

Reference & Engagement Group – Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Reference & Engagement Group (REG) is the formal structure through which Healthwatch Worcestershire can engage with Worcestershire's voluntary and community sector organisations with an interest in health and/or social care and with 'experts by experience' in health and social care matters.

One of the ways in which Healthwatch Worcestershire meets its statutory responsibility to consider the views of volunteers and lay persons is through the Reference & Engagement Group membership.

2. Membership of the Reference & Engagement Group

2.1 Membership of the Group is open to any organisation within the voluntary & community sector that can demonstrate it has in its objectives an interest in health and social care services that are commissioned or provided for the public of Worcestershire.

2.2 Membership of the Group is not open to the statutory sector commissioners/providers or private sector providers, although such organisations may be invited to attend Group meetings if it is in the interests of the business of the meeting that they should be in attendance.

2.3 Membership of the Group is extended to 'Experts by Experience' at the invitation of Healthwatch Worcestershire's Board.

2.4 Membership is by way of application. Approval of applications rests with the Directors of Healthwatch Worcestershire considering the views of Members co-opted to the Public Board Meeting.

3. The Role of the Reference & Engagement Group

3.1 The Reference & Engagement Group performs the following functions:

- To provide information to Healthwatch Worcestershire including patient, service users and carers' experiences of health and social care services commissioned and provided for the public of Worcestershire.
- To provide advice to Healthwatch Worcestershire on its operational business activities.
- To provide assurance to Healthwatch Worcestershire on its operational business activities.
- To extend the reach of Healthwatch Worcestershire:

- by acting as a conduit for information between Healthwatch Worcestershire and the membership/contact base of individual organisations.
- in holding commissioners and providers to account by reporting back to Healthwatch Worcestershire.
- by being a champion for Healthwatch Worcestershire.

4. Governance Arrangements for the Reference & Engagement Group:

4.1 Healthwatch Worcestershire is a company limited by guarantee and regulated by the Companies Act. Therefore, whilst the Directors are committed to ensuring volunteer and lay person input in making their decisions, they are responsible for all matters relating to the undertakings of Healthwatch Worcestershire, and this is reflected in arrangements for the governance of the Reference & Engagement Group.

4.2 Membership of Healthwatch Worcestershire’s membership scheme will be open, on application, to members of the Reference & Engagement Group (one vote per organisation). Up to six members of the membership scheme will be co-opted to Healthwatch Worcestershire’s Board.

4.3 Members of the Reference & Engagement Group will be required to declare any conflicts of interest, and specifically declare any publicly funded health and/or social care services that the organisation they represent provides for the public of Worcestershire.

4.4 Healthwatch Worcestershire’s resources to support the administration of the Reference & Engagement Group are limited and this is reflected in the way in which the Reference & Engagement Group undertakes its business. Whilst Healthwatch Worcestershire will reimburse the reasonable costs of ‘experts by experience’ it anticipates that the costs of representatives of organisations will normally be met by the organisations they represent.

4.5 Healthwatch Worcestershire’s values that are associated with evidence-based decision making, independence and transparency [except in circumstances where there is a need to maintain patient/service user confidentiality] will apply to the business of the Reference & Engagement Group, as will its complaints procedure.

4.6 Members of the Reference and Engagement Group must have regard to the legislation which seeks to prevent a Local Healthwatch from:

- Aligning itself to a particular party or political body
- Being set up or run with a main purpose of achieving policy changes or changes to the law, and
- Making political activities its main activity.