Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 21 June 2023

Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council

Councillor Victoria Wilson, Cabinet member for Communities and Culture said,

"Our dedicated army of volunteers across Staffordshire make an invaluable contribution to the council, this county and the communities we all serve.

"Without them life would certainly be more difficult for many and I would like to thank them for the difference they make to so many lives.

"We recognise too that volunteers can get a huge amount out of helping others and our new "volunteering principles" to make the experience flexible, enjoyable and personally rewarding."

Report Summary:

Ensuring our residents live in thriving and sustainable communities is one of the three priority outcomes in our Strategic Plan 2022-26. People who volunteer for Staffordshire County Council play a crucial role in helping us to achieve these outcomes.

The Council's Communities Position Statement 2023 set out some of the great things we have achieved with our communities and partners over the last 18 months, much of which would not have been possible without the efforts of our volunteers.

Staffordshire County Council volunteers are central to the support provided to our communities and residents; from helping to maintain our highways and green spaces through to supporting families, our libraries, Community Help Points and more.

We acknowledge the contribution of our partners and the incredible work volunteers undertake across the County for other organisations and community groups. However, this report specifically sets out how we plan to develop our offer of support for people who volunteer directly for Staffordshire County Council. This includes our new volunteering principles and practical guidance documents for our staff, ensuring that everyone who

volunteers with the Council is supported to have a positive and consistent experience.

Recommendations:

I recommend that Cabinet:

a. Considers and commits to the nine new 'volunteering principles' for the organisation to adopt.

b. Considers and approves the implementation of the attached volunteering guidance documents for managers and colleagues supporting Council volunteers.

c. Approves the proposed plan to embed this approach across the organisation and further develop our volunteer offer, noting the approach to monitor progress.

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Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

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Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

Introduction:

1. Volunteers are an essential part of Staffordshire's communities. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic response, where we saw volunteers across the county doing their bit to support others in need of help in unprecedented times.

2. The Council continues to invest in supporting and promoting volunteering across Staffordshire, including our new VCSE Capacity Building Framework contract and our #DoingOurBit campaign.

3. The Council recognises that people who volunteer for Staffordshire County Council are a vital part of the workforce. They give up their time to play a crucial role in how we work within our communities to achieve our priorities.

4. It is also important to recognise that people who volunteer, can also benefit from the experience in terms of their own health and wellbeing,

which is supported by research undertaken by the National Council of Volunteering Organisations (NCVO) and their "Time Well Spent Survey".

5. Volunteering can help to reduce social isolation and improve mental wellbeing. As many volunteers undertake activities within their localities it can help them to feel part of their own communities. Volunteering also helps people of all generations to learn new skills and meet new people. These and many more benefits are highlighted in more detail within Appendix 6 – Community Impact Assessment.

6. On 15th February 2023, Cabinet approved a new 'Communities Delivery Plan' for 2023. One of the strategic objectives within the Communities Delivery Plan 2023 is to "*support our organisation and others to have a communities mindset*". This includes reviewing our internal policies to help our staff work in a way that continues to empower our communities.

7. As an organisation it is critical that we support people who volunteer for Staffordshire County Council. To do this, the Council's Communities Leadership Group has engaged with volunteers and our voluntary sector partners to review our current approach to identify how we could further strengthen this.

Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council:

8. Currently we have over 500 regular volunteers who support the Council. Due to the nature of volunteering this figure can fluctuate during the year.

9. Following feedback and learning from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Communities Leadership Group undertook a review of how we support people who volunteer for the Council.

10. This review included speaking with volunteers and colleagues who work with volunteers across the county, as well as establishing a Volunteering Task & Finish group to lead the work around the support offered.

11. The Task & Finish group included representatives from our VCSE Capacity Building Framework Partners, Support Staffordshire, and Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS), as well as commissioning leads and managers from across the authority who support volunteers.

12. Key findings from this review (as well as feedback from our experiences during COVID-19 regarding volunteering) included:

a. **Volunteer contribution** – Volunteers undertake a substantial number of activities across the organisation that allows us to work more flexibly with our communities.

b. **Inconsistencies** – There were some inconsistencies in our approach to supporting volunteers which can lead to ambiguity.

c. **Staff support** – Staff would value further support to ensure that we are managing and working with volunteers effectively to facilitate a positive experience for all.

Volunteering principles for Staffordshire County Council:

13. As a result of this review, this report recommends that the Council adopts nine new 'volunteering principles'.

14. Cabinet endorsement of these principles will acknowledge the vital contribution our volunteers make and will ensure that we work in a way that offers our volunteers the best possible experience.

15. The nine volunteering principles are:

   a. Have **clearly defined expectations**, **roles, and boundaries** for all our volunteers.

   b. Be **inclusive and accessible** for all residents who want to get involved.

   c. Be **flexible where possible,** with different opportunities depending on how much time people can offer.

   d. Be **personalised**, taking into account the different experiences, skills, motivations and capabilities of each volunteer.

   e. Ensure our volunteering opportunities are **mutually beneficial** for both volunteers and the Council's work within communities.

   f. Ensure volunteers have the **opportunity to provide feedback** on their experiences with the Council.

   g. Have **volunteer focussed policies and processes**, including recruitment, induction, and training.

   h. **Recognise the positive contribution** of our volunteers.

i. Co-ordinate our approach to volunteering with **existing Council resources**, such as Open Door, Staffordshire Connects, and #DoingOurBit.

16. The principles above have been developed in partnership with SCC colleagues and our VCSE partners. They have been tested with a sample of our current volunteers. 98% of these volunteers were supportive of the principles and thought they would benefit other volunteers.

17. These principles address the feedback we received about our current approach to volunteering by:

a. **Helping to improve the offer** for those individuals volunteering for Staffordshire County Council as well as providing more consistency in our approach.

b. **Supporting Managers / Staff** currently working with Council volunteers within their service areas as well as recruiting and training new volunteers into their service in the future.

c. **Providing clear information for anyone seeking to volunteer for the Council** on what to expect should they decide to volunteer with us.

Volunteering Guidance for Staff:

18. To assist the organisation to implement these new volunteering principles, the Communities Leadership Group has also developed guidance documents for colleagues who work with Council volunteers across the organisation.

19. This guidance includes support for colleagues on a range of issues relating to recruiting, supporting, and working with volunteers, including:

a. Recruiting new volunteers
b. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks
c. Training and insurance
d. Induction and supervision
e. How to successfully end a placement

20. The guidance has been developed with key stakeholders, including Council colleagues who currently work with volunteers, our VCSE Capacity Building Framework partners, and representatives from our Legal, Health and Safety, and People Services teams.

21. Alongside these documents, a guide for current and prospective volunteers has also been developed to provide further information for what volunteers can expect, which will be hosted on our external website.

22. The main principles and guidance document, along with the guide for volunteers and additional supporting documents including best practice information and guidance on specific topics, have been included as appendices 1-5.

Implementation and Next Steps:

23. Subject to Cabinet approving the proposed volunteering principles and guidance, this paper also recommends the following actions to help further develop our offer for volunteers:

   a. **Promote the new principles and guidance documents** to Council staff, utilising internal communications channels.

   b. **Review our internal intranet pages** on volunteering to ensure the volunteering principles and guidance are easily accessible and is regularly updated.

   c. **Review our external webpages** on volunteering to provide an easier and more accessible way for individuals to register an interest in volunteering for the County Council.

   d. Work with colleagues in People Services (and associated colleagues) to **review available training and e-learning** packages for volunteers, including giving volunteers access to specific e-learning modules on our Learning Hub.

Monitoring our progress:

24. We will continue to review progress in supporting our volunteers through the Communities Leadership Group, as part of regular performance monitoring of the Communities Delivery Plan 2023. This will feed into the Council's quarterly Integrated Performance Management process as applicable.

25. This will include further engaging with colleagues and volunteers on volunteer experiences as part of a one-year review of the volunteering principles and guidance documents.

Legal Implications

26. Legal, Insurance and Health & Safety colleagues have been consulted during the development of the volunteering principles and guidance documents to ensure compliance with relevant policies and legislation.

27. People Services have provided guidance on HR implications. However, the Legal Services Team have not reviewed the final documents.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

28. There is no financial cost to Staffordshire County Council in establishing the principles or guidance for managers / those supporting volunteers.

29. As volunteer time is of significant value to the County Council, our residents, and communities, it is important that we ensure our volunteers have a positive experience.

Climate Change Implications

30. Staffordshire County Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019 and committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Communities & volunteers play a vital role in helping us to achieve this goal and the delivery of our Climate Change Action Plan 2021-25.

31. While volunteering could lead to increased travel, typically many County Council volunteers volunteer within their local community. However, to mitigate against climate change impacts managers are encouraged within the guidance document to consider these. This may include considering if a role can be delivered virtually or ensuring that where possible volunteers are matched to opportunities in their local area to reduce travel.

32. Where individuals are required to travel for their role managers could suggest lower carbon impact transport for the volunteer to reach their destination for example public transport or car share options.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council – Principles and Guidance

Appendix 2 – Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council – A Guide for Volunteers

Appendix 3 – DBS Checks guidance

Appendix 4 – Induction Template Example

Appendix 5 – Example Volunteer Agreement

Community Impact Assessment – Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council

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