

Member of the Board of Trustees: role and responsibilities

The role of the Board of Trustees

It is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees (members can be known as Trustees or Directors¹) to ensure that Healthwatch Essex (HWE) has the financial resources required, is well managed and meets its objectives as detailed in the Memorandum and Articles of Association. In particular, the Board must ensure that the day-to-day operational decisions and activities of HWE comply with both the relevant legislation (such as the Companies Acts and Charities Acts, as well as the Health and Social Care Act 2012) and that they advance HWE's own charitable purpose and objects.²

Composition of the Board of Trustees

The Articles of Association of HWE provide for a Board of up to 12 members. There are currently 7 Trustees, who have been appointed between 2012 and 2020. Trustees serve for 3 year terms to a maximum of 6 years.

The process for appointing new Trustees onto the HWE Board is unusual, recognising our unique role as a voice for the people of Essex. Our Articles require that at least five members of the Board must be appointed via an Independent Panel, whilst also affording the current Board the right to co-opt additional members up to the maximum 12 members.

Following a review of governance, including an audit of the Board's existing knowledge, skills and experience, the Board have indicated that they would welcome applications from all individuals with exceptional qualities who can add value to the governance of HWE, and who may have specialisms or experience in one or more of the following areas:

- Finance
- Accounting

¹ Healthwatch Essex is a company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales, company number 8360699. It is also a registered charity, number 1158356. HWE Insights is a company limited by shares and wholly owned by Healthwatch Essex. It is registered in England and Wales, company number 9989317. The registered office for both companies is: 49 High Street, Earls Colne, Essex CO6 2PB.

² As set out in the Articles of Association, the Charity's objects are 'the advancement of health and the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, or financial hardship by: (1) Providing information and advice to the general public about local health and social care services. (2) Making the views and experiences of members of the general public known to health and social care providers. (3) Enabling local people to have a voice in the development, delivery and equality of access to local health and care services and facilities. (4) Providing training and the development of skills for volunteers and the wider community in understanding, scrutinising, reviewing and monitoring local health and care services and facilities.'

Trustees' individual responsibilities

The role of HWE Trustees can be summarised as follows:

- To be involved in setting, implementing and monitoring HWE's day-to-day and strategic objectives and operating practices, including the budget.
- To monitor the performance of HWE to make sure it complies with constitutional, statutory, regulatory and contractual obligations.
- To take all reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.
- To ensure that financial judgments and estimates are reasonable and prudent, and that suitable accounting policies are applied consistently.
- To ensure that decisions taken by the Board are in the best interest of HWE and that its legal, financial and other responsibilities are met.
- To attend Board meetings, sub-committee meetings, working groups and training events, and to take part in discussions and decision making on a regular basis.
- To receive, read and consider reports, and question these where necessary to ensure that decisions are well founded.
- To offer advice and expertise to the Board.
- To declare any relevant personal, professional or commercial interests in any matters being discussed by the Board.
- To contribute to, and take collective responsibility for, decisions of the Board.
- To undertake special tasks and/or responsibilities as prescribed by the Board or one of its sub-committees, such as representing HWE at meetings and external events.
- To commit to HWE's approach towards valuing diversity and equal opportunities through its service delivery, activities and employment.
- To uphold HWE's code of conduct and maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity.
- To respect the confidentiality of information, particularly where its release would compromise the interests of HWE or breach its statutory, regulatory, contractual and/or other requirements.
- To be responsible (collectively, with the Board) for the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer.

Time commitment

The time commitment for Trustees will be around 4 to 6 hours a month, to include attendance at quarterly Board meetings, reading of papers, email and other correspondence, and attendance at other relevant meetings and events. You will also be invited to attend the Team Away Day once a year.

Knowledge, skills, attributes and experience

Trustees are expected to make both a collective and an individual contribution to the work of the Board. As such, Trustees would be expected to possess (or be willing to acquire) the following knowledge, skills, attributes and experience:

- A commitment to advancing the interests of patients, service users and the public within the changing landscape of health and social care. This should include an awareness of, or an interest in, the potential for using evidence of people's 'voice' and lived experience to drive change.
- A perspective on issues and challenges facing the health and social care system, and an ability to employ a balanced consideration of this when making decisions affecting HWE. Your knowledge or experience of this may be in a professional, unpaid, non-executive or personal capacity.
- Strategic awareness, in order to make decisions in the best interests of Healthwatch Essex, taking into account manifold factors such as HWE's general legal and financial operating environment, HWE's particular statutory powers and obligations and the complex environment of health and social care commissioning, provision and scrutiny in Essex, and the requirements and expectations placed upon HWE.
- Excellent critical skills and business awareness, in order to inform the day-to-day operational and strategic management of HWE.
- Financial awareness, in order to play a lead role in overseeing HWE's effective financial management.
- Excellent communication skills, including a capability to play an active role at meetings, contributing to discussions and informing Board-level decisions. You will also potentially be communicating with a range of different individuals, from senior officials within health and social care to members of the public, so you must be willing to engage widely with people from all walks of life.
- A sound knowledge of charity and corporate governance.

In addition, as a Trustee of Healthwatch Essex, you will be a public representative of an organisation with statutory powers and obligations, and you should have a good idea of what is expected from a position of civic responsibility. You should be open-minded and inclusive, and committed to the principles of diversity and equal opportunity.

Eligibility

Subject to the following exclusions, we would welcome applications from people who believe they could make a significant and effective contribution to the governance of HWE. The Board have set the following exclusions:

Senior employees within health or social care commissioner and provider organisations, whose main function is the provision of services to the people of Essex and County councillors and district councillors who hold an executive position in their council.

Disclosure & Barring Service (formerly Criminal Record Bureau) checks will be required for Trustees-designate. If these raise issues about suitability, the Board may take them into account when deciding whether to confirm appointment. References will also be sought.

Tenure

Trustees are appointed for a three-year term of office, which can be renewed if they and the other Trustees agree, but no Trustee may service more than three consecutive terms of office.

Payment

The role is unpaid, but all reasonable expenses will be reimbursed.

Healthwatch Essex is committed to providing equal opportunities in the recruitment, training and development of its employees and volunteers.