

Delegated Decision

26 March 2024

Introduction of Employer Supported Volunteering Policy



Report of Corporate Management Team

Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 Following the Corporate Management Team approval of an employer supported volunteering scheme, the Council's new policy in relation to Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) will come into force from 1 April 2024, to facilitate the implementation of the CMT decision.

Executive summary

- 2 On 21 June 2023, Corporate Management Team (CMT) considered a joint report of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (NCC) and Adult and Health Services (AHS) with regard to the introduction of an employer supported volunteering scheme.
- 3 County Durham Together presented a report regarding what constitutes a quality Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) experience for individual volunteers, employers and the receiving community/voluntary groups or charities and how the approach could support the sustainability of the voluntary sector going forward.
- 4 CMT agreed to the following proposals:
 - (a) Approve an ESV Policy for up to 24 volunteering hours per year (pro rata for part time employees), to be launched 1 April 2024.
 - (b) Approve a Corporate Director as the senior management sponsor of the scheme.
 - (c) Confirm that a relevant cabinet portfolio holder would undertake the role of 'political champion' for ESV.

- (d) Support the creation of new ESV Co-ordinator post with the required budget growth, to support the ESV Scheme initially funded by Public Health reserves for a period of 3 years.
- 5 Systems/processes have been developed to facilitate the implementation of the ESV scheme, alongside the development of an Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme Policy to support the implementation.
- 6 A further report was presented to CMT on 20 March 2024 to provide an update to CMT regarding the scheme, the appointment of the ESV Coordinator and to confirm the details of the draft policy.
- 7 CMT feedback with regard to potential conflicts of interest and reiterating the importance of the code of Values and Behaviours, has been incorporated into the policy.
- 8 It is recommended that:
- The Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme is noted;
 - The Council's Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme Policy (Appendix 2) is agreed.

Background

- 9 Supported by the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), a feasibility study with options appraisal for the development of a sustainable ESV scheme in County Durham was undertaken. The study considered options for the council as well as for a partnership approach.
- 10 ESV is where the employees of an organisation take paid time off to volunteer during work hours. Employees can choose to use their volunteering time to support a charity or community group of their own choice, or to take up an opportunity provided by their organisation.
- 11 When developing and implementing an ESV, the feasibility study recommended that the council should consider the following key areas:
 - (a) senior sponsorship;
 - (b) alignment of an ESV to council priorities;
 - (c) alignment to the County Durham Vision and Workforce Strategy;
 - (d) voluntary opportunities;
 - (e) the monitoring and recording of an ESV;
 - (f) internal policy;
 - (g) resources, remit and operating model;
 - (h) recruitment and deployment of volunteers;
 - (i) volunteering opportunities criteria and;
 - (j) communication, celebration and promotion of the ESV.
- 12 The role of volunteering throughout the coronavirus pandemic was key to the County's response in supporting and working with our communities. Over 500 council staff voluntarily changed roles to support COVID-19 specific initiatives and hundreds of volunteers were active in their local communities through formal and informal groups supporting projects and activities. To harness and build on this excellent work, the council utilised COMF funding to commission a feasibility study with options appraisal for the development of a sustainable ESV scheme in County Durham.
- 13 ESV schemes provide employees with time off to volunteer during working hours, with the best schemes linking activities to both organisational objectives and employee development needs.
- 14 An ESV scheme for the council would help meet the County Durham Vision and support the Approach to Wellbeing by working within and alongside local communities to help improve the sustainability of Voluntary and Community

Sector (VCS), VCS groups and organisations. In turn, a sustainable and vibrant VCS will help improve the health and wellbeing of County Durham residents.

- 15 The feasibility study was undertaken as follows:
 - (a) Diagnostic stage to confirm the scope and parameters of the project and agree the key stakeholders to be interviewed from both DCC and partner organisations and complete a review of key documents supplied by DCC as part of background review (County Durham Together, DCC Vision and Values/Workforce Strategy/ESV activity to date).
 - (b) Information gathering with stakeholders to understand issues and concerns and test ideas/options to inform the final proposals.
 - (c) Formulation of options and recommendations following review of best practice examples and feedback from stakeholders.
 - (d) Options appraisal completed and production of final report to inform future policy development.
- 16 The feasibility study took into account the County Durham Vision 2019-2035 and DCC Workforce Strategy 2021-2023 and the recommendations from the Voluntary Organisations' Network North East (VONNE) report of April 2021 on Covid-19: The VCSE Key Asks to Aid Recovery in the North East. The study also considered the elements that constitute a quality ESV experience for individual volunteers, employers and the receiving community/voluntary groups or charities and how the approach could support the sustainability of the voluntary sector going forward.
- 17 The report was presented at the County Durham Together Partnership Meeting on 21 January 2022 and received positive feedback.
- 18 The report was also presented to Resources Management Team (RMT) and Neighbourhoods and Climate Change Services Management Team (NCCMT) on 2 March 2022, where further information was requested to better understand the recommendations of the ESV feasibility study in the context of DCC.
- 19 A working group was established with representatives from Partnerships and Community Engagement, Culture, Sport and Tourism, Human Resources and Employee Services and Durham Community Action to consider the development of an ESV Scheme for the council.
- 20 Consultation has also taken place with representatives from HR and Employee Services, Legal, Procurement, Health and Safety, Risk, Insurance and Governance, the Better Health at Work group and the CDT (County Durham Together) Strategic Manager.
- 21 Employees had also been asked to provide feedback on volunteering opportunities through the Working Well Survey, which was issued in October

2022. This survey helped to inform the council's understanding of employees' attitudes towards volunteering.

- 22 The County Durham Together Partnership subsequently presented the feasibility study findings to CMT on 21 June 2023, where CMT agreed to the following proposals:
- (a) Approve an ESV Policy for up to 24 volunteering hours per year (pro rata for part time employees), to be launched 1 April 2024.
 - (b) Approve a Corporate Director as the senior management sponsor of the scheme.
 - (c) Confirm that a relevant cabinet portfolio holder would undertake the role of 'political champion' for ESV.
 - (d) Support the creation of new ESV Co-ordinator post with the required budget growth, to support the ESV Scheme initially funded by Public Health reserves for a period of 3 years.

Employer Supported Volunteering Leave Policy

- 23 The Employer Supported Volunteering Leave Policy produced by Durham County Council (Appendix 2) outlines the following:
- (a) The scope of the scheme
 - (b) Definition of voluntary activity
 - (c) Volunteering opportunities
 - (d) Time available
 - (e) Applying for ESV leave
 - (f) MyView processes
 - (g) Employee responsibilities
 - (h) Legal considerations
 - (i) Monitoring and evaluation
- 24 Employees will request their ESV leave via MyView or via a paper application for those employees who are not digitally enabled. Managers will record ESV leave on behalf of these employees via MyView.
- 25 Payroll and Employee Services have been consulted and agree with this approach, and will be providing all in scope employees with an ESV leave entitlement of 24 hours (pro rata for part time) from 1 April 2024.

Next Steps

- 26 The ESV Coordinator will be supporting the implementation of the scheme through a series of face to face information sessions at sites throughout the county and will meet with managers over the first month of the scheme.
- 27 An overall communications plan / approach has been implemented as follows:

Action	Date
Consultation with Trade Unions	w/c 4 September 2023
Member briefing	w/c 4 September 2023
CEO intranet blog to mark Employee Appreciation Day	1 March 2024
EMT Briefing	April 2024
Publication of the policy on the Intranet	28 March 2024
Final policy to trade unions for information.	2 April 2024
Article in Buzz to ensure accessibility to the wider workforce and non-digital employees	2 April 2024

Conclusion

- 28 The Employer Supported Volunteering Policy at Durham County Council enhances our commitment to employee wellbeing and ensures our compliance with the CMT decision to implement an ESV Scheme.

Background papers

None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The legal implications have been considered as part of the scheme's development e.g. public liability advice has been provided by the Risk, Insurance and Governance Manager

Finance

A post of ESV Co-ordinator is proposed to be established on Grade 10, £41,226 - £45,822 (SCP 27 to 31 including on-costs) to be funded through Public Health Reserves.

Consultation

Consultation will take place in-line with council policies including trade union consultation. The 'Employee Working Well 2022' survey will be issued to all employees asking for opinions with regard to volunteering.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The scheme will be open to all employees. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) – policy screening exercise has been undertaken and a full EIA is not required.

Climate Change

Volunteering opportunities available have the potential to have a positive impact to the environment and potentially climate change.

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

Volunteering opportunities available have the potential to have a positive impact in relation to crime and disorder.

Staffing

An ESV co-ordinator based in the Public Health team, within Adults and Health Services will support the implementation and development of the scheme.

Accommodation

None

Risk

None identified

Procurement

Corporate Procurement Procedures will be followed for any identified procurement implications.

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) Policy



1 Introduction

In support of the County Durham Vision and the Council's Social Value commitment and the Council's status as a Better Health at Work Award winner, the Council encourages organisations to promote volunteering activities which benefit both our communities and employees themselves, forging stronger workplace relationships, whilst meeting environmental, social and governance responsibility goals. The Council supports employees to pursue volunteering opportunities.

In addition to the valuable contribution volunteering provides our voluntary sector and communities, it also gives employees a chance to learn new skills, support their wellbeing, gain valuable new experiences and gain a better understanding of the communities we serve. This policy provides information for employees who wish to take paid volunteer leave. Managers are also encouraged to support employees who volunteer outside of work (and outside of the scope of this policy), acknowledging the positive contribution this can have on our communities and their individual development. Managers are encouraged to discuss volunteering opportunities with employees as part of PDR meetings and 121s.

2 Scope of the ESV policy

This scheme applies to employees of the council, excluding casual employees, those on agency assignments and those employed in schools with delegated budgets, where the governing bodies of individual schools have their own procedures. It enables employees to take paid time off to undertake volunteering during their contracted normal working hours, but it cannot be used to 'claim back' any time spent volunteering outside of these hours.

2.1 Definition of voluntary activity

Voluntary activity can be defined as: 'any activity that involves spending time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives' (National Council for Voluntary Organisations)

Whilst employees will be in receipt of their contractual pay when volunteering (in line with this policy), they must not receive payment (apart from claiming expenses) from the organisation they choose to volunteer with.

This policy does not replace the statutory provision of time off in relation to public duties, namely:

- Justices of the Peace (Magistrate);
- Members of a Local Authority;
- Members of a Statutory Tribunal;
- Members of a Regional or Area Health Authority;

- Members of Police Authorities.

This policy does not replace the policies already in place with regard to volunteering for school governor responsibilities, official trade union duties and activities, and volunteering with the Cadet Force Adult Volunteers or the Reserve Forces.

For further information regarding Cadet Force Adult Volunteers or the Reserve Forces, please see the:

[Cadet Force Adult Volunteer Policy](#)

[Reserve Forces Policy](#)

3 Volunteering opportunities

Employees may already be active volunteers or can source their own volunteering opportunities. Examples include:

- Volunteering through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme or St John Ambulance
- Supporting adults at risk and those with disabilities
- Reading and listening activities at schools
- Organising sports activities, clubs or events
- Acting as a trustee for a charity
- Undertaking community based projects

The above opportunities do not constitute an exhaustive list and DCC will support employees to engage in additional volunteering opportunities which bring benefit to the local community and the employee themselves in line with the Council's policies and values.

Volunteering opportunities which do not align with Durham County Council values or interests, or which reflect negatively on the reputation of DCC and its partners will not be considered.

Where a volunteering opportunity creates a potential conflict of interest with the employee's role or the Council's interests, **the request will not be supported. Employees are reminded of the council's [Employee Code of Our Values, Behaviours and Conduct](#).**

When considering a requests to undertake volunteering, managers must consider whether or not such outside working would be in conflict with council interests or weaken public confidence in the council, or adversely impact upon the employee's ability to carry out their role with the council.

All volunteering activities must fall within one of the key priority areas, in line with the County Durham Vision, County Durham Partnership themes and the Durham County Council Workforce Strategy. These priority areas are:

- Environment – where the volunteering activity supports the creation of a physical environment which contributes to good health. linking to the County Durham Partnership, Environment and Climate Change;
- Education and Employment – where the volunteering activity supports projects designed to inspire educational achievements, employment and training for young people;
- Business and Economy – where the volunteering supports activities that contribute to the growth and expansion of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) and businesses to create a strong, competitive economy and employment opportunities;

- Health, Safety and Wellbeing – where the volunteering activities support projects aimed at benefiting the health and wellbeing of residents within the communities;
- Community Resilience – where the volunteering activities supports a community's ability to prepare for anticipated hazards, adapt to changing conditions and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions;
- Staff Development – where the volunteering can help employees gain valuable experience and build skills.

In addition, the Council works with partnership organisations who host and promote volunteering opportunities in County Durham and regional events. Employees are encouraged to register with their chosen scheme and access the volunteering opportunities available via the relevant website.

3.1 Durham Community Action

Durham Community Action (DCA) is a well-established charity that provides support to communities across County Durham. DCA has an established accredited volunteer centre – County Durham Volunteer Centre and promotes volunteering opportunities on a countywide basis for a range of charities, voluntary groups, and public sector services through an on online platform which can be accessed through the following link:

[County Durham Volunteering](#)

Additional support can be provided by staff at Durham Community Action including practical help:

- Arranging a confidential one to one interview with a trained volunteer adviser to find out what opportunities may be available;
- Providing you with information about volunteering and current opportunities;
- Helping you to fill out any paperwork that may be required.

For further information please contact: volunteering@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk or telephone: 01388 742040.

3.2 Durham County Council Culture, Sport and Tourism

Durham County Council Culture Sport and Tourism is committed to volunteering and acknowledges the vital contribution which volunteers make to the organisation and the wider community, as well as the benefits to the volunteers themselves.

The aim of the Culture, Sport and Tourism volunteering scheme is to strengthen communities through volunteering opportunities whilst embracing diversity and promoting equality and inclusiveness, allowing communities to improve social, physical and mental wellbeing and providing opportunities for communities to gain experience, enhance employability skills and further develop knowledge.

Many opportunities are available including walk, cycle and run leaders, leisure assistants, storytelling, festival makers and many more.

Further information and details of the registration process can be found at [Culture and Sport Volunteering](#)

3.3 Family Support Schemes - Volunteer drivers

Durham County Council work with Supportive to find volunteer drivers who use their own car to transport children and young people in care, to their appointments and visits to see their families. They need volunteers who can be flexible with their time and can be available at short notice. This volunteering opportunity is working directly with Supportive.

To find out more about becoming a volunteer driver visit the [Supportive website](#).

Further advice on determining the suitability of volunteering opportunities can be provided by the Council's ESV Co-ordinator.

4 Time Available

The Council endeavours to support employees to undertake a maximum of twenty-four hours (pro rata for part time) paid leave per leave year (1 April – 31 March) to undertake volunteering work.

Example 1 : Karen works 18.5 hours per week (0.5 FTE) and will be entitled to 12 hours paid leave per year to undertake volunteering work.

Example 2 : Natalie is employed 37 hours per week, but her contract is expected to end on 30 September. As her projected contract end date is 6 months into the leave year, her ESV leave entitlement will be 12 hours for the period 1 April to 30 September.

Employees can use their volunteer leave flexibly, for example one day at a time (7.5 hours), half a day (3.75 hours) or a couple of hours. If the employee volunteers for less than one day, the employee should return to work when they have completed their voluntary activity or use alternative leave (annual leave/flexi) if not returning to work.

Employees will not be credited for time spent volunteering outside their contractual normal working time. Employees will not be credited for time spent travelling to the voluntary opportunity.

Any volunteering leave not taken cannot be carried over, exchanged or used against anything other than volunteer work.

4.1 Applying for Leave

All requests for paid leave to undertake volunteering duties must be approved by your line manager.

Employees are required to submit a request for volunteering leave to their manager for approval.

This can be done either through the MyView system or via a paper request form, depending on the system used by the service.

When submitting a request, employees must provide details of the volunteering opportunity such as the name of the organisation and volunteering activity to be undertaken. Employees must also provide details of the dates on which they wish to take volunteering leave and provide reasonable notice. What constitutes reasonable notice can be agreed locally by managers in line with service

requirements. The manager can refuse to allow requests for volunteering leave where it will cause operational difficulties.

Requests will be considered in line with operational requirements and cannot be guaranteed therefore it is essential that as much notice as possible is provided to allow managers to plan for the absence.

Where a volunteering opportunity creates a potential conflict of interest with the employees role or the Council's interests, **the request will not be supported. Employees are reminded of the council's [Employee Code of Our Values, Behaviours and Conduct](#).**

When considering a requests to undertake volunteering, managers must consider whether or not such outside working would be in conflict with council interests or weaken public confidence in the council, or adversely impact upon the employee's ability to carry out their role with the council.

It is recognised that some volunteering opportunities may present themselves at short notice, and managers are therefore encouraged to be flexible in their approach to consideration of volunteering leave requests which are of a more urgent nature.

Where managers are unable to support a request for ESV leave, they are encouraged to discuss this with the employee to ensure the reasons for refusal are understood.

4.2 MyView

Employees who are in scope of the annual leave module on MyView will submit their request for volunteering leave through the online system. Instructions on how to do this can be found at <https://www.durham.gov.uk/myview>

The MyView system has been configured to allow employees to submit their requests for volunteering leave via the Leave Module. Employees can request up to the maximum of twenty-four hours (pro rata for part time) paid leave per year. Employees must ensure that they do not submit requests for more than twenty-four hours per year (pro rata for part time). Any requests over twenty-four hours per year (pro rata for part time) will be rejected by managers.

It is important that all requests for volunteering leave are kept up to date throughout the year and submitted in advance of the voluntary activity taking place.

4.3 Requests outside of MyView

Employees who are not in scope of the annual leave module on MyView will be required to submit their request for volunteering leave to their manager via a paper request form.

Employees must ensure that their request does not exceed their volunteering leave entitlement of up to a maximum of twenty-four hours (pro rata for part time) paid leave per year.

It is important that all requests for volunteering leave are kept up to date throughout the year and submitted in advance of the voluntary activity taking place.

Managers should then enter the volunteering leave onto MyView via the My People Absence tab option on the manager MyView dashboard, selecting the Employee Absence Calendar option. Select the leave type 'Volunteering Leave'. MyView Guidance for managers to record volunteering

leave is available <https://www.durham.gov.uk/myview>. Managers will receive an email from MyView advising that the leave has been authorised, when submitting on behalf of employees.

5 Responsibilities

Employees are trusted to use this time for its purpose and any suspected instances of misuse will be investigated in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures. As representatives of the Council their actions will directly reflect on the organisation. As a result, all employees must act in line with the [Employee Code of Our Values, Behaviours and Conduct](#) whilst using volunteering leave. Any concerns with an employee's conduct whilst volunteering will be investigated in line with the relevant Council disciplinary procedures.

It is the manager's responsibility to be satisfied that the employee has considered and accepted any risks associated with the proposed volunteering activity and employees will be asked to confirm this when they submit their request to volunteer.

Risk assessments are needed to ensure organisations running the volunteering activities are fulfilling their duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their volunteers. The ESV Co-ordinator and Durham Community Action will work with organisations to ensure that the relevant risk assessments are in place.

Unless an employee is volunteering to assist an activity directly managed by the Council, the Council will not be liable for damages or injuries that occur whilst volunteering and employees should check arrangements with the organisation that they are supporting.

It is also the employee's responsibility to satisfy themselves that the volunteering organisation's health and safety policies are adequate and request sight of risk assessments if they have any concerns. The host organisation will be responsible for providing any induction, health and safety or other training required in order that the volunteer can perform activities correctly and safely.

The host organisation is responsible for ensuring any required safeguarding checks are processed and in place prior to the start of the volunteering activity. This may include a DBS certificate if working directly with vulnerable people.

Employees of the Council working with children or vulnerable adults and / or in Regulated Activity in an external organisation must ensure that the volunteering provider has relevant safeguarding policies in place before commencing their volunteering activity and be aware that the external organisation is responsible for ensuring that Volunteers complete any relevant Disclosure Barring Checks.

Should an employee of the Council be removed from Regulated Activity by the host organisation, it is the responsibility of the host organisation to ensure that a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service is completed.

6 Legal Considerations

When completing volunteering duties, employees of the Council do not have the same rights as an employee or worker; as a result, volunteers are not covered by employment legislation but, as

members of the public, they are covered by relevant legislation such as health and safety and data protection laws.

Volunteers may have a volunteer agreement provided to them from the host organisation, which explains:

- the level of supervision and support offered;
- what induction and training will be received.
- the organisation's insurance;
- health and safety issues; and
- any expenses the organisation will cover.

The volunteer agreement is not compulsory, although it may set out what is expected it does not form a contract between the volunteer and the organisation.

Staff should be aware of Data Protection issues and maintain confidentiality procedures. Information of a confidential nature should only be discussed with the designated person of the organisation or when a safeguarding concern is raised.

Concerns that volunteers may have in relation to the governance of the organisation, health and safety, data protection or harassment can be referred to external agencies. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has further information on volunteers' legal status. Further information can be found via the following [link](#).

Support, guidance on volunteering opportunities and further information on the ESV scheme can be obtained by contacting the ESV Co-ordinator, details of which are provided at the end of this document.

7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation of the employee volunteering programme is vital so that we can improve and build on it.

We will continually monitor and evaluate its impact to ensure long term success.

The recording and reporting of outcomes of the Employer Supported Volunteering scheme will enable DCC to understand uptake in volunteering and measure the impact the ESV scheme has made both within the organisation and the community.

Prior to commencement and on completion of the volunteer placement, employees will have the opportunity to provide feedback on their volunteering experience, enabling DCC to refine and improve opportunities and support within the Employer Supported Volunteering scheme.

Feedback may be collected in the form of a short volunteering specific survey. Volunteers may also be contacted directly by the ESV Co-ordinator to discuss any perceived benefits, or concerns that they may have, regarding the employer supported volunteering experience. The Council may from time to time, with the employee's permission, use the employee's volunteering experience to highlight the value of volunteering to other employees within the organisation and to partner organisations.

For advice regarding the application of this policy please contact:

HR Advice and Support hradviceandsupport@durham.gov.uk

Service Payroll and Employee Services can be contacted by emailing:

Neighbourhoods and Climate Change PESNCC@durham.gov.uk

Regeneration, Economy and Growth PESREG@durham.gov.uk

Children and Young People's Services PESCYPS@durham.gov.uk

Adult Health Services PESAHS@durham.gov.uk

Resources PESResources@durham.gov.uk

Further support can be accessed by contacting:

Occupational Health occhealthadmin@durham.gov.uk

Health and Safety hsteam@durham.gov.uk

Employee Assistance Programme www.healthassuredeap.com

Username: durham

Password: council

0800 716 017

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If you have any concerns about how your data is handled, please contact either the Data Protection Officer at dpo@durham.gov.uk or the [Information Commissioner's Office](#).

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