the Chief Executive Officer and the Directors of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. All directors, staff and volunteers working for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have a personal responsibility for adhering to the policy and the procedures put in place.

- 10.2 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will take account of this policy and code of practice when formulating other organisational policies and procedures.

- 10.3 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire aims to ensure that it remains aware of the problems caused by inequality in society, the way in which they affect others and the implications for its work.

- 10.4 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that that its activities, and those commissioned from provider organisations, are compliant with public sector equality duties, including Equality Impact Assessments on all policies, procedures and processes.

- 10.5 All consultants, trainers, researchers and authors engaged by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will be made aware of, and asked to ensure that their work reflects, this Policy.

- 10.6 All directors, staff and volunteers (working in Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire) will receive a copy of the Equality and Diversity Policy, and be expected to read it, as part of their induction.

- 10.7 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will include in its work programme specific actions designed to develop and implement effective equality and diversity practice.

11. Complaints

- 11.1 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that all alleged incidents of discrimination or harassment are taken seriously, handled sensitively, investigated and resolved through its Complaints, Grievance and/or Disciplinary Procedures, as appropriate.
- 11.2 The Complaints Procedure provides for complaints to be dealt with, in the first instance, by the member of staff directly involved and then, if not satisfactorily resolved, by the Chief Executive Officer and, in the final instance, by the Board of Directors. Any serious complaint must be brought to the attention of the Chief Executive Officer who will raise the matter with the Chair of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire.

12. Monitoring and Review

- 12.1 Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recognises that regular monitoring and evaluation is essential for thorough reviews of its Equality and Diversity Policy. Appropriate monitoring systems for staff recruitment, volunteering, consultation and research, and the take up of services will be put in place and the results used to review its policies and procedures annually. In the light of these findings its work programme will be amended so that equality and diversity practice can be further developed.
- 12.2 The purpose of monitoring in employment will be to review the application and employment patterns of men and women, of Black and Minority Ethnic and white applicants and staff, and of applicants and staff with disabilities.
- 12.3 The purpose of monitoring client and member services will be to ensure that services are reaching all sectors of the community, especially those who are seldom heard, affected by health inequalities and/or vulnerable to discrimination, and to ensure that they meet the needs of our members and clients.
- 12.4 Staff Performance and Development Reviews will include specific evaluation of work that demonstrates commitment to this Policy.
- 12.5 The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Chief Executive Officer. Significant changes will require the approval of the Board of Directors. The policy will also be reviewed every three years as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.