

Equal Opportunities Statement and Policy

Effective Date: 22 October 2018

Review Date: October 2023*

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This policy is written for all staff and volunteers employed by Healthwatch Reading and includes all those working for Reading Voice, which is managed by Healthwatch Reading.

Statement

Healthwatch has five core values the first of which is Inclusive; we start with people first; we work for children, young people and adults; we cover all health and social care services; and we work for everyone, especially those whose voices often go unheard. Healthwatch will engage with its local population, embed itself in its local community and promote good and fair working practices. Therefore, Healthwatch Reading will not accept any form of discrimination in carrying out its work. It will seek to ensure that no-one receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of age, race, gender, disability, sexuality, marital status, ethnicity or religious belief in both the recruitment and employment of staff and volunteers, and in the delivery of its services.

Introduction

This policy aims to outline Healthwatch Reading's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and equal treatment for staff, trustees, and service users in terms of employment and access to services; and to provide guidance on anti-discriminatory practice. This policy is non-contractual.

Scope

The policy applies to employees directly employed by Healthwatch Reading, to workers employed via agencies, contractors in terms of employment, trustees, and service users in terms of service provision. The policy applies specifically to discrimination and equality of opportunity in respect of 'protected characteristics' as defined in the Equalities Act 2010:

- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Sex
- Religion or cultural beliefs
- Gender reassignment
- Marital status and civil partnership
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity

The policy applies across the range of employment policies and practice, including those relating to Discipline, Grievance, Harassment, Expulsion and Complaints.

Responsibilities

Healthwatch Reading values its staff, volunteers, contractors, trustees and service users, and expects them to be treated in a respectful manner. Accordingly, all have a

responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect. The chief executive is responsible for providing advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues, and to ensure the policy document is kept up to date.

Aims

Healthwatch Reading is committed to valuing diversity and working with equality as a core value, Healthwatch Reading aims to:

- Promote equality of opportunity
- Celebrate and value diversity
- Eliminate unlawful direct and indirect discrimination

Healthwatch Reading will provide equality of opportunity and equal treatment as an integral part of good practice. The organisation is committed to a working environment in which the contribution and needs of everyone are fully valued and recognised. We will support our staff, workers, trustees and contractors in not tolerating any inappropriate, violent or abusive behaviour from colleagues, other organisations or service users.

General purpose

Healthwatch Reading's practices will ensure that staff, volunteers, Directors, and service users 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.

Healthwatch Reading's commitment to anti-discriminatory practice relates to all kinds of discrimination, as set out below:

- Direct discrimination - where someone is treated less favourably than another because they have a protected characteristic
- Indirect discrimination - when a requirement or a condition is applied which has a detrimental effect on a particular group or individual. This applies even if there was not a deliberate intention to discriminate.
- Associative discrimination - direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who has a protected characteristic.
- Perceptive discrimination - direct discrimination against someone because others think they have a protected characteristic even if they do not possess that characteristic.
- Harassment - unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic, which violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. This applies even if the conduct is not directed at the individual or if they do not have the protected characteristic.
- Third party harassment - potential liability for the harassment of staff by others such as contractors or service users.
- Victimisation - when someone is treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint under the Equalities Act or it is thought that they have done so.

Healthwatch Reading Service Provision

In developing its products, support materials or other services Healthwatch Reading will seek to ensure access to its service users. This will include, wherever practicable, making specific access arrangements for its service users with disabilities or learning difficulties, or any other protected characteristic which may apply, such as religion and belief. Healthwatch Reading will attempt to ensure that none of its policies discriminate directly or indirectly against any group or individual.

Healthwatch Reading aims to deliver services throughout Reading for the whole population and every service user will be treated in a professional manner, with courtesy and respect. Users of our services and those who take part in our activities will be informed that Healthwatch Reading is committed to an Equality and Diversity Policy, so that:

- They will know a policy exists and a copy is available to guide all members of the organisation and others to share the commitment and code of practice of equality and diversity.
- All who meet Healthwatch Reading will know the standards that we are trying to achieve and can assist us in trying to achieve them.
- They will know they have the right to complain; if they feel these standards are not being adhered to or are dissatisfied with the service provided to them.

Healthwatch Reading will make sure that our services meet the needs of our diverse communities by continuing to involve communities in identifying their needs and by seeking to meet these needs.

Healthwatch Reading will develop services to be inclusive, focusing on particularly those groups facing disadvantage and discrimination. We will do this by:

- Providing information in plain English and use methods other than written documents to present information as appropriate,
- Offering information in accessible formats, including spoken community languages, large print and on the internet,
- Access interpretation, translation and sign language services as Appropriate where funding allows, Public spaces will show images and provide literature that reflects the diversity of the community, e.g. ethnicity, sexuality etc.

Employment Practices - Recruitment and Selection

Healthwatch Reading aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer and to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable in the context of the policy. Selection, recruitment, training, promotion and employment practices will be subject to regular review to ensure that they comply with the Equal Opportunities Policy. All training opportunities will be published widely to all appropriate employees and not in such a way so as to exclude particular groups. Healthwatch Reading regards discrimination, abuse, harassment, victimisation or bullying of staff, service users or others during work as disciplinary offences that could be regarded as gross misconduct.

Healthwatch Reading believes that harnessing the differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where the talents of people are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met. Healthwatch Reading will ensure that recruitment practices fulfil the requirement of the equality and diversity policy. That:

- Vacancies will be advertised in line with Healthwatch Reading policy and applications from people from different communities will be encouraged.
- Applicants complete a monitoring form, and data is analysed on a regular basis so any imbalances can be recognised and addressed.
- Staff are only appointed based on a proper match between their skills and experience and the essential stated requirements of the job.

Ensuring good practice in staff and volunteer terms and conditions of employment/volunteering and other related policies and procedures.

Ensuring all staff are encouraged to reach their full potential in their posts, having fair access to learning and development opportunities both during induction and in ongoing employment. Staff training needs with regard to equal opportunities issues e.g. challenging discriminatory behaviour, ageism etc, will be identified and met.

Ensuring a culture and working environment free from discrimination and harassment and acting swiftly if these are compromised in any way within Healthwatch Reading.

Providing a safe and accessible working/volunteering environment. In line with the Disability Discrimination Act. Healthwatch Reading will make all reasonable changes to workplaces to accommodate the appointment, promotion or redeployment of staff with specific requirements and accommodate volunteers where appropriate support/access is available.

Developing flexible working practices harnessing optimum work-life balance in line with the satisfactory running of the organisation.

All recruitment adverts will carry the statement “Healthwatch Reading is an Equal Opportunities and Diversity employer and welcomes candidates from all sections of the community.”

Commitment to volunteers (including trustees and Board members)

Healthwatch Reading is committed to equality of opportunity and diversity for volunteers by:

- Seeking to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds in an open and fair way.
- Seeking to recruit trustees from diverse backgrounds in as open a way as possible.
- Monitoring and reviewing the diversity of volunteers/trustees.
- Supporting volunteers to ensure they have a positive experience with Healthwatch Reading
- Including diversity and equality issues in volunteer induction and training
- Reimbursing reasonable out-of-pocket expenses
- Dealing with complaints concerning volunteers/trustees’ conduct or allegations of mistreatment by Healthwatch Reading, (including alleged discrimination), by the use of the complaints procedure. Issues of gross misconduct apply to trustees and volunteers.

Training and Development

The Board of trustees, staff and volunteers need to recognise and fulfil their personal role in making Healthwatch Reading a genuinely inviting and inclusive organisation. Healthwatch Reading will ensure that all trustees staff and volunteers know about the

equality and diversity policy and their responsibilities within it, by providing continuing communications and training to achieve this.

Conditions of Service

All members of the Board of trustees, staff and volunteers will be required to adhere to the equality and diversity Policy.

Review our recruitment procedures and employment terms and conditions periodically to ensure that they fully implement this policy.

Monitoring Service Provision

Healthwatch Reading will continue to monitor the take up of its service provision: this will enable Healthwatch Reading to know whether its service provision is adequately meeting the needs of the diverse population of the borough. Monitoring will include ethnic background, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith and religious beliefs and disability. The Annual Report will include a summary and analysis of this monitoring data.

Responsibilities

The Board of trustees has the ultimate responsibility to ensure, implement and review the policy. It is the responsibility of trustees, staff and volunteers to promote the policy by ensuring that Healthwatch Reading activities promote equality and diversity.

Healthwatch Reading will take steps to ensure material is not displayed, which offends against the principals of this policy.

Responsibilities of the chief executive

The chief executive holds the day to day responsibility for ensuring that the policy is implemented. The chief executive will be responsible for providing an annual report to the Board of trustees on the progress of the policy. The chief executive will also be responsible for producing an equality and diversity Action Plan to show how we will be implementing this policy. The equality and diversity Action Plan will be updated every 4 years to reflect changes in the action planned and the wishes of communities following the collation of feedback and the monitoring of data.

Data Collection

Healthwatch Reading complies with the requirement of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. Any data, either qualitative and or quantitative, required to monitor the requirements or the impact of the Equalities Act 2010, will be collected where it is reasonable, proportionate and practical to do so. Any such requirements will be notified to Healthwatch Reading service users and will follow a common data format.

This policy was revised and adopted by Healthwatch Reading Trustees on 22nd October 2018.

Signed

Name

Designation

* This policy may be revised sooner if there is a change in working premises, conditions or laws directly affecting this policy.