Suffolk County Council

Volunteering Policy

"Volunteers are a really important part of an active and vibrant community"

Introduction

from Nicola Beach Chief Executive

Volunteers are a really important part of an active and vibrant community. They're the selfless people who make things happen that otherwise might not. They're the people who put the needs of others before their own. Often, they don't even realise they're volunteering, because helping people is just what they do.

We see the difference volunteers make in Suffolk every day: improving the lives of the people they support, helping to create stronger connections in our communities and making our county the kind of supportive place we're striving for.

To those who choose to volunteer within the services that Suffolk County Council provides, I'd like to say a heartfelt thank you. Thank you for choosing to give not only your time but also your skills, expertise, passion and commitment. We're enormously grateful for your contribution and want to make sure we support you in your role.

I would also like to encourage Suffolk County Council staff to take up the volunteering opportunities presented by this new policy. We all live in communities, and the places we live in impact on us. Giving back to your community helps others, but you can benefit hugely too. It can help you learn more about yourself, develop new skills and even put you on a path to your future career.

This new policy sets out how Suffolk County Council will support people who choose to volunteer with us, as well as how we will support our own staff to volunteer.
We're looking forward to working with you.

Context and summary

This policy is to ensure Suffolk County Council is fulfilling its commitments as part of the Countywide Volunteer Strategy, which it signed up to as part of the Health and Wellbeing Board on 21st July 2016.

This commits the council to support the delivery of the following objectives:

1. To raise the profile of volunteering in Suffolk

2. To enable people to volunteer and be more engaged in their community

3. To engage employers and business leaders in providing and promoting volunteering opportunities

4. To deliver enhanced services and opportunities across Suffolk which build social capital and local capacity

This policy clarifies the support for those who may help Suffolk County Council (SCC) through volunteering.

SCC benefits greatly from volunteers supporting its services and this is likely to increase in the future in-line with the Council's Family 2020 strategy and the drive towards blended services that sit alongside community and voluntary support. Volunteering has many benefits for individuals who choose to volunteer including improved health and wellbeing. SCC wants to ensure that all those who volunteer on their behalf have an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. SCC commit to supporting individuals to deliver their role effectively to ensure that residents of Suffolk are given the support and services they want and need.

This policy plans to highlight what volunteers can expect from SCC and what SCC expects from its volunteers within the section titled *Volunteering with Suffolk County Council - what you can expect and what we expect of you.*

SCC also recognises the skills, knowledge and experience of its staff and the huge difference they can and do make through volunteering within communities SCC acknowledges the benefits of having a staff volunteer program for the individuals, the organisation and the communities of Suffolk.

SCC want to encourage staff who can, to volunteer more, through the promotion of volunteering, by utilising flexible working to allow staff to create a good work-life balance. SCC offer volunteers up to two days paid leave to allow individuals who have limited availability the chance to contribute to their community. This is highlighted in Employer Supported Volunteering.

This policy also sits alongside our current policies for staff volunteering in public service roles such as school governors, police special constables and armed forces reservists. It also fits into other staff benefits including, maternity/paternity and adoption leave.

Context and summary

What will the policy help the Council to achieve?

System Leadership

This policy is a clear demonstration of our commitment to fulfil the pledge we made as part of the Health and Wellbeing Board. As a key system leader in Suffolk, it is important that the Council is leading by example by providing support to our volunteers and making provision for its staff to have time and flexibility to volunteer and contribute.

Support Council and System wide transformation

Our transformation plans rely on a strong voluntary and community sector and the community resilience agenda is an enabler of some of the Councils key transformation programmes such as [1]Supporting Lives Connecting Communities and the [2]Family 2020 Strategy. The majority of VCS organisations rely on some level of volunteering capacity in order to make them sustainable. The Council also benefits from volunteering capacity as part of blended service delivery for example the youth offending service utilises the support of 45 volunteers, they act as mentors/supporters and undertake 1:1 visits to support young offenders, the environment team have dozens of volunteers promoting composting, clearing up beaches and helping to maintain the areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Corporate approach

Volunteering currently operates disparately across different parts of the Council.
Adopting a clear policy would provide clarity and consistency of approach across directorates.

Streamlined process

The implementation of corporate policy would be accompanied by the development of processes which would streamline and improve support to volunteers within the Council and aid recruitment and retention as part of a blended services approach.

Insight

This increase in the involvement of volunteers in our work will have a positive impact as they will help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the community we aim to serve and bring a unique perspective to all our work.

Pandemic response and recovery

At Suffolk County Council we recognise that volunteering covers a wide range of methods which are now available using technology to support communities and individuals virtually.

There are volunteering groups and activities that have been developed rapidly to respond to the emerging needs within communities of an informal nature.

Ideally, we would expect that all volunteering is within a recognised body however, in some cases it maybe that volunteering is in the form of supporting those within your local or wider community.

Examples of community volunteering

- Local religious groups

- National group or movement

- Regional group or movement

- Parish councils

- Local food banks

- Wellbeing support

- Shopping for the elderly or vulnerable

https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/adult-social-care-and-health/about-adult-and-community-services/
2. https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Adult-social-care-and-health/public-health-in-suffolk/Suffolk-Family-2020-Strategy.pdf

Values

Suffolk County Council's Volunteer policy is based on a set of core principles that are in-line with the Council's WE Aspire Values. These include:

Wellbeing

Suffolk County Council recognises the benefits of volunteering and aims to look after the health, physical and mental wellbeing of ourselves and others.
We demonstrate kindness and compassion to both ourselves and to each other. Volunteering can lead to a greater sense of meaning, seeing yourself connect with your community and those around you can be incredibly rewarding.

Equality

Suffolk County Council embraces the value of individuals by providing equal opportunities for all. This approach improves customer relationships, creates mutual trust and removes barriers. It supports us to develop a better understanding of community needs and tailor services effectively, as well as ensuring our staff and volunteers feel confident.

Achieve

Suffolk County Council want to make a positive difference for the people of Suffolk. We value volunteering across the community and recognises the important contribution volunteers are making in Sport, Arts, Culture, Community Development and the many other vital support and services which they deliver. The Council will seek to work in-line with the Suffolk-wide volunteering strategy to provide a local environment for volunteering which will enable it to grow.

Support

Suffolk County Council believes by working together with our partners, customers and communities we will allow solutions to be tailored and resources aligned more effectively. The council benefits from sharing knowledge skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers and believe volunteers should gain personal benefits from the experience by, embracing this partnership and inclusive approach, as well as aiming to build rapport with and supporting others.

Pride

Suffolk County Council recognises the benefits of and takes pride in staff sharing skills, knowledge and experience through volunteering. We are accountable, showing pride and passion for what we do. We acknowledge those things that make a difference to our colleagues, customers and communities.

Innovate

Suffolk County Council strive to come up with ideas to make things work better, by using technology and thinking creatively about how we and volunteers can improve access to the people of Suffolk and the wider community.

Respect

Suffolk County Council believe in taking an honest, open and ethical approach to all we do, to ensure that we treat others with the same fairness and respect in which we would like to be treated ourselves. We recognise everyone has something to give to their community through volunteering whether internal or external.

Empower

Suffolk County Council encourage, empower and motivate others to make a positive difference to Suffolk and wider communities. By supporting our colleagues, customers and partners through volunteering and values the involvement of volunteers in our work.

Volunteering with

Suffolk County Council

What you can expect

- First and foremost, you can expect to have an enjoyable experience volunteering with Suffolk County Council

- The recruitment process will be efficient and fair. Recruitment will usually be undertaken through Suffolk's Volunteering portal *http://volunteersuffolk.org.uk*

- You will be given relevant and appropriate training to deliver your volunteering role (taking into account your current level of skills and knowledge)

- You will be given an induction within 4 weeks to help you understand how the Council operates, the work of the team you are volunteering within and the role you will play

- Reasonable out of pocket expenses will be paid to you promptly

- You will have regular personal and/or group supervision - either in person or over the phone - with your volunteer manager to ensure you are supported in your role, have a clear understanding of what is expected of you and given feedback on your work

- We will listen to you and respond to your feedback

- You will be provided with any necessary equipment to deliver your volunteer role

- Any conflict will be resolved fairly using the Council's conflict resolution process

- The Council will create a page on its website that provides relevant information for volunteers and recognises the contribution of our volunteers

- You will be kept informed of changes in the Council that will impact upon you or the service you support

What we expect of you

- We expect you to deliver your volunteer role to the best of your abilities
- Treat with respect those you are working with; individuals, other volunteers and staff
- Inform your volunteer manager if you cannot deliver your role or are unavailable to volunteer when you are supposed to, giving as much notice as possible
- Focus on supporting individuals, communities or projects to the volunteering role agreed
- You will work within the scope of your role and only make decisions on behalf of the Council that are necessary to deliver your role
- You will ensure everything you do in your role you do as an ambassador of the council and do nothing that will bring the Council into disrepute
- Work in-line with all the Council's policies and procedures including Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Modern Slavery, Lone-working, Confidentiality, Equalities and Inclusion, and Data Protection
- Willingness to share your learning & experiences to enable the Council to further improve support and services

SCC Staff

Recruiting and Managing volunteers in your services/teams

What you should do:

Recruitment

- You should in the main recruit volunteers through Suffolk's Volunteering portal *http://volunteersuffolk.org.uk*

- Ensure volunteer roles are well defined

- Contact potential volunteers promptly to arrange an interview

- Inform volunteers promptly of the outcome of the interview

- Provide an induction meeting and arrange for DBS check (where appropriate) within 4 weeks

Management

- Treat all volunteers with the same respect you would treat staff and in-line with the Council's ASPIRE values

- You will provide regular 1:1s or group supervision with all volunteers either over the phone or in-person to ensure they are supported in their role, have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and are given feedback on their work

- Ensure you have sufficient budget to pay for relevant and appropriate training and pay reasonable out-of-pocket expenses. Also ensure expense claims are paid promptly

- Any conflicts will be resolved fairly using the Council's conflict resolution process

- Keep volunteers informed of any changes in the department or organisation that will impact upon them

What support the Council will offer to help you manage volunteers

- The Council will identify a more effective way of registering volunteers on the system for expenses

- The Council will provide advice through FAQs on MySCC

- Will ensure volunteers are covered by the Council's insurance

- Will provide guidance on conflict resolution

- Ensure volunteers have appropriate access to IT systems where necessary

#VolunteerSuffolk
BE AMAZING. BE A VOLUNTEER.

Employer Supported
Volunteering

Why the Council want to encourage and support staff to volunteer.

The Council recognises the importance of volunteering and the positive impact it has on the individual volunteering, the communities they volunteer in and the Council, not only in terms of delivering Council priorities but also has a positive impact on morale, productivity and the Council's reputation.

Benefits to the community

- These are seen through increased community resilience which can be identified in its impact in areas such as:
    - Crime reduction
    - Safer, stronger communities
    - Recognition that voluntary activity has a direct impact on the participant's health therefore reducing stress on the NHS and Social Care.
    - Reduced incidences of anti-social behaviour
    - Creates opportunities for employment in high unemployment areas
    - Raising awareness of community safety priorities including Domestic Abuse, Modern Slavery, Criminal Exploitation, Hate Crime, Preventing Radicalisation and Anti-Social Behaviour and appropriate reporting mechanisms Community safety | Suffolk County Council

Benefits for the individual

- Contribution within the community leads to a greater sense of belonging and a sense of self-worth
- Chance to experience new life opportunities, meet new friends and be an active part of their community
- There are also well documented benefits in terms of improved health both physical and mental through being more physically active
- For those in employment it may lead, not only to a sense of contributing but may also result in new career pathways or inspire towards further training and personal development

Benefits to the Council

- Building strong teams, especially when volunteering used as team building exercise
- Free employee skills development and developing future leaders
- Opportunity for 'back office' staff to work in the community and see the impacts of their work on the community
- Improved staff retention & recruitment
- Increased staff morale and reduced sick leave
- Improved SCC status through staff volunteering in local communities and increased understanding of the communities we serve
- Effective investment in the community through the utilisation of our workforce skills & expertise
- Raising awareness of community safety priorities including Domestic Abuse, Modern Slavery, Criminal Exploitation, Hate Crime, Preventing Radicalisation and Anti-Social Behaviour and appropriate reporting mechanisms Community safety | Suffolk County Council

How Suffolk County Council will encourage and support staff to Volunteer.

- **Promotion -** create a volunteer culture within the Council:
  - The Council will promote Suffolk's Volunteering portal *http://volunteersuffolk.org.uk*
  - It will promote the benefits of volunteering to staff and managers
  - Continue to promote flexible working and a good work-life balance so staff can work in a way that supports their volunteering activities. For more information on flexible working please refer to AskHR's flexible working guide and Time Off Guidance.
  - It will recognise volunteering as a potential area for personal development as part of the PDR process as well as, or replacing, training. Please refer to guidance on AskHR for information on how volunteering can support your personal development.
  - Recognise the skills within our people and the benefit this can bring to the communities in Suffolk

- **Support to Volunteer**
  - The council will provide up to two days paid leave per year for staff to volunteer in Suffolk
  - The Council will sign up to Suffolk 'Pro-Help' to provide free professional expertise to Suffolk's voluntary organisations and community groups

    *Pro rata for part time staff

What the Council expects of staff in return

- Any staff member who wishes to volunteer in work time either through using volunteer days or through flexible working should have an open and honest conversation with their manager as part of the normal supervision cycle and PDR process. They should be clear about the time required and how they will ensure it does not impact upon their paid role

- You will continue to act within the Council's policies and procedures and will not do anything that will have an adverse effect on the Council or bring the Council into disrepute

- You should share your learning and experience with your team and the wider council to ensure the organisation benefits from your volunteering