

Volunteering Policy

1. Introduction

At Healthwatch Sutton, we welcome volunteers to help us undertake our work and we will aim to involve a diverse range of volunteers from across the Borough, who are reflective of the local community.

This Volunteering Policy describes the arrangement between Healthwatch Sutton and the volunteer.

2. Aims of the volunteering policy

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Set out the principles and working practices for volunteer involvement in HWS and ensure that best practice is followed.
- Provide a reference document which will cover all aspects of Healthwatch Sutton's relationship with volunteers for everyone who is concerned with recruiting, supporting, developing and managing volunteers and their expectations and promoting voluntary activities.
- Ensure that volunteer involvement in HWS is understood and accepted by paid staff, volunteers and directors and there is clarity about why we involve volunteers.

3. What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy freely given for the benefit of the community, and can take many forms. It is undertaken by choice, without concern for financial gain.

4. Why Healthwatch Sutton involves volunteers

Volunteers bring a variety of skills and a fresh perspective. They can offer time and passion to a particular project, adding value to our work and supporting our sustainability.

Volunteers have knowledge of their local communities; by involving volunteers, HWS are able to build stronger links with the local community.

Volunteers act as ambassadors, promoting HWS activities and services. This is a unique role, different to that of paid workers, who they do not replace.

HWS expect that staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers and, where appropriate, will actively seek to involve them in their work.

5. Who can volunteer?

HWS has a responsibility to treat all volunteers equally and fairly.

HWS will recruit, support and manage volunteers in line with our [Equality and Diversity Policy](#), to ensure that individuals will not be discriminated against on any grounds including age, disability, race, sex, religion or cultural beliefs, gender reassignment, marital status and civil partnership, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity.

HWS recognises barriers to volunteering for individuals from different sections of the community; social, physical and psychological, and we will monitor our volunteer involvement practices continuously, to ensure that we are inclusive of all sections of our community.

5.1. Young volunteers

HWS will seek to involve children and young people as volunteers, ensuring that we have appropriate safeguarding measures in place as per our [Safeguarding Children Policy](#) and seek parental permission for all volunteers under 16 years.

5.2. Volunteers with a disability

HWS will work positively with volunteers with a disability and will ask all potential volunteers if they require any adjustments to support them in their volunteering role as part of the application process. HWS will make reasonable adjustments to volunteering roles and available support, within currently available resources.

5.3. Volunteers in receipt of benefits

HWS will promote volunteering to individuals on means tested benefits and provide a copy of the Department of Work & Pensions guide [“volunteering while getting benefits”](#) to any volunteer or potential volunteer who informs us that they are in receipt of means tested benefits.

HWS is aware that there may be requirements for volunteers to be available for work; to be free to go for an interview within 48 hours' notice, and to be able to start work within one week of being given notice.

5.4. Volunteer with minor or spent convictions

HWS recognises that many individuals have criminal records with spent or minor convictions and are reluctant to apply for voluntary work where this would involve disclosure of their record. HWS welcomes applications from individuals who may have minor or spent convictions and will promote this as part of the volunteer application process.

5.5. Volunteers from overseas

HWS welcomes volunteers from overseas who have the legal right to undertake voluntary work as part of their immigration status in the UK. HWS recommends that individuals check their right to volunteer with the [UK Border Agency](#), in order not to jeopardise their immigration status.

HWS recognises that not all individuals will have the skills and experience required, nor be eligible for every volunteering role. In these instances, and where we have no other suitable opportunities available, we will signpost individuals to their local volunteer support organisation for additional support.

6. What can people get from volunteering with Healthwatch Sutton?

HWS recognises that volunteering is a two way process; with volunteers giving their time to help and in return gaining some benefits for themselves.

Volunteering with HWS can provide new challenges and help people learn new skills.

Volunteering with HWS can be a stepping stone into employment or training opportunities. HWS will support volunteers on this journey by providing references to those who have completed a volunteering project of volunteered for 20 hours or more.

Volunteering can provide an opportunity to meet new people and be involved with something personally rewarding.

7. Planning for volunteer involvement

HWS recognises the importance of planning volunteer involvement as an integral part of the development of operational activities; acknowledging the requisite investment of staff time and other resources needed.

HWS will seek to develop a range of imaginative volunteering opportunities, both short and long term, and will regularly review these to ensure that it is involving a diverse range of volunteers from across the borough, who are reflective of the local community.

HWS will develop a role description for each volunteering opportunity.

HWS will ensure that volunteers are insured for any planned volunteering activities and will risk assess each role, to plan what training, support and recruitment methodology is required.

HWS will budget to ensure that volunteers receive training, support and out of pocket expenses in line with our [Travel and Expenses Policy](#).

8. Recruitment and selection

HWS will use an open and fair recruitment process for each volunteering role, which will be outlined to potential volunteers in advance.

HWS will promote volunteering opportunities through a variety of advertising methods, to ensure that the opportunity is promoted to a wide range of potential volunteers.

HWS will only ask for the information needed to ensure that someone is suitable for the role they have applied for. All information given by volunteers will be treated confidentially in line with our [Confidentiality Policy](#).

HWS will make reasonable adjustments where possible, to meet the access needs of potential volunteers.

Volunteers will be selected and screened for suitability through one or more of the following methods, dependent on the role:

- Completed application form for all volunteer roles.
- Informal or formal interview, depending on the requirements of the volunteer role.

- References - all volunteers are required to give the names of 2 people who can be approached for personal references. Acceptable referees should have known the potential volunteer for at least 1 year and cannot include family members.
- If the role required regulated activities in relation to Adults at Risk or Children, HWS will ensure that the volunteer has a Disclosure and Barring Service Check, in line with our Safeguarding [Adults](#) and [Children](#) Policies.

If an applicant is not suited to the volunteering role, HWS will explain the reasons to the applicant and direct them to other volunteering opportunities. HWS will make decisions regarding suitability in line with this Policy and organisation's values and strategic direction.

9. Induction, training and ongoing support

HWS will provide an induction and appropriate training for volunteers, relative to their volunteering role, so that they are prepared for the tasks allocated to them e.g. safeguarding, equality and diversity training, confidentiality, health and safety etc.

A volunteer handbook will be provided for new volunteers as part of their induction training, which will include information relative to their volunteering role e.g. volunteer role description, staff contact details, safeguarding contact information, information on claiming volunteer expenses and other useful information.

All volunteers will have a named individual as their main point of contact and will be provided with appropriate support; this could be through one to ones with a staff member or peer support, as appropriate to the role. This will provide volunteers with the opportunity to feedback on the progress of their volunteering role, discuss any personal development needs appropriate to their volunteer or talk about any problems. Volunteers will be offered an opportunity of an annual development review meeting.

HWS will seek to involve volunteers as partners in project development decision making processes, for example through project meetings.

HWS will ensure that volunteers will receive appropriate recognition for their contribution to HWS in the form of thanks for volunteering activities undertaken, for example volunteer certificates and an annual Christmas lunch.

10. Personal safety

All volunteers are expected to follow safe practice guidelines, as described in the Volunteer Handbook.

Volunteers will not be asked to attend meetings at the home of a member of staff or another volunteer, nor will members attend meetings at a volunteer's home.

Members of staff are not to provide transportation for volunteers to events or meetings. Staff will not arrange car sharing for volunteers. Volunteers are not obliged to provide transportation for other volunteers.

Staff will carry out risk assessments, as necessary, for events that volunteers will be supporting.

11. Volunteer expenses

Please refer to the [Travel and Expenses Policy](#).

12. Dealing with problems

HWS aims to make volunteering a positive experience for volunteers and the organisation, but recognises that sometimes, for all sorts of reasons, problems can occur.

HWS will have a clear and fair problem solving process for volunteers to help resolve any issues at the earliest opportunity. This process is only for dealing with concerns around the volunteering relationship; for other concerns or complaints, please refer to the [Complaints Policy](#).

HWS will make reasonable adjustments within the organisation's resources to ensure that volunteers can engage fully in the problem solving process.

Volunteer may bring a support person or advocate to any meeting that forms part of the problem solving process.

HWS recognises that problems can occur on either side of the volunteering relationship.

Problems a volunteer could experience with HWS could include:

- Feeling they are not being given adequate training and support to undertake their volunteering role.
- Feeling they have been asked to do tasks that they do not want to do.
- Feeling they are not being treated fairly by HWS staff or other volunteers.

(This list is not exhaustive)

Problems HWS could experience with a volunteer could include:

- Not doing the tasks HWS has asked them to do, or taking on tasks outside their agreed volunteer role.
- Not following Healthwatch Sutton's policies and guidelines.
- Behaving in a way that falls outside the volunteer's code of conduct.
- Being unreliable and not telling us why.
- Misuse or theft of Healthwatch Sutton's resources.

(This list is not exhaustive)

12.1. Dealing with volunteers' concerns

- **Informal:** HWS will work with volunteers to resolve any concerns that the volunteer has informally through ongoing support outlined in section 9 above. HWS will encourage volunteers to resolve any issues through this informal process in the first instance.
 - If the volunteer's concern is not resolved to their satisfaction through this informal process, or their concern is with the person who provides their one to one support, they can notify the Chief Executive via email, letter or telephone conversation.

- **Formal:** The Chief Executive or their nominated representative should acknowledge the concern in writing (or in the volunteer's preferred method of communication) within 3 working days.
 - The Chief Executive or their nominated representative will offer the volunteer a meeting to listen to their concerns and attempt to resolve them within 15 working days of the meeting. Exceptionally further time will be needed, where possible this will be agreed with the volunteer.
 - If the volunteer wishes, the concerns can be discussed via telephone, letter or email instead of a meeting, but this may extend the period of time for resolution of the issues beyond the 15 working days.
- **Appeal:** If the volunteer does not agree with the outcome of the formal stage, they may raise their concern with the Board of Directors.
 - The Board will acknowledge this appeal within 5 working days by the volunteer's preferred method of communication and offer an appeal meeting to listen to the volunteer's concerns and review the outcome of the decision, to ensure that the organisation's policies and procedures have been followed correctly.
 - The Board will notify the volunteer of their response within 15 working days of this meeting. Exceptionally further time will be needed; this will be agreed with the volunteer in advance where possible.
 - The Board's decision is final.

12.2. Dealing with Healthwatch Sutton's concerns

- **Informal:** HWS will work with volunteers to resolve any concerns informally through ongoing support as detailed in section 9 above.
 - HWS will tell volunteers about any problems regarding their volunteering at the earliest opportunity.
 - HWS will agree with the volunteer how it can support them to move forward in their volunteering role. If appropriate, volunteers will be offered additional training, extra learning time or agree a change in their volunteering role.
 - If the above process does not resolve the problem, HWS will offer the volunteer a formal meeting to discuss this.
 - There are some occasions where HWS will not be able to offer any support or the opportunity for volunteers to change their behaviour or practice; while not a complete list, this may include:
 - Threats, abuse or attacks on any staff, volunteers or members of the public.
 - Breaking HWS policies on safeguarding [children](#) or [adults at risk](#).
 - Criminal acts against HWS such as theft.
 - Any serious breach of the [Volunteer Agreement](#).
- **Formal:** The Chief Executive or their nominated representative will offer the volunteer a meeting to talk through the organisation's concerns with the volunteer. They will explain what the issues are and outline their impact. The Chief Executive will explore with the volunteer if there are any other opportunities to resolve the concerns and notify the volunteer of their decision within 15 working days.
 - If HWS is unable to agree a resolution with the volunteer, the Chief Executive may ask the volunteer to stop volunteering for the organisation.

- HWS will signpost volunteers to the Volunteer Centre Sutton for other opportunities, if the organisation is unable to continue supporting an individual as a volunteer.
- **Appeal:** If the volunteer does not agree with the outcome of the formal stage, they may raise their concern with the Board of Directors.
 - The Board will acknowledge this appeal within 5 working days by the volunteer's preferred method of communication and offer an appeal meeting to listen to the volunteer's concerns and review the outcome of the decision, to ensure that the organisation's policies and procedures have been followed correctly.
 - The Board will notify the volunteer of their response within 15 working days of this meeting. Exceptionally, further time will be needed; this will be agreed with the volunteer in advance where possible.
 - The Board's decision is final.

13. When a volunteer's involvement with Healthwatch Sutton ends

A volunteer's role with HWS may end for a variety of reasons. The volunteering may come to an end at the request of either the volunteer or HWS, for example the volunteer may no longer be able to fulfil the role, they may leave the area, their availability may be too limited, the role may no longer meet the volunteer's needs.

HWS may no longer be able to offer the volunteering role which interests the volunteer, and as detailed above, the volunteering may come to an end as the result of a dispute between the volunteer and HWS.

Whatever the circumstances, HWS will formally acknowledge the end of the volunteering relationship:

- A member of the team will send the volunteer a letter within 15 working days of being notified that their volunteering is ending.
- The letter will acknowledge the time that the volunteer has spent supporting HWS.
- Whenever appropriate, the letter should also thank the volunteer for their support.
- The volunteer will be offered a meeting with a member of staff in order for the organisation to learn from the volunteer's experience of supporting HWS.
- Where appropriate, staff will offer the volunteer reasonable support to find an alternative volunteering role; for example: signposting them to a local volunteer support organisation, a different Healthwatch (if leaving the area), or another local volunteer using organisation.
- If appropriate, the volunteer should be reminded that they can seek references from HWS.
- The conversation should also clarify and whenever possible, facilitate an ongoing relationship the volunteer may wish to have with HWS. For example, the volunteer may wish to continue to be kept informed in which case they should continue to be on appropriate mailing lists (i.e. for newsletters). Otherwise, the volunteer's details should be removed.

- HWS should ensure that all documentation relating to the volunteer is updated with the date the volunteering has ended, and their details removed from any volunteering database/lists.
- Any outstanding expenses will be paid within 14 working days of receipt of a claim being submitted.

HWS staff will ensure that the volunteer:

- Returns all property belonging to HWS which may have been loaned to the volunteer to assist them in their volunteering role, to the office.
- Returns all identity badges to the office.
- Completes and submits any outstanding expenses claim within a month of stopping volunteering, if possible sooner.

Approved by Healthwatch Sutton Board of Directors: 09/03/2020

To be reviewed: 09/03/2023

Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer of Healthwatch Sutton