



National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce: ways of working charter

Purpose

This charter sets out the principles and expectations around ways of working for members of the National Maternity and Neonatal Taskforce.

It sits alongside the taskforce's terms of reference and provides a shared understanding of how members will engage with one another and with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in a respectful and constructive way.

Respectful conduct

Taskforce members will:

- treat all other members with respect and professionalism. This includes listening actively and valuing diverse opinions and perspectives and collectively working to ensure the group remains a safe and inclusive space for open dialogue
- avoid personal criticism, discriminatory behaviour or unprofessional conduct
- engage constructively in discussions, recognising the different views at the table are critical to the collective value the taskforce will bring
- act in good faith and in the interests of improving maternity and neonatal services, outcomes and experiences (for families and staff)
- prepare for and attend scheduled meetings where possible
- acknowledge that the taskforce has been convened to respond to a national investigation, and that timely progress is essential. While maintaining a safe, respectful and trauma-informed environment, members will work collaboratively to support timely decision-making and delivery

Where consensus may not be achieved, members of the taskforce will ensure the chair is given the full range of views and perspectives and recognise it is the chair who will take ultimate responsibility for decisions taken by the taskforce and on the national action plan.

Any concerns about the conduct or behaviour of another taskforce member should be raised with DHSC. DHSC will then consider any necessary next steps.

DHSC support to the taskforce

The DHSC team will:

- provide clear information on the purpose, scope and expectations of taskforce membership
- support with appropriate secretariat support, including agendas, papers and meeting records
- provide guidance on confidentiality, conflicts of interest and external communications as and when is needed
- treat taskforce members with respect and recognising the time, expertise and experience they contribute
- support the taskforce to operate in a trauma-informed way, ensuring meetings, materials and interactions are approached with sensitivity, psychological safety and awareness of lived experience
- commission, as required, additional policy advice, information or insights to aid discussions by the taskforce

Support before, during and after engagement

All members of the taskforce have access to an independent professional emotional support service. This service is available to members directly, without the need for referral from DHSC. Information on how to access this support is shared with members separately to this charter.

The service will include optional preparatory support calls prior to any engagement activity, on-the-day remote support, follow-up support after the engagement activity and mailbox service to request emotional support, accessible 24/7.

In addition, taskforce meetings may have a counsellor present at them, so to provide immediate support to participants of the meetings where required. Counsellor attendance at these meetings may be virtual or in person, as agreed in advance with DHSC.

Information sharing and confidentiality

We would encourage taskforce members to share the themes of what was discussed at meetings with members of their organisation, colleagues and networks. We would also appreciate members' support to disseminate published information about the work of the taskforce and other work going on in maternity and neonatal services.

There will be occasions where taskforce members are privy to confidential or sensitive information, these documents will be marked draft or confidential, as such these should not be shared or disseminated. Failing to maintain confidentiality will be raised with the taskforce chair and action may be taken to address breaches of confidentiality.

Social media

In order to support a safe and constructive working environment of the taskforce where members are encouraged to constructively discuss any differences of views, care should be taken with the use of social media:

- social media should not be used to share the detail of taskforce discussions, attribute comments or views to individual members, or disclose information that has not been published or otherwise agreed for wider sharing. Members should be mindful that discussions may involve sensitive issues, personal experiences or developing policy positions, and should exercise appropriate judgement when communicating publicly
- any communications on social media should be consistent with the respectful conduct principles set out in this charter. This includes no personal criticism of other taskforce members or posting content that could undermine the safe and constructive working environment of the taskforce
- taskforce papers, draft documents and meeting materials must not be shared on social media unless they have been published on GOV.UK or DHSC has explicitly confirmed that wider sharing is permitted. If members wish to share documents more widely beyond the taskforce, they should first check with DHSC

Any queries or concerns about the use of social media should be raised with DHSC, who will discuss the matter with the taskforce chair and consider any further action required.

Conflicts of interest

In order to ensure transparency and maintain integrity, all members are expected to:

- declare any actual or perceived conflicts of interest relevant to the work of the taskforce
- act in good faith to manage any conflicts appropriately, including stepping back from specific discussions where necessary

Voluntary participation

Participation of the taskforce is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time by notifying the taskforce support team.

Membership of the taskforce does not confer employment status, executive authority or individual decision-making power on behalf of DHSC.