

Waltham Forest Volunteer Centre
**ORGANISATIONAL POLICY
AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT**

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NB: By Resolution of the Board, paragraphs 12b, 13b and 15 will not come into force until further resolution of the Board.

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PURPOSE

- 1) The Waltham Forest Volunteer Centre ('the Centre') identifies its core role as one of promoting and otherwise working towards the creation of a diverse volunteering community in Waltham Forest. The Centre does this through the provision of services to the volunteering and volunteer involving community, and by encouraging and supporting organisations to develop and use good practice and to actively support equality of opportunity. The Centre recognises the importance of ensuring that the Centre itself provides high quality services and puts best practice in place in its own work. This policy is part of putting that commitment to quality and to equality into practice.
- 2) The Centre should be available and accessible for the provision of services to all volunteer-involving organisations ('VIO's') in the Borough, and additionally to organisations which are considering involving volunteers in the future.
- 3) The Centre encourages organisations which believe in and support our aims and objectives to register and / or to become members of the company so that it can develop a stronger volunteering network and ensure that VIO's are able to play a part in the way the Centre is run. This document governs that relationship. In order to promote good practice across the borough this document stipulates that in order to Register or to become a member an organisation must meet certain basic requirements and standards or commit to meet those standards within a stated period of time.
- 4) The Centre's vision of the creation of a diverse volunteering community in Waltham Forest means that the Centre will monitor and challenge bad practice in relation to volunteering or a failure to operate according to the principles of equality of opportunity. The Centre will be proactive and will support and assist VIOs who need and want to develop their policy and practice in these areas. Where necessary the Centre will take the appropriate action as laid out in this policy.

SCOPE

- 5) This document is intended to lay out clearly what services the Waltham Forest Volunteer Centre will (and won't) provide to VIOs in the Borough, and to ensure that the Centre provides a service which is both high quality and continually improving.
- 6) This Policy lays out the minimum standards and the relevant procedure for Registration and Membership. It also explains the brokerage service and how it operates.
- 7) This Policy sets out how, when and why the Centre will monitor and challenge bad practice and discriminatory practices, and lays down the action it might take when such practices are serious and / or persistent.
- 8) This Policy intends to put into practice the principles and commitments laid out in the Centre's Equal Opportunities Policy.

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF RELATIONSHIP

- 9) Organisations can become register or become members of the Centre, or both.
- 10) Registration allows the Centre to offer a brokerage service to an organisation and to collect and distribute information to and from that organisation.
- 11) Membership allows the Organisation to become involved in the democratic processes of the Company, through General Meetings or through election of a Deputy to the board.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

12) In order to become a member of the Centre an organisation or individual must

- a) be one of the following:
 - i) a statutory body, or
 - ii) a charity, or
 - iii) a not-for-profit organisation, or
 - iv) a profit making organisation whose governing document mandates that any profit or surplus *must* be gifted to a charitable or not-for-profit organisation.
 - v) An individual

You may need to provide documentation that demonstrates that you fall into one of these categories.

- b) **NOT IN FORCE** Be able to demonstrate a commitment to good volunteering practice and equality of opportunity either by
 - i) Providing copies of written health and safety, volunteering and equal opportunities policies which as a *minimum* make the following commitments:
 - to pay volunteers basic travel expenses
 - to insure volunteers whilst volunteering
 - to allow volunteers access to a grievance procedure
 - not to discriminate on the grounds of race*, sex, sexuality and disability

(*in the broad sense as per the Race Relations Legislation)

OR

- ii) A written commitment from the trustees or governing body of the organisation to put in place such policies within eighteen months.
- c) Provide us with your contact details and nominate a Deputy (unless the membership is for an individual).

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- d) Failure to comply with the requirements in a) and b) above shall result in the refusal or termination of membership.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

13) In order to register with the Centre an organisation must

- a) be one of the following:
- i) a statutory body, or
 - ii) a charity, or
 - iii) a not-for-profit organisation, or
 - iv) a profit making organisation whose governing document mandates that any profit or surplus *must* be gifted to a charitable or not-for-profit organisation

You may need to provide documentation that demonstrates that you fall into one of these categories.

- b) **NOT IN FORCE** Be able to demonstrate a commitment to good volunteering practice and equality of opportunity either by
- i) Providing copies of written volunteering and equal opportunities policies which as a *minimum* make the following commitments:
 - to pay volunteers basic travel expenses
 - to allow volunteers access to a grievance procedure
 - to insure volunteers whilst volunteering
 - not to discriminate on the grounds of race*, sex, sexuality and disability

(*in the broad sense as per the Race Relations Legislation)

OR
 - ii) A written commitment from the trustees or governing body of the organisation to put in place such policies within eighteen months.
- c) In addition to i) and ii) above an Organisation may be asked to explain any areas of concern raised by its responses to the questions on the Registration form before registration can be completed.
- d) Provide us with your contact details and other information requested on the Registration form.
- e) Failure to comply with the requirements in a) and b) above shall result in a refusal to register or termination of registration.

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REFUSAL OR TERMINATION OF REGISTRATION OR MEMBERSHIP

14) Any decision not to register or admit an organisation (or individual) as a member will be made by the Board, who will give reasons. The Centre will consider representations made by an Organisation (or individual) regarding a decision not to register in accordance with the Complaints Procedure, copies of which are available on request.

INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS

15) **NOT IN FORCE** Organisations and individuals who were registered or whose membership commenced prior to the commencement of this policy shall, where not already provided, be required within three months of having received notice of the existence of this policy to:

a) demonstrate a commitment to good volunteering practice and equality of opportunity either by

i) Providing copies of written volunteering, Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety Policies which as a *minimum* make the following commitments:

- to pay volunteers basic travel expenses
- to allow volunteers access to a grievance procedure
- to insure volunteers whilst volunteering
- not to discriminate on the grounds of race*, sex, sexuality and disability

(*in the broad sense as per the Race Relations Legislation)

OR

ii) A written commitment from the trustees or governing body of the organisation to put in place such policies within eighteen months of notice being given of the existence of this policy.

iii) Failure to comply with the requirements in a) i) and ii) above shall result in the termination of membership or registration.

SERVICES PROVIDED

16) The Centre provides a range of services through which it aims to promote and make accessible volunteering. The Centre is always willing to listen to ideas about new services which would help achieve these aims. The Centre:

a) Provides a brokerage service between prospective volunteers and VIO's. This service is a referral not a recruitment service (see Service Level Agreement). The Centre can advertise your vacancy to find willing volunteers.

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- b) Provides advice and support regarding policy and best practice in volunteering.
- c) Works in partnership with organisations to create volunteering opportunities – identifying, defining and publicising new vacancies.
- d) May be able to assist if there is a dispute between volunteer and VIO – we may be able to act as an intermediary or advise the parties.
- e) Throughout the Borough, promotes volunteering to make prospective volunteers aware of the opportunities available.
- f) May be able to assist with training volunteers.
- g) Can help you try and identify what is going wrong if you have trouble retaining your volunteers or if you are having trouble recruiting them in the first place.
- h) Will comment and campaign. We will gather and publish information about what VIOs are doing, the health of the volunteering community in the local area, and any problems which have been identified.
- i) Gathers feedback to identify areas where there is a need for a different kind of service that the Centre can help with.
- j) Will run promotional, recognition, informative and training events.

WHAT IS GOOD PRACTICE?

- 17) The Centre considers the following to be essential elements of good volunteering practice.
- a) Volunteering must be voluntary – coercion or pressure negates the essential gift element of volunteering.
 - b) Volunteers must not be exploited. Always ask yourself – what is the volunteer getting out of this? There must be a balance between the benefit to the volunteer and the benefit to your organisation.
 - c) You should not automatically refuse to take on volunteers because of e.g. convictions or previous mental health problems or disability. You should make your decision based on an assessment of risk and relevance.
 - d) Volunteers must be insured.
 - e) Sometimes training is necessary, depending on the position.
 - f) Volunteers travel expenses must be paid and if they work for more than 5 hours, their lunch expenses. Where possible childcare costs should be paid. If a volunteer is disabled they may have extra travel costs (e.g. taxi fare) which should be paid. Expenses should be paid promptly and if necessary in advance.

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- g) Volunteers must know what their duties are, who they are accountable to or who supervises them and what special responsibilities they have (e.g. regarding confidentiality)
- h) Volunteers must have access to some form of grievance procedure, preferably the same one which applies to staff
- i) Volunteers should be recruited and treated fairly and according to the principles of equality of opportunity
- j) Volunteers do not have the same legal rights and statutory protection as an employee, but they should still be treated as a part of the organisation and their contribution should be valued.
- k) Volunteers should be asked for feedback on their volunteering experience and involved in organisation wide consultations.
- l) Volunteers might not ask you for a financial reward but remember to reward your volunteers. A letter of thanks or a certificate will always be appreciated.

POSITIVE ACTION

- 18) The Centre believes that good practice is more than written policy. Where the Centre is made aware of practices that are of concern it will take action. The action taken will depend on the circumstances in each case. Below are some of the action the Centre may take.
- 19) In the case of concerns arising from information included on a registration form, see paras 13c & 14 above.
- 20) The Centre will initially offer support and advice to VIOs which appear not to be adhering to basic principles of equality of opportunity of which appear to be operating below the basic standards of good practice in relation to the treatment of volunteers. The Centre will usually contact the VIO to explain its concern and establish whether such concern is justified. Where appropriate the Centre will arrange a meeting with a representative from the Organisation to try and identify how the Centre can help.
- 21) Where the Centre has followed the steps laid out in the preceding paragraph but still has concerns it may consider suspension and subsequently de-registration of the VIO concerned.
 - a) No decision to suspend will be made except by the Chair of the Board who, having made such a decision will notify the VIO in writing, giving reasons for the decision. A suspension will be stated to last for a specified period of time, after which point the matter not being resolved registration will be withdrawn indefinitely until such time as the concerns of the Centre relating to the VIO are allayed.

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- b) The Centre will consider representations made by an Organisation (or individual) regarding a decision to suspend or deregister in accordance with the Complaints Procedure, copies of which are available on request.
 - c) The main effect of suspension or deregistration is the withdrawal of brokerage services. The Centre will not advertise positions or refer volunteers to an organisation which is suspended or deregistered.
- 22) Exceptionally (for example where the practices of which the Centre is aware are serious), the Centre may report such matters to the relevant authority, for example:
- a) Commission for Racial Equality,
 - b) Equal Opportunities Commission,
 - c) Disability Rights Commission,
 - d) The Charity Commissioners,
 - e) Companies House,
 - f) The Police.

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR REGISTERED ORGANISATIONS

23) General

- a) The Centre will always try and provide a professional and efficient service.
- b) Our staff should always be polite.
- c) We will try and respond to messages promptly.
- d) We will do what we say we will do in our policies.
- e) We will listen to suggestions.
- f) We will provide the best services we can with the resources available to us.

24) Brokerage

- a) The Centre will provide a brokerage service to Registered Organisations.
- b) The Centre will regularly contact organisations to update its information on vacancies and requirements.
- c) The Centre will hold details of vacancies on its database and may advertise them through inclusion in the publications it produces from time to time.
- d) The Centre can assist an organisation in the writing of task descriptions for vacancies.
- e) The Centre will attempt to identify volunteers who are willing to volunteer in the positions vacant and once identified will either refer the prospective

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volunteer to the organisation or contact the organisation to arrange a meeting between prospective volunteer and organisation.

- f) The Centre interviews most prospective volunteers to determine their areas of interest but does not vet or filter prospective volunteers. Prospective volunteers are referred on the basis of interest. It is the sole responsibility of the VIO to ensure that a prospective volunteer is suitable.
- g) The Centre does not undertake to perform any police, reference or other checks on prospective volunteers prior to referral or at any time. If such checks are necessary they must be carried out by the VIO. The Centre accepts no liability for the consequences of a failure to ensure that a prospective volunteer is suitable, responsible and otherwise fit to volunteer in the relevant position.
- h) Occasionally the Centre may contact an organisation to discuss whether or not a prospective volunteer is suitable for a vacancy. For example, this may be because they have disclosed a previous conviction to us which is several years old. The volunteer may have asked us to find out if the conviction will prevent them from filling a particular vacancy.
- i) The Centre will not offer a brokerage service where registration has been suspended or withdrawn, or has not been fully completed.
- j) The Centre will not accept vacancies which are not voluntary or which are exploitative.

25) Advice and support re: policy and best practice

- a) The Centre will provide advice and support to Organisations who want to introduce or update their policies or to change their practices to reflect best practice or who want to take steps to make volunteering more accessible. The appropriate support will vary from organisation to organisation and may be constrained by the availability of staff time. Examples of the kind of support which may be available are listed below.
 - i) Provision of guidance material
 - ii) Good practice audit in the form of visits to organisations and / or review of existing policy documents
 - iii) presentations to staff or governing bodies of organisations about volunteering best practice
- b) The Centre can advise, provide materials and review but we cannot write your policies for you. Every organisation is different and every organisation needs a policy which suits their needs and which has been written by the people who will put it into practice. We do not currently hold model policies.

26) Dispute Resolution

- a) The assistance the Centre can give where a dispute between volunteer and VIO is limited and will depend on the individual circumstances, but the Centre

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is willing to consider in each case how it can help to resolve matters in a mutually satisfactory way. If an organisation wishes the Centre to assist they should contact the Director to discuss the matter.

- b) The Centre makes no commitment to act 'for' one or other side in a dispute but will offer assistance in the interests of promoting good practice in volunteering, for example advising on what may or may not be reasonable in the circumstances, on how resolution may be reached, or acting as an intermediary.

COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

27) The Centre has a Complaints Procedure which can be used by any organisation which is unhappy with the services provided by the Centre or with a decision made by the Centre which affects the organisation. Copies are available on request.

28) The Centre is always willing to receive constructive criticism and suggestions for how to do things better. Please get in touch if you have comments to make.

OTHER USEFUL DOCUMENTS

29) Other documents which might be useful are listed below. All are available on request from the Centre.

- a) Equal Opportunities Policy
- b) Complaints Procedure
- c) Volunteering Policy
- d) Memorandum and Articles of Association

REVIEW

This document was approved by Board on 7th August 2002. It shall be reviewed within 6 months and thereafter at least every two years. The date by which this document must next be reviewed is 7th Feb 2003.