

Human Resources Committee

10 August 2007



Employee Volunteering Scheme

Joint Report of Kim Jobson, Head of Human Resources and Rachael Shimmin, Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an overview of the Employee Volunteering Scheme (EVS) being prepared for Durham County Council (DCC).

Background

- 2 Employee volunteering schemes are based around the employer allowing staff paid time to volunteer. Although initially instigated by the private sector, there have been increasing examples of such schemes in the public sector. A number of County Councils (for example, West Sussex, Surrey, Buckinghamshire) have adopted schemes in recent years along with other public sector bodies such as the Inland Revenue and Primary Care Trusts.
- 3 The original proposal within the County Council came through the Staff Suggestion Scheme and initial work was carried out by a working group involving DCC officers and staff representing the Volunteer Centres in County Durham.
- 4 A report was taken to the Corporate Management Team in December 2006 and then on to Cabinet on 25 January 2007, where the EVS was agreed in principle for a pilot 12-month period. That report recommended the release of staff as volunteers for up to 20 hours per annum to support voluntary projects in County Durham.
- 5 The scheme supports DCC's commitment to volunteering as providing an important service within the community. DCC has demonstrated this commitment through our membership of the County Durham Compact¹. The EVS also fits with a draft 'Code of Good Practice on Volunteering' currently under development. This Code² sets out further principles and undertakings for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and statutory bodies in County Durham aiming to support and promote volunteering.

¹ The County Durham Compact aims to promote and support partnership working between the voluntary & community sectors and statutory partners in the county, including DCC. Details can be found at www.onevoice.co.uk – the 'One Voice' Network is the lead body on Compact development in the county.

² The Code will require all signatory statutory bodies to identify a timetable for introducing an EVS.

Benefits of Volunteering

6 Research on the impact of EVSs has demonstrated multiple benefits. Apart from the prospective benefits to the community, DCC and individual employees can gain from positive contributions to staff development, improved morale and a wider positive public profile. In addition, the scheme would contribute towards our overarching strategies such as our corporate aims, the equality & diversity agenda and Investors in People. Benefits include:

(a) For the County Council – staff development through involvement in new situations, stronger motivation encourages staff retention, enhances staff involvement with local communities, improved partnership working, demonstrating that we are leading by example.

(b) For the Employee – gaining valuable experience, helping other people & making a difference in the community, learning new skills, improving transition from work to retirement.

(c) For the organisation involving volunteers – actively involves people from the local community, helps goal achievement through use of volunteers' skills & knowledge, reduces staff shortages.

Current Position

7 Officers of DCC are continuing to work closely with colleagues in the VCS to prepare a suitable policy and develop an agreement that allows the Volunteer Centres to operate a brokerage service. During the time of the pilot, it is anticipated that the six County Durham Volunteer Centres will support DCC. This will include carrying out interviews (where appropriate) with prospective volunteers to help identify suitable opportunities, develop appropriate marketing in conjunction with DCC, register and monitor all volunteers from DCC staffing through their established database systems and provide DCC with regular updates on the numbers of volunteers and the types of volunteering. Although this brokerage service will be delivered on a no-cost basis to DCC during the pilot project, this issue would have to be re-visited following the initial 12-months and any continuation of the service may well necessitate a charge needing to be agreed and levied to DCC.

8 The final policy is still in draft format. However, a number of primary factors are relevant for report at this moment:

- Volunteers will be able to apply for up to 20 hours per annum to work on projects – employees are encouraged to match this with a similar commitment from their own time.
- Managerial approval must be sought and obtained before an employee can take time within the scheme.
- Any role should normally be linked to an activity within County Durham and benefit the community that is served by DCC.

- The activity selected by the volunteering employee must be identifiable as supporting one or more of the DCC corporate aims.
- Similarly, the activity must not lead to a conflict of interest with regard to the employee's contract with DCC or bring the Council into disrepute.
- Any volunteering activity must not be used to replace or substitute for any paid role.
- Employees are not covered by DCC insurance policies while undertaking voluntary activities.

9 At this stage, no formal launch has been scheduled. It is appreciated that some members of staff may already operate in a volunteering capacity. However, they will not be able to seek to use the EVS until it has been confirmed and rolled out across DCC. At this stage, it is anticipated that the policy will be released during the autumn of 2007.

Recommendations and reasons

- 10 This report has been included for information purposes. It provides the background to the proposals previously agreed at Cabinet and indicates the potential benefits of an EVS. Many national organisations have found that encouraging employee volunteering has provided positive benefits for themselves, the community and their employees.
- 11 The scheme will also be strongly associated with the personal development programme for DCC employees and linked into the appraisal process.
- 12 A further report will be prepared for a future HR Committee that will include details of the final policy.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – there may be some opportunity cost associated with take-up.

Staffing – line managers to support requests wherever operationally viable and in a planned way.

Equality and Diversity – the scheme will be open to all eligible staff. It allows the opportunity for some employees to participate in voluntary activity who may otherwise be excluded due to existing responsibilities outside of work time, eg carers.

Accommodation

Crime and disorder – some volunteering opportunities may contribute to combating crime and disorder.

Sustainability – some volunteering opportunities may relate to environmental projects and raise awareness of environmental issues with DCC staff.

Human rights

Localities & Rurality – most volunteering will occur in local communities and benefit the local area by environmental or social improvements.

Young people – some volunteering opportunities may be for the direct benefit of young people.

Consultation – the trade unions will be consulted during the development of the policy.

Health – some volunteering opportunities may be in organisations involved in health related services. Some research shows that volunteering can have a positive impact on the health of the volunteer.