

## **EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING**

**Submitted by:** Partnerships Officer (Community Development)

**Portfolio:** Stronger and Active Neighbourhoods

**Ward(s) affected:** All

### **Purpose of the Report**

The purpose of this report is to outline opportunities that Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has to promote and develop an Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) scheme whilst recognising the volunteering opportunities that the Council already provides and supports. The report sets out a planned pilot to explore these opportunities in the first instance in order to ascertain whether an ESV scheme would be workable for the Borough Council and its staff.

### **Recommendations**

- (a) That Cabinet notes the contents of the report.**
- (b) That Cabinet supports the establishment of an ESV pilot scheme for the Council, following consultation with staff, followed by an initial open forum with employees and other interested parties on the concept of volunteering which will gauge the level of interest in the organisation.**
- (c) That, in the event of a pilot being set up, Cabinet supports a review of this pilot in order to ascertain whether a permanent ESV scheme should be set up in the Borough Council.**
- (d) That Cabinet considers and endorses the proposal from North Staffs Volunteer Centre (NSVC), which is designed to support the development of an ESV pilot for the Borough Council**

### **Reasons**

An ESV scheme has a number of potential benefits for the organisation and for the community as a whole. These potential benefits are outlined in this report.

An ESV pilot scheme allows the Council the opportunity to test out the veracity of these potential benefits and allows lessons to be learnt as part of an evaluation process, prior to any subsequent decision to develop and implement an ESV scheme.

Potentially developing a pilot with the outside support will test how robust a scheme could be. It is proposed that the North Staffs Volunteer Centre (NSVC) could help in the development of the pilot, given the NSVC's knowledge and experience of this area, including initial engagement with staff and others via an introductory seminar on the concept of volunteering.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Volunteering is defined as "an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to)

close relatives”.<sup>1</sup> Based on this definition, the Council’s ruling political administration has expressed a commitment to investigate the potential for developing volunteering in order to deliver the benefits alluded to the above quote by encouraging Council employees to get more involved in volunteering.

- 1.2 Building on this commitment, Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) has been investigated as a possible way to encourage employees to volunteer and to support them in their volunteering activities. ESV has the potential to enhance employee skills and improve relations between staff and the local community. It can also work in a number of ways, e.g. individuals volunteering, staff teams carrying out volunteering challenges, and the provision of professional support on a pro-bono basis.
- 1.3 In working on the delivery of this commitment, there is a need to test out a number of areas of ESV. These are: -
  - The potential costs and benefits of such a scheme.
  - How the scheme could work in practice and what areas could the scheme be applied to.
  - The level of interest in such a scheme amongst employees and others.
- 1.4 In order to investigate the possible responses to these and other questions, it is proposed that a pilot piece of work be undertaken, following initial engagement with staff and other interested parties at NBC to gauge the level of interest in such an initiative.
- 1.5 Given that this is a relatively new initiative, approaches have been made for support on the possible introduction of an ESV scheme for the Council. As a result of these approaches, the North Staffordshire Volunteer Centre (NSVC) has put forward a proposal for support. NSVC has three levels of consultancy on ESV and offers support packages for employees. The NSVC proposal is included with this report at Appendix C.

## 2 **Issues**

- 2.1 Some volunteering activity already takes place in some service areas – e.g. the community section of Operational Services. A table can be found at Appendix A on the level and type of activity within this service area between 2011 and 2013. It may be that the ESV pilot scheme could look to the current arrangements in Operational Services for lessons as part of the pilot process, so as to ensure consistency.
- 2.2 It should be noted that any ESV scheme established should be aware of existing Charters, such as the Staffordshire Compact Volunteering Code of Practice and the TUC/Volunteering England Charter for Strengthening Relations between Paid Staff and Volunteers.
- 2.3 In addition, the Volunteering Strategy for Staffordshire includes an action to develop ESV schemes within partner organisations (a copy of this document is available from Member Services upon request).
- 2.4 ESV schemes can work on either paid or unpaid leave, with pros & cons for both – see below:-

<b>Advantages.</b>	<b>Disadvantages.</b>
<b>Paid Leave.</b>	
Higher uptake likely.	Contrary to the principle that volunteering is unpaid.

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering England.

More attractive to lower paid staff – potentially more equitable.	Could attract interest for the wrong reasons.
Potentially unaffordable.	Costs of covering for absent staff.
	Possible negative perception by public.
<b>Unpaid Leave.</b>	
Minimal costs of covering for absent staff – easier to budget for.	Lower uptake likely.
Consistent with the principle that volunteering is unpaid.	Less attractive to lower paid staff – potentially more inequitable.
Staff more likely to volunteer for the right reasons.	

- 2.5 NSVC have submitted a proposal to assist the Council to develop the ESV pilot scheme outlined in this report. This can be found at Appendix C. This will be considered according to the Council's procurement regulations, although the approach to NSVC was made following consideration of alternatives and the market as a whole.
- 2.6 Members will note from the proposal that the offer is for support from NSVC for the period from January-March 2013 and includes a number of elements including an ongoing brokerage service specifically for Council employees and the potential further development of volunteering opportunities across the Council's services. It is suggested that this support from NSVC is used to oversee the work on the pilot and to offer support on the evaluation of the pilot process. To this end, it is proposed that the pilot takes place from February to March 2013.
- 2.7 The opening part of the pilot process will be to survey staff as to their views on such a scheme and whether they would be interested in participating. Based on these views, it is proposed that an open forum will be held for staff and other interested parties on how ESV works. As well as providing information, this session will also be used to gauge the level of interest amongst employees for a potential ESV scheme in the Council.

### 3. **Options to Consider**

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendations of the report, as set out above, specifically the establishment of an initial information seminar with staff on how an ESV scheme works followed by, if deemed appropriate, a pilot project designed to provide the Council with the necessary information before a further decision can be made on whether to implement an ESV scheme across the Council.
- 3.2 Cabinet is further asked to approve the recommendations and start of a process of information and evaluation in the first instance on the feasibility of introducing an ESV scheme for the Council (Option A – recommended)
- 3.3 Cabinet may wish not to approve these recommendations – this decision would carry with it the risk of missing an opportunity to enhance volunteering across the Borough and also losing out on the potential benefits of volunteering as set out in this report (Option B – not recommended).

### 4. **Reasons**

- 4.1 As said, ESV schemes have the potential to deliver a number of benefits to a range of different stakeholders, including the following: -

<b>Employer.</b>	<b>Employee.</b>	<b>Beneficiary/community.</b>
Opportunity to contribute to solving community problems.	Opportunity to learn new skills for their personal development.	Additional support for their need/activity/project.
Opportunity for positive PR.	Enhanced self-confidence & sense of self-worth.	Additional volunteers on whom to call.
Employees able to use new skills to their job.	Opportunity to help the community.	Specialist knowledge and skills brought to their organisation.
Improved employee health, satisfaction and retainment.		

4.2 It is these and other potential benefits and how they might apply to Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and the wider Borough which the pilot ESV scheme outlined in this report will be designed to investigate.

## 5. **Proposals**

5.1 That Cabinet approves the establishment of an initial information session on ESV with staff and other interested parties.

5.2 That, based in part on the levels of interest amongst employees, the Council establishes a pilot ESV scheme in order to investigate the issues relating to ESV and also the potential benefits set out in this report.

5.3 Cabinet instructs officers to assess support for the project. Including the proposal from NSVC found at Appendix C according to the Council's procurement regulations.

## 6. **Reasons for Proposals**

6.1 The potential benefits of an ESV scheme for different groups and organisations have been set out in this report and require close analysis and evaluation to ascertain whether they apply to Newcastle-under-Lyme BC and the Borough as a whole.

6.2 Commissioning NSVC to assist with this process means that they can bring their specialist knowledge, skills & experience in order to support the Council in the pilot process.

## 7. **Outcomes Linked to Sustainable Community Strategy and Corporate Priorities**

7.1 The possible development of a pilot ESV scheme is linked to the Corporate Priority "Creating a Healthy and Active Community".

## 8. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

There are no legal or statutory implications.

## 9. **Equality Impact Assessment**

9.1 The possible development of a pilot ESV scheme may have a positive impact on equalities in developing positive links with voluntary and community organisations in the Borough.

10. **Financial and Resource Implications**

10.1 These will be explored as part of the proposed pilot process.

10.2 There would be direct expenditure involved if the proposal from NSVC was agreed. There would also be resource implications, albeit unquantifiable, if the development work was carried out in-house. It is proposed that any funding for the process of investigating an ESV scheme comes from Business Improvement & Partnership budgets.

11. **Major Risks**

11.1 A risk assessment has been carried out – see Appendix D

12. **Key Decision Information**

12.1 This report is classed as a non-key decision document as there are no legal implications linked to non-compliance.

13. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

There are none.