



Engaging  
Communities  
Solutions



# Engaging Community Solutions CIC (ECS) Volunteer Strategy 2023 – 2026

# **Volunteers are at the heart of our organisation.**

## **WELCOME**

A very warm welcome to you!

Volunteering remains central to the ethos of the organisation and the delivery of many of our services. We depend on volunteers like you to ensure we can deliver effective local Healthwatch services throughout England and support our research team in the work that they do. People's experiences are at the heart of all we do, and it is our volunteers that make such a difference and help us achieve the biggest impact in our work.

We have developed this strategy to ensure we can continue to welcome and support everyone who chooses to volunteer at ECS and that volunteers continue to be at the heart of our community in the future.

This volunteer strategy sets out our objectives and commitments to our volunteers over the next three years, including how we will keep them at the heart of everything we do and develop roles to adapt to the changing needs of our strategy and volunteers.

Providing a robust framework to ensure our volunteers and staff can work side by side is fundamental to our success.

Thank you for volunteering.

## About ECS

ECS was established as an Independent Community Interest Company in 2012, called Engaging Communities Staffordshire, which reflected our initial geographical area of operations. Since 2012, we have grown rapidly and in 2019, took the decision to rebrand ourselves under the new name of **Engaging Community Solutions CIC (ECS)**, reflecting the fact we now offer a wide range of services throughout England. ECS brings public engagement, consultations, and consumer advice services together to create evidence and insight that can be used to improve services, particularly around health and social care. It is community led and works with local organisations through a mix of staff and volunteers.

It is a hub where information is brought together which enables us to see the bigger picture in a way that has not been possible before. We want everyone to benefit from the best possible health and social care services which will lead to better health and wellbeing. As part of this we see voluntary action as a positive force for social change. Our combined effort will mean all individuals and communities should have a voice which can influence access to and experience of health, social care, wider public services and tackle inequality, discrimination and disadvantage through effective consultation, collaboration, insight, and evidence gathering.

We want to encourage people to feel more confident to voice their opinions so that service commissioners and providers can use their resources in the most efficient and effective way possible and find new and innovative ways to secure better quality services.

ECS is governed by the ECS Board which holds ultimate accountability for the delivery of its contracts and services. The Board has a wider range of responsibilities. It is led by a Chair and supported by Non-Executive Directors; details can be located on ECS website [www.weareecs.co.uk](http://www.weareecs.co.uk).

ECS currently holds the contracts for delivery of Healthwatch across Halton; Bedford Leicester/Leicestershire; Sandwell; Stoke-on-Trent; Warrington and Walsall as well as advocacy services in Halton and Warrington.

## About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services and is there for find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 requires a local Healthwatch in every local authority area of England, to give individuals and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided in their area.

Nationally and locally, we have the power to make sure that those in charge of health and social care services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage health and social care services to involve people in decisions that affect them. People's views come first – especially those who find it hardest to be heard.

We champion what matters to people living and working in your local areas where we deliver Healthwatch and work with others to find ideas that work. We are independent and committed to making the biggest difference.

Healthwatch England: All local Healthwatch are linked to a national body called Healthwatch England. You can find more about Healthwatch England here: [www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk)

**The services Healthwatch cover are: -**

- All hospital-based health services for adults and children.
- All community-based health services for adults and children including GPs, dentists, pharmacists, podiatrists, health visitors, district nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and community psychiatric services.
- Residential and nursing home services for adults.
- Social work and / or care services including home helps, home carers, support workers and social workers or care managers.
- Services that combine health and social care including sexual health centres, wellbeing centres and day centres for older people.
- Services and support for children and young people apart from those who are in receipt of social care support from the local Council.

## What powers do we have?

We are independent of central and local government with our own legal powers and set our own work plan to reflect the concerns of the local community. We are unique in having some statutory powers and duties whilst retaining our independence.

We can:

- Enter and view premises where health and/or social care services are provided. (This power does not extend to premises that provide social care to children, but Healthwatch is expected to gather the views and experiences from children and young people in collaboration with local partners.)
- Refer issues of concern direct to our local Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- Have a seat on our local Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Escalate issues direct to Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- Service providers and commissioners have a duty to respond to local Healthwatch reports and recommendations within 20 working days. (This includes providers of children’s social care services.)
- We also have a duty to provide information to the public about health and social care services and service providers. You can find out more about Healthwatch legal powers here.

## How do we work?

We believe that Healthwatch can only be truly effective if we can reach as many people as possible, so we work with established networks, groups, and organisations in the local area where we operate.

Our approach to being effective is underpinned by creating a ‘network of networks’ which:

- Builds strong links with local voluntary and community groups.
- Uses established community networks to share information, and to find out what matters to people.
- Works collaboratively with local partners who have strong local knowledge and connectivity with communities of interest and can support our work in obtaining the views of these communities.
- Builds a bank of trained volunteers who can be the eyes and ears of Healthwatch at grass-roots level.
- Champions the voices of those who are seldom heard.

## What we do

There are three key aspects to our work.

**Voice** – Ensuring local people’s voices are heard and their experiences can influence the design, commissioning and delivery of local health and social care services.

**Scrutiny and Accountability** – Holding those who plan and commission local services to account through our involvement in the Health and Well Being Board, our reports and recommendations, our power to enter and view services and our ability to refer issues of major concern direct to Healthwatch England or the local Health Scrutiny committee.

**Information and Signposting** – Providing and information and signposting service to provide information about local health and social care services to help people make informed

choices about what is best for them. Also providing information and signposting to people wishing to complain about health and care services.

At ECS we are committed to offering a flexible range of opportunities and to encouraging a diversity of people to volunteer with us, including those from under-represented groups such as youth, people with a disability, older people, people with language barriers, and people from black and minority ethnic communities.

Our team of skilled and dedicated volunteers make it possible for us to deliver excellent service to our customers.

## Our mission and vision

- Inspiring change and improving outcomes.
- Strive to be the voice of the public for public services across all the areas we cover.
- Support the voice of the community and offer an effective way for people to be involved in the services that provide for their health and social care needs.
- Enable better decisions to be made by health and social care organisations based on the experiences and views of people and the collection and analysis of data.
- Involve people in ways that are efficient and effective.

## Our values

- People first. We work with people. We give people a voice. We respect and empower people.
- Being open and transparent. We listen. We seek connections, we start conversations, build relationships, and take part in our community.
- Respect. We treat those who contact us with respect and dignity.
- Learning and growing. There is no end to the knowledge. We want more. We seek out views and feedback to provide insight.
- Persevering. Nothing worth doing is easy. We scrutinise and challenge decisions to seek out positive outcomes.
- Innovation. We look in different places, ask other questions, try new things. Nothing is every “good enough”. We lead the way forward.
- Impact. We focus on outcomes to create impact. We use our powers to influence how services are planned and delivered.
- Confidentiality. We keep your information safe and secure. Data security is at the heart of our operation. Information and feedback are used on an anonymous basis unless you tell us different.
- Transparency. Information and experiences, successes and failures, good news, and bad news – we share openly. It makes us stronger.
- Giving back. We share our success by giving back to the community around us – to people who can use our help.

## Why volunteers are important to ECS?

- Volunteers bring skills, expertise, time and passion.
- Volunteers bring a wide range of diversity and inclusivity
- Volunteers add capacity to the organisation and flexibility
- Volunteers use their own experience when engaging with the public.
- Volunteer connects to the local community

## What can volunteers gain from volunteering with ECS?

- Gains tools to use within their own personal goals
- Training and development
- Supervision and support
- Paid expenses
- Recognition and acknowledgement
- Various of roles
- References for employment

## Principles of volunteering

When it comes to engaging communities through volunteering, there are several principles that can guide ECS's efforts to ensure meaningful and impactful interactions. Here are some of our key principles:

- Inclusivity and Diversity:** Ensure that our volunteering initiatives are open to people from all backgrounds and encourage diversity. Embrace inclusivity by actively involving individuals from different ethnicities, ages, genders, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This creates a rich and varied volunteer base and fosters a sense of belonging and equal opportunity.
- Collaboration:** Foster a spirit of collaboration by involving volunteer members in the planning, decision-making, and implementation processes. Seek their input and involve them in designing and executing volunteering projects to ensure they address genuine community needs.
- Empowerment:** Empower community members to take an active role in our volunteering efforts. Provide them with opportunities for skill development, leadership, and decision-making. Encourage their ownership and involvement in project planning, execution, and evaluation. By empowering individuals, we can help create a sense of pride, ownership, within the community.
- Recognition and Appreciation:** Acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of our volunteers and community members. Recognise their contributions, celebrate achievements, and express gratitude for their dedication and commitment.
- Ethical Practices:** Uphold ethical practices in all aspects of volunteering. Maintain transparency, and accountability in our interactions with volunteers, partners, and

community members. Prioritise informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy when engaging community members.

- F. **Respect and Empathy:** Show respect to our volunteers by valuing their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Approach volunteering with empathy, seeking to understand the challenges they face and working together to address them. Ensure that our initiatives do not exploit or create dependency, but rather foster self-reliance, empowerment, and mutual respect.
- G. **Sustainability and Long-Term Impact:** Aim for long-term impact by focusing on sustainable volunteering initiatives. Rather than focusing solely on immediate needs, consider the broader context and work towards creating positive change that endures beyond the volunteering period. Encourage community ownership and involvement to ensure the initiatives can continue and evolve even after the volunteers have moved on.
- H. **Capacity Building:** Offer opportunities for skill development and capacity building among volunteers. Provide training, workshops, and resources that enhance their abilities to address community challenges effectively. By empowering individuals, we can create a sustainable framework that extends beyond short-term volunteering efforts.
- I. **Volunteer Safety and Well-being:** Ensure the safety and well-being of our volunteers by providing proper training, support, and supervision. Establish protocols for risk management, including health and safety measures, to protect both volunteers and the community.
- J. **Continuous Learning and Evaluation:** Embrace a culture of continuous learning and improvement by regularly evaluating the impact and effectiveness of our volunteering initiatives. Reflect on lessons learned, successes, and challenges. Use feedback to refine our approaches and share lessons learned with the volunteers and other stakeholders.

## Future plans

Over the next three years we are committed to:

- Growing our volunteers making it a platform where we are recognised as an organisation that values our volunteers
- Retaining our existing volunteers by engaging and communicating with them on a regular basis
- Maintaining our Investing in Volunteers Accreditation
- Ensuring all our volunteers have the most up to date training to deliver their areas of volunteering
- Ensuring all our volunteers are recognised on a 6 monthly basis.
- Adapting our volunteering roles to meet the ever-changing world.





ECS

Engaging Communities Solutions

Blakenall Village Centre

79 Thames Rd

Walsall

WS3 1LZ

[www.weareecs.co.uk](http://www.weareecs.co.uk)

t: 0800 470 1518

e: [contactus@weareecs.co.uk](mailto:contactus@weareecs.co.uk)

tw: @EcsEngaging