

Volunteers Policy

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i Document Information

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1. Context

The Authority has adopted the National Council for Volunteering Organisations (NCVO) definition of volunteering as:

‘..... any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.’

Volunteering plays a key part of the continued transformation of the Lee Valley Regional Park. The vision for the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is to become a ‘World Class Leisure Destination’ and the dedication of our registered volunteers continues to grow year on year through a range of mutually beneficial volunteering opportunities and quality volunteer management.

2. Objectives

These objectives are derived directly from the Authority’s aim for ‘Community – a Park which will provide opportunities for wellbeing’; this includes a specific objective that recognises the importance of the ‘provision of opportunities for volunteering’. Each objective identified below identifies actions that will deliver continuous improvements and enhancements to the service.

1. Develop a volunteer programme in the Authority and encourage activities for all by:
 - (i) Improving awareness and increasing access to volunteering opportunities for both the Authority and its managed venues.
 - (ii) Seek to raise the current ratio of volunteers to staff.
 - (iii) Work with all departments within the Authority to constantly identify new opportunities to meet changing needs and business priorities.
 - (iv) Secure Investing in Volunteers (IiV) every three years at renewal.
 - a) By constantly refining all procedures and ensure they are ‘best in class’ in line with IiV standards.
 - b) Ensure we carry out our duty of care to volunteers by operating robust procedures in relation to safeguarding and mechanisms for dealing with complaints or disciplinary incidents involving volunteers.
2. Match the Authority’s business needs with volunteer support through:
 - (i) Ensuring each department’s capacity can support the volunteer programme by identifying gaps and matching these with existing skill sets of existing and new volunteers.
 - (ii) Reviewing our recruitment processes to ensure new volunteers have the right skill set where possible to serve our business needs.
3. Develop opportunities to promote diversity involving groups from hard-to-reach communities and the voluntary sector by:

- (i) Promoting the Volunteer Strategy and programme to 'target groups'.
4. Resource additional support for volunteers by:
- (i) Reviewing the operation and function of the existing staff team, to ensure there are no capacity issues.
 - (ii) Actively promote the involvement (including sponsorship of sites) of 'corporates' through presentations and visits. 'Corporates' represent a good opportunity for volunteering as part of their corporate 'social responsibility' programmes.
 - (iii) Seek to develop new options for companies to contribute to the Park through their CSR activities.
 - (iv) Maintaining the enthusiasm and commitment of our existing volunteer base by ensuring individuals and groups are rewarded for their dedication, endeavour and contribution.
 - (v) Constantly review and examine our reward and recognition activities.
5. Encourage staff to pursue volunteering opportunities which support communities across the Region by:
- (i) Actively creating volunteering opportunities and then promoting and encouraging staff to pursue those opportunities initially in their own free time, but potentially longer term as part of a CSR programme.
6. Actively seek opportunities for joint partner programmes for volunteer activities through:
- (i) Identifying areas where further joint working can be identified and delivered. This should build on one or two partners that currently undertake projects with the organisation – for example Canal and River Trust and CHEXS, who already deliver joint projects across the Park.

3. Responsibilities

The Head of Human Resources is responsible for the delivery of the Policy and the Volunteers Officer is responsible for the overview, monitoring and evaluation of the Volunteer Policy.

4. Legal Considerations

1. There is no legislation in relation to working with volunteers (although there is case law which provides guidance). As an organisation using volunteers we have a duty to keep abreast of changes in good practice and ensure these are conveyed appropriately. Working with organisations such as National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), local volunteer centres and holder of the Investing in Volunteers Award (IIV) the Authority is seen as maintaining the highest standards of Volunteer Management.

2. Set out below are some suggestions (derived from the case law) to reduce the risk for the Authority of creating a legally binding contract with volunteers. It may not be realistic to avoid all of the potential risk factors, but removing some of the indicators of a contractual relationship should be possible:
 - (i) Avoid making payments to volunteers that could be construed as wages. Payments to cover actual expenses should be clearly identified as such and ideally reimbursed against receipts.
 - (ii) Remove or, at least, minimise perks that could be seen as consideration.
 - (iii) Reduce obligations on the part of the volunteer. Giving a volunteer the ability to refuse tasks and choose when to work will point away from the existence of a binding contract.
 - (iv) Avoid using language that makes the arrangement sound contractual and adopt flexible language, such as "usual" and "suggested".
 - (v) Treat volunteers fairly by dealing with problems and grievances and good communication between the parties should reduce the likelihood of disputes with volunteers.

5. Relevant Policy & Procedures

There is a Volunteers Strategy that is directly linked to this policy and a Volunteers Handbook that supports the overall volunteers programme. The volunteers programme is managed through process and procedure that is part of the Quality Management System process and there are relevant procedures available to all staff working with volunteers via the Authority's Intranet (Compass) and the Authority's Corporate and Visit web sites. There is also support in the form of a guide for staff who manage volunteers and an e-learning module which is available to all staff.

6. Policy Implementation

The implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Volunteers Officer and staff who work with volunteers. The policy will be published on Compass for all staff and training will be provided for those working directly with volunteers. The policy will also be available on the Lee Valley Visit and Authority Corporate web sites.

7. Monitoring & Evaluation

1. The effectiveness of this policy will be measured against the following targets:
 - Volunteer Hours
 - Active Volunteers
 - Monetary Value of Volunteering
 - Non-Riparian Volunteers percentage changes
 - Minority Volunteers percentage changes
 - Ratio of Volunteers to Staff
2. The following Performance Indicators are reported via the Authority Scorecard to the Members:
 - Usage
 - Customer Satisfaction
 - Complaints

- Compliments
- Regionality
- Health and Safety Audit

8. Review

The policy will be fully reviewed every 3 years or sooner if any legislation comes into place or changes.

9. Glossary of Terms

Some of the terminology used in this document may be unfamiliar so this glossary has been attached to clarify some new terminology.

- **Private and Commercial Sector Groups (Corporate Tasks)** – Groups of volunteers who are attached to a company or organisation undertaking a single day of volunteering activity. Normally funded by the company and undertaken on a normal working day. Used also as team building days or also called community days.
- **Diversity** – In this context means the variety of people that you have within your volunteering force and will include ethnic diversity, age diversity, gender diversity, disability diversity and community diversity. The essence is not to discriminate against any level of diversity within an organisation.
- **Hard-to-Reach / Minority** - ('target groups') current terminology used by the government and volunteering organisations to describe any person or group who may not have access to general information due to language or technical barriers. This includes many ethnic minority communities, people with disabilities or young or old sections of the community.

10. Appendices

There are a several companion documents to this policy:

- Volunteer Strategy Document
- Volunteers Handbook
- Staff Guide to working with Volunteers