

# Volunteer Engagement Policy

July 2021

Agreed by TUs



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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. People choose to volunteer for a variety of reasons. For some it offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around them. For others it provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge as a pathway into employment. Regardless of the motivation, what unites them all is that they find it both challenging and rewarding.
- 1.2. Volunteers bring a range of expertise to particular tasks or projects. Their expertise should complement and add value to the skills of staff. In many instances, volunteers can develop a range of support to service users that cannot be provided solely by paid staff, and the Council welcomes volunteers in all service areas. The Council is committed to engaging with volunteers in a way that complements and expands service delivery.

## **2. What is volunteering?**

- 2.1. The Council regards volunteering as an unpaid activity where someone freely gives their time to help an organisation or an individual who they are not related to. Volunteers are not paid staff and do not have a legally binding contractual relationship with the Council.

## **3. Planning for volunteer engagement**

- 3.1. The Council identifies roles for volunteers which extend the work of the organisation. Volunteers are involved at appropriate levels of the organisation in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff.
- 3.2. A written role description, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations of their role should be agreed before any volunteer is sought. This role is then subject to review at least annually with the volunteer's supervisor.
- 3.3. Volunteers must not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

## **4. Equal opportunities**

- 4.1. The Council is fully committed to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and will proactively offer volunteering opportunities to people from different backgrounds as a contribution to developing and maintaining an organisation where differing ideas, abilities, backgrounds and needs are fostered and valued and where those with diverse backgrounds and experiences are able to participate and contribute.

## **5. Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers**

- 5.1. The Council implements a fair, effective and open system in the recruitment and selection of volunteers and treats all information collected in this process confidentially. Where applicable the Council's Safer Recruitment Guidance should be applied.
- 5.2. Volunteering opportunities are advertised on the Council's website and through partner organisations. All potential volunteers participate in a recruitment and selection process that is appropriate to the role offered. The Council uses application forms, references and meets the volunteers for a discussion about their suitability.
- 5.3. The process should only be conducted by appropriately briefed/trained staff and aims to allow both parties to give and receive enough information to assess whether the volunteer opportunities available match the potential volunteer's skills, qualities and needs.
- 5.4. If successful, individuals will be provided with a copy of the Volunteer Agreement, details of the role and starting arrangements.
- 5.5. If unsuccessful, individuals will be offered an opportunity to discuss the outcome and identify possible alternatives outside of the Council.

## **6. Safeguarding**

- 6.1. Where the role requires it, all supervisors must ensure that volunteers are aware of, and have received appropriate training in the Council's Safeguarding Policy on Children and Adults.
- 6.2. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks will be carried out on any volunteer who in the course of their activity has regular, unsupervised, contact with the same group of children or young people. A DBS check will also need to be carried out on volunteers who care for or deal with the personal affairs of any adult. Further guidance can be found in the Council's safeguarding policies and procedures.

## **7. Risk Assessment**

- 7.1. A specific risk assessment for the volunteer must be carried out prior to the volunteer commencing their placement. The assessment should consider:
- The exact duties that will be undertaken including any equipment or substances that the volunteer could be using or coming in contact with.
  - The work environment – any risks from other related or unrelated activities that the volunteer may come into contact with.
  - The volunteer's experience and abilities
- 7.2. Robust controls must be put in place to remove the risk of injury. Copies of the risk assessment should be sent to the organisation that is placing the volunteer and to the Health and Safety team.
- 7.3. The risk assessment must be updated if, during the placement, the activities change and new risks need to be controlled or existing risks altered. However, this process must not be seen as prohibitive – controls need only be proportionate to the risk and may be changed, where appropriate.

## **8. Induction, training and ongoing support**

- 8.1. The Council will provide all volunteers with an introduction to the organisation as well as induction and training tailored to the volunteering opportunity. The following mandatory e-learning courses should be completed by all volunteers in addition to training required by the role undertaken.
- Data Protection & IT Security
  - Health & Safety Level 1
  - Equality and Diversity
  - Customer Care
  - Introduction to Safeguarding
- 8.2. During the induction period volunteers will be provided with written information on relevant legislation, organisational policies and codes of

practice and will be given the opportunity to discuss any of the issues with their supervisor.

- 8.3. All volunteers will receive appropriate support and supervision in their activity. The level of supervision will match the nature of the role and the experience of the volunteer. All volunteers will have a nominated supervisor, someone they can have regular access to if problems arise or when help and support is needed.
- 8.4. It may be necessary to obtain a written consent from a parent or guardian of volunteers aged 16-18.

## **9. Expenses**

- 9.1. The Council is committed to paying reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses ensuring that potential volunteers are not excluded due to financial reasons.
- 9.2. This is usually limited to travel.
- 9.3. These need to be agreed with relevant managers or volunteer supervisors before the volunteer commences their activity. Where expenses are not agreed, volunteers must be made aware of this at the first opportunity in the recruitment process.

## **10. Volunteers in receipt of benefits**

- 10.1. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to establish whether volunteering is going to affect their entitlement to any social security benefits. Further advice should be obtained by the volunteer from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus, or Citizens Advice.

## **11. Insurance**

- 11.1. Volunteers with the Council are protected by the organisation's public liability and personal accident insurance.
- 11.2. However, where volunteers drive as part of their voluntary activity, and use their own vehicle, they must ensure they possess insurance that covers them for business use. Further guidance should be sought from the volunteer's own insurance company. Supervisors must check and record this documentation if required.

## **12. Complaints**

- 12.1. As volunteers are not employees, they are unable to use the Council's Grievance Policy. However, they are entitled to use the Council's Complaints Procedure if they have any concerns over their treatment by the organisation.
- 12.2. Complaints by volunteers should be raised in the first instance with their supervisor and dealt with informally where possible. Where appropriate, the complaint will be investigated fully by their supervisor, or if the complaint is against their own supervisor, by another council officer.
- 12.3. If a complaint is brought against a volunteer, HR advice should be sought immediately.
- 12.4. Complaint will normally be investigated by the relevant volunteer supervisor or the supervisor's manager. Every attempt will be made to resolve the matter as quickly and informally as possible. If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved, then the volunteer may be told their services are no longer required with immediate effect.

## **13. Moving On**

- 13.1. The Council welcomes feedback and encourages volunteers to offer ideas for improvements. Volunteers who choose to stop volunteering at any time will also be invited to provide feedback before they move on.
- 13.2. Volunteers who are leaving the Council and who have made a regular commitment to it should be offered an exit interview, reference and/or statement of their achievements to ensure that their services are properly and formally appreciated.

## **14. Termination of Activity**

- 14.1. Where appropriate, the role and placement of the volunteer may be terminated by the supervisor at one week's notice, or immediately where inappropriate behaviour has occurred or where a health and safety risk has been identified. In all cases, the volunteer will be entitled to an explanation of the decision and action taken.



## **Volunteer Agreement**

Volunteers are an important and valued part of Reading Borough Council. We hope that you enjoy and benefit from volunteering with us. This agreement states what to expect from us, and what we hope from you. We aim to be flexible, so please let us know if you would like to make any changes and we will do our best to accommodate them.

This agreement is within the framework of Reading Borough Council's Volunteer Policy.

We, Reading Borough Council, will do our best to:

To introduce you to how the organisation works

- Agree and clarify your role during your time with us
- Review your developmental / training needs and meet them where appropriate and possible
- Provide a supervisor through whom you can give and receive feedback
- Respect your skills, dignity and individual wishes and to do our best to meet them
- Consult with you and keep you informed of possible changes
- Provide a safe workplace
- Apply our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Apply our complaints procedure if there is any problem

I, the volunteer, agree to do my best:

- To work reliably to the best of my ability, and to give as much warning as possible whenever I cannot work when expected
- To follow Reading Borough Council's policies and procedures, including Health and Safety, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and ICT policies along with other policies which are relevant to the role that I am doing.

Note: this agreement is in honour only and not a legally binding contract of employment.



Volunteer Name:	
Volunteer Signature:	
Date:	

On behalf of Reading Borough Council:	
Supervisor name:	
Supervisor signature:	
Date:	