

Online and Virtual Meetings Policy

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Author/Responsible Person	Michelle Wright
Next revision due	June 2025
Staff/volunteer training delivered	Included in staff induction and Volunteer Handbook
Date sent to staff	06/07/2022
	This policy covers Connected Together CIC and <i>all</i> its contracts and managed organisations, for example Healthwatch North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire (HWNW) and Healthwatch Rutland (HWR).
Checked for rebranding	Michelle Wright - 01/04/2022
Signed off by CEO	Kate Holt - 18/05/2022
Checked By	Catherine Maryon (CTCIC Director) - 24/05/2022

Online Code of Behaviour for Connected Together CIC/local Healthwatch Staff and Volunteers

1. Introduction

Since March 2020 and the Covid19 pandemic ways of working have changed with more online/virtual meetings. As society returns to more normal times it is expected that some virtual meetings will continue, and some meetings will become a hybrid mix of both face to face and online meetings with attendees both at the meeting in person and online.

It is therefore very important that every member of staff and volunteer who works with CTCIC/Local Healthwatch is aware of their role and responsibilities online and have clear guidelines under which to operate.

One way of achieving this is to have an Online Code of Behaviour, which clarifies what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. All staff and volunteers who work with CTCIC/Local Healthwatch must sign a copy of the Online Code of Behaviour to confirm that they have received it and understand their responsibilities under it.

All agreements and Online Codes of Behaviour will be stored securely by the company for a period of five years following the termination of employment or the volunteer relationship, which is the current legal requirement.

2. Breaches to the Code of Behaviour

- Breaches of this Code will be dealt with through the company's disciplinary and problem-solving procedures for staff and volunteers

3. Online Code of Behaviour

The following guidelines should be followed at all times.

This covers, where relevant, online meetings and social media activities:

- Only use secure platforms or password-protected platforms for online meetings e.g. MS Teams or Zoom
- Make sure online invitations are sent only to staff and volunteers and are not available to the public (unless attendance is agreed prior to the meeting)
- Do not give out personal phone numbers or email addresses via an online platform
- Always gain participants' consent if the meeting is to be recorded
- Always gain participants' consent before taking a screen shot/ screen grab or picture of an online meeting
- Consider personal and family safeguarding when using video. Check what you have around you that may be in shot
- If attending or hosting a virtual meeting ensure that people are happy with family photographs, or indeed family being in shot? CTCIC recommends background blurring or use a pre-prepared background
- Always give participants the option to attend online meeting/events with their video off to maintain privacy
- **Always remember that you are representing Healthwatch and that this is your personal view not that of Healthwatch**

ALWAYS share concerns on any of these matters with a CTCIC/Healthwatch manager.

4. Good online behaviour involves:

- **Thanking, acknowledging, and supporting people-** remember people may not be able to see you nod, smile or frown as you read their instant messages or attend an online meeting. Some people may also not be able to read the comments in the chat option, perhaps due to sight impairment or other disability, or simply because it can be hard to keep up. It's also a good habit to respond constructively acknowledging the other person's perspective - without this, they may feel ignored and be discouraged from contributing further.

- **Acknowledging before differing** - before you disagree with someone, try to summarise the other person's point in your own words. This will help them feel confident that you are trying to understand them and be more likely to take your view seriously.
Clearly showing your emotions - smileys or emojis can be used to express feelings, and most online platforms allow you to use emojis to express a variety of emotions. However, emotions can be easily misunderstood online, be mindful that people may not realise when you are joking, and that one person's joke may not seem amusing to someone else. You should always be aware of the receiver(s) of your message, and that people from differing cultures and backgrounds may interpret your words differently.
- **Avoiding 'flaming'** - if you read or hear something that offends or upsets you, slow your response down. It can be tempting to reply immediately, - remember though that angry, emotional retort can quickly escalate into a flaming spiral of angry messages and discussions.
- **Disagreeing with the comment, not with the person** - disagreement is expected but remember to focus on the matter under discussion and avoid negative comments about other people.
- **Respecting difference** - respect others' cultural, religious, professional, academic and economic backgrounds, skills, abilities and contributions.
- **Asking permission** - Do not use or reproduce others' comments or personal information without their express permission.
- **Always uphold the organisational core values and beliefs** - It is vital that when we attend a virtual meeting, we behave in the same way that we would when we attend an in-person meeting so that our behaviour reflects the code of conduct that has already been agreed to by staff and volunteers.

Online Code of Behaviour Agreement

I have read the CTCIC Online Code of Behaviour Policy and understand my responsibilities.

Name: _____

Sign: _____

Date: _____