

**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE ON 15 APRIL 2009**

**PORTFOLIO: OVERALL STRATEGY AND POLICY DIRECTION**

**REPORT FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**SUBJECT: EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME**

**1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 To introduce an Employer Supported Volunteer Programme on a voluntary basis along the lines outlined in the attached Appendix, to be implemented from 1 April 2009.

**2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 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 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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 doing voluntary work, what is happening to their “day” role and work programme; also how will it impact upon staff who do not “volunteer”? The volumes likely to sign up, based on schemes elsewhere, are anticipated at between 30%-40% of staff (some 60 to 90 people) and it is considered at this level, through careful management, any potential workload and staff morale and turnover issues should be successfully overcome, with more positives than negatives.

## **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, voluntary 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 3 day allocation for voluntary and community work in the District, the cost to the Council in terms of pay would be in the region of £35000-£45000. 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 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**

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**Background Papers:-**

None

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## Employer Supported Volunteer Programme

### Objective

Employee volunteering is about people giving up their time and expertise to support projects of real value to the community.

Rochford District Council aims to establish an employer supported volunteering scheme to bring stronger links between the Council, its employees and the community by enabling and encouraging staff to volunteer in projects 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

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 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

The administration of public events

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

#### **How will the scheme work?**

All staff could have an allocation of up to 3 volunteer days in each leave year (pro rata for part time staff). This allocation will not be carried over from one leave year into another.

The volunteer 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 PDR process and team meetings and plan the year as much as possible in advance to ensure the usual service provision continues.

Appropriate volunteering 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 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 be able to help find suitable voluntary work for staff.

#### **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 PDR process, with feedback to management team and the Executive on a 6 monthly basis.

In addition, the local group receiving the volunteer 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 volunteers but employer supported volunteers are covered by employment law, including when they are offsite volunteering 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 volunteering.

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

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

For projects that require employer supported volunteers to come into contact with vulnerable groups (e.g. minors, people with mental health problems, the elderly) they will most likely need to have a police check before they can start. This is likely to be an 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.