

# Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council

Principles & Guidance for SCC staff responsible for  
supporting or managing volunteers

2023



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## **Introduction:**

Helping our residents to live in thriving and sustainable communities is one of the three priority outcomes in our [Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026](#). Volunteers play a crucial role in achieving this.

Volunteers are central to the support that Staffordshire County Council provides for our residents. Volunteers help us with almost everything we do, from maintaining our highways and green spaces, through to supporting families and older people to stay independent by helping in our libraries, Community Help Points, and Family Hubs.

It is vital that we ensure everyone who volunteers for Staffordshire County Council is given the tools and support they need to have a positive experience that benefits both their communities and their own ambitions and aspirations.

This document sets out nine key principles for how we expect our staff to work with volunteers. To help ensure our organisation delivers on these principles, this document also provides a set of practical guidance and good practice examples for staff who are looking to recruit, manage, and support volunteers that can be applied to service areas as needed.

This document has been created as part of our [Communities Delivery Plan 2023](#) and alongside our [People Strategy](#). When creating our principles, we felt it was important to gather the views of our current volunteers, as well as our partners in the VCSE sector and staff who regularly work with volunteers. To do this, we undertook a targeted consultation exercise with two main service areas which have a large percentage of volunteers, as well as establishing a Volunteering Task and Finish Group that reports into the council's Communities Leadership Group.

In addition to guidance for our staff, we have also created a separate stand-alone document which is directly intended for use by volunteers coming into the organisation. This can be found in **Appendix 1 (Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council – A Guide for Volunteers)**.

## **Our Volunteering Principles**

**Staffordshire County Council is committed to providing a consistent, supportive, and mutually beneficial offer for people volunteering to support the authority.**

To help us achieve this, we have developed nine key principles for working with volunteers. **These principles should be adopted by all staff when recruiting and working with people who volunteer for Staffordshire County Council.** This way, we can ensure that across the entire organisation we provide the best possible experience for our volunteers, supporting the Council's work with our communities and helping volunteers to also benefit from their volunteering experience.

**We will...**

- 1) Have clearly defined expectations, roles, and boundaries for all our volunteers**
- 2) Be inclusive and accessible for all residents who want to get involved**
- 3) Be flexible where possible, with different opportunities depending on how much time people can offer**
- 4) Be personalised, taking into account the different experiences, skills, motivations, and capabilities of each volunteer**
- 5) Ensure our volunteering opportunities are mutually beneficial for both volunteers and the Council's work within communities**
- 6) Ensure that volunteers have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences with the Council**
- 7) Have volunteer focused policies and processes, including recruitment, induction, and training**
- 8) Recognise the positive contribution of our volunteers**
- 9) Co-ordinate our approach to volunteering with existing Council resources, such as Open Door, Staffordshire Connects, and #DoingOurBit**

## **Guidance for SCC Managers**

To help managers and services across the organisation to support these principles, we have prepared the following guidance which covers topics such as recruitment, engaging with and managing volunteers, and ending volunteering placements.

### **1. Planning & Recruitment:**

Before starting to look for volunteers it is recommended that managers and service areas consider the following, in line with both our volunteering principles and nationally recognised good practice from the National Council for Volunteering Organisations (NCVO).

#### **1.1 Role descriptions**

A role description should be developed before recruiting a volunteer. Your description should ideally include some or all of the elements listed below, depending on the nature of the placement and service area:

- Title of the role
- Tasks & responsibilities\*
- Provide boundaries and any activities which the volunteer should avoid
- Any skills or experience the individual would need to take on the role
- Provide information on who would be responsible for the volunteer
- Targets / performance measures for the role / service generally
- Location\*\* and hours available
- How the role would fit in with the wider service
- Expectations around behaviour and dress code (if applicable)

\*It is important to ensure that when writing any role description that you do not imply that the volunteer will be contracted to perform specific tasks. Volunteers, unlike employees, do not have to accept volunteering work offered, and similarly, the authority isn't required to provide volunteering work. This is a clear distinction within employment law. If you are unsure, please contact Ask People Services before publishing a role description.

\*\*Staffordshire County Council declared a Climate Change emergency in 2019 and committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. To that end managers and service areas generally are encouraged to consider the Climate Change implications of taking on a volunteer(s) and potential means of mitigating those impacts.

Such mitigations might include:

- Consider if the role would require the individual to travel to and from a specific location or to travel around the County as part of the role, and if so to suggest lower carbon impact methods of transportation such as using public transport (where feasible).

- It could be that you try to match volunteers to specific roles closer to where they reside or if there are several volunteers to try to encourage car sharing (again as applicable)
- It is also suggested to consider if the role could be delivered in a different way such as virtually.

Also, when writing your role descriptions please have regard for the fact that individuals may ask for it in an alternative format such as easy read, braille, large font or another language etc.

It would also be beneficial to have a discussion with [Ask People Services](#) around the likelihood that the role would require a DBS check to be undertaken for the successful volunteer. A DBS check will be required if the volunteer will have any regular unsupervised contact with children or any vulnerable adults during their placement. This is in line with our policies for paid staff however DBS checks for volunteers are typically free.

### 1.2. Insurance Checks

Volunteers who undertake activities under the direction of the council will normally be covered by our Public and Employers' Liability Insurance. However, managers are advised to consult the council's [Insurance Services](#) to ensure that the activity to be undertaken is covered by the council's insurance.

The council's insurance policies require that the activities be suitably and sufficiently risk assessed in accordance with the council's management arrangements and guidance regarding risk assessments.

It is important to remember when recruiting volunteers under 18, that there may be some limitations on what the young person is allowed to do and still be covered by our insurance. Managers may also be required to conduct an enhanced risk assessment for younger volunteers. This risk assessment will need to include the consent of a young person's parent or guardian to undertake the tasks set out in the role description.

### 1.3 Training & Supervision

It's important that any volunteer within the organisation feels supported and confident to perform the role they're undertaking.

It is recommended that service areas consider who will be directly responsible for managing the volunteer, as well as whether a mentor or buddy system would be appropriate. Mentor or buddy systems can help volunteers continue to deliver their placement as required in the absence of a manager or when volunteering within the community.

Training for volunteers entering a new placement or service is also important. This would include any training required to perform specific tasks, as well as any wider training considerations. Examples of wider training might include:

- Safeguarding
- Data Protection & Confidentiality
- Health & Safety
- Dealing with difficult customers
- Modern Day Slavery

#### 1.4 Volunteering Adverts

When advertising a volunteering placement with the council, it is recommended that the following areas be covered within your advertisement:

- The role of the local authority and your service area
- The reason your service area is looking for volunteers and the difference that they could make
- What the volunteer might get from their involvement (e.g., face to face contact with residents, skills development, work experience for younger people etc).
- Who they can contact if they have any questions about the placement or if they want to find out more information

There are also various ways that we as a council can advertise for volunteers depending on the needs of your service area. These include:

- The Council's website
- Advert on WM Jobs
- Via a social media posts / campaign / communications bulletin
- Free local newsletters or on local social media groups
- Networking with existing local community groups or partners operating in that area
- Local radio adverts
- Adverts in council building receptions

Another element of the advert to consider is how you want to receive any expressions of interest from individuals. Expressions could come in one of several different ways, including:

- Via e-mail to a specified individual / service mailbox
- Through the main council switchboard
- Responses via social media posts – although these can be difficult to manage given its accessibility
- Through a specified partner organisation if applicable
- Completion and submission of an application form

Some service areas which already have multiple volunteers have set up dedicated volunteering pathways into their service areas. Good examples of this include:

- The [Council's Library service](#), which has a dedicated website along with related and linked content and videos from current volunteers explaining their experiences.

- Volunteering in Council managed [Children's Centres](#), which has an easily accessible website, explains the different placements clearly, and has an online application form.

### 1.5 Personal Information & Data Protection

Organisations need to collect and keep information about their volunteers (*unless it's just for a one-off event*) which is likely to include information which would come under the Data Protection Act's definition of "personal data". As a result, organisations must follow the rules about how it collects, stores, uses and discloses information.

The Data Protection Act has eight principles which provides guidance on what organisations should do. Those are:

- Data must be used in a fair and lawful way,
- Collected for a lawful reason and not be used for anything that is not part of this reason,
- Adequate, relevant, and not excessive for the reason for which it was collected,
- Accurate and kept up to date,
- Not kept longer than needed,
- Collected and stored in ways that respect the data subjects' rights,
- Kept with appropriate security measures,
- Not moved to a country or territory outside the European Economic Area unless the country or territory has laws that protect data subjects from their personal data being used inappropriately,

Some personal information you may decide or need to collect may be classed as "sensitive personal data" which has tighter rules about how it can be used. This type of data includes:

- Racial or Ethnic origins,
- Political opinions,
- Religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,
- Membership of a trade union,
- Physical or Mental Health conditions or medical history,
- Sexual orientation,
- Criminal history,
- Details of any criminal proceedings taken against a person, including sentences.

More information and guidance can be found by consulting the Information Governance's pages on [SharePoint](#).



## 1.6 Expenses

If, as a service you are considering recruiting volunteers you will need to have a conversation around if you may be prepared to pay out of pocket expenses to volunteers and the situations when those payments will be made.

There is no central budget for the payment of expenses to volunteers so this would need to come from your own service budgets.

The NCVO suggests the following are examples of situations when you may want to pay out of pocket expenses:

- Travel to and from the place of volunteering,
- Meals and refreshments,
- Equipment such as protective clothing,
- Administration costs (if they pay for postage, phone calls or stationery)

If you have a volunteer driver (and you've decided to pay them mileage) you are able to pay mileage allowance payments up to [certain tax-free limits](#) (which are the same rates SCC and most local authorities use to pay mileage for staff) if they're using their own car.

## **2. Pre-Placement – Initial Contact & Suitability Checks**

### 2.1 Initial Conversations

Once your advert is public, it's important to contact any individuals who have expressed an interest in the placement as soon as possible. It is suggested to make contact in 3 to 5 working days of an initial expression of interest where possible.

When considering initial contacts, the language used when speaking to potential volunteers is important. It has been recognised as good practice (both nationally and through engagement with our own volunteers) that referring to the initial contacts as an "interview" can be counterproductive and can discourage potential volunteers. It is considered more appropriate to refer to any initial discussions in a less formal way, for example a "conversation" or a "tea and chat". This can help to put potential volunteers at ease and increase the chances that the individual will feel more comfortable in taking up a volunteering placement.

During initial conversations, you may want to discuss the following:

- Provide the prospective volunteer with the written role description and go through each element of it
- Explain any limitations or boundaries
- Discuss the volunteer times available, being flexible where possible
- Outline where the role supports the wider team / organisation

Initial conversations are an opportunity for both parties to get to know each other and see if the role and individual are suitably matched. It will also provide potential volunteers the opportunity to ask questions and clarify anything they may be unsure of.

It is also suggested to make them aware that if they are claiming any state benefits that they should ideally speak to the DWP / Jobcentre Plus before starting any placement in case this had an impact on their benefits. More detailed information on this has been provided in **Appendix 1 – A Guide for Volunteers**.

## 2.2 Volunteers from the European Union

Although the UK is no longer a member of the European Union, EU Nationals can still volunteer in the UK if they meet the following criteria:

- They have settled or pre-settled status
- They have a visa that allows them to volunteer
- They're volunteering with an EU-Funded programme which is still recognised by the UK government.

In each situation you would need to proof before proceeding. The NVCO have more [guidance](#) around this topic if it's applicable to your service needs.

## 2.3 Placement Offer & DBS

If both parties are happy to move forward following the initial conversations, managers can start preparing for the placement to begin. This will usually be the point at which a DBS check application would be initiated.

There are four levels of DBS check, however if the volunteering placement requires unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable adults then either a Standard DBS or Enhanced DBS will be required before starting. For more detailed information on DBS checks, please see **Appendix 2**.

## 2.4 Alternative Placements

If either party feel the placement isn't the right match, it is recommended that consideration is given to whether an alternative volunteer placement might be suitable. This could include looking at other service areas or directing the volunteer to alternative placements on the [volunteering pages](#) on the Council's main website, visiting [Support Staffordshire's website](#) for more information on other volunteering opportunities locally, or visiting [#DoingOurBit.info](#) to find out more about how they can help themselves, their families, and the place they live, even if they don't have time to volunteer formally.

# **3 Placement Stage – Induction, Supervision & Management**

## 3.1 Induction:

All new volunteers should have an induction ideally on the first day they volunteer.

The aim of the induction is to ensure that the volunteer understands their placement clearly, they are aware of how and when they should carry out their assigned tasks,

and they are able to perform these tasks in a safe manner, understanding what they are doing and how they are contributing to the goals of the Council.

An induction process could also include elements such as:

- Introducing the volunteer to staff and other volunteers,
- Explain any service specific or more general training courses which they would be required to undertake,
- Provide them with a tour of their volunteering environment,
- Show them where they can access resources as required,
- Let them know where they can take breaks,
- Introduce them to their allocated buddy / mentor if appropriate,
- Check with them if there is anything else they need to raise or if anything is likely to change with their circumstances,
- Provide them with a Volunteer Agreement – if applicable – **see Appendix 4** for an example.

The induction is also an opportunity to share any applicable policies and procedures which we have within the authority such as:

- Safeguarding
- Organisational structures
- Complaints process
- Health & Safety
- Volunteer Benefits

An example induction template is available as **Appendix 3**.

### 3.2 Supervision:

Providing volunteers with appropriate supervision and support will enable them to fulfil their placement effectively and get the most out of their volunteer experience, resulting in the best outcomes for all parties.

It is good practice to maintain contact with a volunteer after the induction process is complete. This can include inviting the volunteer to participate in regular catch-up's or 1 to 1's, which can be done either in person or via Microsoft Teams as applicable to the service area's requirements. These catchups are a good opportunity to gauge how the placement is going for the volunteer, offering them the opportunity to raise any concerns or questions and crucially providing them with feedback.

If the volunteer is under the age of 18, it may be necessary to undertake the one to one's with the young person's parent / guardian. It is recommended that this is discussed with the young person and parent / guardian during any initial conversations. If you have several volunteers within your service, it is also recommended to undertake group catch-up meetings as well as individual 1 to 1's. This provides an opportunity for the volunteers to get together, share experiences and discuss topics which they might not have been able to raise in their 1 to 1 discussion.

### 3.3 Health & Safety:

Staffordshire County Council is committed to ensuring that we look after the health, safety and welfare of any volunteers undertaking placements with the Council. It is important as a manager of volunteers to ensure that you refer to the current [Health & Safety policies](#) in place across the organisation around volunteering and are able to share these with any volunteers coming into your service areas.

### 3.4 Resolving Issues:

In the event of any issues occurring during a volunteering placement, it is good practice to ensure that action is taken quickly to resolve any problems as they develop. This can reduce the risk of losing the volunteer and manage any potential reputational risks to the organisation.

If issues do arise, it is good practice for the responsible manager to undertake a fact-finding exercise to ascertain what the issues are. Once this has been undertaken, an initial meeting can then take place with any relevant parties, followed by a review meeting after an agreed period.

During this initial meeting, it's important to discuss with the volunteer what the issue is, what impact it has had, and agree an approach to resolving the issue moving forward. How this conversation is conducted with the volunteer is important, and managers should ensure they remain professional, not take sides, and listen to the views and feedback of the volunteer.

It may also be appropriate at the meeting to discuss the following:

- Reviewing the placement and expectations, including any boundaries which have previously been set out
- Offer more support or training if the volunteer has been struggling to undertake the volunteer activities or tasks
- Adjust the tasks for the volunteer if this would suit their abilities better
- Discuss whether there is a more suitable volunteering placement elsewhere in the organisation

If it is not possible to resolve the issues, it may be necessary to bring the placement to an end

### 3.5. Ending a placement:

In some circumstances it may be necessary to bring a volunteer placement to an end due to a variety of reasons.

For example, a placement may end due to a change in service, legislative changes, or issues have arisen during the course of the placement that can't be resolved.

The volunteer may need to end their placement due to a change in their personal circumstances, health issues, or they have secured employment resulting in the volunteer no longer being able to commit to the placement.

In either situation it is important to try to maintain a positive relationship with the volunteer if possible. If the Council has made the decision to end the placement, then it is best practice for the responsible manager to ensure that the volunteer receives a written acknowledgment of their contribution expressing the council's gratitude for their work.

If the volunteer wants to end their placement, the responsible officer should discuss with the volunteer whether any potential adjustments can be made to help them continue in the placement. If the volunteer decides that they do not wish to remain in the placement, the responsible manager should confirm in writing the end of their placement and thank them for their contribution.

Once a volunteer has left the organisation, the responsible officer should ensure:

- All Staffordshire County Council property is returned (ID badges, and any equipment etc)
- The volunteer has completed any outstanding information required around any ongoing safeguarding issues
- They have deleted any personal information or data they held on behalf of the council
- If they have any social media accounts, ask that they remove any references to being in an active volunteering placement with the council
- That any codes or passwords to equipment or property are changed so they no longer have access
- All remaining volunteers or staff within the team are aware that the individual has left the placement and that they should not share any ongoing information with the individual moving forward
- The volunteer is given the opportunity to provide feedback on how the placement has gone from their point of view and anything that could have been done differently

## **Additional Resources:**

Further information on the work we are doing with our communities can be found on the **dedicated Communities page** on Staffs Space [here](#). This includes our latest Communities Delivery Plan and information on key strands of work, including our Early Help Strategy, Supportive Communities, and how we are working with the local VCSE sector through our VCSE Capacity Building Framework.

Volunteers also have a key role to play in our approach to **Making Staffordshire Sustainable** and achieving our commitment as an organisation to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Further information on how we are #DoingOurBit to make Staffordshire Sustainable can be found on Staffs Space [here](#).

Formal volunteering is only one way in which people can get involved. Our **#DoingOurBit campaign** encourages residents and staff to consider doing one small thing to help themselves, their loved ones, and the place they live. [DoingOurBit.info](#) has a range of information, ideas, and advice for how everyone can get involved, even if you don't have time to volunteer.

Further information on our **People Strategy** and our associated volunteering policies can be found on Staffs Space [here](#).

The development of our volunteering principles and guidance for staff has been supported by the council's VCSE Capacity Building Framework Partners Support Staffordshire and the Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS). Further information on the support they provide for volunteers and VCSE groups across Staffordshire can be found using the links below:

- **Support Staffordshire** – [www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk](http://www.supportstaffordshire.org.uk)
- **Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS)** – [www.staffscvys.org.uk](http://www.staffscvys.org.uk)

This document has also been developed using nationally recognised good practice from several organisations, including the [National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\)](#). NCVO has a range of online resources available which may prove useful to staff and service areas looking to recruit and work with volunteers.

## **Key Contacts:**

For further information on HR issues relating to volunteering, please contact [Ask People Services](#)

For further information on conducting DBS checks, please email [disclosure@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:disclosure@staffordshire.gov.uk)

For further information on the council's insurance policies and how they may relate to volunteering, please email [insurance@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:insurance@staffordshire.gov.uk)

For further information on the council's work with communities, including #DoingOurBit and our VCSE Capacity Building Framework, please email [adam.rooney@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:adam.rooney@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Across Staffordshire County Council there are multiple service areas which have successful long term volunteering placements and programmes. Representatives from these service areas have helped in the development of our volunteering principles and guidance. They have kindly put their names forward to act as a point of contact for any managers or service areas thinking of recruiting volunteers:

- **Chris Plant** – Area Manager (North) – Staffordshire Libraries & Arts Service [chris.plant2@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:chris.plant2@staffordshire.gov.uk)
- **Kate Tomson-Rayner** – Early Years Coordination Service [kate.tomson-rayner@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:kate.tomson-rayner@staffordshire.gov.uk)