

Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

7 October 2015

Report title	Employee Volunteering Scheme – progress report	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds City Economy	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Keren Jones, City Economy	
Originating service	Economic Inclusion	
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Report to be/has been considered by		

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Panel is recommended to:

1. Review the progress of the Employee Volunteering scheme
2. Comment on the proposed future direction of the scheme

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report is intended to update the Confident, Capable Council Scrutiny Panel on progress made with the Employee Volunteering Scheme and to ask the panel to review progress to date.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 5 November 2013, Cabinet Resources Panel approved a report proposing the development of an Employee Volunteering Scheme.
- 2.2 The agreed scheme comprised:
- An allowance of up to two days per year of paid time for council employees to volunteer (pro-rata for part-time staff). (This amount of time is standard national best practice.)
 - That all employee volunteer activities to be considered as a direct contribution to employee development as part of the staff appraisal process.
 - That all activities should take place within the Wolverhampton geographical boundaries.
 - That all volunteering should be of benefit to the not for profit sector in the city.
 - Volunteer activities to support the corporate priorities for communities to increase their self-reliance.
 - Linkages with the Volunteer Centre.
- 2.3 The scheme has a number of benefits for the council, employees and voluntary sector organisations. These benefits might be best demonstrated with an example. In July some of the Economic Inclusion team undertook a day's volunteering in support of Compton Hospice. As well as show casing the event to other employees via City People, the team also provided some much needed support to the hospice as part of their Compton in the Park event by stewarding, running activities and overseeing the car parking arrangements. The team received an email from Compton Hospice thanking them for their efforts on the day and telling them how much their work was appreciated.
- 2.4 The members of the Economic Inclusion team that took part in the activity reported that they had enjoyed making a contribution to such a worthwhile cause. They felt that they had been able to positively add to efforts of Compton Hospice's employees and volunteers.
- 2.5 The activity has contributed towards team development, created a sense of job satisfaction, contributed towards team building, enhanced the council's reputation in the wider community and demonstrated the council's commitment to employee development.
- 2.6 The Economic Inclusion Team are undertaking further volunteering activities for instance collecting food and toiletries for one of the food banks and training as Nordic walk leaders.

- 2.7 Another clear benefit of the scheme is the ability of employees and managers to use the scheme as a very cost efficient staff development tool. If, for instance, an employee wanted to gain skills in project management, a placement could be arranged enabling them to receive on the job experience of this area.
- 2.8 If an employee is interested in volunteering but is not sure what sort of activity they would like to do, they complete an Expression of Interest form which is forwarded to the Wolverhampton Volunteer Centre. Based on the information provided, the Volunteer Centre will suggest some suitable volunteering activities.
- 2.9 The Volunteer Centre is also proactive in offering group activities to employees wishing to volunteer. This might include gardening, decorating or fundraising.
- 2.10 The scheme has been incorporated into the suite of Human Resources policies.
- 2.11 Nationally, employee volunteering received an additional boost when it was announced in the Conservative Manifesto that the Working Time regulations would be amended to enable public sector employees and private sector staff at companies with more than 250 employees to take three days paid volunteering leave. If this reform does take place, the City of Wolverhampton Council would need to update its policy in line with this new legislation.

3.0 Progress

- 3.1 The Employee Volunteering scheme was launched in March 2014. An event was held for staff including a presentation and an opportunity to ask questions. This was followed by two drop in sessions enabling staff to meet individually with the project lead and a drop in session in the foyer of the Civic Centre as part of Volunteer Week in June 2014.
- 3.2 The scheme was also promoted on the core brief, which sign posted people to more detailed information hosted on the Human Resources intranet.
- 3.3 A session was held with voluntary sector organisations to encourage them to make use of the scheme by offering volunteering opportunities to Council staff.
- 3.4 The organisational strategy for the Council has been amended to take account of employee volunteering, underlining its importance as part of the staff appraisal process. It includes specific reference to "Provide opportunities for employee volunteering in the city that supports the city's ambitions."
- 3.5 To date 14 people have successfully applied to volunteer as part of the Employee Volunteer scheme. These figures are broadly in line with other authorities conducting similar schemes. In year two Gateshead had 17 employees that took part in their scheme and Sandwell has anything between 12 and 24 employees participating annually.

4.0 Future direction of the scheme

4.1 It is proposed to continue to promote and develop the scheme by:

4.1.1 Continuing to showcase examples of employees volunteering through City People.

4.1.2 Looking at creative ways of encouraging managers to discuss employee volunteering with employees as part of the employee appraisal process by adding some guidance in the e-learning module and face to face training for managers.

4.1.3 Presenting the scheme to the Place and People Directorate leadership teams with a view to them cascading the information down to heads of services and managers to use as part of the appraisal process.

4.1.4 Investigating any further revisions or developments to the scheme e.g. whether employees could be encouraged to match the paid volunteering time with their own time.

4.1.5 Establishing a portal (possibly as part of the new intranet) to make employees aware of available volunteering opportunities.

4.1.6 Enabling staff to book volunteering leave directly on the Agresso system.

4.1.7 Including an item on the scheme in the new staff induction programme.

4.1.8 Reaching employees with no or limited internet access via roadshows, leaflets and local newsletters.

4.1.9 Including an item on the Learning Hub explaining how employee volunteering can be part of personal and professional development.

5.0 Financial implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the volunteering scheme. The policy stipulates that volunteering will only be allowed where it does not involve a visible financial cost to back-fill staff cover. Expenses arising from any volunteering undertaken will be met by the individual or the organisation for which they volunteer.

5.2 Each application for volunteering will be assessed on a case by case basis by the line manager to confirm that the leave for volunteering can be accommodated and that there are no financial implications.

[ES/23092015/R]

6.0 Legal implications

- 6.1 Potential legal implications of the scheme have been mitigated. Whilst the City of Wolverhampton Council will allow staff up to two days per year for bona fide volunteering, the staff member will be attending as an individual, rather than as an employee of the council, therefore releasing the council from either direct or vicarious liability for their actions while engaged in volunteer pursuits. Wherever possible, Wolverhampton Volunteer Centre will broker written volunteering arrangements containing appropriate clauses reflecting this position.

[KO/28092015/Q]

7.0 Equalities implications

- 7.1 The equalities analysis did not uncover any adverse impacts. However, under equalities legislation the Council is also under a duty to foster good relations between communities and to support participation in public life. The Employee Volunteering Scheme has the potential to contribute significantly to this agenda through, for instance, encouraging staff to volunteer within organisations and activities that foster good relations and by encouraging a diverse range of staff to participate in public life.
- 7.2 Part of the scheme encourages that disabled staff are assisted to participate in the scheme through the provision of 'reasonable adjustments' by the Council. This would not incur any additional costs. For instance, if a staff member had an adapted phone, they would be permitted to utilise it as part of their volunteering. This would be at the manager's discretion.
- 7.3 The Council is also monitoring take up of the scheme across the equalities strands. This will include who applied for the scheme, who was unsuccessful and any differentials.

8.0 Environmental implications

- 8.1 The scheme is already showing some benefits to the environment as employees are beginning to volunteer at environmental projects.

9.0 Human resources implications

- 9.1 Under the scheme employees are allocated up to two days paid time for volunteering. Any application would need to be approved by the line manager, having taken business needs into consideration, and the appropriate documentation would be sent to the human resources support desk.
- 9.2 Employees book their volunteering time as they would special leave.

9.3 The benefits of this scheme has the potential to outweigh the cost. These are laid out in full in the Employee Volunteering Scheme in Appendix A, but they include:

- Improving employee job satisfaction, morale, commitment and performance.
- Enhancing the council's reputation and profile.
- Helping the council to attract and retain high-performing employees.
- Encouraging individual and team development.
- Helping team building through group volunteering.
- Strengthening relationships with voluntary, community and faith sectors – creating a “one team” approach.
- Helping to demonstrate its commitment and support to employees by encouraging them to play a more active role in society

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Employee Volunteering Scheme 10 October 2013 Confident Capable Council Scrutiny Panel

Employee Volunteering Scheme 5 November 2013 Cabinet Resources Panel.