

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL  
VOLUNTEERING POLICY  
September 2002**

1. 1. Within the adopted voluntary sector policy the Council has already defined its view of volunteering: -

- *“Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship. It is the commitment by individuals of time and energy for the benefit of the community. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.*
- *It is one of the main ways in which citizens of all ages and from all sectors of society become involved in the life of their community and society.*
- *Volunteering also has many benefits for individuals, providing an invaluable and inexpensive gateway for personal development and fulfilment.”*

1. 2. Volunteering is recognised as a major resource, contributing thousand of hour’s labour per week to the Highland social economy.

1. 3. The Council recognises that it has a variety of roles in relation to volunteering including acting as: -

- A **supporter** of volunteering in Highland communities.
- A **funder** of activities that give rise to opportunities for volunteering.
- A **purchaser** of services that engages volunteers.
- An **engager** of volunteers in the delivery of services.
- An **employer**, with skilful staff, who themselves undertake volunteering.

1. 4. This policy statement looks at each of their roles in turn and sets out a clear statement of policy which should promote, encourage and guide volunteering in Highland.

**2. A SUPPORTER OF VOLUNTEERING IN HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES.**

2. 1. The Council recognises that a few, very simple measures in work and working practice can make a positive impact on volunteering. This policy statement seeks to cement these good practices into the activities of the Council.

2. 2. This policy recognises that the voluntary sector cannot thrive without an adequate infrastructure, which addresses the need for: -
  - information on volunteering,
  - advice on how to get involved,
  - volunteer training and development.

Accordingly Council services, working in liaison with Volunteering Highland and the many hundreds of voluntary groups across the highlands will seek to maximise the availability of information and advice on volunteering, encourage volunteers to come forward, co-ordinate the placement of volunteers and promote opportunities for volunteer training.

2. 3. The Council, and its wellbeing partners, note and support the fact that public agencies in simply recognising the value of volunteering can itself lead to a greater commitment to volunteering. Accordingly the Council will seek to highlight volunteer endeavour through publicity, events and awards.
2. 4. That streamlined Council procedure can help reduce the burden on volunteers and voluntary organisations. The council will continue to adopt procedures and practices that assist volunteering through for example the provision of straightforward advice and quick responses to enquiries. In particular Council Services will seek to provide good information and advice on volunteering issues and opportunities through the Council's web-site – [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk). The Council will seek to highlight its efforts of volunteering within individual Service Plans and set out clear outcomes to be realised.
2. 5. The Council recognises the benefits of the involvement of the local voluntary sector in consulting volunteers and will establish recognised mechanisms to ensure that the voluntary sector is consulted on the wide range of issues that affect volunteers. The Council will work with its Wellbeing Alliance partners to co-ordinate effort.
2. 6. The Council recognises the need for a strategic approach to the development of volunteering and in particular supports the work of the local volunteering agency, Volunteering Highland, in providing leadership on volunteering. The Council will encourage networking of Volunteering Highland with other key voluntary sector organisations such as local Councils of Voluntary Service (CVSs) to co-ordinate work, promote good practice and ensure quality of service to the consumer.

### 3. A **FUNDER** OF ACTIVITIES THAT GIVE RISE TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING.

3. 1. The Council invests over £9m per annum in the voluntary sector and more in terms of securing services from organisations who engage volunteers. Service Agreements or conditions of grant govern many of these activities. Through these arrangements the Council seeks Best Value and Performance Measurements. The

Council will seek to ensure that in funding activities evidence of a proactive approach to involving volunteers should be included as a requirement where appropriate.

3. 2. The policy to be promoted must make it easier for people to volunteer, especially under-represented groups such as young people, people with a disability, older people and people from minority ethnic groups or simply people who live in rural areas where volunteering opportunities are more limited. The policy will seek to charge all existing supported organisations to set standards of performance of volunteer recruitment and support as an obligation from their funders. Additional funds are being made available to local communities and Councils under the Scottish Executive's social exclusion agenda and other programmes to help widen the base of those who actively participate in volunteering. The Council and its partners will seek to draw down these new funding opportunities to assist with this objective.
3. 3. The Council in funding services involving volunteers will also ensure that service providers using volunteers know about and understand this volunteering policy and the principles that underpin it. It is hoped and expected that they in turn will adopt the same good practices and procedures.
3. 4. The Council will seek to encourage service providers engaging volunteers to ensure that volunteering opportunities are advertised widely, in ways that are accessible to all sections of the community. Such advertising will specify the task to be undertaken and will draw attention to the benefits and experience to be gained from participation in volunteering.

#### 4. A **PURCHASER** OF SERVICES THAT ENGAGES VOLUNTEERS.

4. 1. The Council in purchasing services involving volunteers will work with its service providers to ensure that:
  - The role of volunteers is made clear and satisfactory arrangements are in place for their management.
  - Information, advice and assistance will be available to voluntary management committees about the handling of the contractual arrangements.
  - Consideration will be given to utilising agreements to set out the roles and commitments of the volunteers.
4. 2. The Council will occasionally seek information on the involvement of volunteers in the provision of purchased services. The purpose for the collection of this data is to promote the opportunities for volunteering, determine the characteristics of those so involved and where appropriate seek to broaden the range of those who could get involved in volunteering opportunities within local communities.

## 5. AN ENGAGER OF VOLUNTEERS IN THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES.

5. 1. Volunteering Highland in contributing to the development to this policy have highlighted the following principles for volunteering in public serves which the Council is happy to endorse. These are:

- **Distinctiveness:** The contribution volunteers make is distinctive. Volunteers are not the same as paid staff. Differences in their time commitment, their contribution and the relationship they develop within the organisation need to be understood and reflected in the way they are managed.
- **Additional:** The tasks that volunteers carry out are additional and complementary to the work of paid staff. Their roles should not be a substitute for paid workers. Volunteers should have appropriate and clearly defined roles.
- **Value and diversity:** Volunteers can contribute to social services by adding value and diversity. Volunteering provides opportunities for people from a variety of backgrounds to become involved in their communities. It allows for people who are socially excluded to bring their skills and experience to a wide range of situations and help build links and bridges. People from different backgrounds, education levels, ages, disabilities, and from black and ethnic minority communities, can contribute their skills and experience.
- **Quality:** Volunteers can thus enhance the quality of a service by adding value and diversity. Volunteers should be involved in meaningful and important work, which should be carried out to a good standard.
- **Reciprocity:** There is reciprocity in volunteering - it is a two-way process. Volunteers are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons and it is important to understand these. They include worthwhile achievement and helping others, learning new skills, and gaining social support networks. It is crucial to balance and match these aims with the needs that must be met and the tasks that must be undertaken.
- **Parity and recognition:** Volunteers, while not paid staff, should have parity of esteem with them. They need clarity about their roles and responsibilities, induction, supervision, support, training and opportunities for development. Volunteers should abide by, and be subject to, the organisation's policies and procedures on health and safety, equal opportunities and confidentiality.
- **Investment:** This parity requires investment in volunteering and senior level management support. Although volunteers give their time, skills and talents for free and bring added value and diversity, their management requires adequate resourcing. Volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses should be reimbursed, and staff responsible for involving, managing and supervising volunteers should be supported with time, training and recognition.
- **Safety:** Volunteering needs to be safe. Good practice in the management of volunteers is essential to minimise risks and to operate safely.

- **Choice:** Service users have the right to choose not to engage in volunteer activity if it is not right for them, and social service staff should be consulted about working alongside volunteers. Volunteers should have a choice of voluntary work and be allowed to opt for specific roles. Choice adds to the involvement of a wider variety of volunteers.
5. 2. To help bring these principles into working practice the Council when engaging volunteers will recognise the following rights and in return expect volunteers to adhere to certain responsibilities.

### **Rights of volunteers**

- To know what is expected of them. Tasks to be performed by volunteers will be clearly defined, so that all concerned with their activities are sure of their respective responsibilities.
- to have clearly specified lines of support and supervision.
- To be valued.
- To have safe working conditions.
- To be insured.
- To know what their rights and responsibilities are if something goes wrong.
- To be paid agreed expenses.
- where appropriate the Council will provide an induction period and a review/appraisal session to assess the progress of the placement and to resolve any problems
- To receive appropriate and relevant training.
- To be free from any form of discrimination or harassment which contravenes good equal opportunities practice.
- Have appropriate access to grievance and disciplinary procedures.

### **Expectation that Volunteers will be :**

- Reliable
- Honest
- Respect confidentiality and, where necessary, sign confidentiality agreements.
- Attend training and support sessions where agreed
- Carry out their tasks in a way which corresponds to the aims and values of the authority
- Work within agreed guidelines and remits.

5. 3. It is the responsibility of Council Services to identify ways in which the work of the Council can be extended by the involvement of volunteers, and to ensure that these opportunities complement rather than supplement the work of employees. The Council will consult with appropriate Trade Union when appropriate.
5. 4. Volunteers will not be asked to take on tasks formerly or currently undertaken by employees, or to work in ways, which facilitate a decrease in paid employment. Volunteers will not be employed in times of industrial action to do the work of paid staff. It is important to recognise however that they may continue with their regular work, but should not be asked to undertake additional duties.
5. 5. Turning to issues of recruitment, interview and selection all appropriate volunteering opportunities will be advertised widely in ways that are accessible to all sections of the community. Such advertising will specify the task to be undertaken and will draw attention to the benefits and experience to be gained from participation in volunteering. Written agreements between the Council and the volunteer will detail description of the task, time, commitment, necessary skills and actual duties. The Council's Equal Opportunities Policy will be adhered to in relation to appointing volunteers.
5. 6. The Council has clearly understood procedures for vetting volunteers who are to work with children and other vulnerable groups. Vetting/Screening procedures will take full account of proposals for a National System of Accreditation and vetting information (criminal record checks, etc) for adults working with children and young people in Scotland. The Council will request references where this is appropriate.
5. 7. An exception to requirement for vetting will apply to senior school pupils who involve themselves in school based volunteering for example assisting younger pupils with reading and writing activities. Where volunteering takes place within a school, normal school policies, guidance and staff supervision procedures will apply. Where pupils are undertaking a volunteering activity involving children outwith the school which the volunteer attends, then the head teacher should seek appropriate references from his / her staff on the suitability of all such pupils to undertake school organised volunteering. The head teacher would then confirm in writing with his or her counterpart at the recipient school that the pupil volunteers are deemed by the senior school to be suitable to work with young children. It remains clearly the responsibility of the primary schools to facilitate such volunteering with appropriate adult supervision and management.
5. 8. Whilst the bulk of volunteering activity may be undertaken by adults, it is recognised that some volunteering work may involve young people. The Council will expect that where such volunteering takes place appropriate and proper levels of support and supervision will be put in place for young people who volunteer.

6. **AN EMPLOYER, WITH SKILFUL STAFF, WHO THEMSELVES UNDERTAKE VOLUNTEERING.**

6. 1. The Council has over 12,000 employees many of who undertake volunteering activities within their own communities. The Council is very supportive of staff who use their skills and experience to the benefit of local interests, in the knowledge that many of these individuals bring in return additional information, understanding and skills to their profession. Indeed the council positively encourages staff to become involved in voluntary activity.
6. 2. The Council's Code of Conduct already addresses the relevant points on which staff should be aware when committing themselves to volunteering activities. For example: -In undertaking voluntary activities outside the Council, staff must ensure that there is no conflict of interest, and that there will be no adverse effect on the work of the Council. Care must be taken by staff in accepting gifts or opportunities that might conflict with the work or interests of the Council. Furthermore the use of Council resources (Council equipment, financial and other resources) is limited and always requires express consent from the council. Guidance from management is always available to staff who are in doubt over these matters.
6. 3. The Council in its encouragement of employer- supported volunteering will:
  - Increase employees' awareness of the opportunities for volunteering through advertising in Council bulletins, pre-retirement and professional development courses, etc.
  - The Council will look at the feasibility of designating an appropriate officer within services and Areas to support promote and encourage the involvement of employees in volunteering. Alternatively staff are encouraged to approach Volunteering Highland who can assist with the placement of volunteers.
  - The Council will seek to promote volunteering experiences to staff drawing on initiatives and events in Highland, for example events promoted during Volunteering Week, Children in Needs, Comic Relief, etc.