

## **Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Volunteer Policy**

The Council is immensely proud of its volunteers who, through their efforts, are putting something back into society, working with our staff to make the borough a better place, whilst also learning new skills and socialising with others.

The use of volunteers allow many improvements to be made which without them would not be affordable. Volunteers are essential in helping to maintain current service standards. Volunteers complement and add value to the services the Council provide and the Council is thankful for the time they give.

It is recognised that people and our communities thrive when there are more opportunities to volunteer, to give time and effort to making Tonbridge & Malling and its organisations and communities a better place.

It is important that volunteers are not discouraged by too much bureaucracy, but a framework is required.

### **What is volunteering?**

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 the borough 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 three days paid time off for voluntary duties with recognised groups undertaking work of benefit to the residents of the borough.

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. 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:

- Purpose of role
- A broad outline of tasks and activities to be undertaken
- 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)

### **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.

### **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 have their own safeguarding policy, risk assessment and insurance.

A partnership agreement with constituted volunteer 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.

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 that 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.

### **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.

### **4. Health and Safety**

The Council are committed to ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and wellbeing of its volunteers in accordance with Health and Safety Legislation. This includes carrying out suitable and sufficient risk assessments for all volunteering activities and implementing appropriate control measures to minimise risk. In addition, where a volunteer makes us aware of a pre-existing medical condition or disability, an individual risk assessment may also be necessary.

Where identified, the Council will provide volunteers with suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and clear guidance on its use. Volunteers will receive relevant information, instruction and training to enable them to carry out their roles.

Volunteers are expected to take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and that of others who may be affected by their actions. They must follow the Council's Health and safety policies, procedures and instructions and report any hazards, incidents or near misses.

### **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 required for any volunteer whose role may involve unsupervised access to children or vulnerable adults.

Managers and volunteer supervisors must seek advice from the Council's Human Resources team to determine the appropriate level of DBS check for each role.

Volunteers must not commence duties until the appropriate DBS checks have been completed and clearance has been confirmed.

Further guidance is available within the Council's Safeguarding Policy.

## **6. 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.

## **7. Expenses**

The Council will not pay volunteers but is committed to paying reasonable "out of pocket" expenses such as car parking, 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.

## **8. Moving On**

The Council welcomes feedback and encourages volunteers to offer ideas for improvements.

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

## **9. Review**

This policy will be reviewed within 3 years of its adoption.

**Human Resources April 2026**

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