

Holding Board Meetings in Public

This policy sets out the way people are able to contribute to the Healthwatch Shropshire Board meetings which are held in public.

Board meetings in public

Healthwatch Shropshire (HWS) is committed to openness, transparency and accountability to the people of Shropshire. The Healthwatch Shropshire Board has agreed to hold quarterly Board meetings in public at which members of the public can raise questions to HWS.

Notification of the Board meeting in public

Notice of Board meetings will be given via the website and social media accounts, and through the e-newsletter and hard copy newsletter (where timely). Notification will be given a minimum 10 working days in advance of the meeting.

Agendas will be publicly available and placed on the HWS website at least five working days before the meeting. Minutes of the HWS Board meetings, once approved by the Board as an accurate record of the meeting, will be publicly available and placed on the HWS website.

Participation by the public

The public are invited to attend as observers. If you plan to attend a Board meeting as an observer, we would be grateful if you inform us in advance to confirm seating. Observers will be seated separately from the main Board table.

At the start of each Board meeting in Public, there will be a public session for questions from members of the public, if submitted in advance to HWS.

Submitting a question

Questions are required to have been submitted in writing (by post or e-mail) no later than midday five working days before the day of the Board meeting, to enable answers to be as informative as possible.

If a question is submitted after the deadline it will be considered only for the next Board meeting.

Questions should be sent to enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk or in writing to:

Healthwatch Shropshire
4 The Creative Quarter
Shrewsbury Business Park
Shrewsbury, SY2 6LG

HWS requires the questioner's:

- Name and contact details
- The name of the organisation/group represented (if applicable)
- The question to be put to the HWS Board

By submitting a question this is considered to be consent for your name only to be published, and this will normally be done within the minutes of the meeting.

Normally only one question may be asked by any one person or organisation at any one meeting. Questions should relate to matters of policy or decision which are normally made by the HWS Board.

Questions are asked in the order they are received, except where similar questions are placed together. If there isn't enough time to answer all questions, some questions may be deferred to the next meeting. The Chair is responsible for the selection of questions to be answered at any given Board meeting.

A question may be edited - to bring into a proper form, to make it clearer, and/or to keep it to a reasonable length.

A question may be rejected if it:

- Is not about a matter that HWS has responsibility for
- Is defamatory, frivolous or offensive
- Is substantially the same as a question which has been answered within the last six months and the context for the response has not changed
- Requires the disclosure of exempt or confidential information or
- Is a statement rather than a genuine enquiry to obtain information.

If a member of the public does not wish to ask their question in person the question can still be put to the HWS Board which will give an answer. A written answer will also be sent to the questioner.

The minutes of the meeting will record the questions asked, who asked them, and summarise the answers given.

Confidential items

The HWS Board will occasionally consider that some agenda items and their minutes should remain confidential. Such items will be discussed in closed session at the start or end of each meeting and members of the public will not be permitted to attend.

Agenda items and minutes will be treated as confidential on the grounds that they:

- Contain information of a commercially sensitive nature
- Include legal or other professional advice on sensitive or confidential matters
- Involve matters concerning a named individual, an individual who can be identified or an individual who has a reasonable expectation that the matters will remain confidential, or contain an individual's personal information; or
- Are deemed as such by the Chair.

Confidential Board minutes will be recorded in a separate document to the main minutes and will not be publically available.

Confidential material may be made available to the public only when the Board determines that it is no longer confidential.

** Healthwatch Shropshire would like to acknowledge the document from Healthwatch Birmingham which has informed this approach.*