

Telford & Wrekin Council

# Volunteer Handbook

## How do I become a volunteer?

Thank you for thinking about becoming a volunteer with Telford & Wrekin Council. This booklet will give you some information on what it means to be a volunteer with the council. It sets out what we would expect from you as a volunteer and also our commitment to you and other information that you might find useful.

Telford & Wrekin Council is a Co-operative Council which aims to work closely with residents, partners and local organisations to deliver the best we can for the borough. We are responsible for all local government functions in the Telford and Wrekin area. This includes services for children and families, adult care and support, leisure, libraries, planning and building control, recycling and waste. We aim to provide high quality services to all our customers. Volunteers are very important in helping us to do this in lots of our service areas. There are many different opportunities to volunteer, for example you might want to volunteer to work in a youth club or to work with some adults who may be vulnerable.

If you decide that you would like to volunteer with the council, you can visit [www.volunteertelford.co.uk](http://www.volunteertelford.co.uk). This website lists all of our volunteering opportunities. Using this site you can apply for whichever opportunity you are interested in and we will get in touch with you to discuss it further.

If there are opportunities to volunteer which you find interesting then you will be asked to complete a short application form and you may be asked to a meeting to discuss your application. An example is included at the back of this booklet.

If you are going to be volunteering for some specific types of work with children or adults who may be vulnerable we will need ask for a check to be made against the relevant 'barred' lists' as some people have been barred from working in these areas and we are legally required to check these lists before we allow people to start working or volunteering in such areas. We may also ask you to have a criminal records check or to give names of people who can give you a reference.

If you are accepted as a volunteer then you will be asked to sign a volunteer agreement (like the one at the back of this booklet). You will also be introduced to a council employee who will be your main council contact whilst you are a volunteer.

## Why Volunteer?

As a volunteer you will be giving your time to help improve the lives of people within Telford and Wrekin, but there are also personal benefits associated with volunteering, including:

- the chance to have fun doing something you have never tried before
- increasing your confidence

- a sense of satisfaction and achievement
- the opportunity to make new friends and contacts
- the possibility of some training and to be able to learn new skills
- the chance to test out a potential new career
- increasing your experience to be able to apply for a new job
- making a fresh start

### **Our commitment to you**

As a volunteer, you can expect to be:

- ❖ given an introduction to the council before or when you start volunteering
- ❖ receive support and guidance from a council contact and to be given chances to meet with them on a regular basis
- ❖ given a clear idea of the things you are being asked to do and the responsibility that it will mean
- ❖ given training to be able to do your volunteering
- ❖ treated with dignity and respect
- ❖ asked to do genuine volunteering not 'unpaid' work
- ❖ provided with the appropriate tools and/or equipment
- ❖ to have the chance to discuss any changes which may affect your volunteering and to be able to give your views
- ❖ provided with a reference on the basis of your voluntary work

### **What we expect from you**

As a volunteer, we expect you to:

- be reliable
- be honest
- treat people with dignity and respect
- follow council policies and practices
- report any issues of concern to your council contact, especially in relation to concerns over the safety of children and vulnerable adults.

- give reasonable notice of absences where appropriate (e.g. when you go on holiday) or of your intention to stop volunteering.
- inform the Benefits Office before you start volunteering if you are on state benefit
- inform your insurer if you are going to use your car during your volunteering. Any increase in premiums should be covered.
- If you are a volunteer in an area which requires you to have had a criminal records check, then we would also expect you to notify your council contact if you are being investigated by the police or receive a criminal caution, conviction or reprimand at anytime whilst you are still a volunteer with the council.

### What council policies will I need to follow?

As a volunteer with the council we will expect you to follow all of our policies and codes of practice. Your council contact will be able to give you more details on these but the main policies which you need to know about are:

- **Equality & Diversity:** We are committed to providing real equality of opportunity for all and we also expect our employees and volunteers to treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- **Health & Safety:** We aim to keep people safe and as a volunteer, you will be expected to behave in a way which is safe for you and others. You will also be expected to report anything that may appear to be unsafe practice.
- **Smoking:** You will not be able to smoke in any Telford & Wrekin Council building or place of work
- **Protecting Children & Vulnerable Adults:** The council has policies for the protection of children and vulnerable adults which you will be expected to follow if you are volunteering to work with these groups.
- **Confidentiality:** In order to ensure that all customers of council services are protected, and in particular children and vulnerable adults, volunteers are required to maintain confidentiality when carrying out voluntary work with the council and after voluntary work has come to an end. As such you should not under any circumstances discuss any confidential information with any unauthorised person. If you are unsure what information you can discuss and with whom you should ask your council contact.

### **Do I get paid expenses for volunteering?**

If you need to use your car as part of your voluntary role, you will be paid travel expenses. You must be insured to use your car on council business. Your council contact will be able to give you information on this.

### **Will I be insured by the council whilst I am volunteering?**

The council's main insurance (public liability, employers' liability and officials' liability) does cover volunteers when they are acting on behalf of the council. You will need to have your own insurance cover if you use your car on council business.

### **I am currently in receipt of benefits. Will volunteering affect these?**

Volunteering should not affect your right to benefits as long as the only money you receive is to cover your volunteering expenses. However it is always advisable to discuss this with your benefits adviser before you start volunteering. Your benefits adviser will vary depending on the type of benefit you receive. It could be the council (for benefits such as Council Tax and Housing Benefit), Jobcentre Plus or The Pension Service. There are no limits on the amount of time you can volunteer for as long as you continue to meet the conditions of the benefit or tax credit you are receiving. For example if you receive Jobseekers Allowance you must still be actively seeking a full-time job, able to attend job interviews at 48 hours notice and be available to work at one week's notice.

### **Will I have to have a criminal record check to do volunteering?**

In many volunteer roles we will not ask you to have a criminal records check. For some types of volunteering with children or adults, however, we will ask you to have a criminal records check. We would want to talk to you confidentially about any past convictions or warnings you may have received before we could accept you as a volunteer in those areas. This is because we need to make sure children and adults are as safe as possible. We understand, however, that whilst you may have had criminal record in the past, you may have put that behind you and moved on and we will take this into consideration. If you want to discuss this further you can ring People Services on 01952 383522 and ask to talk to one of the advisors.

### **I am under 18, can I still volunteer**

We are always keen to encourage more young people to volunteer for the council so there is no reason why you cannot volunteer if you are 16 or 17 years old. However we will need to ensure that the role will not place you or the people you are working with at risk so this will be discussed with you at application stage. We will also seek consent from your parent or guardian. If you do volunteer for us, we will ensure that you are properly supported and supervised at all times by adults (employees or other volunteers) who have had a DBS check.

### **What training will I receive as a volunteer?**

You will be given an introduction to the role and the council by your council contact when you first start volunteering. There may also be courses you are required to attend which are relevant to the role you are volunteering in. If this is the case your council contact will discuss this with you.

### **What if I have any problems during my volunteering?**

Please raise any problems with your council contact who will try to sort out any concerns. If do not want to raise issues with your council contact, you may prefer to raise these with another manager. The Speak Up Policy is also a way that volunteers can raise issues of serious concern within the council if they do not feel they can raise these issues with their main council contact. Examples may include possible fraud or corruption, theft, dangerous procedures risking health and safety, abuse of clients or pupils, damage to the environment or discriminatory behaviour. Issues will investigated as appropriate or referred to relevant organisations.

### **What if I no longer want to volunteer?**

If you decide that you no longer wish to volunteer, simply tell your council contact. You may be asked to give us some information on your experiences of volunteering which we can use to help us improve our services.