

VOLUNTEERING POLICY

1. POLICY OVERVIEW

a. Scope of the Policy - *Who is the policy for?*

This policy applies to all volunteers engaged by Leighton-Linslade Town Council.

Some aspects of this policy also apply to volunteers from community groups and not-for-profit organisations working in partnership with Leighton-Linslade Town Council to deliver projects for the parish of Leighton-Linslade.

This policy is not intended for Councillors who are specifically covered in the Councillor Code of Conduct Policy.

b. General Policy Statement - *Who are we and why do we involve volunteers?*

Leighton-Linslade Town Council exists to provide services for those living and working in Leighton Buzzard and Linslade. These include parks and open spaces, markets, allotments, cemeteries and public toilets. It also provides support services such as the Teenage Advice and Information Centre (TACTIC) and organises a calendar of events to enhance life within the parish.

Volunteers are valued contributors to the Council's work, providing manpower, new skills and perspectives, and increasing engagement with the local community. We strive for a mutually beneficial relationship which brings added value to both the Council and the community, whilst recognising the motivations and objectives of volunteers.

c. Purpose of the Policy – *Why do we need a volunteering policy?*

We want volunteers to feel supported in a way that reflects the values of the Council, and to achieve this it is important to set out how the partnership is designed to work. The relationship we have with volunteers is non-contractual, and no working relationship is created or implied at any time, however we still feel it is important to have clear, reasonable guidelines to manage expectations and help things to run smoothly.

d. Principles of the Policy – *What are the main points?*

- We appreciate that volunteers contribute their time, skills and knowledge freely for many reasons and we will support personal aspirations and professional ambitions wherever possible and appropriate.
- We value volunteers and recognise that they should have satisfying tasks that are personally fulfilling, as well as the support, training and equipment to do these tasks effectively and safely.

- We will create an environment of understanding among staff to ensure that they work positively with volunteers.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact, which Leighton Linnsade Town Council has signed up to, the shared principles of which are:

- **Respect:** Differences between the public and voluntary and community sectors are mutually understood, acknowledged and respected.
- **Honesty:** Open communication, transparency and integrity.
- **Independence:** The independence of voluntary and community organisations in fulfilling their mission is recognised and supported. This includes their right within the law to campaign, to comment on and to challenge public sector policy (whatever funding or other relationship may exist with the public sector) and to determine and manage their own affairs.
- **Citizen empowerment:** Valuing a thriving civil society that is built around communities and people, meeting their needs and reflecting their choices.
- **Volunteering:** The energy and commitment of people giving their time for the public good contributes to a vibrant society and should be recognised and appreciated.

2. VOLUNTEERING WITH US

a. Equality and Diversity – *Who can volunteer?*

We want to be as inclusive as possible and will not discriminate on the basis of any protected characteristics, namely: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. We welcome volunteers from all backgrounds, recognising that having a broad, diverse group of volunteers brings a variety of knowledge, skills, creativity and experience, and promotes social and community cohesion.

People's individual circumstances differ, but this should not prevent people from being able to contribute to their community. Therefore, we aim to identify and remove barriers to volunteering. For example, where a volunteer might need additional help with equipment, or a flexible commitment to fit around other obligations, we will endeavour to support such requests where practical.

There may be occasions when a person is not suitable for a specific role, for example for reasons of Health & Safety, or where a role involves children or vulnerable people. Where this is the case, we will be open to making reasonable adjustments or to looking at options such as additional support.

Where it is not possible to place a volunteer in their requested role, we will seek to find a suitable alternative.

Discussions when placing volunteers will always be open, unbiased, and involve all concerned.

b. Criminal Convictions – *Can people with criminal convictions volunteer?*

Having a criminal record will not necessarily prevent anyone from volunteering with us but this depends on the nature of the volunteer role and the nature and circumstances of the offences.

Most of our roles do not require a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check and if it's not needed, we will not do one. Where a role does require a DBS check we will make that clear from the start.

Unless the role requires us to ask questions about a full criminal record, we only ask about *unspent* convictions as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

All information given to us is handled, stored and destroyed in accordance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and our Data Protection Policy.

c. Additional Support Needs – *Is any extra support available?*

Volunteers who have additional support requirements will be considered wherever possible and we will make reasonable adjustments, where practical, to ensure our opportunities are accessible to those with additional needs.

We will consider the nature of the role, availability of supporting staff, availability of specialised equipment, health and safety, the welfare of the individual and any other considerations applicable to the role or the volunteer.

Discussion will be as open and fair as possible. In some cases, alternative roles might be offered instead.

Where links to other support agencies might help a person to volunteer, the Council aims to support this.

All personal information will be confidential and handled, stored and destroyed in accordance with GDPR and the Council's Data Protection Policy.

3. HOW WE SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS

a. Induction, Training and Support – *What can volunteers expect from us?*

New volunteers will be made welcome and given:

- a brief description of the Council and/or partner organisation and its values,
- task-related training to enable them to fulfil their role,
- any other appropriate training including Health and Safety,
- guidelines and discussion on relevant procedures, code of conduct and confidentiality.

All volunteers will be given:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and protective clothing as required, or where a reasonable request is made (see 2.a Equality & Diversity),
- regular supervision,
- opportunity to discuss tasks, identify and resolve any problems and to be given thanks,
- regular role reviews to ensure the needs of the Council and the volunteer continue to be met,
- opportunity to share ideas and input in the development of their role,

- where available, development opportunities appropriate to the role,
- opportunity to feedback to the Council and to be involved in the development of volunteering policy.

All volunteers can expect:

- to be treated with respect,
- to be appreciated,
- there to be clear communication channels,
- to have a voice in discussions and decisions that directly affect them.

b. Support for Voluntary, Community and Not-For-Profit Groups – *How are partner groups supported by the Council?*

Independent voluntary and community groups working in partnership with the Council can expect to receive support from the Council.

As all groups are very different, the level of practical support required may vary, but will be decided by mutual agreement on a case-by-case basis in advance of any project and will be in line with principles set out in the Bedfordshire & Luton Compact.

In all cases, the Council aims to support the development and growth of partner groups equally by:

- offering an open-door policy for advice and support,
- providing a named individual (Nominated Officer) to offer impartial advice and support for those groups which may not have resource for this,
- providing assistance with administrative tasks, such as help to write Risk Assessments
- providing or loaning PPE and protective clothing where it is not available to the group but required for a task,
- being willing to promote volunteering opportunities arising from partnership work on the Town Council's website and social media platforms,
- being willing to signpost and refer volunteers to appropriate external support available, for example Community Action Bedfordshire.

The Council also supports Voluntary, Community and Not-for Profit groups on an annual basis by way of:

- **General Grants** of up to £500 (£250 for start-up organisations) are offered twice-yearly to be used for specific projects to benefit the community, including purchasing of equipment, training of volunteers, marketing or subsidising a trip or visit
- **Guaranteed Grants** of over £500 per year are available for a four-year period to enable the continued provision of events and services in and around the town
- **Community Action Bedfordshire** is the local support service for volunteers and voluntary and community groups. The Town Council part-funds CAB by way of a Guaranteed Grant.

c. Supporting Young Volunteers – *How are under 18s supported?*

Where volunteers, and/or service users are under 18, additional supervision will be given and supporting staff will be DBS checked and suitably trained.

Young volunteers are given support to complete their Induction Checklist, which helps them to fully understand their role, boundaries, policies and procedures and assists with identifying areas where they need clarification or additional support.

Where Peer Volunteering is in place, staff will not put volunteers in situations where they can be adversely influenced by others, and will put in place safeguarding procedures to help and support the volunteer in their role.

d. Health and Safety – *How do we keep volunteers safe?*

We have a duty of care to all staff and volunteers and volunteers will be given information and training on how to carry out their role to ensure their own and other's safety.

A risk assessment for each volunteer role will be carried out. For roles managed by the Council, these will be undertaken by the relevant Head of Service or the Health & Safety Responsible Officer.

Where the volunteer role is managed by an external community or voluntary group, the risk assessment will be carried out by the group, with a copy submitted to the Council. In this case, support to complete the risk assessment can be given by the Town Council on request.

In the case of a volunteer requiring additional support, a specific risk assessment will be required for that individual to take account of their capabilities or additional requirements. Volunteers can request a copy of the risk assessment undertaken for their role, task or personal requirements (where applicable) at any time.

e. Insurance - *How are volunteers covered?*

Volunteers, whether individuals or volunteering as part of a group, who are engaged in tasks directly managed by Leighton Linlade Town Council are fully protected by our personal accident and public liability insurance.

Those volunteering through independent voluntary or community groups who self-manage will need to check that their organisation has suitable cover before volunteering.

If there is no suitable insurance cover in place for a particular task, this should be brought to the attention of the Town Council before any task starts so that appropriate cover can be arranged.

Volunteers who are required to use their cars as part of their volunteering, not including travel to and from a place of volunteering, must inform their own insurers to arrange suitable cover. This doesn't usually incur a charge, but in the unlikely event that it does, and if the cost would impact the volunteer's ability to volunteer, this should be brought to the attention of the Council (see 2.a Equality & Diversity and 3.f Expenses).

f. Expenses – *Will it cost anything to volunteer?*

There may be occasions where a person wants to volunteer but the personal costs involved would create a barrier to that volunteering.

This may include essential costs, for example travel costs or motor insurance cover, or additional costs, for example not having 'spare' clothes to use where a task will be mucky

- Personal Protective Equipment, where required for the task, will be made available by the Council, or the group managing the volunteer, whichever applies.

- Protective or additional clothing may also be supplied, on request, where it is required for the role or to overcome financial barriers for a volunteer. (see 2.a Equality & Diversity)
- With prior agreement from the Town Clerk, reasonable personal expenses may be reimbursed on a case-by-case basis to enable volunteers to overcome financial barriers to volunteering.

All individual requests will be handled discretely, in the strictest of confidence, and all personal data held will be stored and destroyed in line with our Data Protection Policy.

4. VOLUNTEER CONDUCT

a. Code of Conduct – *How should volunteers behave?*

We are proud to have a working atmosphere that is conducive to the nature our work, our values, our public image and reputation. The welfare and personal security of employees, volunteers and Councillors is of the utmost importance.

Volunteers represent the Council and should do this by having respect for all people and conducting themselves in a way which reflects the values of the Council.

This expectation includes conduct towards other volunteers, staff and members of the public. It also includes a volunteer's online conduct, where applicable, in line with our Social Media Procedure document.

b. Data Protection and Confidentiality – *What can be discussed with others?*

Volunteers may have access to personal data or gain sensitive knowledge about the work of the Council, volunteers, staff, Councillors, organisations, community groups or clients who have contact with the Council. There is an absolute obligation, both during and after volunteering with us, to maintain confidentiality and not to pass on information to any individual or third-party organisation unless required to do so by law.

Volunteers using Council computers are expected to observe the Council's IT Policy and all volunteers are required to observe the Council's Data Protection Policy. Principles laid out in the Social Media Procedures document also apply.

c. Policies and Procedures – *The guides to help get things right*

All policy documents mentioned in this document are written to set out expectations and avoid misunderstandings. They are available to view at the White House, as is a copy of the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact.

Volunteers are required to read all relevant documents applicable to their role. On request, alternative format documents can be provided.

5. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

a. Feedback – *Do volunteers have a say in revising policy?*

We encourage volunteers to get involved on all levels of their volunteering and they will be included in developing or revising policies that affect them, in line with the Council's

Community Engagement Strategy 2018. This may be by direct approach to individuals, or by consulting with a group's spokesperson who will be encouraged to gather the opinions of the group members as part of their response.

There may be occasions where only a random selection of volunteers and/or groups are consulted, in order to manage responses and workload of Council Officers but where this is the case we will aim to include as diverse a selection of volunteers as possible.

We also seek to encourage constructive dialogue on any aspect of a volunteer's journey with us so that we can identify any issues early and develop volunteer tasks and roles with all perspectives in mind.

6. Dealing with Problems

a. Troubleshooting – *What if a problem arises?*

We are all human and recognise that problems can arise. All volunteers can expect to be supported by the Nominated Council Officer.

We will have an open-door policy in place, to assist with any complications arising with volunteers and community groups, in a fair and open way.

In the event of a conflict, whether between volunteers or between volunteers and staff, we aim to resolve any problems informally wherever possible and in a timely, fair and effective way.

The Nominated Council Officer will be made available to discuss any concerns safely and in confidence.

Volunteers are encouraged to address problems about any aspect of their volunteering as promptly as possible, to enable quick solutions and minimise risk of issues escalating. In the event of any disagreement, volunteers are encouraged to:

1. Discuss the issue with the person concerned to see if a solution can be found.
2. If the matter is not easily resolved, raise the problem with the Nominated Council Officer.
3. If a satisfactory outcome cannot be reached, the problem may then be brought to the attention of the Town Clerk who will investigate and decide on an appropriate response.

In the event of a serious complaint, or inappropriate or dangerous behaviour, the Council's Nominated Officer will discuss this directly with the Town Clerk and decide on the appropriate action to take.

Volunteers can bring another person of their choice to any meeting for support.

Volunteers are not contracted and are free to leave at any time. Equally the Council also reserves the right to ask a volunteer to leave if this is in the best interest of the volunteer, the Council or the volunteer group. In any case we will act fairly and openly.

All data gathered during any dispute will be collated, stored and destroyed in line with our Data Protection Policy.

b. Right to Leave – What if I want to leave?

We keep in mind that volunteers give their time freely and that circumstances, availability, motivation and interests may change. Volunteers are free to leave at any time and are not required to give a reason, although a reason can help us to understand and address any issues.

We always appreciate notice wherever possible; not just so we can reallocate tasks, but to give us opportunity to support the volunteer's next steps where appropriate, and to say thank you for their contribution.

It also gives us time to ask for feedback, so that we can understand what we are doing well and where we might improve what we are doing, for the benefit of future volunteers.

POLICY ADOPTED BY COUNCIL 25 JANUARY 2021

This policy will be reviewed regularly, and at least every three years.