

1. Introduction

This scheme allows employees to take up to two-days or equivalent (pro-rata) paid time off to volunteer. It's a great way to develop new skills and support something that's worthwhile. Employees can get involved in activities that benefit individuals, clubs, charities, faith groups and the environment.

2. Aim of the scheme

The Employee Volunteering Scheme aims to increase volunteering opportunities for employees at West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group.

The CCG will do this by:

- releasing employees from normal duties for two days (15 hours) per year (pro-rata) to continue current volunteering, undertake new volunteering activities
- encouraging employees to volunteer in their own time too
- broadening volunteering boundaries
- encouraging volunteering to be used for development
- reducing bureaucracy
- communicating effectively
- reviewing and revising the scheme where appropriate or necessary.

3. Why volunteer?

For volunteers, it can:

- bring a great sense of personal achievement and self-worth by contributing to the wellbeing of the community
- give a broader outlook and appreciation of diverse communities
- give others the benefit of experience and skills
- help to develop new skills and experiences
- improve employability – providing valuable experience and demonstrating a 'can do' attitude
- be fun, social and enhance health and wellbeing
- help adjustment from work to retirement.

For communities, it can:

- help voluntary organisations to deliver services and improve communities
- build a more robust and resilient society
- improve relationships between CCG staff, residents, partners and communities.
- Ensure early identification of community need and challenges
- Deliver better community partnerships with the statutory sector

For the CCG, it can:

- improve employee job satisfaction, morale, commitment and performance
- enhance its reputation and profile
- help it to attract and retain high-performing employees
- encourage individual and team development, thereby contributing to Q/A schemes such as, Investors in People accreditation
- help team building through group volunteering
- strengthen relationships and understanding with voluntary, community and faith sectors – creating a ‘one team’ approach
- help to demonstrate its commitment and support to employees by encouraging them to play a more active role in society.

4. Volunteering allowance

4.1 Time allowance and eligibility criteria

All employees are allowed two days (ie 15 hours) pro-rata per year paid time off to volunteer, provided that:

- you have agreed it with your manager at least four weeks in advance of the volunteering activity taking place so that cover arrangements can be made if necessary. As with annual leave, the needs of the service must be taken into account and you must obtain agreement to volunteering leave before making any commitments to a voluntary organisation
- it does not involve a visible financial cost to ‘back-fill’ staff cover, eg bank staff
- time taken to volunteer will not disrupt or adversely affect individual or team activity
- there are no conflicts of interest, eg political campaigning
- activities benefit the environment, individuals other than close relatives; charities and community groups within West Essex, bordering neighbourhoods and from which West Essex residents benefit
- activities undertaken are with organisations which are ‘not for profit’
- any development activities undertaken benefit the role and service (see ‘Additional paid time’ below)
- that the expectation is met that employees will become Employee Volunteer Ambassadors upon completion of volunteer programme

This covers employees who already volunteer and those just starting out.

You can use your volunteering time flexibly, one day at a time, two together or broken down into hours to fit the needs of the activity and the voluntary organisation/individual. You will need to discuss this with your manager to make sure that this fits both your and the team’s needs.

You can also ‘top-up’ volunteering allowances with annual leave or unpaid leave if necessary. Eg you could use three days’ annual leave and two days’ volunteering allowance for a week off to work at a residential activity i.e LD Residential Camp.

4.2 Allowance for those working part-time

The 15 volunteering hours are calculated pro rata to your working hours, in the same way as annual leave. E.G if you work for half of every week, you would be able to volunteer for 7.50 hours. Volunteer hours can be taken as individual hours over an agreed period of time or as individual days.

4.4 Additional paid time

In addition to the two days (15 hours) each year, potentially you could also take (at your manager's discretion):

- one day for team volunteering events for 'team building' purposes, eg countryside conservation or land clearance
- one day a year for volunteering during any 'down time' (eg if the building in which your team is based is closed, or if you are unable to travel to work due to adverse weather conditions) and your manager agrees that appropriate work and/or alternative arrangements are not available. This does not include looking after your own children.
- one day for individual development, eg where you need to undertake training for your volunteering role, which would also benefit your role at the CCG or your career progression and cannot be met by the CCG's training programmes.

4.5 Carrying over volunteering days

Volunteering days cannot be carried over from one year to the next.

4.6 Disclosure Barring Service (eDBS) Checks

Certain activities that involve working with young people or other vulnerable groups may require you to have a Disclose Barring check (formerly Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)). The organisation will indicate if this is necessary and this will need to be organised through the host organisation or independently.

4.7 Public duties

Duties associated with school governance, duties as a magistrate, election candidacy, support at polling stations, trade union activities and employee advocacy are covered separately.

4.8 Subsistence and travel expenses

The CCG will cover reasonable travel expenses for team and individual development linked to volunteering. Otherwise volunteering activities should be claimed through the organisation with which you are volunteering.

4.9 Monitoring

The level of detail required to agree and monitor an employee's volunteering activity is at the manager's discretion.

4.10 Recording volunteering time

Once you have agreed your volunteering activity with your manager, you will need to record it as authorised 'paid time' under the special leave policy.

Though the scheme is effective from 30 July 2014, you and your manager may find it practical to align volunteering time to the annual leave timetable in the first and subsequent years.

5. Before volunteering

5.1 Discussion with manager

Before you volunteer, you must discuss with your manager the type of volunteering you wish to do. If you know which organisation for which you would like to volunteer, you should contact the organisation to find out what opportunities are available, then speak to your manager.

You must provide your manager with the following information at least four weeks in advance:

- the type of volunteering activity
- the name of the voluntary organisation
- where the activity will be carried out
- the benefits of the activity, both to the employee and the voluntary organisation
- duration, frequency and commitment required
- any risks, eg conflicts of interest, contravention of political restrictions or political campaigning.

The information you provide to your manager will enable them to discuss and explore any implications or risks. The manager will need to understand enough about the proposed volunteering activity to be able to approve it.

Where at all possible, managers are expected to support volunteering activities, demonstrating flexibility for cover arrangements eg swapping shifts, covering each other's work, working flexibly and/or remotely, use of flexi-time, time off in lieu and unpaid leave. You and your manager should agree what is reasonable.

Managers will need to consider:

- the possible impact of volunteering time on service activity, eg operational and shift cover
- Opportunities for individual development, which benefit your current role or career progression and which cannot be met by CCG training courses.

5.2 Appeals

If your manager does not approve your proposed volunteering activity, you have the right to appeal through your manager's manager. Your manager will need to evidence the reasons for their decision.

5.3 Liability

It is the manager's responsibility to be satisfied that there are no conflicts of interest and that you have considered and accepted any risks. The CCG will not be liable for damages or injuries that occur while you are volunteering for other organisations. Organisations registered with Volunteer Centres have their own health and safety policy and the appropriate insurance policy.

However, volunteers will be indemnified under the public liability policy held by West Essex CCG in the following circumstances:

- A CCG employee volunteering for a CCG service, even if it is in a different service area and on days not normally worked.
- Members of the public, volunteering for CCG Services (as covered in the Volunteers policy).

6. Volunteering activities

6.1 Types of volunteering

Volunteering can be anything from helping out a neighbour to being a trustee for a charity. It can be a short one-off activity or a regular ongoing commitment. West Essex CCG actively supports low level on-going Neighbourly Neighbour Volunteering through our Community Mobilisation programme and actively encourages strong citizenship. For example:

- mentoring Looked After Children and vulnerable people
- supporting vulnerable adults and disabled people
- reading and listening activities at school
- outdoor activities, eg countryside conservation or land clearance
- sponsoring charities, eg through fund-raising
- electronic/remote support: research, websites, translation
- club leader, treasurer or secretary, eg at youth clubs, Scouts, Guides or similar groups
- organising sports activities or events
- police Specials
- trustee for a charity
- PTA officer/member
- The Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- team building events

You could discuss with your manager:

- taking up a volunteering opportunity, as an individual, that you have a particular interest in and might wish to continue doing

- giving a one-off contribution to a voluntary organisation, whether individually or as part of a team activity or project
- exploring activities that have the potential for longer-term volunteering. For example, spending time with a charity or job-shadowing another volunteer to gain experience and knowledge that benefits your work
- undertaking specific training linked to a new or current volunteering activity, such as charity law training for trustees or treasurers.

The pages on CCGs intranet include details of West Essex Volunteer Centres and sets out lots of volunteering opportunities and sources of advice. The Do-it website contains useful information about volunteering activities in a range of locations.

6.2 Scope of volunteering

You can volunteer to do almost any activity and it need not be connected in any way with your work for the CCG. Many people use volunteering as a way of trying something completely new.

6.3 Geographical volunteering boundaries

The volunteering activity must be within West Essex or its bordering neighbourhoods. You can volunteer to work with any charity in West Essex, provided there is no conflict of interest with our volunteering principles (see section 7 below).

6.4 Training requirements (including health and safety) to perform volunteering activities

The organisation for which you volunteer is responsible for providing any induction or other training to allow you to perform your volunteering role and remain safe. Where this training benefits your role at the CCG or your career progression and cannot be met by CCG training, you will need to negotiate an extra paid day with your manager.

If you are involved in community transport volunteering using your own car, you will need to check that your own motor policy is suitable.

6.5 Clothing and equipment

If the volunteering activity requires specialist clothing or equipment, this will need to be provided either by the organisation or by the volunteer. The organisation will provide details of what is required.

6.6 Organising a team volunteering event

Managers can contact the Volunteer Centres for a list of team volunteering opportunities. Teams will be asked for the numbers involved, any limitations, in terms of ability, times, locations etc and to provide a range of dates for the volunteer centres to provide a list of volunteering opportunities for you to choose from

Volunteer Centres require as much notice as possible to set up events with your chosen host and for any cancellations. Charities depend on your team's support and may require time to find a replacement.

7. Our volunteering principles

When volunteering, you agree to:

- respect the privacy, property and confidentiality of others
- report any problems you experience to your manager and Volunteer Centre (where it has acted as a broker)
- aim to fulfil the commitment you have made and inform your named contact in the voluntary organisation if you are unable to attend
- act in a professional way, recognising that you are representing the CCG while carrying out the volunteering activities.

The code of conduct continues to apply to employees when volunteering. The code contains provisions that encourage the highest standards of integrity and personal conduct on the part of all employees.

The CCG strongly recommends that the organisation for which you volunteer is registered with a Volunteer Centre for quality assurance purposes. If the organisation is not registered, you can suggest that it registers with a Volunteer Centre for free. If the organisation is unlikely to register with a Volunteer Centre, you and your manager should satisfy yourselves that the organisation's quality assurance and health and safety policies are adequate.

8. After volunteering

You should discuss your volunteering activity with your manager and share the experience with colleagues, eg on notice boards and through the CCG Communications Team. If you would like to write about your experience in more detail a template for your Volunteer Story will be provided via the Community Mobilisation function.

9. Five easy steps to get volunteering

1. Take a look at volunteer page on the public website and intranet for more details about volunteering.
2. Discuss and agree the volunteering activity with your manager.
3. Record paid time with Payroll or equivalent system.
4. Get volunteering and tell your colleagues about your experience!
5. After you've volunteered, discuss the experience with your manager at your next one-to-one and appraisal, and plan your next volunteering activity.