

Peak District Local Access Forum

Date: Thursday 13th June 2013

Item: 5b – For decision

Title: Derbyshire County Council Countryside Service
Draft Volunteer Policy 2013 - 2023

Author: Steve Cresswell, Countryside Officer, Derbyshire County Council

Purpose of Report

To seek the Local Access Forum's views on the attached draft volunteer policy which has been produced by Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service.

Background Information

This policy sets out the Council's key principles and objectives for the involvement of volunteers with the Countryside Service and provides a framework for best practice. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary – for example, to comply with changes in the law - and at least every 10 years.

The comments made by members of both Local Access Forums during earlier presentations about working with volunteers have already been taken into account. This report is being tabled at the June meetings of the two Forums for any further comments prior to being submitted to Cabinet in July.

Recommendation

Forum Members are asked to comment on and endorse the draft volunteer policy.

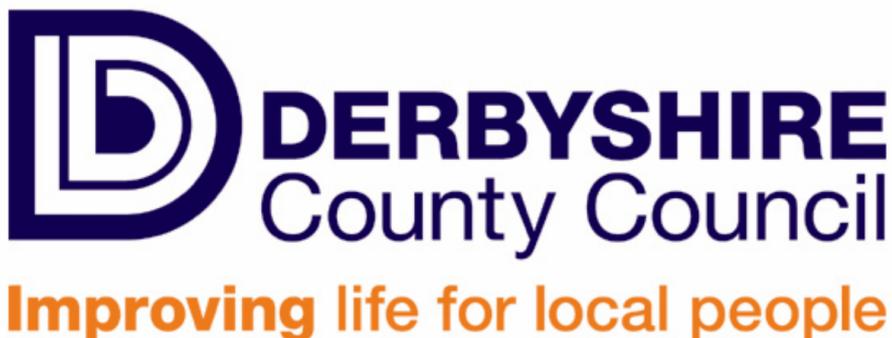
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Derbyshire County Council

**Countryside Service Volunteer
Policy**

2013 - 2023

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Introduction

The Countryside Service is responsible for the management and promotion of Derbyshire County Council's countryside sites and facilities. This includes country parks and other recreational facilities, Greenways, public rights of way and a wide variety of conservation and environmental projects and initiatives.

There are many volunteering opportunities within the Countryside Service and we recognise that volunteers make a significant and valuable contribution to the work of the service: volunteers bring with them a diverse range of skills, knowledge and experiences.

The County Council is committed to increasing the variety of volunteering opportunities available and to ensuring that volunteering is a worthwhile and rewarding experience for all involved. It firmly believes that volunteering is an important aspect of a democratic society and wants to make sure that opportunities to volunteer are open to all.

This policy sets out the Council's key principles and objectives for the involvement of volunteers with the Countryside Service and provides a framework for best practice. It will be reviewed and updated as necessary – for example, to comply with changes in the law - and at least every 10 years.

What is a volunteer?

Volunteers are individuals or groups who offer their time, experience, knowledge and skills without financial gain, helping us to achieve our objectives and provide a benefit to the community.

Certain types of unpaid work for the Council are not regarded as volunteering, for example, student placements and work experience.

Countryside Service Volunteers will be managed in a different way to employees. It is a flexible arrangement and we will only have an expectation of a preferred schedule of time commitments. Unlike an employee, our volunteers do not have a contract of employment with the Council or have the same responsibilities and obligations as employees.

Community-based volunteering

There are many community groups that want to help us manage our sites, Greenways and public rights of way network. These include 'Friends of...' groups, Ramblers groups and Parish Path groups. We will facilitate the creation of such groups and, by providing technical support and assistance, enable them to achieve our mutual goals.

As these groups are working independently and are not an integral part of the Countryside Service, they are not covered by this policy. However, they would be expected to operate to our standards when working for and on behalf of the Service.

Guiding principles

Derbyshire County Council has signed up to the Derbyshire Compact, which recognises four principles fundamental to volunteering. These are choice, diversity, mutual benefit and recognition. In addition, the following principles will guide our work with volunteers. We will:

- Work with volunteers within our existing policies and practices around equality and diversity;
- Provide a volunteer agreement to all volunteers;
- Reimburse eligible out of pocket expenses incurred during the course of volunteering duties;
- Advise volunteers of their rights and duties under data protection legislation;
- Provide appropriate insurance cover for all volunteers whilst engaged in volunteering activity;
- Involve volunteers in roles that add value to the work of the Countryside Service. They will not be substitutes for employees, nor will we expect volunteers to take on inappropriate responsibilities;
- Consult and involve volunteers on issues concerning their volunteering activities;
- Offer suitable induction, training and support for volunteers;
- Provide suitable training and management for employees that support volunteers;
- Expect a high level of good behaviour and conduct in both our management of volunteers and from volunteers themselves;
- Make relevant policies available to volunteers during the induction process and at other times as required;
- Ensure the safe working of volunteers and provide appropriate Personal Protective Equipment to volunteers when required.

These guiding principles may be reviewed from time-to-time to ensure that the needs of both the service and volunteers continue to be met.

Volunteering with the Countryside Service

We want to make volunteering easy to get into for everyone, regardless of their personal situation. We will publicise our volunteering roles through Countryside Service publications and the County Council website. When required, we will engage with potential volunteers through specific, targeted campaigns.

Volunteer opportunities may also be made available in local volunteer centres.

Our procedures will be robust and thorough, whilst remaining informal and adaptable, in order to reflect the needs of volunteers as well as the needs of the Countryside Service.

Where a volunteer may have sole or substantial access to children, young people or vulnerable adults, an enhanced check for regulated activity will be requested through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) prior to the volunteer taking up their role. An enhanced check will also be required for volunteers with access to information about children and vulnerable adults.

Volunteers in roles involving vulnerable adults or children may need particular support, advice and training. Managers should make volunteers aware of the special requirements of the role and of behaviour that is not acceptable.

For some volunteer roles, character references may also be required.

Derbyshire volunteer agreement

Volunteers will be asked to abide by our volunteer agreement, which will clearly set out our expectations of volunteers and what volunteers can expect of us. This will be phrased in terms of hopes and expectations rather than obligations. The volunteer agreement is not a legally binding contract of employment between the County Council and the volunteer. It may be withdrawn from at any time at the discretion of either party, although whilst the parties are working together the principles are expected to apply. Neither party commits to any employment relationship being created either now or at any time in the future.

The role description

A role description will be provided for all volunteer roles. This gives a clear overview of the activities volunteers can expect to be involved in whilst volunteering and helps to prevent confusion or misunderstanding. The role description will identify the activities to be carried out by the volunteer and the skills or experience needed. It will also identify what the volunteer can expect to get out of the role and the time commitment expected.

Induction, support and training

Derbyshire County Council recognises that whilst volunteering can be satisfying and enjoyable, it can also place demands and responsibilities on individuals that may require certain personal qualities and additional skills. The aim is to ensure that all volunteers receive appropriate support and training by providing a comprehensive induction programme. Attendance at further training courses is voluntary.

Volunteers with the Countryside Service can expect support from a nominated employee, who will address their needs for advice, guidance and training. The nature of support will vary depending on the volunteering role. A full-time volunteer may have different requirements to a volunteer attending a weekly or monthly, supervised task. Employees that support volunteers will receive relevant training where appropriate.

Volunteers are expected to abide by Derbyshire County Council policies and procedures whilst on County Council premises, or undertaking any of their volunteering duties. They may be perceived by the public as representing the Council and should act accordingly. The induction programme will include an explanation of these policies and procedures.

There will be a review with the volunteer, initially after three months and then annually for regular volunteers, to confirm their suitability to continue as a

volunteer and to provide the opportunity for mutual feedback. Written review records will be kept.

Appreciation will be shown for the volunteer's contribution. A written testimonial will be given to regular volunteers on leaving their volunteering role and references supplied to other parties on request.

Confidentiality and data protection

Some aspects of the volunteer's role may be confidential. Issues around confidentiality will be discussed with the volunteer during the induction process. The volunteer will also be made aware of the Council's policies on confidentiality and data protection.

Personal information about volunteers will be maintained in line with Derbyshire County Council's data protection procedures and confidentiality guidelines.

Insurance

Volunteers registered with and supervised by Derbyshire County Council's Countryside Service are insured for personal injury and are covered by professional and public liability insurance, in the same way as employees. However, the insurance will not cover unauthorised actions, or actions outside the volunteer's role description.

Friends groups, access groups and other volunteer groups working without charge and at the request of the Countryside Service are also covered by the Council's insurance.

Reimbursement of volunteer expenses

Derbyshire County Council recognises that volunteers should not lose out financially because of their volunteering activities. We will provide a clear procedure for the reimbursement of eligible out of pocket expenses. We will reimburse eligible expenses incurred during the course of volunteering duties and training, but only in exceptional circumstances will we reimburse the cost of travel from home to the volunteering base.

Equal opportunities and diversity

Derbyshire County Council intends to draw on as wide a pool of volunteers as possible. Volunteers from all backgrounds, including those from the protected characteristic groups defined in the 2010 Equality Act, will be treated with respect and encouraged to work within the County Council's equal opportunity and diversity policies.

During the induction process, it will be made clear to the volunteer that they should treat all employees, clients, other volunteers and members of the public with respect, regardless of their backgrounds and beliefs and that volunteers should expect the same in return.

An equality analysis has been carried out on the volunteer policy.

Problem solving

Derbyshire County Council aims to resolve any problems or difficulties that volunteers may have whilst placed within the organisation, fairly and quickly. Issues should be brought to the attention of the appropriate manager for resolution.

Health and safety

Derbyshire County Council's health and safety policies and guidance set the standards for a safe and healthy working environment and must be followed by volunteers at all times. Health and safety information will be made available during the volunteer's induction and for reference as required throughout the placement.

A risk assessment will be undertaken for each volunteer role. Necessary Personal Protective Equipment will be made available, either on loan or provided without charge as appropriate.

Volunteer handbook

Volunteers will receive a *Volunteers' Handbook* providing all the information they need to commence volunteering with the Countryside Service. The handbook will be tailored with local area detail.

Further information

Contact Steve Cresswell, Countryside Officer, on 01629 539660.

Steve.cresswell@derbyshire.gov.uk

A Compact for Derbyshire is an agreement between voluntary and community groups, and statutory organisations which sets out a framework for how they will work together in partnership. See it at:

http://dnet/what_were_doing/partnerships/voluntarysector/derbyshirecompact/default.asp