
**Decision Session: Executive Member for
Culture, Leisure and Tourism**

27 November 2015

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture & Public Realm)

Volunteering and the Council

Summary

1. This report outlines steps that the Council will take to promote volunteering and its benefits to staff and residents. A number of recommendations are made with a view to developing the Council's approach to volunteering and encouraging its volunteering culture to flourish. This will benefit both volunteering within the authority and more widely within York's communities.

Recommendations

2. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - Adopt the new Volunteering Policy for City of York Council set out in Annex 2
 - Approve the Volunteer Managers' Network workplan set out in paragraph 14.
 - Agree to receive an update report on progress in 12 months' time

Reason: To ensure compliance with the York Charter for Volunteering and to enable the Council to offer and promote a strong volunteering culture for its employees and residents.

Background

3. York's Council for Voluntary Services report on, 'The State of the Sector 2015', tells us that more than 26,000 people regularly volunteer in York, giving up to 76,000 hours a week of support, ideas and inspiration to support hundreds of organisations and thousands of individuals across the city. The report estimated that the contribution of volunteers is worth, at the lower end, £17 million and the higher estimate stands at £40 million to the City of York.

The Council has a long history of engaging with the residents of York to offer volunteering opportunities that benefit both the individual and the corporate aims of the Council. Many departments offer a broad range of experiences from helping to look after green areas, to mentoring young people, from being a school governor to leading health walks. There are many examples of good practice and strong volunteer management in developing a volunteer culture.

Volunteer Managers' Network

4. The Volunteer Managers' Network meets quarterly and brings together officers from across the Council, who involve volunteers in their projects. The network enables volunteer managers to share good practice, address issues and concerns and run problem solving sessions with the aim to further develop council's volunteering programmes. Achievements of the Network include a number of initiatives to promote volunteering:
 - Promotion of the Council's employer supported volunteering scheme – to encourage council staff to volunteer;
 - Holding a number of staff volunteering fairs and displays at West Offices and Hazel Court– to make staff aware of volunteering opportunities across the city;
 - A Community Resilience event – to promote volunteering opportunities including Flood and Snow Wardens to residents;
 - Promoting the volunteer managers' training programme - to date over 30 council officers have accessed this training;
 - Production of a good practice guide on - 'Involving young volunteers' – to promote young people's involvement in volunteering;
 - For the last 2 years organising celebratory events as part of National Volunteers' Week. This year's event included 200 volunteers from 17 volunteer organisations who came together to learn about the different roles and celebrate the vast contribution they make to our city.
 - Evaluating the Council's current Volunteering Policy – to ensure that a strong volunteering culture is embedded in the authority;
 - Developing a webpage on the Council's website dedicated to volunteering – to actively promote volunteer opportunities within the council;
 - Production of a corporate volunteer handbook – to provide a consistent approach to managing volunteers;

- Development of an information bank containing fact sheets related to volunteering – to support volunteer managers in their role;
- A review of the equality profiling exercise – to help identify gaps in particular groups to help positively recruit ;
- Carrying out a Volunteer survey – to gain feedback from existing volunteers to help shape the development of future opportunities and improve current policies and practice.

York Charter for Volunteering

5. One of the Network's key achievements is gaining the York Charter Standard for Volunteering. This is a locally devised set of standards that provides a self assessment framework for developing and improving volunteering programmes. It is administered by York CVS who also provide resources in the form of templates, good practice examples and information from organisations such as Volunteering England in order to help each Charter signatory reach its standards and achieve the Charter Mark.
6. The Council signed up to the Charter in June 2012 to confirm its commitment to deliver effective volunteering programmes, increase volunteering across the city and ensure that its volunteers are properly supported and valued. The Council completed the self assessment between January and September 2014. Information outlining each of the Council's volunteering opportunities plus current practices were collated as part of the assessment and submitted to York CVS for a verdict in January 2015.
7. As a result the Council was awarded the Charter Standard which recognised the work to date. Feedback outlined a number of areas for the authority to work on, to further improve its volunteering experience. These include the need to:
 - Incorporate a section on benefits of volunteering in all volunteer role descriptions;
 - Formally adopt a volunteering policy for the City of York Council;
 - Reflect responsibility for volunteers in employee role descriptions;
 - Implement a consistent approach across teams in relation to the reimbursement of volunteer expenses;
 - Work on consistency in relation to provision of supervision and appraisal for volunteers.

An action plan will be formulated to address the above suggestions which will be delivered by the Volunteer Managers' Network.

Training and Development

8. Since February 2014 the Council's Workforce Development Unit in partnership with York CVS have delivered volunteer manager training for 32 officers from across the authority. The course gives clear guidance on good practice for volunteer management to ensure the experience is a positive one for all involved. Further courses are planned to take place through the corporate training offer.

Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme

9. In November 2012 the Council introduced a scheme to promote and encourage employees to volunteer. The scheme offers a day's leave, which is to be matched by a day of leave, for staff to take up a volunteering role. In the last staff survey carried out in 2013, results indicated that of the 1,428 people who completed the survey, 414 (29%) had been involved in some form of volunteering activity in the last 12 months, an increase of +4% since the previous survey carried out in 2011.

Engaging with Residents

10. The Council currently provides a range of volunteering opportunities for York residents which equates to 52 roles involving 1,780 volunteers. Examples include:

Environment: litter picker, gardener, snow warden, a tree warden - in order to create green, safe and attractive neighbourhoods with a real sense of community.

Children and Young People: Specialist Teaching team offers role model, mentor, befriender and training co-facilitator roles for those who wish help young people with special education needs and/or disabilities to understand who they are, build their self confidence and give them voice and control over support they are receiving. Youth and Community Development offers mentoring and youth club assistant opportunities for those who wish to support young people in York.

Sport and Active Leisure: The team offer volunteer cycle ride leader and health walk leader opportunities to help promote social interaction and improve health outcome.

Annex 1 contains the full list of volunteering opportunities currently offered by the City of York Council.

The Council's Volunteering Policy

11. In January 2011 the Corporate Management Team approved an interim volunteering strategy for the Council. It outlined how the Council could improve its policies in order to manage volunteers more effectively and describes the council's aspiration to encourage staff to volunteer. As outlined above, significant progress has been made since the interim strategy was developed and following consultation with the Council's human resources department and the Volunteer Manager's Network, and in the light of the issues raised in paragraph 7 above, a draft refreshed policy has been drawn up (see Annex 2).
12. The new volunteering policy provides a clear steer to the Council's volunteer managers and a uniform approach to volunteer management. It seeks to embed the York Charter for Volunteering principles in the day to day practice and brings together processes and procedures to support the Council's volunteering programmes. The policy's main features include the removing of barriers to volunteering to improve the understanding of the benefits of volunteering amongst all staff. Having robust systems in place supports not only the volunteers to have a positive experience but clear protocols for staff to follow.
13. By continuously improving our approach to the way the authority is engaging with volunteers the outcomes will be:
 - Explore alternative delivery models for council services utilising the skills of volunteers;
 - Increased volunteering impacts positively on the sense of community;
 - Staff and residents gain the benefits of volunteering from a social, wellbeing and self development perspective;
 - Positive impact on the client group, community, organisations, and environment of York;
 - Staff and residents having sense of achievement and opportunity to contribute to the city / community life;
 - Staff and residents having access to opportunities to develop or learn skills that could lead onto further education or employment.

The Way Forward

14. To ensure the Council continues to further develop its volunteering offer there are a number of work areas that will be developed and implemented by the Volunteer Managers' Network over the next 12 months – these include:
 - Based on the feedback from the Charter's self assessment, will look to implement suggested improvements set out in paragraph 7;
 - Continue to hold the Network meetings to ensure that volunteering is truly embedded within the organisation;
 - Promote the Policy to all staff to ensure standards are embraced;
 - Ensure that volunteering remains a high profile agenda in the city by continuing to support the annual York CVS volunteering conference, work in partnership with York CVS in relation to celebration and recruitment of volunteers, continuing as Board Member of York Cares and support projects such as YorZone website that encourages 11-18 year olds to take up volunteering opportunities;
 - Continue to offer Volunteer Manager Training for CYC staff;
 - Continue to promote the employer supported volunteering scheme;
 - Continue with equality profiling to direct our focus to engage with/promote our volunteering opportunities to those groups that are not participating, or are underrepresented.

Council Plan

15. In embedding the volunteering agenda within the authority and promoting opportunities for our residents, it clearly contributes to all corporate priorities:
 - A prosperous city for all
 - A focus on frontline services
 - A council that listens to residents

Implications

16. **Financial:** Potential financial implications in relation to reasonable out of pocket expenses provision for all Council volunteers.

17. **Human Resources:** HR have reviewed the volunteer policy to ensure that it provides relevant guidance to the council's volunteer managers to make sure that volunteers are supported in their volunteers experience with the council. The policy applies to volunteers and not council staff.
18. **Equalities:** Equality profiling of current council volunteer opportunities indicates that the take up from York's protected characteristics, (e.g. gender, age, minority ethnic, and faith) is under represented. The Council will therefore actively promote volunteering opportunities across York's communities of identity.
19. There are no legal, crime and disorder, information technology, property or other implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

20. There are no known risks associated with this report.

Contact Details

Author:		Chief Officer responsible:		
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Mary Bailey, Head of Communities and Equalities		Report Approved	✓	Date 18 November 2015
Specialist Implications Officers:				
Wards Affected:				All ✓
For further information please contact the author of the report				

Annexes

Annex 1 - List of current City of York Council volunteering opportunities

Annex 2 - Volunteering Policy for City of York Council

Annex 3- Community Impact Assessment