

Volunteer Policy: Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service

This policy sets out the broad principles for volunteering with Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service. It is of relevance to all within the organisation, including volunteers, staff members, and those elected and appointed to positions of responsibility. This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains appropriate to the needs of Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service and its volunteers.

What do we do?

Libraries play an essential role in contributing to the well-being and prosperity of individuals and communities. They offer education, entertainment, fulfilment and practical help to all sections of the community: They are public spaces that are open and accessible to all.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service is responsible for running:

- 13 Static Libraries all with public access computers, internet access and printing facilities. Including three Reference Libraries dedicated to the conservation of local historical documents each with microfilm/microfiche readers.
- A Reserve Stock Library that is open to the public on a daily basis.
- Four Mobile Libraries that visit more isolated areas where residents do not have a library nearby.
- A House Bound Service which delivers materials such as large print books and audio books to library users who have become house bound due to age, illness etc.
- A Schools Library Service which helps schools develop their resources to support the whole curriculum and the learning needs every student.
- Deposit Collection Service which delivers materials to non-library sites such as nursing homes for the use of the residents.

What is a volunteer?

Volunteers are members of the public who, unpaid and of their own free will, contribute their time, energy and skills to benefit the library and the wider community. Volunteering is an expression of citizenship and the benefits of volunteering extend to not only the volunteer and the libraries but to the community as a whole. It gives the chance to develop new skills, gain experience and help individuals to realise their full potential.

Anyone can volunteer regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, gender and sexual orientation. The minimum age to be able to volunteer is 16 and there is no upper age limit. Anyone who is under 18 will have to have permission from their parent or guardian to volunteer. Young people may be taken onto work experience placements when sponsored through a school or education establishment.

Why do we take on volunteers?

We believe that volunteers will support and enhance the libraries and bring many benefits to library users, staff and local people. Libraries are valued community spaces and increased involvement by local volunteers in the delivery of library services will ensure that they will remain at the heart of communities. We believe this can be achieved by meeting the varied needs of residents and increasing community involvement with the help of volunteers.

Volunteer Roles

Volunteering is a legitimate and crucial activity which is fully supported by Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Services and it is not intended to be a substitute for paid employment. The role of volunteers will complement paid staff but will not replace paid staff. Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that paid staff are clear about the role of volunteers so good working relationships can develop between paid staff and volunteers.

There are many different opportunities for volunteers within the Library Service. These can include:

- Helping library users with the computers
- Helping research family history using local archives
- Helping to organise library stock
- Hosting coffee mornings
- Hosting a reading group
- Helping run the local toddler group
- Storytelling for young children
- Storytelling for adults with learning difficulties
- Helping with the Summer Reading Challenge
- Helping to organise the sale of old library stock

These are all important roles that help not only the library but the community as well.

The Recruitment Process

All volunteering opportunities will be advertised as and when they become available on the Rhondda Cynon Taf council website; at local libraries and other council venues. They will also be advertised to the local Volunteer Bureau.

All potential volunteers will be required to:

- Fill in an application form
- Provide details of a referee
- Attend an informal interview
- Have a Disclosure and Barring Service Check
- Sign a Volunteer Agreement
- And commit to a four week trial period in which they will find out more about the role, receive training and allow time to adjust to the new role.

There are some circumstances where volunteering may affect the payments of benefits. All potential volunteers who are claiming benefits are advised to check their individual circumstances as Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council will not accept any responsibility for loss of benefits of any kind.

Welsh Language

In accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 and Welsh Language (Measure) 2011 the council is required to meet statutory standards in respect of the Welsh Language. Accordingly some volunteers will be required to work through the medium of Welsh and English.

Training and Development

The Council will ensure that all volunteers are made to feel welcome and all volunteers will receive an informal induction. This may be before, or on the first day of, volunteering and this will equip all volunteers with essential information on policies, health and safety, safeguarding etc. and procedures and skills in order for them to carry out their role competently and safely. Depending on the role, training can be one-to-one on-the-role training, or via a group training day. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to attend relevant training.

Supervision and Support

All volunteers will have a designated member of staff within the library to which they can go to for guidance and advice to help the volunteer to carry out tasks

successfully. In most instances this will be the on-site Branch Librarian. All volunteers will be made aware of and given contact details of their assigned member of staff.

Insurance

All volunteers will be insured under Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's Employer Liability Insurance and Public Liability Insurance. The organisation does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage.

Expenses

Volunteers will be paid expenses when the use of a car is essential to the volunteering role. Travel expenses are processed through the Council's Finance Department. Travel expenses are paid at current Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council rates and will be reimbursed after the submission of the appropriate form. To be able to claim travel expenses when using your own car you will need to have business insurance.

The Volunteer Supervisor can provide more details of claiming travel and other pre-agreed role related expenses.

Health and Safety

The Council is committed to providing and maintaining a safe environment for its volunteers. Volunteers will receive appropriate health and safety training as part of their induction and training. Volunteer Supervisors will carry out risk assessments on all activities undertaken by volunteers. Volunteers will also have duty of care for themselves and others around them.

Equal Opportunities

The Council values diversity amid its paid staff and volunteers and is committed to actively encouraging applications from a wide cross section of backgrounds and experiences and to ensure that differing ideas, abilities and needs are valued. Volunteering opportunities are widely promoted in ways that makes them accessible to a diverse range of people.

Confidentiality

Volunteers are bound by the same rules for confidentiality as paid members of staff. Details of the Council's Confidentiality Policy will be provided during the induction.

Information Protection and Communication

Personal information recorded about volunteers will be stored and maintained with appropriate safeguards for confidentiality under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Volunteers will be expected to donate to Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Services any original copyright works they may produce while volunteering and will be asked to sign a copyright agreement for any important projects.

If volunteers are asked for an opinion or comment by the press or any other media source, volunteers should refer them to their Volunteer Supervisor. All press and media communication go through the Council's Press Office.

Settling Differences and Finishing as a Volunteer

The Council aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. In the event of a problem, all relevant information and facts should be obtained as quickly as possible to resolve the problem in as quick a manner as possible. The volunteer shall be supported while an informal solution is being established. If an informal solution cannot be found then the complaint will be referred to Rhondda Cynon Taf's wider grievance or complaints policies and procedures. If a volunteer's behaviour is repeatedly or seriously unacceptable, they may be asked to change their role or to leave the role completely.

Volunteers can expect their views to be heard, noted and acted upon promptly, with the aim of reaching a positive and amicable solution. Any grievance raised will be dealt with in accordance with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's policy and guidelines.

The Council recognises that volunteers are free to end their involvement at any time and volunteers will be invited to attend an informal exit interview for the future benefit of the volunteer programme. Any Council equipment, property, ID passes etc must be returned. The Council can also end the volunteer arrangement at any time should the project come to an end or if the arrangement is no longer deemed to be mutually beneficial.

The Volunteers' Charter

The Council expects volunteers to:

- Work with us to achieve our aims and objectives to the best of their abilities
- Work independently and without supervision when necessary
- Be reliable
- Be honest
- Carry out their role to the best of their ability as set out in the role description
- Treat volunteering as a mutually beneficial activity to both parties
- Give reasonable notice, wherever possible, if unable to undertake agreed activities
- Respect confidentiality, equality and health and safety requirements
- Act under the direction of their Volunteer Supervisor
- Attend relevant induction, training, feedback and support sessions
- Project a positive image of the Council at all times
- Tell the Council in advance if they want to stop Volunteering
- Share any concerns that involves their work as soon as possible with the appropriate person

The Council recognises the rights of volunteers to:

- Know what is (and is not) expected of them
- Be given tasks that they are capable of and that are of benefit to the service
- Be treated fairly, equally and free from discrimination
- Receive useful and appropriate induction and training
- Receive support and supervision with a point of contact at all times when working on site
- Receive relevant and agreed out of pocket expenses
- Be insured
- Receive appreciation
- Be offered the opportunity for personal development