Every Resident a Reader Project Volunteer Policy



**Date:** January 2022

# Introduction

North Tyneside Council (the Authority) wishes to support an increase in community action through volunteering and recognises the benefits of this for volunteers, our services and the community as a whole. The council values the involvement of volunteers in our activities work as they help to reflect the interests, needs and resources of the community we serve and bring a unique perspective to all our work.

This policy is part of a range of initiatives undertaken by the Authority, working with the North Tyneside Strategic Partnership (NTSP) to support an increase in volunteering in the borough. Its purpose is to set out how the council will manage and support volunteers who work alongside, or enhance, existing services provided by the council.

# What is a volunteer?

North Tyneside Council defines volunteering as:

 “The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individual outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice”.

# Principles

This policy is based on 4 principles:

1. **Choice** – the decision to act as a volunteer must be freely made by each individual. A volunteer may decide to stop volunteering at any time though we ask that a notice period is given so the service can continue to operate.
2. **Diversity** – volunteering will be promoted for all North Tyneside residents, regardless of background and/or protected characteristics including age, sex, race, religion/belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership, or disability.
3. **Mutual benefit** – volunteering has benefits for the person volunteering, the service area they are working in, and the Authority as a whole. This policy recognises that volunteers offer their time and skills freely and should therefore benefit in return. Whilst volunteers are not employees and do not receive pay, they may benefit in a wide range of other ways including, for example, improvements in their wellbeing, feeling part of their community, receiving training and experience, gaining enhanced confidence, and receiving support with job-seeking through letters of support or references.
4. **Recognition** – the council wants to ensure that it recognises and values the work volunteers do and the high quality of the services they deliver which complement the services offered by the council.

# The Role of the Volunteer Supervisor

A Volunteer Supervisor is responsible for the recruitment, management and development of volunteers in a similar way to the management of employees. This should therefore be an identified part of a role and included within the job description.

A Volunteer Supervisor’s role typically includes:

* finding and assigning tasks for volunteers to carry out
* recruiting volunteers for the service/organisation
* supporting and supervising volunteers, including dealing with concerns from or about the volunteer
* making changes to roles to make them more inclusive and accessible, for example for volunteers with disabilities or long-term health conditions
* developing volunteers

# Health and Safety

Issues relating to the health and safety of volunteers should be considered when the post is being created and monitored regularly thereafter. Volunteer supervisors have the same responsibility for the health and safety of volunteers as they do for employees of the Authority including considering them as part of risk assessments.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website below includes advice and guidance regarding the management of the health and safety of volunteers. This includes relevant legislation, risk assessments such as lone working, reporting incidents involving volunteers, and other sources of advice. <https://www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/employer/index.htm>

Advice regarding the measures required regarding Covid 19 can be found on the government website here <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-volunteering>

# Insurance

Council services provided through the use of volunteers are fully covered by the council’s insurance. Please note that any groups which are run by volunteers, who are not under the council’s control, in council premises need their own insurance.

Drivers using their own cars in connection with voluntary work must inform their own insurance company to ensure they have adequate and continued cover.

# Recruitment and Selection

The Authority’s process for the recruitment and selection of volunteers aims to apply a fair and consistent approach that supports its commitment to building a diverse and inclusive organisation.

The following section takes managers through the stages of the process - from role creation and advertising through to information about any pre-start checks required for the role such as references, safeguarding/criminal records checks, and the rights of candidates who are not UK Nationals relating to volunteering.

## Creation of a Volunteer Role Description

A key stage requiring careful consideration is role-creation and the design of an appropriate role description. A template role description is available in Appendix 1 to support with this. This sets out details, and considerations such as:

* the purpose of the role – (including how the volunteer will complement work undertaken by council employees)
* the support and supervision provided -– including in relation to safeguarding
* the training required for the role,
* any requirements to carry out the role e.g. experience or skills, or any safeguarding checks required – DBS or references. Remember this is a voluntary role so these should be limited.
* any qualifications required including driving licenses
* what the individual will get from the role.
* the safeguarding responsibilities of the role where relevant, including the skills, experience or qualities needed to ensure the role is undertaken safely, including where the role is emotionally demanding

## Finding Volunteers

There are a wide variety of ways to advertise for new volunteers including options form the list below.

If supervisors are looking for specific skills, they should think about where they will most likely find people with those skills. Consideration should also be given to reaching out to people who are under-represented to support them to get involved.

* word of mouth referrals
* leaflets and other printed media
* using Volunteer Centres
* social media such as LinkedIn and Twitter
* on the council website
* organising or speaking at events
* press and radio adverts
* through websites like [Do-it](https://doit.life/), [Reach](https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/), and [Volunteering Matters](https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/), or via North Tyneside’s Voluntary Organisations Development Agency (VODA) volunteering@voda.org.uk.
* colleges or university student unions

## The Advert

The advert should set out:

* what the council or service does and what cause or group of people it benefits
* the difference the volunteer will make to the cause
* what the volunteer will get from their involvement
* that we pay expenses and for what
* who candidates can ask questions about the role
* whether the role requires a DBS check and if so what level
* how else they can find out more and/or make an application.

Supervisors should use language and images that reflect and welcome diversity.

## Application Form and Guidance

There is a standard Application Form and Guidance available for the recruitment of volunteers (see Appendix 2). This is kept deliberately short to prevent candidates from being deterred by a long form. The form allows candidates to express an interest in the role and briefly cover their suitability for it. Where further information is required to reduce the number of candidates for interview volunteer supervisors may consider conducting telephone or video-call interviews as an initial selection process (records of these should be retained with other volunteer recruitment information as detailed in section 7.8).

Where requested copies should be provided in alternative formats/languages. There is information about translation and interpretation services on the intranet here <http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/page/3142/translation-and-interpretation>.

## Interviews/selection processes

Whilst it is important to get a good fit between the individual and the role, interviews for volunteering positions should not be too formal. People are offering their time free of charge rather than seeking paid employment so the process should reflect that.

The interview is an opportunity for the supervisor to get to know the potential volunteer, allowing them time to talk about themselves, whilst giving them further information about the responsibilities and benefits of taking on the role. This allows both parties to identify whether there is a good match between role and candidate.

In preparation for the interview supervisors should:

* advise candidates of any documentation that they need to bring with them to interview (as in point 3 above e.g. DBS Identity Information)
* ask the potential volunteer if they need any support to attend the interview and make adjustments where possible.
* give candidates information to help them prepare for an interview i.e. so they know what you're going to ask them about.

Within the interview supervisors should discuss:

1. the role and how their skills and experience would fit it
2. why they want to volunteer and what motivates them
3. any requirements they'll need to meet before appointment – this can include. references, qualifications evidence check (where it is a legal requirement to carry out the role) including driving licenses, DBS check, medical declaration (See section 7.6 for further details)
4. the support they'll get in the role
5. what else they’d need from the Authority to be successful in the role, for example to have flexible hours to allow for childcare or to have documents provided in a different format like large print.

Supervisors should keep a record of the interview including the questions and the candidate’s responses. These should be retained as set out in section 7.8

## Appointment Process

**Successful candidates** - Following the interview/selection process supervisors should first contact the successful candidates to offer them the role subject to pre-start checks.

These can include references, medical declaration, criminal records checks via DBS and, in very limited cases for non-UK Nationals, a check of their right to do voluntary work in the UK. Please see the following sections for full details.

Once the following relevant checks are complete, a start date can be agreed, and induction plan prepared.

**Unsuccessful candidates** – Following interview, either you or the candidate may decide that they are not suitable for the role or it is not suitable for them. In these cases it’s important to either ask why they are no longer interested (to support you with future recruitment) or to explain why you are not offering them the role (to support them to find suitable roles)

### References

Supervisors can ask new volunteers to provide references dep upon the nature of the role. In most cases, a letter (including via email from a relevant address) is sufficient. They could also talk to the referees by phone to check information discussed at interview.

Where the role involves working with children or vulnerable/adults at risk of harm (in particular where a DBS check is required for the role) supervisors should request two references (one from the current or most recent employer where possible) as part of a Safer Recruitment approach and should verify these references via a phone call to the referee. The reference request to ask the referee about the candidate’s suitability to work with the relevant vulnerable group(s) including whether there is any information relating to safeguarding that the Authority should be aware of.

### Medical declaration and discussion

Candidates who are successful at interview should be asked to complete a Medical Declaration to advise their supervisor of any medical conditions which may have an impact upon their ability to perform the volunteer role. There is a template for this purpose – See Appendix 3.

Supervisors should also have a discussion with the volunteer about their health and wellbeing as part of their induction, to ensure that the right support and adjustments are in place.

### Criminal record checks via the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

Particularly for roles which work with children or vulnerable adults, it is important to consider whether the candidate is eligible for a criminal record check via the DBS and if so at what level. Advice regarding eligibility can be found on the NCVO website [here](https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/specialist-guides/getting-started-with-criminal-records-checks) and further detailed guidance about eligibility can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dbs-eligibility-guidance>. Volunteer supervisors can also seek advice from their HR Business Partner.

Please note, candidates **do not pay for either standard or enhanced DBS disclosure checks for volunteer positions.** The checks however are processed in the same way as for a paid position. Volunteer supervisors wishing to carry out DBS checks for candidates should email the Recruitment and Safeguarding Team at hr.recruitment&safeguarding@northtyneside.gov.uk to register for use of the online checking system and associated training.

### Volunteers from overseas

In some cases it may be necessary for supervisors to carry out Right to Work in the UK checks for volunteers. This depends on the whether the volunteer is volunteering or carrying out voluntary work. See below for details.

**Volunteering OR voluntary work** - Sometimes people from overseas can volunteer but can't do voluntary work so it’s important to be clear regarding the different terms.

In practice, volunteers don’t have to commit their time and shouldn't feel like they do, whereas voluntary workers might have set hours, or a lot of responsibility for a service which could make them feel like they have to commit their time even if they don't have a written contract.

The Home Office defines it as follows

* **Volunteers** don't have a contract, must not be a substitute for an employee and must not be doing unpaid work. They must not get payment in kind but are sometimes paid for reasonable expenses. They usually help a charity or voluntary or public sector organisation.
* **Voluntary workers** usually have obligations to do their work. The law may find these to be 'contractual' even if there isn't a written contract. For example, the voluntary worker might have to do their role at set times or carry out set tasks. Voluntary workers are sometimes paid in kind. For example, they could get free training, products or services from the organisation.

**Right to work checks** - If a person is a volunteer and **not** a voluntary worker (see above), you don’t need to check their right to work in the UK.

If, however, there is any way that the volunteer is doing voluntary work and has a contract (even if not a physical one), you should check their right to work in the UK. Please seek advice from your HR Business Partner.

**Visas and volunteering** – Where a candidate has a visa to allow them to be in the UK, supervisors should confirm whether it allows volunteering, as some do not.

Volunteers can check if they need a UK visa by using the UK Visas and Immigration service’s online tool at <https://www.gov.uk/check-uk-visa>

**Refugees and asylum seekers** - People who have refugee status or humanitarian protections can do any type of work including voluntary work and volunteering.

People who've applied for refugee status or humanitarian protection (asylum seekers) can volunteer in both the public and voluntary sectors, including when appealing against a decision to refuse asylum.

**Volunteers from the EU** – The UK is no longer a member of the European Union, but EU nationals can still volunteer in the UK if:

* they have settled or pre-settled status (speak to your HR Business Partner for advice), or
* they have a visa that allows them to volunteer (see section above on visas)

## The Volunteer Agreement

North Tyneside Council has a standard Volunteer Agreement which must be used (Appendix 4). The agreement sets out the non-contractual arrangements between the council and the volunteer. This includes a description of the volunteer role, the process for claiming expenses, the council’s data protection obligations and a confidentiality clause. There may be times when a volunteer placement is not working well for either the volunteer or the service area, and the Volunteer Agreement also sets out how this will be managed.

## Recording of Volunteer Information - Central registration and local volunteer files

Once a volunteer has been appointed the Volunteer Supervisor **must** advise HR of the details of the individual appointed. This allows the Authority to maintain a central record of where volunteering arrangements are in place across the council. Volunteer supervisors can contact HR by emailing HR.Notifications@northtyneside.gov.uk or calling 0191 643 8701.

Information provided should include the volunteer’s personal details and contact information, and information about any references or DBS checks carried out (and any risk assessments required as a result).

Volunteer supervisors should also create local volunteer personal files to store and retain information relating to the management of that volunteer. This information must be stored and retained safely and confidentially in line with the Authority’s Information Governance policies and procedures.

Information relating to the recruitment process of volunteers should be retained locally for a period of 6 months (to allow the Authority to respond to any challenge or to revisit previous applicants where further roles become available) before being securely destroyed. As above information regarding successful candidates will be transferred to the central register and local volunteer personal file

# Induction and training– section to be rewritten after process agreed

Induction

North Tyneside Council has a full induction process for all volunteers which is tailored to the requirements of the role and may include training if required. A template induction plan is provided to ensure clarity and consistency across the volunteering roles (See Appendix xxx).

* how it will make changes to roles to make them more accessible – during induction and ongoing.

Health and wellbeing discussion to be included

VODA

**Induction and Training**

It is important to induct new volunteers into

your organisation, much in the way you would

induct a new member of staff. You may want

to develop a Volunteer Induction Pack that

includes things like the organisation’s policies

and procedures, annual report and structure

so that they know about the environment they

will be volunteering in.

It is also important to offer volunteers any

**appropriate** training they need. You should

only offer training that is of direct relevance to

the role. This is to avoid creating a contract of

<https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/recruiting-and-welcoming-volunteers/running-a-volunteer-induction/>

# Support and Supervision

Volunteers are allocated a named supervisor. The Volunteer Supervisor will provide guidance on a day-to-day basis as well as regular support and supervision through one-to-one meetings with the volunteer. The regularity of the one-to-one meetings will depend on the role and the frequency the volunteer is engaged and will be agreed as part of the induction process.Further detailed guidance on Volunteer Support and Supervision Meetings is available in Appendix 5.

# Problem Solving Process

The Volunteer Supervisor will deal with any minor issues, complaints or grievances about or by the volunteer informally through their usual support and supervision in the first instance. In the case of more serious issues/complaints, however, or where the informal route has not been successful, the Volunteer Problem-Solving process will used (see Appendix 6).

# Ending a Volunteer Agreement for service reasons

Where changes to service requirements or resources result in the need to cease or reduce the use of volunteers within a service, volunteer supervisors hold a meeting with each volunteer to advise them that their volunteer agreement will be brought to an end. The following process should be followed:

* Have a meeting with the individual to explain that v is being ended confirming the end date
* Give and explain the reasons why this is happening and reassure the volunteer that this is not about them
* Thank them for their time and commitment to the role they have carried out, and their community
* Give them a chance to say goodbye to their colleagues or any services users they have been working closely with (if appropriate)
* Arrange for the return of property – either ours or theirs
* Signpost them to other volunteering opportunities, either within the Authority or via VODA or other local volunteer centres

# Expenses

As detailed in Principles section above volunteering is unpaid and the person should not benefit financially. It should not, however, leave them out of pocket. Volunteers should therefore be reimbursed for any reasonable expenses incurred whilst volunteering. (Payment should not be paid that is more than out-of-pocket expenses as this is treated as taxable income.)

North Tyneside Council will reimburse volunteers’ out of pocket expenses when claims are submitted and approved according to the council’s expenses process with the appropriate proof of expenditure. Further information is on the intranet here <http://intra.northtyneside.gov.uk/page/3180/expenses-and-travel>.

Make your process as easy as possible for your volunteers. For example, give all volunteers copies of your expenses policy and form at their induction so they don’t have to ask for it.

# Confidentiality, Data Protection and Intellectual Property

**Confidentiality**

During the course of their volunteering services, volunteers may have access to confidential and or sensitive information regarding the Authority or our clients and service users. Volunteers must not use or disclose this information to any person either during your volunteering experience with us or at any time afterwards.

**Data Protection**

Volunteers must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 when handling personal data when performing their roles, including personal data relating to any employee, customer, client, supplier or agent of the council. Volunteers must also comply with the council’s Computer Security Policy, Data Protection Policy, Information Security Policy (and associated information governance policies), Social Media Policy and any other applicable policies.

Volunteer Supervisors should provide copies of the above policies and procedures to volunteers during their induction and whenever requested.

Failure to comply with any of the policies listed above will be dealt with under the Volunteer Problem Solving Process). The Authority may share the volunteer’s personal information with third parties such as the Information Commissioner where instances of this type occur.

**Intellectual property**

The intellectual property rights of any original work produced by volunteers automatically transfers to the council.

# Safeguarding

Volunteer supervisors must take safeguarding issues into account in a number of areas when creating and supervising work involving volunteers.

The following section details some areas of consideration in relation to safeguarding. Managers are also advised to refer to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) website [here](https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/safeguarding/checklists-training-and-other-support/specialist-guides/safeguarding-for-volunteer-managers) which contains a wealth of regarding the safeguarding considerations that volunteer supervisors must make, including planning for safeguarding as part of the role, safer recruitment of volunteers, and supporting volunteers.

## Risk Assessment

This looks at the safeguarding risks from the volunteer to others, and the risks experienced by the volunteer themselves within the role. It should include questions such as:

* What activities will the volunteer carry out and how often/for how long
* Who they will come into contact with, and what responsibilities will they have towards them?
* Are the volunteers or the people they come into contact with at risk of harm?
* Are there any legal implications of that activity regarding safeguarding? (Is it regulated activity, which has different criteria for children and for adults at risk, and means you should follow a more detailed safer recruitment guide)
* Does the role have any responsibilities for training others in safeguarding?
* Does the role have any responsibilities for receiving safeguarding concerns from others?
* Does the role offer support and supervision to others?
* Will the role likely be exposed to especially challenging behaviour or emotionally demanding activities? What support can the organisation offer to help them manage this?
* Who does the volunteer report to if they have any safeguarding issues to raise?

These questions will help the supervisor to identify:

* the risk of volunteers causing harm to others; service users, residents, employees, or other volunteers
* the risk of other people within or connected with the Authority (including service users) causing harm to the volunteers
* whether volunteers can recognise harm and know what to do about any harm that comes to their attention whilst volunteering.

Following this risk assessment managers must decide whether any risks can be satisfactorily mitigated to acceptable levels, including any action required such as putting in place training, further guidance or supervision, splitting the role to make managing risks easier, or removing the higher risk elements.

## Internal Governance

Services should consider the need for the creation of service or team specific policies or procedures to keep help keep volunteers and others safe. These can include measures, identified within the risk assessment process, to put restrictions roles or contact, or to introduce higher levels of monitoring or training as necessary.

## Safer Recruitment

As is the case with the recruitment of employees, Volunteer supervisors should apply Safer Recruitment practices in relation to the recruitment and induction of volunteers working with vulnerable people. Please see the section on recruitment and selection above for more details and the Authority’s Recruitment and Selection Procedure in relation to Safer Recruitment.

# Further advice and support

There is a wealth of advice for volunteer supervisors and volunteers on the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) website [here](https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/) and [here](https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/recruiting-and-welcoming-volunteers/recruiting-volunteers/#find-potential-volunteers).

North Tyneside’s Voluntary Organisations Development Agency (VODA) website also contains lots of practical advice and guidance including policies and procedures <https://voda.org.uk> or you can call them on 0191 643 2626.

VODA also hosts the North Tyneside Volunteer Network - [https://voda.org.uk/north-tyneside-volunteer-network-2/](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/xn-DCkAWcYnPXRuVEdi7?domain=voda.org.uk/).

Anyone who manages volunteers in England can join the [Association of Volunteer Managers](https://volunteermanagers.org.uk/) (AVM). <https://volunteermanagers.org.uk/>