

Volunteering Policy

Purpose

This document outlines Healthwatch Reading's policy on working with volunteers. The policy provides guidance to both staff and volunteers recruited by Healthwatch Reading, to ensure a high standard of volunteering experience. This policy does not apply to a person volunteering as a Healthwatch Reading trustee, for which there are separate policies.

Principles of Involving Volunteers

Healthwatch Reading (HWR) values the contribution of volunteers. Working with volunteers increases HWR's contact and involvement with the local community. It is our intention that all HWR volunteers will be supported, respected and valued. We aim to provide a volunteering experience where both the organisation and volunteer benefit. These principles reflect this commitment:

- We use a best-practice recruitment and selection process for our volunteers.
- We invest in our volunteers by providing an induction and relevant training, depending on training availability and the needs of the volunteer.
- We provide opportunities to help volunteers develop and acquire new skills.
- We expect that staff at all levels will work positively with volunteers.
- We encourage the involvement of volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds so that our service is representative of the community in Reading and we are able to respond more effectively to local people.

Our key commitments to volunteers

Healthwatch Reading will ensure that every volunteer is:

- Supported by a named HWR member of staff.
- Given a role description and signs a volunteer agreement.
- Given a copy of relevant policies and procedures.
- Provided with an induction programme, depending on their role and previous experience.
- Provided with support in their volunteering role, depending on their role and experience.
- Offered training and development opportunities as and when they are available.
- Reimbursed for local travel expenses and a contribution towards lunch costs if their volunteering session is over four hours.

We will also ensure that:

- We are committed to equal opportunity and work to reduce barriers to volunteering.
- Our staff treat volunteers with respect and courtesy.
- Our staff and trustees recognise volunteer's contribution to HWR.

Volunteer Recruitment & Selection

Healthwatch Reading (HWR) aim to ensure that the recruitment process is as inclusive and accessible as possible. We will promote and advertise HWR volunteering opportunities using a range of channels e.g. information in public venues, RVA website, at events, in the local media, social media and via local businesses. The nature of the volunteering opportunity will be taken into account when deciding on the best way to advertise a volunteering opportunity.

All prospective volunteers will be given a task description stating the requirements for the role including skills and experience. They will be provided with an opportunity to discuss the position informally. The formal interview will be conducted by the responsible manager and focus on what they would like to do, what skills they offer, their suitability and how best their skills may be used. Volunteers will be subject to a four week trial period.

Support and Supervision

Volunteers will have a named member of staff as their direct supervisor. They will be provided with one-to-one supervision sessions to feedback on progress, discuss future development and air any problems. Volunteers are encouraged to express their views about matters concerning the organisation. HWR aims to identify and solve problems at the earliest possible stage and build on good practice.

Induction, training and supervision of volunteer

All volunteers will receive an induction from HWR staff. This will be delivered on a 1:1 or group basis, depending on the volunteer role, the needs of the individual volunteer and the availability of HWR staff. The induction will ensure that the volunteer has a clear understanding of their role, HWR's expectations of the role and that they feel welcome. The induction process is detailed in HWR Volunteers procedures file.

Volunteers will be offered support and supervision based on the role and their individual needs. The support and supervision process is detailed in the HWR Volunteers procedures file.

RVA Policies and Procedures

Volunteers with HWR are expected to adhere to the Policies and Procedures of the organisation. It is the responsibility of each volunteer's supervisor to ensure that all policies and procedures are read and understood by the volunteers.

Equal Opportunities/Diversity

We pursue equality and fairness in the recruitment of our volunteers and work hard to ensure that no person is discriminated against on the grounds of their gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital status, race, ethnic origin, colour, nationality, disability, religion, belief or age. We monitor our volunteer participation to ensure that our volunteers are broadly representative of the local communities we serve and to ensure that we meet these aims.

Disclosure & Barring (DBS) checks

Volunteers recruited by HWR may need to have a DBS check. This would depend on their volunteering role and if that role involves the volunteer having contact with children, young people or adults in vulnerable situations. HWR volunteer's roles are assessed by the HWR Safeguarding Lead to determine if a DBS check is required.

Expenses

Healthwatch Reading (HWR) are committed to ensuring our volunteers are not out-of-pocket due to travel costs associated with their volunteering activity. HWR will reimburse local travel expenses and will contribute towards lunch costs if the volunteering session is over four hours. These will all be paid on the production of a valid receipt.

Health & Safety

Healthwatch Reading have a duty to look after the safety and wellbeing of our volunteers. This means that HWR will ensure that appropriate precautions are put in place to control and manage any significant risks e.g. relevant training sessions and support sessions.

As with HWR staff, HWR volunteers must take reasonable care for their own health and safety and the health and safety of others who may be affected by what they do, or omit to do, while volunteering.

Volunteers must also comply with HWR's health and safety policy. This policy is explained during volunteer inductions.

Insurance

HWR volunteers are covered by HWR's public and employer's liability insurance whilst undertaking their volunteering role. Volunteers using their car in their role are expected to have appropriate car insurance.

Safeguarding

All volunteers will receive information about safeguarding vulnerable adults and children, in the volunteer's handbook and in their induction. Volunteers in certain roles may receive additional safeguarding training, as determined by the HWR safeguarding lead. All volunteers will be expected to comply with HWR's safeguarding policy.

Confidentiality & Data Protection

All data regarding a volunteer will be kept in line with HWR's data protection policy. All volunteers will be expected to comply with the HWR data protection policy. This policy will be explained during volunteer's induction.

Problem Solving Procedure and Complaints

If a volunteer is not happy with any aspect of their involvement with HWR, they should first discuss the matter with their supervisor. The supervisor will in all cases try to resolve the matter in the most appropriate manner. It may be necessary to tackle a grievance in a more formal way in which case the disciplinary and grievance policy will be used.

All volunteers are expected to adhere to the policies and uphold the aims of HWR, and as its representatives behave in an appropriate manner. If a volunteer behaves, or is suspected to have behaved in a manner likely to cause offence or bring HWR into disrepute, the volunteer's supervisor will discuss the matter with the volunteer and the disciplinary and grievance policy may be implemented. The CEO has the authority to prevent any individual from volunteering with HWR, although any such decision will be made on objective criteria and within the principles and practices of HWRs Equal Opportunities Policy.

HWR aims to provide a volunteering environment that is enjoyable and rewarding. It welcomes feedback from volunteers on the quality of the volunteering experience it offers.

Reference Requests

HWR values the benefits that volunteering can bring in terms of developing a volunteer's skills and employability. HWR staff are happy to provide a reference for our volunteers. In order to give an accurate and meaningful reference, HWR require a volunteer to have worked with us for a minimum of 20 hours, to allow staff to gain a measure of the volunteers' skills, knowledge and personal qualities.