

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

13 July 2023

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Portfolio Title - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Bob Cook

Employer Supported Volunteering

SUMMARY

In recognition of the importance of volunteering to our residents and communities to consider an approach to employer supported volunteering, that encompasses employee volunteering leave of absence, volunteering as part of a team development day and employer organised volunteering opportunities.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)/DECISION(S)

Part of this Council's commitment to the Stockton Volunteering Strategy is to encourage organisations to support their employees to volunteer. It is therefore important that as a key employer in the Borough, that we set the standard for other organisations to follow, by promoting and facilitating our own employees to undertake volunteering through time off work, and organised volunteering activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet approve the Employee Volunteering Policy (at Appendix 1)

BACKGROUND

1. In July 2021 Cabinet endorsed 'People Power: A Volunteering Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees 2021 to 2026'. This Volunteering Strategy was co-produced by the Council and Catalyst with the aim of informing, supporting, and developing volunteering within the borough.
2. The vision detailed in the Volunteering Strategy is to ensure that we have a borough where:
 - More people will be sharing their skills and talents for the good of the community through volunteering.
 - Volunteering in the Borough will be a positive experience for volunteers and the people and organisations they volunteer with.
 - The contribution volunteers make to the Borough will be recognised and celebrated.
3. The Council's current leave of absence policy provides employees with the ability to request unpaid leave to undertake volunteering in work time. Subject to Cabinet approval we propose to introduce a new employee policy, this specifically outlines our commitment to supporting our employees to volunteer within the borough of Stockton-on-Tees in work time.

4. See Appendix 1 for full copy of the proposed Employee Volunteering Policy.
5. This policy will also form part of our approach to Stockton Futures. By encouraging and supporting our employees to take time of work to volunteer in our community we will be supporting the principles of:
 - Empowered communities - Understanding our communities & helping them to thrive in the way that they choose;
 - Collaborate with communities – starting a new conversation with residents & communities to describe what we want the Borough to be like in future;
 - Positive conversations - Focussing on the strengths of people & communities;
 - People Centric – removing organisational boundaries to ensure that we meet the needs of individuals ;
 - Equality - Aiming to reduce inequality across the Borough in everything we do;
 - Doing things differently - Developing creative & original ways to make a difference;
 - Stronger together - Developing a shared understanding of what we can do together to have the biggest impact.

PROPOSALS

6. We ask Cabinet to consider the policy having particular regard to the following options:
 - Employee Volunteering Leave of Absence
 - Volunteering as part of a Team Development Day.
 - SBC Organised Volunteering Opportunities

Employee Volunteering Leave of Absence:

7. Our proposal is to amend the current policy of unpaid leave, to allow employees to take 1 day paid leave (pro rata for part time employees) within a rolling 12-month period to undertake volunteering activities within the borough of Stockton-on-Tees. All requests would be subject to the usual line manager approval in line with business needs and will be recorded on the MyHR system so we can monitor take up.
8. It is proposed to start by offering 1 day a year and to monitor the take up in the next 6-12 months, at which point we can review. It is unlikely all employees will take up the offer, but if they did this would equate to 18,914 volunteering hours (based on 2,556 FTE as of 31st March 2023).
9. In addition to paid leave, employees can still request unpaid leave, annual leave, and flexitime to undertake additional volunteering activity or to volunteer outside of our borough.

Volunteering as part of a Team Development Day

10. Volunteering as a team can help develop communication skills, creativity, collaboration, and ability to work together as a group. Teams will be encouraged to seek out volunteering opportunities for their Team Development Day or apply for the SBC Organised Opportunities (see above). Conversations are also ongoing with Catalyst (Volunteer Manager) with the aim of working with our VCSE partners to identify a 'forward plan' of potential activities for SBC teams to volunteer their time and services.

SBC Organised Volunteering Opportunities

11. As part of the ongoing Fairer Stockton on Tees (FSOT) Cost of Living activity there is a Corporate Social Responsibility task and finish work group. Colleagues across the FSOT and Community Engagement Teams will work with the VCSE to identify volunteering projects or pieces of work on a time-limited basis to enable employees to share their time, skills, and experience, in addition to the volunteering activity for teams. These opportunities will be promoted in KYIT for employees or teams to apply for and may where appropriate to the project grant more than 1 day paid leave.

MONITORING & REPORTING

12. All volunteering activity will be record on the MyHR system as paid (or unpaid Leave). No change to the MyHR system is needed to accommodate this, and managers can input paid (or unpaid) leave the same way as they input sickness absence.
We will monitor employee volunteering activity (paid and unpaid) and report back to Cabinet on the take up by employees and Teams in the next 6 months.

COMPARISONS WITH THE TEES VALLEY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

13. Middlesbrough Council provide 1 day paid leave for employees to undertake volunteering. At the time of writing Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar & Cleveland currently do not offer any paid time but have stated this is likely to be reviewed.

VOLUNTEERING WITH STOCKTON ON TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

14. A further report will be presented to Cabinet in the near future, outlining volunteering activity within the Council and proposing terms by which we engage volunteers.
15. We have a number of volunteers supporting our work in the Community, but they have been engaged on different terms with some receiving an attendance allowance, some expenses, and others nothing at all. Volunteer agreements and paperwork also vary.
16. We propose to introduce a standard set of terms for all volunteers, and new documentation for all services to use when engaging volunteers. Volunteer activity will also be included in our Workforce Profile Report in future.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

17. A Community Impact Assessment was not required to support the development of these proposals. The proposals concern the internal operation of the Council.

CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

18. There are no direct Corporate Parenting Implications as a result of this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

19. The policy will be managed within in existing resources.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

20. Confirmation of insurance and responsibility for risks will need to be in place for any volunteering activities and any situation such as loss of pay due to incidents arising while staff are volunteering will be addressed through HR procedures.

RISK ASSESSMENT

21. The policy is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk. The main risks are associated with accidents or incidents while staff are volunteering. Suitable risk assessments should be in place for any volunteering activities.

WARDS AFFECTED AND CONSULTATION WITH WARD/COUNCILLORS

22. The proposals do not have an impact on any specific wards.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

23. People Power: A Volunteering Strategy for Stockton-on-Tees 2021 to 2026 – Cabinet July 2021

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