



# Our guide to **volunteering**

Information and **advice**







We are committed to supporting you as a volunteer...

# Welcome

Thank you for offering your time to support the Council and its wider goals.

We want your time with us to be rewarding, safe and enjoyable and this short guide has been designed to provide information to help achieve this.

It covers the essentials around aspects like insurance and expenses and tells you where you can find more detailed information to help you in your role.

When you start with us, you'll be given a named point of contact so, if you need to know anything that isn't covered in this guide, don't hesitate to ask them.

# Why do people volunteer?

People volunteer for many reasons - to help our work, gain work experience or meet new people. Whatever your reason, volunteering should benefit both you and the council.

## We aim to make sure you:

- **feel welcomed** as a volunteer and have a good understanding of what the council is and does
- know what you are expected to do and who you are answerable to
- are a real **part of the team**
- have access to appropriate training
- know who to talk to if there are problems or difficulties and have your concerns listened to
- are properly **valued and thanked**
- receive regular and constructive feedback
- are trusted (with confidential information if necessary)
- have safe working conditions and adequate insurance cover
- are taken seriously by paid colleagues
- are not out of pocket



## We ask you to:

- **be reliable**, and tell us if you are unavailable or running late
- **respect confidentiality** whenever you have access to confidential information
- carry out the agreed project/role to the best of your ability
- give us honest feedback and ideas for improvement
- be accountable and accept constructive comment
- take part in relevant training
- ask for support if you need it
- treat staff and your fellow volunteers with the courtesy you would expect to receive
- comply with our policies, procedures and standards
- undertake your work safely and report any concerns immediately.

We aim to make sure you feel welcomed as a volunteer





# Richmondshire District Council

Richmondshire District covers 509 square miles and is actually larger than four English counties, but within its boundary live only 51,400 people (2007 estimate). Richmondshire is therefore one of the most sparsely populated District Councils in the country, its boundaries stretching from the River Tees to Cumbria. The area is predominantly rural in character and a large part is situated in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

The largest town in the District is the historic market town of Richmond with its Norman Castle, cobbled market place, famous Georgian Theatre Royal and elegant Georgian buildings. There is a thriving tourism industry within Richmondshire and this now forms the economic bedrock of the District.

The District also boasts two other bustling market towns, Leyburn and Hawes, with many other urban developments to the east, namely Catterick, Scotton, Hipswell, Colburn and Brompton on Swale. Reeth is also a service centre for the upper Dales.

Richmondshire District Council is one of seven District Councils in North Yorkshire. It was created in 1974 by amalgamation of a number of smaller Local Authorities and contains two of the best known Yorkshire Dales – Swaledale and Wensleydale. There are 101 parishes within the District, electing 34 Members to the Council.

We provide a huge range of services to the people of Richmondshire

# Volunteering with us

We are committed to supporting you as a volunteer. We want your volunteering to be rewarding and fulfilling, and we are always happy to hear from you about any aspect of volunteering with us.

A copy of our volunteer policy is available at **richmondshire.gov.uk** or from your supervisor. Documents referenced in **purple** within this document can be downloaded from the council's website or in hard copy from your supervisor.

Richmondshire District Council supports the principles set out in the **TUC Charter for strengthening relations between paid staff and volunteers (available at: [tuc.org.uk](http://tuc.org.uk))**. Our policy should be read and interpreted in the spirit of that charter.

A copy of our volunteer policy is available at **richmondshire.gov.uk** or from your supervisor





# Getting started

## Recruitment

Our volunteers are normally recruited through a third party organisation working on our behalf. They organise the recruitment process for us including any DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks required for volunteers who will be working with children, young people or vulnerable adults.

## Welfare benefits

If you receive welfare benefits, you can volunteer and receive out of pocket expenses, as long as you comply with the relevant regulations. You should inform Jobcentre Plus. **The Volunteering While Receiving Benefits** leaflet is available at [direct.gov.uk](https://www.direct.gov.uk), from your Jobcentre Plus office or **RCVA**, who can provide more advice on volunteering when claiming welfare benefits.

## Information and support

When you start working with us, your supervisor or the volunteer coordinator within your service area will make sure that you have all of the information you need in your new role and an ongoing point of contact for any queries or help.

Volunteering can provide the practical elements required for formal vocational training and assessment



## Volunteer Arrangements

Volunteers are not required to sign legally binding contracts, and are able to dictate the level of commitment they contribute. However, depending on the task, it may be helpful to devise and agree a 'suitable' work plan with the volunteer's supervisor. The contribution of the volunteer is vital and clear responsibilities and a reliable partnership is essential.

Volunteers should be issued with a Volunteer Agreement Letter (see example at Appendix 2), Volunteer Handbook and an outline of their role and responsibilities.

The Council and/or the volunteer retain the right to terminate the Agreement in writing at any time without notice.

## Confidentiality and Data Protection

During induction all volunteers will be made aware of their rights under the Data Protection law and the importance of respecting the confidential nature of Richmondshire District Council business.

Volunteers must be made aware that any information they produce during their time volunteering may be made available to the public, if asked, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Volunteers must not have access to personal information for colleagues, children, young people or vulnerable adults unless deemed necessary by the supervisor.

Volunteers must not have access to business information about Richmondshire District Council such as finances.

## Induction

You will have an induction into your role with your supervisor when you first join us as a volunteer. There will also be opportunities to take part in a Council induction session which will provide a much broader introduction to the Council and its services. You will also be given a volunteer agreement.

## Trial period

Just like in employment, there may be a settling in or probationary period. This is for the benefit of both sides. You will have a named supervisor to support you and answer any queries, so make the most of this in your first few weeks. If you have any issues about your volunteering, don't be afraid to raise them.

## Training

You may need some training to undertake your tasks effectively. Often this will be delivered in house. Volunteering can also provide the practical elements required for formal vocational training and assessment.



# The essentials

## Expenses

We value the work carried out by our volunteers and can reimburse your out of pocket expenses. You may claim, if you wish to, by completing an expenses form, available from your supervisor.

The main cost you are likely to incur is travel, including commuting travel to and from your volunteering base. You should **use the most cost-effective transport** available and try to be as **environmentally friendly** as possible. Consider sharing transport with a staff member or another volunteer. If public transport is practical, please use it. If you need to travel during the course of volunteering (business travel), you should use public transport or one of our vehicles if possible.

You may incur other expenses from time to time. If you wish to claim for these, you must agree them in advance with your supervisor. All claims should be made within three months or monthly if they are over £100.



“ It enables me to work with a group of very interesting people who have a wide range of knowledge about the local area.”

## Insurance

Whilst we hope you won't need it, like paid staff, you may face a slight risk of injury, damage or loss of property, or liability for accidents. All volunteers managed by the council are covered by our **insurance**. As we are liable for any negligent actions by our volunteers, our insurance also covers this. Our personal accident cover is limited to assault only and so we **strongly advise** you to take out your own **personal accident insurance**.

## Driving

If you are using your own vehicle while undertaking your volunteering role, you will need to tell your insurers, making it clear you are only receiving out of pocket expenses, and ask them to ensure you have adequate cover. Volunteering is normally regarded as part of the social, domestic and pleasure use of the vehicle, but the decision is down to your insurers.

If you need to extend your insurance to include business use, there will probably be no increase in your premium if added at time of renewal. There may be an administration fee if this cover is added part way through a policy year.

“We have a very entertaining time which gives us a good laugh. Also it gives us plenty of physical exercise.”



If you are using your **own vehicle for our business**, you will need to comply with The Grey Fleet Policy and adhere to **The Grey Fleet Driver's Handbook**. This is available from your manager. We will need to check that you have an appropriate driving licence for the vehicle being driven, insurance cover and an MOT certificate.

We will reimburse volunteer drivers for any expenses incurred on our behalf in line with HM Customs and Revenue's guidelines and pay the approved Richmondshire District Council **mileage allowances** for reimbursement of travel costs, which is tax-free and covers vehicle wear and tear as well as fuel costs.

You should keep clear records of journeys taken as a volunteer, noting mileage, time, date and purpose of journey.

"When I heard volunteers were wanted it seemed a perfect way, not only to put something back, but to enhance the pleasure by learning what really goes into the management of an area such as this."





## Equality and diversity

We believe that no one should be treated less favourably than anyone else because of their gender, marital status, age, race, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation. We will do everything reasonably practical to make volunteering available to everybody and to conform to all relevant legislation. We want to create a good and harmonious working environment in which you should not feel threatened or intimidated.

## Confidentiality

During your volunteering, you may find yourself working with material that is not public knowledge. This is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone not directly connected with our work. Your full co-operation is expected to ensure that such material remains confidential.

Likewise, we will ensure that any personal information you supply us with is treated in confidence and is handled in accordance with Data Protection regulations.

## Problems or complaints

We aim to make your volunteering enjoyable and worthwhile but occasionally problems do occur. We have a **complaints** and **grievance procedure** in place so you can raise any concerns and give us feedback to improve the way we manage and support our volunteers. In the first instance, you should take any problem or grievance to your supervisor. If the matter is not settled satisfactorily, you should then contact the service manager. We will make every effort to settle any dispute or grievance fairly and amicably. Where an issue cannot be resolved at a local or department level, we may ask RCVA to mediate.



If we have concerns about your behaviour or contribution as a volunteer, we will discuss them with you and agree steps to address the concerns. These may include additional training or mentoring. However, if these areas of concern cannot be resolved after additional formal discussions, your volunteering relationship with us may have to end.

## Health and safety

We aim to take all reasonable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our volunteers. We are committed to providing and monitoring a safe and healthy working environment and to giving appropriate instruction, training and supervision for your health and safety.

As with any organisation, there are risks. So we have safety advice and procedures to help ensure you have a safe and enjoyable time. As part of your induction programme, you will receive information and training specific to the place you will carry out your voluntary work. You should be aware of the health and safety measures that are in place and ask your supervisor if you are not sure or want to know more.



"It enables me to discover history, natural history and other facts which I find fascinating."



Working safely with us requires that you take care of yourself and think about how your actions could affect the health or safety of others. If you have concerns at any time report these to your supervisor immediately. If at any time you feel you do not have the physical capabilities or expertise to undertake a task or role, please say so. Tell your supervisor if you are on medication or have any known medical conditions (vertigo, asthma, epilepsy or allergies to plasters, wasp stings and so on).

On the next few pages are some basic tips about keeping safe while volunteering. Please read them and use whatever is applicable to your situation.

## Fire procedures

Be aware of the fire procedures for the area where you are volunteering, including the location of alarms, exits and fire extinguishers.

## First aid

**Make sure you know:**

- Where the first aid kit is
- Who the first aiders on site are and how you contact them in an emergency
- Where the accident book is, what you should report in it and to whom



## Risk assessment

We undertake **risk assessments** for all our activities to identify safe ways of carrying out our work. We ask that you follow these tested ways of working to ensure you, your fellow volunteers, our staff and the general public stay safe. If you are not sure how to undertake an activity safely, please ask your supervisor.

## Physical safety

Lifting and handling loads incorrectly can cause back injuries. Heavy labour in any form – for example, shovelling and dragging – can also be a problem. Please make sure you read our **guide to the safe handling of heavy goods**.

## Working with chemicals and substances

If you need to use chemicals in your volunteering role, check whether the area you are volunteering in is covered by the COSHH (Control of Substance Hazardous to Health) regulations. Under COSHH, any substances that could be hazardous to health in the workplace must be identified and the risk assessed. Your supervisor can advise you about **COSHH** and the safe use of any chemicals.



“Why didn’t I do it sooner?”

## Working with computers and display equipment

No matter how good your typing skills, over time you can suffer ill effects if you use a computer without taking a few sensible precautions. Ask for instructions on how to make sure your chair, keyboard, monitor and desk are properly adjusted, and remember to take regular breaks. See our **display screen equipment policy and guidance** for more information.

## Clothing

Always dress appropriately for the duties, weather conditions and site at which you are volunteering. Take advice from people familiar with the site if you are unsure, particularly in exposed areas. If you are provided with uniform or personal protective clothing, make sure you wear it. If you are carrying out practical tasks on our land, we strongly advise you to have an up to date tetanus inoculation. Your GP can advise on this. We also have guidelines for dealing with cuts and grazes, insect bites etc. Just ask your supervisor.

## Smoking

Smoking and E-Cigarettes are **prohibited** in all our buildings, vehicles and neighbouring land. If you smoke off site, please consider the health, comfort and safety of others. You should ensure that cigarette ends and matches are fully extinguished and properly disposed of before leaving an area. We also ask that you do not smoke in front of children.

## Accidents and hazards

We all have an obligation to ensure our actions do not put other volunteers, staff or the public at risk. If you are injured or see anyone injured as a result of the work you are involved in report this immediately to your supervisor. The best way to deal with accidents is to prevent them from happening in the first place. So, if you see a hazard or an accident waiting to happen, please warn colleagues and your supervisor straight away.

## Dignity at Work

Richmondshire District Council is committed to the development and promotion of a positive workplace culture where all staff and volunteers are treated with dignity and respect. The Council believes it essential to have a Policy which prohibits personal bullying and harassment between staff and volunteers and aims to ensure that any allegation of harassment or bullying of an employee or volunteer by another employee or volunteer, an employee, volunteer or a partner organisation, or a Member, is taken seriously, is properly investigated and is dealt with effectively. The policy can be viewed on the Council's Intranet, or a copy can be obtained from Human Resources.

## Termination

If you or the Council wish to terminate your volunteer services, either party should inform your Supervisor as soon as possible to ensure continuity of services.

## Use of Mobile Phones

It is not only extremely dangerous, but also illegal to use a mobile phone whilst driving a vehicle. It is preferable to switch off mobile phones whilst driving. If it is essential to keep the phone switched on then pull over and park safely and switch off the engine before using the phone.

## Official Conduct

The public is entitled to expect conduct of the highest level from all staff and volunteers. Volunteers must always behave in a manner in which their integrity should never have to be questioned. Nothing must be done which might give rise to suspicion, however ill founded, that they are influenced in any way by factors outside employment with the Council.

Volunteers must not ask for or accept gifts or gratuities from the public and it is an offence under the Local Government Act for you to do this.



Volunteers' off duty hours are their own personal concern, but you should not let your work and your private interests conflict. Volunteers should also be on their guard against becoming involved in arguments whilst talking with members of the public. Complaints and enquiries should be directed through your Service Manager for the Corporate Director to resolve.

## Lone working

The Council is committed to ensure that no lone worker is at greater risk of injuries and ill-health as a result of not being directly supervised or working alone whilst undertaking the Council's work. The **lone working policy and guidance** provides further information.

## Working with children and vulnerable people

We take all practicable steps to safeguard the welfare and safety of children and vulnerable people. As a volunteer you have an important role to play in raising a concern if you see or hear about anything involving harm or neglect. We have **safeguarding arrangements** in place where concerns can be raised and investigated. If your volunteering role involves contact with young people or vulnerable adults you will be given specific training along with some separate guidance notes.

## Further information

For more information about volunteering contact:

**Richmondshire District Council:** [richmondshire.gov.uk](http://richmondshire.gov.uk)

**RCVA:** [rcva.org.uk](http://rcva.org.uk)

**Volunteering Richmondshire:** [volunteeringrichmondshire.org.uk](http://volunteeringrichmondshire.org.uk)

**Citizens Advice Bureau:**  
[hambletonandrichmondshirecab.org.uk/volunteering.aspx](http://hambletonandrichmondshirecab.org.uk/volunteering.aspx)

**Volunteering England:** [volunteering.org.uk](http://volunteering.org.uk)







For more information on volunteering please visit our website at **[richmondshire.gov.uk](http://richmondshire.gov.uk)** and search for 'volunteering'

If you would like this information in another format or language please contact:

**Richmondshire District Council**  
**Mercury House**  
**Station Road**  
**Richmond**  
**DL10 4JX**

Phone: **01748 829100**

Fax: **01748 826186**

E-Mail: **[enquiries@richmondshire.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@richmondshire.gov.uk)**

**[richmondshire.gov.uk](http://richmondshire.gov.uk)**

