

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

(Including Social Media Policy)

A guide for Trustees and staff when using communications (including social media) to promote the work of Healthwatch Hertfordshire.

Social Media - Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications that enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, X, LinkedIn, You Tube and Instagram.

Why do we need a social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to Healthwatch Hertfordshire's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards outlined in this policy which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all staff, Trustees and representatives and applies to content posted on both a Healthwatch Hertfordshire account and a personal account (when comments relate to Healthwatch Hertfordshire).

It sets out how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of Healthwatch Hertfordshire and the use of social media by staff and Trustees in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff and Trustees support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

Point of contact for social media

Our Communications team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, speak to one of the team.

Which social media channels do we currently use?

Healthwatch Hertfordshire uses the following social media channels:

- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchHertfordshire>
- **X:** <https://x.com/HWHertfordshire>
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/4257258/>
- **Reddit:** for individual posts about specific projects

Use of personal social media accounts – appropriate conduct

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise.

1. Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive Healthwatch Hertfordshire. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Healthwatch Hertfordshire. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about Healthwatch Hertfordshire's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Healthwatch Hertfordshire's positions, policies or opinions."
2. Staff and Trustees who have a personal blog or website (which indicates in any way that they work at Healthwatch Hertfordshire) should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the Deputy Chief Executive. Similarly, staff and Trustees who want to start blogging and wish to say that they work for Healthwatch Hertfordshire should discuss any potential conflicts of interest.
3. Those in senior management and specialist roles where they are well known in their field of expertise must take particular care, as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Healthwatch Hertfordshire's view.
4. We encourage staff and Trustees to share tweets and posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity you might see opportunities to comment on, or support, Healthwatch Hertfordshire and the work we do. Where appropriate, and using our guidelines, we encourage staff and Trustees to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the Deputy Chief Executive, who will respond as appropriate.
5. If a staff member or Trustee is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to Healthwatch Hertfordshire, they should talk to the Deputy Chief Executive and under no circumstances respond directly. See our **Media Policy** (below.)
6. Healthwatch Hertfordshire is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties.
7. If a complaint is made on Healthwatch Hertfordshire's social media channels, staff should notify the Communications Team who will formulate an appropriate response in accordance with the organisational complaints policy.

8. Never use Healthwatch Hertfordshire's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be requested from the Communications Team.
9. Think about your reputation as well as our organisation. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully.
10. Staff and Trustees shouldn't post content about supporters or service users without their express permission. If staff and Trustees are sharing information about supporters, service users or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from Healthwatch Hertfordshire. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, staff and Trustees must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.
11. Staff and Trustees should not set up other Facebook groups or pages, X accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of Healthwatch Hertfordshire. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts, the Communications Team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.

Media – Introduction

This policy aims to ensure that all external communications involving Healthwatch Hertfordshire employees maintain, protect and enhance the reputation of our company, as well as the national Healthwatch brand. In addition, it ensures that all external contacts are recorded (and in most cases dealt with) by the Communications team.

It sets out a clear and consistent approach for dealing with the media, including who can speak on behalf of the organisation. It also provides rules and guidelines for fielding and responding to media enquiries and issuing press releases/statements.

In order to maintain a professional relationship with the media, due diligence must be taken to ensure that information provided is accurate and complete, reflects the official position of the organisation and is provided in a timely and professional manner.

Due to the nature of our work, it is possible that we could occasionally attract less positive attention from the media, which could have a damaging effect on our reputation so we need to minimise the chances of misrepresentation by the media.

This policy applies to all employees, Trustees and anyone volunteering or working on behalf of Healthwatch Hertfordshire.

Definition of media

For the purpose of this policy, when referring to 'the media', we mean reporters, journalists, researchers, editors and others working for the press in all forms: newspaper, magazines and other publications, radio, television, social media and internet sites.

General

All dealings with the media, including proactive press releases and replying to requests for information/interviews, will be undertaken by the Communications Officer when possible¹ or the Deputy Chief Executive.

We will aim to respond effectively and punctually to requests for information from the media, taking note of the required deadline for a response.

Process for dealing with media enquiries

There are many reasons why the media may try to contact our organisation and the issues involved may be positive, or negative. Any statement made to the media by a person working for, or representing, Healthwatch Hertfordshire will be interpreted as an official statement of the company. We must therefore ensure that correct policy is communicated and all media statements are consistent, with up to date and accurate information.

1. To ensure this, any contact with the media must be conducted through the Communications Officer or the Deputy Chief Executive. They will be responsible for drafting, and getting approval for, quotes or statements to be provided to the media.
2. If a journalist contacts a member of staff, Board member or volunteer directly, they should be directed to the Communications Officer in the first instance, or the Deputy Chief Executive.
3. The only exceptions to this guidance are the Chief Executive and Chair who are not required to advise the Communications Officer prior to making a comment, however they should feed back the details of the media interview and an outline of the response given to the Communications Officer. Nobody else should independently make comment on behalf of Healthwatch Hertfordshire.
4. Requests for quotes or interviews from the media should always be directed to the Communications Officer first who will:
 - Consult with Chief Executive or Deputy Chief Executive about the request and determine who and how we respond
 - Advise the media/reporter accordingly
 - Support the process and prepare a written quote/statement OR prepare for the interview, providing briefing notes when required
 - If a written quote or comment is requested, this will be finalised by the Communications Officer and then signed off by the Chief Executive before sharing with the journalist.

Process for dealing with interviews

We must ensure that staff who communicate with the media are those best equipped to do so.

¹ As the Communications Officer role is part-time, media enquiries outside working hours should be directed to the Deputy Chief Executive.

1. The only official spokespeople for Healthwatch Hertfordshire who may conduct media interviews are the Chief Executive and the Chair.
2. In the event that the Communications Officer is unavailable, the spokesperson should keep a record of their responses to the media and share these with the Communications Officer or the Deputy Chief Executive, along with details of when the media report was published/aired.
3. In some cases, staff may address conferences or seminars where media may be present. If so, keep in mind comments made at the conference may be assumed to be representative of company views and advise the Communications Officer if you believe media may reference Healthwatch Herts.

Process for dealing with press releases

It is important to be proactive in seeking opportunities to promote the activities and reputation of Healthwatch Hertfordshire.

1. Where possible these opportunities will be identified in advance by the Communications Officer and discussed at the Communications Team meeting or with the Chief Executive.
2. Draft press releases will be sent to the Chief Executive for approval/sign off to ensure consistency and accuracy and to agree any quotes. The Chair will also be able to approve any press release in which they are quoted.
3. Where possible an advance copy press release will be shared with any stakeholders who are mentioned in the release.

Duty to protect

We have a responsibility to our users, partners, employees, and volunteers to ensure that certain information remains confidential.

1. Unless information is already known to be in the public domain, or we have the express permission of the person involved, no personal information or information that may cause an individual to be identified should be released. We will ensure that we have written consent to share any identifying personal information or images in a press release, online or through any media outlets.

Managing crisis communications

Healthwatch Hertfordshire has a history of enjoying positive media publicity. However, given the nature of the organisation's services and projects, it is important to recognise that this might not always be the case. Therefore, it is necessary to be aware of the need to manage any publicity – negative or otherwise – that may result from a 'crisis' situation which Healthwatch Hertfordshire has been viewed to cause or be involved in. Such a strategy will ensure any damage inflicted on the organisation – its reputation, services and projects – by negative publicity is limited. It will also assist in enabling the organisation to disassociate itself from the crisis, should this be an appropriate course of action.

1. A media spokesperson – which will be the Chief Executive where possible – must be nominated when a crisis has arisen. This role must be agreed by the Chief Executive and Chair. It's important to act quickly, as a speedy response and a good statement will help limit the damage and sometimes kill off an inaccurate story altogether.
2. Healthwatch Hertfordshire is part of a network of local Healthwatch and any activity that could negatively impact the Healthwatch brand could affect all Healthwatch. We will keep the Healthwatch England Communications Team fully informed of any crisis and, if necessary, seek further advice on how to manage issues from them.

Related Policies

Confidentiality Policy

Values and Behaviours Policy

Managing information and Privacy Policy

Customer Care Policy

Complaints Policy

EDI Policy

Safeguarding Policy

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years by the Policy Lead, Deputy Chief Executive and approved by the Board.

Policy reviewed and signed off by Board on 28th November 2024.