

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 09/05/23

Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Provide comments and feedback on the nine new volunteering principles.
- b. Provide comments and feedback on the guidance and supplementary documents for staff working with Staffordshire County Council volunteers.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

Summary

1. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:
 - a. Provide comments and feedback on the nine new volunteering principles.
 - b. Provide comments and feedback on the guidance and supplementary documents for staff working with Staffordshire County Council volunteers.
2. Feedback from the Committee will help to inform a report which will be considered by Cabinet in June, and comments will be used to further develop and inform the ongoing work, with the aim of providing a consistent and positive experience for people volunteering for Staffordshire County Council (SCC).

Report

Background

3. Ensuring our residents live in thriving and sustainable communities is one of the three priority outcomes in our Strategic Plan 2022-26. Our volunteers are critical to delivering this priority. The Council's Communities Position Statement 2023 set out some of the great things

we achieved with our communities and partners over the last 18 months, and much of this would not have been possible without the efforts of our volunteers.

4. The work to develop a set of principles and guidance to support people who volunteer for Staffordshire County Council is part of our Communities Delivery Plan 2023. This plan sets out how we will work with our partners to further empower our communities over the next 12 months and was approved by Cabinet alongside the Communities Position Statement on 15th February 2023.
5. Volunteers are central to the support that Staffordshire County Council provides for our residents and communities. Volunteers help us with almost everything we do, from maintaining our highways and green spaces, through to helping families and older people to stay independent, and supporting communities in our libraries, Community Help Points, and Family Hubs.
6. Feedback from our services shows that volunteers play a crucial role and have a positive impact on the delivery of Council services.
7. It is also important to acknowledge that volunteering has significant benefits to the individual as well. Research has shown that volunteering can have positive impacts on a person's physical and mental wellbeing. It can enable people to be more physically active, help them gain new skills, meet new people which in turn helps to tackle social isolation, it can also help them to gain more confidence in themselves and their abilities.
8. Following lessons learned and feedback from volunteers and partners during the response to Covid-19, an action was identified in the Communities Delivery Plan 2023 to review our current support for Council volunteers and develop some practical guidance for our staff. It was also agreed by the Communities Leadership Group to develop a set of principles for the organisation to commit to, to ensure all Council volunteers, have a positive and consistent experience.
9. Gathering the views of our current volunteers, our partners in the VCSE sector and staff who regularly work alongside Volunteers, has been central to create and develop the principles and guidance documents.
10. The nine draft volunteering principles have been developed with a range of key stakeholders. This includes Council service area leads and commissioners who work closely with volunteers, and our VCSE Capacity Building Framework partners, Support Staffordshire and Staffordshire

Council of Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS), who have considerable experience in the promotion and development of volunteering.

11. The principles have also been informed by consultation with current volunteers in Staffordshire County Council run Libraries, Community Managed Libraries, and our Early Years Children's Centres.
12. By committing to these new volunteering principles, the Council will strive to:
 - 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 give.
 - d. Be personalised, considering 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 that volunteers can provide feedback on their experiences with the Council.
 - g. Have volunteer focused 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.
13. The set of practical guidance documents for staff have also been created in collaboration with service area leads and commissioners who regularly work with volunteers, with advice and support from our Legal, People Services and Health & Safety teams. This guidance includes information on topics such as:
 - a. Planning and recruitment
 - b. Training and insurance
 - c. Expenses
 - d. Induction and supervision
 - e. Ending a volunteer placement

Implementation & Ongoing Monitoring:

14. Further to the work which has been undertaken so far, we will be seeking permission from Cabinet to approve the following implementation actions which we believe will further embed the principles across the organisation and enhance the access to support and guidance for internal managers:

- a. **Review our internal intranet pages** on volunteering to ensure the guidance document is provided in an easily accessible format to managers and is kept up to date with relevant information which may also include establishing a dedicated SharePoint site to host the information.
 - b. **Review our external webpages** on volunteering to explore providing an easier and more accessible way for individuals to register an interest in volunteering for SCC – this could include developing a singular access mechanism for those individuals.
 - c. Work with colleagues in People Services (and associated colleagues) to **review available training and e-learning** packages for volunteers, which may include the potential of enabling volunteers access to specific e-learning modules on the learning hub.
 - d. Provide **internal communications to promote the new principles and guidance documents** to managers / staff, which may include utilising Business Brief, an article on the Knot and / or Yammer channels.
15. We will continue to review our progress and monitor how we support volunteers, as part of monitoring the Communities Delivery Plan 2023, which in turn will feed into the council's quarterly Integrated Performance process as applicable.
16. In addition, the council will engage with its workforce and SCC volunteers to obtain further feedback on their volunteering experiences, in Q1 2024, approximately one year after the introduction of the principles and guidance documents.

Link to Strategic Plan

17. The attached volunteering principles and guidance documents link directly to 'How we Work' to "encourage our communities to help themselves and each other". Our work with communities and volunteers is also crucial to delivering SCC outcomes across a number of our wider strategic plan priorities.

Community Impact

18. The volunteering principles (and accompanying guidance for managers / those supporting volunteers in the organisation) aim to provide benefits to individuals with protected characteristics by promoting cross

organisation buy-in from all services who either work with volunteers currently or decide to recruit volunteers in the future.

19. Furthermore, the principles intend to promote a positive experience for everyone volunteering within the organisation, benefitting both volunteers themselves and their wider communities. A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) has been completed for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet in June 2023.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Volunteering for Staffordshire County Council – Principles & Guidance for SCC staff responsible for supporting or managing volunteers.

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

Appendix 3 – Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) Check – Information

Appendix 4 – Volunteer Induction – 1st day template (example)

Appendix 5 – Volunteer Agreement – Information & Template (example)
Community Impact Assessment (CIA)

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