Title:

Involving Partner Organisations Policy

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Version Control

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July 2020	Head of Volunteering	v0.1	New policy under development
Oct 2020	Head of Volunteering	v1.0	Approved by the Policy Approval Group
May 2026	Head of Volunteering	v1.1	Under review
Sept 2026	Head of Volunteering	v2.0	Approved by the Policy Approval Group

Executive Summary

NHS Lothian recognises the value of working in partnership to maximise health outcomes. NHS Lothian welcomes the contribution of external organisations in supporting the health outcomes for patients, families, visitors and staff.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that NHS Lothian has appropriate assurance that external organisations with which it has a formal and direct partnership or service arrangement or other formal involvement have undergone proportionate governance checks and approval processes. It also ensures where the external organisation's service delivery involves volunteers, it is line with the Scottish Government Clear Pathway Guidance before activity commences.

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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out NHS Lothian's approach to safe, effective, and well-governed partnership working with external organisations delivering services on behalf of or in partnership with NHS Lothian services, whether within NHS Lothian premises, community settings, partner organisation premises or people's homes.

This policy provides a framework through which NHS Lothian can obtain proportionate assurance that external organisations have undergone appropriate due diligence checks before activity commences.

It ensures that all such activity, including that delivered by external organisation recruited volunteers and staff is:

- Safe and person-centred
- Aligned with NHS Lothian standards and values
- Supported by appropriate governance and oversight

The policy also ensures that key organisational functions are appropriately involved in the development and approval of organisational partnerships where this is required, including:

- Site Directors
- Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Chief Officers
- Service and Business Managers
- Voluntary Services
- Information Governance/IT Security
- Estates and Facilities
- Procurement
- Infection Prevention and Control
- NHS Lothian Charity

The policy supports the consistent application of Scottish Government Clear Pathway Guidance (2018) and ensures that NHS Lothian can evidence that relevant external organisation activity is appropriately authorised, governed, insured and monitored.

2.0 Policy statement

NHS Lothian is committed to working in partnership with external organisations to improve outcomes and experiences for patients, staff and families and visitors.

NHS Lothian recognises the independence of external organisations and values their contribution across communities. This policy applies only where NHS Lothian has a direct partnership, service arrangement or other formal involvement that requires assurance regarding patient safety, governance, quality of service and organisational

risk. The policy seeks to protect both NHS Lothian interests and the interests of external organisations.

All such arrangements must operate within a framework of clear governance, defined accountability, and proportionate assurance, ensuring that patient safety, service quality, and organisational standards are upheld at all times.

NHS Lothian will:

- Ensure appropriate governance processes are in place prior to service commencement
- Apply a consistent, risk-based approach to assessing and approving outside organisation involvement
- Balance enabling partnership working with maintaining appropriate oversight and assurance

The level of governance applied will be proportionate to the location, scale, complexity and risk of the activity, avoiding unnecessary barriers to collaboration while ensuring safety and compliance.

The primary purpose of this policy is to provide assurance that external organisations delivering activities in partnership with NHS Lothian have been appropriately assessed, approved and monitored in the interests of patient safety, organisational governance and risk management. This policy is not intended to regulate or oversee the wider activities of any external organisations.

3.0 Scope

This policy applies to all NHS Lothian services where external organisations are involved in delivering activity on behalf of, in partnership with, or in support of NHS Lothian services, including within NHS premises, community venues, external organisation premises and people's homes, including:

- Partner Organisation recruited volunteers
- Partner Organisation recruited staff
- Mixed models involving both volunteers and staff recruited by Partner Organisations

Where external organisation activity is procured, commissioned or delivered under a contractual arrangement where NHS Lothian is funding the service, the Procurement Team should be engaged to ensure a procurement exercise is carried out. The NHS Lothian Supplier Management Procedure provides guidance on appropriate contract management, performance monitoring, risk management, review arrangements and escalation processes proportionate to the nature, value and risk of the service being delivered. However, there is an expectation that:

- The principles and requirements of this Policy and the Clear Pathway guidance are met within procurement processes, and/or
- Procurement teams engage with Voluntary Services where appropriate to ensure alignment with this Policy and its associated Procedure

This ensures a consistent standard of governance across all external organisation involvement regardless of funding route.

This policy does not apply to:

- NHS Lothian's Volunteers, work experience, student placements, observerships or honorary contracts.
- Any work carried out by the External Providers Office in managing referrals to external providers for healthcare appointments or treatment
- Independent activities delivered within the community by organisations that can be accessed by patients, staff, families and visitors with no involvement from NHS Lothian e.g., local charities and community organisations.
- General signposting to charity and community resources and services
- NHS Lothian staff providing information to patients about organisations that can support them
- Fundraising activities, awareness events or community engagement activities that do not involve service delivery on behalf of or in partnership with NHS Lothian/NHS Lothian Charity. Where this activity is requested the NHSL Charities and Fundraising Policy applies.

The purpose of this policy is not to maintain a register of all the support organisations operating within Lothian. Rather, it is to provide assurance regarding those organisations and activities where NHS Lothian has a direct partnership or service relationship and where governance oversight is required in the interests of patient safety and organisational assurance.

4.0 Definitions

Volunteer: 'A person who gives freely and willingly of their time to help improve the health and wellbeing of patients, users, (and their families and carers) of the NHS in Scotland', Strategy for Volunteering in the NHS in Scotland CEL 10 (2008)

Partner Organisation (PO): Any external organisation that delivers services, activities, programmes, volunteer-led initiatives or other support in partnership with, on behalf of NHS Lothian, including charities, community groups, social enterprises, cultural organisations, educational institutions and other non-NHS bodies.

PO Recruited Workforce: An umbrella term describing individuals recruited by a Partner Organisation to deliver services within NHS Lothian. This includes both volunteers and paid staff.

PO Recruited Volunteer (Indirect Volunteer): "Volunteers are recruited, trained and supported by Third Sector organisations." Clear Pathway Guidance (2018). Partner Organisations remain responsible for the recruitment, training, supervision, conduct and support of their own staff and volunteers unless alternative arrangements have been explicitly agreed.

PO Recruited Staff: Paid staff employed by a Partner Organisation delivering services in partnership with NHS Lothian.

Due Diligence: Due diligence is the reasonable steps an organisation or individual takes to check facts, assess risks, and ensure a decision or agreement is informed and responsible before proceeding.

4.1 Due Diligence

All Partner Organisation involvement must be supported by appropriate due diligence before any service commencement, including the application of the Clear Pathway Guidance where Partner Organisation recruited volunteers are involved. Staff should consult with NHS Lothian's Voluntary Services team to ensure this has been completed before any Partner Organisation involvement can begin. Categories of due diligence check are explained below:

Organisational Legitimacy and Governance

- Evidence of formal organisational status (e.g. Office of the Scottish Charity Register registration where applicable)
- Clear governance structures and accountability (e.g., Articles of Association)

Insurance

- Appropriate public liability, employer liability and professional indemnity insurance where relevant.
- Evidence of insurance cover obtained and reviewed prior to approval.
- Confirmation that proposed activities fall within the scope of the organisation's insurance arrangements.

Legal/regulation compliance

- Appropriate compliance for the service being delivered e.g., waste exemptions, permits/licenses, financial regulations etc.

Safeguarding and Protection

- Robust safeguarding and protection policies, procedures and training
- Appropriate Disclosure Scotland checks where required

Key Organisational Policies/Procedures

- Health and Safety which applies to the relevant activities
- Fire Safety
- Infection Prevention and Control
- Equality and Diversity
- Volunteering (where applicable)

Information Governance

- Compliance with data protection legislation

- Completion of required Information Governance processes (e.g. Data Protection Impact Assessment)
- Data Sharing Agreements where required

Risk Assessment

- Partner Organisation's must carry out risk assessment of all activities which includes identification and mitigation of risks associated with service delivery within a healthcare setting
- Particular consideration should be given to lone working arrangements, safeguarding, information governance, health and safety and clarity of responsibility where services are delivered in community settings or within people's homes
- Where appropriate, NHS Lothian may undertake their own risk assessment

Defined Referral Protocols (where applicable)

- Clear pathways into and out of services

Formal Agreement

- Defined service outcomes and expectations
- Appropriate use of Service Level Agreements which are appropriately signed off prior to services commencing
- Named NHS Lothian and Partner Organisation leads

4.2 Governance Sign-Off

Before any activity can commence, all due diligence must be signed off and approval must confirm that NHS Lothian has received proportionate assurance that:

- Appropriate due diligence requirements have been met
- Responsibilities are clearly defined
- Suitable insurance arrangements are in place
- Risks have been appropriately assessed
- The activity aligns with the intended purpose and values of NHS Lothian

Proportionate Assurance

- Governance requirements scaled according to level of activity and risk
- NHS Lothian recognises that governance requirements should be proportionate to the scale, complexity and risk of the activity being delivered. The governance requirements for a one-off wellbeing event will differ from those required for a service involving direct patient contact, home visits, clinical environments or access to confidential information.

Ongoing Review

- Agreed review arrangements proportionate to the scale and risk of activity should be in place – no arrangement should be indefinite.
- Processes for performance concerns, risk escalation and service changes should be clearly set out
- Evidence of business continuity arrangements where services are critical to patient care
- Significant changes to the nature, location, scope or risk profile of an activity must trigger a review of governance arrangements and may require renewed approval.

Concerns and Escalation

- NHS Lothian reserves the right to suspend or withdraw approval for Partner Organisation activity where governance requirements are not maintained or where concerns arise regarding safety, quality, legal compliance or organisational risk.

5.0 Implementation roles and responsibilities

The implementation of the policy will be led by Site Directors and Chief Officers and supported by the Voluntary Services Team and Service Managers. Key to the successful implementation of the policy is oversight at Site Director/Chief Officer level of Partner Organisation activity across the organisation and an awareness of key staff within the organisation of their responsibility to understand and follow this.

5.1 NHS Lothian Board

NHS Lothian Board is responsible for ensuring the safety of patients who come into contact with Partner Organisation Workforce and the safety of all visitors to NHS Lothian sites including Partner Organisation Workforce. The Board provides assurance that appropriate governance arrangements are in place for all Partner Organisation activity delivered within NHS Lothian.

5.2 Site Directors/Chief Officers

Site Directors/Chief Officers are responsible for:

- Final sign off of all Partner Organisation activity. Where appropriate, Site Directors/Chief Officers can delegate their authority to relevant staff.
- Co-signing Service Level Agreements for activities taking place within their areas of oversight and responsibility.
- Ensuring that organisational processes and procedures have been applied to the organisations wishing to deliver activities across our sites e.g., (approval from accommodation committees etc).

5.3 Head of Volunteering

The Head of Volunteering will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the policy and associated materials and practice to ensure they are fit for purpose and enable active and potential organisations are involved appropriately to add value and maximise impact.

5.4 Service/Business Managers

Service/Business Managers are responsible for:

- Identifying and understanding the need and appropriateness of Partner Organisation involvement in their service area
- Ensuring early engagement with Voluntary Services and Information Governance and Procurement where required
- Ensuring no partner organisation-delivered activity can commence without appropriate governance approval from the relevant Site Director or Chief Officer (or delegated authority).

5.5 Voluntary Services Team

The Voluntary Services Team will:

- Hold a central register of approved Partner Organisation partnerships, agreements and service arrangements operating within the scope of this policy
- Maintain records demonstrating completion of due diligence checks.
- Provide assurance to Site Directors and Chief Officers that required checks have been satisfactorily completed prior to sign-off
- Support services to apply Clear Pathway principles
- Support services to determine if Partner Organisation involvement is appropriate
- Advise on proportional governance and due diligence requirements for short term or minor involvements with low levels of risk
- Support Service/Business Managers and their teams to carry out regular reviews of Partner Organisation activity.
- Signpost Partner Organisation's to appropriate external support if minimum organisational requirements cannot be met

5.6 All NHS Lothian Staff

It is the responsibility of all NHS Lothian staff to be aware of the added value that Partner Organisations can bring to patients, families, volunteers and teams. All staff must ensure that Voluntary Services Team are involved at the earliest stage when engaging with Partner Organisations delivering services within NHS Lothian. No

engagement with Partner organisations should progress beyond initial discussion stage without involvement from Voluntary Services.

5.7 Partner Organisations

All Partner organisations who wish to work in partnership with NHS Lothian must be aware of this policy and observe the processes and procedures set out in associated materials and share relevant elements with their workforce. Organisations unable to meet the requirements set out in this policy must recognise that this may mean we are unable to work together.

6.0 Associated materials

Involving Partner Organisations Procedure

Partner Organisation Due Diligence Checklist and Guidance

7.0 Evidence base

Clear Pathway Guidance, Voluntary Health Scotland (April 2018)

Supporting collaboration between the third and public sectors: evidence review - gov.scot

Public body guidance - Public bodies - gov.scot

Volunteering for All: a national Framework, Scottish Government (April 2019)

Fit for the Future: NHS Lothian Volunteering Strategy 2023 – 2028 (Aug 2023)

The State of Scottish Volunteering - Insights from Volunteer Scotland's research (2025)

Volunteer Scotland – Social Value of Volunteering in Scotland. (March 2025)

Adding value through volunteering in NHS trusts: a resource for volunteer services managers and policy leads (May 2022)

Volunteer Scotland – Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing (2018)

The contribution of Volunteering to Scotland's Health and Wellbeing, Volunteer Scotland (Nov 2019)

8.0 Stakeholder consultation

Draft versions of this policy were made available for consultation to a wide number of stakeholders including, the local Third Sector Interface, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Acute Corporate Management Group, REAS policy group, NHS Lothian Charity, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity as well as key internal stakeholders across the named teams within this document. This policy was placed on the NHS Lothian Consultation Zone, and an Equality and Children's Rights Impact Assessment was undertaken.

9.0 Monitoring and review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner where there are significant legislative, governance or organisational changes.

Implementation of the policy will be monitored by the Head of Volunteering through:

- Maintenance of a central register of all Partner Organisations delivering services within the scope of this policy.
- Quarterly audits of the register to ensure required governance documentation remains current.
- Quarterly liaison with Procurement and Information Governance to identify new, amended or discontinued PO arrangements.
- Monitoring compliance with Service Level Agreements and governance requirements.
- Review of incidents, complaints, concerns or governance breaches involving Partner Organisations.
- Monitoring the completion of required approvals prior to commencement of service delivery.
- Periodic review of partnership arrangements to ensure continued alignment with organisational priorities and patient needs.

The following indicators will be used to assess whether the policy is operating effectively:

- Partner Organisations operating within scope are recorded on the central register.
- New Partner Organisations involving volunteers demonstrate compliance with the Clear Pathway Guidance prior to commencement.
- Partner organisations have current due diligence documentation and signed agreements where required.
- Organisations within scope have valid insurance documentation recorded.
- No new PO activity commences without appropriate approval and sign-off.
- Governance concerns, incidents or compliance issues are identified and managed through agreed escalation processes.
- Evidence of regular review of partnerships is available.
- Positive feedback is received from NHS services and partners regarding clarity of governance arrangements and partnership working.
- Annual reports can demonstrate the contribution and impact of PO involvement across NHS Lothian.