Volunteering scheme

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Document History

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1.0	July 2025	Introduction of scheme	Helen Ginty/Eloise Chambers
	April 2026	Amended to remove reliance on iTrent for approvals	Helen Ginty
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1. Introduction

1.1 Luton council recognises the contribution that volunteers make to the community and are committed to providing opportunities for members of staff to engage in volunteering activities that will benefit the residents of the town and help support the council community leadership role.

1.2 Volunteering also provides opportunities for employees to contribute to their local community and in doing so, build relationships, increase confidence and acquire new skills which will benefit you, your team and your community.

1.3 The purpose of this scheme is to outline the council's approach to employee volunteering and the process that managers and employees need to follow to agree time off for volunteering.

1.4 This scheme should be reviewed in conjunction with the Code of Conduct, particularly the section addressing voluntary work outside the council, which outlines the requirement for employees to inform their management of any volunteering activities they undertake in order to prevent potential conflicts of interest. This scheme does not remove the obligation to provide such notifications to management.

2. Scope

2.1 This scheme applies to all employees of the council on successful completion of their probationary period.

2.2 This scheme is not contractual and can be amended or withdrawn by the council at any time.

2.3 There are specific provisions for those who also work as magistrates, governors, special constables, reservists and other roles relating to these. For further information see the compassionate and special leave procedure.

3. Definitions

3.1 The meaning of some key words and phrases, for the purposes of this policy, are explained below:

Volunteering: any activity that involves spending time, without payment, doing something that aims to benefit individuals (other than close relatives), groups or the environment.

For the purposes of this scheme, volunteering includes regular activity with a voluntary organisation, support for a one-off specific event that benefits the community and is not paid employment, and support for council-led or council-sponsored events where volunteers are requested.

Volunteer organisation: for the purposes of this scheme a voluntary organisation refers to any group, body or initiative, whether formally registered or informally constituted that operates for the benefit of the community, without the intention of generating a profit for private individuals or shareholders. This includes but is not limited to:

- Registered charities and non-profit organisations
- Community groups and local initiatives
- Council run community events
- Schools, nurseries, and educational settings (eg reading support, mentoring, classroom assistance)

- Health and social care settings (eg befriending services, support groups)
- Environmental or civic projects (eg litter picking, conservation work)
- Faith-based or cultural organisations offering community services

4. Responsibilities

4.1 **Employees** are responsible for:

- identifying appropriate volunteering opportunities and for requesting time off in writing to their manager using the Employee Volunteering form (available as a digital form on iTrent self-service and as a manual form from the intranet)
- ensuring that they adhere to the council's policies and procedures including the Code of Conduct when undertaking voluntary activities. This includes notifying the volunteer organisation and their manager and terminating the arrangement if they believe the activity may represent a health and safety risk or a conflict of interest
- satisfying themselves that the volunteer organisation has in place its own public and employers' liability insurance
- ensuring that they are fit and capable of undertaking the voluntary work for which they are seeking time off
- ensuring they are aware of and follow the rules and procedures of the volunteer organisation whilst undertaking voluntary activities

4.2 **Managers** are responsible for complying with the requirements of this policy and procedure and for ensuring that employees are aware of their responsibilities.

5. Time allowed for volunteering

5.1 Employees can request a maximum of two days or 14.8 hours paid time away from work during any 12-month period (January to December) for volunteering activities that will be of benefit to the residents of Luton (pro rata for part time employees).

5.2 The time may be taken as a whole block or spread across the year but must be a minimum of a half day (3.75 hours) per request.

5.3 Where travel to and/or from the activity occurs within the employee's normal working hours this will also count towards the two days or 15 hours allowed.

5.4 Time off for volunteering is in addition to other time off allowed under the compassionate and special leave procedure e.g. jury service, school governor, magistrate, reservist.

5.5 Should an employee wish to undertake volunteering for more than two days per year they may request additional leave in the normal way e.g. annual leave,

5.6 Please note that time cannot be taken in lieu of volunteering undertaken during normal leisure time – see 5.7.

5.7 The exception to 5.6 is where the council asks for volunteers to support a council-led or council-sponsored event that takes place outside normal working hours, such as a weekend community event, and employees may request time off in lieu for the hours volunteered. The volunteering form will still need to be completed so we can capture the extent and nature of volunteering across the council and time off in lieu must be agreed in advance by the line manager and recorded in accordance with local arrangements (see Time off in lieu scheme). Where volunteering takes place during an employee's normal rest time, the employee and manager must consider the working pattern and ensure the employee has

adequate rest before returning to work. Weekend or out-of-hours volunteering must not compromise statutory rest entitlements, health and wellbeing, or safe service delivery.

5.8 Most volunteering will be employee led but, from time to time, the council will promote volunteering opportunities. Teams may also wish to use volunteering opportunities to support team building.

5.9 Colleagues are encouraged to think about the skills and experience they could offer to support community organisations, for example in areas such as IT, finance, HR, decorating or creative arts. Where an employee wishes to use specific professional or practical skills, the Social Inclusion team may be able to signpost them to suitable organisations or opportunities. For general volunteering interests, colleagues should identify suitable opportunities themselves, including through the platforms listed in Appendix 1.

5.10 In times of emergency the council may ask staff to volunteer to help in the community to support affected individuals e.g. fire, floods, clinical emergencies. This does not count towards the two days employee volunteering.

6. Travel and associated costs

6.1 Travel costs will not be reimbursed by the council however the voluntary organisation may reimburse reasonable out of pocket expenses, brought about through the employees volunteering.

7. Training, checks and insurance

7.1 Employees who will be working with children and/or vulnerable adults will require a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before commencing any voluntary work. This will be the responsibility of the volunteer organisation to arrange.

7.2 Whilst the council encourages employees to undertake volunteering activities, we cannot accept responsibility for insuring employees when engaged on activities with other organisations. Individuals must therefore ensure that they are adequately covered by their chosen voluntary organisation.

8. Procedure

8.1 An employee who has identified a volunteering opportunity should complete an Employee Volunteering Request form and send it to their line manager to authorise, giving a minimum of four weeks' notice.

8.2 The form should include the name of the volunteer organisation or council-led/council-sponsored event, its purpose, the nature of the volunteering work to be undertaken and the dates and time required. The employee must also attach confirmation of the arrangements, for example a letter from the volunteering organisation or event coordinator.

8.3 If the employee intends to take two days off in one block, they only need to complete the form once. If the employee wishes to split the two days over separate activities they should complete a form for each activity, giving a minimum of four weeks' notice on each occasion.

8.4 The line manager will consider the application, check that the request complies with the requirements of the volunteering scheme and confirm the decision to agree or refuse the request, seeking further information from the employee first, if required.

8.5 When authorising volunteering activities managers must be satisfied that:

- the employee has provided evidence, for example confirmation from the volunteering organisation, event coordinator or council service lead, that the activity will benefit residents of Luton and confirming the volunteering arrangements
- the employee is not receiving payment for time worked
- there is no conflict of interest with the employee's work (or with the council in general)
- that the time allocated will not disrupt or adversely affect service delivery
- the activity is not part of normal work responsibilities and duties
- where time off in lieu is requested, the activity is a council-led or council-sponsored event taking place outside normal working hours and volunteers have been specifically requested
- the activity will not bring the council into disrepute

8.6 Any employee found to have falsely requested time off for volunteering activities or who act in an inappropriate way whilst carrying out volunteering activities may be subject to disciplinary action.

8.7 If the request is refused, the reason(s) will be discussed with the employee and recorded on the form. Reasons for refusal may include (but are not limited to) impact on service delivery, insufficient notice, or lack of cover.

8.8 If an employee considers themselves to have been treated unfairly, they should initially raise this informally with their manager. If this is not appropriate or does not result in a satisfactory outcome, they should raise it formally by making use of the council's Grievance procedure

8.9 If an employee is unable to attend their volunteering activity due to sickness or an unforeseen event, they should inform the volunteer organisation and their line manager as soon as possible following council sickness absence policy. If the employee is unable to attend their voluntary activity due to sickness the time will not be deducted from their volunteer hours 'allowance'.

9. Compliance

9.1 Failure to follow this scheme may impact on good employee relations and the reputation of the council as a good employer. Therefore, appropriate action will be taken for employees who fail to follow this procedure.

10. Monitoring

10.1 Human Resources will monitor the extent and range of volunteering activities across the organisation on an annual basis.

Please note: We are working to automate the approval process for volunteering leave via iTrent self-service. In the interim, the process will remain manual and managers should ensure that a copy of the authorised form is forwarded to HR Services to enable monitoring of uptake and the application of this scheme.

Appendix 1 – UK volunteering platforms

If you are looking for suitable volunteering opportunities the platforms listed below may be helpful.

- GoVo – a national digital volunteering platform operated by Royal Voluntary Service. Individuals can search by location, interest and remote/in-person options; the business offer is aimed at employee volunteering, including matching, tracking hours and reporting impact.
- Doit.Life – describes itself as one of the UK's largest volunteering databases, connecting individuals with local, national and community volunteering opportunities. It appears useful for employees looking for general volunteering roles by postcode or interest.
- Reach Volunteering – a skills-based volunteering platform. It is particularly focused on matching people with professional skills to charities, community organisations and trustee roles. This would be useful where employees want to volunteer expertise such as HR, finance, digital, project management or governance.
- Get Volunteering – a national volunteering search site with local filtering. It has a specific Luton page listing local opportunities
- NCVO – not primarily a volunteering vacancy site itself, but it provides guidance on finding volunteering opportunities and signposts people to trusted national providers, including CharityJob, Do IT, NHS Volunteering, Reach Volunteering and Vinspired.
- Volunteering Matters – a long-established UK volunteering organisation offering opportunities around mentoring, befriending, social action, community connection and employee volunteering.
- NHS Volunteering – useful for employees interested in health, care, patient support or community wellbeing-related volunteering, including some roles with NHS organisations and charities
- The Big Help Out – good for one-off, short-term and community-based volunteering, particularly around the annual campaign weekend. It now links closely with Doit.Life for ongoing volunteering opportunities.
- Rest Less – includes volunteering opportunities searchable by location and currently lists a range of roles in and around **Luton**. It may be especially useful for employees looking for flexible or community-based roles.