

Report to: Personnel and General Purposes Sub Committee, 17th July 2019

Report of: Head of People Services

Subject: EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING POLICY

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Sub-Committee agrees to the introduction of an 'Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) Policy.'

2. Background

2.1 ESV is where employees could take paid time off to volunteer during work hours or claim back time for volunteering outside of working hours. Employees can choose to use their volunteering time to support a charity or community group of their own choice or to take up an opportunity provided by their company.

Our city plan has 5 key themes where social and voluntary action is key to their overall success. Enabling our employees to give some of their time back to their local communities can only enhance this:

- Stronger and connected communities
- Prosperous city
- Healthy and active city
- Heritage city for 21st century
- Sustaining and improving our assets

In a climate where the levels of corporate social responsibility can make the difference between the employer branding of one business over another, ESV is becoming increasingly popular in both the private and public sectors. It is recognised that a successfully managed employer supported volunteering programme can be a fulfilling experience for everyone concerned.



2.2 Our people strategy states we will focus on:

- Attracting the best candidates to work for us
- Offering great development opportunities to our people
- Creating the conditions in which being the best you can be is noticed and rewarded
- Supporting our workers to be happy, healthy and here
- Understanding what engages our workers and delivering what they need from us

Volunteering can play a valuable contribution to all of those ambitions by enhancing what we can offer to attract new employees; adding additional opportunities to our employees as part of the wider learning and development offering; recognising what our employees have said is important to them; and driving up levels of engagement and satisfaction.

Furthermore, there are many discussion papers highlighting the direct relationship between people staying connected, giving some of their time to things that matter to them and their higher levels of health and well being. In fact our staff survey with Best Companies specifically measures employee engagement in line with 'giving something back.

Exposing our employees to experiencing other environments, cultures, colleagues and delivery models can only enhance their contribution to the council and their ability to live our values, particularly in times of encouraging creativity and transformation.

- 2.3 Our employees told us as part of our excellence self assessment that we needed to improve on how we valued and recognised their performance. When consulting with colleagues about the things that would help them 'feel' valued, time off for volunteering was a common and recurring suggestion.
- 2.4 There is no direct cost to the council to introduce an ESV. This is about giving people time. That means we can very quickly and easily introduce something that is not only recognised nationally as good practice in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but is something our employees want.

Although there will be a loss to the council in terms of time spent doing the day job, there is clear research that indicates the levels of employees satisfaction and engagement as a result of being supported to do something that matters to them, has a positive impact on their performance generally.

3. Preferred Option

- 3.1 Adopt a scheme with a supporting simple request, approval and confirmation process (see **Appendix 1**) that enables staff to take up to 2 days additional leave per financial year for volunteering activities.
- 3.2 We will define volunteering in line with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations' (NCVO) guidance which states that it is:

'any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual'
- 3.3 In addition, we would expect any volunteering activity supported as part of our ESV programme to be based in or for the benefit of Worcester and not driven by any political or extremist view).
- 3.4 Volunteering can also include any internal opportunities to support for major city events and can either be for the short or long term.

| Example of Short term | Example of Long term |
|---|--|
| Supporting a charitable fundraising event such as a marathon, cycle ride Career talks in schools Team challenge Other Council events such as the Christmas fayre, park shows | Charity trustee School Governor Befriender or mentor Work in a charity shop Organise a community group |

3.5 Volunteering Leave could be taken in half or whole days but at the agreement of the manager, within operational demands and with at least 1 months notice of start to enable effective planning.

3.6 We will ensure appropriate mechanisms are established for gathering volunteering successes, enabling some council measurement of social impact.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Like some organisations, we could allow the flexi working scheme to support volunteering and therefore not introduce additional paid time off. The difficulty with such an approach is that it excludes a large proportion of the workforce who work fixed shift patterns and can not benefit from flexi time.

Such an approach also means that by default employees have accrued time off due to additional hours work and we then encourage this time off to be used for further work. The benefit of flex time off for employees is to maximise on work life balance.

4.2 We could adopt a scheme that enables staff to take up to 2 days additional leave per financial year for volunteering activities undertaken in non working days/hours. In other words, people would be gifted with time off to offset time spent on charitable activities undertaken in their own time. There would be an expectation that this is matched by an equal commitment of the individual's own time.

4.3 We do not introduce an employee supported volunteering programme and think carefully about our rationale for not pursuing something of real interest to staff that would cost the council very little to introduce.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The costs to deliver are manageable and arguably indirect. There will be an increase in staff downtime and an associated indirect cost implication for days lost to volunteering. This would equate to £23,760 pa (as at November 2018) based on 35% of the workforce using 2 days additional leave at an average day rate of £108.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

It is critical that any programme we introduce is built on fair and robust processes and practices in order that the anticipated benefits can be realised.

5.3 Risk Implications

- There is a risk of staff misusing the system in order to gain additional time off.
- There is a risk of council reputational damage should an employee engage with a charitable activity that 'hits the press' for any negative reason
- There is a risk of an insurance claim if we are not clear in our policy and practice about responsibilities

All risks are low in likelihood. Policy and process implementation will mitigate the risk.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

An Employee Assisted Volunteering Policy will be introduced.

5.5 Equality Implications

Fair and transparent systems will be developed to ensure all staff have the opportunity to participate.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

Staff time to develop, maintain and monitor our ESVP.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

Need to be clear on responsibilities during any volunteering time.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

Taking such an approach can only enhance the Council's social, environmental and economic impact.

Ward(s):

All

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Background Papers:

None