

Guide to volunteering

November 2021



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Volunteering and Healthwatch

Our volunteers are at the heart of what we do and are an integral part of an effective Healthwatch.

The Healthwatch regulations require the involvement of volunteers in the delivery of activities and in decision-making.¹ This is also reflected as a key component to running a Healthwatch in the [Quality Framework](#).

From speaking to local people to find out their views, to using this information to influence those who run services, volunteers play a vital role at Healthwatch.

“Healthwatch would not achieve what it does without the help of volunteers. They play an important role in helping us raise our profile, reaching out to diverse communities, and influencing how local services are delivered and designed.”

— Imelda Redmond, National Director

This guide aims to support Healthwatch Volunteer Managers throughout the process of volunteer recruitment, induction and ongoing management and support.

It offers best practice guidance to help you connect with different parts of your community and track the impact your volunteers are making.

Alongside this guide we have produced a range of resources including:

- A Volunteer Handbook template for you to adapt and give all your volunteers that covers what they should expect from volunteering with you.
- A Volunteer Agreement template so people are clear on commitments and expectations on both sides
- Volunteer role descriptions
- Volunteering policy and Volunteer expenses policy templates for you to adapt if you do not have one already

You can find all these resources and more on [the Network site](#).

We are here to help

If you have any volunteer queries please get in touch by:

- Contacting our National Lead on volunteering Alvin.Kinch@healthwatch.co.uk or your Regional Manager
- Using the [Working with Volunteers](#) group on Workplace

¹ Regulation 40 [The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities \(Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch\) Regulations 2012](#)

Equality, diversity and inclusion

As organisations whose sole purpose is to give a strong and powerful voice to people who often go unheard, equality, diversity and inclusion should be at the heart of all our work.

Equality of opportunity, including for people who fall under one or more of the protected characteristics categories means thinking through your recruitment, communications, selection and support practices, including making reasonable adjustments and ensuring equal access to opportunities, training. It is important that people or groups are not treated less favourably because of a Protected Characteristic. Applying an 'equality lens' to policies, processes helps to identify potential for any bias towards individuals and groups.

Collecting and analysing monitoring information relating to protected characteristics as described in the Equality Act 2010 will help you understand the diversity of your volunteers. Subsequent action can then be taken where there is underrepresentation, over representation) or a negative impact from current practices. The Protected Characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Take a look at:

NCVO information on [Equality and Diversity](#)

Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into your volunteering program

It is important that your Healthwatch is welcoming and supportive and that your volunteers are treated with respect and dignity and feel valued. Here are some ways that you can ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded throughout your volunteering programme.

- You have policies in place concerning equality, diversity and inclusion, harassment and bullying.
- You have a clear and fair recruitment practice that seeks a diverse volunteering team and under-represented groups are encouraged to apply. This is regularly reviewed to ensure they do not discriminate.
- You have a zero tolerance towards any acts of discrimination or harassment by or against volunteers and other stakeholders including the public.
- Your volunteers are all aware of the inclusive values of the organisation and are actively consulted and involved in policy development.
- You make reasonable adjustments to help people to volunteer including recruitment processes, training and support and volunteering activity.
- Everyone is offered training and learning and development opportunities.
- All volunteers are encouraged to develop and progress. Any barriers faced by specific groups are identified and action taken to address them.
- You are aware of any potential tensions within the volunteering environment and act to anticipate and address them.
- Everyone is encouraged to raise concerns at an early stage and is aware of the procedure should they wish to make a complaint.

Take note:

There is a distinction between how the Act applies to volunteers and to employees. NCVO says 'In January 2011, the Court of Appeal confirmed the Equality Act does not apply to volunteers in the same way as employees and ruled volunteers without contracts are not covered by anti-discrimination legislation for workers.

It said that to be protected by anti-discrimination legislation, an individual must have a contract and that a wage is 'highly relevant'. A volunteer agreement does not constitute a contract of employment'.

Although not covered by legislation, we highly recommend that Healthwatch take a pro-active approach to addressing anti-discrimination and support an organisational culture where such matters can be raised and dealt with appropriately.

Essential policies to support volunteering

We have developed a range of policies that support effective volunteering. The table below sets out those policies, why they are important for volunteering and where you can find them.

Policy		Link
Volunteering	<p>This sets out your commitment to volunteering, the roles of volunteering and how they will be supported and treated fairly and consistently and what they can do if things go wrong. This should include what volunteers should do if they are subject to harassment and bullying.</p> <p>Your staff team should be aware of the Volunteer Policy, so they fully understand why volunteers are involved and what role they have within your Healthwatch.</p>	Volunteer Policy
Code of Conduct	Your volunteers are required to behave in accordance with the values of the organisation. This sets out expectations to avoid bringing your Healthwatch into disrepute.	Code of Conduct
Complaints	Volunteers may be the first point of contact for members of the public. Therefore, your volunteers should be able to let the public know how to raise a complaint with you.	Complaints Policy
Confidentiality	Volunteers are likely to be party to information that needs to be kept confidential. This ranges from hearing about someone's personal experience to receiving information within a document from a health or social care provider or commissioner. It is important therefore that both volunteers and staff are clear about keeping confidentiality and what to do if there is a breach in this area. This policy links closely to the Data Protection policy.	Data Protection Advice and Guidance
Conflict of Interest	Your volunteers should be aware of potential conflicts of interest e.g. if their partner is a Care Home Manager of an establishment to which the volunteer will be conducting an enter and view visit. You can put steps in place to potentially manage such conflicts by asking all volunteers to complete a Declaration of Interest.	Conflict of Interest
Decision making policy	This sets out the role of volunteers in making 'relevant decisions'.	Decision Making Policy

Data protection	It is important that volunteers understand the importance of consent and handling any personal and sensitive data they encounter when volunteering for you, as well as their own rights of access to the information you hold about them.	
Expenses	<p>NCVO recommends having a Volunteer Expenses policy and including this within your Volunteer Handbook.</p> <p>Whilst volunteering is unpaid, your volunteers should not be out of pocket when volunteering for you - this could be a barrier to people with low income or little spare cash. Any reasonable expenses incurred should be reimbursed.</p> <p>Set your own limit for meals and refreshments to reflect costs in your local area.</p>	Volunteer expenses policy
Health and Safety	<p>Each local Healthwatch should also have a written Health and Safety Policy (or be covered by their host organisation policy). We have a duty of care towards our volunteers and an obligation to protect them under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, as well as a moral duty to consider their health and safety, just as we would our paid staff.</p> <p>We also have a common law duty of care to take reasonable care to avoid harming others, and each local Healthwatch and their trustees could be liable if a volunteer is injured because the duty of care was not met.</p>	Health and Safety Executive template
Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults	<p>It is important you demonstrate that your Healthwatch is taking their responsibilities in this important area seriously. Some of the ways to do this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have children and vulnerable adult safeguarding policies in place that are in line with your local authority's procedures and policies and share them with your volunteers. • Ensure your volunteers undertake relevant safeguarding training and identify to whom to escalate concerns i.e. their volunteer manager. • Always carry out recruitment checks. • Always follow your policies and procedures and maintain written evidence. 	
Whistleblowing	It is important that your volunteers are included in your whistleblowing policy, and that they understand how to raise a concern if they need to. NCVO recommends including volunteers in your policy.	NCVO Whistle blowing information

If you are a hosted Healthwatch

If you are a hosted model of local Healthwatch, your host organisation will likely already have policies that they may expect you to adopt. This is fine, discuss with your host organisation and clarify the principles that protect your independence and that of your volunteers. For example, individuals who volunteer for both you and your host should consider completing a declaration of interest form.

You will also want to ensure that data protection procedures reflect the different branding. For example, consent forms should reflect that you and your host are different bodies and volunteers have the option of sharing their personal data with both or just one of you.

A little more on health and safety

Reasonable steps include giving volunteers the right information, training, safety clothing or equipment when necessary and supervision. Written risk assessments should be undertaken to highlight potential problems and help put safety measures in place and shared with volunteers, so they know what is expected of them.

Even though this is not a legal requirement for organisations with less than five employees, we recommend that all local Healthwatch have a Health and Safety policy (or be covered by their host organisation policy), as this is one indication that duty of care is taken seriously. NCVO recommends that volunteers should be included in this policy, which they should have a copy of, and that inductions should explain the policy and what it includes.

Insurance and risk management

Make sure your insurance policy covers activities carried out by your volunteers. You need:

- Public liability or employers' liability insurance - this provides cover for the organisation if a volunteer is harmed due to the organisation's negligence.
- Public liability insurance - this covers the organisation and the volunteer if a third-party is injured through the volunteer's actions.

You should also conduct a risk assessment for each of the roles that volunteers will be performing. This will also help if your insurer must tailor your policy to your specific needs.

Recruitment

Volunteer roles

Although each Healthwatch may have their own specific volunteer roles, there are several broad categories.

- **Visiting services** - This includes roles such as Enter and View Authorised Representatives and mystery shoppers.
- **Community Engagement and Outreach** - Speaking to people in the community via hospital, library, shopping centre stalls, Healthwatch and community events, online engagement via social media and other platforms.
- **Administration support** - Data entry of Healthwatch intelligence, supporting with basic administration in the Healthwatch office.
- **Board member/Advisory Group member** - Working to ensure the governance of Healthwatch is robust to ensure effective Healthwatch delivery.
- **Representation** - Attending meetings on behalf of Healthwatch to share intelligence with providers, commissioners and feedback essential information to Healthwatch.
- **Communications / Social Media** - Supporting with social media, email marketing, and website content.
- **Champion and Ambassadors** - Acting as the 'eyes' and 'ears' of what is happening within the community. Some champions might have a specific geographical area they are assigned to.
- **Research** - Helping conduct research including telephone surveys to people to find out their experiences as well as supporting analysis and report writing.
- **Information and Signposting** - Helping to provide information and signposting to support people to access the health and social care they need.

Take a look:

Download our example [Volunteer role descriptions](#).

It's important to provide written outlines, or descriptions, of volunteer roles. The descriptions should be consistent across your Healthwatch and comply with your volunteer policies. This is crucial to staff and volunteers understanding their roles.

Each role description should:

- Set out overall purpose of the role.
- Show how the volunteer's work fits in with the work of your Healthwatch.
- Offer a list of tasks so the volunteer can compare these with their skills and expectations.
- Set out any required skills and/or experience.
- Provide a basis for measuring activity levels and meeting expectations.
- Advise if a DBS check is required for the role, and if so, what level of check.

- Point to the benefits of the role to the volunteer e.g. learning new skills, exploring new areas of work, meeting people, making a difference to the community.
- Include reference to support to be provided.
- Describe the intended outcome of the work.
- Include the approximate time commitment for the role e.g. two hours per week.
- Make clear your commitment to flexibility and fitting around a volunteer's personal circumstances e.g. family and caring, work etc.

Do you offer bitesize opportunities to volunteer?

In the October 2020 volunteer management survey 50 out of 87 Healthwatch said they had opportunities for people to volunteer on a one-off basis e.g. at least once a year. This might suit someone who is able to volunteer via their employer's volunteering programme.

Examples of bitesize volunteering Healthwatch offers:

- Helping to design a leaflet to encourage young people join their GP Patient Participation Group.
- Reviewing GP websites dedicated to young people.
- Reviewing websites and NHS leaflets to make sure they're accessible and user-friendly.

Advertising

We asked Healthwatch Volunteer Managers about the best ways to advertise volunteering opportunities This is what they told us:

- Advert in local free paper that goes to every household
- Attending student wellbeing events and college fairs
- Providing talks to university students
- Online application forms with promotion via social media
- Using well known sites such as Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) and do-it.org to promote opportunities.
- Promoting via Healthwatch channels including website, social media and email marketing
- Print marketing such as posters in community centres and volunteering leaflets with a freepost expression of interest form

Application and selection

- **Keep the application form simple.**
This should not be the same as your staff application form. There must be a clear distinction between paid employees and unpaid volunteers.
- **Make sure you consider your equality of opportunity and diversity policy**
Where appropriate ensure different languages or inclusive images are used. You also need to be conscious about accessibility for people with disabilities. Asylum seekers, volunteers from overseas and ex-offenders can volunteer. If necessary, appropriate legal guidance should be sought from one of the national centres.

- **Keep the interview informal**

This is not a competitive process; you are trying to get the best out of the applicants. Make sure you give the applicant plenty of time to talk about themselves so you can find out if they are going to be a good fit and what support they may need that will make for a good volunteering experience.

You may wish to have your interview as part of your induction training to enable a two-way discussion so both parties are aware of what's involved in volunteering.

- **Set a trial period**

This allows both parties have an opportunity to consider if this is really the right role.

- **Be honest**

If you don't think the person is the right fit for the role, better to say at outset than later. They may be better suited to another role in Healthwatch or another organisation.

- **Decide how many references from volunteer applicants are required and advise them that a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check may be required depending upon their role. NCVO recommend having two references. There is more information on DBS checks later in this document.**

Ex-offenders

Volunteer policies would normally state that a criminal record will not always prevent you from volunteering, but it must be declared and risk assessed as part of the application process.

The [Recruiting Volunteers with Criminal Record Toolkit](#) excerpt below provides guidance about this. Here's a helpful section:

Don't request information about criminal convictions on your application form.

You can include a statement such as:

"We need to ask you about any unspent convictions as part of our duty of care. A criminal conviction will not necessarily prevent you from becoming a volunteer; the decision will depend on the type of offence and its relevance to the volunteering role."

Some roles will also require a criminal record check. If you do have any unspent convictions please include details in a sealed envelope. If you would like to discuss any convictions you may have, please contact the person named in the covering letter. All information will be dealt with according to our Confidentiality Policy."

Recruiting young volunteers

Many Healthwatch have a youth or young people's project or volunteer group. Volunteering with Healthwatch offers young people the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and skills and increase their understanding of health and social care.

If you are recruiting volunteers under 16, you will need to gain parental/carers consent.

When recruiting young volunteers, consider advertising on social media, speaking to colleges, universities, youth clubs and community centres and through your existing volunteer base.

The following resources provide information on how to involve young people through volunteer work.

- Resources on [involving young people in Healthwatch](#)

- [Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's Young Healthwatch video](#) of volunteers sharing their thoughts on volunteering
- Opportunities for young people looking to obtain new skills and experiences with [The Duke of Edinburgh's Award](#)

Enter and View volunteers

Healthwatch have a legal power to visit health and social care services and see them in action. This power to Enter and View services offers a way for Healthwatch to meet some of their statutory functions and allows them to identify what is working well with services and where they could be improved.

There are strict regulations concerning volunteers who carry out Enter and View activity. Please refer to our [guidance on Enter and View](#) which sets out requirements for volunteers.

DBS checking your volunteers

What is a DBS check?

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check provides information about a volunteer's criminal history at a point in time.

DBS checks are there to help you make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with children and/or adults at risk. It is an important consideration for safeguarding your staff, volunteers, and those who use and interact with your service.

DBS checks are only one aspect of ensuring effective and safe recruitment practices and should not be used in isolation. Undertaking ID checks, reviewing information provided on volunteer application forms, taking references, holding interviews etc. all contribute assurance, as far as possible, that potential volunteers are of good character and suitable to work in local Healthwatch.

For DBS purposes, an adult is someone who is aged 18 or over.

The minimum age at which someone can be asked to apply for a DBS check is 16.

Deciding which level of DBS check you need

There are four different levels of check:

- A **Basic Disclosure Check** shows convictions and conditional cautions considered to be 'unspent' under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. The 1974 Act aims to give those with convictions or cautions the chance in certain circumstances to wipe the slate clean and start afresh, therefore eligible convictions or cautions become 'spent' after a specified period of time known as the 'rehabilitation period', the length of which varies depending on how the individual was dealt with.
- A **Standard Disclosure Check** shows spent, and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings.
- An **Enhanced Disclosure Check** shows the same as a standard check plus any information held by local police that is considered relevant to the role.
- An **Enhanced Disclosure Check with Barred List Check** shows the same as an enhanced check plus whether the applicant is on the list of people barred from working in regulated activity.

A basic DBS check can be used for any position or purpose. Only certain volunteer roles and activities are eligible for further levels of DBS checks.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) advises “The law sets out when roles will be eligible for DBS checks at different levels. It makes it an offence to employ (or work with, in the case of volunteers and others) individuals who are on the barred lists to undertake certain activities in respect of children and adults at risk. **It also makes it an offence to knowingly seek a check for a person if the role they are being considered for isn't eligible.**”

Stage one -risk assessment

Each local Healthwatch has developed its own approach to how volunteers are involved in supporting the staff team, therefore each team should undertake their own risk assessment, based on your volunteer role descriptions, and not individual applicants, to help you identify potential risks associated with that role.

The [example role descriptions](#) we provide have a statement providing guidance on DBS checks, however, we know that you may adapt these so it is important you review your own role descriptions and make your own judgements.

Your risk assessment should consider:

- what activities your volunteers will be undertaking,
- the level of contact they will have with children and adults at risk,
- the level of supervision they will have,
- how often the volunteer will be carrying out activities
- where they will be carrying out their activities.

Your trustees and advisory board members, whether paid or unpaid should be part of this process too. There are additional organisational considerations for trustees - see section on page 18.

The risk assessment should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that volunteers are working within the parameters of their role profiles and there are no changes to duties which would involve a different approach to requesting DBS checks.

Stage two - deciding which level of DBS check you need

To decide which level of check to carry out, you need to apply the eligibility criteria for different levels of criminal records checks to your risk assessment.

There are different approaches for working with adults and working with children, where this is the case they are highlighted below.

Read through the guidance below, and always seek the highest level of check that a role is eligible for. Once you have decided which level of check to make, document your decision and keep accurate records on the actions you have taken to help with any potential queries or future challenges.

Basic Disclosure:

Your risk assessment may indicate that no DBS checks are required, for example, some admin volunteer roles that have no contact with children or adults at risk. You can still decide that for reassurance in terms of safe recruitment practices, the role will require a Basic Disclosure Check, as there are no eligibility criteria for this level.

Working with children

When a child is aged 16-17 and is in any kind of paid or unpaid employment, those who teach, train, supervise, instruct, or provide them with advice and guidance as part of their employment, are not in regulated activity with children and are not eligible for a Standard or Enhanced Disclosure Check.

A Basic Disclosure Check can be sought based on your risk assessment.

Standard Disclosure

Working with adults:

To consider whether you need to request a Standard Disclosure Check, you need to satisfy two questions:

- Will the volunteer be unsupervised and carry out activities with adults who are receiving a health and social care service or activity?
Full details of services and activities can be found on pages 10 and 11 of “[DBS Checks: Working with Adults in the Charity Sector](#)”..
- Will the volunteer be undertaking one of the following activities?
 - a) Providing any form of care or supervision.
 - b) Providing any form of treatment or therapy.
 - c) Providing any form of training, teaching, instruction, assistance, advice or guidance*.
 - d) Moderating a public electronic interactive communication service.
 - e) Carrying out any form of work in a care home if the person doing the work has the chance to have contact with the residents**.
 - f) Providing representation or advocacy services.
 - g) Conveying adults, regardless of if they are accompanied by a person caring for them.

If both questions are answered positively, then the role may be eligible for a Standard Disclosure Check.

*Local Healthwatch signposting and advice services are not specifically aimed at either adults or children. The helplines are signposting callers to health care professionals and support services who will provide the appropriate advice or guidance to callers on their emotional, physical and educational wellbeing. Helplines that are set up for any member of the public can only ask their volunteers to apply for a Basic Disclosure Check.

**Enter and View Authorised Representatives are eligible for at least a Standard Disclosure Check. If they meet the frequency requirements, then they may be eligible for an Enhanced Disclosure Check.

Enhanced Disclosure

Working with adults

If you have identified that the volunteer role may be eligible for a Standard Disclosure Check, you now need to consider the frequency of the work to understand whether the role is eligible for an Enhanced Disclosure Check.

Will the volunteer be representing Healthwatch for any of the following time periods?

- At any time on more than three days in any period of 30 days; or
- At any time between 2am and 6am; or
- At least once a week on an ongoing basis,

If so, then they meet the DBS definition of ‘working with adults’ and are eligible for an Enhanced Disclosure Check.

If the work does not fall within these frequencies, stick with a Standard Disclosure Check.

Enhanced Disclosure Check with Barred List

This level of check is required by law for regulated activity. This is defined in the following ways for working with adults and children.

Working with adults

Volunteer roles that include: providing health care, personal care, transport, social work, assistance in relation to household matters involving cash where the adult cannot manage themselves and powers of attorney.

Please note: The day to day management of a volunteer who carries out regulated activity will require the same level of check.

Working with children

Volunteer roles that include:

- teaching, training, instructing, caring for or supervising a child who is under the age of 16 in relation to their employment, on more than three days in any 30-day period
- providing a child under the age of 16 with advice or guidance on their emotional, educational or physical well-being in relation to their employment on more than three days in any 30-day period

There are several other activities that fall within this category, including health care and personal care, which are activities not usually carried out by a Healthwatch team.

Read the booklet “[DBS Checks: Working with Children in the Charity Sector](#)” if you are undertaking activity with children that is not captured above.

Please note: The day to day management of a volunteer who carries out regulated activity with children will also require an Enhanced Disclosure Check including a Children’s Barred List Check

If you think you require a check at this level, read the full descriptions within the booklets “[DBS Checks: Working with Adults in the Charity Sector](#)”, and “[DBS Checks: Working with Children in the Charity Sector](#)”.

This advice relates to local Healthwatch commissioned activity. If you run a service or contract other than local Healthwatch, you must ensure you adhere to the requirements of that contract, e.g. Advocacy Services.

Check your decisions

When you have decided what level of check is required, use the gov.uk eligibility checker tool to support your decision.

<https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>.

Requesting a DBS check

You should have a written policy on the suitability of ex-offenders undertaking volunteer roles that’s available upon request. Our [Guide to volunteering](#) provides example wording

All applicants should be told in advance if they will need to have a DBS check as part of the recruitment process. Our [Volunteer role descriptions](#) give examples of wording you can use.

Requesting a basic DBS check

A basic DBS check can be used for any position or purpose.

Applying for a basic DBS check costs £23 (September 2021) for all applicants, including for volunteering roles.

Applications can be made online by the volunteer themselves, alternatively, local Healthwatch, with consent, can apply on behalf of the volunteer through a Responsible Organisation, a list of which can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/responsible-organisations>.

Full details of the application process can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/request-copy-criminal-record> including support for transgender application and help using the online service, and general guidance on the basic level at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/basic-dbs-checks-guidance> which includes links to rehabilitation periods and guidance to spent and unspent convictions and cautions.

Requesting a standard, enhanced or barred list DBS check

Standard, enhanced, and barred list DBS checks are free of charge for volunteers.

Only organisations who process high volume checks are eligible to become a registered body and submit their own requests for a DBS check.

Local Healthwatch can use the services of an Umbrella Body. A list of Umbrella Bodies can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-dbs-umbrella-body>.

Umbrella Bodies are bound by the DBS Code of Practice for Registered Persons and must ensure that DBS applications are correctly applied for at the right level of check. You may therefore experience constructive challenge from your Umbrella Body seeking to understand your level of request. Whilst some applications will be straightforward, there will inevitably be complex situations where interpretations may differ. It is important you document these cases in case of future challenge and discuss with the Umbrella Body or DBS customer services team (contact details at the end of this resource) where necessary.

Accepting existing DBS certificates

Volunteers will sometimes have certificates from previous employers or other volunteering activity they undertake. You can accept DBS certificates that are already in issue. If you are considering doing so check that:

- The certificate is at the right level for what you need, e.g., basic, standard or enhanced.
- The certificate is for the right workforce e.g. child workforce or adult workforce.
- The date on the certificate is relatively recent. The certificate is only accurate up to the day it is issued, so unless you have access to the update service, it may already be out of date.

Some volunteers will be signed up to the DBS Update service. For full details of how you obtain up to date certificate data, access the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service>

How to deal with results from the DBS check

If there are disclosures on the DBS certificate, discuss the content with the applicants before deciding on their suitability as a volunteer.

If an offence or other information is disclosed, this does not necessarily mean that you should refuse their application as a volunteer.

You should conduct a risk assessment and focus on whether the offence or other information indicates a risk to people using your service and what measures could be put in place to enable them to undertake the role safely, such as additional supervision or limiting their duties.

Where there is significant doubt, the decision should always favour the welfare of the children or adults using your services. Consider any information disclosed alongside the other information submitted by applicants, which you have gathered during the application process.

Ensure your risk assessment is written down and available for review or referral in the future. Store and retain the completed risk assessment securely in line with your data protection guidelines as it is likely to contain highly sensitive data.

Key questions to consider as part of your risk assessment

- Barred list check: does the DBS bar the appointment? If yes, the appointment is automatically unlawful, and the person must not be appointed to the post.
- Did the volunteer disclose this information during the application process before you received the DBS information? All disclosures should be discussed with the volunteer applicant. Are you satisfied with the volunteer's explanation of the circumstances of the offence? Do you have any concerns about the volunteer's motivations for volunteering with you?
- What are the offences and how serious are they?
- What were the circumstances of the offence? What were the circumstances of the potential volunteer at that time and now?
- How relevant are the offences to the role they want to do? Does the volunteer role allow the opportunity to re-offend?
- What particular risks affect the people who the potential volunteer will have contact with, in their role?
- How old was the person when the offence was committed? Minor offences which occurred a long time ago may be less relevant than recent ones.
- Was this a one-off or a pattern of offending? Repeat offences indicate an inability to change behaviour and may be more likely to happen again.
- What level of supervision will the person receive? Will supervision reduce the risk? What mechanisms are in place to monitor the volunteers progress?
- Are references satisfactory? Is it appropriate to verify references by a telephone call?

A risk assessment should include only relevant data upon which a decision must be made as to engaging the volunteer, or what stipulations the volunteering relationship will have such as supervised activity only.

Managing DBS checks

It's important that you keep accurate records of the decisions that you've made and actions you have taken to help deal with any potential queries.

You should keep a list of DBS checks you have requested, when they have been undertaken, a record of everyone who has seen the certificates or information from them, and when they are due to be updated. You should not keep copies of certificates.

It is against the law to share information contained in a DBS certificate with anyone who is not involved in your organisation unless a relevant legal exception applies, or share with anyone

within your organisation unless it is necessary for them to have the information to carry out their duties.

Your data protection policies for storage and retention should include details of the handling, retention and disposal of DBS certificate information, including risk assessments, and be made available to members of the public if requested.

Updating DBS checks

A DBS check has no official expiry date. Information within it will be accurate at the time the check was carried out.

There is no 'set' requirement to update checks and it is up to each local Healthwatch to understand the level of risk posed, and how often new checks should be undertaken.

It is customary to renew every three years.

There is a DBS update service for Standard and Enhanced checks, full details at:

<https://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service>.

DBS checks for trustees

There is no legal requirement that states which level of DBS check that trustees or board members need. To work out which check you'll need to do (whether your trustee/board member is paid or unpaid) you need to consider:

- 1. The levels of DBS checks required for other staff and volunteer roles**

If any member of staff or volunteer in your local Healthwatch qualify for an Enhanced Disclosure or a Barred List Check then your trustees do too.

- 2. The duties of the role**

The trustee role should also be assessed as you would any volunteer or staff role within your organisation. For example, if one of your trustees is also an Authorised Representative for Enter and View, then they will be eligible for at least a Standard Disclosure Check.

If your trustees do not qualify for a Standard or Enhanced Disclosure Check, your risk assessment may indicate a Basic Disclosure Check, which can be carried out for anyone, is appropriate.

Please note: If you are hosted Healthwatch, this information applied to the trustees of your host organisation.

Common scenarios

Here are a few common scenarios provided by local Healthwatch to help you decide which level of DBS is most appropriate.

We regularly have student placements

Scenario: A 15-year-old student is undertaking a placement with your local Healthwatch. He will be with you two days a week for three months. You assign responsibility to a volunteer to train and supervise him for those two days every week. The volunteer is not supervised by a member of staff and has full responsibility for the student placement.

Action needed: This is regulated activity with children.

- Your volunteer should have an Enhanced Disclosure Check in the child workforce with a Children's Barred List Check.
- The volunteer's supervisor would also be in regulated activity and is eligible for the same level check.

Other team members are not eligible for a higher-level check, you can arrange a Basic Disclosure Check for them if you think it's necessary.

If the student placement was 16 or 17, then this would not be regulated activity, and all involved would only be eligible to apply for a Basic Disclosure Check.

Our trustees only ever meet online and don't actively engage face to face with the public

Go back to the guidance in the section above on DBS checks for trustees.

1. Do any of your staff or volunteers qualify for an Enhanced Disclosure or a Barred list Check? If yes, then your trustees qualify for an Enhanced Disclosure Check.
2. Will your trustee be undertaking any activity such as being an Enter and View Authorised Representative? You should risk assess and apply eligibility criteria as you would for any role in your organisation in line with the approach previously described.
3. Remember, Basic Disclosure Checks can be carried out for any role.

Our work includes young people aged 13 to 18

Local Healthwatch approach the involvement of young people in different ways.

Action needed:

- Apply the risk assessment and eligibility criteria to your young volunteer roles. The responsibility for training and guiding your young volunteers is most probably with your staff team.

Volunteers interacting with young people is not encompassed within the 'working with children' definition used by DBS. In this instance a Basic Disclosure Check may be appropriate, unless the volunteer had direct and unsupervised responsibility for children - see student placement example above.

Our admin volunteer doesn't engage with people face to face but has access to confidential materials

You should undertake a risk assessment of the role profile for your volunteer as described above. If this shows that they do not meet the criteria required for a Standard or Enhanced DBS, then you can still assess the role as requiring a Basic Disclosure Check if you feel it appropriate.

You also have other tools at your disposal in terms of the following policies to support training and supervision: Code of Conduct, Confidentiality, Data Protection, Safeguarding.

Our engagement volunteers undertake lots of face to face sessions with both groups and individuals in health and care settings

Undertake a risk assessment of the role profile you have for your engagement volunteers to understand what sort of activity they will be undertaking, how often, and whether they will be supervised. Then consider whether that activity would require a Standard or Enhanced Disclosure check as described earlier in this resource.

Sometimes activity will be via technology such as Zoom or on the telephone rather than in person. The process for deciding which level of check is required remains the same as above.

Having contact with children and / or adults at risk, does not necessarily mean volunteers will always meet the DBS definitions and criteria which require Standard or Enhanced Disclosure Checks.

You can apply for a Basic Disclosure if you feel it appropriate. Your training and supervision programme can help you identify areas where closer supervision or one to one discussion is required to help volunteers understand the boundaries within their roles. Confidentiality, Code of Conduct, Data Protection and Safeguarding training will help volunteers understand their roles.

Our Umbrella Body says our Enter and View Authorised Representatives are not eligible for a Standard or Enhanced Disclosure Check as per the guidance in this document

Section 42, subsection (2) of the **NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012**, states that a criminal records certificate under section 113A of the Police Act 1997(a) must be obtained for Enter and View Authorised Representatives.

This means a Standard Disclosure Check must be requested as a minimum, and if the criteria for frequency of activity is met, then an Enhanced Disclosure Check should be requested.

Induction

Volunteer Agreement

Your Volunteer Agreement should set out your commitment to your volunteers. It should also outline what you want them to get out of volunteering and what you expect from them in return.

It is a reference point for your volunteers and a reminder to you and your staff team of the standards of good practice when interacting with your volunteers.

We have supplied a template for you to use. If you already have your own, please make sure it includes the following areas as recommended by NCVO:

1. Induction and training
2. Named contact for support
3. Equality statement
4. Expenses statement
5. Insurance cover
6. Health and safety practices
7. Policies and procedures
8. The role itself

You must take care to ensure that you do not inadvertently create an employment contract with your volunteers by way of your agreement. Avoid the creation of mutual obligations which could be regarded in law as creating a contract by basing it on reasonable expectations rather than obligations.

Take a look:

Download our example Volunteer agreement.

[Find out more](#)

Volunteer handbook

It is good practice to provide each volunteer with a handbook as a guide to what is included in induction training and a permanent reference point for them.

The handbook will also contain information about Healthwatch England and help them understand how the work they are doing fits into the national picture.

The contents of your handbook will therefore mirror your induction. It will be a mixture of process and signposting to policies that are important to volunteering.

Take a look:

Download our example Volunteer Handbook.

[Find out more](#)

Induction checklist

- ☐ Has been introduced to the Healthwatch staff team and board
- ☐ Has been introduced to the Healthwatch volunteer(s)
- ☐ Has their main contacts' name, contact details and working days/times
- ☐ Has been provided with the Healthwatch volunteer handbook
- ☐ Has been provided with the volunteer agreement and signed copy returned
- ☐ Has signed a volunteer agreement and been provided with a copy
- ☐ Has been informed about the Healthwatch workplan and projects
- ☐ Has completed the [Healthwatch induction module](#)

New Volunteer Document Checklist

If you use the Volunteer Handbook as your reference guide you should have everything you need completed and explained to your volunteer. Here is a checklist of the types of documents you need your volunteer to complete.

- ☐ Bank details for expenses
- ☐ Volunteer agreement including confidentiality statement
- ☐ Declaration of Interest
- ☐ Emergency contact details and any relevant medical conditions/medications that may need to be considered in case of an emergency.
- ☐ Photo consent form

Supporting your volunteers

Regular catch ups

Regular contact or 1-2-1 meetings with your volunteers are opportunities to provide and receive feedback.

Whilst some elements of your catch ups may be similar to those you might have with a staff member such as a discussion about activities and tasks, there are some issues that you will not discuss with a volunteer.

Understanding a volunteer's individual situation is important as is being as flexible as possible to someone's personal situation that may change over time.

Take a look:

Check out Voluntary Action Rotherham's top tips on support and supervision of volunteers.

[Find out more](#)

Rewarding and retaining your volunteers

Providing support, recognising and rewarding the contribution of your volunteers will help to retain them as volunteers.

Here are some ideas:

- Personal thank you cards
- Inclusion in social events
- Telling them about the specific difference they make in specific areas or projects. Whether this is acknowledgements at internal and external meetings, at events or in reports
- Articles in newsletters highlighting your volunteer(s)
- Celebrating your volunteers' contributions and achievements during Volunteer Week
- Signing up to [Tempo Time Credits network](#) where people can earn credits whilst volunteering. These credits are used for activities, services and products in return for their time

Some volunteers do not want to be rewarded and recognised for their efforts and would rather quietly get on with their activities and tasks. Take the time to get to know your volunteers to see what they'd prefer. Sometimes a simple thank you in the 121 or support session is enough.

Take a look:

Read NCVO's blog on best practice in recruitment and retention.

[Find out more](#)

Dealing with difficulties

If you want a healthy organisation, the best ways to handle concerns, conflict and unmet expectations are up front and directly.

We all find these conversations difficult, but not dealing with them can cause problems such as lost motivation, volunteers leaving and reputational damage. The volunteer handbook includes the process to go through if this situation arises. Here is a summary of the process:

1. Define the issue in a fair way- it's about having a two-way conversation with your volunteer about the concern they/ you have
2. Try to resolve the issue - it could be that training is needed. Avoid making it about the person and instead deal with the problem.
3. No resolution - arrange a formal meeting and give opportunities to resolve the issue
4. Come to an outcome - if the volunteer does not agree with the outcome, they are free to appeal with the Healthwatch Advisory Board/ Board of Directors
5. Responding to the appeal - the Advisory Board/ Board of directors will inform the volunteer of their final decision within 10 days of raising the appeal
6. Follow up - it might be that the person may no longer be a Healthwatch volunteer however, if appropriate, check in with them from time to time
7. Reflect - take some time to think through what went well with the above process. What needs to change to make it better? Is there something that you could have done differently?

Managing your volunteers

Top tips for a new Volunteer Manager

We asked Healthwatch Volunteer Managers what top tips they would give to someone new in the role. They said:

- Build relationships by:
 - a) Joining local voluntary and community sector groups and forums (VCS)
 - b) Exploring education links with local colleges and career hub
 - c) Speaking to other Healthwatch and find out how they manage their volunteers
 - d) Attending student volunteer fairs and events, even via Zoom.
- Plan your recruitment carefully and consider access needs for interviews e.g. not everyone can get to your office or use Zoom
- Be authentic and genuine - always remember the time and energy your volunteers are giving
- Value and appreciate your volunteers and prioritise building relationships with them
- Use your volunteers to spread the word and recommend volunteering with Healthwatch to their contacts

Volunteering Management systems

Managing volunteers is a busy task and is often only one part of a staff member's job. In a recent survey to Healthwatch Volunteer Managers (October 2020) we found that people used a range of methods and systems to keep record volunteering activity such as:

- Volunteer records,
- Contact details,
- Volunteer activities,
- Projects involved in,
- Time spent volunteering
- Difference made by volunteers.

Over 70% of Healthwatch who responded use spreadsheets whilst nearly 40% said they used the Healthwatch CiviCRM to differing degrees.

Systems used to manage volunteers:

Healthwatch CiviCRM

The CiviCRM is used by several Healthwatch in the management of volunteers. See the three headings below for the benefits of the CiviCRM:

- Recruitment - Identify your volunteers quickly and easily, different types of volunteer, their areas of interest, their availability: days, time of day, location within your area
- Volunteer activity - captures the number of volunteering activity hours and produces reports for stakeholders on the activity
- Volunteer management - Capture details of training completed, DBS, DBS expiry date and number, Photo consent, send standard welcome letters and personal emails

Charity Log

Charitylog is a fully cloud/web-based CRM system that was designed specifically as a CRM system for the third sector and encompasses many of the different activities carried out by charities - contact/case management, calendars, group activities, outcomes, mail-merge and document uploads, volunteer and staff management, reporting etc.

Volunteer recruitment can be managed within the system as well as skills and matching to clients. It is possible to allocate volunteers, record time spent by volunteers and even provide limited logins if access is required.

There are three versions of Charitylog. Contact www.charitylog.co.uk

TeamKinetic

Team Kinetic has three tiers to its volunteer management system. TeamKinetic is a customisable, cloud-based application volunteer management systems. It provides tools for the areas of recruitment, reward and recognition as well as other features related to volunteer management. TeamKinetic is designed to minimise the barriers to volunteering. One of the key features is the ability to provide a deep insight into the health of a volunteer programme. It can be tried for free at TeamKinetic.co.uk

Impact and evaluation

Many people volunteer because they want to make a difference within their community. Helping volunteers understand the value they add to your organisation will help both motivate them and help you better understand the outcomes and impact of your work.

From the October 2020 Volunteer Management Survey, we know that about a third of the 87 Healthwatch respondents had a system to track the difference made by volunteers. We are going to be developing tools to help support more of you to do this.

Evidencing the activities and outcomes of volunteer work is beneficial when sourcing funding for projects, in that local people are part of making a difference locally.

Five ways you could track the impact your volunteers are making

- You could quote the amount of time that has been given by volunteers over the year.
- You could express this figure in equivalent number of working days, to make it more meaningful for the reader.
- You could then take this further to quote the added value contributed by volunteers for your Healthwatch in terms of the equivalent paid hourly rate, costed at least at the National Living Wage.
- **Throughout their volunteering experience** - A regular volunteer satisfaction survey helps provide valuable feedback to help celebrate what's going well and what needs to improve to make the volunteer's experience a better one. Take a look at some example volunteer survey questions.
- **When they leave their volunteering role.** - For some volunteers, involvement with Healthwatch provides excellent experience for future employment and to learn new skills. Asking volunteers about this, if they leave to start paid work or training, can provide useful data and case studies to further promote the added value of your Healthwatch service.

Volunteer satisfaction survey

To help you better understand how supported your volunteers feel, and where the volunteering experience could be improved, we encourage you to provide an opportunity for your volunteers to regularly share their views via a satisfaction survey.

We have provided a set of example questions for you to adapt and use.

Example satisfaction survey

About this survey:

We want to provide you with the support that you need as volunteers, and we are constantly looking at ways to improve how we do this. This is where we need your help. We would be very grateful if you could spend a little time giving us your thoughts.

Your feedback will help inform our plans to improve our support to our volunteers.

1. What volunteering role do you carry out at **Healthwatch XX**?

2. Why did you want to volunteer for **Healthwatch XX**?
 - a) Gain new skills
 - b) Meet new people
 - c) Contribute to the local community
 - d) Share your experience and knowledge
 - e) To help gain experience for employment
 - f) Other, please explain your answer

3. Does volunteering enable you to achieve what you want to? (based on your response to the previous question)
 - a. Yes,
 - b. No
 - c. Somewhat

4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoy volunteering at Healthwatch					
I know what to do in my role					
I feel appreciated for my volunteering efforts					

I find volunteering fulfilling					
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Please add any further comments:

5. Please tell us how you would rate your experience as a volunteer.

	Very good	Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
Overall experience					
Communication with Healthwatch staff					
Communication with Healthwatch volunteers					
Training provided					

Please add any further comments:

6. Thinking about training; please tell us more about your answers and if there is anything else that would help you in your role.

7. What is good about your volunteering?

8. How could we improve your volunteering experience?

For example, you might want to think about travelling to your volunteering, location and timing of the activity or the need for adaptations or additional support to help you do the tasks.

9. Is there anything that you would like to change about your volunteering and/or the work we have available?

10. If someone else was thinking about volunteering with us what would you say to them?

11. Please use this box to tell us anything else you would like to say

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Further guidance

There are a wide range of specialist volunteering support organisations and resources to support the effective management of volunteers.

Useful guidance

- [Understanding your legal rights when managing volunteers.](#)
- [NCVO Online training course](#)
- [Directory of Social Change \(DSC\) Complete Volunteer Management Handbook.](#)
- [Healthwatch Managing Volunteers Remotely guidance](#)
- [Investing in Volunteers \(liV\) quality standard](#)
- [National Occupational Standards for Volunteer Managers](#)
- [Getting started with criminal records checks](#)
- [DBS Checks: Working with Adults in the Charity Sector](#)
- [DBS Checks: Working with Children in the Charity Sector](#)

Useful organisations

- [Vinspired](#) an online platform connecting young people to the causes they care about.
- [NAVCA](#) is a membership body supporting thousands of local infrastructure organisations.
- [Volunteer Centres](#) provide support to local organisations and people wishing to volunteer in their communities
- [Association of Volunteer Managers](#) is an independent membership body that supports, represents and champions people in volunteer management in the UK.
- [The Disclosure and Barring Service](#) is where you apply for your DBS checks for volunteers.
Email: customerservices@dbb.gov.uk Telephone: 03000 200 190