

Belfast City Council Volunteer Policy 2016

Volunteering underpins the life of the city of Belfast in youth work, sports clubs, faith based groups, events, older people’s work, community and environmental groups and much more. There is a long tradition of Belfast City Council supporting volunteering and involving its citizens in the work of the Council as volunteers. Volunteering in Belfast is about people choosing to give time to others and their communities so making the city a better place to live. This policy recognises and supports volunteering and works to enhance the positive contribution it has in reducing inequality and strengthening bonds between people across the City.

In producing this policy Belfast City Council seeks to create an enabling and facilitating environment for volunteering within the Council in order to improve the quality of volunteering.

While the Council plays a key role in building community capacity and providing civic leadership this policy is about volunteers involved directly by Belfast City Council. Further work is planned to enhance the Council’s role as an enabler of volunteering in partnership with other organisations.

Volunteering is defined as “the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice’.¹

This policy development is an opportunity for Belfast City Council to reaffirm our vision for volunteer support, improve our practice and work in partnership with colleagues to extend this approach across the Council. It also outlines the principles on which the relationship between a volunteer and Belfast City Council is based.

1	Introduction
1.1	The volunteering relationship is based on trust and involves no obligations associated with employment. No payment, other than the reimbursement of agreed out-of-pocket expenses is made.
1.2	Belfast City Council involves volunteers in its work. Volunteers add value to the work of paid staff and play an important role in delivery of the Belfast Agenda. Volunteering should be a mutually beneficial experience with the organisation, volunteers and service users all benefiting.
1.3	Individuals will be volunteering in an organisation that is committed to equal opportunities and diversity. This commitment is reflected throughout the organisation’s policies and practices.
1.4	This policy and associated procedures are designed to embed good volunteering practice and contribute to its consistent application across the Council.
1.5	By providing a positive, high quality volunteering experience, Belfast City Council will be better placed to attract, involve and retain volunteers.
1.6	Volunteers involved with Belfast City Council have a direct impact on the life of the city as well as supporting the delivery of the Belfast Agenda through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of programmes for children and young people; • Delivery of older people’s services; • Community based activity; • The arts; • Sport and Leisure activities;

¹ “Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future. The Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland”, Department for Social Development, March 2012

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and the environment ; • Events
--	---

2	Vision and Values
2.1	As already noted, Volunteering is defined as “the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice’. ²
2.2	Belfast City Council values volunteer involvement in its work as an expression of active citizenship. We recognise the integral role volunteering plays in delivery of the Belfast Agenda through supporting Living Here, Working and Learning, City Development and to a lesser extent Business Development.
2.3	We support and encourage volunteering that builds connected, cohesive, competitive and confident communities.
2.4	Belfast City Council values the involvement of volunteers in our work as they help reflect the interests, needs and resources of the communities we serve. Volunteers bring a unique perspective; they are part of our team, with a distinctive but complementary role alongside paid staff. Involving volunteers enables us to enhance the benefits we can offer to citizens.
2.5	We value volunteering across the community and recognise the important contribution volunteers make to all aspects of community life as well as the many vital services which they deliver. As a funder of community and voluntary sector organisations we seek to encourage a local environment which supports volunteering to grow.
2.6	Volunteering is a mutually beneficial experience. Belfast City Council benefits from the skills, experience and enthusiasm of volunteers. In turn we believe that volunteers should gain personal benefits, such as improved health and wellbeing and skills development from their volunteering experience. We are committed to managing volunteers in a way that ensures the needs of both parties are met.
2.7	Belfast City Council strives to be a diverse and inclusive organisation operating within a diverse and inclusive city. As part of this we are committed to ensuring equality of access to high quality volunteer opportunities and equality of treatment for our volunteers in all our policies and practices.

3	Volunteer Roles
3.1	Belfast City Council offers a range of roles for volunteers that bring added value to our work. Volunteers are involved at appropriate levels in roles which complement, but never substitute, the work of paid Council staff.
3.2	The role or task of the volunteer is identified prior to the placement of an individual at a given location. All volunteers are provided with a written role description, outlining the purpose, tasks and main expectations of their role. This role is reviewed with their immediate supervisor at least once a year.
3.3	Volunteers will not be asked to fulfil the roles of paid staff in times of industrial action. They may continue with their regular tasks but will not be asked to undertake additional duties.

4	Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers
4.1	Belfast City Council is committed to making volunteering an inclusive process in which people from diverse backgrounds and with diverse skills can participate. We wish to see all sections of the community represented amongst our volunteers. Volunteering opportunities

² “Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future. The Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan for Northern Ireland”, Department for Social Development, March 2012

	are widely promoted, and we will endeavour to make recruitment and selection materials available in formats accessible to any individual or group, upon request. We aim to review the make-up of our volunteers on a yearly basis to identify and target any under-represented groups.
4.2	Belfast City Council implements a fair, effective and open system in the recruitment and selection of volunteers and treats all information collected in this process confidentially. The acceptance of a volunteer is made on merit, the sole selection criterion being the individual's suitability to carry out agreed tasks.
4.3	All potential volunteers must complete the appropriate recruitment and selection process for the role they are applying for. Due to the range of roles available within Council this will vary but may include a registration form, a matching meeting, a reference check and a criminal records check in line with Access NI Guidelines.
4.4	The recruitment and selection process is conducted by an appropriately briefed/trained staff member and aims to ensure both parties give and receive sufficient information to assess whether the volunteering opportunities available match the potential volunteer's interests, skills, qualities and needs.

5	Management of Volunteers
5.1	<p>All volunteers will be managed in line with Belfast City Council's volunteer management procedures. Belfast City Council aims to reflect the voluntary nature of its relationship with volunteers in all our policies and procedures for managing their involvement. This will involve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A written letter of welcome which outlines the expectations and responsibilities of both the volunteer and Belfast City Council. ▪ An induction which will begin prior to commencing their voluntary work and continue as required during the settling in period. For one off and short term volunteer role opportunities induction should take place prior to the volunteer beginning the actual volunteer role. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All relevant health & safety training will be provided before a volunteer begins their role. ▪ Appropriate written information on relevant legislation, organisational policies and codes of behaviour. Volunteers will need to provide written confirmation of receipt of this information. ▪ All volunteers are allocated a named member of staff as their supervisor with an alternative identified should the designated supervisor be unavailable. This person will provide day to day guidance on any issue related to the voluntary work. ▪ For longer term roles, there will be a settling in/taster period, the length of which will depend on the nature and hours of the voluntary work. Volunteers are given additional support during this period ending in a review meeting between the volunteer and his/her supervisor to ensure both parties are satisfied with the arrangements. ▪ Regular support to and supervision of the volunteer. The frequency, duration and format of this support and supervision are agreed between the volunteer and his/her supervisor at the end of the settling in/taster period. ▪ The volunteer's designated supervisor will deal with minor complaints or issues about or by volunteers or their work through the council's volunteer management support and supervision procedures in the first instance. ▪ However we recognise our duty to protect the well-being and interests of our volunteers, staff and service users and therefore operate a formal complaints procedure in the case of more serious complaints. In the case of particularly serious offences, as specified in the Code of Conduct, for example inappropriate physical restraint, this process may be bypassed and/or the subject of the complaint asked to leave. Where a criminal offence is suspected the matter will be handed over to the police.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Belfast City Council will gather feedback and opinions from volunteers in appropriate ways and on a regular basis. ▪ Provision of adequate and appropriate facilities, equipment and resources to enable volunteers to fulfil their roles.
5.2	<p>Record Keeping</p> <p>In order to effectively monitor the work carried out by volunteers and how they are managed, a personal file is maintained for all volunteers. This will include contact details and other relevant personal information, the initial application forms, details of the recruitment and selection process, agreements made, hours worked, records of supervision, training undertaken and complaints or grievances received or made. Some of this information and other relevant information may also be recorded in computerised records. All such information is treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and volunteers are entitled to inspect all such information pertaining to them. Some information in relation to volunteering may be subject to Freedom of Information.</p>
5.3	<p>Insurance</p> <p>Belfast City Council will ensure that appropriate insurance is in place to cover the activities of volunteers whilst carrying out their voluntary role as agreed with their volunteer supervisor and recorded in the written role description. Drivers should, however, check with their own insurance company to ensure they are adequately covered whilst using their cars in connection with their voluntary work</p>
5.4	<p>Belfast City Council reimburses volunteers' agreed out of pocket expenses following the Council's procedure for volunteer expenses. This will require claims to be submitted on a standard Expenses Claim Form and accompanied by proof of expenditure. Full details of rates and methods for claiming will be given at induction.</p>
5.5	<p>Belfast City Council staff required to recruit, select and manage volunteers will be provided with the necessary training.</p>
6	Training
6.1	<p>Belfast City Council is committed to encouraging volunteers to improve their personal and professional effectiveness in order to fulfil their potential.</p>
6.2	<p>In addition to induction training, volunteers and their supervisors will agree appropriate training that is relevant to their voluntary role. All requests will be subject to available funding.</p>
7	Monitoring & Review of the Policy
7.1	<p>This policy is regularly monitored and reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it reflects the nature of volunteering within Belfast City Council and any legislative requirements.</p>