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## Volunteer Policy

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|----------------------|----------------|-------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Policy Name:</b>  |                | Volunteer Policy        |               |                                |
| <b>Policy Owner:</b> |                | Chigwell Parish Council |               |                                |
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## **1. Introduction**

Chigwell Parish Council values the time, skills and enthusiasm that volunteers give to the parish. Volunteers help the Council to deliver services and projects that benefit the whole community, such as looking after open spaces, supporting community events and helping to keep the parish clean, safe and welcoming.

This Policy sets out how Chigwell Parish Council will involve, support and look after its volunteers, and what the Council asks of volunteers in return. It aims to make sure that volunteering with the Council is a safe, positive and rewarding experience, and that the Council meets its legal and statutory responsibilities as a local authority.

Chigwell Parish Council's Policy:

- Explains what we mean by a volunteer and the status of volunteers
- Sets out the Council's commitment to its volunteers
- Explains how volunteers are recruited, inducted, trained and supported
- Sets out arrangements for health and safety, safeguarding and insurance
- Explains how out-of-pocket expenses can be claimed
- Sets out the standards of conduct we expect from volunteers
- Explains how any problems or concerns will be resolved

Volunteers are not employees of the Council. This Policy is not a contract and does not create an employment relationship or any other legally binding obligation between the Council and a volunteer. We reserve the right to amend or remove this Policy.

## **2. Scope and definitions**

For the purposes of this Policy, a volunteer is anyone who, of their own free will and without payment (other than reimbursement of agreed out-of-pocket expenses), gives their time to undertake activities organised by or on behalf of Chigwell Parish Council for the benefit of the community.

This Policy applies to:

- Individual volunteers who help with Council-organised activities on a regular or one-off basis
- Members of community groups, schools, businesses or other organisations who volunteer on Council-organised activities
- Councillors who volunteer on Council-organised activities in a practical capacity outside their formal duties as elected members (for example, helping at a litter pick)

This Policy does not apply to:

- Councillors carrying out their statutory duties as elected members, which are governed by the Council's Code of Conduct and Standing Orders
- Employees of the Council, including where employees take part in community activities as part of their paid duties
- Independent community groups who run their own activities on Council land, who remain responsible for their own volunteers, insurance and risk assessments

The Clerk (or an officer nominated by the Clerk) will act as the Council's Volunteer Coordinator and is the main point of contact for all volunteers.

### **3. Volunteer status**

Volunteering with the Council is entirely voluntary. Volunteers are not employees or workers of the Council and do not receive a wage, salary, honorarium or any other payment or benefit in kind in return for their time.

There is no obligation on the Council to provide volunteering opportunities, and no obligation on a volunteer to accept or attend any particular activity. Volunteers may stop volunteering at any time.

Any Volunteer Agreement or role description provided by the Council is intended to set out what each party can reasonably expect of the other. It is binding in honour only and is not intended to create a contract of employment or any legal relationship.

Volunteers will not be used to replace paid staff, to cover vacant posts or to undertake work that would ordinarily be carried out by an employee or paid contractor of the Council.

### **4. The Council's commitment to volunteers**

Chigwell Parish Council will:

- Provide a clear description of each volunteering role and what it involves
- Provide an induction and any training needed to carry out the role safely
- Identify a named person who volunteers can contact for support
- Carry out risk assessments for volunteering activities and provide any necessary safety equipment
- Make sure volunteers are covered by the Council's insurance when carrying out agreed activities
- Reimburse agreed out-of-pocket expenses in line with this Policy
- Treat volunteers fairly, with respect and in line with the Council's Equality and Diversity commitments
- Handle volunteers' personal information in line with data protection law
- Recognise and thank volunteers for their contribution to the parish

## **5. What we ask of volunteers**

In return, we ask volunteers to:

- Carry out their role in line with this Policy, the role description and any instructions given by the Volunteer Coordinator or activity lead
- Follow health and safety instructions, use any safety equipment provided and report any accidents, incidents or hazards
- Treat members of the public, councillors, staff and other volunteers with courtesy and respect
- Respect the confidentiality of any information they come across while volunteering
- Let the Volunteer Coordinator know as soon as possible if they are unable to attend an agreed activity
- Not represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council unless specifically authorised to do so
- Declare any personal interest or relationship that could create a conflict of interest in their volunteering role
- Not attend volunteering activities while under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Raise any concerns or problems with the Volunteer Coordinator

## **6. Recruitment and selection**

The Council will promote volunteering opportunities openly, for example through the Council's website, noticeboards, social media and newsletters, so that anyone in the community has a fair opportunity to get involved.

Anyone interested in volunteering will be asked to complete a short volunteer registration form, which will include their contact details, an emergency contact, any relevant skills or experience, and any health conditions or access requirements that the Council should be aware of so that reasonable adjustments can be made.

Depending on the role, the Volunteer Coordinator may arrange an informal conversation with the volunteer to discuss the role, their interests and availability. For roles involving a position of trust, money, keyholding or working with children or adults at risk, the Council may also ask for references and/or a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (see Section 7).

The Council reserves the right to decline an offer to volunteer where it does not have a suitable role available, or where it considers that the individual is not suitable for a particular role. Where this happens, the reasons will be explained sensitively.

## **7. Safeguarding and DBS checks**

Chigwell Parish Council is committed to safeguarding children and adults at risk. All volunteers must follow the Council's Safeguarding Policy and report any safeguarding concerns to the Clerk (or, in the Clerk's absence, the Chair of the Council) without delay. If someone is in immediate danger, volunteers should call 999.

Where a volunteer role involves regulated activity, or regular and unsupervised contact with children or adults at risk, the Council will require an appropriate DBS check before the volunteer starts the role. DBS checks for volunteers are free of charge and the Council will arrange this. Where a check is required, the information will be handled confidentially and in line with DBS guidance and data protection law.

Most general volunteering activities organised by the Council (for example litter picks or planting days) are open to the public and supervised, and will not require a DBS check.

Volunteers should not be left alone with children or adults at risk unless they have been specifically authorised and checked for that role.

## **8. Induction, training and support**

All volunteers will receive an induction appropriate to their role before they start. This will normally include:

- An introduction to the Council and the activity they will be involved in
- Their role description and who to contact for support
- Health and safety arrangements, including the relevant risk assessment, safe use of any tools or equipment, first aid and emergency procedures
- How to report accidents, incidents and safeguarding concerns
- Confidentiality, data protection and representing the Council
- How to claim expenses

For group activities, a short safety briefing will be given at the start of each session and all volunteers will be asked to sign in and out.

Where specialist training is needed (for example for the use of particular tools or equipment), the Council will provide or arrange this. Volunteers must not undertake any task they have not been trained or authorised to carry out.

The Volunteer Coordinator will keep in touch with regular volunteers to check how they are getting on, provide feedback and give them the opportunity to raise any questions or suggestions.

## **9. Health and safety**

The Council has a duty of care towards its volunteers and will take all reasonably practicable steps to protect their health, safety and welfare, in line with the Council's Health and Safety Policy.

The Council will:

- Carry out a risk assessment for each volunteering activity and share the relevant control measures with volunteers
- Provide suitable personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, high-visibility vests and litter pickers, where required
- Make sure a first aid kit is available and, for organised group activities, that a named person is responsible for first aid
- Make sure any tools and equipment provided are safe and suitable for use
- Put arrangements in place for any volunteer who may need to work alone, including checking in and out

Volunteers must:

- Follow the risk assessment and any safety instructions given
- Wear and use the PPE provided
- Not use their own power tools, machinery or vehicles for Council activities unless this has been specifically agreed in advance by the Clerk
- Not work at height, near roads or water, or with hazardous substances unless this has been specifically risk assessed and authorised
- Stop work and report to the activity lead if they feel unwell or believe something is unsafe
- Report all accidents, injuries and near misses to the activity lead or the Clerk as soon as possible so they can be recorded

Activities may be cancelled or stopped at short notice because of bad weather or other safety concerns.

## **10. Insurance**

Volunteers carrying out activities that have been organised or agreed by the Council are covered by the Council's insurance policies, including public liability and, where applicable, personal accident cover, subject to the terms of the Council's policy. The Clerk will check with the Council's insurers that volunteers are covered for the activities being undertaken, including any age limits that apply.

Insurance cover only applies to activities that have been agreed in advance by the Council. Volunteers who undertake activities on their own initiative, without the Council's agreement, will not be covered.

Volunteers who agree to use their own vehicle as part of their role must make sure they hold a valid driving licence, MOT (where applicable) and motor insurance that covers use for volunteering. Volunteers should check this with their own insurer.

## **11. Expenses**

Volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of volunteering for the Council. The Council will reimburse reasonable out-of-pocket expenses that have been agreed in advance by the Clerk, for example:

- Travel costs for agreed journeys made as part of the volunteering role (mileage at the rate agreed by the Council, or public transport fares)
- The cost of materials or equipment purchased with prior approval

Expenses must be claimed using the Council's expenses claim form, supported by receipts, and should normally be submitted within three months of the expense being incurred. Claims will be authorised and paid in line with the Council's Financial Regulations.

The Council will only reimburse actual expenses incurred. No flat-rate payments, gifts of money or other rewards will be made, as these could affect a volunteer's status and could have implications for any state benefits they receive.

## **12. Confidentiality and data protection**

Volunteers may come across personal or confidential information while volunteering, for example details of residents or matters being considered by the Council. Volunteers must keep this information confidential and must not share it with anyone outside of their volunteering role, both during and after their time as a volunteer.

The Council will collect and hold volunteers' personal information (such as contact details, emergency contacts and, where relevant, health or DBS information) only for the purposes of managing volunteering. This information will be stored securely, kept only for as long as necessary and handled in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Council's Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice.

Photographs may be taken at Council events and volunteering activities for use in Council publicity. Volunteers will be asked for their consent and may choose not to be photographed.

### **13. Representing the Council**

While volunteering, volunteers are seen by the public as representing Chigwell Parish Council and should behave in a way that reflects well on the Council.

Volunteers must not speak to the media, make public statements or post on social media on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so by the Clerk. Any media enquiries should be passed to the Clerk.

The Council is politically neutral. Volunteers must not use their volunteering role to promote any political party, candidate or campaign, and must take particular care during pre-election periods.

Volunteers must not accept gifts or hospitality offered to them because of their volunteering role, other than items of very small value, and must tell the Clerk about any offer made.

### **14. Equality, diversity and inclusion**

Chigwell Parish Council welcomes volunteers from all parts of the community. We will not discriminate against any volunteer or potential volunteer on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.

We will make reasonable adjustments, where we can, to enable people with disabilities or health conditions to volunteer, and will try to offer a range of opportunities that suit different levels of time, ability and experience.

Volunteers are expected to treat everyone fairly and with respect. Bullying, harassment or discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated.

### **15. Young volunteers**

The Council welcomes young people who wish to volunteer, subject to the following:

- Volunteers under the age of 18 must have written consent from a parent or guardian, who will also be asked to provide emergency contact details
- Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied and supervised at all times by a parent, guardian or responsible adult (such as a teacher or group leader) who takes responsibility for them
- A specific risk assessment will be considered for young volunteers, and they will not be asked to use tools or carry out tasks that are unsuitable for their age
- Any age limits set by the Council's insurers will be followed

The Council's Safeguarding Policy will apply to all activities involving young volunteers.

## **16. Resolving problems**

### Concerns raised by volunteers

If a volunteer has a concern or complaint about their volunteering experience, how they have been treated, or anything else related to their role, they should raise it with the Volunteer Coordinator in the first instance. Most issues can be resolved informally.

If the concern cannot be resolved informally, or relates to the Clerk, the volunteer may put their concern in writing to the Chair of the Council, who will consider it and respond. The Council's Grievance Policy, which applies to employees, does not apply to volunteers.

### Concerns about a volunteer

If there are concerns about a volunteer's conduct or suitability, the Volunteer Coordinator will discuss these with the volunteer informally in the first instance and try to find a solution, which may include additional support, training or a change of role.

The Council's Disciplinary Policy, which applies to employees, does not apply to volunteers. However, where a volunteer's behaviour is unacceptable or puts others at risk (for example, through breach of health and safety rules, safeguarding concerns, discrimination, harassment, or misuse of Council property, money or information), the Council may ask the volunteer to stop volunteering, with immediate effect if necessary. The Clerk will inform the Chair of the Council of any such decision.

Where there is a safeguarding concern, the Council will follow its Safeguarding Policy and may make a referral to the appropriate authorities, including the DBS where required by law.

## **17. Ending volunteering**

Volunteers may stop volunteering at any time. We would be grateful if volunteers let the Volunteer Coordinator know, and return any Council equipment, keys or identification they have been given.

The Council may also bring a volunteering arrangement to an end, for example where a project or activity has finished, where there is no longer a suitable role, or in the circumstances set out in Section 16.

On request, the Council may provide a reference confirming the volunteer's role and the period they volunteered for.

## **18. Review and updates**

This Policy delegates authority to the Clerk, as Volunteer Coordinator, to oversee and manage volunteering in line with this Policy. Where a matter concerns the Clerk, it will be overseen by the Chair of the Council and Full Council, who may delegate the matter to the Personnel Committee. It is the responsibility of the Clerk to ensure that this Policy is reviewed and updated at least annually or when there is a significant change in legislation, guidance, the Council's insurance arrangements or internal processes. Such updates should be made in a timely manner and wherever practical introduced at the same time as the new process or regulation is effective. It is the responsibility of the Clerk to ensure this Policy is formally adopted by the Council on an annual basis.

This Policy should be read alongside the Council's Health and Safety Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Data Protection Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy, Financial Regulations and Social Media Policy.

## **19. About this document**

This document is intended for Chigwell Parish Council volunteers, councillors and officers. The unauthorised alteration or distribution of this document is prohibited.

## Appendix A – Volunteer Agreement

This agreement sets out what Chigwell Parish Council and the volunteer can reasonably expect of each other. It is binding in honour only and is not intended to create a contract of employment or any other legal relationship.

**Volunteer name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Volunteering role / activity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Volunteer Coordinator (contact):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chigwell Parish Council agrees to:**

- Provide an induction and any training needed for the role
- Provide a safe environment and any necessary safety equipment
- Provide insurance cover for agreed volunteering activities
- Reimburse agreed out-of-pocket expenses
- Treat you fairly and with respect, and handle your personal information in line with data protection law
- Provide support and a named contact for any questions or concerns

**The volunteer agrees to:**

- Follow the Council's Volunteer Policy and any instructions given while volunteering
- Follow health and safety guidance and report any accidents, incidents or hazards
- Keep confidential any information learned while volunteering
- Report any safeguarding concerns to the Clerk
- Let the Volunteer Coordinator know if unable to attend an agreed activity
- Not speak on behalf of the Council unless authorised to do so

I confirm that I have read and understood the Chigwell Parish Council Volunteer Policy.

**Volunteer signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent / guardian signature (if under 18):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed on behalf of Chigwell Parish Council:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_