

# Healthwatch Newham Equal Opportunities Policy

## Background

Healthwatch Newham is an independent charity for health and social care. We run events, projects and activities to gather local people's views, experiences, comments or concerns about health and social care services in Newham. By getting out and about in the community, we aim to reach a wider section of the community to ensure their voices are heard. The information we collect is then shared with local decision makers to ensure services meet the needs of the people who use them.

Volunteers are central to the work we do and are grateful for their commitment and dedication to support our work. As local residents, students and members of local communities, volunteers can provide an invaluable insight into local needs, issues and how health and social care services are delivered.

## The organisation aims to:

- Encourage equality and diversity in the workplace as they are good practice and make business sense.
- Provide a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and an environment in which the contributions of all staff and volunteers are recognised and valued.

## This policy applies to all volunteers.

We aim to ensure that no user of **Healthwatch Newham** receives less favourable treatment due to a protected characteristic as defined in the Equality Act 2010 (i.e. age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation), unrelated criminal convictions, or membership or non-membership of a trade union.

All volunteers have a responsibility to co-operate with all Healthwatch Newham procedures and measures to ensure equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

## Application of Policy

Healthwatch Newham will review the Equality Policy annually to ensure adherence to legislative requirements, good practice and that other policies do not create barriers for, or discriminate against people, because of any protected characteristics.

We will bring this policy to the attention of our trustees, staff and volunteers when they join Healthwatch Newham.

We will use our induction, supervision, appraisal and learning and development policies to ensure that staff and trustees have the skills to support good practice on equality and diversity.

We will use the supervision and appraisal process to encourage staff to make suggestions and contribute to the ways in which we promote equality as an organisation and with the users of our services.

We aim to ensure that venues that we use for meetings, workshops and training events are accessible and will make reasonable adjustments where necessary. We will aim to ensure that our communications are accessible, including our web site. When necessary we will make specific provision, such as the engaging a British Sign Language interpreter, to ensure that our communication is accessible.

Our recruitment process shows our commitment to equality and diversity. Healthwatch Newham will recruit volunteers through an open and transparent process:

- All posts will be publicly displayed to ensure they reach a wide audience, and we will advertise appropriately to reach as wide a range of people as possible.
- All posts will have a role description and person specification accurately reflecting the duties, levels of responsibility, necessary and desirable skills, experience, knowledge and aptitude required.
- The interview panel will comprise of two people that will independently short-list applicants and ensure each volunteer is interviewed and scored consistently.

### Responsibilities

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has senior responsibility for this policy. The equality policy is fully supported by senior management and the Board of Trustees. It is reviewed, with monitoring information at least annually by our Board Sub Committee. It is promoted widely to all other employees to inform and update them about their rights and responsibilities under the equality policy. Responsibilities include staff conducting themselves to help the organisation provide equal opportunities in employment, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination.

The policy will be implemented in accordance with the appropriate statutory requirements and full account will be taken of all available guidance and in particular any relevant Codes of Practice.

Healthwatch Newham will endeavour to ensure that all its service users receive services of the highest quality which are accessible to as wide a group of service users as possible, whilst recognising and supporting the fact that different groups have different needs and may require specific services.

Healthwatch Newham will seek the views of users and feedback on the services through a variety of routes and ensure their views are represented. It will also expect that those using our service (whether as clients, beneficiaries, or volunteers) will adhere to Equality Policy and processes.

### Recruitment of volunteers with a criminal record

Healthwatch Newham is committed to safeguarding those that use our service, which includes carrying out background checks on certain volunteer and staff roles. The organisation recognises the contribution that people with criminal records make as employees and volunteers and welcomes applications from those with a criminal record.

A criminal record will not normally prevent an applicant from being appointed as a volunteer. We will judge each case on its merits and not discriminate unfairly against any applicant on the basis of a conviction or criminal record information disclosed to us.

For each vacancy at Healthwatch Newham, we will make it clear in the role description whether the position is covered by the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (and so only requiring the disclosure of unspent offences) or whether it is exempt (and so requiring the disclosure of all convictions and cautions, even if they are spent, unless they are filtered).

Criminal record checking process:

- To ensure we recruit purely on skills and experiences, we do not ask for criminal record details at application stage.
- Volunteers must disclose criminal records at the interview stage. A DBS check will be conducted before the training stage.
- Where information is identified on a criminal record check, a volunteer may not be able to continue in their role until a risk assessment has been conducted by the volunteer managers.
- DBS checks will be conducted at a three-year interval.

For any information disclosed, cases will be looked at on an individual basis to identify the risk. Healthwatch Newham may request additional information from an applicant, and will consider details such as:

- Whether the offence is relevant to the position applied for
- The level of risk the volunteer poses to the organisation and its service users
- Relevant details of the offence
- The length of time since the offence took place.

Healthwatch Newham will manage the risk by:

- Adapting the volunteering role to reduce levels of risk
- Provide additional levels of supervision for the volunteer

### Organisation response to issues

All volunteers should understand they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their volunteering, against fellow volunteers, staff, customers, suppliers and the public.

All volunteers will take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow volunteers, staff, customers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's work activities. Such acts will be dealt with under the organisation's grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and any appropriate action will be taken. This could include:

- Discriminating in the course of volunteering or prospective volunteering against fellow or future volunteers in the organisation, transfer or promotion applications on the grounds established in this Equality Policy.
- Inducing or attempting to induce volunteers to practise unlawful discrimination.

- Indulging in verbal or physical, sexual or racial harassment of a nature that is known, or should be known, to be offensive to the victim.
- Victimising individuals who have made allegations or complaints of any discrimination or harassment or provided information about such discrimination or harassment

Any volunteer who has taken action, in good faith, over allegations of discrimination or harassment, will not be victimised by being treated any less favourably than any other employee as a consequence of taking such action.