



Governance in NHS Wales

Section Two - The NHS Code of Conduct for Boards

The Code of Conduct for NHS Wales is detailed in the Welsh Assembly Government's Governance e-Manual.

Codes of Conduct are put in place in recognition that NHS Boards are custodians of a national asset which is directly and intimately involved in the lives of the population. They are also custodians of the resources which the population has provided through general taxation.

These two factors place an obligation on boards to ensure that their organisations have an ethos and culture of public service which permeates everything they do and which reflects and respects public expectation.

The need for public accountability puts a special obligation on NHS boards to conduct themselves and their business in an open and transparent way that commands public confidence. For that reason, board meetings are open to the public and should operate in a way that makes their business understandable to the public. This is particularly important as the NHS moves towards more public engagement so that it can better reflect public expectations.

Public service values matter in the NHS and those who work in it have a duty to conduct NHS business with probity. All staff employed by NHS organisations have a responsibility to respond to staff, patients and suppliers impartially, to achieve value for money from the public funds with which they are entrusted and to demonstrate high ethical standards of personal conduct.

The success of the NHS Code of Conduct depends on a vigorous and visible example from NHS boards and the influence this has on the behaviour of all those who work within the organisation.

NHS boards have a clear responsibility for corporate standards of conduct and acceptance of the code which must inform and govern the decisions and conduct of all board members.

Openness and Public Responsibilities

It is important to ensure that all board members are comfortable with asking questions that contribute to constructive debate without undermining the work of executive colleagues. It is possible to question openly without impugning the integrity or performance of an individual.

Where there are issues of personal performance, whether of an executive or independent member, then these can be addressed through the individual's performance review.

It follows from this commitment to open debate that the use of the confidential part of the board meeting should be restricted to those areas generally concerning named individuals or commercially sensitive information, where there is an overriding need for confidentiality.

Health needs and patterns of provision of health care do not stand still. Boards must demonstrate a willingness to be open and to engage with the public, patients and with staff as the need for change

emerges. Major changes must be consulted upon before decisions are reached. Information supporting those decisions must be made available and positive responses given to reasonable requests for information.

The confidentiality of personal and individual patient information must be respected at all times.

The business of NHS boards must be conducted in a way that is socially responsible. As planners, service providers, and as large employers in their communities, local health boards must forge an open relationship with the local community and engage with citizens, partners and stakeholders about the services provided.

Local health boards and NHS trusts must also demonstrate to the public that they are concerned with the wider health of the population including the impact of the organisation's activities on the environment.

Public service values in management

Boards must ensure that public service values are central in all that they do.

Chairs and board members have a duty to ensure that public funds are properly safeguarded and that at all times the board conducts its business as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Proper stewardship of public monies requires value for money to be high on the agenda of the board.

The boards accounting, tendering and employment practices must always reflect the highest professional standards. Public statements and reports issued by the board must be clear, comprehensive and balanced, and fully represent the facts. Annual and other key reports must be issued in good time to all individuals and groups in the community who have a legitimate interest in health issues to allow full consideration by those wishing to attend public meetings on local health issues.

Public business and private gain

Chairs and board members must always act impartially and must not be influenced by social or business relationships. No one should use their public position to further their private interests. Where there is a potential for private interests to be material and relevant to NHS business, the relevant interests must always be declared and recorded in the board minutes, and entered into a register which is available to the public.

When a conflict of interest is established, the board members must withdraw and play no part in the relevant discussion or decision.

Compliance

Board members must always satisfy themselves that the actions of the board and its members in conducting board business fully reflect the values of the code.