

Governance Document

1. Introduction

Healthwatch Bedford Borough (HBB) is the independent patient champion for health and social care. HBB is delivered by Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS) whose mission statement is “Inspiring change, improving outcomes”. ECS registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and as part of its company registration has had to satisfy the CIC Regulator by way of confirming:

- an asset lock - which in essence means the CIC is “owned” by the local community.
- a Community Interest Test which means it has to dedicate its services to the benefit of the local community.

ECS is registered on Companies House, full details of which can be found here:

<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/08026718>

ECS has been commissioned by Bedford Borough Council to deliver the contract for Healthwatch Bedford Borough from 9 January 2023 for a period of five years.

2. Vision

Healthwatch Bedford Borough will:

- be a critical friend in challenging service providers to ensure that their services are person-centred and responsive to local community needs.
- seek to empower all patients with confidence to make an informed choice about their health and social care needs.
- be a trusted source of information for local information and signposting needs.
- gather timely and insightful feedback from the public to help inform the design and delivery of local health and social care services, ensuring services are designed for the local people and meet their needs.

3. Mission Statement

“Healthwatch Bedford Borough will consult, engage and empower the wider community in a fair, transparent and realistic way”. It will:

- be the patient champion for health and social care services.



- provide positive influence and encourage improvements in local health and social care services, acting as a critical friend to service providers and establishing valid outcomes against which changes can be measured.
- act as the voice of the public, providing a bridge between the commissioners and providers of Statutory Health and Social Care.

4. The ECS Board

The ECS Board comprises of four non-executive Directors. The ECS board:

- Sets and refreshes the vision and strategy for ECS.
- Maintains overall responsibility for the company, its finances, staff, volunteers, business plan and future organisational development.
- Has public accountability for delivery of ECS contracts (including the Healthwatch Bedford Borough contract), ensuring it meets its obligations as set out in contract service specifications and Key Performance Indicators.
- Is responsible for the performance management of the company.
- Champions the voice of the public in the delivery of public services.
- Acts as the spokesperson for the company and is responsible for approving the communications and marketing strategies and stakeholder engagement plans.
- Ensures ECS maintains a public benefit fund, delivering funds to local community initiatives to support community cohesion and local charitable initiatives.
- Is responsible for ensuring that ECS remains an exemplar of best practice, promoting the ECS model at regional and national levels.

5. The Healthwatch Bedford Borough Advisory Board

The ECS Board has devolved authority to a local advisory board that governs the local delivery aspect of Healthwatch Bedford Borough. The Healthwatch Bedford Borough Advisory Board is made up of nine volunteers and a Chair. Membership of the Advisory Board comprises of local residents of Bedford Borough or local residents who use health and social care services in Bedford Borough or work within the Borough.

The Advisory Board meets quarterly and in public, and attendance from members of the public is welcomed. The Advisory Board has the following role and remit:

- Ensure the design/delivery of the outcomes defined in the Annual Work Programme and sign off of the production of the Annual Report.
- Ensure the delivery of outcomes as required by the Service Specification for Healthwatch Bedford Borough. Reporting back on this to Bedford Borough Council.
- Ensure continuing and effective representation on the Health and Wellbeing Board is sustained.

- Ensuring that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) fully reflects the needs of the local community.
- Liaison/development of relationships, joint working initiatives, and development opportunities with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England.
- Governance and communications, including ensuring the need for transparency, championing diversity, and ensuring that Healthwatch Bedford Borough is visible throughout the Borough and has a strong local identity.
- Reviews opportunities for income generation and ensures no conflict of interest exists before approving work.
- Arrangement for the Annual Public Meeting to launch the Annual Report.

6. Relationships with other local Healthwatch organisations

To avoid duplication of work programmes in some areas, Healthwatch Bedford Borough will liaise with adjoining Healthwatch organisations in the case of cross border issues. If appropriate a joint working group may be set up to carry out an investigation and then be disbanded when the work is completed.

7. Code of Conduct

All members of the ECS Board, Bedford Advisory Board, staff, and volunteers will be expected to abide by the ECS Code of Conduct, as shown in Appendix 1.

8. Registering an Interest

All members of ECS, staff, volunteers and the HWBB Advisory Board will be expected to sign the Annual Register of Interests and must take personal responsibility to update it should there be any changes within the twelve-month period.

9. Complaints

In the case of a complaint being made against the HWBB Advisory Board, or ECS, the complaints policy is shown in Appendix 2.

10. Review

This document will be reviewed at the beginning of each financial year or as necessary when there are changes affecting the work of local Healthwatch.

Appendix 1- Code of Conduct

Policy Statement

This code of conduct sets out the expectations ECS has of all those who work or carry out activities for it, in a voluntary or paid capacity, including Board members, Advisory Board members, employees, students and volunteers. For ease of reference, these parties will be called representatives throughout the rest of the document.

The title of Volunteer Coordinator used in this document refers to the named contact in each local Healthwatch delivered by ECS, who supports our local teams of volunteers.

Everyone who represents ECS is expected to behave professionally and in support of our values outlined below.

Principles and Values

ECS delivers a range of services, including Local Healthwatch Services, Advocacy and Social Research. In the course of delivering our services, we are required to reflect the broad range of views and backgrounds of the population and as such, all representatives need to abide by the principles of:

Valuing any contribution an individual can make to local Healthwatch.

- Respecting other people's opinions and beliefs
- Treating other people with dignity

And the seven principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles)

Selflessness: Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Compliance with law

All those who represent ECS are required to abide by relevant laws and regulations, including those relating to the environment, health and safety, discrimination, disability, and employment. Representatives will be ethical and responsible whenever dealing with company finances, the services we deliver, partnership and collaborative working and public image. Representatives will inform the ECS Managing Director or local Service Manager immediately of any possible or actual infringement.

Conflict of interest

Representatives will complete a declaration of interest form when they join ECS, and ensure it is kept up to date. Representatives are expected to maintain professional boundaries in their relationships with each other, and external parties such as commissioners and providers. Full details can be found in our Conflict-of-Interest policy.

Serving the public

Representatives will always perform their duties to the highest standard and treat members of the public with dignity and respect, taking account of their individual needs. Representatives will actively promote equality, diversity and social inclusion and encourage all the community to participate in engagement activities. Representatives will be honest and impartial when conducting any ECS activity, regardless of personal views and will discuss any conflict with the appropriate line manager or Volunteer Coordinator. ECS is a politically neutral and independent organisation.

Use of public funds

Representatives of ECS have a duty to ensure the safeguarding of public money and proper care of assets which have been publicly funded. Representatives will carry out these obligations responsibly and take appropriate measures to ensure that ECS uses resources efficiently, economically, and effectively, avoiding waste and extravagance.

Respect in the workplace

Our aim is to create a positive environment within which individuals and organisations with an interest in our work can contribute freely, equally, and openly. Use of technology for virtual meetings and events will also be regarded as 'the workplace' therefore the same standards of behaviour, as set out in this code of conduct are required to be adhered to during all virtual meetings. We will not allow any kind of discriminatory behaviour, harassment, or victimisation.

Representing ECS

Staff and volunteers including board members are accountable to the public for their actions and the way they carry out their responsibilities. They should always behave in a manner which does not bring ECS/ local Healthwatch/ Advocacy or Research Services into disrepute or damage our relationship with the public, service providers or other stakeholders. Representatives must be respectful and offer constructive criticism which does not seek to undermine an individual.

ECS Healthwatch Advisory Board (HAB) members are expected to understand and respect the principle of collective decision making and abide by the Healthwatch **Decision Making policy**. When a decision is made, all HAB members are bound by that decision and should publicly support it.

Where representatives of ECS/ local Healthwatch attend meetings whether in person or virtual means, they will provide feedback in a timely and structured manner. When speaking on behalf of ECS/ local Healthwatch, representatives will reflect the priorities and policies of ECS/ Healthwatch, even if they differ from personal views. If they are there in a personal capacity or a capacity connected with another role they undertake, they should always be explicit if they are expressing their own personal views. When participating in meetings or other activities, in person or online, representatives agree to:

- Attend on time and be prepared.
- Send apologies if unable to attend.
- Listen to, respect and value the opinions of others.
- Speak one at a time through the Chair or meeting facilitator.
- Be clear and keep to the point, using plain English and avoiding the use of jargon and acronyms.
- Ask for more information or explanation if necessary.
- Declare an interest where one exists or may be perceived to exist.
- Work positively with Healthwatch representatives.
- Provide feedback to those they represent.
- Respect the authority of the role of the Chair or meeting facilitator and accept a majority vote, where needed, as decisive.

Approaches to representatives by third parties for information or views, including contact with the media must be referred to the local Healthwatch Manager or Chair, or ECS Managing Director in their absence. In respect of media communications, the local Healthwatch Manager and HAB Chair will be the official spokesperson of a local Healthwatch, and no other staff or volunteer should commit to media interviews without first consulting and gaining the approval of the Chair/ Manager.

All staff and volunteers must be politically impartial in their public role. ECS will sometimes initiate or participate in campaigning about an issue. Care must be taken to ensure that, in doing so, the principle of political neutrality is always maintained and that nothing is done that could be interpreted as partisan in nature or suggests support for a specific party-political view.

Duty of confidentiality

We will sometimes receive information which is not in the public domain, often relating to individuals, organisations, or financial matters. Representatives of ECS will respect confidentiality and not divulge third party information without the agreement of the third party, or a legal requirement to do so, and operate according to our **Confidentiality policy**. Every staff member, when they join ECS is required to sign a confidentiality agreement and each volunteer is required to sign a Volunteer Agreement which outlines their duty of confidentiality.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion

We are committed to understanding, accepting, and appreciating individual difference. In practice, this means treating others with dignity and respect, recognising the value of each individual and their experience. We will not tolerate discrimination against others based on, but not limited to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation, in accordance with our **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy**.

Gifts and hospitality

It is not normally acceptable for representatives of ECS to accept a gift, reward, or favour from others for work done in an official capacity. Gifts in the form of promotional aids, whether related to a particular product or general utility, may be distributed to representatives of ECS provided that the gift is inexpensive and relevant to the practice of their profession or employment. In these circumstances an 'inexpensive' gift means one which has cost no more than £25.00 (excluding VAT). Examples of acceptable gifts include pens, diaries, calendars, windscreen scrapers, etc.

If gifts are offered, your Line Manager or Volunteer Coordinator must be informed, and will determine the action to be taken. Your Gifts and Hospitality Register must be completed.

Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking

Smoking is not permitted on ECS premises, or within the premises where ECS work is being undertaken.

Consumption of alcohol is not permitted during working hours. Representatives of ECS must not be under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or other substances during working hours.

Incapacity for work through the misuse of drink, drugs or other substances is a disciplinary matter for staff and will be addressed through the problem-solving process for volunteers. Where representatives are prescribed medication that may affect their mood or ability to carry out their role, they should bring this to the attention of their line manager or Volunteer Coordinator.

Representatives found in possession of illegal drugs or using illegal drugs at work will be reported to the police. ECS operate a zero-tolerance approach to illegal drugs.



Dress code

All representatives of ECS should be neat and tidy in appearance and dress in a way that inspires confidence in a professional service. The ECS dress code policy is designed to help us all provide a consistent professional appearance to our customers, stakeholders, and colleagues. Our appearance reflects on ourselves and the company. The goal is to be sure that we maintain a positive appearance and not to offend customers, clients, or colleagues.

Dress Code Policy:

- All ECS representatives are expected to dress in smart **casual, business** attire unless the day's tasks require otherwise.
- Everyone is expected to present a clean, professional appearance and everyone is expected to be well-groomed and wear clean clothing, free of holes, tears, or other signs of wear.
- Clothing with offensive or inappropriate designs or stamps are not allowed.
- Clothing should not be too revealing.
- Clothing and grooming styles dictated by religion or ethnicity are exempt.

Managers are expected to inform ECS representatives when they are violating the dress code and anyone in violation is expected to immediately correct the issue. This may include having to leave work to change clothes.

If for any reason the dress code is not adhered to, ECS has a right to address this is through the ECS disciplinary policy and procedure.

Reporting misconduct

If any representative, employee, or volunteer has a question or concern, or feels that an employee, volunteer, or the organisation is not meeting the commitment outlined in this document, do not stay silent. Contact your Line Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, Board Member or Chair, or the ECS Managing Director in their absence. If the concern remains unresolved, reference should be made to our **Grievance procedure**, the problem-solving process for volunteers, or our **Whistleblowing policy**.

Members of the public who wish to report a breach in our code of conduct can raise the concern directly with the ECS Managing Director, ECS Board Chair or local Service/Healthwatch Manager via email: contactus@weareecs.co.uk or by calling 0800 470 1518. Alternatively, if it is more appropriate, they can raise a complaint in accordance with our **Complaints policy** which is also available on our website, and upon request from any member of our team.

We take our Code of Conduct seriously and expect the same of our representatives, employees, and volunteers.

Failure to comply

Breaches of our code of conduct will be treated consistently and fairly by the Managing Director and ECS Board of Directors.

Failure to comply with the principles and underlying policies in this document may result in disciplinary action for paid employees which can include termination of employment, or commencing the problem-solving process for volunteers, which can include termination of the volunteer agreement and relationship.

Data protection

Any personal information provided in connection with this policy will be processed in accordance with data protection principles and will only be processed to ensure that individuals act in the best interests of ECS. The information provided will not be used for any other purpose.

Review of policy document

The ECS Board will review the effectiveness of the code of conduct policy set out in this document every year.

Code of conduct policy	
Version	4.0
Author	Elizabeth Learoyd
Approved by	Board of ECS
Date approved	October 2022
Effective date	6 October 2022
Review date	5 October 2023

Appendix 2

healthwatch

Healthwatch

Bedford Borough

Complaints

Policy

Healthwatch Bedford Borough Complaints Policy

Purpose of this document

Engaging Communities Solutions (CIC) is contracted by Bedford Borough Council to deliver Healthwatch Bedford Borough.

Individuals and organisations have the right to express their views about the performance of Healthwatch Bedford Borough and the way in which it conducts its business.

Anyone who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the service received by Healthwatch Bedford can make a complaint under Healthwatch Bedford Borough's complaints policy.

We will treat both concerns and complaints in the same way.

This Policy does not cover:

- 1) Complaints or concerns about the NHS, which should be dealt with through the NHS complaints procedure.
- 2) Complaints about the provision of social care services which should be dealt with by Bedford Borough Council complaints procedure.

We will review this policy on a regular basis.

Date: 9 January 2023

How to raise a concern or make a complaint about Healthwatch Bedford Borough

- 1) In the first instance we would encourage you to raise a concern, or complaint, or to provide feedback on our service informally. Providing information or correcting misunderstandings or misconceptions at this early stage may enable the issue to be successfully resolved.
- 2) If the concern or complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, then you should notify us via email, letter or via a telephone conversation with a member of staff.
- 3) Healthwatch Bedford Borough will acknowledge the concern or complaint in writing (or in the complainants preferred method of communication) within 3 working days.
- 4) Attempts to resolve the concern or complaint will be completed within 15 working days of establishing the nature of the concern or complaint. Exceptionally, if further time is needed, where possible this will be agreed with you.
- 5) The Manager of Healthwatch Bedford Borough will review all concerns/complaints. If you are not happy with the outcome you will be able to appeal. The concern or complaint will then be reviewed by the Chief Executive of Engaging Communities Solutions CIC within 15 working days. (Please note that if the complaint is about the Healthwatch Manager, the complaint should be addressed to the Chief Executive of ECS, and the appeal will be conducted by the ECS Board) Once the appeal process has been completed the concern or complaint will be closed.
- 6) If you are still not satisfied you can take your concern or complaint to Bedford Borough Council.

Bedford Borough Council can be contacted in the following ways:

- Website: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/complaints-and-feedback>
- Telephone: 01234 267422
- In writing: Customer Service Centre, 2 Horne Lane, Bedford, MK40 1RA.

You may also subsequently take your concern or complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman who can be contacted in the following ways:

- Website: <http://lgo.org.uk>
- Telephone: 0300 061 0614