



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL



Employment Committee

Monday, 8 July 2024

Report of Councillor Rhea Rayside,
Cabinet Member for People &
Communities

SKDC Volunteer Policy – Update on Implementation

Report Author

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Purpose of Report

To update the Employment Committee on the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy.

Recommendations

That the Employment Committee:

1. Notes the progress on the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy and requests any further information required at this time.

Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?	No
What are the relevant corporate priorities?	Connecting communities
Which wards are impacted?	All Wards

1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

Finance and Procurement

- 1.1 The Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy provides for the reimbursement of expenses incurred by volunteers whilst undertaking their role. This is subject to an authorisation process as detailed within the Policy, expenses paid are expected to be minimal and will be met from existing budgets.

Completed by: Paul Sutton Interim Head of Finance (Deputy 151)

Legal and Governance

- 1.2 The Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy has provided a framework for volunteer engagement which safeguards both the Council and volunteers, with a view to creating a positive and legally compliant relationship.

Completed by: Graham Watts, Monitoring Officer

Health and Safety

- 1.3 The Council has a legal and moral duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of volunteers whilst performing duties on behalf of the Council or on Council property. The level of protection afforded to volunteers must be the same as the Council provides to employed staff, this includes volunteers and volunteer activity being covered by the Council's Employer's Liability Insurance.
- 1.4 The Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy provides a framework to ensure that volunteers are provided with the appropriate level of training and

equipment as well as identifying procedures for reporting and addressing safety concerns.

Completed by: Phil Swinton, Health and Safety and Emergency Planning Manager

Human Resources

- 1.5 The successful implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy demonstrates the importance of engaging volunteers in a positive and constructive way and has ensured consistency and fairness in the Council's approach across service areas.
- 1.6 The Policy clearly sets out what volunteers can expect from the Council in relation to legal compliance, risk management and volunteer recruitment, and what the Council can expect from a volunteer in return.

Completed by: Fran Beckitt (Head of HR)

2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 Within its Corporate Plan the Council has set an ambition to work in partnership with the voluntary, private, and public sectors to enable the delivery of community projects, and to provide responsive services to meet the needs of South Kesteven communities.
- 2.2 At a meeting of the Employment Committee held on 6 September 2023 the Members present considered a draft Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy (the Volunteer Policy) and approved its adoption.
- 2.3 Prior to the development of the Volunteer Policy, although the Council engaged the services of volunteers, there were no formal arrangements in place or a consistent framework to govern the relationship and working arrangements between the Council and volunteers.

3. Implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven Policy

- 3.1 Since the adoption of the Volunteer Policy significant progress has been made in relation to its implementation, the Policy forming the basis of the relationship between the Council and volunteers across the Parks Service and Arts and Cultural Services.

Parks Service

- 3.2 The Council is responsible for the three parks in Grantham, these being Wyndham Park, Queen Elizabeth Park, and Dysart Park. As well as maintaining the parks to a high standard the Council is committed to the achievement of Green Flag status,

which is an international accreditation awarded to high quality publicly accessible parks.

- 3.3 The Wyndham Park Visitor Centre is a valuable community resource built with the support of grant funding received from Heritage Lottery. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the centre was well utilised supported by a core group of volunteers. However, in more recent times the facility has remained under-utilised due to a significant number of volunteers who failed to re-engage following the extended period of closure.
- 3.4 In July 2023 the Council employed a Parks and Community Engagement Officer. A primary function of this role is to improve the activities offered across the Parks Service, and to engage a core group of volunteers to assist the Council with a range of roles and activities.
- 3.5 Since the adoption of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy a total of fourteen volunteers have been recruited and are actively working across the Parks Service. As well as increasing the hours the Wyndham Park Visitor Centre can be available, this has transformed the range of activities offered at the Visitor Centre which now include:
 - Weekly book club meetings
 - Building Better Opportunities coffee mornings in association with Grantham College
 - Grantham Deaf Group coffee mornings
 - Use of the Visitor Centre as a warm space
 - School holiday activities for children
 - Craft activities for adults
 - Monthly Lincolnshire Police drop in sessions
 - Self-defence classes
 - Talks and lectures in the Visitor Centre and around the Park.
- 3.6 The roles which volunteers now regularly perform include:
 - Book club volunteers
 - Visitor Centre Assistants, providing a wide range of local information
 - Volunteering at events
 - General park volunteers (checking posters, flower beds/planters, signage and general park conditions)
 - Arts and craft facilitators
- 3.7 The re-introduction of volunteers in the Parks service has also assisted the delivery of events by other Council services. Earlier this year the Arts Team arranged an Easter Egg trail in Wyndham Park and the event was supported by five Park volunteers who helped set up the trail, register attendees, deal with queries, sell duck food, run craft activities and aid the clear up afterwards.

- 3.8 The Parks and Community Engagement Officer has received very positive feedback from volunteers regarding the Volunteer Policy which has been welcomed by existing and new volunteers. The comments made by volunteers have included that the Volunteer Policy recognises the value and importance of volunteering and how they contribute towards the daily operation of the Parks and Wyndham Park Visitor Centre.
- 3.9 The Council has also received a lot of positive comments resulting from the increased range of activities on offer. These have included comments from Park users that it is good to see the Visitor Centre not only reinstated as an information centre, but also as a place for learning, fun and community cohesion.

Wyndham Park Forum and Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park

- 3.10 The Wyndham Park Forum and Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park are independent organisations which operate within their own governance arrangements. Historically members of each organisation have undertaken volunteer activity in the two parks and offered advice and guidance to the Council on park related matters. Whilst they operate as two separate organisations the same three individuals are involved in key roles of each group.
- 3.11 Over a number of years the relationship between members of the two organisations and Council Officers has been difficult, primarily due to a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities. For example, there have been instances where Council Officers, and contractors engaged on behalf of the Council, have been given instructions by members of the two volunteer organisations which is wholly inappropriate.
- 3.12 Following the adoption of the Volunteer Policy the two groups were contacted with a view to their members signing up to the revised policy document. As there was an initial reluctance to do so, as an alternative measure Officers developed a draft Terms of Reference which is provided at **Appendix One**. The draft Terms of Reference is based on the principles within the Volunteer Policy and aims to clearly set out the responsibility of the Council and the two respective organisations.
- 3.13 Despite protracted discussions, and as the Terms of Reference remained unsigned, a meeting was facilitated by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council in April 2024 to discuss any reservations the groups may have, and to emphasise the importance of signing up to the principles of the Volunteer Policy.
- 3.14 Due to the lack of progress made following the meeting, the Leader wrote to the respective organisations to inform them that volunteer activity will need to be suspended if the Terms of Reference or individual volunteer forms remain unsigned.
- 3.15 The Leader has subsequently received a response which suggests that the two organisations do not wish to be treated as employees and would rather enter into a

Partnership Agreement with the Council. As detailed in paragraph 1.3 of this report the Council has a duty to afford volunteers the same level of protection as employees, and therefore the Deputy Leader is arranging a response to the letter, and to re-emphasise the need to either sign the Terms of Reference or individual volunteer forms.

Arts and Cultural Services

- 3.16 A total number of 45 volunteers are engaged at the Guildhall Arts Centre in Grantham and undertake a wide variety of roles which include meeting and greeting customers, undertaking usher duties, and checking tickets at performances. Following the adoption of the Volunteer Policy existing volunteers were asked to re-register and have also been very positive about the introduction of the policy.
- 3.17 Historically the services of volunteers have not been engaged at Stamford Arts Centre. However, there are now plans in place to develop a core of volunteers and, during the summer months, a drop-in session is planned to enable potential volunteers to have a tour around Stamford Arts Centre and to discuss the available opportunities.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 This report is presented in response to a request from Employment Committee for an update on the implementation of the Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy. Therefore, no other options have been considered.

5. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 5.1 Employment Committee are requested to note the update provided and request any further information which is required at this time.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 Report to Employment Committee dated 6th September 2023 [Volunteering with South Kesteven District Council Policy](#)

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Draft Terms of Reference – Wyndham Park Forum and Friends of Queen Elizabeth Park