

Somerset Council Volunteering Policy and Framework

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Introduction

This document provides the policy and framework within which volunteers are recruited, deployed, managed and supported to add value and richness to Somerset Council services. It defines 'volunteering' and details the principles on which the Council recruits, supports and manages volunteers.

It is not a detailed operational guide – for this please see the [Volunteer Leads' and Managers' Handbook](#). The Handbook has the same status as this document; therefore the processes it includes should be followed as Somerset Council policy.

All volunteer roles must be approved through the [Central Volunteer Team](#), which will also support services through the necessary processes.

Why volunteering matters

Somerset Council recognises that enabling and encouraging people to participate in volunteering activity will provide benefits to those involved, the people they support and the wider community. The time, energy and expertise volunteers bring to supporting the county's services and communities is something to celebrate.

Volunteering supports the delivery of the County Business Plan through:

- Improving lives and delivering services and support to more people than would otherwise be possible;
- Providing people with additional skills and experience to improve their employability;
- Providing people with a sense of purpose and attachment to their community which helps them live healthy, safe and independent lives;
- Supporting people and their communities to be resilient, well-connected and compassionate by linking individuals and groups through volunteering;

It is recognised that volunteering has significant social value which is felt by the volunteer themselves, the people and families they support, the host organisation – in our case Somerset Council – and wider society. Volunteers develop skills, knowledge and experience that can be useful in paid employment and other environments.

What is volunteering?

For the purposes of this policy Somerset Council defines volunteering as:

'An activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and social action.'

Volunteering in Somerset Council

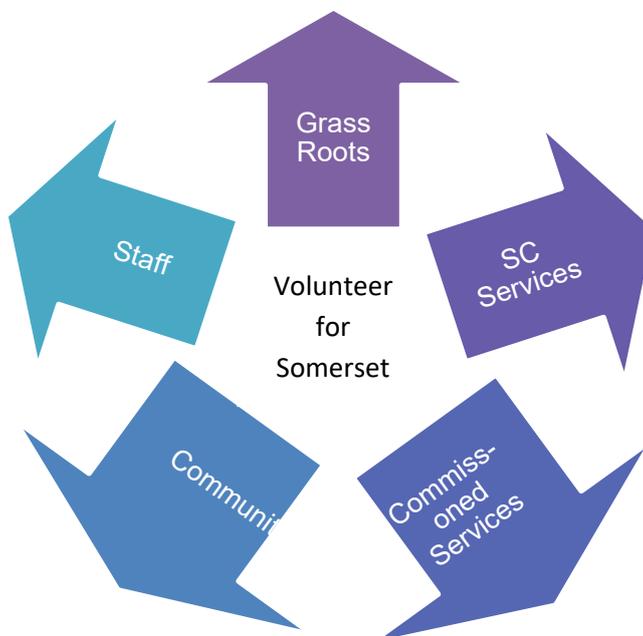
Somerset Council encourages the involvement of volunteers in its services. Volunteering is overseen by the Central Volunteer Team which works with services to:

- Embed a consistent approach across all council services to how we Identify, Promote, Recruit and Match, Support, Review and Celebrate volunteering.
- Provide an enhanced gatekeeper and commissioning role around volunteer activity
- Develop and promote opportunities for staff volunteering
- Consider how the Council works with and supports the broader voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector

The involvement of volunteers enhances the effectiveness of Somerset Council services, in particular adding value and richness to activities, and offers new ways to meet individual needs.

It is recognised that employee volunteering can improve job satisfaction, commitment and performance, as well as strengthen relationships with community groups. Somerset Council has a stand-alone staff volunteering policy – [click here for information](#).

Somerset Council Volunteer Framework



Grass roots	Encouraging individuals to recognise the power of their actions to change things that are important to them (e.g. good neighbour initiatives)
Community / place-based	Supporting and encouraging formal and informal volunteer opportunities, including organisation and place-based approaches - recognising the role of VCFSE infrastructure
Somerset Council services	Supporting coherence and consistency in the approach to volunteering
Commissioned services	Developing and embedding standards and expectations across commissioned services which involve volunteers, and maximising opportunities to deliver broader social value
Employer-sponsored volunteering	Supporting our own staff to play an active role in their communities

Somerset Council standards and expectations for volunteer management

The following guiding principles, outcomes and standards inform and guide Somerset Council's approach to volunteering and commissioning services which involve volunteers.

Guiding Principles:

- Effective volunteer involvement requires a culture, leadership and structure that supports and values the role of volunteers and the volunteers themselves.
- Volunteers' rights should be protected. This includes the right to volunteer in a safe and supportive environment. Volunteers are owed the same duty of care as paid staff.
- Volunteering opportunities should be open to all and should be an enriching and positive experience, with volunteers engaged in meaningful and useful activities.
- Volunteers need to understand their responsibilities which include acting responsibly, being accountable for their actions and respecting organisational values and practices.

Key Outcomes

Outcomes:	Activities:
Effective arrangements are in place to embed a positive culture of volunteering and to ensure volunteer roles are suitable	Identify
Volunteer opportunities and the benefits of volunteering are widely understood and information is easy to access	Promote
Timely recruitment of the right volunteers to the right roles	Recruit and match
Volunteers understand their roles and have the knowledge, skills and support to safely and effectively carry out their duties and achieve their goals	Support and develop
Volunteer contribution, value and impact is understood, appreciated and celebrated	Review and celebrate

Standards

Identify
Effective arrangements are in place to embed a positive culture of volunteering and to ensure volunteer roles are suitable
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Volunteer involvement is appropriate, planned and designed to contribute to Somerset Council's strategic aims and objectives. 2. Policies and procedures applying to volunteers are communicated, understood and implemented by all relevant staff and kept under regular review. 3. Responsibilities for leading and managing volunteer involvement are defined, supported and implemented. 4. Resources (including time, funds, equipment and technology) are allocated for volunteer involvement and management. 5. Appropriate safeguards are in place to protect the volunteer, Somerset Council and individuals they may be in contact with. 6. Learning, expertise and resources are shared and efforts are made to minimise duplication and overlap.

Promote

Volunteer opportunities and the benefits of volunteering are widely understood and information is easy to access

1. Activities to attract volunteers with the relevant interests, knowledge, skills and attributes are planned and reviewed.
2. The benefits and opportunities for volunteering are effectively promoted through appropriate channels.
3. Collaborative opportunities to promote volunteering, such as National Volunteers' Week, are explored with partners.

Recruit and Match

Timely recruitment of the right volunteers to the right roles

1. Expectations are managed, and potential volunteers are provided with relevant information about Somerset Council, the volunteer role and the recruitment and selection process.
2. Volunteers are selected based on interest, knowledge, skills and attributes relevant to the role, in line with good practice.
3. Volunteer recruitment processes help maintain the safety and security of service users, employees and volunteers, and comply with Safer Recruitment standards.
4. Where appropriate, individuals are signposted to other Council or community opportunities.

Support and Develop

Volunteers understand their roles and have the knowledge, skills and support to safely and effectively carry out their duties and achieve their goals

1. Volunteers complete an induction and other training relevant to their role and responsibilities.
2. Processes are in place to protect the health and safety of volunteers, and volunteers can report issues and concerns.
3. Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.
4. Services are respectful of volunteers' cultural values and perspectives.
5. Volunteers are provided with appropriate supervision, support and direction that enables them to effectively carry out their roles.
6. Effective communication channels ensure volunteers are informed and up to date with relevant developments and initiatives.
7. Volunteer roles are reviewed with input from volunteers and employees.
8. Exit processes recognise achievements, capture feedback and where appropriate encourage future re-engagement of volunteers.

Review and Celebrate

Volunteer contribution, value and impact is understood, appreciated and celebrated

1. The impact of volunteer involvement and their experience with Somerset Council is monitored and evaluated.
2. Volunteers can inform and influence service delivery and design.
3. Volunteers are informed about how their contributions benefit Somerset Council, service users and the community.
4. Volunteer contribution is tracked and understood.

5. Volunteers are thanked and their contribution is acknowledged and celebrated.