

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 Northumberland

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. We:

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

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.

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'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 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 HWN's 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 HWN 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 HWN Board to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Healthwatch Northumberland and its volunteers.

Agreed January 2026

Review January 2027