



EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE - 2 FEBRUARY 2017

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this paper is to outline proposals for the Committee to consider in relation to employee volunteering.

Background

2. At present, Council employees who wish to provide voluntary services to relevant charities or voluntary sector bodies can request unpaid time off to undertake these activities.
3. However, as part of their 2015 election manifesto, the Conservative Party pledged its commitment to grant those working in large companies and the public sector up to three days paid leave per year to undertake voluntary work.
4. No further details are currently available regarding when this entitlement is likely to be implemented or whether employees will need to meet any qualifying criteria. Following the absence of any related legislation in the Queen's Speech, there is speculation that the pledge may not be an immediate priority for the Government or that they may even be considering dropping it completely. However, if the commitment goes ahead the relevant changes will need to be made to the Council's leave provisions.
5. Over recent years, with budget cuts driving the need for Councils to consider more creative ways of delivering their services, greater recognition has been given to the important role that volunteers can play in supporting local communities.
6. As a result of this and new ways of thinking about engaging with communities around designing and delivering services, the number of employer supported volunteering schemes within organisations has increased. These schemes provide employees with the opportunity, during work time, to use their workplace skills to support the needs of community and voluntary organisations.
7. Volunteering schemes of this nature can provide a range of benefits, for example:
 - Reducing the impact on front-line services as individuals who would previously have contacted the Council can obtain the support they require in a different way;
 - Enabling community and voluntary organisations to access high quality volunteers with varied skills;

- Enabling organisations to achieve closer engagement with the local community and to build their reputation as a socially responsible company;
- Providing a non-traditional way of training and developing employees;
- Enabling employees to get involved in volunteering when they would otherwise not have been able to (e.g. due to caring commitments outside of work);
- Improving staff morale, enhancing work performance and helping to unlock potential.

8. Recognising this recent shift in the use of volunteering opportunities, the Committee is asked to consider the following proposals.

Proposals

9. In order to align with the Government's plans, it is proposed to introduce an element of paid volunteering leave. However, instead of amending the Leave Arrangements Policy to reflect these new provisions, it is proposed to implement a new Employee Volunteering Policy which incorporates details of a range of paid and unpaid volunteering opportunities. A copy of the proposed policy is attached as Appendix A.
10. Introducing a separate policy will help to demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting the local community, increasing employee engagement, and attracting and retaining new employees in line with the Employment Deal.
11. As part of the Policy, the Council recognises that it has a huge resource in terms of employee skills and knowledge that could be channelled towards achieving its objectives as outlined in the Communities Strategy. With this in mind, work is currently underway on a County Council administered employee volunteering scheme, referred to as the 'Community Builders Project' which will harness employees' professional and personal interests and offer a way that they can use these to support volunteering in their local community (geographical or of interest). This will offer staff an opportunity to enable personal and professional development and provide the transfer of skills and resources to communities thereby building their resilience and capacity.
12. All volunteering through the Community Builders Project will be approved as activity that will contribute towards the delivery of the Communities Strategy. A copy of the draft project outline is attached as Appendix B.
13. Paid leave under the Employee Volunteering Policy will primarily be granted for volunteering activities that are in support of the Council's Communities Strategy and the Community Builders Project. As these opportunities will need to be constantly updated to reflect the Council's changing priorities, it is proposed to publish the details on the Council's website and intranet rather than as an appendix to the policy.
14. Depending on the success of the initiative, there is also the possibility that the Council could work with other organisations such as the Leicestershire Partnership Trust (LPT) to share volunteering opportunities. The LPT are also introducing paid volunteering leave and are intending to implement a specific website dedicated to this purpose. If wanted, it may be possible for the Council to feed into this website in future.

Employees would then be able to volunteer for activities that have been posted by both organisations.

Implementation

15. The Trade Unions are in support of the introduction of a Policy on employee volunteering and the proposal to limit paid leave primarily to activities in support of the Communities Strategy.
16. If approved by the Employment Committee, a copy of the new Policy will be published on the Council's intranet for managers and employees to view. An article will also be published in the Managers' Digest and a news item posted on the Council's intranet.
17. To coincide with the launch of the Policy, a list of activities linked to the Communities Strategy will be finalised and the details posted on the website.
18. As there is currently no formal recording process for this type of leave, 'Volunteer Paid Leave' and 'Volunteer Unpaid Leave' will be added to the list of options available on Oracle to enable reporting on its use.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to consider and approve the proposals for implementation of an Employee Volunteering Policy.

Background Papers

None.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A - Employee Volunteering Policy
Appendix B - Communities Builder Project Outline

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

The proposed policy seeks to encourage employees to undertake volunteering activities which will benefit various groups within the local community.

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