

Delegated Decision

9th June, 2020

Covid 19 Volunteering Unit – Proposed Way Forward and a Creation of a Virtual Volunteering Unit



Report of Corporate Management Team

Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide implications

Purpose of the Report

1. To outline the process and reasoning behind establishing a Volunteering Unit, following consideration of the Corporate Management Team to go ahead with the initiative to effectively respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Executive summary

- 2 This report sets out proposals for the creation of a virtual Volunteering Unit to manage and coordinate volunteer offers and requests to support the LRF's efforts to tackle the impact of Covid 19 on services and communities. A wide network of potential supply has been identified but there is an urgent need to be able to 'match' these willing volunteers to opportunities that are emerging in a coordinated way.

Recommendation

- 3 To note the decision and reasoning behind the decision taken by the Council's Corporate Management Team on 13th April, 2020 (as set out in the attached background paper) to establish a Volunteering Unit.

Background

- 4 Since the Government decision to introduce lock down processes we have seen a positive community response to the Coronavirus crisis. Communities across County Durham have mobilised to provide local support structures. These local acts of kindness, to support neighbours and local communities have been vital in helping the vulnerable and self-isolated access essentials such as food, and without them the Covid Support Hub would inevitably have faced many more calls and placed significant risk that statutory partners could not respond effectively to residents needs
- 5 In addition to local people coming together and organising themselves in local mutual aid groups, over 400 people have recently volunteered to offer support through the Council's Covid webpage. This is on top of the volunteers we are already aware of (over 3,300) that we have called on for other projects and activities such as Lumiere etc. and are held on the Council's kinetic database. In addition, a range of partner agencies have other volunteer databases that pre-existed Covid 19, but which could be called upon to help fill emerging service gaps as well as support new community and VCS support initiatives.

Main Implications

- 6 Given the important role community groups and volunteers have in ensuring the vulnerable are supported through the pandemic, without the establishment of a volunteering unit to match willing volunteers to groups that need help to provide a service, there is a risk that:
 - Voluntary groups are unable to provide a support service
 - Volunteers become despondent at the idea of volunteering and put off the idea of supporting community groups in the future.

now need to develop a robust way of matching this supply to the expected demand across various sectors for the potential need for additional volunteers to support mainstream and voluntary sector service delivery linked to COVID-19 support. This will be in addition to the underlying message that one of the main ways to help will be to offer support to the vulnerable and self-isolating in people's local neighbourhoods by keeping in contact and helping to get shopping.

Conclusion

- 7 Given the implications of not establishing a Volunteering Unit, and as a reflection of the significant role volunteers and local community groups have had during the Covid-19 crisis, CMT took the view that the unit should be established in order to provide a means for local groups who need support to source volunteers, and for those who want to help to be linked to those who need support. It is also recognised that although the

unit had limited involvement in the many mutual aid groups that were spontaneously established across the county, maintaining these groups in the longer term (post Covid) would have many benefits and the unit could play a role ,alongside Durham Community Action, to make this a reality.

Background Papers

- 8 13th April, 2020: Corporate Management Team - Covid 19 Volunteering Unit – Proposed Way Forward and a creation of a Virtual Volunteering Unit

Author(s)

Gordon Elliott

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

Staff costs for personnel in the Volunteering Unit will be met from existing budgets. Associated costs for volunteers placed to support service provision will be met by the host organisation.

Consultation

None identified

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality policies will be followed in creating and staffing the Unit

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

The staff identified to work within the Unit will be sought through approved redeployment routes linked to COVID-19 policies on a voluntary basis

Accommodation

The Team will exist as a virtual Team and no fixed accommodation is required.

Risk

Risk of placing volunteers with 'host' organisations will be mitigated by making it clear that external organisation receiving volunteers will be responsible for associated management of the volunteers. A Safe Volunteering Guide has also been developed to provide basic information to staff.

Procurement

None

Corporate Management Team

13 April 2020

Covid 19 Volunteering Unit – Proposed Way Forward and a creation of a Virtual Volunteering Unit

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide implications

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek CMT's agreement to the creation of a Volunteering Unit to manage the coordination and deployment of volunteers to support COVID-19 priority services across key partner and Voluntary sectors areas within County Durham.

Executive summary

- 2 This report sets out proposals for the creation of a virtual Volunteering Unit to manage and coordinate volunteer offers and requests to support the LRF's efforts to tackle the impact of Covid 19 on services and communities. A wide network of potential supply has been identified but there is an urgent need to be able to 'match' these willing volunteers to opportunities that are emerging in a coordinated way.

Recommendation(s)

- 3 CMT is recommended to approve the creation of the Volunteering Unit and acknowledge the suggested changes to the Council's website to capture the data needed to track demand.

Background

- 4 We have seen a positive community response to the Coronavirus crisis. Communities across County Durham are mobilising themselves to provide local support structures. These local acts of kindness, to support neighbours and local communities have been vital in helping

the vulnerable and self-isolated access essentials such as food, and without them the Covid Support Hubs would inevitably be facing many more calls.

- 5 226 people have recently volunteered to offer support through the Council's Covid webpage. This is on top of the volunteers we are already aware of (over 3,300) that we have called on for other projects and activities such as Lumiere etc. In addition, a range of partner agencies have other volunteer databases that pre-existed Covid 19, but which could be called upon to help fill emerging service gaps as well as support new community and VCS support initiatives.
- 6 Currently we find ourselves in a situation of having a large potential supply of volunteers. We now need to develop a robust way of matching this supply to the expected demand across various sectors for the potential need for additional volunteers to support mainstream and voluntary sector service delivery linked to COVID-19 support. This will be in addition to the underlying message that one of the main ways to help will be to offer support to the vulnerable and self-isolating in people's local neighbourhoods by keeping in contact and helping to get shopping.

Work to Date

- 7 A Volunteering Sub-Group has been established, chaired by Gordon Elliott with the work being managed by Andrew Megginson. This Sub-Group is feeding into the Communities Support Group chaired by Gill O'Neil. The Sub-Group includes strong DCC representation, including HR and also includes Durham Community Action, a Town & Parish Council's lead and a senior manager from Livin Housing who is acting in a coordinating role for the wider Social Housing Sector.
- 8 The group has carried out the following work to date;
 - (a) Mapped and harmonised various volunteer databases which have identified over 10,000 registered volunteers (not including the NHS GoodSam volunteers);
 - (b) Established a database of the various individual volunteer offers coming into DCC through the AAP Community Hub (226 as of 9 April);
 - (c) Developed a 'Safe Volunteering Guide' to ensure volunteers remain safe and adhere to appropriate social distancing guidance whilst volunteering.

Identifying Opportunities

- 9 Requests for additional support by volunteers are starting to come in and we expect this to build over coming weeks as demand on services increases and current supply of volunteers, particularly in the voluntary sector, reduces due to isolation issues.
- 10 These need to be coordinated as currently there is not clear route for offers of support, as well requests for assistance. It is there proposed to create a Volunteering Unit to track demand and consider who is best placed to provide additional support where a service provider finds themselves in the position of being unable to do so from their own staff, or volunteer resources if they are voluntary sector organisation.
- 11 Gaps in potential service delivery could be filled from different levels of support. This includes;
 - (a) DCC Staff through the redeployment process;
 - (b) Support by trusted partners such as Housing organisations and local councils;
 - (c) Ad Hoc offers of support from Businesses (27 offers of staff and resources have been made to date);
 - (d) Individual community-based volunteers – through existing databases or media call outs.
- 12 There is a need for a bespoke service to consider specific requests and identify who is best placed to provide the needed support.

Proposal

- 13 Creation of a virtual Volunteering Unit along similar lines as the Community Hub to assess incoming requests, to triage these requests and to match need to the available supply of volunteers.
- 14 Appendix 3 sets out the process for how this will operate and the key functions of the Team.
- 15 We are seeing evidence of very local community need being met by social media calls within localities. This Volunteering Unit will prioritise bespoke asks directly linked to priority COVID-19 related services that can't be filled through other routes.
- 16 Although the Council will provide a 'coordination' service we are clear that the wellbeing and management of the volunteers will lie with the host organisation and volunteers will need to follow their policies and

procedures. A Safe Volunteering Guide has been developed that provides basic guidance for all volunteers to consider. This is attached as Appendix 2.

Link to AAP COVID-19 Projects

- 17 This new Team will also be well placed to consider how the supply of volunteers could link to the development of the COVID-19 projects being developed by AAPs and Members. We are starting to see for example, projects coming through that include costs to support volunteer drivers mileage. If we have a business offering free access to delivery support this can be matched within the Unit and therefore ensure these limited funds go further and offer better VFM.

Team Structure

- 18 The Team will be managed by Andrew Megginson and it will need to provide 7-day support to monitor and manage requests.
- 19 The Team will focus on developing volunteering job roles, direct discussion with providers, considering training needs for prospective volunteers, monitoring and evaluation of people placed within organisations. It will include the following staff:
 - (a) Staff from the Volunteer & Skills Team in Leisure & Culture (2);
 - (b) Partnership Staff (3);
 - (c) Durham Community Action – Volunteering Lead (1);
 - (d) HR Staff to ensure links to the redeployment of DCC staff x 1;
 - (e) Adult Services x 1 (as this is an area of work likely to be under particular pressure for volunteers out with Council redeployed staff).
 - (f) NHS x1 (an area of work likely to experience extreme pressure)
 - (g) Data manager x1
- 20 We will working with Alison Lazazzera to identify potential redeployed staff to support this function over coming weeks to ensure sufficient cover arrangements to develop a shift pattern for a 7-day service.

Components needed

- 21 To operate this effectively we need to create a way for organisations to make requests for help in a coordinated way through one route to avoid duplication of effort across the Council. We are working on the following additions:
- (a) Inclusion of a link on the Council's website for organisations to register a request;
 - (b) An 'ask' form has been developed to capture key information to be able to assess the job role that is needed and the skills required including when help is needed and for how long;
 - (c) The Community Hub phone number that has already been publicised will be used to triage calls received requesting volunteer support (although it is recognised that some requests will also come directly into the Volunteer Unit e.g. urgent requests from LRF partners, and updates from partners who are currently tracking pressures across a range of providers);
 - (d) Comms on the Volunteering Unit are also being prepared to effectively direct requests;
 - (e) An effective means to capture the various offers that are coming in from Businesses offering support. So far the focus has been primarily on individuals offering support. Refinements to the current online questionnaire are being developed for the COVID-19 site so that businesses can better clarify their offer of help. This includes offers of staff, funds, equipment including PPE, Premises and vehicles.
- 22 Performance Data – the Volunteer Unit will also provide performance data linked to volunteering to track numbers placed, monitor retention rates, assess geographic factors and the types of roles requested.

Additional Issues for CMT's information

- 23 From discussions with partners such as RSL's and also some major businesses, the area that they have expressed caution to be involved in is wider care support and any activity which potentially places their employees at a greater risk. Offers such as driving roles, telephone befriending etc are favoured by external partners. This may place more demand on DCC staff and individuals to fulfil these roles, as well as the need for bespoke public call outs for assistance such as the current ask for residential care workers.
- 24 A lack of clarity existing about the redeployment process for the NHS 'Goodsam' App volunteers. Guidance on the roles they could assist with is clear, but many different interpretations exist on who can call on them

and how 'jobs' are created. The Volunteering Sub-Group have identified this as a work area to examine. Discussions with NHS volunteering managers have also identified no knowledge of the number of new volunteers that exist within County Durham that could be called on.

Recommendation

25 CMT are asked to approve the establishment of the Volunteering Unit.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

Staff costs for personnel in the Volunteering Unit will be met from existing budgets. Associated costs for volunteers placed to support service provision will be met by the host organisation.

Consultation

None identified

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality policies will be followed in creating and staffing the Unit

Climate Change

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Human Rights

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Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

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Accommodation

The Team will exist as a virtual Team and no fixed accommodation is required.

Risk

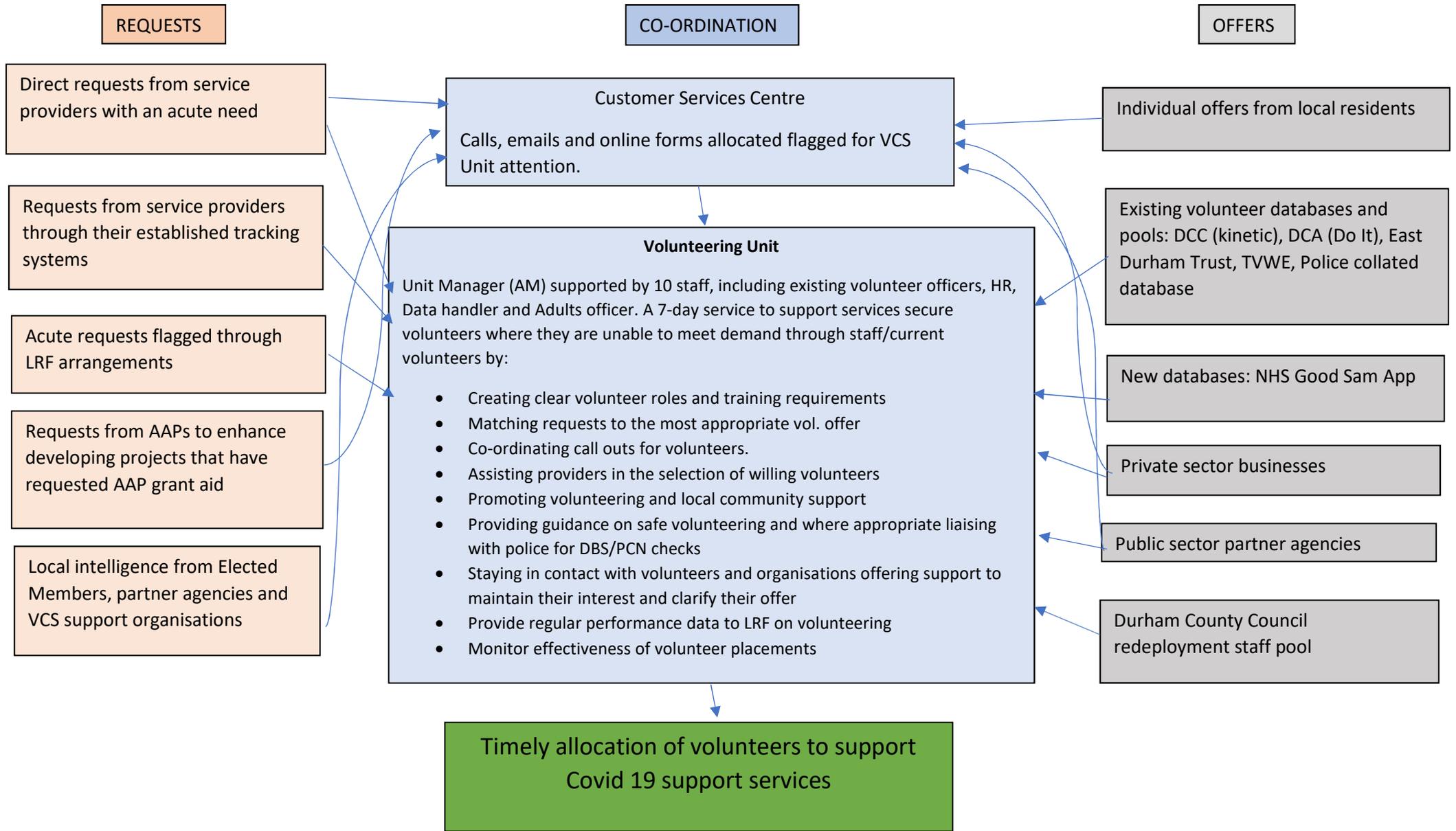
Risk of placing volunteers with 'host' organisations will be mitigated by making it clear that external organisation receiving volunteers will be responsible for associated management of the volunteers. A Safe Volunteering Guide has also been developed to provide basic information to staff.

Procurement

None

Volunteering Unit Workflow

Appendix 2



Guidance for Volunteers



How to help safely during the Coronavirus outbreak

The organisation you are volunteering for may provide specific guidance to you depending on the nature of the volunteering role and they may have relevant policies and procedures in place such as health & safety regulations. However, general guidance you should also follow at all times includes;

- Adhere to the government guidance on social distancing. Stay 2m away from anyone you do not live with at all times.
- Avoid sharing car journeys with any non-household member whilst volunteering.
- You should not go inside the homes of anyone you do not live with, especially vulnerable people or people who believe they may be infected and are isolating themselves. Breaking these rules could put you at risk of infection, or risk spreading it to others.
- Remember to keep a safe distance when leaving any items on the person's doorstep or drop off area, and make sure that they have collected the goods before leaving. Maintain social distancing. In most instances shopping should be for essential items only (no alcohol or tobacco).
- Avoid cash handling where at all possible.
- Wash your hands regularly with soapy water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser if available. Catch it, Bin it, Kill it.
- If you feel unwell whilst volunteering or start to display symptoms of the coronavirus then stop volunteering immediately, follow government advice on self-isolation and inform your host organisation. If you feel well enough you could always change your volunteer role and provide support from your home such as supporting a telephone befriending service for example.
- Carry appropriate identification with you at all times. Your host organisation may provide you with a letter outlining your role so you can demonstrate what you are doing and why you may be traveling to different locations

- When offering help to others, do not place yourself in unsafe situations (e.g. lone working late at night, unless absolutely necessary). Your safety must be your first priority.
- Follow any lone working guidance offered by your host organisation.
- Tell your family or an emergency contact what you are doing and where you are. Carry a mobile phone at all times so you can be contacted.
- Wear appropriate clothing for the volunteering role. This may include additional Protective Personal Equipment given to you by your host organisation who you are volunteering for. Approach them for guidance on this.
- If your volunteer role includes driving it is advisable to check your personal car insurance policy to see if you are covered to fulfil this role
- Keep it manageable and know your own limits – your wellbeing is important.
- Be clear on any expenses you may incur and ask what your host organisation will / will not cover whilst you are volunteering.
- Do not offer advice outside of your expertise.
- Should you encounter any welfare issues whilst volunteering which cause you concern e.g. a vulnerable person / child then you can report any concern direct to Durham County Council on 03000 260000