

Volunteer Handbook

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Other policies and forms to view online at

<https://healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk/volunteers-hub/>

If viewing this document online, click on the policy links listed below:

- [Confidentiality Policy](#)
- [Data Protection Policy](#)
- [Equality and Diversity policy](#)
- [Policy for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults](#)
- [Health & Safety Policy October 2000](#)
- [Policy declaration \(smartsurvey.co.uk\)](#)

If you require a copy of this pack in paper format or large print, please contact us on **03332 408468** or by email at LornaB@healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk

Volunteer Agreement

1 Code of Conduct

As ambassadors for Healthwatch Northumberland, all members of the volunteer team are expected to honour the following principles of conduct and behavior.

Respect

- Treat each other, and anyone else involved with the work of Healthwatch Northumberland, with equal respect, courtesy, sensitivity and dignity
- Have respect for individual and organisational confidentiality
- Behave in a responsible, reasonable and proportionate manner at all times
- Be aware and respectful at all times of the needs of service users, residents and patients you come into contact with
- Communicate appropriately with others with whom you come into contact

Openness and accountability

- Conduct themselves fairly and openly
- Ensure all actions and decisions made on behalf of Healthwatch Northumberland are appropriate to and in the interests of Healthwatch Northumberland
- Always carry a Healthwatch Northumberland Identity Card

Honesty

- Set aside personal views and never attempt to take advantage of your involvement with Healthwatch Northumberland to pursue these
- Declare any private interests or conflicts of interest and take appropriate steps to resolve any conflicts

Best interests and objectivity

- Ensure all activities are in the best interest of Healthwatch Northumberland and the wider community
- Avoid the pursuit of specific issues at the expense of other Healthwatch Northumberland priorities

Integrity

- Do not put themselves under any financial or other obligation to any person or organisation that may attempt to influence any decision or action that is taken by Healthwatch Northumberland
- Comply with all health and safety requirements
- Do not make unreasonable requests or demands
- Dress appropriately for the activity being undertaken

Equality and diversity

- Comply with the Equality Act 2010 at all times

2 Joint Volunteering Commitment

Healthwatch Northumberland aims to:

- ✓ Provide a friendly and supportive atmosphere, where volunteering is rewarding and pleasurable
- ✓ Match the needs of the organisation with the skills, knowledge, experience, time and motivation of the volunteer
- ✓ Ensure that volunteers are properly introduced to the work of Healthwatch Northumberland and that appropriate training is provided
- ✓ Recognise and thank volunteers for the contribution they make
- ✓ Respect volunteers, and listen and learn from what they have to say
- ✓ Encourage and develop good two-way communication
- ✓ Ensure volunteers receive appropriate support and guidance from a named member of the Healthwatch Northumberland team
- ✓ Make sure volunteers know who to talk to if there is a problem



- ✓ Consider the health, safety and welfare of Healthwatch Northumberland volunteers
- ✓ Reimburse volunteer expenses promptly
- ✓ Support volunteers who wish to move on from their volunteer role

In return, we ask volunteers to:

- ✓ Take part in induction and training activities as required
- ✓ Follow Adapt (NE) and Healthwatch Northumberland policies and guidelines
- ✓ Ask for support and guidance when needed
- ✓ Maintain service-user and organisational confidentiality
- ✓ Appreciate that volunteer and service-user relationships can be friendly, caring and supportive but must remain professional at all times
- ✓ Take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others while taking part in agreed volunteer activities
- ✓ Refrain from speaking to the press or media, or publishing information about their volunteer role, unless authorised by Healthwatch Northumberland
- ✓ Advise Healthwatch Northumberland of any concerns or complaints
- ✓ Honour the Healthwatch Northumberland 'Code of Conduct'

Volunteering Policy

Introduction

At Healthwatch Northumberland we are keen to provide every opportunity for members of the public to engage with us and support what we do. Our ability to do this is strengthened by the unique contribution that each volunteer makes to our organisation.

We involve the people of Northumberland in everything we do by seeking their views and experiences of health and social care services provided in the county. Healthwatch Northumberland has an important role to play in ensuring that people using services have their voice heard and, where they identify the need for change, they are listened to.

The activities of our volunteers help us to reach and engage with as many people in Northumberland as we can, giving everyone the chance to have their say no matter where they live or what their circumstances are. We see volunteers as an integral part of the Healthwatch Northumberland team and give them the support they need to ensure that volunteering is a rewarding experience.

This policy sets out the broad principles for volunteering with Healthwatch Northumberland and has been produced in consultation with volunteers and staff.

2 About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Northumberland¹ is the **local** independent champion for people who use health and social care services in the county. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.

¹ * Healthwatch Northumberland is run as a project by Adapt (North East). Adapt (North East) is a registered charity, a company limited by guarantee and a social enterprise, which provides services to people in North East England with the aim of promoting an inclusive society.

We:

- **Listen** to what people like about services or what could be improved.
- We **share people's views** and experiences with the people that have the power to **make change happen**.
- We **help people find** the information they need about **services in their area**.

Healthwatch England is the **national** independent champion for people who use health and social care services, and they support local Healthwatch, including Healthwatch Northumberland, to find out what people want and to advocate for services that meet local communities' needs. Healthwatch England also encourage those running services to involve people in changes to care.

3 Equal opportunities and diversity

We are committed to developing and maintaining an organisation in which differing ideas, abilities, backgrounds and needs are fostered and valued, and where those with diverse backgrounds and experiences are able to participate and contribute.

4 Volunteering for Healthwatch Northumberland

Volunteering is seen as an integral way for Healthwatch to deliver its work by improving inclusivity of people from across local communities, bringing skills, knowledge and experience of services as part of our 'voice' and providing ways for people to be involved in improving services.

Healthwatch Northumberland acknowledges the invaluable contribution volunteers make to our organisation. Our service benefits greatly from the commitment of individuals who give freely of their time, knowledge, skills and experience. Volunteers enhance the diversity and capacity of our organisation; they do not replace the role of paid staff.

4.1 What is a volunteer?

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations defines volunteering as:

“ ... **any activity** that involves spending time, **unpaid**, doing something that **aims to benefit the environment or someone** (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that **volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.**”

Everyone has the right to volunteer, and volunteering can have significant benefits for individuals.

4.2 Volunteer roles at Healthwatch Northumberland

There are a number of ways volunteers can become involved with the work of Healthwatch Northumberland, depending on the skills, experience and time they have to give. Volunteer role descriptions set out the tasks that volunteers will undertake and the approximate time commitment; these are available from Healthwatch Northumberland or can be downloaded from our website.

4.3 Insurance

Adapt (North East) has personal accident and public liability insurance for all staff, volunteers and service users. If a volunteer sustains an injury whilst carrying out voluntary work, they may be eligible for compensation.

There is no upper age limit to volunteering. All volunteers are covered by public liability insurance. However, please note that our personal accident insurance only applies to volunteers up to the age of 80 years. Volunteers over the age of 80 years are no longer covered by our personal accident policy and participate in recognised volunteering activities at their own risk.

If volunteers intend to use their own vehicle while volunteering for Healthwatch Northumberland, they will need to inform their insurance company prior to their start date; the failure of a volunteer to notify their insurance company could invalidate their cover.

4.4 Duty of care

All voluntary and not-for-profit organisations have to undertake a 'Duty of Care', under the Health and Safety at Work Act, to identify risk areas and procedures. The Health and Safety at Work Act affects everyone.

It is considered good practice by the Health Safety Executive to apply the same standards to voluntary workers as to paid staff under the 'Duty of Care'. We advise that volunteers do all that is reasonably practicable to ensure their health and safety, and staff and service users. It is necessary for volunteers to feedback any concerns, however minor, to a member of Healthwatch Northumberland staff.

All volunteers will have access to training via the Assemble platform.

4.5 Confidentiality and data security

All information about service users, volunteers and staff is confidential and should be treated as such. We ask that volunteers refrain from divulging any information gained during the course of their duties to any third party.

This applies to:

1. Adapt NE; or
2. any of our service users; or
3. any of our employees/volunteers.

There is an exception if you need to share this information as part of your job or if you are made to by law.

It is the responsibility of all staff and volunteers to ensure data security. You will be responsible for the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all data which you have access to in the course of your work. You must adhere to our Data Protection Policy and associated policies, which will all be made available to you. Failure to adhere to these policies may result in disciplinary action.

4.6 Expenses

Volunteers will be reimbursed for reasonable out of pocket expenses in accordance with the Healthwatch Northumberland volunteer expenses policy.

4.7 Policies and procedures

Volunteers are required to adhere to Adapt NE's policies and procedures; these are available to view at the office and will be provided at induction. Volunteers will be asked to sign a disclaimer to confirm they have read and agree to adhere to the relevant policies and procedures.

5 Volunteer recruitment

Healthwatch Northumberland recruits volunteers based on their ability to carry out tasks outlined in specific volunteer role descriptions.

The volunteer recruitment process is designed to help Healthwatch Northumberland and the prospective volunteer decide whether a role can be found that matches the needs of the organisation with the skills, experience and time offered by the volunteer.

Healthwatch Northumberland will provide information about our volunteering programme and the roles available. The prospective volunteer will be asked to provide information about the skills, experience and time that they can give. They will also be asked about their own needs, aims and motivations.

5.1 Registration of interest

Anyone interested in volunteering with Healthwatch Northumberland will be able to view volunteering role opportunities on the Healthwatch Northumberland website or through Assemble and apply for them online.

For individuals for whom a written expression of interest may not be appropriate, an initial discussion may be arranged instead.

5.2 Interview

Following application, the prospective volunteer will be invited to meet with an appropriate member of the Healthwatch Northumberland team for an informal interview. This will enable Healthwatch Northumberland to decide if the volunteering role applied for, or another more suitable role, can be offered.

5.3 References

If a suitable volunteer opportunity is identified, the prospective volunteer will be asked to provide details of two people whom Healthwatch Northumberland can approach for references. These must not be relatives and need to have been known to the applicant for at least two years.

5.4 Disclosure and Barring Service check

Healthwatch Northumberland volunteers will be required to undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service check and to sign up to the DBS Update Service where applicable. The level of check will depend on the nature of the volunteer role. The administration charge for the check will be met by Healthwatch Northumberland.

5.5 Identity card

At the end of the recruitment and selection process, volunteers will be issued with a Healthwatch Northumberland identity card. This card should be worn at all times when taking part in activities as a Healthwatch Northumberland volunteer.

6 Induction and training

All new volunteers with Healthwatch Northumberland will be made to feel welcome and will be provided with the relevant information, induction and training appropriate to their role.

6.1 Induction

Volunteers will be taken through an induction process to ensure that they understand the role of Healthwatch Northumberland and how volunteers are involved; have access to relevant policies and procedures; and are aware of the support available. Volunteers will be provided with any information they need to undertake the identified volunteer role.

6.2 Training

Healthwatch Northumberland volunteers will be given the training they need to undertake the role and tasks they will be involved in. The training

each volunteer needs will be identified through the induction process and support sessions.

7 Support and guidance

Healthwatch Northumberland strives to support its volunteers in a way that helps them to carry out their role to the best of their ability. Volunteers will receive support and guidance from a named member of the Healthwatch Northumberland team. This will enable the volunteer and named support to review activity undertaken by the volunteer and to identify any support and training needs.

Annual volunteer review sessions are organised by the Volunteer Officer. These provide an opportunity for Healthwatch Northumberland volunteers to review and reflect on their volunteering experience.

Volunteers are invited to take part in Healthwatch Northumberland's Annual Team Survey. The feedback from the survey is used to improve practice and make things better for everyone.

8 Communication and feedback

Healthwatch Northumberland believes strongly that good communication is essential. The type and frequency of communication will vary depending on the volunteer role. The Engagement and Volunteer Officer sends regular updates to all volunteers through the Assemble newsfeed and Healthwatch Northumberland produces a Supporters Newsletter that volunteers can subscribe to.

We welcome feedback and suggestions about how we can do things better and we provide a range of different ways for volunteers to communicate their thoughts and ideas to us.

9 Dealing with problems

Healthwatch Northumberland aims to foster a friendly environment where volunteers feel valued and supported, and where two-way communication is encouraged. We recognise that on occasion volunteers may need to raise concerns or complaints; such issues should be discussed with the volunteer's named support in the first instance. If this is not appropriate, then the volunteer should discuss the issue with the Volunteer Officer.

Healthwatch Northumberland has a Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure to help support volunteers with any issues that cannot be resolved informally. This

procedure covers the way concerns or complaints raised by the volunteer, and any concerns Healthwatch Northumberland may have with the performance of the volunteer, will be dealt with.

10 Moving on

Healthwatch Northumberland recognises that volunteers may cease their involvement with us at any time and for a variety of reasons. Exit interviews may be carried out to discuss the reasons the volunteer is moving on and to find out if they might wish to be involved again in future.

11 Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Healthwatch Northumberland Board to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Healthwatch Northumberland and its volunteers.

Agreed May 2025

Review May 2026



Volunteer Passport Handbook

Welcome to the Volunteer Passport Portal

The Volunteer Passport has been designed to help recognise and celebrate the incredible value you bring to volunteering in Northumberland.

The Volunteer Passport will help you to:

- **Develop key skills** in customer care, communication, digital proficiency, teamwork, and promoting equality and diversity.
- **Build connections** with like-minded individuals and organisations dedicated to making a difference.
- **Showcase your achievements** by documenting your contributions and skills, creating a record of your volunteer journey that can open doors to future opportunities.

Together, we can strengthen our communities, support those in need, and create a Northumberland where everyone can thrive.

Thank you for being a part of this initiative. We look forward to working with you and celebrating your successes!

Why do we engage with Volunteers?

- Volunteers allow organisations to achieve more than they could with paid staff alone.

- Volunteering connects people with causes that matter to them
- Volunteers come from all walks of life, contributing unique talents, expertise, and fresh ideas to enhance the organisation's work.
- Volunteers help spread awareness of organisations within their personal networks and beyond.
- By contributing their time and efforts, volunteers reduce costs and free up resources, allowing the organisation to allocate more funding to core activities.
- Engaging with volunteers creates opportunities for building skills, leadership development and personal fulfilment, which benefits both the volunteer and the organisation.
- Volunteers inspire others to contribute and create a ripple effect of goodwill and collective action.

Mission Statement

The Volunteer Passport seeks to empower individuals by recognising and celebrating their contributions to community service and volunteering. Our mission is to:

1. **Promote lifelong volunteering:** Inspire and support a culture of giving back by providing a record of volunteer achievements.
2. **Promote skill development:** Highlight the valuable skills and experiences gained through volunteering, enhancing personal and professional growth.
3. **Strengthen community connections:** Build bridges between organisations and individuals with a shared interest in making a positive impact.
4. **Open doors to new opportunities for volunteers.**

Through the Volunteer Passport, we aim to celebrate the spirit of volunteering and empower volunteers to create meaningful change in their communities.

Vision Statement

We envisage a county where every volunteer's dedication is recognised, valued, and celebrated. The Volunteer Passport aims to become a county standard for honouring volunteer contributions, enabling individuals to showcase their skills, experiences and impact.

The Volunteer Passport will empower people to connect with opportunities, inspire lifelong volunteering, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

Your volunteering key information

Your involvement as a volunteer is highly valued and we want each volunteer to develop new skills, gain valuable experiences, and grow personally and professionally.

Within Northumberland we are working with various organisations that offer volunteering opportunities in areas such as retail, care, health and community development.

You will receive log-in details to access the volunteer platform called 'Assemble'. The Assemble platform allows you to view all volunteering opportunities and sign up.

We encourage you to explore these opportunities and get involved in activities which match your interests and availability. Your participation helps us to create a stronger, more vibrant community together.



ASSEMBLE

Please try again.

Welcome back.
Sign in with your email

Please enter your email address

eg. "john@organisation.com"

Next

Volunteer understanding

The volunteer understanding is a non-contractual agreement, but we do ask that volunteers accept this with our ethos in mind. Your commitment is key.

Feedback

As more individuals engage with the project, we value your feedback. There's much we can learn from one another, and kindness towards each other makes everything work better.

Your volunteer page

We use a bespoke platform called 'Assemble' to record volunteer information from the point of application right through your journey as a volunteer.

Find your volunteer record here: <https://app.goassemble.com/auth/login>

Important note: This is your personal volunteer profile to manage, and we ask that you keep your information up to date e.g. contact details, emergency contact, photograph, additional information. Please take time to regularly check that your details are complete and up to date.

Please get in touch if you would like someone to show you how to get the most from your volunteer page. Just email:

admin@thrivingtogethernorthumberland.org.uk or telephone 01670 618 020. You could also ask your volunteering contact.

The Assemble App

You can log into your volunteer page from your mobile using the Assemble Mobile App. To download the Assemble App, go to your app store, search for 'Assemble for Volunteers' and download the app.



Welcome back.
Sign in with your email

Please enter your email address

e.g. "john@organisation.com"

Next

[Have a signup code?](#)

Training

As a volunteer, we have a duty of care to support and protect you in your role. It is important that all volunteers complete the following online training modules—regardless of their specific role—unless equivalent training is already provided by your volunteer organisation.

- Health and Safety
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Safeguarding
- Equality and Diversity

These modules are crucial for ensuring your safety, wellbeing and effectiveness. You can revisit and review these modules at any time to refresh your knowledge. We recommend revisiting the training at least every 12 months.

The training modules listed above can be accessed by visiting the Northumberland County Council Learning Pool:

<https://ncc.learningpool.com/login/> or you can complete the Training that the Organisation you are volunteering with.

If you do not have an existing account, you can create one by selecting 'Create new account' at the foot of the page. Select 'Search Courses' at the top of the page.

By volunteering, you will not only make a meaningful impact but also build a portfolio of transferable skills to support your personal and professional growth.



Roles and responsibilities

Task	Thriving Together	Organisation	Volunteers	Assemble
Setting up Role profiles	✓	✓		
Create non-volunteer role profiles	✓			
Add new volunteers		✓		
Adding user personal details		✓	✓	
Creating Accounts	✓			✓
Adding rotas	✓	✓		
Assigning volunteers to rotas	✓	✓	✓	
Chasing up references	✓			✓
Manage team structures	✓			✓
Manage Activity categories	✓	✓		✓
Manage recognition certificates	✓	✓		
Manage skills and interests	✓	✓	✓	
Create and manage opportunities	✓	✓		
Create Events / Manage Attendees	✓	✓		

View Events	✓	✓	✓	
Add / View notes and touchpoints	✓	✓		
Add / View Private notes and touchpoints	✓			
Start leaving process	✓	✓	✓	
View and manage folders in the hub	✓	✓		
Send messages	✓	✓	✓	
View and manage news articles	✓	✓		
View reports	✓	✓		
Enter expense claims	✓	✓	✓	
Approving expense claims	✓	✓		

Volunteer Chain of Contact

There may be times when you need additional information or support.
Please use this flow chart to help you work out who you need to contact.



Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

1. What are my responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding adults?

- **To know** the name of your Designated Safeguarding Lead and how to contact them
- **To respond** appropriately to a vulnerable person
- **To report** to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or directly to Onecall if that is not possible
- **To record** your concerns - 'Don't do nothing'

2. What do I do if I hear or see something that worries me?

- Tell the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- If that is not possible, telephone Onecall
- In an emergency call 999 for the police

3. Can I go to find someone else to listen?

- No. You should never stop a vulnerable person who is freely recalling significant events.

4. Can I promise to keep a secret?

- No! The information becomes your responsibility to share in order to protect. You have a duty of care towards a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

5. Can I ask questions?

- No! Nor can you make judgements or say anything about the alleged abuser; it may be construed as contriving responses.
- You **can** ask them to repeat a statement.

6. Do I need to write down what was said?

- **Yes**, as soon as possible, exactly what was said and make sure you date and sign the record.



Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure

1 Introduction

Occasionally problems can arise when someone is volunteering. The problem might be as a result of a complaint or issue raised by a volunteer, or it might be in relation to a complaint or issue raised about a volunteer. The aim of this policy is to help deal with any problems relating to volunteer involvement in a fair and timely way.

All issues will be treated in confidence and should only be discussed by those directly involved in trying to resolve the issue. Volunteers have the right to be accompanied by a colleague, friend or representative in any meetings that form part of the problem-solving process.

It is expected that volunteers will raise any problems in a timely manner, usually within 30 days of an incident occurring. Issues raised after 30 days will not usually be taken forward.

2 Dealing with problems raised by a volunteer

Stage 1: dealing with problems informally

All problems, whether concerning a member of staff, the organisation or another volunteer, should be discussed with the volunteer informally in the first instance. This will normally be done in a meeting with the volunteer's named support. Where an issue relates to the named support, the volunteer should ask to speak with the Volunteer Officer.

Stage 2: dealing with problems formally

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 1, they should make a complaint in writing to the Healthwatch Northumberland Project Coordinator within 10 working days. Healthwatch Northumberland will respond to the formal complaint within 10 working days from receiving it.

Stage 3: appeals

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, they can appeal to the Chair of Healthwatch Northumberland in writing within 10 working days of notification of the outcome of Stage 2. The Chair will consider the complaint and respond to the volunteer within 10 working days. The decision made at this stage is final and there is no further right to appeal.

3 Procedure for dealing with poor volunteer performance and/or inappropriate behaviour

Healthwatch Northumberland aims to foster a friendly environment where volunteers feel valued and supported, and where two-way communication is encouraged. We recognise that there may be occasions when volunteers stray from the Healthwatch Northumberland 'Code of Conduct' or fail to perform the volunteering activities as described in the Volunteer Role Description.

Concern about a volunteer's performance will be raised by the volunteer's named support and additional support may be offered in one or more of the following ways:

1. Refresher training on policies and procedures
2. Revisit the volunteer role description
3. Additional training, if required
4. Consideration of other more suitable volunteer roles

Performance will be monitored and reviewed by the volunteer's named support.

When concerns about a volunteer's performance and/or behaviour fail to be resolved by the procedure outlined above, Healthwatch Northumberland will consider ending a volunteering placement. If this decision is reached, Healthwatch Northumberland will inform the volunteer face-to-face as part of an exit meeting. We appreciate that this may be a difficult situation for the volunteer, who will be offered the opportunity to be accompanied by someone to the meeting.

4 Serious concerns and formal complaints

A volunteer placement may be ended without warning if Healthwatch Northumberland believes that there is sufficient cause, such as when behavior is too inappropriate or harmful, or when confidentiality has been breached.

If a formal complaint is received about a volunteer, Healthwatch Northumberland's Project Coordinator will deal with this in line with the Adapt (NE) 'Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy'.

6 Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Volunteer Officer to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Healthwatch Northumberland and its volunteers.

Volunteer Expenses Policy

1 Introduction

As part of Healthwatch Northumberland's commitment to ensuring equity of access to our volunteering opportunities, out-of-pocket expenses that are incurred while undertaking a volunteering role with us will be paid.

- Expenses must be approved in advance by a member of staff and claimed via the Assemble Expenses function.
- Claims will only be paid for actual expenses incurred, as evidenced by receipts.
- Expenses claims should be submitted at the end of each month and will be reimbursed by the end of the following month by BACS transfer, for which volunteers are asked to provide bank details.

2 What can be claimed?

2.1 Travel

Wherever possible, volunteers will choose the most cost-effective method of travel to volunteering activities. Where a volunteer uses their own vehicle, they will confirm that it is taxed, has an MOT, if appropriate, is insured and that the insurance company is aware they are using the vehicle to carry out volunteering activity. This will be evidenced by a signature on the Volunteer Expenses Claim Form.

Mileage is payable in line with HMRC guidance, currently at 45p per mile. Car parking and public transport costs will be refunded where a volunteer has incurred costs – receipts should be submitted along with the relevant expenses claim form. The use of a taxi will be by prior arrangement only.

2.2 Refreshments

Where a volunteer is attending a function over three hours, and no refreshments are provided, a refreshment allowance of £2 is claimable.

Where a volunteer is attending a function over four hours, a lunch allowance of £5 is claimable.

2.3 Online/remote working

Online or remote working may mean volunteers use their own phone to speak to members of the community. Where volunteers incur charges above their personal home telephone package, we will reimburse calls at 10p per minute.

Where a volunteer uses home broadband for the benefit of Healthwatch Northumberland, if the broadband usage is part of their package they should not incur any additional charges. A volunteer should speak to the Volunteer Officer if they expect to incur charges because of their volunteering activities.

3 Claiming benefits

If volunteers get more than out-of-pocket expenses, they will be treated as being in paid work. This may impact upon tax status and benefits that are being claimed. This also applies to payments in kind.

We reimburse out-of-pocket expenses incurred in order to volunteer, e.g. travel costs. We collect receipts and reimburse exactly what has been spent. This means that if needed, a volunteer could demonstrate to a benefits adviser that any money received from Healthwatch Northumberland was a reimbursement and not a payment.

4 Exceptional circumstances

As part of our commitment to inclusivity, where a volunteer has additional support needs that may prevent them from volunteering, we will seek to address these where possible and reasonable to do so.

Requests for expenses not covered by this document should be made to the Project Lead in advance of incurring the cost and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

5 Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Volunteer Officer to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Healthwatch Northumberland and its volunteers.

Protocol for attending the Healthwatch Northumberland Board meeting as a volunteer

Background

At Healthwatch Northumberland we are keen to provide every opportunity for members of the public to engage with us and support what we do. Our ability to do this is strengthened by the unique contribution that volunteering with us makes to our organisation. Volunteers are an integral part of the Healthwatch Northumberland team, and we want to ensure that volunteering is a rewarding experience and includes opportunities to experience our decision making processes.

This protocol sets out the ways in which our volunteers with can attend Healthwatch Northumberland Board meetings.

1. Volunteering policies and procedures

This protocol is part of the policies and procedures set out in the Volunteering Handbook and is subject to undertakings in the Volunteer Agreement.

2. Healthwatch Northumberland Board

The Healthwatch Northumberland Board sets the overall strategy for Healthwatch Northumberland to achieve its statutory functions. It sets and monitors an annual Operational Plan of activities.

The board has no formal responsibilities outside of this. Members are not trustees. All legal and contractual responsibilities, including employment are held by Adapt North East. The Chair of the Healthwatch Northumberland Board reports on its achievements and progress to the Adapt North East Board.

The Healthwatch Northumberland Board has individual members and organisational representative members. Neither staff or volunteers are members of the board.

3. Attending Healthwatch Northumberland Board meetings

Any volunteer can attend Healthwatch Northumberland Board meetings. Dates are published in advance. Minutes of previous meetings are available on the website and the agenda and supporting papers are distributed a week before each meeting.

To attend, a volunteer should inform the Project Coordinator who will then arrange for the relevant papers to be sent on.

Meetings are held in different locations in the county. Expenses can be claimed on the same basis as other volunteering activities as set out in the Volunteer Expenses Policy.

Due to venue limitations, it may occasionally be necessary to limit the number of volunteers who attend a meeting.

4. Principles

The principles of volunteers attending Healthwatch Northumberland Board meetings are:

- Any volunteer attends as an individual. They are not representing the volunteer group.
- The purpose of attending a Board meeting will be to gain an insight into the work of Healthwatch Northumberland which might not come through other volunteering activities and to share relevant knowledge or experience.
- The Volunteer Code of Conduct must be observed.
- A volunteer may be asked by the Chair to give their views on topics under discussion. This should be the individual's view based on their experience of health and social care in Northumberland or their experience of volunteering with Healthwatch Northumberland. Volunteers are unable to vote on any issue.

- Attendance cannot be used to raise concerns or issues that should be raised using the informal process in the Volunteering Policy or the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure.
- The Chair can ask volunteers to withdraw from the meeting if there are sensitive individual or contractual issues being discussed. These would normally be apparent from the agenda but may emerge during a meeting.
- Volunteers may share insights with other volunteers but are not required to make a report to the wider volunteer group. Any reports must be factual, without judgement, not breach confidentiality or conflict with the published minutes.

5. Becoming a board member

A volunteer can apply to be a Healthwatch Northumberland Board member. Individual members are recruited through an open advertised process. If accepted the volunteer would sit as a board member and would be subject to the Board Member agreement and not this protocol. Such a Board member would not be a representative of volunteer group.

Version 2

Date approved December 2023