

UPTON & NORTH ELMSALL PARISH COUNCIL

VOLUNTEER POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Purpose of this Policy

Upton and North Elmsall Parish Council recognises and values the contribution that volunteers can make to the local community.

This policy sets out how the Council will involve, support and manage volunteers who undertake activities on behalf of the Parish Council. It is intended to ensure that volunteering is carried out safely, appropriately and with clear expectations for both volunteers and the Council.

This policy also helps to protect the Council, its staff, councillors, volunteers and members of the public by ensuring that volunteer activities are properly authorised, risk assessed and supervised.

2. Scope

This policy applies to volunteers who are acting directly on behalf of Upton and North Elmsall Parish Council and who have been authorised to carry out activities by the Council or by the Clerk under delegated authority.

This policy does not automatically apply to volunteers working on behalf of third-party organisations, hirers, tenants, allotment groups, community groups, charities or other external bodies, even where their activities take place on Parish Council land or premises.

Where a third-party group is using Council land, buildings or facilities, that group remains responsible for managing its own volunteers unless the Council has formally agreed otherwise in writing.

No individual, councillor, volunteer, tenant, hirer or community group may represent themselves as acting on behalf of the Parish Council unless they have been formally authorised to do so.

3. Definition of a Volunteer

For the purposes of this policy, a volunteer is a person who freely gives their time, skills or experience without payment to support activities authorised by Upton and North Elmsall Parish Council.

Volunteers are not employees of the Council. Nothing in this policy creates an employment relationship, contract of employment or entitlement to payment.

Volunteers may include, for example:

- residents assisting with Council-approved community projects;
- individuals supporting events organised by the Parish Council;
- people assisting with planting, tidying or environmental projects approved by the Council;
- individuals assisting with other Council-approved activities.

Councillors may also volunteer their time, but when doing so they must remain mindful of their role as elected members and must not act outside Council authority.

4. Approval of Volunteer Activities

Volunteer activities must be authorised in advance.

Approval may be given by:

- Full Council;
- a committee with appropriate delegated authority;
- the Clerk, where the activity is operational, low risk, within existing Council policy or decisions, and within the Clerk's delegated authority.

Volunteers must not begin any work on behalf of the Council until the activity has been approved and appropriate arrangements are in place.

The Council may decline or withdraw approval for any volunteer activity where there are concerns about safety, suitability, insurance, safeguarding, reputational risk, conflict with Council policy, or any other reasonable concern.

5. Role of the Clerk

The Clerk is responsible for the day-to-day administration of volunteer arrangements on behalf of the Council.

This may include:

- receiving requests or offers to volunteer;
- confirming whether proposed volunteer work has been authorised;
- ensuring appropriate risk assessments are in place;
- ensuring volunteers receive relevant information before starting;
- keeping appropriate records;
- reporting relevant matters to Council or committee;
- stopping volunteer activity where there is a safety, governance or other concern.

Where appropriate, the Clerk may delegate day-to-day supervision of a volunteer activity to another member of staff, councillor or authorised person.

6. Recruitment and Suitability

The Council will consider the nature of the volunteer role before agreeing who may undertake it.

Depending on the activity, the Council may need to consider:

- the volunteer's skills, experience and physical ability to carry out the task safely;
- whether any training or supervision is needed;
- whether the role involves contact with children or vulnerable adults;
- whether a DBS check is required;
- whether the role involves access to confidential information, keys, equipment or Council premises;
- whether there are any health and safety concerns.

The Council is not obliged to accept every offer of voluntary assistance.

7. Young Volunteers

The Council may allow young people to volunteer where the activity is suitable, properly supervised and appropriately risk assessed.

Parental or guardian consent will usually be required for volunteers under the age of 18.

Young volunteers must not be asked to carry out unsuitable, hazardous or unsupervised work.

8. Safeguarding

The Council is committed to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Volunteers must not undertake activities involving children, young people or vulnerable adults unless the role has been properly assessed and authorised.

Where required, appropriate safeguarding measures will be put in place. This may include supervision arrangements, role-specific guidance, or a DBS check.

Volunteers must not place themselves in a position where they are alone with a child, young person or vulnerable adult unless this has been specifically authorised as part of an approved and risk assessed role.

Any safeguarding concern must be reported to the Clerk immediately.

9. Induction and Information

Volunteers must receive information appropriate to the activity before they begin.

This may include:

- the purpose of the activity;
- who is responsible for supervising or coordinating the activity;
- what tasks the volunteer is authorised to carry out;
- any tasks the volunteer must not carry out;
- health and safety information;
- relevant risk assessments;
- emergency arrangements;
- accident reporting arrangements;
- safeguarding information, where relevant;
- confidentiality and data protection requirements, where relevant.

For simple, low-risk activities, this may be a brief verbal induction. For higher-risk or ongoing activities, a written induction or volunteer briefing may be required.

10. Health and Safety

The Council has a duty to take reasonable care of the health and safety of volunteers and others who may be affected by volunteer activities.

Volunteers also have a responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and the health and safety of others.

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Volunteer activities must be risk assessed before work begins. Where an existing risk assessment does not cover the proposed activity, a new risk assessment must be prepared.

Volunteers must comply with all relevant health and safety instructions, risk assessments and safe working arrangements.

Volunteers must stop work immediately and report the matter to the Clerk or supervisor if:

- they feel unsafe;
- conditions change;
- equipment becomes unsafe;
- they are asked to do something outside the agreed activity;
- a member of the public, volunteer or staff member may be at risk.

11. Activities Volunteers Must Not Undertake Without Specific Approval

Volunteers must not undertake higher-risk activities unless the Council has specifically authorised the activity and appropriate risk assessments, training, supervision and insurance arrangements are in place.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- working at height;
- electrical work;
- gas work;
- tree work or use of chainsaws;
- work involving asbestos or suspected asbestos;
- use of pesticides, herbicides or hazardous substances;
- use of power tools or machinery;
- work on or near the highway;
- excavation work;
- lone working in higher-risk situations;
- any work requiring specialist training, qualification or certification.

The Council may decide that certain works must only be carried out by employees, contractors or suitably qualified professionals.

12. Tools, Equipment and Personal Protective Equipment

Volunteers may only use tools, equipment or materials that are suitable for the task and have been approved for use.

Where personal protective equipment is required, this must be identified through the risk assessment process and provided or approved before work begins.

Volunteers must not use their own tools, equipment or machinery unless this has been authorised in advance. Where volunteers use their own tools or equipment with approval, the Council will not accept responsibility for loss, damage or injury arising from defects, misuse or unsuitable equipment, except where the Council is legally liable.

13. Insurance

Subject to the terms and conditions of the Council's insurance policies, volunteers acting on behalf of the Council and under its authority will normally be covered by the Council's relevant insurance arrangements.

This does not apply to individuals acting without Council authorisation, acting on behalf of another organisation, or carrying out activities outside the agreed volunteer role.

The Council's insurance does not cover volunteers' personal belongings against loss or damage.

Any incident, accident, near miss or damage must be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible.

14. Expenses

Volunteers are unpaid.

Reasonable expenses may be reimbursed only where they have been approved in advance by the Council or the Clerk, where delegated authority applies.

Claims for expenses must be supported by receipts or other appropriate evidence.

Volunteers must not make purchases or commit the Council to expenditure unless they have been specifically authorised to do so in advance.

15. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Some volunteer roles may involve access to information relating to the Council, staff, councillors, residents, hirers, allotment tenants or other individuals.

Volunteers must treat any confidential or personal information appropriately and must not share it unless authorised to do so.

Volunteers must comply with the Council's data protection policies and any instructions given by the Clerk.

Where a volunteer role involves handling personal data, additional guidance may be provided.

16. Conduct and Behaviour

Volunteers are expected to behave respectfully and appropriately while carrying out activities on behalf of the Council.

Volunteers must:

- act safely and responsibly;
- follow reasonable instructions;
- treat staff, councillors, other volunteers and members of the public with respect;
- avoid behaviour that could bring the Council into disrepute;
- use Council property, facilities and equipment only as authorised;
- avoid conflicts of interest;
- not use their volunteer role for personal, political, commercial or financial gain.

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Volunteers must not make statements on behalf of the Council, speak to the press, publish social media posts as a Council representative, or commit the Council to any course of action unless specifically authorised.

17. Photographs, Publicity and Social Media

Volunteers must not take or publish photographs of children, vulnerable adults, staff, councillors, residents, hirers or other volunteers as part of a Council activity unless this has been authorised and appropriate consent has been obtained.

Any publicity relating to Council volunteer activities should be managed through the Council's usual communication channels.

Volunteers must not present personal views as the views of the Council.

18. Use of Council Land, Buildings and Facilities

Volunteers may only use Council land, buildings, facilities, tools, equipment or materials for the purpose authorised by the Council.

Volunteer status does not give any person a general right of access to Council land, buildings, storage areas, offices, keys, equipment or materials.

Any use of Council facilities for private, commercial, fundraising or third-party purposes must be separately authorised by the Council.

19. Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses

All accidents, incidents, near misses, damage or safety concerns must be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible.

Where required, the accident book or appropriate incident record must be completed.

The Council may review an activity following an accident, incident or near miss and may amend, suspend or stop the activity if necessary.

20. Concerns, Complaints and Problems

If a volunteer has a concern or problem relating to their volunteer activity, they should raise it with the Clerk in the first instance.

The Council will seek to deal with concerns fairly and proportionately.

Where a concern relates to the Clerk, the matter should be referred to the Chair of the Council.

Complaints from members of the public about volunteer activities will be handled in accordance with the Council's usual procedures.

21. Ending Volunteer Arrangements

Either the volunteer or the Council may end a volunteering arrangement at any time.

The Council may stop a volunteer activity or end a volunteer arrangement where:

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- the work is no longer required;
- the activity is unsafe;
- the volunteer has not followed Council instructions;
- there are conduct concerns;
- there are safeguarding, insurance, reputational or governance concerns;
- the activity is no longer considered appropriate;
- the Council considers it necessary for any other reasonable reason.

Where appropriate, the Council may ask for the return of keys, equipment, documents, clothing, identification or any other Council property.

22. Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read alongside the Council's relevant policies and procedures, including:

- Health and Safety Policy;
- Risk Management Policy;
- Safeguarding Policy, where applicable;
- Accident Reporting Procedure;
- Equality and Diversity Policy;
- Complaints Procedure;
- Social Media and Communications Policy;
- Press and Media Protocol;
- Information and Data Protection Policy;
- Data Retention and Disposal Policy;
- Code of Conduct, where the volunteer is also a councillor.

23. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually at the May Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, or sooner if required due to changes in legislation, guidance, insurance requirements, Council operations or identified risk.