

Welcome to Lincolnshire County Council

A Guide for New Volunteers



Welcome from Debbie Barnes, Executive Director

I am delighted you have chosen to volunteer with us. You are joining an organisation that is ambitious, people-focused and strives to be the best in everything we do.

The Council's vision is to engage with the community; to promote opportunities for volunteering, continually improving our services and developing capacity within the third sector by providing opportunities for volunteers to participate in activities throughout the Council and our communities.

The Council is committed to a high standard of volunteer support. As a Lincolnshire volunteer you will be valued as a member of your team and by the organisation as a whole. I am sure you will find that the Council is a place where you feel that your views will be heard, and your ideas valued. It is a place where you can make a real difference.

I am sure that you will enjoy volunteering with Lincolnshire County Council. Make your time with the Council count. Share your ideas. Help us to transform the Council and make it the best in the country.

Thank you for giving your time helping to provide services to the people of Lincolnshire. Your effort is highly valued and is crucial in making Lincolnshire a better place to live.

Kindest regards

D Barnes

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This guide is designed to give you an insight into the way the Council works and how this could affect you. Hopefully, it will support you in carrying out your volunteering activities. Please note that this welcome book should not be seen as legally binding, nor is it intended to create a contractual relationship with our volunteers. However, as a matter of respect and dignity, we believe that volunteers deserve to be treated fairly and inclusively wherever reasonable. If you have any queries, please contact your Volunteer Supervisor in the first instance.

2.0 Induction

2.1 Now the initial recruitment process is complete, there are a few things that need to be carried out before you can start your activity with us:

- If your activity requires a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check you will need to complete the relevant paperwork and receive clearance before you can commence your activity. Your Volunteer Supervisor will make it clear if you require DBS clearance for your activity and will provide you with guidance. This clearance is usually only required in certain circumstances and with groups (such as frequent contact with children or dealing with the personal affairs of adults) Further details can be found in section 5 of this handbook.
- You will need to clarify your current health situation, and there is a very simple self-declaration Volunteer Health Form that your Volunteer Supervisor will complete with you. It is important to let us know if you do have any health issues – this will rarely stop you volunteering with us, however it does allow us to consider any reasonable adjustments we can carry out to make your activity easier. A very small number of volunteers may require a referral to our Occupational Health Provider.
- We will need to confirm your identity; this is regardless of whether you are undergoing a DBS check. You should show your volunteer supervisor an original document, such as a driver's licence or passport.
- You will need to sign and date the Volunteer Indemnity Form. It is crucial you sign this prior to commencing your activity, as this form indemnifies you against any potential claim. Put simply, this will provide you with all the insurance you need to volunteer with us (a separate check of driving documents will need to be carried out for any volunteer driving during their activity).
- Finally, we will need you to provide us with details of at least one referee. This is usually a previous employer or voluntary body, but it can be anybody in a position of trust such as a schoolteacher or police officer.

- 2.2 Your volunteer supervisor will then carry out an induction with you. This will ensure you're aware of site-specific issues such as health and safety and where you can get a cup of tea!



3.0 During your activity

3.1 Expenses

- 3.1.1 You should not be 'out of pocket' through volunteering with us. Your volunteer supervisor will explain your entitlement to claim reasonable 'out of pocket' expenses during your induction, these expenses will be at reimbursed at 'actual' rates and will only be able to be repaid to you on production of receipts – please be sure to keep them. Expenses for mileage will be reimbursed at the current levels indicated by HMRC.

3.2 Training

- 3.2.1 To support you in your role volunteers need to be aware of the County Council's values and key policies and procedures. As part of our commitment to supporting volunteers we will provide you with a briefing in four essential areas: Health & Safety, Safeguarding, Information Governance and Equality & Diversity. We will ensure the information provided will be appropriate to your role (certain elements of need to be covered even at the most basic level)
- 3.2.2 Where there is a need for role specific training to enable you to carry out your activity, we will endeavour to provide this. We are only able to offer training directly relevant to your volunteering role and not as a reward or reimbursement for your activity. All our training is given freely and there is no requirement for you to stay with us for a specific length of time after receiving this training - although we hope you will stay with us for as long as you are able. If you believe you have a specific training need, please speak to your volunteer supervisor.

3.3 Supervision

- 3.3.1 You will always have a named volunteer supervisor who will be your first point of contact whilst carrying out your activity. Your supervisor will oversee any activity you carry out, as well as being on hand to deal with any queries or issues you may encounter during your time with us.
- 3.3.2 Your volunteer supervisor may arrange 'one-to-one' sessions with you as and when required. This is an informal opportunity to discuss your volunteer activity, pick up any latest news and make any suggestions.
- 3.3.3 You can refuse demands made of you if you consider them unrealistic, beyond the scope of your role or if you feel you do not have the appropriate skills to carry them out.

3.4 Attendance

- 3.4.1 As a volunteer, there is no obligation to attend your activity. However, your activity is very important to us and to service users and we will discuss with you at Induction the amount of time you are able to provide us with on a regular basis. If you are unable to attend for any reason, please try to let your volunteer supervisor know as soon as possible for us to try to maintain the service you provide.

3.5 Ending your activity

- 3.5.1 If you wish to end your volunteering activity with us, you can do so at any time. However, we would ask that you let us know as soon as possible of your intention to leave. This will make it easier for us to recruit a new volunteer if required.
- 3.5.2 Your volunteering activity may be considered as a time-limited project or a one-off activity. In other words, it will be made clear if we expect your activity to finish by a particular date. If this is the case, you will be alerted to this by your volunteer supervisor during your induction.
- 3.5.3 Unfortunately some volunteering opportunities may end without a great deal of warning. Where this happens, we will try to inform you as soon as we are able, and certainly try to provide you with five days' notice.
- 3.5.4 When you finish your activity with us, you will be asked to return any items or equipment we have given you to carry out the activity, and we request that you do this as soon as possible.
- 3.5.5 We have a Volunteer Departure Feedback form that we would be grateful if you could complete. This form allows us to monitor our activities and make positive changes for future volunteers. Once completed, this form can be returned to your volunteer supervisor or your line manager. If you are unclear who to return the form to then return to volunteers@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

3.5.6 Volunteers who are leaving the organisation who have made a regular commitment to it will be offered an exit interview, a reference and/or a statement of your achievements.

4.0 Guidance on conduct

4.1 When carrying out your activity with us, we would ask you to behave appropriately. The Council has specific policies and procedures relating to paid staff that sets out their expected standard of behaviour and conduct. Although these policies and procedures may not always apply to you, it is important that you are aware of them and in principle act in a similar fashion. The following points highlight some of the key issues relevant to you.

4.2 Political Issues and Awareness for Volunteers

4.2.1 The Council is a political body. We are led by the decisions of our elected councillors, who represent the electoral divisions in which we all live. Consequently, we must all be seen to be as politically neutral and non-biased as we can be during our activities with the Council.

4.2.2 Therefore you must not use your volunteering activity to further any political aims; to try to influence the Council's decision-making process, particularly in relation to your own activity or role (other than in an official consultation process); or use your position to influence elected members.

4.2.3 It is important to maintain the reputation of the Council. We must be as transparent as we can be, therefore please do not accept personal gifts for personal use from members of the public for your activities.

4.3 Health and Safety

4.3.1 Your volunteer supervisor will alert you to our Health and Safety policy and procedures. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 applies to staff, members of the public and volunteers. We all have an obligation to make our activity bases as safe as possible. Please alert your supervisor if you feel there is any Health & Safety concern at your location.

4.3.2 Although some health and safety obligations may seem unnecessary, please remember that your safety is our number one priority, and our staff take their duty of care towards you seriously and act to ensure you are not in a position of danger.

4.3.3 Please be sure to dress appropriately for your activity, this includes the use of any protective equipment you may have been issued with.

4.4 Equality and Diversity and Inclusion

4.4.1 Lincolnshire County Council welcomes people from all sections of the community regardless of race, gender, disability, age, nationality, sexual orientation or religious belief, therefore, please be respectful to all our service users, staff, and other volunteers.

4.5 Use of Information Technology

4.5.1 The majority of volunteers will not require access to any of the Council's computer systems. However, if IT access is required as a part of your role, this will be made clear during your induction. You are more than welcome to make use of the public IT facilities in our libraries and other areas.

4.6 Alcohol & Drugs

4.6.1 Unless permission has been granted for a specific purpose, you should not consume alcohol on Council property. You should also ensure that you are fit to always carry out your activity; this is especially important if you are operating industrial machinery or driving. If in doubt it is always better to make your volunteer supervisor aware of any concerns, you may have.

4.7 Confidentiality & Media

4.7.1 During the course of your activity you may become aware of confidential matters relating to staff, other volunteers, or members of the public. We require that you respect the confidentiality of all information and do not disclose this information to third parties. Your volunteer supervisor will advise you on the legislation relating to the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts.

4.7.2 Please do not make statements or comments to the media on behalf of the Council. We have a dedicated team responsible for all communications. If you are interested in speaking to the media (for example – to promote a volunteer project) please liaise with your volunteer supervisor.

5.0 Safeguarding

5.1 We have a duty to protect the most vulnerable in our community and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all who use our services. If, during your activity, you become concerned about the wellbeing of any service user, you should alert your volunteer supervisor or another member of staff immediately.

- 5.2 Staff within the Council are trained to deal with these situations and will be able to help. Please do not try and resolve any situation yourself as, even with the best of intentions, you may make yourself vulnerable to allegations of impropriety.
- 5.3 Some of our volunteers who come into regular contact with vulnerable service users (such as children and adults who require personal care) will be asked to undertake a DBS check. If your activity requires a DBS check, you will be informed by your volunteer supervisor at the earliest opportunity. Please do not be alarmed at being asked to undertake this check; it is not a reflection of criminality on your part, as these checks are always applied to the *activity* rather than the individual. Any costs associated with the DBS check would usually be met by the Council.
- 5.4 If required, you will be asked to complete the DBS form which will ask for a variety of information including:
- Current and some previous addresses
 - Gender
 - Date of birth
 - Details of current convictions
 - Documents confirming your identity
- 5.5 Please be honest in disclosing previous convictions, as a previous offence does not automatically bar you from volunteering with us. However, withholding information may raise questions.
- 5.6 The DBS team will then carry out the relevant checks and will make you aware of the outcome. As of 2013 DBS certificates (i.e., the outcome of your check) will only be sent to the applicant (you), although LCC will be informed of whether a certificate is 'clear'. You should show your certificate to your volunteer supervisor at the earliest opportunity.
- 5.7 Your details, and findings of the check, will be kept completely confidential. The Home Office has very strict guidelines on the holding of such sensitive information; and we are fully compliant with this.

6.0 Complaints

- 6.1 Complaints by and regarding volunteers are, thankfully very rare. However, from time-to-time problems can occur and it is only wise that we have a system on how to deal with them. It is in all our interests to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.
- 6.2 If you have an informal complaint, please speak with your volunteer supervisor in the first instance. Both of you should try and agree a plan and timescale for resolving the complaint. If you are uncomfortable in speaking with your volunteer supervisor, then you should request to speak to their line manager.

- 6.3 If you formally wish to raise a complaint, then you should follow the *Problem-Solving Procedure for Volunteers – Complaints by Volunteers* document (see Appendix A).
- 6.4 If a complaint is made about you, your volunteer supervisor will follow the *Problem Solving Procedure for Volunteers – Complaints about Volunteers* (see Appendix B). You may be called to an informal meeting with your Volunteer Supervisor who may be accompanied by their line manager.
- 6.4.1 During this meeting you will likely discuss any resolution that may be possible and a timescale for implementing any changes. The issue will usually be resolved at this point and no further action will need to be taken. However, occasionally, additional action may need to be taken that could include training or moving to a different activity. In some circumstances it may be necessary to ask you to stop your activity, i.e., if frequent ‘no shows’ mean we cannot rely on you.
- 6.5 In the, extremely unlikely, event of a serious incident such as physical violence or discriminatory behaviour you will be asked to stop your activity immediately. Your Volunteer Supervisor will explain why this has happened and point out why your behaviour was unreasonable. In this instance you may be asked to leave with immediate effect.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1 We all hope that your time spent volunteering with us will be enjoyable. Our volunteers tell us that they take many positives from their activities, and we hope you will as well. Your time is very much valued by all of us at the Council and we thank you for being a part of our services. Please enjoy your experience and do not hesitate to contact your volunteer supervisor for support.

APPENDIX A

Problem Solving Procedure for Volunteers – When you have a complaint to make

Complaints are, thankfully, very rare but from time-to-time problems or issues may occur. This guidance is designed to allow volunteers to raise problems or concerns they have about their activity or the place they carry out that activity. The aim of this guidance is to ensure a fair and effective system that allows volunteers to have their complaints dealt with as quickly and as possible.

What is a volunteer complaint?

A volunteer complaint is anything that causes you undue upset or distress because of your activity. Everybody from paid staff to volunteers will sometimes have problems with their activity that they wish to resolve. Issues that may cause a complaint include:

- Health and Safety
- Misunderstandings with staff
- Misunderstandings with other volunteers
- Bullying/Harassment
- Changes to the arrangements around your activity

Reasonable Expectations

Volunteers

All volunteers have the right to raise any issues, problems or concerns you may have and to have them dealt with as per this guidance. It is highly recommended that the complaint is dealt with as informally as possible in the first instance, and volunteers are encouraged to discuss any complaint with their volunteer supervisor first. If this is not possible or appropriate, they should ask to speak to their volunteer supervisor's line manager.

Your supervisor is responsible for making sure you are aware of the procedures LCC has for working with volunteers. Your supervisor should be fair and consistent to all volunteers. They should also be responsible for making sure all volunteers are supported in their activities.

What to do if you need to make a complaint

Any complaint you raise will be dealt with in strict confidence and any records kept will be held according to LCC confidentiality policies

It is in everyone's interest that complaints are dealt with at local level and as informally as possible.

Stage 1: Verbal complaint

Initial complaints, whether concerning a member of staff, the Lincolnshire County Council or another volunteer, should first be discussed informally. Many issues can be solved this way.

Complaints should be raised with your volunteer supervisor. If the complaint concerns your volunteer supervisor, then you should talk to their line manager. If you're unsure as to who this person is, please email volunteers@lincolnshire.gov.uk

The volunteer supervisor (or their manager) will attempt to address your complaint informally and reach a resolution that is acceptable to everyone.

Stage 2: Written complaint

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the verbal complaint, you should make a formal complaint in writing.

The appropriate service manager will deal with the complaint and a full or interim response will be sent within 10 working days.

All complaints should be raised within 3 months of the incident, or within 3 months of the volunteer being aware of the incident.

Stage 3: Opportunity to appeal

If your complaint is unresolved, you have the right to appeal. All appeals will be heard initially by a senior manager, and if required by the relevant Head of Service.

If you wish to appeal about the resolution of your complaint you should write to the Head of Service within 7 days from the date of receipt of the initial response to your complaint.

The Head of Service will endeavour to respond to you within 20 working days of receipt of the letter. Please be advised that any decision by the Head of Service will be final and no further appeal will be heard.

APPENDIX B

Problem Solving Procedure for Volunteers – When someone makes a complaint about you

Complaints regarding volunteers are thankfully very rare. However, like grievances, there are occasions where problems may arise. Volunteers are not paid staff and are not bound by the Code of Conduct in the LCC Employment Manual. Despite this a certain standard of behaviour is expected of volunteers. Should a complaint be made about you this guidance outlines your expectations and how any complaint will be resolved.

Reasonable expectations

Volunteers should comply with relevant LCC policies and procedures. Your supervisor will make you aware of any expectations during your induction. Complaints should be resolved openly, fairly, and quickly and you should be kept informed at every step of the procedure.

Your supervisor is responsible for making sure you are aware of all the expectations that are in place for your activity. Volunteer supervisor is also responsible for ensuring that all issues regarding volunteers are dealt with fairly and consistently.

What is a problem matter for volunteers?

A problem matter would arise for volunteers when reasonable standards of behaviour fail to be met. The list below gives you some idea of what would be considered 'unreasonable' (although the list is not exhaustive).

- Physical violence
- Racism, sexism, homophobia, or religious bigotry/sectarianism
- Bullying (of staff or volunteers)
- Disrespect of staff, other volunteers, or service users. This includes the use of foul or abusive language
- Theft (of any kind, either from service users or from council property)
- Behaviour likely to bring the council into disrepute (such as negative comments to the media)
- Frequent, unexplained, 'no shows' for an activity
- Misuse of drugs or alcohol whilst carrying out volunteering activity
- Damage to council property
- Disregard for health and safety

What should happen if someone complains about you?

Stage 1: verbal discussion

Many complaints will be able to be dealt with informally. Where this is the case, you will be asked to meet with your volunteer supervisor to discuss the issue and to agree on a course of action to rectify the situation. If you feel any decision made or actions, you

are asked to carry out are unreasonable you have the right to make an appeal, details of how to do this follow later.

Where a serious issue has taken place, you may be called to a meeting with your volunteer supervisor and their immediate manager. During this meeting you will be asked to discuss the issue and to explain any unreasonable behaviour. The meeting will look at ways to resolve any issues; this could include signposting to a different activity or possibly training (if relevant to your role).

You should note that complaints should not be made anonymously. Everyone should have the right to know what they have been accused of and by whom so that they are able to offer their side of the story. All complaints are treated confidentially and will only be discussed amongst those who are directly involved in trying to resolve the issue.

You should be given the option to be accompanied to the meeting by a nominated person of your choice.

Stage 2: Written warning

In the unlikely event that the issue is not resolved by the verbal discussion, where appropriate, you may be issued with a written warning outlining the reason for the complaint.

You should be given the opportunity to state your case formally to your Volunteer Supervisor. Meetings should take place in a confidential place, and you should be allowed to be accompanied to any meetings by a person of your choice.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, further objectives could be set, or help offered. If no resolution can be found it may be necessary to stop your role in the activity. Again, you have the right to appeal any decision made if you do not agree with it.

Stage 3: Opportunity to appeal

As discussed above you have the right to appeal any decision made that you are unhappy with, this includes if your participation has been immediately ended.

Any appeal should be made in writing within 7 days of any decision being made. All appeals will be heard by the relevant Head of Service.

The Head of Service will review your appeal and will seek information from other parties, including your Volunteer Supervisor and other volunteers/staff. The Head of Service will endeavour to respond to your appeal within 20 working days. Please be advised that the decision of the Head of Service is final.

Exceptions

In some cases, volunteers may need to be asked to stop volunteering immediately while the matter is explored. For example, if a volunteer is accused of harassment, theft, or violent or racist behaviour.

The decision to ask a volunteer to stop volunteering should be confirmed with you in writing. In some cases, legal proceedings may need to be concluded before the next step of the problem-solving procedure can take place.

If your part in a volunteering activity is ended there is no 'notice' period to serve.