

Volunteer Framework - Review 2012

There is broad consensus that people's lives are improved if they are confident and able to do more themselves. In recent years the ever increasing focus on personalisation, co-production and 'person centred' approaches, has provided evidence of the benefits individuals can experience when given more control. Healthy places are places where individuals and groups actively engage in the life of their community and this has benefits not just for the individual but for the local environment, culture, sense of community and cohesion.

BCC has a tradition of working to unlock the potential capacity of its citizens so they can be supported to play a greater role in their community.

While this can take many forms, it includes encouraging individuals to participate more in local life, such as giving time to volunteer.

Volunteering is defined as "the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice".¹

This policy review is an opportunity for Community Services to reaffirm our vision for volunteer support, improve our practice and, once evaluated, work in partnership with colleagues to extend this approach across Council.

1	Introduction
1.1	Community Services involves volunteers as an intrinsic part of its work. Volunteering should be a mutually beneficial experience with the organisation, volunteers and service users all benefiting.
1.2	To ensure this mutual benefit it is crucial for Community Services' to examine and consolidate its existing volunteer management and development practices.
1.3	Good volunteer management practice currently exists across the service. The development of a volunteer policy and associated procedures will embed this good practice and contribute to its consistent application across the service.
1.4	By providing a positive, high quality volunteering experience,

¹ "Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future. The Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland", Department for Social Development, March 2012

1.5	<p>Community Services will be better placed to attract, involve and retain volunteers.</p> <p>As well as supporting our own volunteers, Community Services also supports volunteering across the sector through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • its grant aid programme • the Area Support team; and • the Toolbox training programme we have developed for community groups.
-----	---

2	Vision and Values
2.1	As already noted, Volunteering is defined as “the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice’. ²
2.2	The Community Services section values volunteer involvement in its work as an expression of active citizenship. We recognise the integral role volunteering plays in the community development process.
2.3	We support and encourage volunteering that builds connected, cohesive, competitive and confident communities.
2.4	Community Services values the involvement of volunteers in our work as they help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the communities we serve. Volunteers bring a unique perspective to all our work and we recognise them as a core part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff. Involving volunteers enables us to enhance the benefits we can offer to citizens.
2.5	We value volunteering across the community and recognise the important contribution volunteers make to all aspects of community life as well as the many vital services which they deliver. As a funder of community organisations we seek to encourage a local environment which supports volunteering to grow.
2.6	Volunteering is a mutually beneficial experience. Community Services benefits from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers, and in turn we believe that volunteers gain personal benefits, such as improved health and wellbeing and skills development, from their volunteering experience. We are committed to managing volunteers in a way that ensures the needs of both parties are met.
2.7	Belfast City Council strives to be a diverse and inclusive organisation operating within a diverse and inclusive city. As part of Belfast City

² “Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future. The Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland”, Department for Social Development, March 2012

	Council Community Services is committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers in all our policies and practices.
--	--

3	Volunteer Roles
3.1	Community Services offers a range of roles for volunteers that bring added value to our work. Volunteers are involved at appropriate levels in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid staff.
3.2	The role or task of the volunteer is identified prior to the placement of an individual at a given location. All volunteers are provided with a written role description, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations of their role. This role is reviewed with their immediate supervisor at least once a year.
3.3	Volunteers will not be asked to fulfil the roles of paid staff in times of industrial action. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

4	Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers
4.1	Community Services is committed to making volunteering an inclusive process in which people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skills can participate. We wish to see all sections of the community represented amongst our volunteers. Volunteering opportunities are widely promoted, and we will endeavour to make recruitment and selection materials available in formats accessible to any individual or group, upon request. We aim to review, the make-up of our volunteers on a yearly basis to identify and target any under-represented groups
4.2	Community Services implements a fair, effective and open system in the recruitment and selection of volunteers and treats all information collected in this process confidentially.
4.3	All potential volunteers must complete a registration form, attend a matching meeting and provide references. Additional measures may be implemented depending on the nature of the volunteer role, and criminal records checks are conducted where appropriate.
4.4	The recruitment and selection process is conducted by an appropriately briefed/trained staff member and aims to ensure both parties give and receive sufficient information to assess whether the volunteering opportunities available match the potential volunteer's interests, skills, qualities and needs.

5	Management of Volunteers
5.1	All volunteers are provided with a written letter of welcome which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and Community Services. This agreement may be reviewed at any time, with the consent of the volunteer and his/her supervisor including during the initial review meeting and at the end of the settling in/taster

	period.
5.2	All volunteers are provided with an induction within six weeks of commencing their voluntary work. For one off and short term volunteer role opportunities induction should take place prior to the volunteer beginning the actual volunteer role.
5.3	The induction provides <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • background information on Community Services and the work of Belfast City Council • an explanation of its structures and procedures • a description of the volunteer role and the work team • an outline of how the volunteer will be supported, including practical information deemed necessary.
5.4	During the induction period new volunteers will receive written information on relevant legislation, organisational policies and codes of behaviour. Volunteers will be given the opportunity to discuss any issues or matters of concern with the volunteer supervisor during regular meetings or as otherwise mutually agreed.
5.5	All volunteers are allocated a named member of staff as their supervisor with an alternative identified should the designated supervisor be unavailable
5.6	All volunteer placements are subject to a settling in/taster period, the length of which will depend on the nature and hours of the voluntary work. Volunteers are given additional support during this period ending in a review meeting between the volunteer and his/her supervisor to ensure both parties are satisfied with the arrangements.
5.7	The named supervisor can provide day to day help and guidance on any issue related to the voluntary work. The supervisor is responsible for providing regular support to and supervision of the volunteer. The frequency, duration and format of this support and supervision is agreed between the volunteer and his/her supervisor at the end of the settling in/taster period.
5.8	Community Services aims to reflect the voluntary nature of its relationship with volunteers in all our policies and procedures for managing their involvement. The volunteer's designated supervisor will deal with minor complaints or grievances about or by volunteers or their work through the usual support and supervision procedures in the first instance.
5.9	However we recognise our duty to protect the well-being and interests of our volunteers, staff and service users and therefore operate a formal complaints procedure in the case of more serious complaints.

	In the case of particularly serious offences, as specified in the Code of Practice, this process may be bypassed and/or the subject of the complaint asked to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected the matter will be handed over to the police.
5.10	Community Services recognises the important role that volunteers fulfil. We also appreciate the importance of seeking volunteers' ideas and opinions at regular intervals. Gathering feedback and opinions from volunteers will be of benefit to both parties. We endeavour to communicate with volunteers and seek their views and opinions in appropriate ways and on a regular basis.
5.11	In order to effectively monitor the work carried out by volunteers and how they are managed, a personal file is maintained for all volunteers. This will include contact details and other relevant personal information, the initial application forms, details of the recruitment and selection process, agreements made, hours worked, records of supervision, training undertaken and complaints or grievances received or made. All such information is treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and volunteers are entitled to inspect all such information pertaining to them.
5.12	Volunteers with Community Services are fully protected by the Council's public liability and personal accident insurance whilst carrying out their voluntary role as agreed with their volunteer supervisor. Drivers should, however, check with their own insurance company to ensure they are adequately covered whilst using their cars in connection with their voluntary work.
5.13	Community Services will provide adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles.
5.14	We will reimburse volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses for travel and subsistence (e.g. lunches) when agreed with their volunteer supervisor and submitted on a standard Volunteer Attendance and Expenses Claim Form accompanied by proof of expenditure.
5.15	Community Services operates appropriate procedures for volunteers and their supervisors to deal with matters of concern, A volunteer's supervisor provides support and supervision, identifies training requirements, countersigns expenses claims and any other duties deemed necessary for the appropriate and effective management of any volunteer.
5.16	All Community Services staff required to undertake such duties are provided with the necessary training in relation to management, supervision, support and if appropriate training of volunteers.

6	Training
6.1	Community Services is committed to encouraging volunteers to

	improve their personal and professional effectiveness in order to fulfil their potential.
6.2	Volunteers may choose to attend any appropriate in-house training that they feel is relevant to their voluntary role, after discussion and agreement with their supervisor and subject to the availability of places.
6.3	Volunteers may request financial and/or practical support from their volunteer supervisor to attend external courses where these have a clear relevance to the volunteer's work. All requests will be subject to available funding.
6.4	Following agreement from their supervisor, volunteers attending approved training – internal or external – may do so within their normal hours of voluntary work and may reclaim out-of-pocket expenses.

7	Monitoring & Review of the Policy
7.1	This policy is regularly monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it reflects the nature of volunteering within Community Services and any legislative requirements.