



Planning Aid Wales volunteer policy

Adopted 10th January 2012

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out the broad principles for voluntary involvement in Planning Aid Wales. It is of relevance to all within the organisation, including volunteers, staff and directors.

1.2 The policy was adopted by the Planning Aid Wales Management Board on 10th January 2012. The policy will be reviewed every two years to ensure that it remains appropriate to the needs of Planning Aid Wales and its volunteers.

2. Statement of values

2.1 Planning Aid Wales values the important role volunteers take in helping to deliver its services and is committed to:

- i) recognising the individual skills each person offers and ensuring that all volunteers have a defined place in the structure of the organisation;
- ii) ensuring the role of volunteers complements but does not replace the role of paid staff;
- iii) providing appropriate resources to the recruitment, support and development of volunteering;
- iv) ensuring that volunteers are treated equally;
- v) arranging its volunteering efficiently so that volunteer time is best used to the mutual advantage of all;
- vi) supporting volunteers by providing a comprehensive induction to the organisation, a mentor and / or a member of staff as a point of contact;
- vii) encouraging volunteers to develop existing skills and knowledge by providing an annual programme of training events appropriate to different volunteering roles and access to appropriate external training.

3. Roles of volunteers

3.1 Planning Aid Wales values the contribution made by volunteers and is committed to involving volunteers in appropriate activities and in ways which are encouraging and supportive. The organisation provides a range of volunteering opportunities relevant to its work and appropriate for volunteers drawn from planning and non-planning backgrounds.

3.2 We offer the following primary volunteering roles:

i) Casework Volunteers provide planning advice to members of the public on our behalf and assist in other tasks such as training and the writing of planning guidance publications. Casework Volunteers must have a Royal Town Planning Institute accredited planning degree and at least six months work experience in a planning environment.

ii) Community Volunteers assist in all aspects of our work other than casework, such as training, outreach, marketing and fundraising. We welcome anyone with an interest in planning or specialist skills appropriate to our work such as community development.

3.3 Further roles for volunteers in the organisation include membership of the Management Board, acting as mentors to less experienced volunteers and short-term office placements. Volunteers will be informed and where possible, consulted on changes to any roles.

3.4 Appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that paid staff are clear about the role of volunteers, and to foster good working relationships between paid staff and volunteers.

4. Entitlements of volunteers

General

4.1 All volunteers will become members of the Company and as such will be entitled to attend and vote at Planning Aid Wales Annual General Meetings. It should be noted that as members, volunteers are liable for up to one pound of the debts accrued should the company be wound up, as prescribed by paragraph 6 of the Company's Memorandum of Association.

4.2 Planning Aid Wales recognises the rights of volunteers to:

- i) know what is expected of them;
- ii) have clearly specified lines of support and supervision;
- iii) be shown appreciation;
- iv) have safe working conditions;

- v) be insured;
- vi) know what their rights and responsibilities are if something goes wrong;
- vii) be paid expenses;
- viii) be trained and have the opportunity for personal development;
- ix) be free from discrimination;

4.3 All volunteers will receive regular information updates on Planning Aid Wales activities and on topics related to the organisation's activities.

Recruitment and selection

4.4 Planning Aid Wales is committed to equal opportunities and believes that volunteering should be open to all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, ability, religion and political beliefs.

4.5 Due to the specialist remit of the advice services we provide, our Casework Volunteers must have a Royal Town Planning Institute accredited degree and six months work experience in a planning environment. This is in order to ensure the advice service we provide is accurate and reliable. Volunteers who do not meet the above criteria will be invited to become a Community Volunteer and will be offered mentoring support to gain relevant experience.

4.6 Wherever possible, we will recruit Community and Casework Volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds that reflect the makeup of the communities we serve in Wales. Volunteering opportunities will be widely promoted in ways that makes them accessible to all.

4.7 Prospective volunteers will be invited to submit an application form, which will distinguish the roles they could apply for and provide clear and concise information on the selection criteria and typical tasks for each role. Information about the volunteer not relevant to the performance of the volunteering tasks concerned will be disregarded in terms of recruitment and selection.

4.8 All volunteers will be asked to nominate one reference and will not be permitted to undertake any activities on our behalf until an acceptable reference has been received.

4.9 Volunteers are normally not required to work with children or vulnerable adults. As such, criminal record checks are not considered to be necessary. However, new work activities may require working with the above groups and in such instances volunteers will be required to undertake either a Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure (CRB check) and / or to meet the requirements of registration with the Independent Safeguarding Authority

(ISA) Vetting and Barring Scheme. Planning Aid Wales will meet the costs for any checks required.

Induction and Training

4.10 New volunteers will be properly briefed about the activities to be undertaken and given all the necessary information to enable them to perform with confidence. All new volunteers will:

- i) receive an induction pack giving information on Planning Aid Wales, contact details of appropriate staff, copies of all relevant policies, details of mentoring schemes, advice on Continuing Professional Development, a role description for the relevant volunteer position and an introduction to our procedures;
- ii) complete an audit questionnaire which will ask for more detail on their experience in relation to the role they have chosen, allow them to discuss their volunteering preferences and propose ideas for training;
- iii) receive induction training which will allow discussion of the information provided under (i) above, raise any questions and get to know staff and fellow volunteers. Locations for induction and other training events will be selected whenever possible to ensure coverage across Wales;
- iv) receive further training and guidance as necessary to enable them to undertake the specific tasks as required;
- v) be invited to attend training courses as provided by the annual volunteer training programme;
- vi) be provided with contact details for an appointed member of staff and a mentor as required.

4.11 All staff with direct responsibilities for our volunteers will be provided appropriate training in volunteer management.

Support

4.12 The Planner and Case Manager is the staff member nominated to provide guidance and advice to help the volunteer carry out tasks effectively. He / she has overall responsibility for the development of voluntary activities and the management and welfare of volunteers within the organisation.

4.13 New volunteers will be provided access to an experienced Planning Aid Wales volunteer to act as a mentor, either on a task by task basis or on an ongoing basis as appropriate. More information on mentoring is provided under the organisation's volunteer mentoring policy, which will be circulated to volunteers as part of their induction.

4.14 All volunteers are required to complete an annual audit questionnaire which will allow the volunteer to identify, monitor and evaluate the volunteer's involvement, recognise achievements and identify individual training needs. The audit will also allow for reflection on their experiences in relation to the role they have chosen, allow them to discuss their preferences for volunteering activities, and give feedback on their experiences.

4.15 Volunteers will also be given the opportunity to share their views and opinions with the organisation through regular bulletins, our website forum, at meetings and other events where appropriate. The contribution and achievements of volunteers will be celebrated in Planning Aid Wales publicity material and at events, including the Annual General Meeting.

Settling differences

4.16 Planning Aid Wales aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently and seeks to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly to arrive at a positive and amicable solution.

4.17 The Planner and Case Manager is in the first instance responsible for handling problems regarding volunteer complaints or conduct and these should be referred to him / her. In the event of a problem, all relevant facts should be obtained as quickly as possible. Support will be provided by the organisation to the volunteer while it seeks to resolve the problem in an informal manner. If an informal resolution proves impossible, the organisation's wider disciplinary, grievance or complaints policies and procedures (which include volunteers) will be referred to.

Expenses

4.18 Planning Aid Wales recognises that the reimbursement of expenses incurred in travelling to and from the place of volunteering or in the course of volunteering is important. Full details on expenses are provided in the Planning Aid Wales expenses policy, which is provided to volunteers as part of the induction process. All volunteer expenses must be authorised in advance by the Planner and Case Manager.

Insurance

4.19 All volunteers are covered by Planning Aid Wales' insurance policy whilst they are on the premises or engaged in general work as a volunteer. However, it should be noted that only Casework Volunteers are authorised to provide advice to members of the public on our behalf. The organisation does not insure the volunteer's personal possessions against loss or damage.

Health and Safety

4.20 Planning Aid Wales attaches the greatest importance to health and safety matters and undertakes to provide a safe and healthy working environment. The organisation has provided health and safety and volunteer lone working policy which will be circulated to volunteers as part of their induction. The policies apply to all volunteers in the organisation.

Equality and diversity

4.21 Equality and diversity is about accepting and embracing people's differences and creating an environment in which everyone feels valued. Planning Aid Wales is committed to equality and diversity as a key feature within all its activities. New volunteers will be invited to complete a diversity monitoring form and will be provided with a copy of our equality and diversity policy. We will set up a new equality and diversity monitoring process and will regularly evaluate and monitor our progress towards diversity.

Confidentiality

4.22 The organisation will advise the volunteer on its confidentiality policy and procedures, where relevant. This would include those relating to personal information held by the organisation relating to the volunteer.

5. Responsibilities of volunteers

5.1 Specific responsibilities will vary according to the role description for each volunteer. However, all volunteers will be required to abide by the policies of Planning Aid Wales and should be committed to the organisation's objectives. The organisation expects its volunteers to:

- i) be reliable;
- ii) be honest;
- iii) carry out tasks in a way which reflects the aims and values of the organisation;
- iv) for Casework Volunteers, follow procedures for administration and monitoring of casework as set out in the Caseworker Guide, and for all volunteers, follow guidance set out in the Volunteer Induction Pack and all other policies;
- v) avoid involvement in any cases or activities where a conflict of interests is likely to arise with their employer, the client or Planning Aid Wales;
- vi) adhere to professional standards and be accountable for work carried out and advice given on Planning Aid Wales's behalf: for this

reason all volunteers must agree to their work being subject to monitoring for quality assurance purposes;

- vii) as far as possible undertake to attend relevant training provided by Planning Aid Wales;
- viii) respect confidentiality at all times;
- ix) have an understanding and commitment to equal opportunities and diversity.

Planning Aid Wales acknowledges the assistance of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action in drawing up this policy.