

A Volunteering Strategy for Brent – *Brent Together*

Foreword

Volunteers make an incredible contribution to the civic life of our borough, with many people dedicating their time to support our charities, community groups, cultural programmes and sporting events. Increasingly our local organisations recognise the value that volunteers bring to their activities, and with a wealth of new opportunities on the horizon we're working to ensure that both volunteers and organisations have the support they need to make volunteering in Brent a mutually beneficial experience.

We recognise the vital role that volunteering plays for individual wellbeing, promoting community cohesion, supporting our local economy, increasing the employability of our residents and adding value to our local organisations. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that these benefits are open to everyone, so that the diversity of our volunteers reflects the diversity of our borough, and to maximise the range and quality of opportunities open to them.

We are lucky to already have a thriving volunteering community in Brent, with 42% of residents currently taking part in formal volunteering and 63% informally helping their community.¹ This strategy will build on these foundations so that volunteering becomes an essential component of Brent's civic infrastructure.

Our Ambition

Brent Together is the council's commitment to increase the scope of volunteering in Brent and make sure everyone feels more involved in their community. It will also address the wider ambitions of the Stronger Communities strategy. The strategy will inform decision-making around volunteering in Brent over the next 4 years. Its success will be measured largely by the diversity of people actively engaged in volunteering across the borough and by the range and quality of opportunities available to them. The strategy fits well within the overall borough plan and its priority areas.

Volunteering is a great way to get involved with your local community, develop skills and help to make Brent a better borough. ***Brent Together*** is our commitment to recognise and celebrate those who give up their time to make their community better.

The strategy's overarching aims are to make Brent a place where:

- People from across Brent's communities, of different backgrounds, feel encouraged and motivated to volunteer their time;
- Brent offers the best possible volunteering opportunities in terms of both range and quality;
- Volunteering is truly inclusive and brings our diverse communities closer together;
- The council leads the way as an example of good practice in volunteering.

¹ *Brent Community Engagement Research Report*, May 2019.

Investing in Volunteering

To realise our ambitions for volunteering in Brent we recognise the need for thoughtful investment. Through our investment we commit to deliver:

- An online volunteering platform that is easily accessible and unique to Brent;
- A Community Volunteer Coordinator to oversee delivery of the strategy.

Across the duration of this strategy we expect this to directly support 800 people to take up volunteering opportunities and 2, 500 people to access information on quality local volunteering opportunities.

A Partnership Approach

To achieve our ambition for an active volunteering borough, we will take the lead in a borough-wide alliance where responsibility for promoting volunteering is shared between partners from across the public, voluntary and private sectors. We want everyone who is involved with volunteering and community action to be part of ***Brent Together*** and be recognised for the contribution they make.

Our Commitment to Volunteering in Brent

We commit to delivering a volunteering programme that is inclusive and high quality, and rewards achievement.

We will provide high quality information to make volunteering accessible

We want everyone in the borough to easily access information about the volunteering opportunities open to them. We will achieve this through:

- Establishing a new online platform for volunteering, integrated within Brent Council's website;
- Working within Brent Hubs to encourage people from all communities to take up volunteering opportunities;
- Including information on volunteering opportunities within a Welcome Pack for newly arrived community members.

We will provide great volunteering opportunities

2020 is set to be an exciting time for volunteering in Brent, with the launch of two volunteer-led initiatives that are unique to the borough. These opportunities will reflect the unique heritage, diversity and needs of our borough:

- Brent's Emerging Communities programme will work with volunteer 'community champions' from our Eastern European and Latin American communities. Volunteers will support the borough's emerging communities to access the support, information and services they need to feel fully at home in Brent;
- London Borough of Culture 2020 (LBOC) will provide opportunities for up to 300 local people to get involved with the delivery of a borough-wide cultural programme. Volunteers will be involved with all aspects of the 2020 programme in various roles, from backstage assistants at events, to Storyfinder volunteers collecting the memories of local residents.

We will allow volunteers to take the lead

Our volunteers will play a key role in shaping the future of volunteering in Brent, participating not only in project delivery, but in the planning and development of projects, and in securing their legacy. In particular:

- Volunteers from emerging communities will be instrumental in increasing the diversity of Brent's volunteers by promoting volunteering opportunities within their communities. They will drive delivery of the Emerging Communities programme through facilitating new connections between their community and the public sector;
- LBOC's Trailblazer volunteers will work collaboratively with the LBOC volunteer coordinator to shape the 2020 programme. Trailblazers will also play a key role in the recruitment, induction and training of LBOC volunteers;
- Throughout its duration, LBOC 2020 will be steered by Community Advisors, individuals who are well-connected in their communities and passionate about the potential for culture and creativity to bring positive change. Community advisors will attend regular project board meetings, sharing their expertise and helping steer key strands of the LBOC programme. Community Advisors will also play a crucial role in securing the legacy of LBOC;
- Volunteers will be involved directly in delivery of a new online volunteering platform as test users during the platform's development.

We will recognise and reward achievement

We will raise the profile of volunteering in Brent through rewarding our borough's volunteers and showcasing their achievements. With this aim we will:

- Continue to host the Pride of Brent Awards, shining a light on groups and individuals of outstanding achievement in their voluntary work;
- Celebrate the activities of our volunteers during the national Volunteers Week (annually on 1-7 June), including a volunteers' tea with the Mayor;
- Further investigate rewards for volunteering that are in line with the volunteering ethos.

Opportunities for all: meeting our Stronger Communities priorities

We want our borough to foster a volunteering culture that is genuinely inclusive and where residents of all abilities and from every neighbourhood feel they have something meaningful to offer. With this aim, our volunteering strategy takes particular consideration of Brent's Stronger Communities priorities, specifically:

Tackling Poverty. Statistics show that across the UK individuals from upper socio-economic groups are 17% more likely to engage in volunteering than those in lower socio-economic groups.² We want the benefits of volunteering to be open to everyone, including those on lower incomes. To make this possible we will:

- Increase our understanding of the obstacles that prevent uptake of volunteering among certain demographic groups, as part of the LBOC Inclusion project;
- Promote volunteering opportunities to all residents, including those from lower socio-economic groups, through Brent Hubs.

Engaging New and Emerging Communities. We want all communities to feel they can contribute meaningfully to civic life, easily access the services that support their integration and feel genuinely connected to the residents of our diverse borough. Our Emerging Communities programme takes a volunteer-led approach to achieve this.

A dedicated Community Volunteer Coordinator for Brent's emerging communities (Eastern European and Latin American) will:

- Work in partnership with local organisations to recruit and support a total of 48 volunteers from emerging communities before March 2021;
- Support some of these volunteers to become 'Community Champions', offering support and information and improving awareness of and access to council services;
- Involve volunteers from emerging communities in delivering the wider Volunteering Strategy.

² *Taking Part Survey 2017-18*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taking-part-201718-quarter-4-statistical-release>.

Leading by Example

Promoting employee volunteering

We know our commitment to volunteering needs to go beyond financial investment. This is why we will encourage all council staff to take up to 3 days per year to volunteer in the borough during their contracted working hours and highlight the benefits of volunteering for personal wellbeing and as a rewarding aspect of training and development. This will help voluntary groups benefit from the skills and energy of council officers whilst allowing staff to further improve their knowledge of the area and the residents they serve.

We will encourage up-take of this opportunity by:

- Reviewing internal management of the employee volunteering scheme and updating current policy and procedure;
- Promoting employee volunteering to new staff during Corporate Induction;
- Securing support for volunteering by senior staff members and councillors;
- Promoting employee volunteering at internal events including Better Brent Festival and Forward Together;
- Further investigating volunteering opportunities with our partners in the voluntary and private sectors;
- Participating annually in national Volunteers Week (1-7 June), including a dedicated 'Council Volunteering Day'.

Strengthening the council's volunteering offer

The council also has a valuable opportunity to promote best practice in volunteering through its own services. From Hub assistants to parent mentors, volunteers already play a key role in delivering services to the community. We want to strengthen the council's volunteering offer by:

- Conducting an internal 'volunteering census' in order to build a complete picture of the roles that volunteers currently play within council services and the current number of council volunteers;
- Strengthening coordination and collaboration between council projects that work with volunteers by establishing an internal 'Volunteer Coordinators Network';
- Offering shared learning opportunities to the council's volunteer coordinators;
- Standardising the council's processes for working with volunteers by:
 - Developing council-wide policies and procedures that may then be adapted to suit the needs of each specific service;
 - Making wider use of the council's recently purchased volunteer management software;
- Establishing a 'single point of access' for the council's volunteering opportunities online;
- Publicising opportunities and success stories from all council projects working with volunteers through avenues including 'Your Brent' magazine and through Brent Connects forums.

Piloting our Approach

We recognise the need to adapt our approach in response to new learning. In particular, the council has the opportunity to pilot and develop aspects of the volunteering strategy through its new volunteer-led initiatives: London Borough of Culture and the Emerging Communities programme. Learning from these two initiatives will inform the council's best practice in volunteering with a specific focus on:

- Effective recruitment methods;
- Volunteer retention;
- Inclusivity and diversity;
- Volunteer management systems;
- Capacity building for volunteer coordinators.

Learning will be captured and shared through the Volunteer Coordinators Network.

Volunteering in Action

Volunteers are already playing a vital role within a broad range of council services. Below is an example of how volunteers add value to our services.

Parent Champions, Early Years team

The 'Parent Champions' programme works with volunteers to provide information and sign-posting to parents of young children. Champions visit libraries and toddler groups in many areas across the borough, providing information and sign-posting on the services and financial support available to parents of young children. Champions are given thorough training in areas including safeguarding, awareness of services and maintaining professional boundaries. New champions also receive the support of a more experienced volunteer while they become familiar with the role.

Parent Champions have added enormous value to the work of the Early Years team. Champions are key to the team's outreach, growing new links within the community and having a significant impact on the uptake of free childcare entitlements. The programme is also highly valued by its volunteers. As parents who are not currently working, the champions build their knowledge, confidence and skills and are supported to access progression opportunities, including employment.

Click [here](#) for a video about the national Parent Champions scheme.

Future Developments

We will continue to grow an ambitious volunteering culture in Brent by proactively seeking to develop our offer. Specifically, over this five-year period we will:

- Capitalise on the legacy of LBOC to increase engagement in volunteering and to learn from the programme's successes;
- Investigate a time credits scheme for Brent to further broaden the uptake of volunteering.

How can you get involved?

For more information about any aspect of the volunteering strategy please contact volunteering@brent.gov.uk.