

Managers Guidance on Employee Volunteering Scheme

August 2009



See also Staff Guidance to employee Volunteering Scheme

What do line managers need to know about the Employee Volunteering Scheme?

At Wiltshire Council an employee volunteering scheme has been set up to support and encourage staff who would like to participate in volunteering activities.

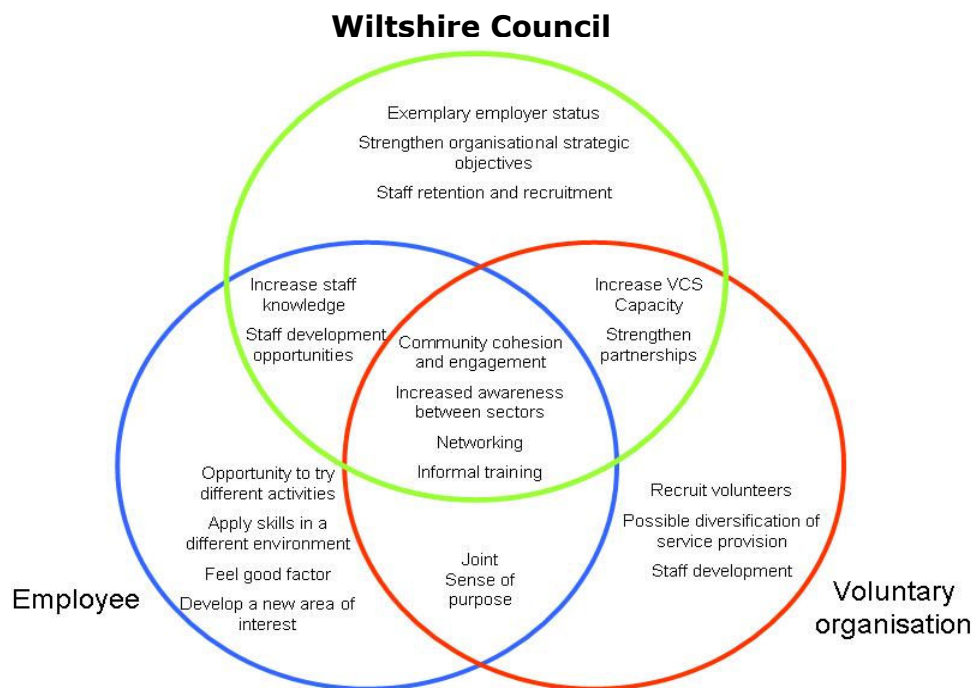
The scheme allows each eligible member of staff to have 22.5 hours paid leave per year to take part in volunteering activities which are eligible within the scheme.

Staff guidance clearly states that participation in volunteering activity is encouraged by the Council but is always at the discretion of the line manager who has the overall view on service capacity. It is expected that unless planned release for volunteering causes operational problems, managers should support their staff to volunteer.

Why volunteer?

There are many reasons why people want to participate in volunteering activities. Amongst other things these include wanting to give a helping hand in the local community, improving and developing new skills and simply getting to know more people.

Indeed, there are a lot of benefits which are associated with volunteering and employee volunteer schemes. These benefits apply to the volunteer, the organisation that they are volunteering with and the volunteer's employer who is allowing them to participate in the scheme.



Who can take part in the scheme?

The scheme is open to the all Wiltshire Council employees, with the exception of school-based and commercial contract staff who unfortunately are not able to take part in the scheme at present due to issues surrounding cover provision and contract liabilities.

How Do I Decide About Releasing Staff for Volunteering?

If any of your staff have decided that they would like to participate in the scheme, they are required to consult with you before proceeding further. You will make the decision about whether they will be able to take part in the scheme, although you should only refuse permission if it would cause disruption for service delivery or is not in the best interest of the Council. Once they have received your initial approval, they will need to complete the formal application form and they (and you) will sign it.

If staff seek your approval to convert their existing voluntary activity into this scheme, they will still need your approval to do so, since service capacity will be your over-riding responsibility.

You may wish to consider the only valid reasons for refusing a request:

- Additional cost to the department
- Inability to manage customer demand on the department
- Negative impact on service quality/performance
- Conflicting demands due to structural change

When making the decision on whether you can release staff, you might find it helpful to consider – how would you manage operations during other absences, for example sickness or annual leave? Volunteering activity should never be short notice, but planned with you to align with team commitments.

You are best placed to make the decision for a number of reasons. You will know what other commitments your work area has, including other absences from the workplace. You will also know whether this staff member needs to focus on other priorities or has competing commitments such as absence for public service duties or study leave.

If you need advice, this will be available through the scheme co-ordinator.

Whilst it would be unusual for any staff member to be told they cannot participate in the scheme at any time, the final decision on whether a staff member can be released at that time for volunteering activity will rest with the line manager.

The final decision on whether the proposed voluntary activity is eligible within the scheme will rest with the scheme co-ordinator.

How much leave can be given to take part?

Each eligible employee will be allowed a maximum of 22 hours per year as paid annual leave, providing it is for volunteering activities which are permitted within this scheme. This will be on a pro-rata basis. Therefore if they work 2.5 days a week they will be permitted 11 hours paid leave per year for the scheme.

When can volunteering leave be taken?

Leave can be taken in small blocks e.g. blocks of one hour per week over 22 weeks, or in larger blocks. For community challenge events, it might be a full day.

Unused days cannot be carried over to the following calendar year.

In which volunteering activities can staff participate?

There are a range of volunteering activities available to staff including Council led community challenge events. Individual opportunities may be found by the staff member, or they can find out what is on offer from the local Wiltshire Volunteering Bureau. As the scheme is implemented and developed there will be information and taster sessions available to staff on Council sites across the county. I

If team managers are keen to consider individual or team volunteering opportunities in their local area, Community Area Board Managers are happy to link with teams and managers to discuss this.

Eligible activity includes registered charities and bona fide community groups. If you are in doubt, check with the scheme co-ordinator. It does not include personal hobbies, or any activity associated with membership of a professional body, which is more properly professional development rather than voluntary activity.

Do staff have to match the amount of time given through the Wiltshire Council scheme with their own spare time?

Whilst it would be great if staff were able to give some of their own spare time outside of work hours to participate in volunteering activities, they do not have to do so in order to take part in this scheme.

If staff volunteer in (eligible) activity during unsocial hours, they can take time off in lieu, at single time rates, in agreement with their line manager.

Will Wiltshire Council reimburse costs if staff take part in the scheme?

Generally no. Wiltshire Council will not reimburse any costs, including travel, if staff take part in the scheme. It may be that certain voluntary organisations are able to reimburse some personal costs, but this will need to be discussed directly between the volunteer and the organisation in which they will be volunteering.

If staff are participating in a Council-led community challenge event, they will be able to claim necessary travel costs at the relevant Wiltshire Council mileage rate.

What if there are any potential conflicts of interest?

If a potential volunteer or their manager identifies any potential or existing conflict of interest, (e.g. official contact with a voluntary

organisation involved in the scheme or a personal relationship involvement) the member of staff should make these known and not choose them as the organisation for which they volunteer. If, as line manager, you have a concern about this, you can seek guidance from HR.

How will Wiltshire Council know when staff are volunteering?

Staff will have informed you with reasonable notice of when they want to participate. They will be asked to keep a log of when they take part in volunteering activity, which they will have to send to Human Resources, via the relevant SAP link.

Whilst the scheme is based on trust, Wiltshire Council reserves the right to contact any organisation with which staff are volunteering.

Will staff need a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check?

If staff are working with certain groups of people, such as children or vulnerable adults, then they will need a CRB check. The voluntary organisation that they will be volunteering with will undertake this. Most organisations do not charge volunteers, but staff are informed that may want to double-check first. If staff need a CRB check for Council-led community challenge events, the Council's HR department will undertake the check, but the process can take several weeks, so staff will need to plan for this.

Any health and safety considerations?

There are a wide range of activities that staff can participate in when volunteering. They may need to think about whether there are any activities which they should avoid. As line manager you will want to reinforce this. For example, if they have a bad back, then maybe doing gardening for a community centre is not a good idea.

All registered voluntary organisations have appropriate arrangements for health and safety, risk and insurance and these should be in place before staff begin volunteering. Wiltshire Council is NOT responsible for providing cover for insurance, health and safety or risk assessments whilst staff are volunteering in the scheme, unless the Council itself is providing the volunteering opportunity.

Once staff have found an activity that they would like to take part in, they will need to contact the voluntary organisation to ensure that they have the appropriate policies in place. The staff member, or the voluntary organisation will need to provide evidence of these before being permitted to undertake activity.

The next steps?

Managers briefings will be available as the scheme is implemented and at regular intervals thereon.

If your staff are interested in taking part in the employee volunteering scheme and you would like additional information or advice please contact the scheme co-ordinator.

email:

telephone:

For specific HR advice please contact your HR advisor.

Procedure

-

**Procedure for Wiltshire Council
Volunteering Scheme**

DRAFT