
REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 21 OCTOBER 2009

PORTFOLIO: OVERALL STRATEGY AND POLICY DIRECTION

REPORT FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: COUNCIL SUPPORT OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 To introduce a Council Employee Support Programme for the voluntary sector along the lines outlined in the attached Appendix, to be implemented from 1 April 2010.

2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 This report follows on from the report deferred by the Executive in April. It is particularly opportune in the light of the findings recently published as part of the 'Place Survey', which showed that the District appears to have one of the lowest indicated levels of participation in volunteering nationally.
- 2.2 It is recognised that many of our staff have unique skills which would be invaluable to the voluntary sector especially in times of recession when resources become more difficult and when the voluntary and community sector can play an important role in the provision of services and facilities within the District. It is also particularly timely for the District Council to demonstrate its community leadership role through attempting to provide a framework through which its employees, if they so wish, can become involved in local community and voluntary projects.
- 2.3 The detailed objectives of such a scheme are outlined in the appendix but the main benefits would appear threefold:-
- i) To the Council through increasing linkages with local communities and demonstrating in practical ways its support and assistance to local projects.
 - ii) To the staff who work for the Council in terms of increasing their skills, demonstrating worth within the community and increasing morale and motivation.
 - iii) To the communities involved which make up the District through providing the framework for releasing additional resources in a very practical and visible way.
- 2.4 It would also be a very practical response to the District's poor showing around 'volunteering' as indicated in the 'Place Survey'. Details of the proposed scheme are outlined in the attached appendix.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 Not to introduce such a scheme.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 A key risk associated with such a scheme relates to the possible impact on the Council's image and reputation. If the scheme goes well and is seen to be a success, then the Council's reputation will be enhanced. If it is unsuccessful, then the Council's reputation is likely to suffer.
- 4.2 There are also risks in terms of opportunity costs around staffing and workloads and the impact this may have on staff morale and retention. When staff are assisting the voluntary sector, what is happening to their "day" role and work programme; also how it will impact upon staff who do not "volunteer".
- 4.3 The volumes likely to sign up, based on schemes elsewhere, are anticipated at between 30%-40% of staff (some 60 to 90 people). At this level it is considered, through careful management, any potential workload and staff morale and turnover issues should be successfully overcome, with more positives than negatives.
- 4.4 Lastly, it is important that the scheme is not perceived as competing with elements of the private sector or replacing the voluntary and community sector as such. It is simply an attempt to provide additional capacity and impetus to the existing voluntary and community sector within the District.

5 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Some of the projects picked up under a volunteering scheme could well help to address this agenda e.g. Handy gardening; youth diversionary activities.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Again, some of the projects addressed could have positive environmental outcomes e.g. Tree planting; ditch clearance.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 As outlined above, those voluntary assistance schemes provided on an "opt-in" basis tend to be taken up by between 30%-40% of staff, some 60-90 people in the context of Rochford District Council. If each of these staff used their full 2 day allowance to assist with voluntary and community work in the District, the cost to the Council in terms of salary would be in the region of £22,000-£28,000. If more people opted into the scheme, then the cost would increase; if less people participated, then it would be less. However, this needs to be balanced against the direct value to the community and voluntary sector of such intervention and the number and profile of the projects completed.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: _____

Paul Warren
Chief Executive

Background Papers:

None

For further information please contact Paul Warren on:-

Tel:- 01702 318199

E-Mail:- paul.warren@rochford.gov.uk

If you would like this report in large print, braille or another language please contact 01702 546366.

COUNCIL SUPPORT OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Objective

Employee participation is about our staff making available their expertise to support projects of real value to the community.

Rochford District Council aims to establish an employer supported scheme to bring stronger links between the Council, its employees and the community by enabling and encouraging staff to assist in voluntary and community projects taking place within the Rochford District. The main objectives are to:

- Bring real benefits to the local community
- Develop employees' skills and increase their morale and motivation
- Increase awareness of community issues among staff
- Improve links and communications across departments
- Create networks with potential service users and partners
- Enhance the public perception of the Council
- Developing community engagement. Get closer to policy development and community issues such as health, crime and regeneration
- Improve services through a greater understanding of local peoples' needs
- Improve voluntary and community capacity within the District
- Encourage a culture of 'volunteering' in the District through example

The government places a strong emphasis on voluntary action and community collaboration. The civil renewal agenda rests on a vision of communities working together to solve shared problems that cut across the boundaries of traditional government action. Volunteering and support is particularly relevant in this time of recession.

How will volunteering projects be agreed

Projects must contribute to the Local Strategic Partnership objectives, or the Council's own vision, objectives, and key initiatives and projects.

In addition, Services may have particular voluntary and community projects which would support the local community and already be working closely with groups to support these. Additional projects which relate specifically to Service objectives could be put forward by a Head of Service for consideration by a Corporate Director.

Types of volunteering activity might include:

Community care work

Environmental work and conservation projects

Fundraising or other work for community projects or charities

Administrative support for voluntary groups

In all requests to volunteer for a project, staff should speak to their line manager as a first step.

How will the scheme work?

The Council will permit all staff to offer their services for up to 2 days in each year (pro rata for part time staff). This allocation will not be carried over from one leave year into another. Should the staff member choose to become more involved with the project that they are interested in, then they would need to provide their services on a true voluntary basis without further payment.

The two days will be paid in the usual way for all council approved local community projects.

Managers will discuss volunteering opportunities and ideas through the staff Performance Review MPR process and team meetings and plan the year as much as possible in advance to ensure the usual service provision continues.

Appropriate opportunities might utilise current skills and expertise or seek to develop new ones.

A Volunteering Agreement will be completed by the member of staff and submitted to their Head of Service for approval.

It is possible that Services will already have links with local community and voluntary groups and an awareness of local projects. In addition the council intranet will hold information on volunteering ideas and links to local groups.

Links will also be made with Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Services. They have confirmed that they would welcome the provision of such assistance.

Voluntary Scheme or Contractual Obligation?

The scheme will be optional with employees given the opportunity to opt in. It will not be imposed on staff. Based on experience elsewhere, take up is likely to be around 30%-40% of the workforce, with much depending on the age profile and skill set of staff.

The best schemes nationally appear to be employee led and employer supported. This policy initiative would effectively provide a framework for demonstrating employer support.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Scheme

Managers will review progress with their staff and evaluate the success of their volunteering projects through the staff Performance Review process, with feedback to management team and the Executive on a 6 monthly basis.

In addition, the local group receiving the service will be asked to complete an evaluation form.

The scheme will be formally reviewed after 12 months of operation.

Insurance and Health and Safety

There is no legislation that explicitly covers the provision of this service but employer supported schemes are covered by employment law, including when they are offsite and including out of work hours. Therefore employers are bound by a 'duty of care' to do everything reasonable to protect their employees from coming to harm whilst voluntarily providing this support.

The basic principles of a 'duty of care' are:

- Ensure the staff are adequately trained
- Ensure the staff are adequately supported and supervised
- Ensure the staff are not placing themselves in danger
- Ensure the insurance policy covers staff outside of their place of work

For projects that require staff to come into contact with vulnerable groups (e.g. minors, people with mental health problems, and the elderly) staff will most likely need to have a police check before they can start. There is likely to be a small additional cost to the authority in administration of these checks.

A risk assessment should also be carried out.

Liability insurance for each employee would need to be provided by the voluntary body managing the activity.