

# Volunteering Policy

**October 2020  
(Agreed by Trade Unions)**



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## 1. Objectives and scope

- 1.1. Reading Borough Council recognises that many employees carry out volunteer work within the local community. In order to support them, the Council will give each employee two (2) paid days each year to volunteer in some capacity. The volunteering opportunity must be within Reading Borough Council boundaries.
- 1.2. Volunteering allows employees to use the skills that they have developed at work as well as to learn new skills, such as leadership. Volunteering can also help improve their morale, physical health and work-life balance. Supporting volunteers helps the Council to build relationships with the local community and improve how it is perceived within it.
- 1.3. This policy applies to all those employed by the Council, including those on permanent, temporary or part-time contracts, job sharers, and employees on non-standard terms of employment.
- 1.4. This policy does not apply to:
  - Agency workers or interim staff
  - Schools based staff who may be covered by separate procedures

## 2. Definitions

- 2.1. Volunteering is any unpaid activity that involves spending time carrying out an activity that benefits others.
- 2.2. A partner organisation is the organisation that needs volunteers

## 3. Benefits of Volunteering

### 3.1. For the employee

- a) Can be an opportunity to improve existing skills, personal development and productivity
- b) Can be an opportunity to develop new skills that have been identified either by the employee or as part of a performance review
- c) Can help develop existing skills in a different environment
- d) Can be a form of employee development, as an opportunity in the community may be more beneficial than formal learning
- e) Can increase awareness of the local community
- f) Gives employees a better understanding of the voluntary and community sector
- g) Can increase motivation back in the workplace
- h) Can improve morale, having taken part in a personally rewarding situation

- i) Allows each employee to choose a local charity or community group of interest
- j) Team volunteering may be undertaken as part of a challenge or as a team building event outside of individual volunteering. If that is the case, the employee may still be entitled to two days for individual volunteering.

### **3.2. For the Council**

- a) Helps improve reputation as a socially responsible employer
- b) Raises the Council's profile in the local community
- c) Develops links with the local community than can support business priorities
- d) Supports the TEAM Reading values
- e) Can be used as a team building exercise

### **3.3. For the Partner Organisation**

- a) Gains a better understanding of the Council and how each party can work together
- b) Can make ongoing links with the Council, which is a key employer in the local area
- c) Gains individuals with skills that are needed
- d) Has access to skills and support which may have been difficult to afford

## **4. Do I need to take leave to do voluntary work?**

- a) No, each employee will be given the equivalent of two paid days each year totally 14.8 hours (pro rata for part-time staff) to undertake volunteering in the community
- b) This can be taken as full days or in hours (14.8 in total) over the year
- c) Volunteering will occur during normal working hours
- d) The volunteering year will run from April to March each year
- e) Before deciding to volunteer, you must discuss the opportunity with your line manager and get agreement
- f) Volunteering must not adversely affect the work of your team and will only be agreed by your line manager if deemed operationally possible
- g) The time allocated for volunteering is not intended for placements outside normal working hours.
- h) You can choose to use the volunteering time to support local charities or community groups of your choice, as long as it is within Reading Borough Council boundaries

## **5. Can my manager refuse my request?**

- a) Yes, although the Council supports volunteering, your manager can refuse your request if it conflicts with operational needs or if it creates the potential for a conflict of interest or if it is with a charity or community group which does not fit with the ethos of the Council.

- b) The reason for refusal must be clear, fair and consistent
- c) If you feel that your request to undertake volunteering during work time has been turned down unreasonably you may contact the HR team for advice.
- d) If the volunteering was for personal/professional development, you should discuss alternatives that could assist you with this.
- e) The final decision is with your manager

## **6. What reasons can my manager use to refuse my request?**

Examples for refusal include:

- a) There will be a detrimental impact on the needs of the service
- b) Work within the department cannot be rearranged to accommodate your leave or varied hours
- c) Your individual work performance is likely to suffer

## **7. What type of volunteering can I do?**

7.1 The Council recognises that employees have different interests and are attracted to different types of volunteering opportunities which can either be short or long term.

- a) It can be an opportunity to do something in the community which is totally unconnected with your job, which may support your personal development
- b) It can be part of team building (e.g. all or part of the team could participate in the volunteering activity at the same time)
- c) One off or short-term opportunities:
  - i. These opportunities may work for you if you are busy or if your workload changes frequently.
  - ii. These can range from individual to team building activities
  - iii. Examples include delivering a careers talk in schools, supporting a charity event, running a skills workshop or team challenge days such as taking part in environmental activities
- d) Long term opportunities
  - i. These allow you to make a commitment to support voluntary and community sector organisations by participating over longer periods
  - ii. Examples include coaching and mentoring, working on community projects
  - iii. You may want to take on positions of responsibility which are similar to your job, such as a finance professional helping a charity with budgeting
  - iv. You may use work skills to sit on boards, for example, as a charity trustee, especially where certain skills such as finance, HR or strategy are highly sought after

## 8. Think about what you want to get out of volunteering

- a) Identify an area of personal development that you are unable to pursue in your current job
- b) Do you want practical experience to support your knowledge and understanding of your current job?
- c) Do you want to find out more about an existing or new policy area?
- d) Are you confident that volunteering will help you to meet your personal/professional objectives?
- e) Consider the charity or group you want to support and in which areas you want to focus your efforts that best align with our vision and values
- f) Would you or your team benefit from stronger links with the local community?

## 9. How do I find a volunteering opportunity?

- a) Through [Reading Voluntary Action](#)
- b) You may already know of a charity/community group in the borough which needs volunteers

## 10. Recording the volunteering opportunity

- a) Because volunteering can help you develop new skills for your personal development and can benefit the Council, it is important that you record the experience using the form in Appendix A
- b) Keeping a record can help with monitoring the effectiveness of volunteering
- c) Monitoring of and feedback on volunteering can provide an understanding of the impact of volunteering for you and other employees. The form in Appendix B should be used for this purpose.
- d) As part of your negotiations with your line manager, you may have agreed to feedback about your volunteering work, for example as part of a performance review or one-to-one meeting.

## 11. Criteria for volunteering

11.1 Employees can be released during work time to undertake volunteering as long as it meets one or more of the following criteria:

- a) It supports improving knowledge and understanding of a policy area or involvement in existing policy developments that need and use volunteers
- b) It supports a personal development need identified by you and/ or your line manager
- c) It develops stronger links with the local community

- d) Volunteering must take place within the Reading Borough Council boundaries to benefit the local community

## 12. Volunteering guidance for managers

- a) As a manager, you must be sure that the volunteering takes place within Reading Borough Council boundaries
- b) The volunteering opportunity must be beneficial to the employee, the team and/or the Council
- c) While being aware of the Council's competing work pressures, you are encouraged to support requests for volunteering
- d) You must be consistent and fair in allocating time for volunteering across your team and, therefore, arrangements will need to be regularly reviewed
- e) You must ensure that you adhere to the Council's equality policy to ensure there is no discrimination or unfair treatment against any employees
- f) You could discuss developing a team event which involves volunteering – this could be a community activity linked to the team's area of work.
- g) If you are considering a team event, you must ensure that it is appropriate and acceptable to everyone and does not exclude certain individuals or groups (for example, staff with a disability or from different cultural backgrounds). The participation of individuals in any team volunteering activity is voluntary and those not wishing to participate should not suffer any detriment.

## 13. How will volunteering become part of Reading Borough Council norm?

- a) Share stories on the intranet (blog) or with your team – this may increase 'buy-in' from colleagues and managers
- b) Publicise one off and short term activities – others are more likely to want to be involved if they can fit it round their work
- c) Publicise the range of opportunities, if you are aware of them
- d) Enlist senior manager support
- e) Consider being part of a champions network
  - i. This can encourage more take up of volunteering opportunities
  - ii. Champions act as ambassadors and help promote activities and can help gather feedback and case studies
  - iii. Being a champion is a great development opportunity in itself

## 14. Risk Assessment

- 14.1 The Council's liability for all employees in the workplace does not extend to the external volunteering activities of employees.

14.2 The Health and Safety at Work Act applies to voluntary organisations. They must ensure that volunteers are protected from risks arising out of their work activities. Voluntary organisations and individual volunteers have a duty of care to each other and to others who may be affected by their activities. Voluntary organisations should carry out a risk assessment to identify if activities are low or high risk and ensure the correct preventative and protective measures are in place.

14.3 Risk assessments should be undertaken by the partner organisation.

## **15. Other**

15.1. You are not obliged to continue volunteering for an organisation which you are not happy with.

15.2. You should talk to someone at the partner organisation who is responsible for you while you are volunteering. You should also discuss any concerns with your line manager.



**APPENDIX 1****CHECKLIST**

| <b>Consideration</b>   | <b>Comments</b> |
|--|-----------------|
| Are you clear about what you want to get from volunteering?  |                 |
| Does the organisation already use volunteers?  |                 |
| Do you have your line manager's approval?  |                 |
| How much time can you give?  |                 |
| Which days and at what time of day?  |                 |
| What skills and experience can you offer them?   |                 |
| Does the organisation provide induction?   |                 |
| Has the organisation completed a risk assessment which covers all the activities you will be undertaking?              |                 |
| Have you informed the HR team about your placement?  |                 |
| Will you need to undergo DBS or other clearance? (Check with the organisation)   |                 |
| If you have a disability, is there any reasonable adjustment required to help you undertake the volunteering activity? |                 |
| Does this support the TEAM Reading values? In what way?  |                 |

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Manager \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Manager to confirm in writing the arrangements made.

**PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO HR TO ADD TO YOUR PERSONAL FILE**

**APPENDIX 2****EVALUATION**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Name  |  |
| Directorate   |  |
| Line Manager  |  |
| Where did you volunteer?  |  |
| Date/s of your placement  |  |
| Duration of your volunteering placement   |  |
| What were the key activities undertaken>  |  |
| What were your objectives for completing this volunteering?   |  |
| Please explain how the placement met/did not meet your objectives   |  |
| Please give any suggestions on how your volunteering experience could have been improved  |  |
| Has the volunteering placement provided you with any new skills to take back into your team?<br><br>If so, how will now be taking this forward? |  |

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO YOUR MANAGER**