

Code of conduct

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Code of conduct policy

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, Independent Strategic 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. While 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 Independent Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) 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 ISAB members are bound by that decision and should publicly support it.

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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 ISAB 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**.

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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.

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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.

The amended policy document will be published on the website of ECS and the Advocacy and Healthwatch services it delivers as soon as is practicable.

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