



people policies

Volunteering Policy

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Policy

Policy Statement

A volunteer is a person who gives freely of their skills and experience without expectation of financial reward.

Bristol City Council recognises the valuable contribution that volunteers can bring to the organisation.

Volunteers bring with them a diversity of experience, backgrounds, skills and outlooks, which can provide added value to the services delivered by the Council.

This policy sets out Bristol City Council's approach to volunteering. Its aim is to ensure that the benefits of volunteering are maximised for both the volunteers and the council.

Scope

This policy covers all volunteers undertaking unpaid work within Bristol City Council and is recommended to schools.

The policy does not apply to school pupils on work experience placements or students on work placements, but does include young volunteers aged 14-17 years old. Information on work experience placements can be found here: **Work experience at the council**

Please note that time off for Bristol City Council employees who volunteer is covered in the **Leave Policy** and further information regarding **volunteering leave can be found on the Source**. For Bristol City Council employees who volunteer in emergencies with the Civil Protection team, more information can be found on the Source page **volunteering in an emergency**.

Status of volunteers

A volunteer is not an employee or worker and will not have a contract of employment with the Council. All voluntary work undertaken is unpaid.

The Council will agree a role with the volunteer which both parties believe the volunteer is capable of fulfilling. However, there is no legal or contractual arrangement: the volunteer is free to refuse an offer of voluntary work and the Council is not bound to provide the work.

Volunteering roles

Voluntary work should complement the work of paid staff and provide added value to the benefit of service users. Care should be taken to ensure that no undue demands are placed on our volunteers. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for volunteers to provide ad hoc cover to support service continuity.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Bristol City Council is committed to promoting equity and inclusion, as underpinned in the Equality Act 2010, and to:

- Provide equality of opportunity in terms of volunteer recruitment, training and support, ensuring all processes are accessible and inclusive.
- Value and make effective use of volunteers' diverse backgrounds, experiences, and different ways of thinking.
- Tackle any instance of discrimination faced by a volunteer.

We are keen to ensure that our volunteers are representative of Bristol's diverse community and the people who use our services. We have a commitment to regularly evaluate and monitor our progress towards achieving diversity in our volunteers. To do this, volunteers will occasionally be asked to complete an anonymous survey. If monitoring reveals significant under-representation of a particular community, targeted measures may be undertaken.

Health and Safety

The Council has a responsibility for the health and safety of volunteers. Volunteers must be treated in the same way as paid staff in respect of health and safety, as outlined in Bristol City Council's **Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy**.

A risk assessment specific to each volunteer work area and role must be undertaken by the volunteer's manager and a copy provided to the volunteer, if requested. A separate risk assessment needs to be completed if young volunteers are involved, to cover the council's additional responsibilities for safeguarding children.

Volunteers should at all times follow the Council's health and safety policies and procedures, which should be covered in their Volunteer Induction. Volunteers shall:

- Familiarise themselves with the safety procedures that relate to their work.
- Work with due regard to the health and safety of themselves and others in compliance with those corporate health and safety procedures.
- Use any equipment provided to them in accordance with their training and in compliance with any requirements imposed by the Council.
- Co-operate with and support managers in meeting the Council's health and safety responsibilities.
- Report any accidents, near misses and ill health incidents and/or deficiencies they become aware of, including in their own training and instruction and capability to work safely.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

The council is committed to safeguarding the welfare of those accessing our services. Full details are given in the Council's **Disclosure Policy**, but in summary:

- Where the volunteering activity involves **regulated activity**, which can include regular, unsupervised activity with children and young people under the age of 18 years or vulnerable adults, an Enhanced DBS Check must be applied for.
- Where a DBS check is required, the Council must complete the check; we cannot accept checks done by other organisations. However, the DBS Update Service may be used if the volunteer has previously subscribed to it with the appropriate level of disclosure.
- All those council employees working regularly and unsupervised with young volunteers (aged under 18) must complete an Enhanced DBS check.
- Volunteers aged under 16 do not need to complete a DBS check themselves.
- DBS checks should be redone every three years.
- A Basic DBS check may be completed for any volunteer at the council's discretion.
- Where a conviction is disclosed, further risk assessment may be required as to whether the volunteer can take up the role or not.

DBS checks are processed through the eBulk online system. For further information on how to complete a volunteer's DBS check, please refer to guidance available on **using the eBulk Online system**.

Under no circumstances should a volunteer on whom no checks have been obtained be allowed to work in **regulated activity**.

Managers should seek advice from their directorate **HR Consultancy** team with any questions over the level of DBS check required or if there are any concerns with the disclosure.

Tasks and role descriptions

It is the responsibility of the manager working with the volunteer to outline clearly a volunteer's tasks, roles and responsibilities. They may draw up a role description, if this is deemed necessary. This will set out the duties of the role and the skills and experience necessary, as well as any training that is required before the voluntary work is undertaken or any specific administrative requirements needed for the role (e.g. DBS check). For some voluntary roles, a brief description of tasks would be sufficient.

If a role is suitable for a volunteer aged under 18, this should be clearly outlined in the role description.

Recruitment

Volunteers may be recruited using a variety of means, including publicity and advertising, speculative applications or word of mouth.

All recruitment processes and publicity should be accessible and inclusive, ideally with role descriptions outlining any specific requirements of volunteers. Managers should aim to use a range of publicity methods in order to engage volunteers from across Bristol's diverse communities.

Initial expressions of interest

Volunteers may submit an initial expression of interest form or have an initial conversation with the volunteer manager, who should provide further information about the volunteering, check the volunteer's suitability for the role and discuss any initial questions the volunteer may have.

Informal meeting

For regular placements the recruitment process should include an informal meeting with the volunteer. This may form part of the initial expression of interest, an informal interview, the registration process or of the induction session itself.

The interview can be structured informally and be an opportunity for both parties to assess the suitability of the role.

In most instances an interview with a volunteer will not involve a selection process. However, if not all prospective volunteers will be taken on, people should be made aware of this from the outset. If a prospective

volunteer is deemed to be unsuitable for the particular voluntary role, the reasons for the decision should be explained to them.

Registration

Volunteer managers should ensure that they obtain all necessary information when a person agrees to volunteer in a role. This includes their name, contact details, emergency contact details, and any access requirements. Managers may use a registration form or other means to gather this information. Additional information about the volunteer may be asked, if deemed relevant for a particular role.

References

For most volunteer roles, one reference is required which asks the referee to comment on the volunteer's suitability for a particular activity or for work with a particular client/service user group. The referee does not necessarily need to be a former employer but should not be a relative or partner. A volunteer should not commence a placement until their reference is received and satisfactory.

When volunteers are working with children or vulnerable adults, a volunteer must provide two references. Ideally this will include a reference from their most recent employer.

On an exceptional basis where the volunteering activity is for a one-off event, or part of a team volunteering day, a reference may not be expected.

Volunteers aged under 16 years old should be asked to provide parental or formal carer's consent in order to volunteer with the council, instead of a reference.

Managers should seek advice from their directorate **HR Consultancy team** with any questions regarding reference checks.

Access arrangements

Prospective volunteers should be asked to highlight and discuss any relevant health concerns, impairments, or access requirements with their manager. Their manager should identify any adjustments or support that can be provided for the volunteer to complete the role. Alternatively, the manager may identify an alternative volunteering role.

If, once a volunteer has started a volunteering role, there is any concern about their suitability for the

assigned role, the manager should discuss it with the volunteer and identify any possible support or alternative arrangements as required.

Volunteering Agreement and Code of Conduct

Managers should ensure that all volunteers are familiar with the expected standards of conduct, as outlined below. Managers may prepare a volunteering agreement which both parties can sign before the volunteer commences any work. This should state what the council undertakes to provide the volunteer with and what is expected of them as a volunteer:

- Volunteers must treat all service users, Bristol City Council staff and other volunteers with respect.
- Volunteers should respect the confidentiality of the council's staff, its clients, customers, service users and other third parties and not disclose or use any information they come across while volunteering for their own benefit, except where required or permitted to do so by law.
- Volunteers should work with due regard to the health and safety of themselves and others, including following all instructions and regulations regarding Security, fire and other emergency procedures.
- Volunteers should ensure that their conduct when carrying out volunteering tasks does not discriminate against others or breach equality legislation.
- If working with vulnerable adults or children, volunteers must complete Safeguarding training and follow the principles and procedures outlined in the council's Safeguarding policy.
- Volunteers should not accept gifts (including money) or hospitality (for example, an invitation to a dinner) from customers, contractors or users of Council services. A volunteer should raise any queries in relation to gifts and hospitality with their supervisor.
- Volunteers should ensure that their standards of dress, the type and style of clothes and personal ornamentation worn are appropriate to the nature of the duties and responsibilities undertaken by the

volunteer, including conforming to requirements that apply for health and safety reasons, and to wear any uniform issued to them. Volunteers will be free to observe any requirements for ethnic or religious dress.

- All volunteers will be expected to attend work without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (illegal or other), and without having their ability to undertake the volunteering role adversely impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- Volunteers should not speak to the media/press, communicate with third parties or make comments on social media about matters which directly relate to the affairs of the council or individual service users.
- Volunteers agree to only use any council property, facilities or equipment provided for official council business only.

Induction and Training

All volunteers should be provided with an induction as necessary and appropriate to the duties which they will be undertaking. This should include being provided with the policies and safety guidance relevant to their work.

Any volunteer working with vulnerable adults or children must complete the online Safeguarding Awareness training. Managers may also provide role-specific training and/or briefings, as required.

When volunteering positions are offered to young people, aged under 16, managers should carefully consider the suitability of the training available and adjust it if necessary, using language and content appropriate to this age group.

Support and supervision

Managers should ensure that volunteers are appropriately supported and supervised throughout the duration of their placement. Different roles may require different levels of support and supervision.

Managers should ensure that volunteers are recognised for their contribution and treated respectfully.

Personal Identification

Managers should provide volunteers with a means to prove their identity as a Bristol City Council volunteer while volunteering, for example, a badge or lanyard. These must be returned when the volunteering placement ceases. The form of identification provided may vary depending on the role and its frequency.

Insurance

Volunteers are covered by the Council's insurance policies. (Note, there are some reductions in the amount of compensation payable in respect of the personal accident insurance for those under 16 and over 75.) The insurance will not cover unauthorised actions on the part of the volunteer.

Driving

Volunteers can drive Council vehicles as required by their role providing they have the relevant driving licence for the vehicle. If a volunteer uses their own vehicle on Council business they must comply with the **Corporate Transport Own Vehicle Users Grey Fleet Arrangement** and advise their insurers, or risk insurers declining their claim. The manager must check a volunteer driver's licence and insurance documentation.

A volunteer must report any accidents during their work to their supervisor. They must also report any motoring offences. Fines/penalty charge notices and associated charges for parking or traffic offences will not be reimbursed.

Expenses

Volunteers are unpaid. However, managers will have discretion regarding the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses to volunteers for expenses, which will be in accordance with the Council's **Expenses and Benefits Policy** and **Travel Policy**. Other than expenses as stated here, no other payment should be made to volunteers within the council.

Managers should, wherever possible, avoid the need to pay volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses.

Dealing with problems

If a volunteer encounters problems while volunteering with Bristol City Council, they should discuss any concerns with the appropriate manager and should be aware of how to escalate a concern. Managers should discuss any issues that they may have with a volunteer's work with the volunteer.

If a complaint is made about a volunteer, the manager will decide whether any action should be taken, depending on the nature of the complaint and what action is appropriate. Where a volunteer has failed to demonstrate the expected standards of conduct, the Council may end the volunteering arrangement with immediate effect.

If a volunteer wants to make a complaint, they should refer to the Council's **complaints procedure**.

Data Protection

A volunteer's personal information must be maintained securely, as per the Council's **Data Protection Policy**, and retained according to the council's Data Retention Schedule document and only for a duration necessary to maintain volunteering arrangements with the Council.

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is the reporting of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to council activities. This may include criminal activity, failure to comply with any legal or professional obligation or regulatory requirements, miscarriages of justice, danger to health and safety, damage to the environment, bribery, financial fraud or mismanagement, breach of internal policies and procedures. If a volunteer has any concerns, they should speak out. They should not suffer any detrimental treatment for doing so.

Ending Volunteering

It is appreciated that it is not always possible to give advance notice, but where it is possible either the Council or the volunteer should endeavor to provide as much notice as possible of their intention to end the volunteering arrangement. Managers should aim to respond to reference requests for volunteers as appropriate.

Additional guidance and support

This policy provides outline guidance in the Process section on the application of the policy. There are other documents which provide more detail and helpful guidance that should be read in conjunction with the policy and these are listed below.

Additional guidance

Work experience at the Council

Paid Volunteering Leave

Volunteering in an emergency

Letters and forms

Volunteering Role Description Template

Volunteer Registration Form

Volunteering Agreement

Associated policies

Corporate Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policy

Disclosure Policy

Leave Policy

Expenses and Benefits Policy

Travel Policy

Whistleblowing

Reasonable Adjustments Policy

Corporate Transport Own Vehicle Users Grey Fleet Arrangement

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The audience of this document is made aware that a physical copy may not be the latest available version. The latest version, which supersedes all previous versions, is available on The Source.

Those to whom this policy applies are responsible for familiarising themselves periodically with the latest version and for complying with policy requirements at all times.

History of most recent policy changes – must be completed

Version	Date	Change
1.01	15/12/2025	Updated policy adopted