

**‘Conflict of Interest’ policy**

Healthwatch Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) is independent and accessible to all sections of the community and ensures that the public has real involvement in the governance of the organisation. This applies to meetings where decision-making is involved. This is because Board members who are unpaid volunteers, with Lived-Experience of services, help make transparent decisions on the strategic direction of the organisation. The Prioritisation Panel is a mixture of staff, Board and volunteers who are given access to patient feedback in order to make recommendations that influence the annual workplan research priorities, and where Enter and View visits are made each year. On a quarterly basis the Panel meets to formulate actions that have an operational impact.

Conflict of Interest requires adhering to certain systems, processes, cultures, and values (one of our values is to follow the \* Nolan Principles of public life). This achieves an important level of credibility with the public and failure to act accordingly can attract considerable negative attention and impact on our reputation and integrity of our work. Therefore, Healthwatch BNSSG will make requests to members to identify/declare any ‘conflict of interest’ at the start of all Board of Trustee meetings and Prioritisation Panel meetings it holds.

**Definition**

A conflict of interest involves a conflict between a person’s public duty and the private interest, in which the person’s private-capacity interest could improperly influence the performance of their duties and responsibilities.

* An **actual** conflict of interest may arise when a member of the Healthwatch team is asked to undertake a role that directly affects or impacts their personal or private interests.
* Importantly, some conflicts may only be **perceived**—a member’s involvement could be questioned based on a personal or private interest that may not actually have an impact.
* A **potential** conflict of interest arises where a member has private interests that could conflict with their duties in the future, or where a member has competing interests because they hold more than one public role or duty.

**Transparency**

Healthwatch has a commitment to openness in administrative and organisational processes. By exposing such processes, independence is easier to demonstrate as bias becomes more detectable. Healthwatch will make sure they recruit and induct appropriate, experienced, and skilled Board of Trustees, and Prioritisation Panel members, which may include individuals from recent senior positions within the sector. Transparent systems can help with any perceived conflict of interest due to competing interests, by identifying them and putting in processes to mitigate them as an issue.

**Key questions for members**

***Public duty versus private interest*** Are there any personal or private interests that I may have that conflict or can be perceived to conflict with my public duty?

***Potential*** Could there be benefits for me now or in the future that could cast doubt on my independence?

***Perception*** Remembering that perception is important, how will my involvement in the decision or action be viewed by others?

***Politicisation*** Do members have political interests that may conflict or be perceived to conflict with our public duty?

***Proportion*** Would a member’s involvement in the decision-making appear fair and reasonable in all the circumstances?

***Preparation*** What would be the response if an involvement in a decision-making forum was questioned publicly?

**Managing conflict of interest**

If conflict of interest situations are not properly identified and managed they can endanger the integrity of Healthwatch BNSSG. Transparency is one of the ways in which Healthwatch BNSSG manages conflict of interest.

Other methods include:

* **Registering** a conflict of interest is an important first step. However, this does not necessarily resolve the conflict. It may be necessary to assess the immediate situation and determine whether the following strategies could be required?
* **Restricting** It may be appropriate for a member to restrict their involvement in a matter. For example, refrain from taking part in debate about a specific issue, abstain from voting on a decision, or restrict access to information relating to the conflict of interest. If this situation occurs frequently and ongoing conflict of interest is likely, further steps may be required.
* **Removing** from involvement in the Board of Trustee meeting or Prioritisation Panel when ad hoc strategies are not feasible or appropriate.
* **Relinquishing** the personal or private interests may be a valid strategy for ensuring there is no conflict with a member’s public duty. This may be the relinquishing of membership of another organisation but may not be appropriate and resignation may be the only option.
* **Resigning** may be an option if the conflict of interest cannot be resolved in any other way, particularly where conflicting private interests cannot be relinquished.

\*The Nolan Principles <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

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