



Westgate on Sea Town Council

Volunteer Policy

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Policy

1) Introduction

Westgate on Sea Town Council (WoSTC) recognises that volunteers play an important role in volunteering alongside our staff, supporting services, events and activities throughout Westgate on Sea. By expanding volunteering within our services, we have an opportunity to promote health, wellbeing and social value, be more inclusive, collaborative and accountable to our community and service users.

We acknowledge the valuable contribution that volunteers make to improving and boosting our services. WOSTC is committed to ensuring that its own volunteers are given a rewarding experience and that the wider community gains from high standards of practice by the volunteers supporting WOSTC.

WOSTC benefits regularly from volunteers' time, energy and skills and this document outlines the principles on which these invaluable relationships are based. It also gives basic information for anyone who is volunteering with WOSTC.

2) Policy Statement

A volunteer is someone who contributes their time, skills and experience freely in the support of the delivery of services to the community. Volunteers provide added value to our services and are not a replacement or substitute for paid employees.

There are occasions when WOSTC may enter into a Partnership with a group of volunteers and a Service Level Agreement will be drawn up between WOSTC and the relevant volunteering group.

WOSTC acknowledges the significant role that volunteers play both in supporting service delivery and the role of volunteering in promoting community wellbeing. The council is seeking to offer a wide variety of volunteering opportunities across numerous services for people with particular skills, experience or interests. These opportunities may be for short periods, but some may develop into enduring relationships between particular volunteers and the Council. WOSTC is committed to ensuring that consistent standards are applied to volunteering opportunities with WOSTC. WOSTC will:

- Define and agree the scope of the roles undertaken by volunteers
- Respect the freedom of choice of volunteers about when they engage in volunteering activities
- Provide consistent terms of engagement for volunteers across all WOSTC services
- Support volunteers to develop their own skills and knowledge, and to help and support our communities
- Support volunteers in ensuring they conduct themselves in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures

3) Scope

This policy applies to volunteers engaged in supporting the delivery of WOSTC services. Where an organisation/group is managing volunteers that are engaged in supporting WOSTC, they will assume the role of the supervisor, provide the relevant induction and training to the volunteer/s. They will be responsible for recruitment, any necessary DBS checks and insurance to cover the volunteering activities. WOSTC will liaise directly with the coordinator of the volunteering organisation/group and those that do not have their own policy in place will be required to adopt WOSTC's Volunteering Policy. It does **not** apply to:

- Work experience, apprenticeships and student placements;

- Council employees volunteering for other groups and organisations;
- Services delivered by agents of WOSTC, including contractors, alternate service delivery organisations;
- Volunteers who are active within communities and not managed by WOSTC services.

4) Corporate Context

Volunteering can happen in many different forms, WOSTC views all volunteering as a valuable contribution to help support our neighbourhood and community development. Volunteering is an opportunity for residents and service users; to get involved with the work of WOSTC, be actively empowered and engaged in their community.

Volunteers can make a positive impact on economic, social, cultural and environmental issues. Empower people and communities to fulfil their potential and contribute to social change. Volunteering can also create a greater sense of ownership of 'bettering' their community. Local people hold the insight and knowledge of local issues which is useful to WOSTC when planning programmes of work.

Constructive engagement can lead to positive developments in terms of health, job creation, innovation and crime prevention. Volunteering itself is good for individual health and the more engaged communities are as a collective, the healthier they become socially and economically. Additionally, volunteering can improve both mental and physical well-being and has the potential to tackle inactivity.

Volunteer activity provides a network of social relationships that connect people to each other and their communities. It is this connection that is vital to building democratic, healthy and self-sustaining communities.

5) Legal

Volunteers will not be used in times of industrial action to do the work of paid Council staff. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

Volunteers age 16-18 years

WOSTC has a duty in relation to Raising the Participation Age. The Town Clerk will need to ensure that all 16 and 17-year-old volunteers have suitable education or training offers. It is therefore important that volunteers working in services within WOSTC, aged 16 and 17 meet the requirements of Raising the Participation Age.

Before accepting a volunteer application from an under 18-year-old, the Town Clerk must obtain the consent of a parent or guardian. The volunteer supervisor must also provide clear information regarding the activities involved must be provided to the parent or guardian and the volunteer.

Volunteers who are under 18 years of age must not volunteer before 7am or after 7pm or for more than two hours on any school day or Sunday. Enhanced supervision is required, and robust safeguarding measures must be in place. Volunteers who are under 18 should also have a minimum of 2 weeks free from volunteering activities during the school holidays.

Volunteers in receipt of benefits

It is the responsibility of the volunteer to establish whether volunteering is going to affect their entitlement to any social security benefits. Further advice should be obtained from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus, or Citizens Advice Bureau. Further advice is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/volunteering/pay-and-expenses>

Insurance

Public Liability – Volunteers operating on behalf of WOSTC are covered under WOSTC’s public liability policy. This policy provides cover for volunteers against loss or injury caused by negligence on the part of WOSTC. It also protects the public against loss, injury or damage to property caused by the negligence of anyone acting on behalf of WOSTC, including volunteers.

However, WOSTC will require formally recognised groups, committees, and clubs etc. to hold their own Public Liability insurance cover.

Volunteers using their own vehicles whilst on WOSTC business have the responsibility to ensure that they hold; adequate insurance cover i.e. business use insurance, hold a valid full UK driving licence, the vehicle is taxed, has a current MOT certificate (unless the vehicle is less than three years old), the vehicle is serviced and is maintained to meet statutory legal requirements. The volunteer supervisor must check and record this documentation.

WOSTC does not provide Personal Injury cover for its volunteers. However, if a volunteer was to be assaulted where WOSTC are not negligent the volunteer can submit a claim against the CICA (Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority).

All volunteers are responsible for the care of their personal belongings. WOSTC cannot be responsible nor accept liability for any loss of or damage to a volunteers’ belongings.

Public Interest Disclosure Act

Volunteers are not protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, which covers whistle blowing as part of employment law. Volunteers are not workers within the limited definition in the law but can report any wrongdoing to either WOSTC’s Town Clerk or Chairman. Alternatively, volunteers can also use the East Kent Audit Partnership Whistleblowing Hotline (01304) 872198. Volunteers are not employees of WOSTC and therefore will not receive the statutory protection or compensation.

6) Safeguarding

Everybody has the right to be safe no matter who they are or what their circumstances. Safeguarding is about protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm. WOSTC has a statutory duty to ensure the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults and this extends to the work of all officers, contractors and volunteers undertaking duties on behalf of WOSTC

WOSTC also has a statutory obligation to ensure it is suitably checking, vetting and training its employees, contractors and volunteers who may be in positions of trust or come into contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Volunteers must also be aware of the councils safeguarding obligations and have received a role appropriate training input alongside any volunteer induction they may undertake.

WOSTC’s safeguarding policy is available from the Town Clerk and sets out the requirements for awareness, training and vetting.

All Town Council Members and staff intending to work with volunteers must consider the volunteering role within the context of safeguarding the volunteering individual, wider community and organisation. The role responsibilities should be reviewed with the Town Clerk, prior to any recruitment or appointment to establish whether vetting through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) is required and if so, at what level.

DBS checks will be carried out on any volunteer who in the course of their activity has regular, unsupervised, contact with children or young people. A DBS check will also need to be carried out on volunteers who care for or deal with the personal affairs of any adult.

DBS checks are free for volunteers, however time for applying and processing by the DBS needs to be factored in, which can take up to 12 weeks at busy times.

7) Health and Safety

WOSTC has a duty of care to avoid exposing our volunteers to health and safety risks. All volunteers will be made aware of our Health and Safety Policy and any practical safety concerns as part of their induction. Volunteers are expected to comply with WOSTC's Health and Safety Policy and Guidance documents are available from the Town Clerk upon request. All volunteer roles will be risk assessed, by their key sponsor/contact or Town Clerk, covering both the tasks involved and the environment in which they will be conducted. In addition, where a volunteer makes us aware of a pre-existing medical condition or disability, an individual risk assessment may also be necessary.

As for paid employees, volunteers will be expected to recognise that they are also responsible for their own Health and Safety and that of those around them. Volunteers will be expected to carry out duties without endangering either their own Health and Safety or that of paid employees, other volunteers or the general public. Before undertaking any activities, every volunteer should consider the particular health and safety hazards associated with the site/task and whether their individual circumstances and medical conditions expose them to particular hazards. Any accidents or serious injuries must be reported by the volunteer to the Council through their key contact/sponsor or Town Clerk using the appropriate forms.

Some health and safety obligations may seem unnecessary to a volunteer, but their safety is our number one priority, and our staff take their duty of care towards volunteers seriously and act to ensure that our volunteers are not in a position of danger.

8) Equality Act 2010 (The Act) and Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in the discharge of its functions.

The Volunteer Policy offers opportunities for the Council to discharge its equality duties in:

- 1) Preventing discrimination, harassment, victimization and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- 2) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- 3) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that do not.

Volunteering offers opportunities for different ages; communities and; disabled/non-disabled people to work together to improve their community, gain and share experience, reduce loneliness and isolation, build confidence and foster good relations. Volunteering may also offer individuals the chance to participate in public life where participation is disproportionately low and develop experience that can contribute to their Curriculum Vitae and help in gaining future employment.

Volunteers of all backgrounds, ages (subject to the provisions of Sections 5 & 6 of this policy) and ability/disability are welcomed. However, there may be some situations, for reasons of health and safety, where some volunteering opportunities are not suitable for some groups. Each volunteering opportunity will be risk and equality assessed so that any exclusions are adequately explained and evidenced. Reasonable adjustments for disabled volunteers will be considered in accordance with Equality Legislation.

All staff, Members and volunteers are required to adhere to the council's Equality and Diversity Policy when undertaking work and delivering services on the Council's behalf. Any volunteer conducting themselves in contravention of the Equality and Diversity Policy, i.e discriminating against, victimising or harassing a person or group on the basis of a protected characteristic will be subject to Section 17 of this policy.

Volunteers can expect:

- to know what is expected of them
- to have clearly specified lines of support and supervision
- to be shown appreciation
- to have safe working conditions
- to know what their rights and responsibilities are if something goes wrong
- to have access to appropriate training
- to experience personal development through participation
- to confidentiality
- not to be bullied in any way
- not to experience discrimination, victimisation or harassment

Volunteers are expected to:

- carry out their tasks in a way that supports WOSTC's Vision, Priorities and Values.
- adhere to relevant WOSTC policies whilst engaged in volunteering with WOSTC
- act responsibly and within the law
- operate within agreed guidelines and remits relating to their task
- follow health and safety regulations and instructions
- attend training and support sessions where required
- be reliable
- be honest
- to observe the confidentiality requirements of the council

9) Confidentiality and Data Protection

The expectation is that in the majority of volunteering opportunities, there should not be the need for volunteers to handle sensitive personal data or confidential material.

Supervisors should alert volunteers to their responsibilities, where necessary, under the Data Protection Act 2018, or any successor data protection laws, during induction.

Where confidential material is to be handled by a volunteer, the Council would expect the volunteer to maintain strict confidentiality at all times, and to sign a confidentiality clause to this effect.

Volunteers should regard all information they have access to, or are given as a result of their volunteering, as being restricted unless advised otherwise.

No information should be released to a third party without first seeking the agreement of their supervisor. Where an information sharing protocol has been entered into by WOSTC, volunteers should not disclose personal details (home address, telephone number etc) to clients, but should use their business address when an address has to be given.

WOSTC will fulfil its duty to safeguard the information contained within application forms and records.

The supervisor will safeguard against unauthorised or unlawful processing of personal data, sensitive personal data and confidential material. This includes any accidental loss, destruction or damage to data and material.

Volunteers may exercise their subject access rights under the Data Protection Act 2018, or any successor privacy laws, including the right to access their own records.

10) Recruitment

Volunteers will usually be engaged through one of two routes. A prospective volunteer may approach a service to offer their time, skills and example to gain experience in working in a specific role, or to complete a community aspect to an award e.g. Duke of Edinburgh. Alternatively, a service may identify one or more volunteering opportunities and actively seek to recruit volunteers.

WOSTC welcomes and respects the breadth of experience, knowledge, skills and dedication that volunteers bring. All volunteers will be asked to complete our Volunteer Registration Form. Depending on the service and volunteer role you may be asked to provide two references. One of these, depending on the service with which you are volunteering, may need to be from someone that you have had an official relationship with e.g. last employer, college tutor, teacher, doctor, social worker or religious minister. A second reference may be from a neighbour or friend. Referees should have known you for at least one year and should be from two people to whom you are not related.

11) Support and Supervision

All volunteers will have a supervisor with responsibility for agreeing the scope of their role, providing an induction and appropriate ongoing support, ensuring that volunteers are aware of and operate within the scope of relevant WOSTC policies and procedures and resolving any issues that arise in the course of the volunteering relationship.

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 supervisor. Where appropriate, the complaint will be investigated fully by their supervisor, or if the complaint is against their own supervisor, by the Town Clerk and/or Chairman.

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 as possible. If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved, then the volunteer may be told their services are no longer required with immediate effect.

Where a criminal offence is suspected, the matter will be handed over to the Police and where appropriate notify the KCC Local Authority Designated Officer.

12) Political Awareness for Volunteers

The Council is led by the decisions of its elected councillors. Volunteers must not use their volunteering activity to further any political aims; to try to influence the Council's decision-making process, particularly in relation to their own activity or role (other than in an official consultation process); or use the volunteering position to influence elected members.

13) Gifts and Hospitality

The giving and receiving of gifts may give the impression of favouritism and could raise expectations. Volunteers must not give or receive personal gifts or offers of hospitality from contractors, clients, staff or outside suppliers as this could compromise both the volunteer and Westgate on Sea Town Council.

14) Absence

Volunteers are asked to inform their supervisors if they will not be available due to illness, holidays or for any other reason. It is helpful if volunteers can give WOSTC as much notice as possible so that cover may be arranged. WOSTC respects that there may be occasions when volunteers may wish to take a break for a period of time and are asked to give as much notice as possible.

WOSTC has a duty of care to all its volunteers and will request that should a volunteer need to leave early e.g. due to sickness that they notify their supervisor before leaving.

15) Publicity

Photographs are often taken at WOSTC and these are sometimes subsequently used for publicity purposes. WOSTC will always give due consideration to an individual's right to privacy and respect before publishing any photographs or featuring any individual in writing. If a volunteer does not wish to be featured in WOSTC publicity under any circumstances it is the responsibility of the volunteer to inform their direct supervisor.

16) Termination of Activity

The role and the placement of the volunteer may be terminated by WOSTC or the volunteer with one week's notice or immediately where inappropriate behavior has occurred. In all cases the volunteer is entitled to an explanation of the action taken.

The Council welcomes feedback and encourages volunteers to offer ideas for improvements. Volunteers who choose to stop volunteering at any time will also be invited to provide feedback before they move on, via the end of placement form.

17) Performance & Monitoring Measures

We will collect the following data (via the end of placement form) to measure the outputs and outcomes from this policy:

- Feedback from volunteers who have received training
- Feedback from volunteers on their experiences
- Feedback from WOSTC Members and Staff
- Informal discussions with individual and groups of volunteers
- Exit interviews with long term volunteers (6 months or more)

Title	Volunteer Policy
Status	Adopted
Author	Gill Gray – Town Clerk
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Review frequency	WOSTC is committed to the ongoing monitoring and review of this policy and will carry out a review every two years minimum
Next review date	June 2021
Review to be undertaken by	Town Clerk