



City of  
**Stoke-on-Trent**

# **Housing and Communities Services Volunteer Policy**

**Approved by: Housing and Customer Services OBM  
Date Approved: 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
Review Date: February 2021**

## Table of Contents

1. Purpose .....	2
2. Scope.....	2
3. The benefits of volunteering .....	2
4. Equality Statement .....	3
5. Who can volunteer? .....	3
6. Attracting volunteers .....	4
7. Role of the volunteer .....	4
8. Ways of getting involved .....	4
9. Supporting volunteers in their role .....	5
10. Volunteer’s agreement and code of conduct .....	6
11. Volunteers in receipt of benefits .....	7
12. Induction and Training.....	7
13. Disclosure and barring (DBS).....	8
14. Safeguarding.....	8
15. Health & Safety .....	8
16. Insurance for Volunteers .....	9
17. Confidentiality .....	9
18. Recognition and reward .....	9
19. Resolving problems.....	10
20. Complaints .....	10
21. Moving on .....	10
22. Financial Implications .....	11
23. Consultation on the development of the policy .....	11
24. Monitoring and evaluating performance .....	11
25. Key Contacts.....	11
26. Glossary of terms .....	12

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Volunteer Policy is to set out the Housing and Communities Service approach to involving volunteers in helping it to encourage community engagement, improve services and achieve value for money. It will ensure clarity, transparency and consistency in respect of resident volunteers who work with the Housing and Communities Service to make the city a great place to live.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1.1 The policy applies to any resident of the city<sup>1</sup> that volunteers to take part in activities organised by the Housing and Communities Service for the purpose of helping it to shape and improve services and supporting its work with residents to make our communities a great place to live. Whilst the principles may be applied broadly across volunteering activities organised by any part of the council, this policy focuses on the scope of activities supported by the Communities Team, within the Housing and Customer Services Directorate.
- 2.2 The policy sets out:
- the role of a volunteer;
  - examples of the range of activities that volunteers may be involved in;
  - what support, guidance and training volunteers may receive to enable them to volunteer to their full potential;
  - how volunteers may support the Housing and Communities Service in reviewing services;
  - how the Housing and Communities Service may support volunteers to take part in community activities; and
  - how the Housing and Communities Service will provide feedback to the contribution made by volunteers.
- 2.3 This policy does not apply to school pupils on work experience placements or to students on work placements.
- 2.4 Volunteers will not be asked to carry out the work of paid employees.

## 3. The benefits of volunteering

- 3.1 The Housing and Communities Service recognises that volunteering contributes to social, cultural and economic regeneration by creating a more cohesive society, whilst increasing skills levels and improving health and general wellbeing of

---

<sup>1</sup> Residents must be over the age of 18 years.

volunteers. Volunteering also provides opportunities to meet new people and helps reduce social isolation and loneliness, particularly amongst older people.<sup>2</sup>

- 3.2. We recognise that involving volunteers in activities brings a range of skills and experience to its work, assists it in meeting the needs of its residents and enriches the involvement it has with local communities. Volunteering brings an innovative and fresh perspective to the way services are delivered.
- 3.3 Volunteers who are residents may benefit from increased satisfaction with their home and neighbourhood. Effective involvement helps to break down misunderstandings, helping to improve relationships, whilst building mutual respect and understanding.
- 3.4 We understand that volunteering should be for the mutual benefit of all those involved, recognising that people volunteer for different reasons and varying degrees of involvement dependent on personal circumstances.

## 4. Equality Statement

- 4.1 The City Council is committed to equal access to all its customers and to ensuring that minority groups are not disadvantaged by the council's policies or services. This policy is therefore subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 4.2 The Housing and Communities Service is committed to equal opportunities and as such believes that volunteering should be open to all, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.

## 5. Who can volunteer?

- 5.1 Working with others is at the heart of everything the Housing and Communities Service does and it believes everyone has a role to play in making the city a great place to live. Therefore, we support anyone interested in becoming a volunteer who is over the age of 18 years and resides in the city.
- 5.2 The Housing and Communities Service welcomes volunteers in helping provide valuable feedback and input into how it provides its services. For this type of volunteering, we look for volunteers who use the service.
- 5.3 Volunteers demonstrating a particular expertise or specialism may be asked to provide input into areas that suit their specialist knowledge.

---

<sup>2</sup> Research commissioned by Volunteering England shows that being a volunteer also extends life expectancy, when compared with non-volunteers

- 5.4 We aim to gather the views of people that reflect the diversity of the residents of the city. It is important that volunteering is made accessible to all and we will endeavour to use methods that allow anyone to participate, in order to make volunteering an option to everyone who lives in the city.

## 6. Attracting volunteers

- 6.1 We value the views and feedback of all its service users and wants to encourage as many people as possible to get involved. Information about how to volunteer and what opportunities are available will be widely advertised and promoted through a variety of means, so that volunteering opportunities are accessible and inclusive for all where possible, regardless of background or experience.
- 6.2 We will ensure, where possible, that barriers to participation are removed, such as language, accessibility, timing of meetings, providing reimbursement of reasonable out-of-pocket costs incurred by volunteers where applicable (for example travel, parking expenses and childcare) in order to allow everyone the opportunity to contribute.

## 7. Role of the volunteer

- 7.1 Opportunities will be made available for volunteers to:
- provide feedback about services
  - influence services through service reviews
  - provide feedback and influence policy and strategy development
  - monitor and scrutinise performance
  - be part of a community project or one-off community activity
- 7.2 We value all levels of volunteering and involvement from informal engagement to involvement through formal arrangements. It wants to encourage anyone wishing to volunteer to do so and it recognises that giving time in this way depends on a person's circumstances; therefore levels of volunteering may be flexible.

## 8. Ways of getting involved

- 8.1 Examples of volunteering at an informal level:
- providing opinion and feedback through surveys;
  - providing opinion and feedback using on-line facilities and social media such as interactive sections within websites; blogs; webinars; feedback sessions;
  - organising community litter picking events;
  - taking part in litter picks, reporting fly tipping, helping with a community garden;
  - taking part in community fun days and events;

- taking part in open days / roadshows; and/or:
- promoting the volunteering role and how to get involved.

#### 8.2 Examples of volunteering in formal activities:

- being part of task and finish / focus groups;
- forums;
- planned specific consultation activities;
- membership of Residents Association;
- organising community events;
- membership of the Tenant Board and Complaints Review Panel;
- mystery shopping of services;
- planned estate walkabouts;
- post council house repair inspections;
- scrutiny work; and/or:
- membership of various Panels, for example, Editorial Panel, Sheltered Scheme Panel.

## 9. Supporting volunteers in their role

- 9.1 Where volunteers give their time for free to local groups or organisations, we will provide free regular training and support on things like running events, fundraising and first-aid. If volunteers would like to help look after green spaces in their area, we will provide litter picking equipment and collect all rubbish collected on litter picks.
- 9.2 We will work with volunteers to identify potential funding, networks and spaces to run projects and offer dedicated support for groups. This will include attending residents' associations and other community groups to provide support.
- 9.3 The Housing and Communities Service will look to match the time, skills and experience of the volunteer to a suitable volunteering opportunity, ensuring there is an opportunity for volunteers to use and develop their skills and talents. We will support the volunteer to find paid employment opportunities which recognise the skills and experience developed as a volunteer by signposting to appropriate services and providing references where appropriate.
- 9.4 We want to keep volunteers informed of how their contribution has made a difference. For example, this may be how they have influenced an issue, how their opinions have helped shape policy or service delivery, or how their efforts have made a difference to their community. It will do this by a variety of methods such as:
- feedback session at the completion of any scrutiny work;
  - quality and assurance panels;
  - quarterly newsletters;
  - annual report;
  - celebration events.

- 9.6 It is recognised that different types of volunteering requires different levels of commitment in terms of time and involvement. Where volunteers are involved with a specific activity or exercise, We will advise on the estimated amount of commitment required for the activity involved and how often their services may be required.

## 10. Volunteer’s agreement and code of conduct

- 10.1 Volunteers do not have the same rights as employees or workers. However, they should be treated fairly and consistently. A volunteer agreement between the Housing and Communities Service and its volunteers is a useful way of clarifying the expectations of both parties and is an indication of the mutual commitment between the Housing and Communities Service and the volunteer. The agreement is a voluntary one and does not constitute a contract of employment. It can be cancelled at any time by either party.
- 10.2 It is expected that volunteers will follow some basic rules of conduct around working together with respect and courtesy, particularly when engaged in groups and face to face discussions. These are outlined in the ‘Volunteer’s Agreement’. Volunteers will also be expected to abide by the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations and we will provide training to help volunteers to do this.
- 10.3 Volunteers sitting as a member of the Tenant Board or any other standing group will be expected to adhere to the relevant Code of Conduct and Terms of Reference of that group.
- 10.4 Electronic devices such as mobile phones, laptops and tablets belonging to the council should only be used during volunteer activities where relevant to the activity being carried out or for emergency use only. It is also expected that email addresses given to volunteers should only be used for purpose of volunteering activities and not for personal use.
- 10.5 Volunteers should ensure that when using social media in a personal capacity they do not make any comments that could bring the reputation of the council into disrepute.
- 10.6 If volunteers are required to use social media for purposes such as to promote engagement with services, then the council’s media protocol must be observed. Permission and guidance must also be sought from the Communications Team before using social media in an official council capacity. Failure to do this and/or making inappropriate comments will result in the volunteer being told their services are no longer required with immediate effect.
- 10.7 For all council business, contact with the media is conducted through the council’s Press Office. If the media approaches a volunteer directly whilst volunteering, we would ask that they refer the enquiry to the council’s Press Office. All volunteers will be given a named contact person within the Housing and Communities Service when they are recruited and this person will help them to do this.

- 10.8 If a volunteer makes personal written or broadcasted responses, it should be made clear that they are representing their personal views and not necessarily those of the council. Confidential information must not be used for this purpose. Beforehand, the volunteers should seek advice from their nominated contact within the Housing and Communities Service who will help them to consult the council's Press Office.
- 10.9 Failure to follow the guidelines in the Volunteer's Agreement and Code of Conduct will result in the volunteer being asked to no longer participate.

## 11. Volunteers in receipt of benefits

- 11.1 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 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus, or Citizens Advice Bureau.

## 12. Induction and Training

- 12.1 The Housing and Communities Service will give volunteers an induction before undertaking any activities, depending upon the nature of the volunteering role. This may include:
- an outline of the aims and objectives of being a volunteer
  - working practices and structure of volunteering
  - all the background information required to enable the volunteer complete the role
  - providing key policies
  - detailed information about the procedures for claiming expenses, where applicable to the activity involved
  - how to report accidents and deal with any emergencies
  - introduction to other volunteers
  - tour around the council's facilities (and see some of the Housing and Communities Service initiatives)
- 12.2 Volunteers will be briefed on issues such as confidentiality and the importance of maintaining a correct relationship with all staff, residents, Tenant Board members, Resident Association members and Elected Members. Volunteers may be asked to sign a Confidentiality Agreement to confirm their commitment to confidentiality.
- 12.3 The key policies which new volunteers should be aware of include (although this list is not exhaustive):
- Code of Conduct Policy.
  - Data Protection Policy / User Information Security Policy.
  - Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy.
  - Single Equality Scheme.



- Bullying & Harassment Procedure.
  - IT Access Policy.
- 12.5 Volunteers will have a discussion at least once a year with their named contact where individual training, development plans and skillset will be discussed.
- 12.6 In-house and external training with organisations will be made available to volunteers, where possible and applicable.

### **13. Disclosure and barring (DBS)**

- 13.1 DBS will also be carried out for any volunteer whose role requires it, in accordance with the council's Disclosure and Barring (DBS) Policy.
- 13.2 In accordance with the Tenant Board Terms of Reference, volunteers who sit as Tenant Board will agree for a Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) check be completed if deemed necessary.

### **14. Safeguarding**

- 14.1 As part of their induction, volunteers will be provided with information on safeguarding relating to their area of the involvement method. Volunteers will be made aware of the most up to date policies, including the Safeguarding Adults Policy and Safeguarding Children Policy. They may also be asked to take part in a corporate e-learning exercise prior to carrying out their duties. This will ensure that volunteers are aware of the requirements and what to do if they identify a potential safeguarding risk.
- 14.4 The council has a Policy Statement on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders. In line with this statement, we will undertake not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of a Disclosure on the basis of conviction or other information revealed.

### **15. Health & Safety**

- 15.1 For all Housing and Communities Service-led activities, volunteer roles will be risk assessed, covering both the tasks involved and the environment in which they will be conducted. This includes where the volunteer will be alone during the activity. The team will support the volunteer in understanding any risks and how these can be mitigated, in accordance with existing council procedures. In addition, where a volunteer makes us aware of a pre-existing medical condition or disability, an individual risk assessment may also be necessary. Where activities are undertaken by groups that are not Housing and Communities Services-led, the team will advise of the relevant health and safety requirements, including risk assessments.
- 15.2 Volunteers will be provided guidance with regards to the council's *Health & Safety Policy & Procedure*. Any volunteer who breaches the council's *Health & Safety*

*Policy & Procedure* will have their volunteer status suspended pending a review and investigation of the incident. If it is substantiated then the volunteer may have their volunteer status and agreement cancelled.

## 16. Insurance for Volunteers

- 16.1 Volunteers carrying out involvement activities for and on behalf of the Housing and Communities Service will be covered by the council's Public Liability Insurance while they are on the council's premises or engaged in any activities on the council's behalf.

## 17. Confidentiality

- 17.1 The council is required by law to deal with information in a manner according to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016. It is expected that volunteers comply with the requirements of the act and as such treat information of a confidential nature responsibly and in an appropriate manner.
- 17.2 All volunteers will be expected to sign the council's confidentiality agreement statement, where appropriate to the volunteering opportunity.
- 17.3 We will only use personal information for the purposes in which it was gathered, will maintain the confidentiality of all volunteers' personal information and will not disclose it outside of the Housing and Communities Service without the written permission of the volunteer, unless legally obliged to do so in accordance with our privacy statement, copies of the statement are available online <https://www.stoke.gov.uk/dataprotection> and written copies on request.
- 17.4 Volunteers have the right to have their personal data removed from our records and can update their preferences at any time.

## 18. Recognition and reward

- 18.1 We could not improve the work it does without the support and input from volunteers. To acknowledge this we will always say thank you and show appreciation for a job well done.
- 18.2 To recognise the contribution volunteers make, the we will hold social events each year to celebrate their achievements; this might be a certificate presentation for volunteers or a celebration event. During these events volunteers will get an opportunity to meet other volunteers and supporters of the work and share in the Housing and Communities Service's plans for the future.
- 18.3 We will take opportunities, for example on our website and Facebook page, annual general meetings and local and national press, to praise the achievements of our

volunteers. By sharing this information, we hope to encourage new volunteers. Each year we will hold a volunteers week where volunteers will get the opportunity to come along to presentations.

## 19. Resolving problems

- 19.1 We will endeavor to listen to the concerns of individual volunteers. Volunteers are encouraged to express their views about matters of concern at any time. It is hoped that volunteers will have an enjoyable experience volunteering with the Housing and Communities Service, however if the role as a volunteer does not meet with individual's expectations or with the commitments that we have made, the Housing and Communities Service would like the individual to feel comfortable about letting us know.

## 20. Complaints

- 20.1 We aim to identify and solve problems at the earliest possible stage. In the first instance any complaint raised will be dealt with informally, where possible, if this is appropriate. As volunteers are not employees, they are unable to use the council's Grievance Policy and Procedure. However, they are entitled to use the council's Complaints Procedure.
- 20.2 If a complaint is brought against a volunteer, this will be investigated by the relevant 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.

## 21. Moving on

- 21.1 The Housing and Communities Service reserve the right not to accept a volunteer or to terminate an arrangement.
- 21.2 Any volunteer who breaches either the council's policy on data protection (*User Information Security Policy and the Health & Safety Policy & Procedure*) will have their volunteer status suspended pending a review and investigation of the incident. If substantiated then the volunteer may have their volunteer status and agreement cancelled.
- 21.3 Any volunteer bringing the council or its partners into disrepute will have their volunteer status suspended pending a review and investigation of the incident. If it is substantiated then the volunteer may have their volunteer status and agreement cancelled.
- 21.4 We recognise that volunteers may cease their involvement at any time. When a volunteer chooses to cease their involvement with us will ensure that volunteers are

offered an opportunity to discuss their decision in order to identify any issues which could be improved for volunteers in the future.

## 22. Financial Implications

- 22.1 Any approved reimbursed expenses incurred through volunteering will be financed through;
- the Housing Revenue Account for City Council tenant and leaseholder involvement, and
  - the General Fund, for any other volunteering activity.
- 22.2 On an annual basis, the Housing and Communities Service will review the contribution made by volunteers, using a management tool known as 'cost benefit analysis'. This will allow us to assess the impact volunteers are making and how best to plan future involvement methods.

## 23. Consultation on the development of the policy

- 23.1 This Policy has been developed in partnership with the active Housing and Customer Services volunteers, primarily through the Tenants Board and Federation of Stoke-on-Trent Residents Associations. Their feedback has helped to shape the policy and reflects their priorities.

## 24. Monitoring and evaluating performance

- 24.1 Where the volunteer is involved with formal activities, their progress will be updated through regular discussion with link officers. This will help set training plans where appropriate and allow any support requirements to be understood.
- 24.2 Our approach to involving residents will be monitored and evaluated to understand the performance of the service as a whole. Some outcomes / measures may be;
- an increase in volunteer involvement in decision making
  - promoting volunteer participation among equalities groups
  - increased satisfaction with housing services, standards and living conditions
  - improved neighbourhood satisfaction
  - an improvement in standards of the delivery of services

## 25. Key Contacts

**For comments in relation to this policy and its development please contact the Enabling and Projects Team:**

Telephone (office hours only): 01782 233330

Email: [housing.strategy@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:housing.strategy@stoke.gov.uk)  
Post: Housing Enabling Team  
Floor 2, Civic Centre  
Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST4 1HH.

**For further information on volunteering opportunities, please contact:**

**Communities Team:**

Telephone (office hours only): 01782 238515  
01782 238969  
01782 235916

Email: [communities@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:communities@stoke.gov.uk)  
Post: Communities Team  
Floor 1, Civic Centre  
Glebe Street  
Stoke-on-Trent  
ST4 1HH.

**Social media**

Twitter <https://twitter.com/SoTInvolvement>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SoTTenantInvolvement>

Facebook user name @SoTInvolvement

## 26. Glossary of terms

*DBS:* The Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) helps make safer recruitment decisions and prevent unsuitable people from working with vulnerable groups, including children. It replaces the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA).

*Housing Revenue Account (HRA):* Since April 2012, the Housing and Communities Service has been able to fully retain the money received in rent (the HRA) in order to plan and provide services to their current and future tenants, known as self-financing.

*Tenant Board:* The Tenant Board is a group of volunteer tenants who undertake a varied role in reviewing housing services to recommend improvements.