

VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

Our Vision for
Volunteering in
Waltham Forest



Foreword

A message from Councillor Khan

Our communities in Waltham Forest are forged around shared values, experiences and, in many cases, a desire for a better world. As a resident and Councillor, I have seen the strength of connection within and between our communities. This is reflected in the widespread commitment to public service we see in the borough.

Volunteering is a key form of public service that has a long and proud history in Waltham Forest. We are incredibly lucky to have the passion and dedication of so many volunteers who time and again remind us what is great about our borough. Volunteers are so important to shaping thriving communities in Waltham Forest, from delivering the Borough of Culture to supporting our fantastic voluntary groups.

This has been clear to see in the response to the challenges of the past two years. People registered to volunteer in unprecedented numbers, new mutual aid groups were established, and everyday acts of kindness were commonplace across our neighbourhoods. The borough's collective response to a public health emergency was to think of the acts of public service that would help those that needed it most. Volunteering – in all its forms – was at the heart of this.

We know that many of the challenges that have historically inspired volunteering

in the borough have been made harder because of the pandemic. Together, we must build on the sense of togetherness and care that has always existed in Waltham Forest to emerge stronger from this crisis. Volunteering will play a critical role in achieving this.

For this reason, I am delighted to launch our new Volunteering Strategy. This strategy sets our vision for how volunteering in the borough can flourish and ensure that Waltham Forest is the best place in London to volunteer. Crucially, it sets out the areas we will focus our action on volunteering to enable residents and local groups to shape the future of their communities.

To create this strategy, we brought together community organisations, volunteers, and people who benefit from volunteering. This approach has enabled us to produce a strategy that is rooted in the priorities of our communities. I want to thank everyone who helped to shape our vision and priorities and I look forward

to continuing this collaboration to deliver on shared ambitions.

At the heart of our vision are a set of community missions. These will provide a focus for our action and commits us to the issues people have told us they want to make a personal impact on, including tackling the climate emergency and reducing inequalities. These will be supported through the Council's new Public Service Unit, a dedicated team that will promote participation in all parts of the community.

Waltham Forest is a borough with a rich history of volunteering and participation. Whether it is helping to keep parks clean and tidy, mentoring our young people, or looking after our most vulnerable residents. This strategy seeks to build on this position of strength to ensure we are truly the best place to volunteer in London.



“
This strategy sets our vision for how volunteering in the borough can flourish and ensure that Waltham Forest is the best place in London to volunteer.
”

Cllr. Ahsan Khan

Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Voluntary Sector

A new vision for volunteering in Waltham Forest

Shaped with volunteers and communities, our new vision for volunteering is:

Waltham Forest will be the best place in London to volunteer.

Volunteering will be inclusive to all, it will tackle shared priorities and volunteers will be supported and recognised for their valuable contributions.

To deliver on this vision, three key priorities have been identified:



Our community groups are celebrated and supported with their volunteer roles

Enhance the capacity of community groups to create exciting new volunteering roles and expand their vital work in communities.



All volunteers have a quality experience

Provide a wide variety of high-quality opportunities that promote inclusivity and support people to achieve their ambitions through volunteering.



People can make the change they want in Waltham Forest

Small acts through volunteering can make huge differences. We will ensure our volunteers can contribute to change in the areas they care most about.



The current picture of volunteering in Waltham Forest

In Waltham Forest, volunteering has long played an important role within our communities and has shaped the borough we see today.

20,000

adults and children participate in parks and open spaces volunteering every year



140 families supported by volunteer family mentors since 2018



20 ward-level mutual aid groups covering every part of the borough

1,000

Over **1,000** volunteers signed up to support the Borough of Culture delivering **11,300** hours



Over **800** participants in volunteer-led English Conversation Clubs

13,000

Over **13,000** volunteering hours have been delivered to support COVID-19 vaccinations



118 residential volunteer gardening groups across the borough



Over **100** community groups have supported community testing and vaccinations

4,000

Over **4,000** volunteers are registered as Legends of the Forest



12 formal Friends of Parks groups whose volunteers contribute **11,000** hours per year

400

Over **400** residents are Snow Angels

75

Over **75** residents have completed Bystander Intervention training

How volunteers responded to the pandemic

The local response to the immense challenges of the pandemic would not have been possible without the collective mobilisation of people and organisations across the borough:

68%

did something to help their community during the pandemic

52%

checked in on someone to make sure they were okay

32%

ran errands for a neighbour or community member

15%

volunteered for a local community group, council, or charity

“

I started in the very first lockdown, I was furloughed and it was a complete shock to the system going from something to nothing at all. For selfish reasons, it helped me – I had felt at a total loss of not knowing what to do and how to make a difference.

”

Legend of the Forest

Case Study

Shobhna's volunteering journey

When Waltham Forest became London's first Borough of Culture in 2019, Shobhna was thrilled to take part in the displays of rich cultural diversity the borough embodies. She came across the range of cultural volunteering opportunities and decided to go for it.

At the start of the Borough of Culture year, Shobhna volunteered as a steward, meeting and greeting fellow residents. Enjoying every moment of her volunteering experience, she signed up for several other roles.

During lockdown, Shobhna was keen to reach out to vulnerable members of the community who were shielding. She signed up as a telephone support volunteer, ensuring individuals were receiving the care and support they needed.

“

It gave me great pleasure to see the members of the community appreciate the essential task we were engaged in as volunteers

”

SHOBHNA

Legend of the Forest



The need for a volunteering strategy

Delivering on our ambitious vision for the future of volunteering in Waltham Forest will only be possible if we work together. As a council, we have an important role in delivering this change, but it will not be achieved through a “top-down” approach.

As we face the impacts of the pandemic together, we must expand our approach to volunteering to ensure it plays a leading role in creating a better and more equal borough, for current generations and the next. Through collective commitment and action, we can make Waltham Forest the best place in London to volunteer.

Developing a Volunteering Strategy now will provide a roadmap for the Council, communities, and community groups to deliver on our priorities for volunteering. Collectively, we have developed a shared vision for the future of volunteering in Waltham Forest and identified the key areas where action is needed to deliver this.

“

You learn lots of things, meet people from different backgrounds – it’s great to feel a part of a team doing something for your local community

”

Legend of the Forest

“

There is so much potential to build community and individuals’ resilience through volunteering

”

Local resident



Developing our volunteering strategy

Developed together

Listening, learning, and working together is central to the success of volunteering and public service in Waltham Forest. The development of our volunteering strategy builds on this approach.

The strategy has been co-designed with volunteers, community groups and those who benefit from volunteering to recognise the vital insights these groups bring. A concerted effort was made to ensure that insights gathered were reflective of our diverse population.

Through workshops, interviews and surveys, this approach provided a better understanding of people's experiences and views on volunteering. Crucially, it highlighted ways volunteering can make an even greater difference in the borough.



Volunteers

We developed a volunteer co-design panel, working intensively with current volunteers to learn from their experience and reflect their future interests.

Voluntary and community groups

We hosted a workshop session with voluntary and community sector representatives and conducted a wider survey for community groups to share their views.

People who benefit from volunteering

We promoted an open questionnaire for people to share their perspectives on volunteering, building on feedback from a representative Citizen's Panel during the pandemic.

What we found

What our volunteers and residents told us

Motivations behind volunteering

Key motivations for volunteers include:

25%

giving back to the community

19%

getting to know people

17%

gaining new skills

Ambitions for the future of volunteering

The most popular areas for future volunteering are:

41%

the environment

36%

education

Overcoming barriers to volunteering

Among those who rarely or never volunteer the main barriers to volunteering were:

40%

work commitments

40%

haven't heard about opportunities

23%

childcare or homecare commitments

People who rarely or never volunteer want to see:

54%

more flexible roles

49%

more interesting or a wider variety of roles

Delivering our priorities

If Waltham Forest is to become the best place in London to volunteer, we must make it easier for volunteers to access opportunities and then deliver an outstanding experience for the groups that involve them and the communities that benefit from them. Through our work with volunteers and communities to co-design our volunteering strategy, three key priorities were identified to deliver on our vision for volunteering:



1. Our community groups are celebrated and supported with their volunteer roles



2. All volunteers have a quality experience

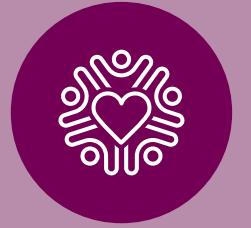


3. People can make the change they want in Waltham Forest

Together, we explored the key areas where action is required to deliver on these priorities. These are set out below along with actions that the Council will take to deliver on them.



1. Our community groups are celebrated and supported with their volunteer roles



Waltham Forest is incredibly fortunate to have a thriving and diverse voluntary and community sector. We know that many of our community groups involve volunteers to help deliver their vital work. We want to work with these groups to create and promote new volunteering opportunities which enable them to expand their important work within communities.

Delivering on this priority will enable community groups to play an even greater role in building vibrant and thriving communities through expanded grassroots volunteering. It will help foster a culture of participation where everyone can play an active role in supporting groups that deliver on their doorsteps.

Building capacity within communities

Recruiting and managing volunteers is a significant undertaking for any organisation. Many community groups are keen to take on more volunteers but their capacity to do so is limited.

We will launch a Public Service Unit to work with community groups to create inspiring new opportunities. Our Public Service Unit will work closely with communities to understand local priorities and help create new volunteering roles and activities which respond to these.

Amplifying community opportunities

Finding people to fill volunteering roles is a key barrier for the voluntary and community sector in Waltham Forest.

We will invite all voluntary and community groups in the borough to register on our digital volunteering platform. This will enable them to promote opportunities to over 4,000 registered volunteers and access resources to support volunteer management. We will promote and celebrate volunteering with community groups through dedicated campaigns.

Providing dedicated volunteering support

Smaller community groups have told us they are interested in creating new volunteering roles to expand their work but need support to build the knowledge and skills to do so.

We will co-design a training programme for community groups to help them recruit and manage volunteers. Our Public Service Unit will work closely with smaller community groups to understand their needs and develop action plans to support their volunteering ambitions.

Creating new community partnerships

Partnerships across public, private and community sectors have been critical to the success of volunteering in the borough. Many community groups in Waltham Forest work in partnership with other organisations to deliver vital services with the support of volunteers.

We will host networking events for community groups to learn from each other and identify new opportunities for collaboration. We will engage with other local partners to identify their volunteering opportunities and use this to inform 'matchmaking' with community groups.

Case Study

Age UK Waltham Forest – supporting older people in our community

Age UK Waltham Forest supports older people across the borough in a range of ways including a befriending programme, an information and advice service, veterans support and social activities.

Volunteers have a vital role in all these programmes. This includes befriending older people to provide companionship and greeting older people at their hub when they come to participate in social activities. Age UK Waltham Forest also have an amazing army of knitting

volunteers who help with their fundraising efforts!

The Council have recently supported Age UK Waltham Forest to recruit more befrienders and hold social events for isolated older people in Chingford.

“

I definitely feel a stronger connection to the local community and the Waltham Forest area, especially given I only moved here two years ago. Volunteering has had a huge benefit on my wellbeing so that I feel part of something bigger and knowing that I can help out in whatever small way I can

”

Age UK befriending volunteer



2. All volunteers have a quality experience



Every person who wants to volunteer has different motivations and interests. **Anyone who wants to volunteer should be supported to do so, and volunteers should be as diverse as the communities they serve. Delivering on this priority will enable people from all backgrounds to achieve their personal goals through volunteering and participate in building a stronger community.**

Promoting diversity & inclusion in volunteering

As one of the most diverse places in London, there is more that can be done to ensure the profile of volunteers in Waltham Forest reflects the communities they support. There are groups who are underrepresented in volunteering and we want to learn what more we can do to support them.

We will recruit a dedicated outreach worker who will work with community groups and residents to understand the barriers to volunteering and explore how we can tackle these. We will ensure volunteering opportunities are inclusive to all, and all opportunities are accessible to volunteers with disabilities.

Expanding choice for volunteers

Current and aspiring volunteers highlighted the need for a variety of roles to choose from so they can easily find opportunities that match their interests, skills, and availability.

We will work across Council services and community organisations to create more diverse volunteering roles. This will include flexible volunteering roles, enabling people to volunteer when it suits them. Our online platform will present opportunities in a simple and engaging way, allowing volunteers to easily identify opportunities that match their interests.

Volunteers at the heart of our approach

Volunteers bring unique insights to how volunteering can be improved. If our shared vision for volunteering is to be realised, volunteers must continue to have a voice in shaping delivery.

We will host regular focus groups with volunteers to hear about their experiences and steer our work. For roles promoted through our digital platform, all volunteers will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience.

Recognising and celebrating volunteers

All those involved in volunteering have highlighted the importance of acknowledging the contribution they make to communities in Waltham Forest. Volunteers enjoy meeting other volunteers and wanted more opportunities to socialise outside of formal roles and shifts.

We will deliver regular celebration events to recognise and celebrate the contribution volunteers make to the borough. We will also promote informal, volunteer-led socials to foster an inclusive and enjoyable experience for volunteers.

Helping volunteers achieve their ambitions

Many volunteers have told us how volunteering provided them with an opportunity to develop new skills and help them to progress towards employment.

We will develop a comprehensive new programme of training and accreditation for volunteers who want to develop skills, including opportunities to be mentored and to become a volunteer mentor. Volunteers seeking employment will be prioritised to receive accredited training and will be matched to roles which help them develop the workplace skills they require.

Case Study

JoyRiders - overcoming social barriers to cycling for women

JoyRiders is a primarily volunteer run organisation that offers bike rides for women who are new or returning to cycling. Most of JoyRiders' volunteers are ride leaders and all volunteers receive in-house training which allows them to learn new skills.

Volunteers find the most enjoyable part of their role is being able to work with women to build up their confidence and see them turn into independent cyclists.

Waltham Forest Council have recently supported JoyRiders to expand their activity through our Community Bank and Enjoy Waltham Forest.

“

I have been leading rides for JoyRiders for over a year now and it's been amazing to see the enjoyment women experience when they have been out for a ride with us. I like seeing the confidence of women increase as they ride around our streets and we all feel great after some exercise.

”

JoyRiders ride leader



3. People can make the change they want in Waltham Forest



Volunteers and our wider community have told us they want to be able to come together to get behind shared causes that are important to the future we all want for Waltham Forest. Our approach to mission-based volunteering will build on this solidarity to focus on how volunteering can help tackle ‘community missions’.

Delivering on this priority will empower people to make an impact on key local causes within their communities, no matter how big or small.

Our four community missions are:

- Act for Climate
- Act for Community
- Act for Healthy Lives
- Act for Jobs

These have been shaped by the priorities within our communities and will be reviewed in 12 months to assess their relevance following input from residents.

Inspiring new roles which support community priorities

People want to see exciting new volunteering roles that contribute towards their priorities and allow them to participate in tackling them.

We will create roles across Council teams that allow people to volunteer towards our community missions, such as our new health champions programme. We will promote these through our online volunteering platform, allowing volunteers to search for opportunities that support specific causes.

Workforce volunteering that benefits our communities

As one of the largest employers in the borough, the Council’s employee volunteering scheme can make a real impact in our communities. Council employees can take 2-4 days per year to volunteer during working hours within Waltham Forest.

We will lead by example on workforce volunteering and ensure all Council employees who wish to, are supported to take up volunteering opportunities that contribute towards our community missions.

Building on the momentum behind volunteering

There have been unprecedented levels of volunteering in the borough during the pandemic. There is now a unique opportunity to harness this energy towards wider issues that will shape our future.

We will develop campaigns to drive volunteer recruitment and activation, encouraging people to take on roles that support our community missions. Through our recognition and celebration of volunteering, we will show our appreciation and highlight how volunteers are supporting community missions.

Collaborating to create new opportunities

Volunteering in support of community missions can be enhanced by a wide range of organisations in the borough, including local businesses, voluntary groups, and the public sector.

We will work with the Council’s public and private partners to find out what volunteering initiatives they are undertaking and align these where appropriate. We also want to give their employees the chance to help with mission-based volunteering opportunities in the community.

Our community missions



Act for Climate

Volunteering will help us come together to tackle climate change in Waltham Forest and have a net-zero impact by 2030.

Volunteers will help everyone benefit from green spaces in the borough and take steps to reduce their carbon footprint.

Act for Jobs

Volunteering will be a stepping stone to employment and will support those in our community who face barriers to making a living. Volunteers will provide support within community settings that allow residents to develop new skills and access support such as mentoring.

Act for Community

Volunteering will make our communities better places to live by tackling inequalities and helping people feel safe and connected.

Volunteers will enhance access to cultural and social activities which bring our communities together and combat social isolation.

Act for Healthy Lives

Volunteering will support our continuing response to COVID-19 and connect communities to well-being activities and support. Volunteers will help people stay safe and healthy as the pandemic continues, and support activities which tackle health inequalities across generations.

Community missions in action



Act for Climate

Green Gym

Green Gyms are fun and free outdoor sessions where volunteers are guided in practical activities such as planting trees, sowing meadows and creating wildlife ponds.

In March 2021, Green Gym volunteers took impressive action to improve community green spaces at Leyton Jubilee Park, Lloyd Park, Abbotts Park and Chingford Green. They planted over 90 trees, 200 sprouting bluebells and 100 sprouting snowdrops. They also attached signs, picked-up litter and cleared leaves.



Act for Healthy Lives

Hannah - Legend of the Forest

The most rewarding volunteering experience Hannah had during the pandemic was as a Check-In and Chat Volunteer. This role involved calling and checking in on people who were vulnerable and at risk of isolation. Hannah developed a rapport with the regular service users, which reassured and comforted them that support was available during this difficult time.

“

I would be on some of the phone calls for hours and I really felt connected to the members of my local community. I also learnt lots more from those who had lived here for years. I felt so close to Walthamstow

”



Act for Community

Andrew - No Space for Hate Ambassador

Andrew is one of 75 residents who have completed Bystander Intervention training where residents are taught how to spot bullying, harassment, or hostility and provided with the tools to safely diffuse situations and support victims in real time.

“

The training has helped me to learn more about how I can be an ally for people on the receiving end of prejudice, racism or street-based harassment or violence.

”



Act for Jobs

Noreen - Local Resident

Noreen is receiving Carer's Allowance for her husband and has a dependent child. As she was reviewing job vacancies, she spotted a job vacancy with the Toy Library. Noreen was unsuccessful in her application but was able to secure a volunteer position as a Play Worker. When a new position opened due to the experience and skills gained as a volunteer, Noreen was successful. She enjoys her role as it offers flexible shifts so she can work around her husband and child.



Delivering our volunteering strategy

We will work closely with our partners, including Groundwork London, to deliver this strategy. To guide our work, the Council will develop a volunteering action plan which will be published online.

We will regularly review our progress using a set of core measures, including:

Number of volunteering hours delivered

Number of active volunteers

How representative volunteers are of the borough's wider population

Proportion of volunteers reporting a positive experience

Number of community organisations in receipt of volunteering support



The strategy and action plan will be reviewed in 12 months to assess progress and will be updated to reflect emerging insights from our communities and volunteers.

To deliver towards our vision, we want to have 1,500 active volunteers that have delivered over 30,000 volunteering hours by March 2023. We will also evaluate the impact that volunteering is having within our communities.

How you can get involved

Volunteering is a great way to connect to your community and make the borough a better place for all. Dedicating time to volunteer allows you to meet new people, learn new skills, give something back to the community or take on a new challenge.

Want to volunteer?

To get involved in volunteering, you can visit the **Legends of the Forest** website and register to volunteer. Once registered you will be invited to complete an optional induction session and will have access to all available volunteering opportunities.

For volunteering opportunities in our parks and open spaces, you can join **The Conservation Volunteers** in Waltham Forest.

Want to recruit volunteers?

Volunteers are currently supporting community groups with one-off events, ongoing activities and much more. Community groups can register to access training and support to create and promote volunteering opportunities. To find out more, visit the **Legends of the Forest website**.

If you have any questions on volunteering in Waltham Forest, please contact volunteering@walthamforest.gov.uk

