

22ND SEPTEMBER 2009

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING SCHEME

Executive Summary

A scheme is proposed for each Wiltshire Council employee to be offered 3 days of paid time out of the workplace for volunteering activities. A series of 'Community Challenge Events' are also proposed which would be included within the 3 days allowance. The benefits to the Council, to the Community and to the Employee are outlined and the scheme guidance for staff and managers is attached in appendices.

Proposal

That Cabinet:

1. Adopts the employee volunteering scheme as proposed in this paper and endorses its implementation
2. Agrees that the Chair of the Schools Forum will be consulted on the involvement of schools in the scheme
3. Encourages the organisations who are members of Wiltshire's Public Service Board to consider adopting the scheme for their employees

Reasons for Proposal

Wiltshire Council does not currently have an employee volunteering scheme. Such a scheme would support the Council in trying to achieve its strategic targets and agreements. It would contribute to a thriving Voluntary and Community Sector (often called the VCS or third sector), assist in building resilient communities and boost levels of volunteering across Wiltshire.

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EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING SCHEME

Purpose of the report

1. To recommend the establishment of a scheme for employees of Wiltshire Council to take part in formal volunteering activity.

Background

2. Having an employee volunteering scheme supports employees to participate in volunteering activities, for example, by:
 - a) Providing information and events about volunteering opportunities
 - b) Having an agreed annual level of paid time to volunteer in the community
 - c) Holding half or whole-day community challenge events to tackle local projects

Why have an employee volunteering scheme?

3. An employee volunteering scheme will help to build good connections between the Council and the local community. "From an employer's point of view, volunteering is an excellent way of broadening workforce skills and bringing organisations closer to the communities in which they operate..." (Head of Civil Service). The scheme will also help develop the skills of employees, provide networking opportunities, boost confidence, develop a wider perspective and enhance the reputation of the Council. Wiltshire Council encompasses expertise in a wide range of specialisms, including, Finance, HR and IT. These are some of the very skills lacking in many voluntary and community organisations which could be contributed through this scheme.

What do we do currently?

4. Wiltshire Council currently has no formal employee volunteering scheme. However, there are some good examples of Wiltshire Council's successes in generally encouraging volunteering in Wiltshire. For example two existing schemes are:
 - a) A successful bid for a grant from V which is the name of the youth volunteering organisation to recruit young people who want to contribute to their community by volunteering to work with Wiltshire Services for Young People. This is a programme for 15-25 year-olds offering opportunities for centre-based youth work, outdoor education, marketing and media, youth participation, alternative sports and targeted youth

support. As part of the V Talent Year work, over the next 2 years, 30 volunteers will be recruited for at least 30 hours over 44 weeks and will include accredited national vocational qualifications (NVQ) so that these young people could progress to employment in this field.

- b) The work of Community Connecting and the Wiltshire Employment Support Team who are working together to support people with learning disabilities who live in Wiltshire to find and sustain independence within their local communities. This includes finding opportunities for people to gain skills and experience through local voluntary work that can lead to paid employment. The scheme is aimed at people with a learning disability aged between 18-65 years old who live in Wiltshire. Job coaches offer help in looking for work which might suit people, preparing applications and supporting people at interviews, developing skills and advising on how working might affect any benefits.
- c) In addition, the Council spends a considerable sum of money with the voluntary and community sector - over £20 million per annum - both through grant aid 'core funding', (assisting organisations to exist and be supported), and through tendered and managed contracts for specific provision, such as day care, lunch clubs, children and young people's services, advice and information provision and carer support.
- d) The former District Councils supported volunteering in a variety of ways, from an established scheme in one district to the support of involvement in the Territorial Army in another. The proposed scheme would therefore allow both new and experienced staff volunteers to contribute to Wiltshire's communities. Where specific terms and conditions apply to ex District Council staff, those pre-existing relevant policies would apply until full harmonisation is implemented. This process begins in October 2009 and is likely to be completed by the end of 2011. Primarily this relates to Salisbury District Council's Special Leave policy, where official time off arrangements covered a wide range of time off for public duties as well as domestic emergencies, religious leave and study leave in addition to legal absence entitlements.

What do others do?

- 5. Examples in the public and private sectors of different levels of paid time in the community and for employee volunteering are given below. Part-time employees are also offered this opportunity on a pro rata basis.

Abbey	35 hours per year
Barclays Bank	2 days per year
Devon County Council	2.5 hours per fortnight
Doncaster Borough Council	1 day per year
Durham County Council	20 hours per year
Greenwich Council	2 days per year
Herefordshire Council	2 days per year
iMPower	8 hours per year
Kent County Council	2 days per year
Luton and Dunstable Hospital	20 hours per year
North Cornwall District Council	3 days per year
Sandwell Borough Council	2.5 days per year
Surrey County Council	2 days per year
Swindon Borough Council	15 hours per year
Welsh Assembly Government	5 days per year
West Sussex County Council	3 days in 1 st year then 2 days

Supporting the achievement of Wiltshire's strategies and targets

6. The Council has in place strategies and agreements which an employee volunteering scheme could help to further. These include:
 - The Local Agreement aim to build resilient communities where people are active and confident in voicing and addressing their own needs and ambitions
 - The Local Area Agreement target to build a countywide vibrant, strong and influential third sector which includes increasing investment and opportunities for volunteering
 - The Sustainable Community Strategy which refers to the important role of social capital and states that the vision for Wiltshire is to work together to create stronger and more sustainable communities in which people readily volunteer and feel encouraged to do so
 - National indicators such as NI6 which requires local authorities to increase levels of participation in regular volunteering and NI7 which requires the Council to create an environment for a thriving third sector. (NB Whilst recognising that there are national indicators which are trying to drive up performance across the county, it is clear that volunteering is very important to Wiltshire Council; it is the aim to strengthen volunteering which is primarily driving this initiative rather than the need to achieve national indicator targets).
 - The Wiltshire Compact which encourages the development of employer-supported volunteering schemes, including practices that offer time off to take part in volunteering opportunities

- The Corporate Strategy where achieving the goals of the Council's services may depend on having a good base of volunteers within the voluntary and community sector, to work on tackling strategic priorities eg mentoring and coaching young people and raising the aspirations of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs); organising more sporting, cultural and leisure opportunities

Additional benefits of an employee volunteering scheme

7. An employee volunteering scheme offers benefits to the Council, employees and the community.

Benefits to the **Council** include:

- enhanced profile and reputation
- skill development of staff, including leadership and organisational skills
- team-building across Council departments (and potentially with partners in the longer-term) through community challenge activities
- improved well-being and satisfaction levels amongst employees
- completion of community projects
- capture of data relating to existing and new volunteering activity in support of national indicator requirements and to inform the public in Wiltshire

Benefits to the **Employee** who is volunteering include:

- paid opportunity for variety in work and time out of the office
- chance to work with organisations that can provide new skills, such as Wiltshire Wildlife Trust or Hospital Radio services
- opportunity to work alongside colleagues in a different context eg through community challenge projects
- recognition and reward eg through an employee award/certificate scheme
- building morale and having fun!

Benefits to the **Community** include:

- local voices heard by the area boards and community area partnerships and acted upon by the Council
- improvement in local amenities
- skill-building and a sense of achievement
- building good relationships between the Council and the communities it serves
- greater trust, satisfaction and confidence in the Council

Recommended options

8. Based upon the variations of models for volunteering schemes, it is proposed that a Wiltshire Council scheme be structured as follows:
- Paid time in the community up to 22.5 hours (or 3 days) per year for each employee or pro-rata for part-time staff
 - Agreed volunteering time to be taken on a flexible basis eg as hourly blocks or larger blocks of time
 - Participating employees are encouraged (but not required) to match this with some contribution of their own spare time
 - Consent to be given by line managers to all interested, eligible employees unless this causes disruption for service delivery or is not in the best interest of Wiltshire Council
 - Expenses incurred by participating employees will not be reimbursed by Wiltshire Council except where Council-led community challenge events require this
 - Employee participation rates to be monitored by the Human Resources Team on SAP
 - A review of the scheme, including participation rates and coordination of the scheme to be undertaken twelve months after implementation
 - Head of Strategy (Voluntary & Community Sector) in the Department of Community Services will manage the scheme, lead on its development and implementation and promote volunteering opportunities within the Council
 - Due to the nature of the scheme and contractual issues, commercially contracted employees (agency staff) will not be included in the scheme
 - Work time spent as a volunteer is in addition to any other time allowed off for public service, for example an armed forces reservist, doing jury service or recognised trade union activity
 - Staff undertaking recognised work as a magistrate, are dealt with in 14 below.
 - Volunteering activity is restricted to Wiltshire county, on the basis that this scheme encompasses a transfer of Council funded resources into Wiltshire communities.
 - Guidance will be available to all managers and employees on how the scheme will operate in practice (see Appendices A & B)
 - It is recommended that the scheme is implemented in April 2010 to allow for completion of policies and procedures, HR SAP updates, publicity and manager briefings.

A scheme shared across Wiltshire

9. Before the transition to the new Council, the Joint Consultative Committee was consulted on the principle of employee-based volunteering. They supported the idea of such a scheme, but advised that school-based staff should also be included. The Director for Children and Education has advised that there should be consultation with the Wiltshire Assembly of Secondary School Heads and the Primary Heads Forum about how school-based staff might be involved.

10. The aspiration is also to develop a joint approach through the Public Service Board so that all partners in Wiltshire participate in the employee volunteering scheme. It is suggested that a report is taken to the Public Service Board in the Autumn 2009 for further comments from partners.

An annual Wiltshire Community Challenge' event

11. Some companies hold a once-a-year 'community day' or separate, smaller events throughout the year. Such an event usually involves a number of projects for different sized teams to benefit a wide range of community groups. Team-building is also encouraged through participating in these projects. Some companies commit each department to carry out one annual community challenge project. A 'challenge' is a one-off practical task completed by a group of employee volunteers, often for one day. For example, this could include decorating a day centre, creating a playground, or organising a children's Christmas party. The opportunities are extensive. The commitment to a community challenge event would be included in the 3 days available to each staff member for voluntary activity.

It is likely that as the community area boards become more established, challenge events will be identified within communities, providing a great opportunity for communities to work alongside their Wiltshire Council volunteer challenge team to achieve tangible and rewarding outcomes.

Other volunteering opportunities

12. As well as community challenge events undertaken by a team of volunteers, there need to be other regular volunteering opportunities to suit the skills and interests of the broad range of individuals who make up the Council's workforce. Many types of activity are available across a wide range of voluntary organisations, including administration, befriending, advice services, youth work, conservation etc. Employees can find a task that suits their own aptitudes and gives them a sense of fulfilment. Where volunteering activity falls into unsocial hours, time off in lieu will be taken at single time rate, at a time to be agreed with the line manager.
13. As well as team and group activities, there is the chance to do one-to-one mentoring work, for example with a young person excluded from school, offenders and those at risk in various ways (following training in communication skills, influencing and coaching). It is proposed that members of staff who already are school governors (or who are going to be) are included in this scheme.
14. There has also been a request that Wiltshire Council staff be supported to become magistrates by allowing them additional time needed for this voluntary work. It is suggested that this could help to contribute to diversity and a wider ethnic representation within the magistrates' service in Wiltshire. There is a legal requirement for employers to allow staff time off to fulfil their responsibilities as a magistrate under the

Employment Rights Act (1996); 'An employer shall permit an employee who is a justice of the peace (JP) to take time off during the employee's working hours for the purpose of performing any of the duties of the office'.

Although no legal time off requirement exists, Magistrates are expected to commit a minimum of 26 half-days a year, some of which may be for full-day sittings plus time off for training. Wiltshire Council does not currently have a policy relating to time off for public duties although staff are encouraged to agree "reasonable time off" with their line manager for magisterial duties. It is proposed that staff who are magistrates count the 3 days paid leave as part of their time off to carry out their duties and that they are not asked to make up the other legitimate working hours they spend as a magistrate when agreed in advance with their line manager.

15. It is envisaged that a range of volunteering activities across Wiltshire will together provide some community challenge days and a range of individual volunteering activities, none of which will total more than 3 paid days per employee per year. All relevant policies and procedures to support the scheme will be in place prior to implementation.

Launching the scheme

16. To launch the scheme and 'kick-start' the implementation, we could arrange one, or several events, where the local Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) and other organisations have stands and provide 'taster sessions' for interested staff. It could be a rolling programme held in different locations for staff across the county at lunchtimes. We could also begin with a few smaller challenge events for a team and invite staff to sign up to tackle issues that have been raised through Area Boards. This will serve to raise awareness of the Council's scheme, its role in promoting volunteering and provide valuable local feedback for community areas on actions and outcomes relating to issues raised by members of the community.

Monitoring the scheme

17. If the Council agrees to introduce this policy and scheme, the SAP system could be configured to add a new paid leave type for staff to enter. Data from HR on numbers and type of voluntary leave would be used to inform the annual report prepared by the Head of Strategy, Voluntary & Community Sector.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

18. Employees may decide to contribute to a volunteering scheme which has a positive environmental impact and helps to reduce climate change etc. Project choices will be monitored and reported as the scheme develops.

Equality and Diversity Impact of the Proposal

- 19 Staff may decide to contribute to a volunteering scheme or community challenge which helps people who have difficulties or disabilities and with varying needs for support, such as interpreting, advocacy etc. All employees would be encouraged to take part in the employee volunteering scheme regardless of their own need for additional support to participate

Risk Assessment

- 20 Employees who undertake volunteering need to ensure that they understand the relevant risk assessment concerning the activity and are satisfied that appropriate arrangements for their health and safety are in place. People may need additional health and safety training relevant to the activity and this would need to be provided by the organisation organising the volunteering activity. Employees and the respective volunteer group will be responsible for ensuring that the health and fitness of the volunteer is compatible with the role and responsibilities of the volunteering duty.
- 21 Wiltshire Council's Insurance and Risk Manager has noted that the council will be actively encouraging employees to take part in this scheme and not simply allowing time off to volunteer if staff wish to. This puts a bigger responsibility on the Council to try and ensure employees remain safe whilst volunteering and that it would be sensible to treat this in a similar manner to young people undertaking work experience. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks where appropriate, checking evidence of insurance (for the voluntary or community organisation) and risk assessments would all be good practice and should be carried out. From July 2010 some volunteers may need to register with the Independent Safeguarding Authority to comply with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. This registration is free of charge for volunteers.
- 22 Most employers' liability insurance policies will include volunteers under the definition of employee and therefore if someone were injured whilst undertaking voluntary work, their initial claim should be made against the organisation for which the voluntary work was being carried out. However, it is always possible that the Council could be drawn in if a serious injury occurred, so keeping records of the things such as risk assessments would be recommended.
- 23 Where community challenges are undertaken by teams and groups from the Council, risk assessments and insurance proportional to the activity would need to be part of the planning process. Specific detail on risk analysis is outlined in the scheme information attached at Appendix A, and Appendix B, including safeguards to minimise conflict of interest

where employee volunteers are involved with organisations that wish to undertake contracted work with the Council. Criteria will also be included on what constitutes 'volunteering activity' and how the scheme will be monitored and managed.

Financial Implications

- 24 The financial implications of the employee volunteering scheme are measured mainly in paid staff time. At July 2009, Wiltshire Council has 5,789 employees excluding school-based staff. The average salary for these employees is £19,176. Based on having 220 working days per year (excluding leave, absence etc), the cost of 22.5 hours (3 days), based on the average salary, is £261.49. The average cost of all eligible employees fully participating in the scheme would be in the region of £1,513,765 per annum. However, there is rarely a full take up rate of such schemes and based on national experience, a more realistic estimate would be that around 5% of employees (289) would be likely to participate, reducing the financial implication to around £75,688 per year in staff time "lost" to the Council.
- 25 Whilst these estimated costs of staff time will have some impact on the service area from which the employees are employed, it should not be forgotten that employees will still be contributing to the well-being of the community, and so it may be useful to see these costs as a transferral of social capital from the Council into the community, rather than as a loss. Volunteering activity through the scheme would always be subject to service capacity to release staff.
26. In addition to staff time, there will be small set up costs including branded polo shirts, or caps, for community team challenges by staff (approximately £5,000). Occasional materials such as paint for community projects would come from the existing allocation of grant funding to community area boards. The scheme would also need to be supported by good publicity and information about the volunteering opportunities available to staff eg a booklet. A communications budget of £3,000 is proposed.
27. Where community challenge events include direct contact with the community, the Council will need to ensure that employees have relevant (Criminal Records Bureau) CRB checks in place. For employees working in existing voluntary agencies, those organisations will be expected to apply for CRB checks according to their usual practice. CRB checks for volunteers are free, but the CRB team in Human Resources advise that they would need additional staff capacity if there was a large increase in volume for this service
- 28.. Should the Council pursue the beneficial community challenge event aspect of the volunteering scheme, there would be additional project management costs, either to be absorbed internally, or through

contracting with a voluntary sector organisation which could provide this support eg the Volunteer Centre (such as the one in Swindon), the Community Development Foundation (CDF) or the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS). A tender to support the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) infrastructure in Wiltshire will go out in the Autumn for a start date of 1 April 2010 and this will include the development and implementation of a Volunteer Bureau for Wiltshire and this would be the organisation we would use in the longer-term.

29. As a guide, at present, the Volunteer Centre in Swindon would charge up to £350 to project manage a community challenge event. It is possible to negotiate a bulk brokerage fee for challenges if several are to be undertaken by Wiltshire Council. Across Wiltshire, a community challenge event for each of the 20 community areas could be project managed for around £7,000. The community area manager would also be available to help organise these days.

**Summary of initial additional costs
to be corporately identified**

Shirts, caps	£5,000
Communications and publicity material	£3,000
Project management for community challenge events	£7,000
IT set-up costs	£3, 500
Total	£18,500

Legal Implications

30. The employee volunteering scheme supports Wiltshire's local governance arrangements and compliance with the regulatory framework would be a requirement of participation in community challenge events. For those (majority) of employees who choose to take up voluntary roles in established organisations, legal responsibility, including health and safety requirements would rest with the host voluntary organisation.

Options Considered

31. The options are mainly concerned with the level of paid leave offered to employees to participate in volunteering; of existing schemes for which information was available, this could range from 7.5 to 65 hours per year – with the most generous being 2.5 hours per fortnight in Devon and the minimum being 1 day per year in Doncaster. It was decided to propose 22.5 hours or 3 days per year because of the Council's high level of

commitment to its local communities and developing a thriving voluntary and community sector.

Conclusion

32. If implemented, an annual review of the scheme will be prepared, led by the VCS Support Unit which means that the scheme can be adapted or withdrawn should the review support such steps – for example because of ongoing service capacity issues due to high take up levels. In addition, regular monitoring information will be provided through the normal performance management channels.

The conclusion is that all employees should be offered the opportunity to contribute 3 days to volunteering as part of their paid work for Wiltshire Council where volunteering will be promoted, encouraged and recognised through a formal employee volunteering scheme.

Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None

Appendices

:

- Appendix A: Staff Guide to the Employee Volunteering Scheme
- Appendix B: Manager's Guide to the Employee Volunteering Scheme
- Appendix C: Staff Application Form
- Appendix D: Line Manager Consent Form
- Appendix E: 3 Month Review Form