

## **EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOLUNTEERING**

### **Communities 1<sup>st</sup> – What We Stand For Policy Statement (8)**

#### **Introduction**

Volunteering is the backbone of the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. At Communities 1st and within our wider network of member VCFSE organisations, we are on the frontline, working together to make our communities stronger and more inclusive. Our volunteers are the heart of our organisations, bringing invaluable energy, dedication, and a wealth of skills to our causes. This position statement outlines the motivations, support, accessibility, impact, recruitment, and future strategies for volunteering within the VCFSE sector. We aim to communicate our commitment to fostering a thriving volunteer community, highlighting our essential role and the challenges we face in gaining the necessary support, recognition, and resources to succeed.

#### **Challenges in Volunteering**

While the benefits and widespread interest in volunteering are clear, the VCFSE sector faces significant challenges. Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all community members remains a pressing issue. Maintaining volunteer engagement and retention requires continuous effort, particularly in adapting to the evolving needs and preferences of volunteers. Additionally, there is a need to shift the perception of volunteer work, recognising its true value not only economically but also socially, and ensuring it is seen as an integral and valued component of our societal framework.

#### **Our Pledge**

As Communities 1st and our member organisations, we pledge to:

- Support our volunteers' personal and professional growth by providing opportunities for development through training, mentoring, and leadership roles.
- Actively promote diversity and inclusivity by removing barriers, providing accommodations for disabilities, and offering flexible scheduling options.
- Measuring and highlighting the social value of volunteering through tools, surveys, case studies, and stories, recognising both monetary and non-monetary contributions.

#### **Our Ask of Decision-Makers and Influencers**

To effectively support our communities, we call upon our politicians, senior leaders, and officers within governments, local councils, the NHS, and other public sector bodies to:

1. Recognise the critical role volunteers play in our communities. Support policies that promote volunteering, provide funding for volunteer programmes, and encourage volunteer participation.
2. Allocate resources for the professional growth of volunteers, ensuring they have access to the tools and support needed to thrive in their roles.
3. Support policies that create flexible volunteering opportunities and accessibility for volunteers with disabilities. Promote diversity in volunteer recruitment and recognise the unique contributions of all community members.
4. Acknowledge the social value of volunteering beyond monetary measures. Highlight the positive impact of volunteering on well-being, health, and social cohesion. Recognise and celebrate these contributions to elevate the status of volunteer work.