

Volunteer Policy

This policy applies to volunteers undertaking work / duties on behalf of, but not directly employed by, the Town Council

1. Volunteers must be adequately trained to be able to carry out the role. The exact nature of the training will depend on the role. It is not possible to detail what constitutes 'adequacy' as requirements will vary according to:

- the job or activity;
- the existing competency of volunteers;
- the circumstances of the work (e.g. the degree of supervision);
- the tools and/or equipment being used.

The training standard, however, must be sufficient to ensure the Health and Safety of volunteers and any people who might be affected by the work, as far as reasonably practicable. Responsibility for providing training rests with the individual to whom authority has been provided by the Town Council to undertake the work / duty.

2. Volunteers, if working for only a few hours to help at an event or similar, must still be informed about the task and its purpose, health and safety and supervision arrangements. Responsibility for this rests with the individual to whom authority has been provided by the Town Council to undertake the work.

3. Volunteers expect to be treated equally, regardless of their gender, race, age, faith/religion, disability or sexual orientation. Volunteers must be accommodated from all walks of life.

4. Volunteers must undergo an induction appropriate for the task(s) being undertaken. This must include health and safety, what to do if there is a problem and an introduction to other relevant individuals. Responsibility for the induction rests with the individual to whom authority has been provided by the Town Council to undertake the work.

5. A risk assessment must be undertaken in order to identify risks that might be faced and how they will be managed. If an area of activity presents a significant risk, consideration must be given to reducing or stopping the activity which gives rise to the risk. The Town Council, through the office of its Clerk or other person(s) as advised, must receive a copy of such risk assessment records. Responsibility for undertaking the risk assessment rests with the individual to whom authority has been provided by the Town Council to undertake the work. Risk assessments and their associated paperwork must comply with current Health and Safety at Work legislation.

6. In so far as insurance is concerned, on condition that volunteers are working at the sole request of and under the sole control of the Town Council Volunteer Policy they will be insured under the Town Council's Public Liability and Employers' Liability cover. Reporting to the Town Council in respect of work which is of an ongoing nature is not necessary on each occasion and does not require formal approval of the Town Council on each occasion.

7. Volunteers may only carry out less hazardous work involving non powered hand tools; for example, path maintenance, sand clearance, tree planting etc. Minimum levels of PPE (suitable footwear, gloves, safety goggles etc.) must be worn when undertaking such activities. Prior to work commencing, a visual inspection must be carried out to ensure that there are no obvious hazards such as litter, glass or stones. Responsibility for undertaking the inspection rests with the individual or group to whom authority has been provided by the Town Council to undertake the work. Remedial action must be taken immediately and these inspections are to be recorded. The Town Council cannot be held liable for any injury caused by the use or misuse of tools or faulty equipment. The use of cleaning materials must not be stronger than those available on shop shelves; however no chemicals can be mixed. No weed killers can be used in or around any Town council properties. High visibility vests or other appropriate clothing must be worn where appropriate.

8. Jewellery, necklaces, watches and the like must not be worn where they compromise the safe working environment for the volunteer.

9. Trainers, open-toed shoes, heeled shoes or sandals must not be worn if the safe working environment for the volunteer is compromised.

10. Long hair must be tied up if it is deemed that it could compromise health and safety requirements.

11. All work undertaken by volunteers shall have regard to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and all other Health and Safety Legislation.

12. Volunteers wishing to provide the Town Council with an update on their activities can do so during the informal public participation session of any Town Council or Community Amenities meeting.

13. Out of pocket expenses will not be paid to any volunteer / group without prior permission being granted (receipts to be produced / claim form to be completed and submitted).

14. Volunteers must inform the Town Council of the work they intend to undertake before commencement; this can be done in two ways: a) At the beginning of a Council meeting b) In writing to the Town Clerk In both instances, written approval must be received prior to the undertaking of any work / activities on Town property.

Volunteer Programme

Key questions:

What is risk?

Why we assess risk within our volunteer programme?

What types of risk can be associated with involving volunteers?

How do I keep it manageable?

What is the process for assessing and managing risks?

What is risk?

Risk is everywhere. Every action we take, from crossing the road to trying something for the first time, is a calculated risk.

Risk describes the uncertainty surrounding events and their outcomes that may have a significant effect, either positive or negative, on:

- Operational performance
- Achievement of aims and objectives
- Meeting expectations

The process of risk assessment is designed to enable the council to control and minimise risk and its impact. No activity is risk free and even with good planning it may be impossible to eliminate the risks from any activity. However, if something does go wrong, good risk management should help to minimise the impact of the event.

Why we assess risks within our volunteer programme?

Organisations that involve volunteers are well aware of the benefits they bring. However, they are not always adequately prepared for things going wrong which may cause significant harm to the volunteer, service users, colleagues or the organisation itself.

There are a number of very good reasons why Gainsborough Town Council takes the time to assess risks:

- To protect the council and its resources
- To protect service users
- To maximise effectiveness through applying good practice to address areas of potential weakness

What types of risk can be associated with involving volunteers?

The more demanding the volunteer role and the more contact the volunteer has with colleagues, user groups etc the greater the potential risks. However, even the most seemingly benign role needs to be assessed to identify what could potentially go wrong. The following are just some examples:

Risks to the council and its reputation, for example:

- Volunteer misrepresenting the council through speaking or acting inappropriately
- Volunteer breaching confidentiality
- Service users suffering harm through actions of a volunteer

Risks to service users through, for example:

- Volunteer providing inaccurate information or advice
- Volunteer failing to provide adequate standard of care
- Volunteer breaching confidentiality.

Risks to the volunteer through, for example:

- Council failing to provide adequate training
- Council failing to meet relevant health and safety standards
- Council having inadequate policies and procedures to protect, support and supervise volunteers whilst engaged in voluntary work.

Risk of harm to colleagues through, for example:

- Volunteer acting outside of role description and exceeding skills and/or authority
- Substandard performance by a volunteer
- Theft or fraud by a volunteer.

How do we keep it manageable?

Unfortunately it becomes very easy to see risks in every activity which can make us fearful of engaging volunteers in any capacity. However, the process of risk assessment helps us to identify the really significant risks which should be given particular attention and provides a framework for identifying appropriate actions that should be taken to reduce risks. Implementing this process is in itself a significant step in reducing the overall level of risk.

While managing risk is very important, it is equally important that the measures used do not place unnecessary or impractical restrictions on volunteers preventing them from carrying out their roles fully. It is also important that the process of risk assessment does not become overly excessive or onerous for the council. Organisations commencing the risk management process should remember that the rule of thumb is “reasonable measures, reasonably applied”.

What is the process for assessing and managing risk?

The risk assessment process involves working systematically through four key steps:

1. Identifying the risks faced
2. Categorising the seriousness of these risks according to likelihood and impact
3. Identifying and implementing measures for managing the risks
4. Regularly reviewing your risk assessment to factor in change.

In order to be effective, your approach should be:

- Systematic
- Regular
- Recorded
- Involving all appropriate people
- Monitored
- Reviewed
- Effectively communicated.

1. Identifying risks

The first step is to start to list the risks that exist within the council's volunteer programme. In order to do this the council review volunteering on three levels:

- The activities and functions of each volunteer role
- How volunteers are recruited, selected, inducted and managed
- Any particular risks associated with the individuals carrying out these roles

The Council consider whether there is potential for harm to the volunteer, service users, colleagues and council.

2. Categorising risks

Secondly, we identify which risks are the most serious. By systematically categorising the risks identified, you are able to identify which warrant the most attention.

For each risk identified in the previous stage, the council rate the level of risk according to the likelihood of it happening and the seriousness of the potential impact were it to happen. We use a scale (e.g. High, Medium & Low). The council prioritise the risks according to the rating given. Those which have higher risk ratings (e.g. those that are both high likelihood and high severity) are given much greater and more urgent attention.

3. Manage the risk

The next step the council take is to look at what can be done to reduce the likelihood and lessen the impact of the identified risks. Risks can be managed in a number of ways. You can:

- Eliminate the risk
- Substitute the risk
- Engineering controls
- Administration controls
- Personal Protective Equipment

The first aim is to remove the risk completely. This may involve ceasing the activity or parts of the activity. If this is not possible steps should be taken to reduce the risk. This may involve reviewing and adjusting procedures, adopting new policies or practices or providing additional training.

□ Eliminate the risk

Eliminating the hazard—physically removing it—is the most effective hazard control. For example, if employees must work high above the ground, the hazard can be eliminated by moving the piece they are working on to ground level to eliminate the need to work at heights.

□ Substitute the risk

Substitution, the second most effective hazard control, involves replacing something that produces a hazard (similar to elimination) with something that does not produce a hazard—for example, replacing lead based paint with acrylic paint. To be an effective control, the new product must not produce another hazard. Because airborne dust can be hazardous, if a product can be purchased with a larger particle size, the smaller product may effectively be substituted with the larger product.

□ Engineering controls

The third most effective means of controlling hazards is engineered controls. These do not eliminate hazards, but rather isolate people from hazards. Capital costs of engineered controls tend to be higher than less effective controls in the hierarchy; however they may reduce future costs. For example, a crew might build a work platform rather than purchase, replace, and maintain fall arrest equipment. "Enclosure and isolation" creates a physical barrier between personnel and hazards, such as using remotely controlled equipment. Fume hoods can remove airborne contaminants as a means of engineered controls.

□ Administrative controls

Administrative controls are changes to the way people work. Examples of administrative controls include procedure changes, employee training, and installation of signs and warning labels. Administrative controls do not remove hazards, but limit or prevent people's exposure to the hazards, such as completing road construction at night when fewer people are driving.

□ Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) includes gloves, respirators, hard hats, safety glasses, high-visibility clothing, and safety footwear. PPE is the least effective means of controlling hazards because of the high potential for damage to render PPE ineffective. Additionally, some PPE, such as respirators, increase physiological effort to complete a task and, therefore, may require medical examinations to ensure workers can use the PPE without risking their health.

When this is done we need to decide when these further measures should be taken or implemented and who will be responsible.

4. Review the risks

Risk management within Gainsborough Town Council is a continuous process and is regularly reviewed. It is not reasonable the council complete and document these steps and feel that in itself that is enough. Once an action plan has been agreed, we then schedule in a review to check that things have been done and if appropriate review the risk rating as a result of the action that has been taken.

Risks within the council are constantly kept under review and all existing procedures and work practices are evaluated to ascertain if the risk management in place has had the desired effect of reducing risk and creating a safer environment for us all. All new volunteer roles and activities and any new individuals recruited for these roles will be subject to a risk assessment.

Review of risk assessments within the volunteer programme will feed into the risk management processes within the council as a whole.