

VOLUNTEERING POLICY

1. Purpose of this Policy

The purpose of this policy and its procedures is to provide overall guidance and direction to staff and volunteers within Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (excluding members of the Trustee Board who are covered in the Governance Policy).

3. Scope

For the purpose of this policy, a 'volunteer' is anyone who gives time to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire of their own free will without pay or financial reward beyond reimbursement of expenses incurred whilst volunteering. The relationship Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has with its volunteers is of a non-contractual nature and does not constitute, either implicitly or explicitly, a contractual or employment relationship.

4. Policy Principles

Volunteers are a valuable resource to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, delivering outcomes in partnership with staff and its members.

Volunteers have the right to:

- be given meaningful assignments
- be treated as equals
- receive effective support and guidance
- be fully involved and informed
- receive due recognition for tasks undertaken

Volunteers will be:

- Valued
- Informed
- Involved
- Consulted

In return, volunteers will agree to carry out their tasks to the best of their abilities, to comply with the law relating to the organisation's activities and services and to remain loyal to the aims, values, policies and procedures of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire.

VOLUNTEERING PROCEDURES

1. Recruitment

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire aims to have a fair, effective and open process for recruiting and selecting volunteers that takes into account the principles of our Equality and Diversity Policy.

Opportunities will be advertised widely through our own website, local Volunteer Centre's and other promotional material.

Volunteer role descriptions and person specifications will be provided and may be amended during the selection process to enable both the needs of the organisation and the individual volunteer to be met. Potential volunteers will attend an informal interview with the Chief Executive Officer (or other designated person) of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, complete an application form and provide a personal reference. During the interview, time will be given to exploring a volunteer's motivations and interests for roles with the organisation.

The aim of this process is to allow both parties to assess whether the volunteering opportunities available match the potential volunteer's skills, knowledge, experience and needs.

2. Criminal Convictions

If the role requires the post holder to work with children, young people and adults who are considered vulnerable because of their age, illness or disability an application for a criminal records check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) may be made to assess the volunteer's suitability for positions of trust.

Where a Disclosure is to form part of the recruitment process, a potential volunteer will be encouraged to provide details of their criminal record at an early stage in the application process. Potential volunteers will be asked to provide this information under separate, confidential cover, to a designated person within the organisation and we guarantee that this information will only be seen by those who need to see it as part of the recruitment process.

Unless the nature of the position allows Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire to ask questions about an applicant's entire criminal record, we only ask about unspent convictions as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will ensure that a discussion takes place, at the interview, of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position could lead to withdrawal of an offer to volunteer with the organisation. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire also undertakes to discuss any matter revealed in a Disclosure with the person seeking the position before withdrawing a conditional offer of voluntary work.

Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar anyone from volunteering with the organisation. This will depend on the nature of the role and the circumstances and background of the offences.

3. Appointment

If not undertaken as part of the informal interview prior to appointment, all prospective volunteers will be invited to meet with the appropriate member of staff, and their skills and expertise will be reviewed to ensure that best use is made of their potential, given the location and the amount of time they are willing to contribute. Any training needs will be assessed and arranged accordingly and all reasonable adjustments will be made to enable volunteers to contribute effectively.

Once both parties are agreed, the volunteer will be notified in writing that they have been formally accepted by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire as a volunteer. They will, at the same time, be issued with a (revised) role description.

4. Induction

New volunteers will be made welcome and given a Volunteer Information Pack, including but not limited to:

- Brief description of the organisation and its values
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Confidentiality and data protection (agreement) Policy
- Expenses Policy

Information contained in the pack will be discussed with the volunteer during the induction. A volunteer induction checklist will also be used.

5. Training

The necessary training in order to carry out a volunteer role, including associated responsibilities, will be provided by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire.

Volunteers will have access to training and development opportunities to enable them to fulfill their role within the organisation. They may request to attend any in-house or external training workshop or course where these can be shown to have a clear relevance to the voluntary work they are undertaking within the organisation, subject to the approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

6. Support

We recognise that volunteers should be given regular support to discuss problems or other issues and to be given thanks and feedback. All volunteers will have a named person who will be their main source of support during their voluntary work with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire.

There will be periodic reviews of the volunteer role and the tasks undertaken, including the extent to which these have met or can meet the needs of the volunteer and the organisation and consideration of the future contribution the volunteer can make.

7. Standards of Service

The relationship between Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and its volunteer workers is entirely voluntary and does not imply any contract. However, it is important that the organisation is able to maintain its agreed standards of service to the clients who use it. In consequence, volunteer workers are expected to be reliable and conscientious. When expecting to be absent when scheduled, volunteers should let Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire know as far in advance as possible so that alternative arrangements may be made.

8. Dealing with Disagreements and Problems

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will aim to deal with any difficulties with a volunteer in a fair, open and effective way.

If a volunteer has a problem with the way they have been treated by another volunteer, member of staff, director or service user they should discuss the problem with the person concerned or raise it with the person assigned to work with them and provide support. If the matter is not resolved the volunteer can raise the problem with the Chief Executive Officer.

In the unlikely situation that a volunteer causes a problem through not following the guidelines of the organisation or by behaving inappropriately (see the Code of Conduct on what is unacceptable behaviour), The Chief Executive or the Chair will talk discreetly to the volunteer (and others if necessary) to establish the facts. We aim to resolve the matter quickly.

In the event of a serious complaint or inappropriate behaviour, we may decide on the appropriate action to take, which might include:

- further discussion with the volunteer
- closer supervision
- further training
- a change in role
- suspension or cessation of volunteering
- contacting an outside agency, such as the local authority Safeguarding Manager or the police (in the event of serious misconduct or where a criminal offence is suspected).

The organisation reserves the right to ask a volunteer to leave.

The volunteer will have the right to appeal to a specially convened appeal panel and may be accompanied by a friend, another volunteer or a member of staff. The panel will investigate the facts and decide on an appropriate response. They will inform the volunteer of what action they will take within 14 days of being told about the problem. The decision of the appeal panel will be final.

9. Recognition

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recognises the contribution that volunteers make each year and will, wherever possible, promote the value of our volunteers on our website and through other media. They will be encouraged to be full participants in decision-making and the ongoing implementation of projects that involve them.

10. Expenses

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recognises that volunteering should be accessible to all regardless of income and that volunteers should not be out of pocket for doing their voluntary work. Volunteers are entitled to reimbursement of all reasonable expenses, including travel to and from the office or a meeting, event or other activity undertaken on behalf of the organisation (i.e. the cost of public transport fares or an agreed mileage rate).

Volunteers may claim expenses incurred in the course of their volunteering using an Expense Claim Form. All receipts, other than for mileage, must be submitted. For further information please see Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's **Expenses Policy**.

Any reimbursement for expenses is not a consideration for services and so is not subject to income tax or national insurance, and does not affect a volunteer's welfare benefits in any way.

11. Equality and Diversity

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's **Equality and Diversity Policy** sets out the organisation's commitment to tackle discrimination and promote equality and diversity in all areas of the organisation's work. The policy extends to our volunteers and sets out the way in which volunteers can expect to be treated by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. It also extends to the people our volunteers come into contact with when working for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, and sets out a number of individual responsibilities that our volunteers are required to comply with when volunteering. All volunteers are required to adhere to this policy.

12. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Volunteers may obtain knowledge of a confidential nature about the work of the organisation, or about service users, volunteers, staff, directors, members and partner organisations. There is an absolute obligation to maintain confidentiality in all these matters and not to pass on information to third parties unless required to do so by law.

We regard the lawful and correct treatment of personal information as important to the achievement of our objectives and to maintaining confidence between those with whom we deal and ourselves. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire therefore aims to ensure that we protect the rights of the individual and that no personal information is collected, retained or passed to a third party without their knowledge and consent.

Volunteers are also responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed as a volunteer, whether this information relates to individuals, third party organisations or to the activities of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. Further details are contained in Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's **Data Protection Policy**. All volunteers are required to adhere to this policy.

13. Health & Safety

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has a duty of care to all its volunteers and will ensure that they are made aware of our Health and Safety Policy and of their duty to comply with guidelines for their own, and others' personal safety.

In accordance with the commitments set out in Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's **Health & Safety Policy**, we will provide such equipment, information, instruction, training and support as is necessary to secure the safety and health of all our volunteers and of others who may be affected by their actions, including members of the public.

14. Insurance

Volunteers with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire are fully protected by the organisation's insurance.

If a volunteer sustains an injury whilst they are engaged in voluntary work on Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's behalf and if Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is held to be responsible, then the volunteer will be covered under the terms of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's Employers' Liability insurance policy. However, this Employers' Liability policy will not indemnify against any liability in respect of which compulsory insurance or security is required under the Road Traffic 1988.

Where a volunteer uses their car for volunteering, whether or not they claim for the journey, they must make sure that their car insurer is aware of the circumstances. The volunteer is required to ensure that their insurance covers the use of the vehicle not just for the normal 'social, domestic and pleasure purposes' but also for use by the volunteer when volunteering. Most insurers do not charge any extra premium for volunteers using their cars to assist a charity or community organisation. However, if a volunteer fails to notify their insurer regarding such use then the insurance policy can be invalidated and the driver could be held personally liable for any damage or injuries sustained in an accident.

15. Leaving the Organisation

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recognises that volunteers give their time freely and that their circumstances and availability may alter, resulting in them leaving the organisation. Volunteers have the right to leave at any time; however, to assist with ensuring continuity of service, we would welcome as much notice as possible. The organisation would also welcome informal feedback on the volunteer's experience of working with the organisation.

16. References

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is happy to provide volunteers with references to enable them to undertake other volunteering opportunities or paid employment. This may be during or after their time with the organisation.

17. Monitoring and Review

The effectiveness of this policy, and its procedures, will be monitored and amended as and when necessary by the Chief Executive Officer. Significant changes will require the approval of the Board. The policy will also be reviewed periodically as part of a continuing review of organisational policies.