**Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin**

**Equality and Diversity Policy**

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# Background

The policy outlines Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin (HWT&W) commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and equal treatment for staff, volunteers, and board members in terms of employment and access to services, and to provide guidance on anti-discriminatory practice. This has recently been extended to include recognition of the Modern Slavery Act (2015). This policy will be amended as appropriate in line with new developments in Equality and Diversity best practice and relevant legislation. HWT&W’s commitment to anti-discriminatory practice relates to any type of discrimination, as set out in the glossary at the end of this document.

HWT&W Equality and Diversity Policy supports activity in accordance with the Equalities Act 2010 legislation, and the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

# Policy

HWT&W is committed to valuing diversity and working with equality as a core value. Healthwatch aims to:

* Promote equality of opportunity
* Celebrate and value diversity
* Eliminate unlawful direct and indirect discrimination
* Promote ‘transparency in supply chains’ with regard to ‘anti-slavery and human trafficking’.

HWT&W will provide equality of opportunity and equal treatment as an integral part of good practice. The organisation is committed to a working environment in which the contribution and needs of everyone are fully valued and recognised. Healthwatch will support staff, volunteers and other members in not tolerating any inappropriate, violent or abusive behaviour from colleagues, other organisations, or clients.

The policy applies to employees of HWT&W, to temporary and contract workers (terms of employment), directors, volunteers, and the public - in terms of the Healthwatch service provision and service users.

(Note: *Relevant policies for staff are included in the Employee Handbook, and form part of their employment contract*).

The policy applies specifically to discrimination and equality of opportunity in respect of ‘protected characteristics’ as defined in the Equalities Act 2010:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Race
4. Sex
5. Religion or cultural beliefs
6. Gender reassignment
7. Marital status and civil partnership
8. Sexual orientation
9. Pregnancy and maternity

# Responsibilities

HWT&W values its staff and volunteers and expects them to be treated in a respectful manner. Accordingly, everyone has a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect. The Managing Director is responsible for providing advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues, and to ensure the Policy document is kept up-to-date.

HWT&W supports working in compliance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and will expect transparency of compliance regarding ‘slavery and human trafficking’ from all partners and contractors providing services, support and consultation to HWT&W.

# Equality and Diversity Procedures

## 4.1 Employment Practices

HWT&W aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer, and to ensure that no applicant, volunteer or employee, receives less favourable treatment, or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable in the context of the policy. Selection, recruitment, training, promotion and employment practices will be subject to regular review to ensure that they comply with the Equality and Diversity Policy. All training opportunities will be published appropriately, and not in such a way so as to exclude particular groups. HWT&W regards discrimination, abuse, harassment, victimisation or bullying of staff, volunteers, clients or others in the course of work as disciplinary offences that could be regarded as gross misconduct.

## 4.2 Healthwatch as a Service Provider

In developing services, promotional and publicity materials, HWT&W will seek to ensure that access is equitable for all. This will include, wherever practicable, making specific access arrangements for people with disabilities or learning difficulties, or any other protected characteristic which may apply, such as religion and belief. HWT&W will attempt to ensure that none of its policies discriminate directly or indirectly against any group or individual.

## 4.3 Healthwatch Aims

HWT&W aims to encourage, value and manage diversity and recognises that talent and potential are distributed across the population. HWT&W recognises it is in the best interest of this organisation to recruit and develop the best people for our work, from as wide and diverse a pool of talent as possible.

HWT&W recognises that certain groups and individuals in society are disadvantaged because of discrimination practices directed against them. HWT&W will work to remove any barriers, bias or discrimination that prevents individuals or groups from realising their potential and contributing fully to our organisation’s performance, and to develop an organisational culture that positively values diversity.

When ‘listening’ to communities and individuals, HWT&W will make every effort to understand the context in which people live their lives. Where understanding is more difficult, staff and volunteers will be supported in respectfully seeking information.

Discrimination operates through commonly held assumptions and prejudices, which are reinforced by laws, rules and customs. This makes discrimination appear normal and inevitable. Discrimination works by stereotyping people into different groups or roles, by treating some people worse than others, or simply by ignoring them.

People exposed to discrimination may experience particular issues when accessing health and social care services. When working with partner organisations, HWT&W will be aware of discriminatory practice and how this may manifest itself. Staff and volunteers will be supported in bringing any issues to the attention of partner organisations. Whenever practical and possible HWT&W will support public sector organisations in undertaking Equality Impact Assessments.

All forms of discrimination are unacceptable, regardless of whether there was any intention to discriminate or not. Staff and volunteers have a duty to co-operate with HWT&W to ensure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination. Employees and volunteers should draw the attention of their line manager to suspected discriminatory acts, practices or cases of bullying or harassment.

In undertaking healthwatch activities in the community, staff and volunteers may become concerned about potential cases of ‘modern slavery’ or ‘human trafficking’. Employees and volunteers should draw the attention of the Managing Director to suspected cases to bring any issues to the attention of partner organisations and the law.

The Executive Board will obtain assurances from potential services providers (for back-office and business services) and require transparency of compliance with the Modern Slavery Act (2015) from all new and renewed service contracts.

HWT&W recognises that the promotion of equal opportunities requires more than passive opposition to discrimination; it is therefore committed to taking positive action towards equality of opportunity, recognising that the limited resources and the operational needs of the organisation may impose justifiable restrictions upon our ability to take such action.

## 4.4 Complaints

HWT&W will treat seriously any complaints of unlawful discrimination on any of the stated grounds made by employees, volunteers, temporary workers, partners and services contractors, and the public – clients, or third parties, and will take action when appropriate. All complaints made by external parties will be investigated in accordance with the HWT&W complaints procedures described in the HWT&W Complaints and Compliments Policy, and the complainant will be informed of the outcome. Complaints will be reviewed annually by the Board.

In the event of an investigation concerning a complaint against an employee, the policies, procedures and conditions of employment in the HWT&W Employee Handbook will be followed, and any action necessary dealt with under the Disciplinary Grievance and Appeal Policy and procedures within that Handbook.