

Cheltenham Borough Council's Volunteer Policy

Introduction and Welcome

We are immensely proud of our volunteers who, through their efforts, are putting something back into society, working with our staff to make Cheltenham a better place, whilst also learning new skills and socialising with others. Volunteers complement and add value to the services the council provide and we are thankful for the time they give.

The council adopted a vision that Cheltenham is a place where everyone thrives. Within our place vision we acknowledge the importance of volunteering, making an explicit statement that

“People and our communities thrive when there are more opportunities to volunteer, to give time and effort to making Cheltenham and its organisations and communities a better place.”

What is volunteering?

The council supports the Gloucestershire Volunteering Collaborative definition of volunteering which is:

Volunteering encompasses any unpaid activity where individuals willingly offer their time, skills or expertise to benefit others or contribute to a cause, organisation or community.

There is no contractual obligation on the volunteer to provide their services.

What our volunteering policy seeks to do:

The council recognises the significant contribution that volunteers give to making Cheltenham and its organisations and communities a better place. In doing so, it has a duty to ensure that the experience of those who volunteer is a safe and positive one, with the right amount of support and supervision.

The council also recognises the benefits which volunteering provides its employees, and though the council's own Employee Volunteering Policy supports employees to 'give something back' to their community, whilst at the same time enhancing flexibility and development opportunities for its staff through providing up to two days paid time off for volunteering in the community.

The Volunteer Policy sets out the standard processes and procedures of the council's volunteer programme. These include:

1. Identifying volunteering opportunities
2. Recruitment and selection of volunteers
3. Induction and training
4. Health and Safety
5. Safeguarding
6. Confidentiality and Data Protection
7. Ongoing Support

1. Identifying volunteering opportunities

Ideas for volunteering opportunities can come from either members of staff, elected members or from potential volunteers themselves. However the opportunity arises, it is important that the following steps are followed to ensure that the volunteering opportunity is a safe and positive one, for both the volunteer and for the council.

2. Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers

The council's volunteer supervisor (for the specific volunteering opportunity) should produce a volunteer role description. This will describe the role so that any potential volunteers can assess their suitability before applying. The role description should include:

- title of role
- purpose of role
- a broad outline of tasks and activities to be undertaken
- any targets or measurements of performance
- the name of the person who the volunteer reports to
- location and volunteering hours
- how the role fits in with the work of the organisation
- expectations of behaviour and dress (if appropriate)
- any skills, qualifications and personal attributes required – essential and desirable

The role can then be advertised on the council's website:

https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/info/78/job_vacancies

The council's volunteer supervisor will also need to be mindful of the need to ensure that the purpose of the role is lawful and within the remit of Cheltenham Borough Council.

Individual volunteers

An individual volunteer is someone who volunteers directly for the council, rather than volunteering as part of a constituted group which volunteers under its own insurance.

Volunteers should apply for roles using the online council volunteer application forms:

www.cheltenham.gov.uk/volunteering

Due to the high number of the council's volunteers who volunteer with the Green Space Team, there is a separate application form for those who want to solely be a Green Space volunteer which asks questions relevant to that role only.

The application form is critical as it enables the volunteer to set out the skills they could bring to the role and any issues that might restrict their participation such as their health and wellbeing. The form also asks for some personal data such as age; asks about criminal convictions and gains consent from the applicant to ensure Data Protection compliance.

Completed forms are reviewed by the Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships Team (and Green Space Team for Green Space roles) and shared with the lead council officer for the volunteering opportunity.

Group volunteering

Externally constituted volunteer groups, doing regular activities connected with council land (for example Friends of groups working in council parks/gardens), with their own public liability insurance, will need to complete the online council group volunteering form (available at www.cheltenham.gov.uk/volunteering) as a declaration to confirm that they have their own safeguarding policy, risk assessment and insurance.

A partnership agreement with constituted groups will also be adapted for each group to outline the commitments on both sides and will be signed on behalf of the group and by the council.

Groups (whether constituted or not) that have no public liability insurance will be asked to either get their own insurance or ensure that their volunteers register individually as council volunteers when undertaking council activities.

The volunteer will need to complete the online council volunteer application form. Council staff will then be responsible for supervising the activity and task.

If businesses, local organisations, and educational establishments wish to provide volunteers for a one-off event or activity, then the organisation will be required to have their own risk assessment and public liability insurance that will cover their staff acting as volunteers and to also complete a group volunteering form as a disclaimer.

One off individual volunteers:

There may be instances where more informal volunteering is appropriate and more appealing to volunteers. For example, at a tree planting activity where many volunteers may be those who have walked past and expressed a desire to take part. In this situation, volunteers will be asked to complete a declaration to sign in to the activity which confirms the volunteer understands what is expected of both parties and ensures they are covered by the council's public liability insurance for the activity. These one-off opportunities are the only ones where individuals under 18, aged 16-18 only, may take part, ONLY if they are accompanied and signed in by a parent or guardian.

For one-off volunteering activities the usual process of recruitment, induction and volunteer management does not apply. However, all volunteers are to be treated with respect and support during the activity and should have a named point of contact on the day for any questions or concerns. Staff should follow the 'Staff Guidance on managing volunteers' documents to ensure all safeguarding measures are met.

Young people volunteering:

Council volunteers must be 18+ years old. The only exception is for one-off volunteering opportunities (please see section above) where individuals aged 16-18 can take part, but must be accompanied at all times and signed in by a parent or guardian.

The council will on occasion deliver specific schemes that work with young people or deliver projects or programmes that benefit young people. These activities will all require their own safeguarding and health and safety risk assessments to be prepared and signed off in line with the council's policy framework to ensure that the young people's experience is a safe and positive one.

Volunteers are encouraged not to bring children and young people with them when they are volunteering, as they are the responsibility of their parents at all times which may reduce their ability to focus safely on the task in hand. If it is essential for the volunteer to bring a child or young person (due for example to childcare arrangements falling through at the last minute and the volunteering role being essential) then the child or young person is not a volunteer and the volunteer supervisor should assess the risk and mitigate the risks accordingly. This may mean sending the volunteer home if the risk of the child being on site cannot be effectively mitigated.

3. Induction and Training

The lead council officer for the volunteering opportunity must provide all volunteers with an introduction to the organisation as well as induction and training tailored to the volunteering opportunity. All volunteers will be provided with a copy of the volunteer handbook.

4. Health and Safety

We have a duty of care to avoid exposing our volunteers to health and safety risks. All volunteers will be made aware of our Health and Safety Policy and any practical safety concerns as part of their induction. Volunteers are expected to comply with the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

All volunteer roles will be risk assessed, covering both the tasks involved and the environment in which they will be conducted. In addition, where a volunteer makes us aware of a pre-existing medical condition or disability, an individual risk assessment may also be necessary.

Volunteers must sign the volunteer declaration on their application form. This provides them with basic accident cover and also indemnifies the volunteer against any claim made against them or the Council whilst carrying out their activity.

Where volunteers drive as part of their voluntary activity, and use their own vehicle, they must ensure they possess the relevant class of insurance. Further guidance should be sought from the volunteer's own insurance company. Supervisors must check and record this documentation if use of a vehicle is required.

5. Safeguarding

All supervisors must ensure that volunteers are aware of, and have received appropriate training in the [Council's Safeguarding Policy](#).

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks will be carried out on any volunteer who in the course of their activity has regular, unsupervised, contact with the same group of children or young people. A DBS check will also need to be carried out on volunteers who care for or deal with the personal affairs of any vulnerable adult. Further guidance can be found in the [council's Safeguarding Policy](#). Volunteers who require a DBS check will need to register for the free updates service to ensure it is kept up to date: <https://www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service>

6. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All supervisors must ensure that during induction volunteers are aware of confidentiality and data protection policies. If their role requires, volunteers must receive appropriate training, for example information governance training.

All information about volunteers and groups will be stored in line with the council volunteers' privacy statement. Volunteers will be asked to reconfirm their details and volunteer declaration every 5 years. There is a commitment that this information is kept by the council for a maximum of 5 years following the conclusion of the volunteering opportunity.

The Participation and Engagement Team Leader role will be responsible for the collation and management of this information including keeping the list of volunteers and their consents up to date.

In addition, any volunteer can contact the Participation and Engagement Team Leader at any time to withdraw from the list of volunteers.

7. Ongoing Support

All volunteers will receive appropriate support and regular supervision in their activity. The level of supervision will match the nature of the role and the experience of the volunteer. All volunteers will have a nominated volunteer supervisor, someone they can have regular access to if problems arise or when help and support is needed.

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.

Complaints by volunteers should be raised in the first instance with their volunteer supervisor and dealt with informally where possible. Where appropriate, the complaint will be investigated fully by their supervisor, or if the complaint is against their own supervisor, by another volunteer supervisor or their line manager.

If a complaint is brought against a volunteer, this will be investigated by the relevant supervisor. 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.

8 Expenses

The council is committed to paying reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses ensuring that potential volunteers are not excluded due to financial reasons. However, these need to be agreed in advance with relevant managers before the volunteer commences their activity. Where expenses are not agreed, volunteers must be made aware of this at the first opportunity in the recruitment process.

9 Volunteers in Receipt of Benefits

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.

10 Moving On

The council welcomes feedback and encourages volunteers to offer ideas for improvements. Volunteers who choose to stop volunteering at any time will also be invited to provide feedback before they move on.

Volunteers who are leaving the organisation and who have made a regular commitment to it should be offered an exit interview, reference and/or statement of their achievements to ensure that their services are properly and formally appreciated.

Where appropriate, the role and placement of the volunteers may be terminated by the supervisor at one week's notice, or immediately where inappropriate behaviour has occurred. In all cases, the volunteer will be entitled to an explanation of the decision and action taken.

11 Review

This policy will be reviewed within 36 months of its adoption.