

Volunteer Policy

Scope of Policy

This policy sets out why Platform Housing Group (the Group) involves volunteers and provides a framework for their involvement.

Applicability

The policy applies to all members of the Group.

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 The Group recognises the benefits that the involvement of volunteers brings to an organisation. Volunteers, while not replacing paid staff, complement the roles of paid employees and can enable additional services to be offered. Involving volunteers creates a positive culture and shows that the organisation works in partnership with its customers and others that live within its communities.
- 1.2 Volunteers make a huge difference to our customers' quality of life, helping them to enjoy independent and active lifestyles, which help both physical and mental wellbeing.
- 1.3 We also recognise the benefits of volunteering to customers who volunteer, which can include increased employability (through experience, skills and training) as well as enhanced wellbeing, through social connections, and a feeling that they are contributing to their community.
- 1.4 We are therefore committed to creating a range of volunteer roles for customers and others in our communities to get involved in the work that we carry out.
- 1.5 We will ensure that volunteers are treated fairly, given appropriate support and opportunities to develop skills.
- 1.6 We will ensure that volunteers have the necessary skills to carry out roles and the necessary personal behaviours to act as a representative for the Group.
- 1.7 We will review volunteering roles to assess the difference they are making for individuals and communities.
- 1.8 Involved customers are distinct from volunteers as they carry out specific engagement roles that help us to shape and inform our services, whereas volunteers carry out roles that support local communities. Involved customers are covered by the Customer and Community Engagement Policy.

2. Context

- 2.1 The Neighbourhood and Community Standard (2023) requires social housing providers to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in areas where they provide social housing.
- 2.2 The Group's mission states, "By investing in people and places, we will build a stronger, more sustainable future."
- 2.3 Involving and supporting volunteers is an effective way of investing in communities and promoting social, environmental and economic wellbeing. It is an investment in the individuals themselves but also the communities and environments which their volunteering benefits. It is also an investment that gives returns, as the Group benefits through the involvement of volunteers.
- 2.4 This policy reflects the Group's values:
 - People Matter – demonstrating that we value and support volunteers
 - Own It – empowering volunteers to act as ambassadors in our communities
 - One Team – ensuring that volunteers feel valued as part of the Platform team
 - Be Brave – working with volunteers to develop new initiatives to make a difference for Platform communities
- 2.5 The Group also has a Strategic Aim to 'Provide safe and well-maintained homes and communities' and to 'work with our customers to improve what we do.' The involvement of volunteers from the communities in which the Group operates further enhances this, providing valuable experience, as well as helping to develop skills and employability.

3. Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 The Group aims to have a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship with our volunteers; with their involvement informing and developing our work, and our work enabling individuals to learn skills and achieve personal development through their volunteering.
- 3.2 Volunteering can boost employability through giving experience, developing skills, content for CVs, contacts and references.
- 3.3 It can also provide a sense of achievement, sociability and fun.

All five of the "Five Ways to Mental Wellbeing" (produced by the New Economics Foundation on behalf of Foresight and promoted by Government) can be supported through volunteering:

- Connect
- Be Active

- Take Notice
- Keep Learning
- Give

3.4 Evidence suggests that a small improvement in wellbeing can help to decrease some mental health problems and help people to flourish.

3.5 The involvement of volunteers will be guided by the following principles of good practice:

- The tasks to be performed by volunteers will be clearly defined, so that everyone is sure of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- The Group will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 in the use of data held on all volunteers.
- Volunteering opportunities will complement rather than replace the work of paid employees.
- Volunteers will be provided with regular opportunities to share ideas/concerns with a named contact in line with our Support and Supervision Policy.

3.6 Involving volunteers takes resources: time recruiting and supervising volunteers and funds to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses. While volunteers are not free, investment in their involvement can yield enormous rewards in the long term.

3.7 Volunteers can:

- Enable an organisation to offer more support or services.
- Allow involvement of a more diverse group of people and open new channels for local input.
- Give a new perspective, often reflecting the views of the community.
- Bring energy and enthusiasm. Volunteers join because they want to be there, so they bring a unique energy.
- Bring new skills and experience that may otherwise be unavailable.
- Improve the reputation of the Group within our communities. Volunteers often become ambassadors within the community.

3.8 By adopting this policy, the Group aims to:

- Highlight and acknowledge the value of the contribution made by volunteers.
- Reflect the purpose, values, standards and strategies of the Group in its approach to involving volunteers.
- Recognise the respective roles, rights and responsibilities of volunteers.
- Confirm the Group's commitment to involving volunteers in its work.
- Establish clear principles for the involvement of volunteers.
- Ensure the ongoing quality of both the volunteering opportunities on offer and the work carried out by our volunteers.

4. Policy Outline

4.1 Definition

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) define volunteering as:

“when someone spends unpaid time doing something to benefit others. Helping your close friends or relatives isn't volunteering. But doing something to benefit the environment (and through that, other people) is. Volunteering can be formal and organised by organisations, or informal within communities. It should always be a free choice made by the person giving up their time.”

4.2 Recruitment (including Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks)

4.2.1 Role Descriptions will outline time, commitment, necessary skills and actual duties. Where there is specific training required this will be highlighted as part of the recruitment process. The Group will adhere to its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy when recruiting and selecting volunteers.

4.2.2 Volunteers will be required to complete a DBS check for some roles, with each role risk assessed to determine the need for these to be carried out. This will be a standard check unless specific conditions apply that legally justify an enhanced check.

4.2.3 No volunteer will be permitted to take up a voluntary role that is deemed to require a check unsupervised until either notification of a clean DBS check has been received or a risk assessment has been carried out and concluded that anything present on an individual's record does not represent an unacceptable risk for them to be placed in a particular role.

4.2.4 Where individuals cannot be placed in their preferred role, we will endeavour to signpost to another agency who can support them to find a volunteering opportunity.

4.3 Support and Supervision

4.3.1 Once placed, we will expect volunteers to comply with existing policies and procedures. All volunteers are covered under the Group's Public Liability Insurance.

4.3.2 All volunteers will have an induction to their volunteering which will give background about the Group's values and involve an overview of the relevant policies and procedures.

Following the induction, active volunteers will have regular support and supervision meetings with a named contact to identify areas for development, or to discuss any issues. A record of these discussions will be held as part of the individual volunteer's records. Volunteers can have access to their records at any time.

- 4.3.3 Volunteers will be able to claim reasonable expenses for their volunteering in line with the Travel and Expenses Policy. Volunteers will be asked to discuss any planned expenditure prior to incurring these expenses to ensure that it will be covered by the Group.
- 4.3.4 Set hours and duties may be agreed but there must be a flexible approach, with an emphasis on communication between the volunteer and the person supporting them to ensure that services are delivered but also that volunteers choose when they work.
- 4.3.5 Volunteers can access learning and development opportunities, which are relevant to their volunteering role throughout their time with the Group. Opportunities for learning and development will form part of the discussions at support and supervision sessions.

4.4 **Problem Solving**

- 4.4.1 A volunteer can raise concerns to their Volunteer Supervisor at a support session or at any other time. This may relate to issues like safety, safeguarding, the role, behaviour of staff or others or correct procedures not being followed. Where appropriate, a volunteer's concerns will be dealt with using the Group's Grievance Policy and Procedure.
- 4.4.2 When concerns are raised about a volunteer, they will be investigated in line with any relevant HR policy.
- 4.4.3 Each activity will be risk assessed and appropriate adjustments will be made to ensure that any risks are minimised, such as avoiding unsupervised one-to-one sessions.

4.5 **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for the implementation, monitoring and review of the policy and procedures lies with the Chief Operating Officer. Implementation and adherence to this policy is the responsibility of all employees. Responsibilities of both parties are covered in the Volunteer Agreement.

4.6 **Recognition**

- 4.6.1 We are committed to recognising the value of what volunteers offer not just to the organisation, but to our neighbourhoods and communities, the social economy and wider social objectives.
- 4.6.2 Volunteers are valued members of the Group's Housing team and we commit to showing our appreciation through featuring stories and presenting awards to those who have made particularly outstanding contributions.

4.7 Roles

- 4.7.1 Roles will include opportunities to support vibrant communities at retirement villages, as well as roles that enhance the work the Group does in line with our community objectives, including digital inclusion and health and wellbeing.

5. Equality and Diversity

- 5.1 We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history, as referred to in our relevant Group policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly.
- 5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been considered and which identified no negative impact on any person/group with a protected characteristic as a result of this policy.

A Data Privacy Impact Assessment is in progress and this section will be updated, as appropriate, once completed.

6. Complaints

- 6.1 The Group aims to meet the needs of its customers by providing an excellent service. However, it is acknowledged that occasionally things go wrong and customers may wish to complain. Should the need arise to make a complaint, please refer to the Group's Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 The next policy review is scheduled for **January 2027** and then every three years thereafter.
- 7.2 Approved documents are valid for use after their approval date and remain in force beyond any expiry of their review date until a new version is available.

8. Associated Documents

- 8.1 List of documents - associated policies, procedures and publications:

- Customer and Community Engagement Policy
- Customer and Community Engagement Strategy
- Platform Housing Group Corporate Strategy
- Criminal Record Checks (Disclosure & Barring) Policy
- Travel and Expenses Policy
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has information on volunteers' legal status
- Regulator of Social Housing – Consumer Standards:
 - Neighbourhood and Community
 - Transparency, Influence and Accountability

Authors:	Chris Reed and Gem Murphy
Document type:	Policy
Version 1.1:	Final
Version 1.1 Approved by: Approved date: Release date:	Performance & Risk Forum 31/01/2024 01/02/2024
Version 1 Approved by: Approved date: Release date:	Risk & Performance Forum 26/08/2020 16/09/2020
Customer Voice Panel:	Yes 01/11/2023
Next review date:	01/2027
DPIA completed:	In progress
EIA completed:	No