Countryside and Rights of Way Service

VOLUNTEER POLICY

This policy presents the commitment of the Countryside and Rights of Way Service (CRoWs, previously the Countryside Management Service (CMS)) to working with volunteers, and is applicable to all roles. The main aims of this policy are:

- To describe the role of volunteers within CRoWs and outline expectations for both staff and volunteers
- To ensure staff appreciate the value of volunteers
- To ensure volunteers feel valued and supported

The policy will be available to all CRoWs volunteers and staff, and can be found at the CRoWs office and on the CRoWs website. It will be reviewed every two years by volunteers and staff.

About CRoWs
The Countryside and Rights of Way Service works with communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment.

It does this by:
- Encouraging people to get involved in looking after their local countryside or park by offering a range of voluntary opportunities, from practical conservation to leading Health Walks.
- Providing advice to landowners and managers to help them look after their land with wildlife in mind. Helping a range of people secure funding for landscape improvement and conservation work.
- Promoting outdoor recreation through organising events and working with groups to develop walk and cycle routes to link towns and villages to their surrounding countryside.

CRoWs is hosted and funded in part by Hertfordshire County Council, and further funded by the majority of Hertfordshire’s District and Borough Councils.

How volunteers help CRoWs achieve its aims
Volunteers are an integral part of CRoWs activity, with many projects sustained predominantly by volunteers. The time, experience, knowledge and skills that volunteers offer is highly valued by staff, Hertfordshire County Council, the district and borough councils and local communities. It is CRoWs' aim that volunteers gain satisfaction from their time working with us and that the relationship is one of mutual benefit.

What volunteers can expect from CRoWs
We are committed to encouraging and supporting all volunteers and will do this by:
- welcoming volunteers as part of the team and providing an induction to the services offered
- providing volunteers with a nominated member of staff to serve as a main point of contact and support
- talking to volunteers about their role and providing appropriate training, guidance and support depending on the abilities and interests of the individual and of CRoWs
• always considering the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers
• giving feedback in order that volunteers can develop in their role
• ensuring volunteers feel valued and thanked for their contribution

What CROWS expects from volunteers
• to be good ambassadors for CRoWs and positive role models to other volunteers
• to behave in a responsible and professional manner and adhere to CRoWs policies and procedures whilst working on behalf of CRoWs and its sponsors
• to respect confidentiality
• to give honest feedback, ask for help if it is needed and contribute ideas for improvement
• to never undertake a task that they are uncomfortable doing, or are not trained or capable of doing
• to be accountable and accept constructive comment
• to undertake work safely and report any concerns immediately
• to attend pre-arranged meetings, and inform their supervisor if they are unable to do so

Volunteer induction
Volunteers will receive an induction that is appropriate to their role, the details of which can be found in the relevant Role Description. On the rare occasion that it is decided that we are unable to offer a volunteering opportunity, other organisations may be suggested that are deemed more appropriate. Volunteers will be asked to supply any relevant personal information such as related experience or any medical conditions which may impact upon the type of work offered.

Voluntary roles
There are a range of voluntary opportunities available with CRoWs across the County, the details of which can be found in the various Role Description documents. These cover the activities undertaken, and the support and benefits available. They can be found on the CRoWs website, from the office, or on request. Volunteers are welcome to take on one or a combination of these roles.

(Individuals who are claiming welfare benefits should discuss their voluntary activities with their local Benefits Office.)

Equalities and Diversity
At CRoWs 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 respect and value diversity and will do everything we reasonably can to make sure volunteering opportunities are available to all.

People under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a responsible adult on CRoWs voluntary activities. Those between 16 and 18 may attend activities unaccompanied with the consent of their parent or guardian. The needs of vulnerable adults will be treated on a case-by-case basis. It is likely that we will require vulnerable adults to be accompanied by a carer until the carer, on agreement with CRoWs staff, deems it no longer necessary. This agreement will be confirmed in writing.
Insurance
Whilst engaged on agreed voluntary activities for CRoWs, volunteers are treated exactly as a normal, full time, paid employee for the purposes of both Employers and Public Liability Insurance. As such, the standard Employers and Public Liability policies give the same protection to volunteers as they would to any other employee.

The Employers Liability policy covers the Council’s legal liability in respect of accidental injury, illness, disease or death to employees, and therefore to volunteers. The policy also provides an indemnity to individual volunteers in regard to injuries caused by them to other employees/volunteers, where they are legally liable as individuals.

HCC also holds Public Liability cover, which applies whilst volunteers are participating in agreed activities. This Public Liability policy affords an indemnity to individual volunteers in respect of their legal liability for third party injury or third party property damage.

HCC’s insurance policies do not give any cover in respect of loss of or damage to personal property belonging to such volunteers.

Where the volunteer is using their own motor vehicle for the agreed voluntary activities, it will be the responsibility of the volunteer to ensure that all relevant motor insurance is in place. Therefore, all volunteers are advised to check that their own Motor Policy covers them for the activities concerned, including commuting.

Health and safety
CROWS take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of all our volunteers. We are committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment and to giving volunteers appropriate induction, training and supervision to maintain everyone’s health and safety.

As part of the induction, volunteers will receive information and training specific to the role. Volunteers should be aware of, and adhere to, the health and safety measures that are in place.

Medical conditions
If you have or have had any medical conditions, illness or injury that may affect you or others while working with us, or if there are any changes to your health that we should know about, please let us know. Where necessary we may refer you to our Occupational Health Practitioner for assessment. The information you provide is strictly confidential and will only be seen by the Occupational Health Unit.

Problems or complaints
If a volunteer has a problem or concerns they should, in the first instance, speak to their CRoWs contact, who will make every effort to settle the issue fairly and amicably. However, if they do not feel the matter is resolved satisfactorily, they should contact a member of the CRoWs management team who will take the issue further. As part of the problem solving procedure we ask that volunteers provide feedback to help us improve the way we manage and support our volunteers.
On the rare occasion that there is a problem with a volunteer’s behaviour or contribution, we will discuss the issues with the volunteer, and agree steps to address them. These could include additional role training or increased mentoring. However, if concerns cannot be resolved, we may have to end that person’s volunteering relationship with us.

In the case of a serious act of misconduct (violence, theft, drug or alcohol abuse, harassment, non-compliance with a safety plan or risk assessments, etc.) they will be asked to leave immediately.

Confidentiality
As part of their role volunteers may come into contact with information that is confidential. This should not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone not directly connected to our work.

We will ensure that any personal information supplied to us is treated in confidence and is handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018. Please see our separate Privacy Policy.

Moving on
We understand that personal circumstances change. If a volunteer no longer wishes to continue in their role at any point, they are not obliged to do so. On leaving CROWS, volunteers are welcome to ask for a reference or statement of their achievements. To help us continue to improve our services we may ask volunteers for feedback on their experience.

Contact us
If you have any questions about our volunteer opportunities or volunteer policy or you are ready to get started as a volunteer, please get in touch:

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