

Volunteering Code of Practice

1. Status of the Code

This Code is not legally binding but represents a commitment to good practice for volunteering and should be seen as a mechanism for improving the relationship between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector in Swindon.

2. Aims

This Code of Good Practice underpins the Swindon Local Compact. It aims to enable more people to become involved in the varied forms of volunteering in the community and to offer them the necessary support. The code sets out a shared vision of how the statutory sector and voluntary and community sector in Swindon can promote and support voluntary action while respecting volunteers' independence and free choice.

3. Background

Because volunteers are active in all areas of life, all decision makers should be volunteer-friendly and aware that their actions and decisions may affect local voluntary and community activity. Whilst not an exhaustive list volunteering in Swindon can include:

- Helping provide a service within a voluntary or community organisation, international development organisation, the public sector or private sector body
- Campaigning and action that effects social change
- Befriending and mentoring
- Sports and physical recreation
- Taking part in running a voluntary or community organisation as a trustee, board or committee member
- Serving as a non-executive member of a public body or participating in civic governance eg as a school governor
- Leading a voluntary initiative, usually as part of a voluntary organisation or community group, to improve the quality of life for people in a neighbourhood or community of interest
- Employer-supported community involvement
- Helping develop public policy through involvement in consultation processes and campaigning

- Volunteering through involvement in a faith congregation or community
- Helping raise funds for an organisation

4. Definitions

4.1 For the purpose of this code **volunteering** is defined as an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone other than, or in addition to, close relatives.

4.2 **Community organisations** are those almost entirely made up of volunteers.

4.3 **Voluntary organisations** may involve paid staff who manage volunteers; they may provide support to organisations that involve volunteers in their work; they may provide funding to volunteers and volunteering groups; they involve volunteers who manage paid staff eg management committee members and trustees.

5. Principles

There are four principles fundamental to volunteering. These are Choice, Diversity, Mutual Benefit and Recognition.

5.1 Choice: Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should not result in any form of coercion or compulsion. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to become involved.

5.2 Diversity: Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender, disability **or** faith. Implementing equalities policies and schemes and a welcoming approach are basic to supporting diversity. Volunteers should not be out-of-pocket as a result of volunteering – where possible, organisations should offer reasonable expenses to volunteers, for example, for travel and also encourage volunteers to claim for such expenses.

5.3 Mutual Benefit: Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a relationship in which the volunteer also receives.

Benefits that volunteers may gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills – gained through training where appropriate – experience and contacts, sociability and fun, and inclusion in the life of the organisation.

5.4 Recognition: Explicit recognition of the value of what volunteers contribute to the organisation, to the community, to the social economy and to wider social objectives, is key to a fair relationship between volunteers, organisations and statutory policy and practice. It should be recognised that volunteers have varying abilities and that each volunteer should be able to contribute at their own pace and within their own capabilities.

Within Swindon it is recognised that Volunteer Centre Swindon operates as the local volunteer development agency. It is a fully accredited member of Volunteering England and has 6 core functions that are common to all volunteer development agencies in the country (see **Appendix 1**).

6. Mutual undertakings and agreed principles

6.1 In supporting this code the statutory and voluntary and community sectors will ensure that they:

- a) Recognise that all people should be free to volunteer.
- b) Work together to identify and remove barriers to volunteering and community involvement and develop practices that enable all people to become involved, if they wish.
- c) Agree that funding should be invested in creating and maintaining a modern, dynamic voluntary and community sector.
- d) Will have a consistent approach towards the reimbursement of expenses where it is agreed that volunteers will be involved. This will vary from one organisation to another.
- e) Recognise and justify giving volunteers the training, support, management and resources that they need to be effective.

- f) Will involve and listen to volunteers when developing relevant new policies and ideas.
- g) Recognise the importance of high standards and effective management of volunteers. Staff (both paid and unpaid) who recruit, induct, and manage volunteers will have this work included as part of their role and receive appropriate training and support.
- h) Assist potential volunteers to find volunteering opportunities that fit their needs, interests and abilities.
- i) Undertake Criminal Record Bureau checks on volunteers who will be supporting children, young people or other vulnerable people. If in doubt about the necessity to check then advice should be sought (see Appendix 2)
- j) Provide appropriate training/induction for volunteers to enable them to carry out their volunteering. Sufficient resources will be budgeted to support volunteers, including management and/or peer support, office space and equipment.
- k) Ensure that volunteers know that they are obliged to abide by the organisation's agreements, policies and procedures.
- l) Ensure that volunteers are given clear information about their rights and the organisation's commitment to them as volunteers.
- m) Ensure that the nature and extent of volunteering is acknowledged in all annual reports.
- n) Encourage and enable accreditation of skills acquired through volunteering using recognised qualifications, where appropriate.
- o) Offer written references for volunteers who are actively seeking other volunteering opportunities or paid employment.
- p) Recognise that, as part of the mutual benefit to both volunteer-involving organisation and volunteers, thanks and recognition will be given to volunteers for their contribution.
- q) Give volunteers the same protection under health and safety and public liability as paid employees.

- r) Discuss other options so that if a volunteer is not able to take up a position, for whatever reason, alternatives are offered to them either in the organisation itself or by referral to Volunteer Centre Swindon. Also to ensure that no volunteer potential is lost once a volunteering relationship comes to an end by referral to Volunteer Centre Swindon.
- s) Review the strengths and weaknesses of local volunteering information and infrastructure, and make recommendations based on best practice examples identified.
- t) Support media and communications strategies which ensure that volunteer contributions to raising the quality of life are promoted, and support activities which motivate more people to become involved.
- u) Support initiatives which provide accessible information about volunteering opportunities at a local level, and ensure effective distribution of this information throughout Swindon.
- v) Seek ways as to how detailed demographic information on volunteering and community activity can be collected for comparison with other surveys and research.
- w) Seek to improve the measure of voluntary and community activity in Swindon so that figures can be shown regarding the value that volunteers give in terms of hours spent volunteering and any monetary value that can be attributed to this.

7. Voluntary and Community Sector Undertakings

7.1 In supporting this code the voluntary and community organisations undertake to:

- a) Recognise the importance of trustees as a specific group of volunteers and ensure they receive appropriate training and support to enable them to carry out their tasks.
- b) Support volunteering in the voluntary and community and statutory sectors, by funding and non-financial support, including giving advice, where appropriate.

8. Statutory Sector Undertakings

8.1 In supporting this code the Statutory Agencies undertake to:

- a) Seek to ensure that when all new proposed policy and procedures are discussed the potential impact on volunteer and community activity and funding is considered.
- b) Support volunteering in the voluntary and community sector by funding and non-financial support, where appropriate
- c) Recognise that there are many independent voluntary sector organisations, with voluntary management boards. Seek to work with those already active and organised, rather than setting up new structures.

9. Review

As with the Local Compact this Code of Practice is a starting point not a conclusion. It will be reviewed annually to assess its effectiveness.

10. Appendices

Appendix 1

Within Swindon it is recognised that **Volunteer Centre Swindon** operates as the local volunteer development agency. It is a fully accredited member of Volunteering England and has the following 6 core functions that are common to all volunteer development agencies in the country:

Brokerage: Volunteer Centre Swindon's primary function is to match both individuals and groups interested in volunteering with appropriate opportunities in the local community. It holds information on a comprehensive range of opportunities. It offers potential volunteers support and advice matching their motivation to volunteer with appropriate volunteering opportunities.

Marketing volunteering: Volunteer Centre Swindon stimulates and encourages local interest in volunteering and community activity. This may include promoting and marketing volunteering through local events and campaigns. It manages and promotes a national brand for volunteering.

Good Practice Development: Volunteer Centre Swindon promotes good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer-involving organisations.

Development of volunteering opportunities: Volunteer Centre Swindon works with statutory, voluntary and private sector agencies as well as community groups and faith groups, to develop local volunteering opportunities. It will target specific groups which face barriers to volunteering.

Policy Response and Campaigning: Volunteer Centre Swindon participates in campaigns on issues that affect volunteers or volunteering locally.

Strategic Development of volunteering: Along with other local groups, Volunteer Centre Swindon will feed into strategic thinking and planning at a local, sub-regional, regional and national level.

Appendix 2

**For advice regarding Criminal Record Bureau checks:
Organisations NOT individuals can contact:**

Children's Information Service
6 – 7 Theatre Square
Swindon SN1 1QN
01793 541786
info@cisswindon.co.uk

Appendix 3

The Swindon Compact Volunteering Code of Practice: Working Group

Brian Best – Gorse Hill Community Centre
Sharon Greenaway – Living Options
Cathy Jones – Wiltshire Constabulary
Maddie Lestrage – Service Users Network Swindon
Viv Marsh – Beacon Housing Association
Alex Mullins – Volunteer Centre Swindon
Julie Pett – Swindon PCT
Pam Pixton – Swindon Borough Council