



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Volunteer Policy

October 2022

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the Volunteer Policy is to set out the City Council's 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 City Council to make the city a great place to live.

2. Scope

- 2.1.1 The policy applies to any resident of the city that volunteers to take part in activities or services 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. This policy applies across volunteering activities organised by any part of the council.

- 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 City Council in reviewing services;
- how the City Council may support volunteers to take part in community activities; and
- how the City Council 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 City Council 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 volunteers. Volunteering also provides opportunities to meet new people and

helps reduce social isolation and loneliness, particularly amongst older people.

3.2. We recognise that involving volunteers in activities brings a range of skills and experience to our work, assists us in meeting the needs of residents and enriches the involvement we have 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 neighbourhood and communities. 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 City Council 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 City Council 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 16 years and resides in or has connections with the city.

5.2 The City Council 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.

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 service users and want 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) 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 and policy and strategy development
- provide feedback and influence
- monitor and scrutinise performance
- be part of a community project or one-off community activity
- provide support that adds value within our services

7.2 We value all levels of volunteering and involvement from informal engagement to involvement through formal arrangements. We want to encourage anyone wishing to volunteer to do so and recognise that giving time in this way depends on a person's circumstances; therefore levels of volunteering may be flexible.

7.3 Role profiles will be developed to provide information about the volunteering opportunity in order to match people with the activities that interest them.

8. Ways of getting involved

8.1 Examples of volunteering include:

- being part of task and finish / focus groups or forums and planned specific consultation activities;
- mystery shopping of services;
- scrutiny work;
- organising or supporting community events;
- Participating in “Friends of” schemes eg for local parks
- Stewarding at large scale events, including Tour of Britain, Potters ‘Arf and city centre activities.
- Supporting the management of council assets – eg Community Centres
- Supporting services to deliver added value for example activities and events in libraries; digital advice and support; organising or digitising museum collections, engaging with museum visitors, social care services etc.

9. Supporting volunteers in their role

9.1 Where volunteers give their time for free to local groups or organisations, we may provide free 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 may offer support such as providing litter picking equipment.

9.2 The City Council will work with VAST to match potential volunteers 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 opportunities which recognise the skills and experience developed as a volunteer by signposting to appropriate services and providing references where appropriate.

9.3 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 City Council and its volunteers is a useful way of clarifying the expectations of both parties and is an indication of the mutual commitment. 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 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.

10.4 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.

10.5 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 asked to no longer participate with immediate effect.

10.6 For all council business, contact with the media is conducted through the council's Communications and Marketing team. If the media approaches a volunteer directly whilst volunteering, we would ask that they refer the enquiry to the council's Communications and Marketing team. All volunteers will be given a named contact person when they are recruited and this person will help them to do this.

10.7 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 who will help them to consult the council's Communications and Marketing team.

10.8 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 City Council 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

12.2 Volunteers will be briefed on issues such as confidentiality and the importance of maintaining appropriate relationships with all staff, residents 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.
- Equality and Diversity Strategy.
- Bullying & Harassment Procedure.
- IT Access Policy.

12.4 Volunteers who remain in place long term will have a discussion at least once a year with their named contact where individual training, development plans and skillset will be discussed.

12.5 In-house and external training with organisations may 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.

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 Before a volunteer starts, the line manager responsible for them must ensure that the risk assessment, applicable to the activities they will carry out, has identified how volunteers may be at harm, what measures need to be put in place to control them and a record kept on file. This should cover both the tasks involved and the environment in which they will be conducted and where the volunteer will be alone during the activity. The manager 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.

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 City Council 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 City Council 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 The City Council 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 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.

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 City Council, however if the role as a volunteer does not meet with individual's

expectations or with the commitments that we have made, we 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 City Council reserves 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 revenue budget for the relevant service.
- 22.2 On an annual basis, the City Council 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. Monitoring and evaluating performance

- 23.1 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.
- 23.2 Our approach to involving volunteers 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 services
 - improved neighbourhood satisfaction
 - an improvement in standards of the delivery of services