

# Stevenage Borough Council Employee Volunteering Policy



Version No: 01

Date Live: October 2018

Approved by SLT: July 2018

Approved by Staff side: October 2018

Employer  
of choice

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Stevenage Borough Council is fully committed to employer supported volunteering (EVS) and the Council encourages our employees to get involved in volunteering activities within the local community.

1.2 Employee volunteering is when volunteers are supported by their employer, either during work time or their own time, to undertake volunteering activities.

1.3 We want to encourage more people in Stevenage to volunteer. We know that employees who volunteer will gain skills and abilities which will benefit their work and many of our employees have professional skills, such as legal and financial knowledge, which will be invaluable to local groups.

## 2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of the Employee Volunteering Policy is to encourage all our employees to get involved in volunteering within the local community.

2.2 Stevenage Borough Council believes “The Heart of a Town Lies in its People”. Many of our employees live within Stevenage and care about the town, the community and its people. Volunteering has a vital role to play in achieving this.

## 3. Operation of this policy

3.1 This policy will be operated in line with Stevenage Borough Council's values, which are:

- Excellent
- Innovative
- Caring
- One Team
- Responsive
- Straightforward

## 4. Benefits of Volunteering

4.1 Volunteering is a rewarding and worthwhile activity for all who participate. There are numerous benefits to be gained by undertaking volunteering activities; to you, the Council and the partner organisation.

### 4.2 *Benefits to the Employee*

Volunteering and community involvement could give you the opportunity to:

- Develop new skills that have been identified either by you personally or as part of a performance review. It can also enable employees to develop their skills in a way not necessarily possible in the day to day job e.g. managing a project;
- Further develop existing skills in a contrasting environment;
- Increase motivation in the workplace by working together and being rewarded for volunteering within the community. Most employees enjoy volunteering enormously, seeing it as an opportunity to do something completely different from their day job;
- Build the 'One Team' approach as employees can build relationships within existing teams as well as enabling employees to meet and network with colleagues from other services through team working. Volunteering can also provide networking opportunities with people working for other organisations;
- Improve morale, having taken part in a personally rewarding experience;
- Increase your confidence, volunteers can improve their skills and self-confidence by trying new activities and building new relationships;
- Increase your awareness of the local community. Volunteering will help employees to get a wider perspective of some of the issues in the local community. It also provides employees with an opportunity to contribute to an issue they really care about.
- Volunteering can enable employees to demonstrate the Council's corporate values and behaviours.

### 4.3 *Benefits to the Council*

The Council benefits from:

- Employees with improved skills and personal development. Employees have the opportunity to develop and practice a wider range of skills, especially leadership, communication, creative thinking, problem solving, decision making, project management and team working;
- Employee volunteering can enhance the Council's profile within the community. Employee volunteers make great ambassadors and will help make the Council an Employer of Choice and a great place to work;
- Employees having a better understanding of the voluntary and community sector. The Council recognises the importance of playing an active part in the local community and believes it is important for employees to get involved in community activities as a way to give something back;
- Developing local links with the community that can support business priorities. Employee volunteering will also help the Council to establish beneficial relationships in the wider community.

### 4.4 *Benefits to the Partner Organisation*

As a result of Council employees volunteering, the organisation should:

- Gain individuals with skills that they need;
- Have targeted support to meet specific needs;
- Gain a better understanding of the Council and how they can work more effectively with us;
- Have made ongoing links with the Council; a key employer in the local area.

Employee volunteers contribute time, skills and enthusiasm. Skilled employee volunteers can not only provide the professional skills which voluntary organisations struggle to find or afford, but also help the organisations own employees.

The voluntary sector relies on outside support to meet the needs of the community it serves.

### 4.5 *Benefits to the Local Community*

Volunteering can also support the local community in completing projects that they may no longer be able to maintain e.g. Ascot Crescent pond.

There are also opportunities for the community to get involved in these projects. Please speak to your line manager, The Green Space Team and/or The Community and Neighbourhood Team.

## 5. What does it mean to volunteer?

5.1 Many employees already volunteer locally, outside their normal working hours. Employee volunteering in working hours aims to complement this. The time allocated to employees for the purpose of volunteering is not intended for placements outside of normal working hours. However, employees may use their volunteering hours in a familiar environment, known to them outside of work, during normal working hours if they can show that this will be of benefit to them and the volunteer organisation.

5.2 There are three types of volunteering activities:

- a) **Team Activities** – A ‘one off’ practical task completed by a group of employees, often in one day. This offers great team building opportunities, as well as the chance to work with colleagues from other services across the Council. Employees have a day away from their usual working environment where they can develop new skills and go home with a real sense of achievement. Teams can do full or half day activity, working on projects such as painting buildings or undertaking a community garden project.
- b) **Individual Activities** – Individual activities are a great way to develop individual skills in specific areas of work and to work with different community groups. These can be

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a regular input for a set period of time. It could also be working with other volunteers with a large national charity. It could even be a whole team activity to support team building, through challenges which can strengthen relationships.

*Examples include:*

- Supporting adults at risk and those with disabilities
  - Reading and listening activities in schools
  - Organising sports activities, clubs or events
  - Acting as a trustee for a charity
- c) Council Activities – An organised activity within the council which can support fundraising events and are usually organised by volunteers within the Council. Not all of these examples would form part of the paid time for volunteering. Please discuss this with your line manager/HR Business Partner in the first instance. These activities are Council approved and can include the following examples:
- Dress down Friday i.e. Christmas jumper day
  - National fundraising activities e.g. Macmillan Coffee Morning/Children In Need
  - Other fundraising activities (this would need to be discussed with your line manager/HR Business Partner).

Appendix 1 details the evidence required to be obtained before the discussion takes place with you Line Manager/HR Business Partner.

### 5.3 Volunteers who wish to get involved with organising events

If you are interested in organising any events please see your Line Manager and/or your HR Business Partner.

### 5.4 In addition;

- Volunteering is work undertaken on your own initiative, without payment, for the benefit of others;
- Employees can undertake volunteering on an individual basis, or as a one-off team event, or as a mixture of the two;
- If a team volunteering event is undertaken, for example to complete a 'challenge', this will normally be seen as part of the paid time off given to individuals for the purpose of undertaking volunteering and should be recorded with HR/Payroll accordingly.
- However, at your line manager's discretion, team volunteering may be seen as a team building event outside of an individual volunteering, in which case you may still be entitled up to 2 days for individual volunteering.

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- Before deciding on volunteering, you should discuss with your line manager and obtain his/her agreement after completing Appendix 1.

### 5.5 Do I need to take leave to do voluntary work?

- Each employee will be given the equivalent of 2 days per year (pro rata for part-time and temporary staff) to undertake volunteering in the community. This can be taken as full days or in hours totalling 2 days over the year. Volunteering during office hours will be classed as normal working hours (you do not have to take leave to do this).
- Volunteering must not adversely affect the work of your team and will only be agreed by your line manager if deemed to be operationally viable.
- The volunteering 'year' will run from April to March each year, for the purpose of the 2 day's allowance.
- Time off for volunteering is required to be recorded on MyView.

## 6. What types of volunteering can I do?

6.1 Employees make their own decisions on what type of voluntary activity they want to get involved with. This could be:

- As part of team building;
- By signing up to a local skills bank where they share their professional and business skills and expertise in the community;

Or;

- By doing something in the community totally unconnected with their employment, as personal development.
- Employability events, such as being a Mentor.
- If any volunteering activities could cause a conflict of interest this should be discussed with your Line Manager and or HR Business Partner.

### 6.2 What do you want to get out of volunteering?

- Have you identified an area of personal development that you are unable to pursue in your current job?
- Do you need to find out more about an existing or new policy area e.g. working with a partner or delivery organisation?
- Do you need to gain practical experience to support your knowledge and understanding of your current job?

- Would you or your team benefit from stronger links with the community?
- Are you confident that volunteering will help you to meet your personal/professional objectives?

### 6.3 What about Royal Navy Reserves opportunities?

Please see the Reservist policy.

## 7. Criteria for Volunteering

7.1 Employees may be released during work time to undertake volunteering that meets one or more of the following criteria:

- It supports improving knowledge and understanding of a policy area or involvement in existing policy developments that utilise volunteers;
- It supports a personal development need identified by you and/or your Line Manager;
- It develops stronger links with the local community.

7.2 The volunteering activity must take place within the borough of Stevenage in order to benefit the local community however the Council recognises that not all employees live in the Borough and if there are opportunities within your local community that you would like to get involved in, please speak to your line manager.

7.3 Managers/teams may consider developing a team event involving volunteering, e.g. a one-off community activity linked to the team's area of work. Managers will discuss ideas with staff to decide on an activity appropriate and acceptable to everyone.

7.4 Managers should ensure that when considering team volunteering activities they avoid activities that may exclude certain individuals or groups within the team, for example, those staff with a disability or those from different cultural backgrounds. The participation of individuals in any team volunteering activity is voluntary and those not wishing to participate should not suffer any detriment.

## 8. Discussing Volunteering with your Line Manager

8.1 Before agreeing to undertake any type of volunteering activity during working hours, you will need to speak to, and get agreement from, your line manager.

*Can my Line Manager say "No" to my volunteering?*

*Yes. Although the Volunteering Policy is supported throughout the council, line managers can refuse to let you volunteer if this is due to operational needs.*

*In doing so however, they should make their reasons for refusal clear.*

8.3 If you feel that your request to undertake volunteering during work time has been turned down unreasonably you may contact your HR Business Partner for advice.

8.4 If the volunteering was for personal/professional development, you should discuss alternatives that could assist with your development.

### **9. Guidance for Line Managers**

9.1 Although the Council encourages employee volunteering, the final decision to release employees must rest with line managers. As a line manager, you must be sure that agreeing to a volunteering opportunity will be beneficial to the employee, the wider team and/or the council.

9.2 Work pressures will obviously play a part in line managers being able to release people. However, managers will be encouraged to support their staff who want to volunteer. Flexibility from managers and staff will be key to making volunteering work. Managers may need to share the time available for volunteering across the team and therefore arrangements will need to be reviewed regularly.

9.3 Line managers should be consistent in approach. Volunteering is open to all employees, whatever their grade or work pattern. Therefore all employees should be encouraged to volunteer. Line managers should also ensure that they adhere to the Council's equality policies to ensure that there is no discrimination or unfair treatment against any employees.

### **10. Choosing your Volunteering Opportunity**

It is acceptable for you to find your own volunteering placement, or staff can take up an opportunity provided by the Council; this may need to be discussed with your line manager beforehand.

Council opportunities will be available via the intranet and any ideas/suggestions will be welcome. If you wish to gather volunteers for your volunteering project the intranet will be the ideal place to discuss this.

### **11. Recording Voluntary Work**

11.1 As well as providing much needed support to the local community, volunteering allows you to develop new skills both for your own personal development and for the benefit of the council. It is therefore important that we capture this information in a similar way to training undertaken. This will enable the council to keep records and monitor the effectiveness of all volunteering undertaken.

11.2 After completing your opportunity you may, if you wish, send a case study to your line manager, for inclusion in future publicity material/good news stories. This highlights successful individual projects and team challenges, to encourage others to volunteer in the future.



11.3 All volunteering hours should be recorded on MyView.

### 12. Feedback and Evaluation of Placements

12.1 As part of your negotiations with your line manager, you may have agreed to feedback regarding your volunteering work, for example as part of a performance review, REAL conversations or one-to-one meeting.

12.2 You may also complete a formal evaluation of your volunteering upon completion of your placement. A version is available in Appendix 2.

### 13. Risk Assessment

13.1 The council's personal liability for all employees in the workplace will be extended to any volunteering placements undertaken during normal working hours, provided that the volunteers are under the Councils control and/or supervision, subject to the following criteria:

- The voluntary organisation must provide a working environment that complies with health and safety regulations; employees must ensure they abide by the health and safety at work regulations at all times whilst volunteering;
- A risk assessment needs to be completed on all volunteering activities with the aim of reducing or eliminating any risk associated with an activity;
- Managers should actively support their employee's involvement in employee volunteering and should seek guidance from the voluntary sector if they are unsure about any proposed activity;
- Employee volunteers will be covered by the council's insurance, provided that the volunteers are under the Councils control and/or supervision, so long as they are part of the Employee Volunteering Scheme when undertaking volunteering activities and any activities that need to be discussed with Health and Safety, have taken place if required.

13.2 It is vital that a risk assessment is carried out on all volunteering activities undertaken by council employees as this is a requirement of the council's insurers and good risk management practice. If this is not completed by the volunteering organisations then line managers are required to do this.

13.3 Line managers are required to use the corporate Health and Safety Risk Assessment template found on the intranet.

13.4 To enable risk assessments to be completed before volunteering commences, the checklist should be completed as quickly as possible after a volunteering placement or team challenge has been agreed. If any health and safety concerns arise during or after these checks, these should be raised with the Health and Safety Team.

*NB: Volunteering cannot commence until the risk assessment has been completed and approved by line managers and this should be considered in any timescales.*

### 14. Expenses

14.1 Volunteer organisations will normally supply any necessary tools or other equipment necessary for placements. All equipment must be safety checked as per Appendix 1. However, employees may claim for travel expenses to and from the placement, which will be met from Business Unit budgets. Such expenses are likely to be minimal as all placements are within the borough of Stevenage.

14.2 For team challenges, teams may wish to purchase materials to enhance team-building. Again, these expenses will be expected to be found from within Business Unit budgets as with any other team events.

### 15. Problems

15.1 The aim is that your volunteering will be a positive experience that meets all your objectives. Remember, you are under no obligation to keep volunteering for an organisation that you feel unhappy in.

15.2 If the volunteer placement is not working out as you had planned, you should talk to someone at the partner organisation. Initially, this could be someone who is responsible for you while volunteering. You can then discuss with them your concerns and what you feel would improve your time as a volunteer in their organisation.

15.3 Alternatively, you can discuss any concerns with your line manager.

### 16. How to Apply for Volunteering:

16.1 Please speak to your line manager in the first instance to apply for volunteering. An application form is found in Appendix 1.

## APPENDIX 1:

Applying for Volunteering Checklist:

### Employee Responsibilities:

Consideration	Comments
Are you clear about what you want to get from the volunteering opportunity?	
What skills and experience can you offer the organisation?	
Does the organisation already use volunteers?	
How much time can you give?	
Which days and at what time of day would you like to volunteer?	
Does the organisation provide an induction? What date and time is this?	
Where is the volunteering due to take place? i.e. is this outside of Stevenage?	
Have you completed a risk assessment and returned to your line manager?	
If you need to use equipment has this been safety tested and do you have evidence of this?	
Have you recorded your time in MyView? Will you need to undergo DBS clearance?	
If your activity supports vulnerable adults or children, please provide supporting information for the activity.	
Is there a potential conflict of interest?	
Is the organisation that you would like to support a registered charity?	
Please provide a brief outline of the volunteering activity that you wish to undertake - i.e. what will your day/hours of volunteering involve?	
Has the organisation/your line manager	

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completed a risk assessment which covers all the activities you will be undertaking?	
Do you have your line manager's approval?	
Check with HR Business Partner. If you have a disability is there any reasonable adjustment required to help you undertake the volunteering activity?	

### APPENDIX 2:

Evaluation:

Your Name:	
Business Unit:	
Your Line Manager:	
Where did you volunteer?	
Date/s of your placement	
What was the duration of your volunteering placement?	
What were the key activities undertaken?	
What were your objectives for completing this volunteering?	
Please explain how the placement met/did not meet your objectives?	
Please give any suggestions on how your volunteering experience could have been improved?	
Has the volunteering placement provided you with any new skills to take back into your team?	
If so, how will you now be taking this forward?	