

Guidance for setting up Volunteer Wardens

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Introduction

Wardening has developed considerably since the pilot warden schemes started in 2000. The majority of wardens operate as enablers in a community support and empowerment role but there are some that take an enforcement role. Super-caretakeers and concierge staff have elements of warden duties and many have benefited from the Neighbourhood Management and Warden Team (NMWT) training materials and events/networks which are run regionally through the ODPM funded Warden Resource Centres (WRC). Wardens have been introduced in Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) delivering clean and safe improvements and acting as meeters and greeters in the same way as American Safety Ambassadors. In some parts of the country wardens are working very closely with police as part of the new safer neighbourhood teams whilst in other areas park wardens and heritage wardens have developed within the warden family.

There has also been much good work to introduce junior and youth wardens in order to foster good citizenship and to encourage young people to consider wardening as a worthwhile career. Some warden schemes may now wish to introduce volunteer wardens as a further development of the initiative. This guidance should assist with that development.

Why volunteer wardens?

Volunteer wardens should not replace salaried wardens but work alongside them. They can provide extra visibility by their uniformed presence and offer an opportunity to recruit people from the community in which the warden service operates. Volunteers can be of all ages but involving young people, particularly as volunteer wardens has many advantages. The Government's 'Youth Green Paper', published in July, provides strong encouragement for young people to volunteer within their own communities as does the Russell Commission report on Youth Volunteering. In addition there is much discussion across Government and in the media about respect, young people and anti-social behaviour. Young volunteer wardens would be well placed to encourage respect amongst young people, older people and across all sections of the community. They would model positive behaviour countering the criticism that is often heard about youth nuisance and young people only being associated with negative messages and anti-social behaviour (**see Walsall Youth Ambassadors case study**).

Volunteer wardens can be a source for recruiting salaried wardens (**see Stockton-on-Tees case study**).

Volunteer wardens can help make links with hard to reach groups like some BME communities (**see Stockton-on-Tees case study**) or older residents at sheltered or clusters of retirement properties if the volunteer is of that age.

Rural warden schemes tend to be much smaller than urban or neighbourhood initiatives. If a small parish scheme operates with 1 or 2 salaried wardens, their work and visibility can be much enhanced by involving volunteers.

How to recruit volunteer wardens

Volunteers can be recruited in the same way as salaried wardens - newspaper/job centre/LA/HA bulletins etc. also using advertisements in local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) newsletters or via the Volunteering Bureaux that most CVS operate. Wardens themselves can promote the volunteering by word-of-mouth when networking with residents and community groups.

Getting started

Volunteers are members of staff and should have access to the same induction, training, professional development and support, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, Health and Safety Risk assessments as salaried wardens.

A contract should be drawn up between the warden service and the volunteer spelling out the benefits for the volunteer: training, professional development, guaranteed job interview for a salaried post with the service if vacancies arise and the volunteer is interested in paid work etc. The contract should also outline the commitment from the volunteer e.g. minimum of 6 hours work, participation in training and development, responsibility for health and safety, adherence to warden service policies like equal opportunities. Local CVS Volunteer bureaux can provide sample contracts and also advise on sources of funding for introducing volunteer opportunities.

Volunteers should be provided with the same uniform and equipment as salaried wardens. They should receive expenses. Schemes should follow the guidance about recruitment, training and support that is contained in the NMWT Managers' Guide. This is available from the South West Neighbourhood Resource Centre free of charge.

Volunteers should where possible work alongside salaried wardens who can act as a mentor or buddy.

Working with volunteers is not cost neutral. Volunteers' training, support, equipment, uniform, management time all costs money and should be factored into the scheme budget and plan. Often the drop out rate for volunteers can be quite high. They can however, provide added value to a warden service.

Warden services requiring more information about volunteer wardens should discuss these issues with the South West Neighbourhood Resource Centre. Contact us on (01793) 464001 or e-mail on swresourcecentre@swindon.gov.uk.

Case Study: Stockton-on-Tees Volunteer Wardens

Neighbourhood Wardens were finding difficulty making contact with members of the local BME community many of whom did not speak English as a first language. The warden scheme manager, worked in partnership with the council community cohesion officer and the Parkfields and Mill Lane Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder in order to recruit volunteer wardens from the BME community. Word-of-mouth was used to recruit 4 volunteers with the aim of reaching out to the community but also creating life opportunities for the volunteers. Recruiting from the community led to empowerment and a sense of having ownership of the area. They were trained, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checked and equipped with uniform etc. in exactly the same way as paid wardens. The service did adapt its policies to meet the needs of the BME community by extending uniform to include shalwar, kameez and dupatta¹ in the service colours. Volunteers signed a contract committing to work a minimum of 6 hours a week. The contract stated that if the volunteer performed well, they would be added to the casual pool of wardens and offered interviews for salaried jobs.

They patrolled alongside paid wardens. The first cohort of volunteers worked very successfully and resulted in improved engagement within the BME community and increased take up of warden support. A short video clip of the service can be found on the warden regional good practice DVD that can be obtained from us.

From the 4 original volunteers 1 resigned owing to family circumstances, 2 are now full time paid wardens in Stockton and 1 progressed to a full time college course. Stockton is now recruiting for a new cohort of volunteers and is hoping to recruit a few French speakers that will help the warden service better engage with a group of asylum seekers and refugees whose first language is French.

Case Study: Walsall Young Ambassadors Scheme

Wardens are a familiar sight across Walsall and are much valued by residents and agencies. The wardens already work closely with schools providing input into personal and social education lessons and running junior warden schemes. This summer Walsall has used Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) funds to run a young ambassadors project in the town. These young volunteer wardens (12-17) have been trained and supported by Walsall wardens and work alongside them. At the end of the programme the young people will receive a wardens' 'goody' bag, a certificate and a day out at a theme park as a reward for their volunteering.

¹ Traditional South Asian dress commonly used by South Asians in the UK

Useful Websites:

1. Volunteering England

Volunteering England works to promote volunteering as a powerful force for change, both for those who volunteer and for the wider community.

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>

2. National Association of Councils for Voluntary Service

The NACVS is the growing network of 350 CVS and other local voluntary and community infrastructure organisations throughout England. We help to promote voluntary and community action by supporting our member CVS and by acting as a national voice for the local voluntary and community sector.

<http://www.nacvs.org.uk/>

3. Institute for Volunteering Research

The Institute for Volunteering Research aims to develop knowledge and understanding of volunteering in a way that is relevant to practitioners and policy makers.

<http://www.ivr.org.uk/>

4. Do-It

A database for UK volunteering opportunities and find out all you need to know to become a volunteer.

<http://www.do-it.org.uk/>

5. Time Bank

TimeBank is a national campaign inspiring and connecting people to share and give time. TimeBank appeals to people who know that their time and skills are in demand - but just don't know what to do about it or where to start.

<http://www.timebank.org.uk/>