

 **Volunteer Policy**

(Applies to all persons not employed by the Council)

**1. Guidance Maintenance**

**1.1 Document Version**

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| Amendment | Date | By whom |
| Draft, consultation with volunteers/friends of groups/CHAS/SLT | 2018-2019 | GI |
| Giving for Gedling – website ‘I want to volunteer’ form half the induction form, revised second half ‘checklist’, H&S and declaration (effectively) meeting the requirements of the policy induction form, | 3.4.20 | Fiona H/ GI |
| Volunteer induction form minor changes to GDPR references. Volunteer Policy, handbook minor updates to induction form referencesSection 2.3 and 2.4 premise and landowner references minor additions. Section 3.1 typo removed. 3.2 removed – this paragraph duplicated 2.7, paragraph numbers updated from 3.3 is now 3.2 etc. Paragraph 3.6 typo removed. 3.8 NCVO definition added.12.2 – refer to appendices added. 18.1 duplications removed. 19.1, 26.1 had minor changes made.  | 26.11.20 | GI |
| Policy Version 1.2 Handbook (v3) in section: Volunteer Tasks and roles. Risk assessment reference removed. Your health, minor amends. Service manager references changed to Heads of ServiceAmend to the volunteer expenses section. Section 3.5 slight amendSection 12.1 Insurance. All of the unsupervised sessions must be agreed prior to any voluntary activity commencing by a Council officer (feedback from MC/JR 10.5.21)12.2 minor amendment.Section 26.1 consultation section amendments | 10.05.21 | GI |

**1.2 Maintained by**

Guidance maintained by the Health, Safety and Emergency Planning Officer.

**1.3 Distribution list**

This is a corporate Council Policy and guidance stored on the Council’s intranet, H&S / AssessNET portal, selecting ‘Company documents’ GBC File store, within Volunteer Policy and also located on the Council’s main website.

**1.4 Important information warning**

The data contained in this document forms part of the Councils Health and Safety Policy and H&S management system.

**2. Policy: Volunteer Policy**

2.1 Voluntary activities can be regular such as those arranged with our Parks department, with our Friends of groups, or on a more ad hoc basis such as ‘community litter picking days’ or other one-off or short-term events which could include community emergency response activities.

2.2 This policy is for volunteers who may be members of public, residents, businesses, third parties and other groups that wish to volunteer for the Council, on Council premises, for Council run activities and those under the control of and with the permission of Council officers. The policy will apply to all Council controlled, managed and supported voluntary activities.

2.3 This policy does not cover voluntary activities undertaken on behalf of party political activities. It excludes activities organised by Councillors without Council officer control, any political parties activities when they are not acting on behalf of the Council or when not acting as an employer. Such as electioneering, elected member organised community events, other political party arranged activities, or any voluntary activities not controlled, managed or supported by the Council or its officers as they do not fall within the remit of an employer or are not undertaken on Council premises or Council land.

2.4 This policy does not apply to all types of voluntary activities that occur within the Borough boundaries that are not being managed or controlled by the Council or its officers and not within the Council’s responsibilities as an employer or on land owned by the Council. It is important to stress that this policy only applies to the extent where Council officers have control over activities or are required to for statutory purposes, as the voluntary activities need to be controlled. For example, this policy does not apply to external voluntary groups organised by members of the public such as ‘Keep Britain Tidy’ sessions or any other external groups and organisations that are not within the control of the Council or Council officers.

2.5 This policy is separate to the Employee Handbook’s Volunteer Policy (appendix 39 – Volunteering Policy). The Employee Volunteering Policy is the policy that explains how employees can qualify for additional leave through two different routes. Please refer to personnel for a copy of the employee handbook.

2.6 This policy will not be applicable to Council employees whilst at work. However, when an employee choses to volunteer outside of work and wishes to volunteer for a Council run activity or group session operated on Council premises, this policy and associated documents will apply.

2.7 This policy also supports the Gedling Plan priority of Strong and Dynamic Communities and the objective of promoting and encouraging pride, good citizenship and participation, reduce anti-social behaviour; along with the Sustainable Environment priority to provide an attractive and sustainable local environment that people can enjoy; and thirdly the Healthy Lifestyles priority, and all four of the priorities key objectives.

**3 Background, why volunteers are important to the Council**

3.1 Volunteers can raise awareness about the Gedling Plan’s objectives, build relationships within the community in which we work and contribute to supporting others in the community. By providing volunteering opportunities we provide opportunities for social inclusion, skills development and potential routes to employment. There is also evidence that volunteering can help to improve health and wellbeing for individuals and inform the development and delivery of Council service plans, projects or other key objectives by bringing in new opinions, ideas or approaches of volunteers. This can help the Council to adapt, stay relevant to what the Council Tax payers opinions and the community needs, as well as identifying opportunities to improve what we do. They can also be crucial support in times of great need, such as emergencies.

3.2 A good point to start is understanding what a volunteering policy is and why have one?

*A volunteering policy is a framework for a volunteer programme and how the Council would like to control and manage its volunteers and voluntary groups. It helps define the role of volunteers, what is expected of them and the Council, how they can expect to be treated and sets out clear boundaries of the relationship.*

3.3 The main advantages of having a policy, is that it can help to:

* Demonstrate the Council’s commitment to our voluntary activities, individual volunteers or voluntary groups. The Volunteering Policy documents will show that the Council cares and has thought through how we will manage volunteers.
* Ensure consistency and that all volunteers are treated equally and fairly. Being able to refer to a written policy document ensures that decisions do not have to be made on an ad hoc basis.
* Allow volunteers to know where they stand; it offers some security, in that they know how they can expect to be treated, and where they can turn to if they feel that things are going wrong.
* It helps ensure that Council officers and senior management fully understand why volunteers are engaged and involved in certain agreed activities, and what activities they will be able to do.

3.4 An important consideration was the consultation in developing this policy. This has been far reaching from national guidance, H&S legislation, voluntary research, regional and Nottinghamshire wide H&S practitioner benchmarking, internal organisation Corporate Health and Safety (CHAS) group consultation and as well as engaging past and current voluntary groups and individuals.

3.5 Alongside this has been a review of violent and aggressive incidents between some volunteers towards Council officers, as well as insurance civil claims caused by or linked to voluntary activities that were unsupervised.

3.6 Volunteering has many benefits. Volunteer roles greatly improve the ability for the Council to further enhance services provided to facilities provided for residents and others to enjoy. Volunteering has the opportunity to provide residents with quality, regular, organised voluntary sessions. Volunteering has also been widely reported to enhance the life of those that take part and deliver services or projects in a more effective and efficient way, which can help to save money and resources. However, organisations such as the Council do have to invest in supporting volunteering for this to work effectively.

3.7 Recognition of volunteer contributions, by informally telling volunteers they are doing a great job, asking their opinions on internal developments, getting them to feel comfortable with being a part of the community are all important. More formally, volunteer events (part of [Volunteers' Week](http://www.volunteersweek.org/) maybe), where group recognition takes place, the awarding of certificates, helping volunteers gain accreditation, holding meetings with volunteers and inviting them to be members of working groups offer possibilities. These will demonstrate a recognition both to all volunteers, Council officers and elected members of the importance of volunteers.

3.8 The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) published a report on the volunteer experience [Time Well Spent](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent) showing that the most popular form of volunteer recognition (42%) was verbal or written thanks from the organisation. There is a section on respondents’ perceptions of volunteer recognition in the report. Time well spent was a survey of over 10,000 respondents and was published January 2019. Here are some extracted key findings:

* Volunteers are more likely to volunteer in their own neighbourhood, for local organisations and groups.

* Volunteers in employment are more likely to volunteer for an organisations not linked to their workplace and outside of work hours.
* Helping to improve things is one of the key reasons people start volunteering.
* A very relevant point is that a third of those surveyed agreed that things could be organised better.
* Volunteering for the most, is all about being with others rather than being on their own. Volunteering can help people feel less isolated and lonely.
* The over 65 age group are more likely to volunteer than any other age group. This is one of the factors in why the Council will have limitations on certain physical and more risk-based activities, like removing chain saw usage and work near or on watercourses from the agreed list of low risk activities.
* Disabled volunteers are more likely to disagree that there is a culture of respect and trust than non-disabled volunteers (11% vs 6%), conversely though disabled persons are more likely to volunteer on online platforms, which might provide opportunities for those who otherwise might find it hard to participate.
* 89% of recent volunteers said they met new people through volunteering.
* 7 out of 10 people surveyed have volunteered at some point in their lives.
* A smaller minority of 7% surveyed said they had been heavily involved in volunteering over their lifetime. It is envisaged that for the purpose of our policy, the people we are likely to attract are from the small minority to the infrequent volunteers too.

3.9 Volunteers can learn new skills and develop confidence. Many volunteers encounter a variety of new challenges when they give their time in their communities. Through sharing these experiences with people it can in itself develop new skills, build new friendships and improve their confidence to face challenges in other areas of their lives. Through meeting new people and working together it can provide a self-fulling prophecy as new bonds and networks are formed. These networks strengthen communities, increase their capacity to support each other and tackle local issues from all backgrounds and demographics. These activities have also been linked to an increase tolerance and respect.

3.10 It can be as simple as having a bit of fun. Not every volunteer experience is the same, but volunteering is often linked to healthier lifestyles even with just moderate exercise. Volunteering may give:

* A heightened sense of wellbeing and a stronger immune system;
* an improvement with insomnia;
* speedier recovery from surgery;
* Social responsibility, amongst other known benefits.

**4 Enhancing local Council services and wellbeing provision**

 4.1 Volunteering activities often provide services, facilities and physical improvements that benefit the wider community and would otherwise not be provided. They can also add value to existing services and investments by helping to achieve additional benefits. Engaging volunteers can also help to ensure that services and projects are meeting local needs, by involving people in their delivery.

**5 Improving Neighbourhood Perceptions**

 5.1 Volunteering can make people feel better about the area that they live in. These benefits are not restricted to volunteers themselves – simply observing or being aware of local volunteering activities can make people feel more positive about their neighbourhood. The Council recognises the vital contribution volunteers make to improving the quality of life in communities across the Borough of Gedling. In many respects volunteers are key drivers in helping bind communities together and therefore the Council needs to play its part in supporting and nurturing the current and the next generation of volunteers.

**6 Matching Skills to People’s Abilities and Strengths**

6.1 Identifying appropriate volunteering opportunities will help with improved or enhanced self-confidence and better skills, greater self-esteem and social wellbeing.

**7 Our volunteering objectives**

7.1 The Council has a volunteer policy to set out clear management, also arrangement measures and controls to manage and operate voluntary activities. This will enable the Council and its officers to engage and train volunteers around the borough in suitable activities to support people to improve their skills, health and happiness and add to community satisfaction within their local area. To bring together communities by offering meaningful activities for all. To offer volunteering opportunities in a safe and sustainable way.

7.2 This policy supports the Corporate Governance policy and its core principles. Through demonstrating a strong commitment to our ethical values and respecting the rule of law, ensuring openness, stakeholder engagement, sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits and managing risk.

7.3 The policy reflects the size and nature of the Council, and is proportionate and pragmatic in terms of the level of formality so as not to put potential volunteers off volunteering but to also guard against reputational damage of the Council and its officers.

**The Areas covered in the Council volunteering handbook are:**

* The attracting and induction of volunteers, including equality and diversity
* Instructions and training
* Expenses expectations
* Supervision, support and safeguarding
* Health and safety
* Clothing and personal protective equipment
* Confidentiality and data protection
* Insurance
* Problem solving and complaint procedures for volunteers.
* Being an ambassador for the Council, not a spokesperson
* Accident and incident reporting

**8 Starting out**

8.1 All new volunteers will receive an induction when they begin. What this looks like will depend on the nature of the role undertaken but will include discussing the expectations of both parties, the identification of a named staff contact, instructions on how to complete a task safely and how to use any necessary tools or equipment. As part of this process volunteers will be asked to fill out a volunteer induction form. They will then be entered onto the volunteers’ database.

**9 Becoming a volunteer**

9.1 The Council believes that volunteering should be open to all and we welcome anyone who wishes to volunteer. Volunteering opportunities are advertised in a variety of ways and locations in order to ensure a wide coverage. There may be age and ability restrictions for certain activities.

**10 Volunteer tasks and roles**

10.1 There is a range of tasks that volunteers may undertake. Refer to Appendix 1

 and 2.

**11 Induction and on-going training**

11.1 All new volunteers will receive an induction form and volunteer handbook when they begin volunteering. It is essential that all new volunteers read the handbook and sign the volunteer induction form at their first day of volunteering. More information is available from the supervisor of the session or from the volunteer’s staff contact.

**12 Insurance**

12.1 The Council has Public Liability and Employers Liability Insurance in place that includes cover for volunteers undertaking tasks on our behalf and under our supervision. Any volunteer, including the Friends of Groups and other community groups, working in our open spaces or other volunteer projects without the direct supervision of a Council officer must have their own Public Liability Insurance. All of the unsupervised sessions must be agreed prior to any voluntary activity commencing by a Council officer.

12.2 The level of cover held by an individual volunteer or group will dictate what roles can and cannot be undertaken. The Council does not allow a volunteer or group to undertake any other activities unsupervised nor to use any kind of equipment or machinery tools that are not listed (refer to Appendices), or any for which they have not been trained on and signed off by a Council officer, even if their own insurance policy covers this activity.

**13 Working with children, young people and vulnerable adults**

13.1 The handbook, risk assessments and training will cover suitable arrangements to control activities with the children, young people and vulnerable adults.

**14 Supervision and review**

14.1 All volunteers will have a designated staff contact that they should use as a point of contact for reviews of progress, queries, guidance or problems.

14.2 There may be low risk activities which require minimal supervision. All medium and high risk activities must always supervised and managed by a suitable Council officer.

**15 The Council’s volunteer policy handbook covers volunteers acting as an ambassador for the Council**

15.1 The handbook includes details on what to do if volunteers have any concerns or wish to report a problem during their voluntary activity.

**16 Volunteer health**

16.1 Health of volunteers is an important consideration.

The ‘Your health’ section covers important considerations for volunteers to consider before they finally agree to be a volunteer.

**17 Health and safety, Volunteer responsibilities and clothing, footwear, personal proactive equipment (PPE), transportation and expenses.**

17.1 These are important considerations within the Voluntary policy and associated documents.Refer to handbook for details.

**18 Accident and incident reporting**

18.1 Instructions are clearly covered within the Volunteer handbook.

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| **19 Solving volunteer problems and handling complaints**19.1 Problems can arise because different priorities can develop, for example. Volunteers may feel they don’t get the resources they think they need. Where good support and supervision procedures are in place, problems should be resolved without prolonging the issues.19.2 On the other hand, a volunteer may bring a complaint about a member of staff, or vice-versa, or a client may complain about a volunteer. Volunteers need to feel complaints are handled with sensitivity, that they receive a fair hearing and that the complaints/grievance procedure of the Council will be rigorously followed. This procedure should be in writing and available to volunteers, and will ensure a consistency of response. 19.3 Meeting expectations of volunteers is not always easy. Having variation for volunteer journeys is an important factor, at the same time the challenge is balancing variation against the risk of fines, prosecutions and litigation for both the individual volunteer, voluntary groups or the Council and its officers. The time well spent report found that a third surveyed agreed that things could be much better organised. 19.4 An issue can be that people want to give their time, but often on their own terms. This again reinforces the need for a clear Volunteer policy. A Council Volunteer will have to follow our policy and guidance, if they do not agree with the policy, that’s okay, it just means they do not volunteer for us and will have to volunteer for someone and somewhere else. **20 Letting go of volunteers**20.1 An organisation such as the Council has to be prepared to ‘let go’ of volunteers as well as retain them. For one or a combination of reasons some may be ‘let go’ as they have volunteered in one role for a very long time and run out of steam; for some, their personal circumstances have changed to the detriment of their volunteering; others may, after all, show themselves to be unsuitable in spite of good recruitment procedures. Knowing when to let go is as important as knowing how to retain.20.2 Unless there has been serious misconduct, a departing volunteer should receive thanks and be offered an Exit Interview opportunity. At the discussion the volunteer experience, short or long, can be evaluated and views sought from the departing volunteer about possible improvements that could be introduced for future volunteers. Be as positive as possible so the departing volunteer will retain positive views about the organisation and not seek to lower its reputation. Try to agree the benefits the volunteer has gained whilst with the organisation and offer them appropriate support in seeking new opportunities.**21 Volunteer induction**21.1 A good induction ensures volunteers are able to contribute quickly and feel part of the organisation.**22 Effective volunteer training**22.1 Good volunteer management includes ensuring volunteers are trained to fulfil their roles effectively. 22.2 How much volunteer training to give? This will depend upon the voluntary activities to be undertaken, balancing the risks and having suitable controls in place. It is important to strike the appropriate balance.**23 Supporting volunteers**23.1 The importance of supporting and gaining feedback from volunteers, to assess their satisfaction with their roles.**24 Get to know Council volunteers**24.1 It is important to really get to know your volunteers. This means taking time to understand what they find satisfying about volunteering and any concerns they may have about the role or the organisation. Volunteers do get bored; they have other things going on in their lives. A supervisor of volunteers may be coordinating many volunteers so finding the time to talk to each individual or group may be difficult. However, ensuring volunteers are given opportunities for giving and receiving feedback on their activities is essential. Exit interviews are particularly helpful in this respect.24.2 Understanding your volunteers will help you to:* revise roles to ensure they are still relevant and valuable
* provide new opportunities for keeping volunteers involved and motivated
* enable you to continually improve how volunteers are organised.
* obtain feedback from volunteers

**25 Health and safety considerations**25.1 ‘When is a volunteer a volunteer?’- It’s broadly recommended that local authorities have a normal ‘duty of care’towards genuine volunteers and should use the provisions of Section 3 ofthe Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (duty to others) as guidance inmost instances 25.2 Importance of Good communication -It should be clear that a two way communication channel exists between theCouncil officer and the volunteer. The extent of liability for the Councildepends on what activities have been agreed and how much direction theCouncil has given. This is why the volunteer handbook and induction formare important. These documents safeguard the Council, Council officers, volunteers and say ultimately other park and facility users.**26 Consultation**26.1 The Health, Safety and Emergency Planning Officer undertook a consultation exercise with other H&S Practitioners in Nottinghamshire The Policy includes a consensus opinion of Chartered Safety and Health Practitioners and is one that is fairly pragmatic when the Policy was first developed. In addition, since the policy first went live, operational feedback has now been incorporated into the Policy. 26.2 In recent years Voluntary sessions were as popular as ever, but at times volunteers have been afforded the autonomy to run sessions. The autonomy has given rise in places to some volunteer individuals and groups formulating positions of authority they simply do not have. 26.3 It is envisaged that in time the policy will remain open to feedback and input from all stakeholders to ensure that the policy remains suitable and relevant.  |
| References: Knowhow.ncvo.org.uk advice on volunteer recruitment process/https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/your-team/volunteers/recruiting/copy\_of\_process#**Find out more about volunteering:*** The [Time Well Spent](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/research/time-well-spent) report is a result of a national survey on the volunteering experience.
* The [Getting Involved](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/participation/NCVO_2017_Getting_Involved.pdf) report gives an overview of the different ways that people get involved in society and looks at the nature of participation by drawing upon trends, facts and statistics.
* The [Institute for Volunteering Research](http://www.ivr.org.uk/) is home to reports on volunteering and its impact.
* The [UK Civil Society Almanac](https://data.ncvo.org.uk/category/almanac/voluntary-sector/volunteers-workforce/) provides statistics and information on volunteering.
* The government's [Community Life survey](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey) tracks trends in volunteering.
* Read more about [volunteer management](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/volunteer-management) and [practical advice for volunteering](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering).
* The [Volunteer Rights Inquiry](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/policy-and-research/volunteering-policy/volunteer-rights) aimed to understand the nature and scope of the problems experienced by volunteers and to identify suitable remedies.
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Appendices:

Appendix 1:

List of tasks for volunteers working on Gedling Borough Council Parks and Open Spaces

Appendix 2:

List of other voluntary activities (subject to change)

Appendix 3:

Volunteer induction form

Appendix 4:

Corporate Volunteer Handbook