

Assistant Chief Executive's Human Resources

Employee Supported Volunteering Policy

Introduction

In support of the Rotherham Together Partnership and the Council's social commitment, the Council encourages its staff to engage as volunteers in a broad range of social, environmental and economic initiatives across the Borough.

By actively supporting the community and continuing to be a socially responsible organisation, allowing the sharing of employee's skills, expertise and time by way of social action days and individual activities which have a direct impact on residents, the Council believes that this will have a positive impact for both our communities and staff.

This policy applies to Council employees who are not directly employed by schools, enabling employees to undertake volunteering during working hours as part of their normal working day. This policy cannot be used to 'claim back' any time spent volunteering outside of these hours.

Scope

Voluntary activity can be defined as: 'any activity that involves spending time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives' (National Council for Voluntary Organisations).

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual and whilst employees will be in receipt of their contractual pay when volunteering (in line with this policy), they must not receive payment (apart from claiming expenses) from the organisation where they choose to volunteer.

Volunteering can cover numerous activities such as care work, conservation projects, team challenges, one to one support, using professional skills or board membership and fundraising.

Opportunities do not necessarily need to be related to an employee's current role or skills; they can be a chance to try something new.

The Council supports employee volunteering that contributes to social value and to achieving the Council's priorities.

Up to three days' paid leave per year is available for employees to undertake volunteering activities. Employees can use the volunteer leave flexibly, for example three days in one block, one day at a time or in half days.

Volunteering may be undertaken in two ways:

1. Social Action – Opportunities may be staffed by teams as part of a team building exercise or by a number of staff from across a range of services. Social Action volunteering provides the opportunity for a collective effort to support an identified community project. Where appropriate staff will work alongside partner organisations to deliver a high impact, visible and reassuring approach to an identified community need. Advice on the suitability of a specific opportunity being used as a team building exercise will be provided by the HR Consultancy Team and Organisational Development.
2. Individual Volunteering – these opportunities will be identified by individual staff members independent of the Council. Where an individual wishes to undertake an individual volunteering opportunity they must refer to the staff volunteering policy and seek line manager approval before any commitment is made. HR Consultants, working alongside Organisational Development, will provide general advice and guidance in these instances and to both the individual staff member, line manager and the recipient organisation.

Applying for Leave

Approval for Social Action or individual volunteering leave rests with line managers and before agreeing to undertake any type of volunteering activity during working hours, employees need to speak to, and get agreement from, their manager.

Where a whole team or multiple team members request to be involved in a social action volunteering activity, final decision to approve the request must be taken by the relevant Assistant Director.

All managers are encouraged to support staff volunteering in line with this policy, however there are no additional resources available for covering time off and therefore each volunteering request must be considered on its own merits. Before approving an individual or social action volunteering activity, managers should consider the amount of time required to undertake the volunteering opportunity and the impact on service delivery, in addition to the wellbeing and motivational impact on the wider team and the individual/s making the request.

The Council will not normally approve any requests that lead to additional costs or operational difficulties to the Council.

The application for paid leave to undertake voluntary work must meet the following criteria:

- Involvement helps employees engage with and achieve a better understanding of the needs of residents and local communities
- Involvement contributes to the development of the individual/team wellbeing, team building and engagement
- Involvement benefits the local community/residents
- Involvement must support Council priorities and the Council's social value commitment

Reasonable requests for volunteer leave that meet the criteria will be approved. However, the request could be declined if:

- There is a potential conflict of interest with the employee's substantive role or Council interests
- The activity will bring the Council into disrepute
- There are health and safety concerns
- There is no apparent benefit to the Council's priorities
- There will be a detrimental impact on the needs of the Council and its services

- The member of staff's work commitments cannot be rearranged to accommodate requested time off
- The employee's individual performance level is likely to suffer
- The volunteering is being undertaken during the employee's own time

The Council reserves the right, having considered each individual case, to refuse an application where any of the above criteria are not met.

If an employee feels that their request has been rejected wrongly then they can ask for a review by outlining their reasons in writing and sending this to the manager of their manager within 10 working days. Following this review there will be no further right of appeal.

Responsibilities

Employees are trusted to use this time for its intended purpose, any suspected instances of misuse will be investigated in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures.

As representatives of the Council employee's actions directly reflect on the organisation and all employees must act in line with the Employee Code of Conduct whilst using volunteering leave.

Any concerns with an employee's conduct whilst volunteering will be investigated in line with the relevant Council disciplinary procedures.

It is the manager's responsibility to be satisfied that the employee has considered and accepted any risks associated with the proposed volunteering activity. The Council will not be liable for damages or injuries that occur whilst volunteering and it is the employee's responsibility to ensure that the host organisation has its own Public Liability Insurance in place as required. Advice is available from the Neighbourhood Team on request.

Recording of Voluntary work

As well as providing much needed support to the local community, volunteering allows employees to develop new skills both for their own personal development and for the benefit of the local communities.

It is therefore important that we capture this information in a similar way to other training activity undertaken. This will enable the Council to keep records and monitor the effectiveness of all volunteering undertaken.

Employees should record the volunteering activity via [Employee Self-Service](#)