

Broads Authority

15 May 2026

Agenda item number 18

Creating a framework for Member engagement with operational staff

Report by Head of Governance

Purpose

To propose a draft framework for managing requests from Members to accompany officers during their operational duties, ensuring these interactions are positive, productive and safeguard the respective roles of Members and staff.

Recommended decision

Approve the updating of the Volunteer Strategy to provide guidance on Member volunteering and engagement as proposed in the report.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. At its 19 September 2025 meeting, the Broads Authority considered a paper proposing an update to the Code of Conduct that would clarify the position on Member volunteering. The Authority acknowledged the importance of the issue but did not reach a consensus, referring the matter to this Committee for detailed review.
- 1.2. This paper does not seek to limit Member participation. Instead, it acknowledges the valuable feedback from Members and incorporates critical operational perspectives from staff gathered following the meeting. The aim is to move towards a practical framework that balances Members' desire to learn and contribute with the need for clear boundaries and effective service delivery.
- 1.3. We propose shifting from a Code of Conduct focus to creating a clear Member engagement and volunteering approach for the Volunteer Strategy. This would provide clarity for Members and Co-Opted Members, and staff, ensuring all interactions are constructive and governed by mutual respect.

2. Background and feedback

- 2.1. The original paper highlighted potential governance concerns, including conflicts of interest and the blurring of member-officer roles. The Authority's discussion revealed a strong desire from Members to maintain opportunities for hands-on engagement to better inform their strategic duties.

2.2. Feedback from Members emphasised that:

- The Authority benefits from the expertise and external perspectives of its Members.
- Engagement with operational staff is seen as vital for understanding the Broads.
- A case-by-case approach was preferable to a universal ban.

2.3. Feedback from Staff, gathered to better understand operational realities, highlighted several challenges with the current informal approach:

- Staff can feel obliged to accommodate Member requests at times convenient to the Member, rather than times that fit operational workflows.
- Officers sometimes must alter their planned physical work (e.g. tree trimming) to accommodate a Member who may not be able to participate fully, impacting productivity.
- There is a distinction between a Member wishing to volunteer to complete a specific task, and a Member wishing to observe and learn about operations. The former requires a focus on the work, while the latter is an educational engagement.
- Staff can be placed in difficult situations if asked about broader Authority policy or positions on which they are not briefed, leading to potential miscommunication.

3. Proposed Framework for a Member Engagement

3.1. To address these points, a framework was presented to the Standards Committee on 19 March 2026 for their input. The Committee resolved unanimously to recommend to the Broads Authority that the Volunteer Strategy was updated in line with the proposed framework for inclusion in the Volunteer Strategy. It is designed to foster positive interactions while providing clear guidelines.

3.2. **Guiding Principles**

3.3. Every interaction must have a clear purpose:

- (a) either as a formal volunteering activity, or
- (b) an observational engagement.

3.4. The distinct roles of Members (strategic) and Officers (operations) must always be respected as outlined in the Code of Conduct.

3.5. The work schedule and safety requirements of officers are the primary consideration.

3.6. Engagement opportunities will be offered around existing work plans.

3.7. All queries regarding Authority policy or position on matters should be directed to a member of the Management Team, protecting staff from being put in a difficult position.

3.8. **Proposed Protocol for Member Engagement**

A. Formal volunteering on specific tasks

For Members who wish to actively volunteer to complete specific physical or administrative tasks alongside officers, the following would apply:

- *Opportunities are Officer-Led*

Volunteering opportunities, including dates and times, will be prescribed by officers based on operational need and capacity.

- *Commitment to the Task*

Members are expected to participate fully in the volunteer activity for its duration. If a Member is unable to participate in the core tasks of the day, they should not request to volunteer for that specific activity.

- *Clear Briefing*

Members' volunteering will receive a clear briefing on the tasks, safety procedures, and the chain of command for the day.

B. Observational Engagement and Learning

To better support Members' needs to understand operations without the pressure of task completion, a separate pathway is recommended:

- *Official Tours and Shadowing*

Members wishing to learn about the operations of the Broads should request an official, structured tour or shadowing opportunity. This is distinct from volunteering and is designed specifically for education and observation.

- *Scheduled and Structured*

These engagements will be scheduled separately from critical task-based work and will be designed to maximise learning without disrupting workflow.

3.9. Any concerns regarding the application of this framework or potential conflicts of interest shall be referred to the Monitoring Officer for direction.

4. Communication and follow-up

4.1. To address concerns about misquotation and unclear messaging, the strategy will include:

- A reminder that staff speak in an operational capacity, and any questions of a strategic or policy nature should be directed to the relevant Director.
- Encouragement for Members to confirm any operational insights or policy questions with the relevant Director

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The previous approach, to limit member participation, was clear but it ignored the legitimate desire of Members to engage. The completely informal approach was popular with some Members but creates unacceptable pressures on staff and governance risks for the Authority.
- 5.2. The proposed framework is a pragmatic and constructive approach. It acknowledges the complexity of the issue and provides a structured, fair and transparent way to achieve the engagement Members want, while providing the clarity and protection that staff need.

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Background papers: [Broads Authority Meeting 19 September 2025, Code of Conduct Update on Member Volunteering](#)