

Human Resources Committee

16 November 2007



Pilot 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 seek approval for the introduction of a pilot employee volunteering scheme for a 12-month period from January 2008.

Background

- 2 A report was considered for information purposes at the previous HR Committee on 10 August 2007 that provided the background to this policy development. A report had also previously been to the Corporate Management Team in December 2006 and then on to Cabinet on 25 January 2007. The pilot scheme was approved in principle at that time, based around the central criteria that individual staff could seek up to 20 hours of paid leave per annum to support voluntary projects in County Durham. Any leave arrangements would have to be agreed with their manager before time off could be taken.
- 3 Employee volunteering strategies are being developed in many organisations. This sort of policy has begun to be utilised in the public sector with County Councils such as Devon, West Sussex, Buckinghamshire and Surrey having established employee volunteering schemes. Our scheme initially was prompted through the staff suggestion programme and has been developed in recent months through a Working Party.
- 4 The policy, procedure and accompanying toolkit have been prepared in partnership with the Volunteer Bureaux/Centres (VBCs) of County Durham. The project fits with our overall commitment to volunteering and its role within the community. This commitment has been further demonstrated through our membership of County Durham Compact (CDC)¹ and the draft 'Code of Good Practice on Volunteering'².

¹ The CDC aims to promote and support partnership working between the voluntary & community sectors and county statutory partners, such as the County Council. Further details can be found at www.onevoice.co.uk

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

Benefits of Volunteering

- 5 A successful employee volunteering scheme has the potential to create benefits for the County Council, the employee and organisations who utilise volunteers. The community itself also gains from wider skill availability:
- **County Council** – staff develop through involvement in new situations – particularly in relation to abilities such as teamworking, interpersonal skills and flexibility. In addition the policy may generate stronger staff motivation, encourages staff retention, enhances staff involvement with local communities, improves partnership working, demonstrates that we are leading by example and strengthening our links with local communities.
 - **Employees** – gains valuable experience, helps other people, makes a difference in the community, learns new skills in real-life situations which traditional training may not be able to provide, improves transition from work to retirement.
 - **For the organisation involving volunteers** – actively involves people from the local community, helps goal achievement through use of volunteer's skills & knowledge.
- 6 Data is not available to show how many Council employees already participate in some form of volunteering. Figures can fluctuate with regard to the numbers of people nationally who participate in formal³ or informal volunteering roles. However, a recent national study showed that, of the nine English regions, the North East provided the least number of formal volunteers – only 20% of people give time at least once a month⁴. The next lowest contribution was 27% in London and Yorkshire regions.

Summary of the Policy, Procedure and Toolkit

- 7 The draft policy, procedure and toolkit is attached as *Appendix 2*. The policy would be applicable to all County Council employees, including schools that choose to adopt this policy in its entirety.
- 8 This pilot scheme is founded on a 12-month agreement with the six Durham VBCs – a copy of the draft agreement can be located through *Appendix 3*. This 12-month agreement has been agreed free of charge with the VBC. However, if ultimately, an Employee Volunteering Policy was agreed on a permanent basis, a charge would be levied for the continuation of any further agreements. As well as assisting employees in locating suitable volunteering opportunities and assisting managers with feedback on proposed voluntary organisations, the VBCs will play an important role in the monitoring and evaluation of the scheme. Monitoring will occur in the following ways:
- Coordinated monitoring by a continuation of the working group's activities during 2008;
 - Utilisation of the statistical feedback generated through the VBCs specialist database system;
 - Analysis of returns that are required from each individual volunteering arrangement within the policy.

³ Formal = giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to help other people or the environment. Informal = giving unpaid help as an individual to a person who is not a relative.

⁴ Source: 2005 Citizenship Survey, Department for Communities and Local Government, as reported through Volunteering England.

9 The main elements of the policy and procedure are as follows:

- Any employee who seeks to get involved in the volunteering scheme may be granted special leave of up to 20 paid hours per annum (pro-rata for part-timers);
- The employee is encouraged to at least match the commitment to 20 hours with a similar period of voluntary work directly from their own time;
- The voluntary organisation being supported must provide a safe, positive experience that clearly complies with one of our four corporate aims and benefits the people of County Durham in some demonstrable way;
- Any volunteering activity or programme must not lead to a conflict of interest with the individual's role with the County Council or bring the Council into disrepute;
- Any volunteering role must not replace/substitute for any paid work;
- The scheme can only be applied where the employee utilises the registration process operated by the VBCs within the agreement;
- Working as a volunteer is entirely independent of the employment contract with the County Council;
- Travel and other expenses will not be re-funded by the County Council, unless the volunteering is carried out to support of a County Council service where the County Council is actually providing that service;
- The employee must check with the proposed voluntary organisation with regard to suitable insurance coverage and criminal record bureau checks.

Proposed Launch and Roll-Out

- 10 If the policy, procedure and toolkit is agreed, a launch is planned for 18 January 2008. This will include an event being held at County Hall over the lunchtime period incorporating a signing ceremony for the agreement, involving suitable representation from the County Council and the VBCs. The VBCs and other voluntary organisations would also take the opportunity to advertise a range of suitable volunteering activities and opportunities.
- 11 A publicity campaign would also be generated ahead of the launch to ensure that managers were aware of the policy's aims and how it will operate. In addition, media such as the Intranet, Extranet, newsletters, posters etc, would be enlisted to broaden awareness of the new policy across Council employees.

Recommendations and reasons

- 12 It is recommended that the pilot Employee Volunteering Policy and Procedure is approved. Some of the potential benefits have been highlighted in paragraph 5 and the pilot scheme will allow a suitable timeframe to examine whether anticipated positive effects are forthcoming. Feedback from other County Councils that have previously adopted similar schemes suggests that although there was enthusiastic take-up, the policy outcomes have not demonstrated any negative reaction to service delivery or adverse publicity.
- 13 The introduction of the policy helps us demonstrate our commitment to the County Durham Compact and the draft Code of Good Practice on Volunteering which includes breaking down barriers to volunteering and actively encouraging employee volunteering schemes. As shown in paragraph 6, the North East has the poorest record with regard to active volunteering – this policy may contribute to improving that record.

- 14 Employee volunteering strategies are being developed in many organisations. Research for the national volunteering charity TimeBank shows that of the top 200 UK companies, 94% think that volunteering adds to the skills of the workforce. The pilot project may also be seen to support the Government 's overall civil renewal agenda, which includes for a strong emphasis on voluntary action within communities.
- 15 With the pilot project due to last 12 months, it is anticipated that a further examination of the experiences and outcomes in early 2009 will help determine whether there is further scope for continuing with a longer-term strategy.

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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 are being consulted regarding 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.