

# Cheltenham Borough Council

## Cabinet - 18 February 2025

### Volunteering Policy and Processes

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**Accountable member:**

Cllr Victoria Atherstone, Cabinet Member Safety and Communities

**Accountable officer:**

Claire Hughes, Director of Governance and Customer Services

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** No

**Executive summary:**

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) is very fortunate to be supported by the good will of local volunteers offering their time to help in green spaces and with events and projects. There is a clear benefit to CBC in receiving this much needed support and to the volunteers themselves in being able to make a positive difference to their town.

The council's volunteering policy was put in place in 2019 and has now been reviewed and updated to ensure it is up to date and robust. The number of volunteers and constituted volunteer groups volunteering with the council has increased significantly and continues to do so with new opportunities arising from housing services being brought back in house.

The revised policy includes the adoption of a new partnership agreement that will be entered into with the constituted groups regularly volunteering on council-land and that are working under their own insurance. The agreement will set out the responsibilities and commitments on both sides. This will reduce the capacity demands on the Green Space Development team through enabling the groups to work more autonomously through a clear, safe, supportive and documented process.

## **Recommendations: That Cabinet:**

### **1. adopts the following:**

- **The Gloucestershire Volunteering Collaborative definition of volunteering (see section 3.1)**
- **Cheltenham Borough Council's updated Volunteer Policy (Appendix 3)**
- **Template partnership agreement with constituted groups (Appendix 4)**
- **Cheltenham Borough Council's updated Volunteer Handbook (Appendix 5).**

### **2. delegates authority to the Participation and Engagement Team Leader in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Safety and Communities and the Council's Leadership team to keep the policy and supporting documentation under review and to make changes as necessary to reflect best practice and legal and operational requirements.**

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## **1. Implications**

### **1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications**

There are no financial implications identified as a result of these recommendations.

**Signed off by:** Ela Jankowska, Finance Business Partner,  
[ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:ela.jankowska@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### **1.2 Legal implications**

Volunteers do not have the rights of employees or workers. To minimise the risk that a volunteer may claim to be an employee, it is important that the Council have a clear volunteer policy, which clearly defines what it is to be a volunteer. The policy should note that any payments made to the volunteer are strictly to cover expenses.

The Council has duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure that volunteers undertake tasks in safe conditions and are provided with competent advice on health, safety and welfare matters.

The Council also has safeguarding duties towards those who volunteer and those individuals or groups who come into direct contact with the volunteers and must ensure its Safeguarding Policy is adhered to at all times, including undertaking DBS checks where necessary.

Ensuring volunteers are covered by insurance, whether the Council's own or that of the externally constituted groups is also important.

**Signed off by:** One Legal: [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)

### **1.3 Environmental and climate change implications**

As an update to an existing policy, there are no environmental and climate change implications arising. It should be noted that the policy supports the safe and well managed provision of volunteering opportunities in the council's parks and green spaces which have a positive impact on the maintenance and biodiversity of those spaces.

**Signed off by:** Maizy McCann, Climate Officer, [maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:maizy.mccann@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### **1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities**

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity
- Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council

### **1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications**

There are no EDI implications as this is an update to an existing policy.

### **1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review**

It is proposed that the Volunteer Policy and associated documents (partnership agreement, application forms, staff guidance and volunteer handbook) is reviewed every 3 years to ensure it is working effectively

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## **2 Background**

2.1 Cheltenham Borough Council is very fortunate to be supported by the good will of local volunteers as stated in the executive summary above.

2.2 The council adopted a Volunteer Policy in 2019 in order to provide a clear process for recruiting and managing volunteers. Previous to 2019, different teams and departments had developed their own processes and there had been no consistency across the organisation.

2.3 The volunteer policy has now been reviewed and updated to ensure it is up to date and robust as the number of volunteers and constituted volunteer groups volunteering with the council has increased significantly and continues to grow.

2.4 The updated policy outlines the process for recruiting and managing both individual volunteers who are supervised directly by CBC officers and constituted

groups who register to volunteer for CBC under their own public liability insurance and are responsible for their own volunteers in carrying out tasks agreed with CBC. Volunteering application forms can be viewed on the council's website: [www.cheltenham.gov.uk/volunteering](http://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/volunteering)

- 2.5 A volunteer disclaimer is included in both the individual and group volunteering application forms. The volunteer disclaimer between CBC and their volunteers / constituted groups managing volunteers is a useful way of clarifying the expectations of both parties.
- 2.6 Once a volunteer or constituted group has registered with CBC and been matched with a volunteering opportunity, the CBC volunteer supervisor for the role liaises with them directly, including induction, health and safety briefing and supervision.
- 2.7 There are currently over 260 individuals registered on the volunteer database and over 30 constituted groups. The majority of the volunteers and constituted groups volunteer within the Green Space Development team.
- 2.8 The constituted groups include groups such as 'friends of' groups who volunteer regularly on council land through the Green Space Development Team and also teams from businesses, organisations and educational establishments who come and volunteer as a one off for example as part of their corporate social value policies.

### **3 Changes to the existing volunteer policy and process**

- 3.1 Definition:** As part of the review of the policy, CBC is asked to adopt the Gloucestershire Volunteering Collaborative definition of volunteering. The Collaborative is a group of representatives from the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, public sector and private sector, along with volunteers themselves, working together strategically to improve the way volunteering works in the county. It founded [Go Volunteer Glos](#) which is the central hub for promoting and finding volunteering opportunities in Gloucestershire. The Collaborative's definition of volunteering is:

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

- 3.2 Partnership agreement:** The revised policy includes the introduction of a new partnership agreement (appendix 4) with the constituted groups who volunteer regularly on council land under their own insurance, to set out the responsibilities and commitments on both sides. This will reduce the capacity demands on the Green Space Development team through enabling the groups to work more

autonomously through a clear, safe, supportive and documented process. The agreement will be signed by the group leader and be in place for 3 years. It will form the basis of annual reviews between CBC officers and each group where work plans are agreed.

**3.3 GDPR and processing new volunteer applications:** Volunteer data will be stored securely on Microsoft Lists and accessed through Microsoft Teams channels by the relevant officers. This has been set up by the Commercial and Business Development Team and will make it much easier to process new applications, search the data and will also enable the relevant officers to have secure access to volunteer contact information via smartphone on site in case of emergency.

3.4 The Green Space Development team will be able to process their own volunteer applications through their own Teams channel. Where convictions are declared in a volunteer application or there are concerns about the suitability of the volunteer, the application is referred to the Safeguarding and Partnerships Manager.

3.5 The application forms make clear that volunteer and group data is stored in line with the CBC [volunteers' privacy statement](#). Within this statement it is made clear that their information is kept by the council for a maximum of 5 years following the conclusion of their participation in volunteering. The Participation and Engagement Team Leader will continue to have access to all volunteer data and be responsible for ensuring that it is kept up to date.

3.6 The council recognises that children and young people may want to get involved in volunteer activities, and as a council it is important that we encourage them to become committed volunteers both now and in the future, but this must be balanced against making sure that organised volunteering must have the right safeguarding and protections in place to ensure children, young people and families are safe. Unfortunately, this means that many volunteering activities are not suitable for children to attend. Therefore, the updated policy reflects this, by putting in the right safeguards around children taking part.

3.7 However, the council will continue to work with schools and consider one-off activities and schemes that will give opportunities for young people to take part in a way that keeps them safe and makes sure that their experience is a positive one.

3.8 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.

3.9 CBC Volunteers are provided with a Volunteer Handbook (Appendix 5) which outlines what they can expect from CBC while they are volunteering and what CBC asks of them.

#### **4 Reasons for recommendations**

4.1 To ensure CBC's volunteer policy is up to date and robust to enable the smooth management of increasing numbers of volunteers and constituted groups volunteering for CBC, whilst also ensuring that volunteers remain safe whilst volunteering and that their data remains secure.

4.2 The updated policy reflects the more efficient and effective methods of storing and accessing data (via Microsoft Lists and Teams).

4.3 The partnership agreement with constituted groups who are volunteering regularly on council land will make clear the responsibilities on both sides and enable the groups to get on with work in their agreed work plans more autonomously through a clear, safe and documented process.

#### **5 Alternative options considered**

5.1 CBC could continue without an agreement with the constituted groups volunteering on our land but there is a risk associated with this from a health and safety, safeguarding, GDPR and insurance angle because it places the onus on officers to keep track of increasing numbers of groups without an agreement in place.

#### **6 Consultation and feedback**

6.1 Angela Gilbert from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council has helped to develop the updated policy and supporting documents. Angela supports the voluntary and community sector in developing robust policies and procedures and has considerable experience in supporting volunteer management.

6.2 The council's Health and Safety Business Partner has also helped to develop the policy and associated documents and has provided guidance in reviewing the processes of managing of the Green Space Development volunteers safely and efficiently.

6.3 The council's Commercial and Business Development team has provided the solution to storage of the volunteer database which is now managed securely on Microsoft Lists and accessed through Microsoft Teams channels by the relevant officers.

#### **7 Key risks**

7.1 Without an up-to-date Volunteer Policy in place, there is a risk that the policy does not protect CBC and its volunteers from a health and safety, GDPR, safeguarding and insurance perspective. There is also a reputational risk if CBC is seen to be falling short on how it manages the volunteering process.

7.2 Without a partnership agreement in place with the constituted groups, CBC does not have a clear process for managing the groups working on council land under their own auspices which creates risk around health and safety.

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**Report author:**

Helen Down, Participation and Engagement Team Leader:  
[helen.down@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:helen.down@cheltenham.gov.uk)

**Appendices:**

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening
- iii. CBC Volunteer Policy
- iv. Template partnership agreement with constituted groups
- v. CBC Volunteer Handbook

**Background information:**

N/A

## Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If a volunteer has an accident and the relationship between the council and volunteer is not clear, nor has been properly inducted the volunteer, there is a risk that this may lead to sanctions from the health and safety executive	Claire Hughes	3	3	9	reduce	Implement the updated Volunteer Policy to help ensure that volunteers remain safe when volunteering with the council		
	If a volunteer uses the opportunity to develop inappropriate relationships with children or vulnerable adults, the council could face legal challenge or sanction from external partners	Claire Hughes	3	2	6	reduce	Implement the updated Volunteer Policy to ensure sufficient safeguards in place to ensure volunteers are effectively supervised		



Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If CBC allows constituted groups to volunteer for the organisation without a proper agreement in place and a subsequent issue arises it will cause a reputational issue for the Council	Claire Hughes	3	2	6	Accept	Implement the partnership agreement with constituted groups to ensure responsibilities on both sides are clear	Adam Reynolds	From February 2025
	If the personal details of a volunteer (which could include sensitive health and/or criminal record information) are not stored correctly in line with our GDPR obligations, the council could face sanction from the Information Commissioners Office	Claire Hughes	3	3	9	Accept	Implement the updated Volunteer Policy to help ensure that volunteer's personal details are managed in line with GDPR.	Helen Down	From February 2025
	If a volunteer or constituted group of volunteers has an unsatisfactory experience volunteering	Claire Hughes	2	2	4	Accept	Implement the updated volunteer policy and partnership agreement with	Helen Down / Adam Reynolds	From February 2025

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	for the council, this may impact on the reputation of the council and also affect recruitment of other volunteers.						constituted groups to ensue a consistent approach and mutual expectations between CBC and its volunteers.		

## Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment (Screening)

### 1. Identify the policy, project, function or service change

#### a. Person responsible for this Equality Impact Assessment

Officer responsible: Helen Down	Service Area: Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships
Title: Participation and Engagement Team Leader	Date of assessment: 17.01.25
Signature: H Down	

#### b. Is this a policy, function, strategy, service change or project?

Policy

If other, please specify:

#### c. Name of the policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Volunteer Policy

Is this new or existing?

Already exists and is being reviewed

Please specify reason for change or development of policy, function, strategy, service change or project

Policy has been in place since 2019 so needed review. Part of the review is implementing a new partnership agreement with constituted groups volunteering regularly on council land under their own insurance to make clear the responsibilities on both sides.

#### d. What are the aims, objectives and intended outcomes and who is likely to benefit from it?

Aims:	To ensure the Volunteer Policy is up to date and robust to reflect the increasing number of volunteers.
	To implement a new partnership agreement with constituted groups to ensure consistency in how they are managed.

Objectives:	
Outcomes:	A more consistent approach to managing constituted groups volunteering regularly on CBC land.
Benefits:	CBC volunteers and constituted groups volunteering are treated consistently through a clear process.

e. What are the expected impacts?	
Are there any aspects, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could have an impact on the lives of people, including employees and customers.	<b>No</b>
Do you expect the impacts to be positive or negative?	<b>No impact expected</b>
Please provide an explanation for your answer:	
This is an update to an existing policy.	

**If your answer to question e identified potential positive or negative impacts, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a Stage Two Equality Impact Assessment.**

f. Identify next steps as appropriate	
Stage Two required	<b>No</b>
Owner of Stage Two assessment	
Completion date for Stage Two assessment	