Parish Councils: Working with Volunteers and supporting the Voluntary Sector

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Parish Councils: Voluntary organisations?

- Parish Councils not part of voluntary sector.
- Formal tier of the structure of Government in this country.
- Able to levy taxes at local level according to need.
- Clerks are paid employees.
- Cllrs sometimes paid an allowance, often not.
- Even if paid an allowance Cllrs are not employees.
- However, also not “volunteers” in the formal sense.
- Cllrs democratically elected representatives.
- They hold formal civic office; legally bound by duties.
- Cllrs do not volunteer to sit on the Parish Council; elected.
- But, Parish Councils often categorised alongside VCS groups.
Parish Councils as community hubs

- By bringing people together on a local task a parish council has the potential to create a better community spirit, instil a sense of achievement and make the place a better place to live.
- If acting as a community hub for activity and volunteering, it is important to listen and work with the community.
- By engaging with volunteers, community groups and local businesses, smaller parish councils can complete worthwhile projects even with minimal funding/sponsorship.
- Councils can act as community hubs by facilitating (providing funding, facilities, assets, etc, for/to voluntary groups) or directly delivering, including through the use of volunteers.
Parish Councils and Grants

- If the body applying for/receiving a grant is the parish council, then money immediately becomes public money once received, and all usual rules apply (how and on what spent).
- PC must know the precise purpose of the grant they are providing; otherwise not be possible to know which power it is using, or even if they have the legal power to make the grant.
- PCs cannot make a grant to an individual; groups and organisations only (unless the council has adopted GPoC).
- Grants/donations can only be agreed as explicit agenda items (i.e. not under “correspondence”, “clerks report”, etc).
- Grant should give a direct benefit to the area or its inhabitants.
- Ideally have a clear budget line for grants in the PC budget, an agreed grant policy/process, and an application form?
Other grant tips

- Grant monitoring – do you ask for regular updates, or even an end of year update? Do you request copies of receipts?
- Protecting public money – do you check that the person approaching the PC on behalf of a group is authorised to do so? Who is cheque made out to? Other checks?
- Claw back – do you include a clause allowing the council to claw back any money which is not spent for purposes agreed?
- Due diligence – do you undertake basic checks on the body asking for the grant (e.g. Charity Commission website)?
- Transparent grant making – do you have a clear process and application criteria? Allows the PC to treat applications equally, makes the process fairer and more transparent, and makes decision making for the council much easier.
**Other grant tips**

- **S137** - Are you clear when you are using S137 to make grants? Upper limit must be adhered to and all S137 expenditure accounted for separately in the council's accounts.

- Grant or subsidy? – best practice is that grants are for specific costs/purposes (i.e. not general funding) and shouldn’t be used over a period of years to prop up organisations.

- Grant or contract? – there are occasions when a contract between a local council and an organisation to provide services on its behalf is what should be in place, not a grant.

- Grants for campaign groups – most PCs consider that grant support for groups that exist to campaign on specific single issues (e.g. against specific developments) is not appropriate.

- Match funding – many PCs consider applications more favourably if the organisation receives match funding.
Examples of PC volunteer activities

- Planning and documenting local walks, highlighting the natural features and points of interest
- Encouraging local biodiversity
- Working with the principal authority on providing energy saving information
- Starting a neighbourhood buddy scheme to check on older residents especially in the winter
- Providing funding for new groups to get established
- Buying play equipment for local mother and toddler group
- Promoting a local art and photographic competition.
- Running “best kept garden” competitions.
Advantages for the Council

Why councils consider using volunteers:
• Using skills and enthusiasm in the community; Often untapped
• Encourages community buy-in to projects – Support has financial benefits
• Financially beneficial – although agreed expenses should be paid
• Spreads the workload – Makes running an asset achievable
• Encourages team work – Together achieving success
• Paid staff are not diverted from their own commitments – or distracted
• Increases the quality and the level of the services being provided
Disadvantages for the Council

- Reliability – Councils cannot compel volunteers to work
- Performance management – Managing competency
- Competition and conflict – Managing expectations and disagreements
- Omission and loss – Acts of a volunteer that lead to financial loss of another party
- Potential financial liability – Acts of a volunteer leading to financial loss to the council
- Background history – DBS Checks
- Injury liability – Adequate insurance
- Agreement – An agreement (should not be worded like a contract) that sets out the terms of the volunteer role and that no money or other benefit is expected will help safeguard against any possible future employment tribunal cases being made or the requirement to pay the minimum wage (The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 s 44)
Why Volunteer

• Gain life and work experience while looking for employment
• Enhance the volunteer’s CV
• Intellectual stimulation and growth
• Meet new people
• Be involved in the community
• Learn more about local government
• Keep active
• Share skills
• Learn new skills
• Access to possible training opportunities
What do you want the volunteer to do?

The council needs to develop a clear remit:

- Each volunteer post should have a description of the role
- Clear definition of the desired outcomes
- Who to contact for help
- The opportunity to attend training
- Be given a policy on claiming expenses

Volunteers should feel appreciated and supported
Example task description

- Volunteer at the village hall:
- As and when you are able: (avoiding express obligations)
  - Keep the hall area clean
  - Check to make sure there is enough crockery and cutlery and that they are clean
  - Take bookings and from members of the public
  - Cash up petty cash and put the takings in the safe
  - Close the Hall car park promptly at 10pm
  - Wash crockery and cutlery and clean the kitchen ready for the next day
  - Note any equipment that is damaged or consumables that need ordering
  - Close and lock the window shutters and lock the front door.
  - Call the caretaker to come and lock up
Example desired outcomes

- The council can explain the purpose of the volunteer post and why they value the time they give.

- These volunteer roles help ensure the Hall is open for more nights than could otherwise be possible.
- As there are no other local facilities it provides a valuable social meeting place, venue for activities, and helps retain community cohesion.
- Hall rental is also an important source of revenue that is reinvested to help maintain the hall and its activities.
- Councils also need to express that the volunteer is not committed to any minimum time periods and that they are under no obligation to give their time.
Communication

- Councils need to make sure that volunteers know what to do in an emergency & where they can ask for help.
- Details of a named supervisor
- Volunteers need to be aware of H&S, including who is a first aider, where the first aid kit is, where fire extinguishers are and how to use them, etc.
- If the role requires equipment use or new skills induction and training should be given
- All volunteers treated in line with the councils equal opportunities policy
- If the role incurs out of pocket expenditure clear guidance should be given on what can be claimed and at what rate. For example travel, 45p per mile
Liability and Insurance

Councils are advised:

• Check with the councils insurer for any additional cover that might be required.

• They must have employers liability insurance and although there is no duty to insure volunteers it is desirable to do so.

• Public liability insurance is not mandatory but highly recommended as it can insure the council against a claim made by a volunteer or the actions of a volunteer.

• Personal accident insurance may be extended to cover volunteers.

• Professional indemnity insurance is desirable for organisations that give advice using volunteers.
Recruiting and Keeping Volunteers

Recruiting:

• What skills are the council looking for?
• What opportunities are available?
• Equal Opportunities

• The council may advertise locally using traditional methods newsletters, website, notice board or more widely through local newspapers

• Or on volunteer websites http://www.do-it.org.uk/
• Or social media https://twitter.com/ www.facebook.com
Keeping Volunteers

- Regular team meetings
- Keeping them informed and in regular dialogue
- Sharing success and achievements
- Opportunities to continue to learn new skills
- Managing expectations
- Ensuring they feel valued (Christmas cards etc.)
- Listening to their suggestions and input

The council may want to put in place a process for managing changes in volunteers so that the process does not affect the service involved adversely.
Leicestershire’s Volunteering Landscape

- Key plank of Leicestershire Communities in Charge programme
- Leicestershire Together Volunteering Strategy
- Priority for the Stronger Communities Board
- LCC policy agreed on supporting and developing volunteers
- Wide range of opportunities, now advertised together in one place: www.leics.gov.uk/volunteering
- Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL) provides information about volunteering across Leics www.valonline.org.uk/
- Think Leicestershire brings together like minded people from across the county to help support and grow our communities www.thinkleicestershire.co.uk
Questions and Discussion....