



## **Report to Cabinet**

**Subject: Volunteer Policy**

**Date: 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007**

**Author: Resources Strategy Officer for Head of Leisure Services**

### **Purpose of the Report**

For Cabinet to adopt Gedling Borough's volunteer policy.

### **Background**

The need for a Volunteer Policy arose from the increasing need for Gedling Borough Council to involve and recognise the significant and valuable role that volunteers have in creating and implementing our services.

At present Leisure Services has twenty-one volunteers providing services and a further six in training, this number could grow dependent on the availability to resource further courses and activities.

Six volunteers support the Shop Mobility scheme in Arnold and Housing utilise volunteers on trips organised from the Warden aided complexes.

Volunteering should be a worthwhile and rewarding experience for volunteers, who are an important community resource. Volunteers' experience of working with Gedling Borough Council will shape their overall view of the Council.

The results of Sport England's Active People Survey have highlighted the need to increase volunteer participation and in order to achieve this the necessary mechanisms need to be in place to encourage and support volunteer activity.

The policy provides a framework of best practice and procedures that Gedling Borough Council will follow when appointing, managing and supporting our volunteers, these also meet the requirements of the Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children Act 2004.

The Authority will periodically review the operation of the Volunteer Policy to make sure that it is always in accordance with our Equal Opportunity Policy, and other relevant policies and best practice in relation to managing volunteers.

The principles upon which the policy will be implemented are as follows:

- α We will apply our Equal Opportunity Policy to the recruitment and management of volunteers
- α We will take particular care in relation to children, young people and vulnerable adults and will endeavour to take appropriate action in order to reduce risk to these groups of people.
- α We will provide a volunteer agreement to all volunteers
- α We will make information available for volunteers to enable them to claim expenses
- α We will advise all volunteers of their rights under the Data Protection legislation and expect volunteers to respect the confidential nature of Council business
- α We will provide appropriate public and personal liability insurance cover for all volunteers whilst they are engaged in a volunteer activity with us
- α We do not regard volunteers as unpaid employees and will not expect volunteers to undertake inappropriate responsibilities or be used in a situation where a paid member of staff or a person who provides services under contract to the Council should be used
- α We will consult and involve volunteers on issues concerning their volunteering activity
- α We will offer appropriate training and support for volunteers
- α We will provide suitable training and support for staff who manage volunteers
- α We expect all volunteers to behave reasonably and not bring the Council into disrepute
- α All of the information that we give to volunteers and all of the forms that we ask them to fill in will be clear and easy to understand.
- α Our approach is to have policies and procedures dedicated to volunteers. These are distinct and separate from policies and procedures for members, employees, consultants, service providers and contractors
- α We will provide all volunteers with a copy of the Council's leaflet on how to make a complaint.
- α We will review our guidance every two years.
- α We will update our guidance in line with any changes in the law.

## **Proposal**

Agree the adoption of the Volunteer Policy. The policy will provide Gedling Borough Council with a framework for effective and consistent engagement with Volunteers.

A copy of the report will be provided as an item for information to the Personnel and Resources Committee.

A full copy of the Volunteer Policy is attached at Appendix 1.

**Resource Implications**

Implementation of the policy along with the necessary volunteer recruitment process and supervision will be incorporated within existing roles.

**Recommendation**

For Cabinet to adopt the policy.

**Wards Affected**

'All Wards'

**STANDARD BACKGROUND DOCUMENT**

**CONSULTATION**

**Finance**

**Legal**

**Personnel**

**All Heads of Service**

**CONSIDERATION**

**Equal Opportunities/Impact Assessment**

As a new Gedling Borough Council policy it will require an equalities impact assessment.

**Children**

N/A

**Crime and Disorder**

N/A

**Risk Management**

N/A

## Volunteer Policy

The following policy presents Gedling Borough Council with a framework for effective and consistent engagement with Volunteers. However, there may be occasions when individual departments will need to exercise discretion in the application of this policy.

### **1. Introduction and Scope**

Gedling Borough Council recognises the significant and valuable role that volunteers have in creating and implementing our services.

Volunteering should also be a worthwhile and rewarding experience for volunteers, who are an important community resource. Volunteers' experience of working with us will shape their overall view of the Council.

This document is our policy about volunteers. In it, the term 'volunteer' is defined and our principles and objectives with regard to the use of volunteers is set out. It provides a framework of best practice and procedures that we will follow when appointing, managing and supporting our volunteers.

We will hold a copy of this document at all premises where volunteers are based and will let volunteers know where it is held.

### **2. Definition**

Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer us their time, experience, knowledge and skills without financial gain helping us to achieve our service objectives, or with the aim of providing a benefit to the local community.

The role of volunteers is very different from that of councillors, employees, consultants, students on work placements and secondees (staff doing a different job for a set amount of time).

There is no contract of employment for services between the Council and its volunteers.

Volunteers do not have to commit to a given number of hours. If we ask volunteers to work a given number of hours, which will be at their discretion, we will not penalise them if they are unable to do so.

### **3. Principles**

We will apply our Equal Opportunity Policy to the recruitment and management of volunteers;

- a. We will take particular care in relation to children, young people and vulnerable adults and will endeavour to take appropriate action in order to reduce risk to these groups of people.
- b. We will provide a volunteer agreement to all volunteers;
- c. We will make information available for volunteers to enable them to claim expenses;

- d. We will advise all volunteers of their rights under the Data Protection legislation and expect volunteers to respect the confidential nature of Council business;
- e. We will provide appropriate public liability insurance cover for all volunteers whilst they are engaged in a volunteer activity with us (see paragraph 14);
- f. We do not regard volunteers as unpaid employees and will not expect volunteers to undertake inappropriate responsibilities or be used in a situation where a paid member of staff or a person who provides services under contract to the Council should be used;
- g. We will consult and involve volunteers on issues concerning their volunteering activity;
- h. We will offer appropriate training and support for volunteers;
- i. We will provide suitable training and support for staff who manage volunteers;
- j. We expect all volunteers to behave reasonably and not bring the Council into disrepute;
- k. All of the information that we give to volunteers and all of the forms that we ask them to fill in will be clear and easy to understand.
- l. Our approach is to have policies and procedures dedicated to volunteers. These are distinct and separate from policies and procedures for members, employees, consultants, service providers and contractors.
- m. We will provide all volunteers with a copy of the Council's leaflet on how to make a complaint.
- n. We will review our guidance every two years.
- o. We will update our guidance in line with any changes in the law.

#### **4. Volunteer Agreement**

We will record the arrangements for individual volunteer activities in a volunteer agreement. This agreement is intended to be flexible enough to take account of all individual service needs

## **5. Recruitment**

We will accept volunteers by applying the following process:

- a. We will provide descriptions for all volunteering activities outlining specific tasks, responsibilities and who the volunteer reports to;
- b. Where practicable, we will also provide a person specification that will identify the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to carry out the tasks;
- c. All volunteers will be asked to complete and sign a Volunteer Application and Emergency Contact Details Form.
- d. We will invite all prospective volunteers to meet their intended supervisor for a two-way discussion of the proposed role, its requirements and each other's expectations. This meeting is for both the supervisor and prospective volunteer to see if the volunteering opportunity is suitable.
- e. We will let the prospective volunteer know whether we are happy for the volunteering to go ahead within 5 working days of the meeting. We would ask prospective volunteers to let the Council know if they would like to go ahead within a reasonable period of time;
- f. We have the right to refuse the offer of service of any volunteer;
- g. We may need two satisfactory references. If a volunteer will be in contact with children, young people or vulnerable adults, we may also need a satisfactory disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau plus a satisfactory result from a Social Services client records check before a successful volunteer can start their duties;
- h. For some volunteer activities we may need satisfactory medical clearance from a GP.

## **6. Disclosure of Convictions**

Having a criminal record will not be a bar to volunteering with Gedling Borough Council unless the Head of Department or Service considers that a conviction means that the applicant is unsuitable. Under the requirements of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and any other relevant legislation there may be a need to ask all volunteers to disclose any 'unspent' convictions.

The Council has a legal obligation to protect children or young people under the age of 18 and vulnerable adults. Volunteers who, in the course of their volunteering activity, are likely to come into contact with the following groups of people will be asked to disclose all convictions including any that are 'spent' and a Disclosure Application will be made to the Criminal Records Bureau:

- People aged fewer than 18
- People over the age of 65;
- People suffering from serious illness or mental disorder of any description;
- People addicted to alcohol or drugs;
- People who are blind, deaf or have a speech impairment;

- Other people who are substantially and permanently disabled by illness, injury or congenital disability.

The Council aims to comply with the Criminal Record Bureau Code of Practice on fair use and handling of disclosure information and will act within its own policies.

## **7. Volunteer Management**

All volunteers will have a named supervisor who shall be responsible for:

- a. Providing the volunteer with a written description of the volunteering role outlining specific and general tasks, responsibilities and who they will report to;
- b. Organising a planned induction to the organisation, including explaining relevant policies and procedures (including in relation to dealings with other people) and the duties and tasks agreed;
- c. Ensuring that volunteers are aware of their agreed responsibilities with regards to confidentiality and relations with the media;
- d. Ensuring that volunteers have adequate work space, equipment and services necessary to perform their tasks effectively and safely including personal identification where appropriate;
- e. Arranging a short, timetabled trial period during which new volunteers will receive close support and mutual feedback, including the chance for them to feed back their views; and
- f. Providing regular support
- g. Making sure that the role and activities are reviewed.

## **8. Training**

We will provide training to make sure that volunteers can carry out their activities on behalf of the Council effectively. This training will directly relate to the activity for which they volunteer.

If there is any doubt as to whether the training is related to the volunteer's task, the appropriate Head of Service will be the final arbiter on the decision.



## **9. Conduct and Complaints**

Volunteers will not be subject to our disciplinary procedures nor have access to our grievance procedures both of which are for Council employees only.

However, volunteers will be given an opportunity to discuss any concerns that they may have about their volunteering and consult with us generally.

Volunteers should raise any complaints or concerns with their supervisor. If this is not appropriate or they are not happy with how this is dealt with, volunteers should take their complaint to the Deputy Chief Executive or follow the Council's standard published complaints procedure.

If there are concerns about the conduct or performance of a volunteer, their supervisor will investigate to find out what is happening. This will, where possible, include talking with the volunteer concerned.

If conduct or performance is unsatisfactory, the volunteer should be informed that they will be offered '*special guidance*' for a period. The objective of the '*special guidance*' will be to encourage improvement.

If a volunteer does not meet our standards of performance, and the steps we have taken to encourage them to improve do not work, the volunteer should be offered more suitable alternative voluntary activities or leave as required by the Council.

In cases of gross misconduct the volunteer's agreement will be terminated immediately.

The Council's Personnel Services may provide general guidance in relation to conduct concerns and procedural matters.

## **10. Ending Involvement**

Either the Council or the volunteer can end the volunteering at any time and without any notice. However, unless there is an emergency or misconduct, we will usually try to give volunteers at least 2 weeks' notice and hope that they will offer the same to us.

In all cases we will provide the volunteer with details of the reasons why their involvement is no longer needed.

## **11. References**

If asked, we will provide volunteers with a simple reference giving details of all the activities that they have successfully undertaken for us. This may be provided direct to the volunteer, or other prospective employer or similar if requested.

## **12. Health & Safety**

We have a duty to look after the safety and well being of our volunteers. We will make volunteers aware of our Health & Safety Policy and any special safety arrangements relating to their individual role.

Volunteers as well as employees must take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and others who may be affected by what they do, or omit to do, at work. Volunteers must also co-operate with the Council in performing any duty or complying with any requirement imposed by any relevant health and safety laws.

## **13. Repaying People Their Expenses**

In some circumstances we can reimburse expenses. Individual arrangements will be explained to volunteers before they start their volunteering activity. If a volunteer wishes to claim expenses they should complete an Expenses Claim Form and attach corresponding receipts, travel ticket or other evidence of expenditure as appropriate.

## **14. Insurance**

The Council maintains public and employee insurance against risks including loss and damage to or destruction of its property, the injury or death of members of the public affected by its activities and its employees and volunteers undertaking authorised work for it.

However, the insurance does not extend to unauthorised work or to authorised work carried on by people not authorised by the Council. It is therefore most important that volunteers comply with the conditions of the Council's insurance and do not do anything that might result in the Council not being covered.

All volunteer activities carried out for us will be covered by public and personal liability insurance as long as:

- Volunteers were acting within their authority at the time of the incident giving rise to the claim,
- The Council would have been covered for the claim had the claim been made against the Council,
- The Council has full control of any claim.

## **15. Copyright**

All records in any medium (whether written, computer readable or otherwise) including accounts, documents, drawings and private notes about the Council and its activities, and all copies and extracts of them made or acquired by the volunteer in the course of their volunteering activity shall be:

- (a) the Council's property;
- (b) used for the Council's purpose only;
- (c) returned to the Council on demand at any time; and
- (d) returned to the Council without demand if the volunteer ceases for more than one month to be actively involved with the Council's work.

Also, Volunteers should be aware that:

- (e) Information produced by any volunteer in the course of their volunteering may be made available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

## **16. Asylum Seekers**

Since April 2000, asylum seekers (people in the process of applying for refugee status) and family members are allowed to volunteer. This includes whilst they are appealing against a decision to refuse them asylum. However, it may be the case that they may not be given the right to remain here and volunteer status is not to be regarded as a step towards refugee status being granted.

## **17. Monitoring and Review**

The Authority will periodically review the operation of this Volunteer Policy and to make sure that it is always in accordance with our Equal Opportunity Policy, and other relevant policies and best practice in relation to managing volunteers.