



SAXMUNDHAM TOWN COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER POLICY

Biennial Approval: 8 April 2024
Minute Item: 12/24TC

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement in Saxmundham Town Council. It is of relevance to everyone concerned with recruiting, supporting, developing and managing volunteers and promoting volunteering activity.

2. Vision

Saxmundham Town Council's commitment to people and place will continue to be expressed through active partnerships with individuals and communities, reflecting the volunteering vision and spirit of its original purpose whilst striving to position itself as a leader in the field of volunteering.

3. Commitment to Volunteering

The voluntary principle on which councils were established is one of our greatest strengths. Volunteers are an established and integral part of civic life. Without their active participation, councils would be unable to thrive and prosper. Saxmundham Town Council is committed to working with volunteers and community groups to meet its founding purposes and objectives. Volunteering involvement in appropriate tasks and projects is welcomed and encouraged by the Council.

4. Values and Principles behind Volunteering

Saxmundham Town Council:

- values volunteering as an inclusive act of participation that is itself important in promoting the Council's work.
- appreciates that volunteering is enjoyable and can change and enrich the lives of individuals. Successful volunteer involvement takes account of individuals' motivations, aspirations and fulfilment.
- acknowledges volunteering as of wider benefit to society and its beliefs and values.
- recruits volunteers on a task-led basis to match the Council's needs with volunteers' skills, knowledge, experience and motivation.
- respects volunteers in both listening to and learning from what they have to say.
- values and respects the individual through providing equal opportunities for active involvement within the scope of the Council's needs and resources.
- values volunteering as integral to its work and recognises the 'gift of time' from volunteers as critical to its well-being and success.
- distinguishes volunteering from employment, and puts its flexibility and informality to best effect to complement the work of paid staff.

5. Defining volunteers and the Council's relationship with them

A volunteer is someone who, without expectation of financial compensation beyond reimbursement of expenses, performs a task at the request of and on behalf of Saxmundham Town Council.

The importance of maintaining a balanced effective and mutually beneficial staff/volunteer partnership is essential. It is based on the principle that Council staff provide structure, organisation, direction and day-

to-day management together with appropriate levels of accountability, while volunteers add value to the Council's work by performing a range of supportive roles, contributing time, flexibility and specialist skills. Thus, within this framework, volunteering is a legitimate and crucial activity, which is supported and encouraged by the Council but is not intended to be a substitute for paid employment.

The volunteer role is a 'gift relationship', binding only in honour, trust and mutual understanding. No enforceable obligation, contractual or otherwise, can be imposed on volunteers to attend, give or be set a minimum amount of time to carry out the tasks provided. Likewise the Council cannot be compelled to provide regular work or payment or other benefit for any activity undertaken.

Although volunteers offer time freely and willingly and without binding obligation, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged – both in what the Council expects of volunteers and what volunteers expect of the Council – as well as attainment of high standards upon which the Council's reputation depends.

6. Recruitment and Selection

The Council is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all.

7. Responsibilities

The Council acknowledges the need for a clear and consistent organisational framework for voluntary involvement, which creates a positive climate for development.

Each volunteer, or group of volunteers, has a designated member of staff, or volunteer, to guide and advise them in their tasks. Volunteers are told who to approach for support and have regular access to that person.

The acceptance of volunteer assistance for a particular role is made on merit, the sole selection criteria being the individual's ability to do the specified task subject to the needs and restrictions of the location.

The Council does not specify a general volunteer upper age limit and recognises the valuable contribution made by older volunteers in terms of knowledge and experience. However, the Council would be irresponsible if it permitted volunteers to continue beyond a point where volunteering is detrimental to their own or other people's health and safety. Where necessary, the Council pro-actively uses appropriate and various communication channels to recruit volunteers for specific opportunities.

Volunteers under the age of 16 should be accompanied and supervised by a responsible adult at all times.

The organiser of any volunteers should submit to the Town Clerk in writing, the names of volunteers and the dates they are working prior to them beginning a task.

Individual volunteer involvement begins with the signing of the Town Councils Volunteer Agreement which is kept by the Town Clerk. A signed copy will be supplied to the Volunteer.

8. Training and Development

New volunteers are welcomed and provided with a copy of this policy.

The development of training and support for volunteers is a high priority for the Council in order to provide them with the necessary information and skills to carry out their tasks.

Volunteers may want to develop new skills while helping the Council and, where appropriate, are encouraged to take on new roles or assume greater involvement.

Examination of the effective involvement of volunteers is a component in the annual review of performance.

9. Support and Recognition

The Council understands that although volunteers do not seek reward they do appreciate recognition. All staff, and volunteers, responsible for volunteers are encouraged to ensure appropriate acknowledgement on a regular basis. This could range from a simple 'Thank You' to a more formal recognition by the Council for exceptional voluntary support.

Volunteers are given the opportunity to claim reimbursement of agreed reasonable out-of pocket expenses, subject to production of receipts.

It is recommended Council practice that managers discuss progress with their volunteers on a regular basis. This also gives the opportunity to monitor usefulness of the role, establish whether the volunteer would like to reduce or develop their current contribution, and ensure they feel valued and happy in their role.

The Council's insurance policies include the activities of volunteers and liability for, and towards them.

The Council does not insure personal possessions of volunteers against loss or damage.

10. Data Protection

Personal information recorded about volunteers is stored and maintained with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality. The Town Clerk is the designated Data Manager as defined in the legislation. The Council informs volunteers of their right of access to personal records under the data protection legislation.

11. Confidentiality

The Council advises volunteers of the need for confidentiality where they have access to sensitive Council information which is not public knowledge. Similarly volunteers are expected to maintain the trust the Council places in them to ensure any such information remains confidential.

12. Difficult Situations

The Council aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. The Town Clerk is jointly and individually responsible for handling problems regarding volunteers conduct or complaints. They seek to ensure that the volunteer's views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly and aim for a positive and amicable solution.

13. Information

The Council provides volunteers with opportunities to attend meetings, policies and reports necessary to carry out their roles. Responsibility for communication rests with the Town Clerk who is expected to include volunteers in appropriate meetings and briefings.

14. Moving On

The Council recognises that volunteers may cease their involvement at any time. Exit interviews are recommended to ascertain why a volunteer is leaving, share any learning points and establish whether they want to be involved again.