

North Yorkshire County Council**Corporate and Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee****Corporate Volunteer Project Update
Monday 14th September 2020****1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the Corporate Volunteering project and outline progress made to date.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 An overview on the Corporate Volunteer Project was provided at the Corporate O&S Committee in March 2019 and an update following this in September 2019. Within these, details were provided about how the Corporate Volunteer Project was approved as part of the 2020 Programme and how it aims to maximise and optimise the use of volunteers across all services, creating consistencies in: marketing, recruitment, induction, expenses, training, ongoing support and efficient volunteer processes with the purpose of optimising the use of volunteers and aiding retention. It was agreed that a further update would be provided on this project in Autumn 2020.

3.0 Corporate Volunteering Project

- 3.1 The Corporate Volunteer Project is being delivered by the Resourcing Solutions Team – HR, recognising the synergies between the volunteer journey and employee journey, whilst acknowledging that there are key differences between the two. An officer group continues to meet regularly to provide a steer for the project, discussing challenges and priorities and inputting into areas of work as they progress. This group comprises of representatives from Stronger Communities and the Resourcing Solutions Team and lead officers from the services that manage volunteers.

3.2 Volunteer Strategy

At O&S in March 2019 a draft paper was shared; a Corporate Volunteer Strategy (Appendix 1), which outlines NYCC's commitment to volunteers. The draft strategy was produced in consultation with the volunteer sub-group, volunteer co-ordinators/managers in NYCC, our volunteers, HR Senior Management Team and Management Board; and has been well received by all the groups shared with to date. The strategy (set out in appendix 1) was adopted by the Executive on 13 August 2019 and has been uploaded to the NYCC internet and intranet to convey our commitment to volunteers.

3.3 Expenses

At last year's Corporate O&S meeting Members were advised that work had identified a series of inconsistencies relating to the way in which volunteer expenses were paid, and differing rates. Following consultation, the volunteer sub-group, volunteer co-ordinators/managers, Unison and corporate Pay and Reward a Volunteer Expenses

Policy was developed and signed off by Management Board in early 2020. The Policy provides framework for volunteer expenses for volunteers directly managed by NYCC and aims to ensure volunteer expenses are applied consistently, ensuring equality for all. Impact of the proposals were reviewed and considered as minimal.

3.4 Volunteer ID Badges

A new protocol for provision on Volunteer ID Badges has been developed, ensuring there is a consistent approach towards the type and design of ID badges for all services. This protocol was helpful during the start of the Covid-19 response when 3000 community volunteer ID badges were distributed to the Community Support Organisations in order to ensure all volunteers were registered and verified.

3.5 Triage Tool

To support services who are considering setting up a new project that involves volunteers a Triage Tool has been developed in partnership with the Volunteering Steering Group. The tool aims to be a prompt of all the things that need to be considered to ensure a successful and cost-effective volunteer focussed project. It reminds services that volunteers are not 'free' and that there is a requirement for an investment of time and resource. The tool was reviewed by Management Board in early 2020 and has subsequently been uploaded to the intranet.

3.6 Policy

The Volunteers Policy has been updated following consultation with Volunteer Coordinators and the Project Steering Group. In addition to providing a general framework for recruiting, induction and managing volunteers it also includes a revised volunteer induction checklist, health and safety guide and guidance on young volunteers.

3.7 COVID Volunteering

Almost all NYCC volunteers ceased their volunteering during lockdown as the nature of their tasks could not be completed remotely. However, a small number of the volunteers in Records and Archives and Youth Justice Service continued to do some volunteering, either from home or in alternative ways. The council's Ready for Anything volunteers were deployed to support some elements of COVID support across the county, for example doing welfare checks.

3.8 Stronger Communities worked closely with Community Support Organisations who used their own volunteers to provide services to vulnerable members of the community during lockdown. The response was overwhelming with between 1500 and 2000 volunteers active at any one time and evidenced how willing people are to help others during a public health emergency.

3.9 However, the COVID experience highlights there is still a need to improve coordination and central access to NYCC volunteers across the various service areas. A central database allows for greater cohesion, integration and ease of reach for services to contact and invite volunteers to support other services – such as the COVID support work when needed. This remains the ambition of the programme.

4.0 **Future Focus**

4.1 The Corporate Volunteering Project is continuing to work on a range of projects to streamline the processes for attracting, recruiting and managing volunteers, whilst also being a point of contact for Volunteer Co-ordinators/Managers for provision of advice and guidance.

4.2 Elements include:

- Continuing to update the volunteering pages on the intranet to include rich and engaging content that sparks interest from potential new volunteers
- Transitioning to customer focussed digital volunteer journey, including online volunteer application form. This is currently being considered and developed by Technology and Change. An online volunteer application form is currently being piloted and consultation is taking place with Volunteer Co-ordinators over the content of the form.
- Developing a consistent customer focussed approach to volunteer induction and training, this is currently being developed by the Training and Learning Team in partnership with Technology and Change.
- Reviewing methods to celebrate, recognise and reward volunteers and raise the profile of volunteer value. This was due to be undertaken earlier in 2020 but the COVID lockdown placed this area of work on hold.
- Developing specific volunteer opportunities for young people, encouraging them to become involved in supporting their local communities in both NYCC volunteer opportunities and those in the wider voluntary sector endorsed by Stronger Communities.

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 It is recommended that Members review the update provided on the Corporate Volunteer Project and provide feedback, thoughts and ideas for future consideration in order that a consistent and equitable approach is adopted.

Neil Irving: Assistant Director - Policy, Partnerships and Communities

Report Author: Keeley Metcalfe: Resourcing Solutions Business Partner

Appendix 1 - North Yorkshire County Council Volunteering Strategy

Appendix 1**North Yorkshire County Council Volunteering Strategy****Introduction**

North Yorkshire County Council welcomes and celebrates the benefits of volunteering for individuals, organisations and communities.

The strategy is primarily focused on volunteers that are managed directly by the County Council, however there are also many volunteers managed by partner organisations who also contribute to our service delivery. All of them are valued for the contribution that they make. Where volunteers are managed by other organisations we will encourage the organisation to adopt and implement similar practice.

Who is a volunteer?

A volunteer:

- commits their time and energy for the benefit of others;
- gives their time freely, through personal choice; and
- volunteers without expectation of financial reward.

A volunteer is not:

- a paid worker; or
- on a work placement, work experience or on government sponsored schemes.

Volunteers may be involved in one-off or longer term, regular activities and may be based in a building, out in the community or in the countryside within North Yorkshire.

Volunteers:

- bring additional skills, knowledge and expertise;
- enable a more responsive and flexible approach;
- give insight to the needs and priorities of communities;
- enable extended service provision in ways that would not otherwise be possible;
- champion causes and raising awareness within the wider community;
- enhance the quality of work and customer experience; and
- improve the wellbeing of customers, staff, local communities and themselves.

Our principles

Volunteers are an integral part of service delivery, bringing benefits to customers, services and the volunteers themselves. We commit to ensuring that:

- good quality volunteering opportunities are available;
- volunteers are managed effectively, efficiently and consistently across the council;
- barriers to volunteering are removed where possible, enabling and encouraging a diverse range of people to volunteer;
- the benefits and costs of involving volunteers are understood; and

- the involvement of volunteers is appropriately resourced.

Roles and responsibilities

The volunteer role is based on trust and mutual understanding. The volunteer can choose at their will to attend the tasks which meet their interests, however certain volunteering roles will have essential requirements such as health and safety, specified ways of working, or necessary training where refusal to participate will debar them from volunteering on that task/role. There is no obligation for the County Council to accept a volunteer, provide continuous opportunities or provide training unless it is essential to the volunteering.

However, there is a presumption of mutual support and reliability. Reciprocal expectations are acknowledged, both what volunteers can expect of us and what we expect of volunteers.

Volunteers can expect to:

- have clear information about what is and is not expected of them;
- receive adequate support, including relevant training;
- be insured and volunteer in a safe environment;
- be treated with respect and in a non-discriminatory manner;
- receive appropriate out of pocket expenses within the agreed County Council volunteers' expenses policy;
- have opportunities for personal development;
- be recognised and appreciated;
- be able to say 'no' to anything which they consider to be unrealistic or unreasonable; and
- know what to do and who to speak to if something goes wrong.

In return we expect volunteers to:

- be reliable and honest;
- participate in necessary training;
- carry out all tasks within specified ways of working and relevant County Council policies and procedures;
- uphold our values, contribute positively to the ambitions of the County Council and avoid bringing the organisation into disrepute.

Operational policies and practice

The Chief Executive will have authority to agree operational policies and practice regarding volunteering including recruitment, training and expenses and may delegate this responsibility to a nominated Officer.

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