

TITLE OF REPORT: Volunteering in Gateshead – A New Approach

REPORT OF: Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment

Summary

This report provides an update regarding the process to create a new web based volunteer portal for Gateshead and the format for consulting with committee at the meeting.

The portal will form part of a new digital platform for volunteering that will be accessible at all times by residents, community groups, the wider VCS as well as other public sector organisations along with private sector organisations.

Introduction

1. Gateshead Councils Volunteers Plan has been in existence since 2013 and in that time the numbers of residents participating in volunteering has steadily increased.

The 2013 plan also incorporates a pathway to process volunteering requests. Since the creation of the plan there are over 1600 residents registered with the council with over 8,000 volunteers working across various council services.

2. The system for the management of volunteering projects has remained unchanged since 2013 but now requires updating. This process is now difficult to manage efficiently due to the increasing volume of volunteering requests received. The current process is also highly dependent upon council management of the volunteer recruitment and placement process.
3. This reliance runs contrary to the council's commitment to empowerment and capacity building of residents, communities and community organisations, many of which successfully run their own volunteering opportunities.
4. Through technological advancement there is a need to create a system that enables residents and community organisations to manage their volunteering needs more efficiently whilst considering the effective use of modern technology.
5. In addition much of the volunteer plan requires updating and more measured content is required with a new system for volunteering that is the central focus to the plan. The volunteer plan also needs to be incorporated as a key element of the council's commitment to making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.

Research

6. Initial research into volunteering was conducted by Northumbria University on behalf of the council which concluded in September 2017 revealed that the process for

administering volunteering was too bureaucratic and a “digital platform will have profound benefits for the organisation”.

7. To create a new portal it is intended to work with an external partner with the appropriate human resources, technical ability and expertise to develop and implement the project.
8. Northumbria University’s Psychology and Communication Technology (PaCT) Research Group along with Newcastle Universities OpenLab have both agreed to work with the council in the creation of a new system.

Consultation and Involvement

9. To create a new system we require a consultation process that includes key stakeholders:

- Community Organisations
- Residents that currently volunteer
- Organisations that currently facilitate volunteering
- Elected Members

Workshops will be held in January to enable a number of these key groups to meet with the Universities to consider their volunteering needs from a new system.

10. Committee on Monday 16 October 2017 (Minute CR12 refers) agreed to continue to receive updates and engage in the development of the new system. As part of presenting this report, officers and staff from Newcastle and Northumbria Universities will follow the following format:
 - Provide an introduction to volunteering and current processes
 - Deliver a session led by Newcastle and Northumbria Universities to gather views and thoughts from members regarding volunteering.

The format for the session will be as follows:

- Presentation - Overview to volunteering in Gateshead and outline of the current project
- To ask councillors for specific feedback on the project
- Question and answer session regarding volunteering in Gateshead and how councillors support and encourage volunteering in Gateshead

The session will last no longer than 40 minutes.

Recommendations

11. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
 - Contribute to the consultation through the format of the session as set out in paragraph 10 above.

