

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for  
Corporate Services

to

**Cabinet**

on

**22 September 2015**

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Policy, Engagement & Communication

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## Review of the Council's employee volunteering policy

**Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s): Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee**  
**Executive Councillor: Councillor Gilbert**  
**Part 1 (Public Agenda Item) / Part 2**

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### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek agreement from Cabinet on the recommendations to review the Council's volunteering policy.

### 2. Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet consider:

- 2.1 the implications of the revised volunteering policy
- 2.2 supporting implementation of the revised volunteering policy

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's existing volunteering policy was put together with the 2012 Olympics in mind and supports employees by:
- Giving extra unpaid leave to cover half the number of days that employees are using to do volunteer work (up to a maximum of 10 days per year). For example the employee will be able to take 5 days holiday out of their normal holiday entitlement, but will be given an extra 5 days unpaid leave in order for them to do outside volunteer work; or
  - Allowing flexible working hours
- 3.2 This policy has not been well used with statistics showing that it has only been utilised once since its inception.
- 3.3 The pledge to give the employees of large companies up to three day's leave to volunteer formed part of the Conservative manifesto for the General Election in

May 2015. The government has said it will publish these proposals in due course.

The plans, which would apply to all public sector workers and the employees of companies with more than 250 staff, would affect about 15 million employees and create an estimated 360 million extra volunteering hours a year.

- 3.4 The Southend Way, Culture Change Programme, allows an opportunity for the Council to reflect on the changing role of the Council within its community.
- 3.5 The need to create community capacity and reduce the burden on the public sector is now essential.
- 3.6 The proposed volunteering policy aligns to the Southend Way programme by promoting volunteering as an enrichment element that supports recognition and encourages increased performance.
- 4. Wider benefits** of having an effective volunteering policy are three layer: employees, the Council and the community.
  - 4.1 **Employees** who do volunteer work can use the skills that they have developed at work to help the community; learn new skills and experiences including, for example, leadership qualities which may benefit them back in the workplace; and improve their morale, physical health and work-life balance. Volunteering also gives a greater sense of personal achievement, boosting employees' confidence and improving employability.
  - 4.2 Supporting volunteers helps the **Council** to build and strengthen relationships with the local community and improve how it is perceived within it. It also helps to attract and retain high-performing employees, improves employee job satisfaction and sets a positive example to other organisations and business partners.
  - 4.3 The **community** relies on outside support to meet the needs of those it serves. Employee volunteers can help these organisations to deliver services and ensure early identification of community need and challenges. Skilled employee volunteers can not only provide the professional skills which voluntary organisations struggle to afford, but also help the organisation's own staff through mentoring and coaching.
- 5. Research**
  - 5.1 To identify best practice of other areas, a number of volunteering policies were researched which offer staff paid leave to volunteer. These included:
    - West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group
    - Cheltenham Borough Council
    - Surrey County Council
  - 5.2 The policies of these organisations offer staff two days paid leave or equivalent to volunteer and highlight the benefits to staff, the community and the Council. They include a set of volunteering principles which staff should adhere to during

the volunteering activity along with five easy steps to help employees get volunteering. Each policy has an application and evaluation form which employees must complete prior and following the volunteering activity.

## 6. The proposed revised policy

6.1 In light of the research above, it is recommended that the Council's new policy should meet the following criteria:

6.2 Scope of policy:

- Apply to all employees of the council, regardless of their status, but does not include schools
- Include a clear list of aims and volunteering principles
- Explain the process to get volunteering and the types of volunteering activities employees can undertake. Activities must take place in the Southend borough and directly contribute to the delivery of one or more of the Council's Corporate Priorities (see Appendix 2 for list however this list is not exhaustive)
- Volunteering opportunities will be identified to staff by holding yearly or twice yearly marketplace events at the Civic Centre or Tickfield for voluntary organisations to attend
- Include 'five easy steps to volunteering'.

6.3 The process will be to adopt the best practice identified in 5.2, for managers and employees as follows:

Managers;

- should allow employees to take up to two days (or equivalent) paid time off to volunteer
- should be satisfied that there are no conflicts of interest and consider the impact on the employee's job role
- should make sure there is something in writing from the voluntary organisation to prove that employees have volunteered
- should be able to write out for a reference to the voluntary organisation once an employee has volunteered
- should undertake regular reviews to consider the effect of the request upon the service area, customers and colleagues
- reserve the right to withdraw the agreement if the review shows that the agreement is affecting the service.

Employees;

- should meet with their line manager to discuss possible opportunities and agree it at least four weeks in advance
- can appeal their volunteering request if it is not agreed by their line manager
- should complete an Employee Volunteering Request Form (see Appendix 3) and send it to their line manager

- should, on completion of the volunteering activity, fill out an Evaluation Form (see Appendix 4) and share their experience with colleagues via the intranet noticeboard, one to ones, action learning sets etc.

#### 6.4 Costings

6.5 A generalised costing has been predicted using the levels 3, 7 and 12 on the council's pay structure to demonstrate impact to the organisation for two days a year.

6.6 The equivalent costs for these levels were calculated by dividing each salary by 52 (weeks a year) and then dividing the amount by 5 (days a week worked) to get the daily rate.

6.7 This was calculated to show three different examples as follows:

Level	Daily rate	Two day cost to organisation for 1 person	Two day cost to organisation for 10 people
3	£62	£124	£1,240
7	£111	£222	£2,220
12	£219	£438	£4,380

#### 6.8 Communications

6.9 The new policy will be promoted to staff as a key message from CMT through everyone emails and the intranet. It will also be advertised to external teams through their preferred channels. There will also be a dedicated employee volunteering intranet page which will include volunteering stories. Staff will be directed to HR if they need advice on using the volunteering policy.

### 7. **Other Options**

7.1 The current policy has been considered to be ineffective since its inception in 2012. If the Council did not have an employee volunteering policy, it would miss out on the benefits to employees and the community as outlined in the report.

### 8. **Reasons for Recommendations**

8.1 To put in a place a revised volunteering policy to maximise the benefits of volunteering so that staff can gain extra skills to bring back to the workplace and the community can receive extra support to deliver services.

### 9. **Corporate Implications**

9.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

Aligning the revised volunteering policy to the Council's Culture Change programme – The Southend Way – ensure that it becomes part of the recognition and enrichment element of the changing Council.

Volunteering gives a greater sense of personal achievement, boosting employees' confidence and improving employability which meets the Council's ambition of being an excellent authority.

## 9.2 Financial Implications

There is no direct cost associated with this policy however there will be an indirect cost if staff take the opportunity to volunteer as two days of their work will be lost per year.

## 9.3 Legal Implications

None

## 9.4 People Implications

There are potential resourcing issues should the take up of this policy prove popular with employees. However, this could be adequately supervised through robust scheduling of volunteering agreements and through the effective use of the performance management framework by Group Managers.

## 9.5 Property Implications

None

## 9.6 Consultation

None

## 9.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

This policy supports local voluntary and community sector organisations, many of which actively promote equality and diversity within the borough and for specific groups e.g. learning disabilities, BAME etc.

Community cohesion is as vital to a vibrant community as economic and environmental success and good local services for the diversity of people living in those communities. Quite often higher levels of community cohesion stem from, and are a result of, people having the opportunities to participate in decision-making and take an active part in the shaping of their community. This policy would enhance community cohesion through allowing participation in bridging the gap, changing or challenging structures or interacting with organisations or people of other communities. It would foster a sense of belonging, encouraging the understanding of different cultures and religions/beliefs whilst addressing social problems within communities.

## 9.8 Risk Assessment

None

## 9.9 Value for Money

None

9.10 Community Safety Implications

None

9.11 Environmental Impact

None

**10. Background Papers**

None

**11. Appendices**

11.1 The following appendices are attached to this report:

Appendix 1 – Proposed Revised Employee Volunteering Policy

Appendix 2 – List of the Council's Corporate Priorities 2015/16

Appendix 2 – Employee Volunteering Request Form

Appendix 3 – Employee Volunteering Evaluation Form