

Gateshead Council

Volunteering Recruitment Process

Final Report



CSB Consulting

CSB Consulting is a consultancy firm created at The Business Clinic of Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University. Our group is composed of Luc Cochet, Benjamin Hebert, Dan Serbanescu and Jordan Waugh.

Mission

Our firm brings fresh ideas and practical recommendations to organisations in need, by collecting and analysing primary and secondary data. Our reports aim at helping our clients to find concrete and applicable solutions to given issues.

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Gateshead Council

Gateshead Council is located in Tyne and Wear, Northeast England. Bordering the borough Gateshead are Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northumberland, County Durham, Sunderland and South Tyneside. With a population of over 201,000 inhabitants, Gateshead Council handles issues ranging from parking violations to recycling, libraries and much more.

Vision 2030 was founded in 2007 and since then, Gateshead Council has dedicated more resources into developing the already strong volunteering commitments. The Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering Team (NMV) created and implemented The Gateshead Volunteer Plan in 2013 as a means to increase volunteering in Gateshead. To achieve the increase in volunteers, NMV team actively promotes volunteering around Gateshead and works with local community groups and organisations to develop, manage and promote volunteering opportunities. Recent years have seen a steady increase in group volunteers and corporations reaching out to Gateshead Council as volunteering is a way to promote their Corporate Social Responsibility and develop team building skills. With over 1,700 registered volunteers, the volunteer plan has been a success.

Due to the growing success of a steady increase in volunteers, Gateshead Council faces increased difficulties in managing the growth and utilizing the database to increase future volunteers. Reaching out to CSB Consulting, a brief was created to aid in the creation of Gateshead Council online database volunteering, regarding the volunteer recruitment experience and the administration process.

Client Details

Gateshead Council

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Brief

Gateshead Council online database volunteering, regarding the volunteer recruitment experience and the administration process.

Key Duties

1. Designing a process for volunteers to declare interest through registering online.
2. Outlining a system gaining all relevant information required by each potential volunteer and opportunity provider.
3. Improving the online customer experience of current volunteers and opportunity providers.
4. Simplifying and adapting the current presentation of volunteer roles.
5. Improving the internal administration process for the volunteering section.
6. Reviewing the services of other competitors and how they present them.

The expected outcome for the client is to receive a report that is strategic, adoptable and relevant to move the business forwards and encourage all the stakeholders to buy in for future investments.

Executive Summary

In this part, we will elaborate about the key issues that surround the Gateshead Council regarding the recruitment process, the internal organisation and the online user experience.

Designing a process for volunteers to declare interest through registering online.

The current position of Gateshead Council in terms of registering volunteer interest comes through two channels; online and paper format. A PDF file is available for prospective volunteers to explore, searching for their desired role. After exploring the opportunities, the prospective volunteer can access the Expression of Interest form on the Gateshead Council website in the volunteering section. The second alternative is to manually fill out a paper Expression of Interest form and have it processed by a member of the volunteering department within Gateshead Council.

The underlying issue with the process comes from the way the data is processed. Having a Council employee process the data of each prospective volunteer by interest and other specific details is time consuming, lengthening the enrolment process and adding a level of possible error when handling multiple volunteers. Digitising and creating a process in which the volunteer data is classified by interest, qualifications and other metrics would create a seamless process when registering the prospective volunteer.

CSB Consulting was informed of the needs of Gateshead Council regarding designing the process and was given free rein to brainstorm possible resolutions without being influenced by previous strategies.

Outlining a system gaining all relevant information required by each potential volunteer and opportunity provider.

After the interest of the volunteer is registered, the next step is for the prospective volunteer to supply the Council with a list of references. Referees are required based on Human Resource, Legal, Insurance issues and to receive background information on the volunteer. Certain volunteer roles expose risks which require the volunteer to have knowledge and skills applicable to the role and legal right to take part in the activity. The lengthy process is accomplished by a Gateshead employee which requires them to contact the referees and validate the information. Once this is done, the volunteer can be officially registered and then apply for a specific role of their interest.

Potential opportunity providers have a similar application process when registering with Gateshead Council. After registering their interest, an administrator must approve the request and then the provider has to complete a Volunteer Role template specifying whether it is a one-off opportunity or a recurring role. If approved, the opportunity gets inputted into the database, waiting for potential volunteers to show interest. When a volunteer is found, their information gets sent to a predetermined officer which will approve or decline the request, which itself is a lengthy process. An interview is scheduled with the volunteer and if approved, their information will be stored and the volunteer will be subject to potential training before taking part in their volunteer role.

The complicated enrolment process displays inefficiency throughout the process as an employee is obligated to contact the referees and wait upon their response before moving on to the next step. The whole process can take weeks due to the interactions between all the departments, which can lose volunteers due to loss of interest, no longer having the need to volunteer or going to a different organisation.

Improving the online experience of current volunteers and opportunity providers.

The current situation regarding online interaction between volunteers and opportunity providers with Gateshead Council is limited to the expression of interest form and email collaboration between the Council and volunteers. The creation of a platform to facilitate the interaction between the Council and volunteers is necessary to eliminate massive spreadsheets with volunteer information that cannot give useful information to administrators without increased effort and resources. This information is very useful in determining the correct volunteers available for the corresponding volunteer opportunity. There is a need for volunteers to have access to information regarding possible volunteering opportunities and how to access them, what documents are necessary and what the whole process looks like as well as an overall timeline from registration to volunteering. Opportunity providers also need access to see how their needs can be met, whether through logistical, capital or human resources.

Registering volunteering roles with Gateshead Council is an elongated process at the current situation. After applying to be a registered provider through the Council, the request undergoes approval. If successful, the provider is given a Volunteer Role template for each volunteering role they demand, also specifying the type of volunteering role, whether a long term or a one off role. If the role is approved, it is posted on the role section of Gateshead Council database.

When a registered volunteer applies for the role, an email is supposed to be sent out within 2 days to acknowledge the interest and a request for references is made. If the process is fulfilled, an administrator sends the volunteer information to a volunteer coordinator, who will evaluate the fit of the volunteer based on prior roles and skills. If that volunteer is approved, the provider has to arrange an interview with the volunteer and determine if they find the volunteer fitting for the role. A detailed checklist has to be followed to determine the suitability of the volunteer with information such as training and legal requirements. If the applicant is successful, a letter of confirmation is sent out. If the applicant is still interested, he/she needs to sign the letter to move further along the process. An induction process covering information such as the role profile, supervision, health and safety, risk assessments, insurance and training takes place before the applicant commences the volunteering. If the role lasts longer than one month, an induction review must be completed to ensure the volunteer is satisfied with the role and that they are fully trained. It is important to note that the current process is exceeding the system's capacity and having a profound impact upon applicant delays.

Simplifying and adapting the current presentation of volunteer roles.

The process to register volunteer opportunity roles is fairly complicated and can be time consuming. The current presentation of the available volunteer roles is presented in a document which is uploaded on the Gateshead website. This PDF document contains information regarding the opportunity, the role which the volunteer could partake in, any support while undertaking the tasks and if any possible training might be required. Opportunity updates are not always current and some opportunities might not exist anymore, whether already have taken place or no longer planned. The extensive document is cumbersome as refining the volunteer opportunities is not possible and one must scroll through all listings to find something relevant to themselves. Volunteers can apply to roles that do not exist and then the process has to take place again if they still want to volunteer for a different role. Offering a method to upload and specify the current standing of available volunteer roles is much needed to eliminate the chance of volunteers dropping out due to inefficiencies caused by outdated information or lack of detail in the specifications regarding the opportunity.

Improving the internal administration process for the volunteering section.

Gateshead Council currently manually update their database which consists of all the volunteers, their contact details and references. One administrator is in charge of extracting the data from the Expression of Interest form and inputting it into the Excel database the Council created. From this database, the administrator contacts the potential and registered volunteers to interact with them regarding their inquiries or needs for upcoming volunteering roles. The administrator is also in charge of contacting referees that were given by the potential volunteers and determining the fit. The administrators' next task is to allocate the volunteer a role in their interested field and send over the contact information to the corresponding volunteer provider. With one administrator handling so many tasks, response time can vary case by case and communication with multiple volunteers simultaneously can be a daunting task when exchange of documents and information is occurring. Offering a way where the administrator tasks are greatly reduced can provide the potential volunteer more flexibility in presenting their qualifications in a manner that would give them more flexibility and reduce the back and forth communication between the Council and the volunteer. Simplifying the process can positively affect the volunteer process and reduce the likelihood of events not receiving volunteers, volunteers dropping out of the registration process or losing interest.

Reviewing the services of other competitors

Newcastle City Council has a similar service providing information to volunteers. The close proximity to Gateshead is an important factor in comparing the services. Newcastle City Council has a dedicated website for the volunteer centre which displays volunteering opportunities in the area of Newcastle. To be a volunteer, one has to send an email in order to potentially make an appointment. All online registrations are redirected towards the platform do-it.org (see below). Beyond that, Newcastle City Council does not seem to have a hands on approach to volunteering.

The Council of Hartlepool also has an independent website for volunteering that displays all relevant information, opportunities or contact information. To register as a volunteer, an online form has to be filled out, which includes 3 parts: personal information, preferred sector to volunteer in (healthcare, teaching, IT ...) and the personal skills and qualifications of the candidate. All the information requested is relevant to the volunteer role, however no references are necessary.

As far as the Council of Durham is concerned, there are some volunteering opportunities displayed by category, even though in every category there only is a general description of potential jobs. If one tries to find out more about the opportunities, he/she ends up on a page with general information.

No link to register or instruction on how to apply are displayed, only a login for people having an account with the Council is available. This website gives information to potential volunteers, however would not be suitable for Gateshead Council as they require a system where people can register directly online, as well as having access to all the relevant information they need.

Regarding Middlesbrough, all the volunteering opportunities are listed on their website, application is submitted by completing the online expression of interest form or through a direct contact.

In Cumbria, the Council of Carlisle, Kendal, Workington and others are all merged on a single website. They organise events in each city where potential volunteers can meet the organisations. In order to apply for a volunteering opportunity, they require to contact them directly and an appointment will be made to complete the registration.

Do-it.org is a UK platform listing “over 1 million volunteering opportunities that are posted by volunteer centres, national/local charities and voluntary groups” (Do-it Trust, 2017). Any individual can create a profile and search for any opportunity depending on the criteria. For instance, the location, interests, skills already acquired or wishing to, activities wanted and availability. The user can save openings he/she finds interesting and subscribe to organisations that could potentially post desired opportunities. When one wants to volunteer for a particular offer posted, he/she can “register his interest”, which will show the applications requirements and send his/her details to the organisation. Many Councils such as Leeds, Westminster or Durham collaborate with this platform by uploading all their volunteering opportunities. Another outcome is the “volunteering CV” that displays the number of hours volunteered, verified completed activities as well as the number of organisations the volunteer had participated within, which can be made public.

Regarding the online volunteering recruitment process of NGOs, some are using their own platform such as Greenpeace with Greenwire, a hub where new and potential volunteers connect and share events, photos, videos and news, working as an internal social media platform. Doctors Without Borders offer volunteer opportunities using an online expression of interest form via Google or applying through them directly. Organisation such as Amnesty International or WWF work the same. Finally, there also are some other platforms such as One World 365 or NGO abroad that work as do-it.org but for NGO’s volunteering opportunities.

Research Methodology and Ethics

Before any primary research commenced, a review of the documentation provided by the Gateshead Council was initially investigated. After, secondary research was conducted to establish the adopted volunteer practices of other private, public and voluntary organisations, which provided a clearer understanding of the market conditions and the issues at hand. This was achieved through viewing various websites, news articles and the political agenda/policies set by the UK Government.

The primary research conducted within this report used a mixed methodology approach, which focused upon both quantitative and qualitative research, whilst also acknowledging the importance that this study was based upon internal issues, therefore the data collected was about those involved or who had completed the recruitment process. The quantitative research involved the distribution of an online survey (see appendices) via the email listings at Gateshead Council. The survey itself was aimed to capture the insight of the recruitment process of the volunteers by the Council and its website, whilst also emphasising the experience the potential volunteer received from the beginning of the process to the end. Furthermore, the survey was developed and analysed through Qualtrics, a University affiliated software. Beginning with some basic information about volunteering status before proceeding to a combination of open and closed questions about the recruitment process/experience, whilst also keeping the survey to a maximum of five minutes to maximise participation/completion.

The results received from the survey helped direct the questioning for the qualitative research. In terms of the qualitative research, interviewing was chosen as the sampling method, ensuring the following groups were represented:

- Individual volunteers
- Group volunteers
- Corporate volunteers
- Employee's working within the Gateshead volunteer recruitment process

Each group had unique questions specifically designed to focus upon the different relationships they have with the recruitment process/Gateshead Council. Every interview completed was recorded by audio equipment, in order to create a written transcript of each session, which would later be analysed through grouping and coding techniques. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner that gave the interviewer the flexibility to expand on any important information given by the participants for a greater

understanding. The interviews themselves were conducted through a combination of telephone calls and face-to-face meetings.

Throughout the duration of the primary research all participants involved within the study provided consent, whether that was accepting the terms and conditions on the initial page of the online survey or agreeing to a telephone/face to face interview via email beforehand. Moreover, at no point were participants under the age of eighteen or within a vulnerable state to complete the survey or interview throughout the research process. Safeguards were put in place to ensure the security and anonymity of participants under the 1998 Data Protection Act, whilst also making all/potential participants aware that under no circumstances were they obligated to complete the survey/interview and held the right to withdraw from the study at any given point.

Research findings and analysis

Qualitative investigation

In order to find out more about the recruitment process and the experience of volunteers with the Council, we conducted interviews with four individual volunteers, one group of volunteers, a manager of a corporation sending out employees for occasional volunteering opportunities with the Council and a Council member. In designing the questions, we focused on phrasing them in a manner to avoid leading questions and thus biased results.

The first question we asked them was their motivation for volunteering. The answers pointed to free time they had available or their desire to give back to the community. One also mentioned it was because he/she cares about the environment, likes fresh air and the opportunity was recommended by a friend. When interviewing a group, we clearly understood that their main motivation was the desire to help their community and make their neighbourhood a nicer place.

Moreover, we wanted to understand the needs of the current/potential volunteers and why they chose to volunteer with Gateshead Council, for example why they started searching for opportunities and why they decided to do it with Gateshead Council. One of the individuals registered after meeting with one of the coordinators at a local event. He/she chose Gateshead Council because of the specific position he/she wanted. Another one simply searched online for volunteering opportunities in Newcastle and Gateshead and chose the latter one, because contrary to the first one, it had the position he/she wanted. One volunteer started because he/she was in the Council's emailing list from other services and received an email advertising volunteering. We can see that the reasons are different, this is positive since this means that several sources of recruitment seem to be working for Gateshead Council.

Regarding their views on the recruitment process, one declared that it was "straight forward, very easy" while two others said that it was a long process, one even describing it as very strenuous. They both justified this with the number of stages they had to go through. One volunteer explained that he had to call several times, did not hear from the Council for more than two weeks and it was a challenge to get completely registered. As they said, such a long and demanding process could discourage some potential volunteers, the other one corroborates this fact as he/she had a friend who, found out about the process, got deterred to the point that he/she actually did not even start it and gave up volunteering altogether. It is then clear that the recruitment process needs to be reviewed and rethought as it is not giving entire satisfaction and even doing the opposite of its purpose.

Following up on this feedback, we tried to find out more about their ideas on what could make the process easier. The answers mainly showed that a shorter application process would greatly help.

It was also advised that automatic emails should be generated when stages are completed to acknowledge the progress of the application and avoid delays.

The current system in place with local groups of volunteers is very structured and every single action or decision they want to make needs to be run through the Council. Although having its benefits, this system is showing its limits from the groups' point of view. Indeed, groups of volunteers advised that it would be in everyone's best interest to give more power to the local groups working with the Council. From their perspective, the current organisation of the Council does not allow them any freedom of action or decision which is, in some cases absurd. For instance, they spotted that something should be repaired using mortar and they were asked by the Council to give samples of different types of mortar so the Council could pick which one they should use. This particular example perfectly illustrates how the system is time consuming and the process of decision sometimes not adapted to the relevance of the situation. As mentioned in an interview, building on this idea of relevance, the people in the Council should work in a more practical manner. This implies the process needs improvement.

It was recommended that "the level of responsibility on these sites should be transferred from the Council to these groups". By doing so, there would be a time gained as this system is highly functioning on paperwork, bureaucracy and unquestioned processes sometimes not adapted. Moreover, not only does this system require more time and energy from volunteers for the same results, but it also leads to frustration. It has even been admitted that sometimes they just "go ahead and do it" and then tell the Council that it has been done instead of waiting for their instructions, filling their forms or asking for the procedure to follow.

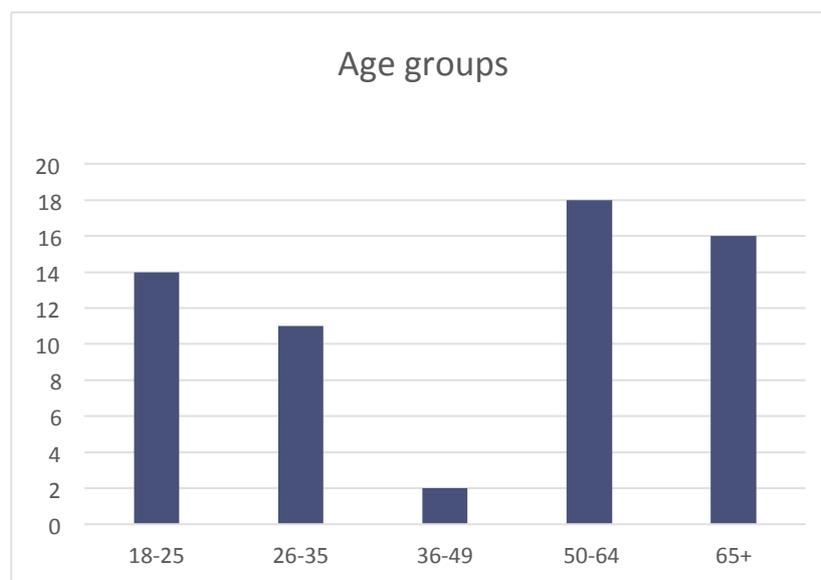
Finally all the participants involved agreed that an all online application process would definitely be helpful. Regarding implementing a platform with offers and a personal profile, they mainly agreed that it would improve their experience as volunteers since finding new opportunities would be made easier. However one person mentioned that it might not be helpful to their personal situation or other pensioners like him/her who do not require career development i.e. writing it in their CV. Moreover, the Council itself desires to enhance their online services and facilitate the volunteers' online experiences. Designing an online platform would respond to many of the previously stated issues and has been an avenue to consider.

To summarise, many of the people we talked to agreed to say that in itself, the volunteering experience they had been through with the Council was positive citing they “really enjoyed it”. The critics were mainly focused on the processes in operation at the Council, whether it concerned their recruitment process or their functional system.

The system/process is currently depicted as time-consuming by many and leads to frustration or even discouragement among members or potential volunteers. The main area of improvement will be to provide a service to modify their current practices or design new processes that will enable a significant ease of use and gain of time.

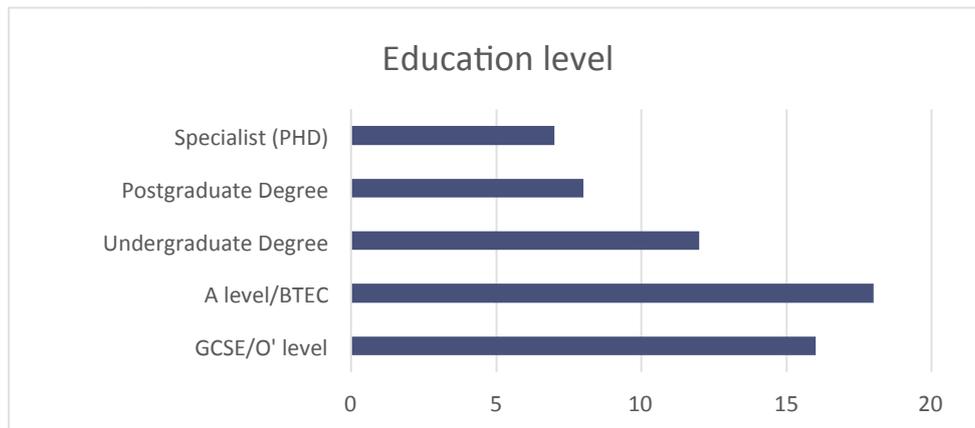
Quantitative investigation

Thanks to demographic questions, we had a clear representation of the sample of respondents. 103 people took the survey but only 61 respondents fully completed it. Even though several questions were responded 74 times, we chose for the sake of accuracy and reliability of our survey’s analysis to focus on the responses of those 61 respondents that completed the full survey, and discarded the remaining.



Out of the 61 respondents, 37 are female and 24 male. The age range of the respondents is the following: 41% have 18 to 35 years of age, 3% have 36 to 49 years of age and the 56% remaining are over 50 year-old. 34 have completed an A-level/BTEC or lower grade of school; 12 have undergraduate degrees, 8 completed a postgraduate degree and 7 a PhD. In terms of current employment status, 52% are not employed and among them, 69% are retired and 19% are students. 48% of the respondents are employed, half of them full-time and the other half part-time. 65% of the employed respondents are professionals, the remaining are either manual unskilled and skilled workers or others. These diverse situations, educational background and employment status give a rather mixed sample that

should give results that are relevant as they come from different types of respondents, as highlighted by the graph below.



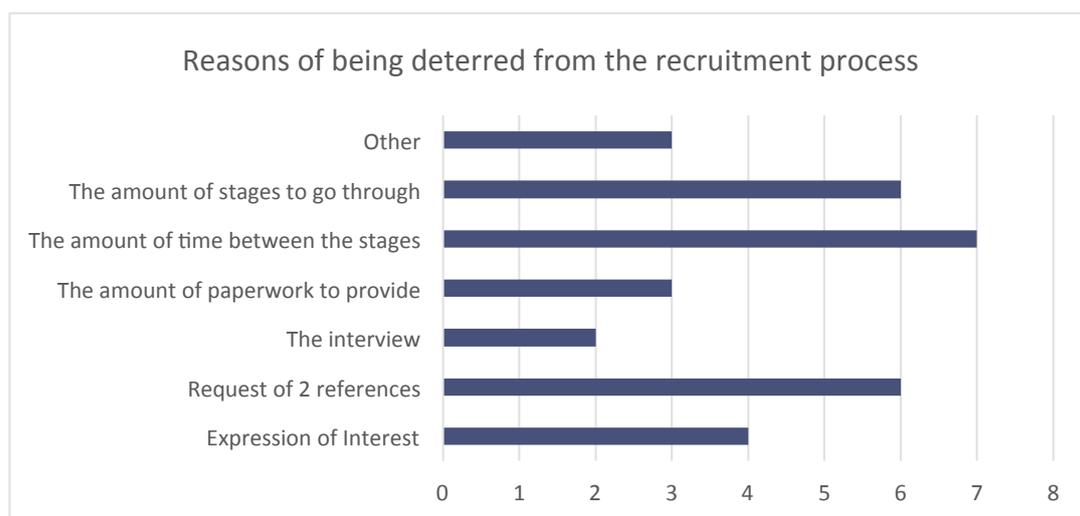
The first question was about the volunteers' year of registration and displayed various results as illustrated by the graph below. Furthermore, 43 respondents are still volunteering whereas 18 are not anymore. We asked them for what reasons they volunteered in the first place and 37% replied that they wanted to give back to the community and help people. The rest were just enjoying working for the Council, others were seeking personal rewards or just enjoyed working with others and having good company. Among the former volunteers, 39% couldn't carry on because of other commitments. The rest of them had either a lack of specific opportunities or were struggling with the Council, which made them quit. As a result, volunteers resigned for personal reasons rather than a real dissatisfaction with the Council.



In terms of the information available regarding the volunteering opportunities at Gateshead Council, the respondents were mainly satisfied with 92% of them finding that information relevant and 88% useful. 87% of the respondents found the information regarding the

different volunteering roles they were searching for. This highlights information is available from the Council’s volunteering section.

When it comes to satisfaction of the respondents towards Gateshead Council’s recruitment process, 72% are satisfied or highly satisfied whereas 28% are either neutral, dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied. 70% of the respondents found the process simple and 18% complicated. However, there were 20% that found it too long and 7% found it short. In addition to that, some volunteers or potential volunteers were discouraged by the length of the recruitment process, as one respondent said: “I was repeatedly asked for references and then ignored. The process took months and I got nowhere”. In fact, out of the 61 respondents, 25 were recruited after two weeks or more, which is nearly half of them. As a result, 25% of the respondents were deterred by the process, because of the amount of time between the stages and the amount of stages to go through during the whole process, such as the request of two references.



Around 74% of the volunteers who took that survey were offered their preferred volunteer role and 26% were not. However the respondents were mainly satisfied with their volunteering experience. 76% of them declared being satisfied or highly satisfied against 16% neutrals and 6% dissatisfied volunteers. About the experience of working with the Gateshead Council, the satisfaction remains high but not as much as for the volunteering experience itself. Indeed, 30% of the respondents were neutral or dissatisfied.

17 of the 61 respondents responded to an opened question asking them about any recommendation they would have to improve Gateshead Council’s volunteering process. Their recommendations covered several aspects of the survey’s questions, such as the speed and length of the process that takes too long between the stages, according to the respondents. Several volunteers pointed out the complexity of the process, in particular the amount of paperwork needed such as the references, and thought those requirements

should be only given and tailored according to the volunteering position that has been assigned. One volunteer also mentioned the possibility of a one off meeting, that would “save a lot of time and paperwork”, as he/she mentioned.

Finally, several respondents shared their views on a potential online application process for the recruitment of volunteers. Their feedback highlighted the potential benefits in terms of information, such as sending electronic acknowledgments at every stage of the recruitment process, with explanations and indications of what is expected and when. Moreover, as detailed by a volunteer, an online application could make the process much more straightforward with the possibility of uploading all required personal details and documents. The option for any external volunteering organisation to advertise directly on the app would “reduce the need for lengthy brokering by the Council”. As a matter of fact, when we asked volunteers if an online application would be appealing to them, 79% responded positively. However, the percentage of positive reply is, for obvious reasons, much higher among the 18 to 35 year-old (92%) than among the +50 year-old (65%), even though the later remain predominantly in favour of an online application.

Recommendations

Development of an Online Platform

Based on feedback, benchmarking and the Council's needs, it has been determined that resources and attention should be allocated to developing an online platform with the following features:

- Personal profiles
 - List of available opportunities and descriptions
 - Dashboard
 - Reviews and recommendations
-

Personal Profiles

In order to simplify the process of registering as a volunteer and applying to volunteering opportunities individually, current and potential volunteers will be able to create their online profile on the Gateshead Council website. This profile will contain their personal details, their geographical area of availability, field(s) of interest, time span of availability (days per week/month or hours per day/week/month or obligations).

They should also be able to detail their working/volunteering experiences, relevant skills, and education either by uploading their CV or by listing the above information in a designated section. A potential feature such as extracting information out of the volunteer's LinkedIn profile would achieve the above fulfilment more efficiently as well as legitimising their efforts.

After setting up their profiles, volunteers will be able to upload any documents required: CV, letters of recommendations or any other compulsory forms related to health and safety. This eliminates the need for the correspondence regarding the list of referees and thus a step of the current process of registration. The collection of documents will also enable the volunteers to apply to future roles without the need for going through the whole process again. For the Council, this collection of documents creates a database where everything is in the same place.

Profiles will be available for individuals but also for corporations, community volunteer groups and opportunity providers so all the actors can interact with each other.

Having this online profile will allow them to have access to different features depending on the type of profile.

- Opportunity providers will be able to
 - Post volunteering offers
 - View individual and volunteer groups profiles
 - Receive notifications/emails when there is a matching profile
 - Contact other profiles through the platform

- Individual volunteers, groups and corporations will be able to
 - View volunteering offers
 - View opportunity providers' profiles
 - Receive notifications/emails when there is an opportunity corresponding to their interests and/or skills
 - Contact other profiles through the platform

The implementation of such a platform would have several benefits for Gateshead Council. First of all, it would help them build their database with all the information entered directly by volunteers themselves through the platform. The Council would only have to access it instead of having to compile everything as they are doing now. This would help the Council remove the need to input data, freeing up time for other tasks.

To better guide the registrations and applications through the platform, emails will be automatically generated after specific actions. Volunteers or providers alike would like to be notified by email after successfully registering, applying to an opportunity/receiving an application or when a matching offer is posted or a relevant candidate comes out.

In regards of the data protection, the members' personal details such email, phone number and address will not be displayed on the platform without their express consent.

Listing of Available Opportunities and Descriptions

Issues with the display of volunteer roles have been mentioned as a potential improvement. To resolve this issue, we recommend that providers of volunteering opportunities should be able to post and manage their offers on the platform pending the approval of the Council. Current needs and availability will be automatically updated based on the fulfilment of the roles if done through the platform or by a member of the organisation in other cases. By only having to approve roles real-time, Gateshead Council will save the back and forth

correspondence with the providers. The current process is time-consuming for all parties and can deter providers as some events are time dependant.

The list of volunteering opportunities can be accessed by volunteers and the application process for the particular role can take place directly on the platform itself. This process will eliminate the need for a Gateshead Council administrators' approval for each volunteer's application. Furthermore contact will be made straight between the provider and applicant, also relieving the Council from this task.

At the moment, all the different volunteer roles are described in a single PDF file where you have to scroll and search for the individual roles you want to know more about, which is laborious. To facilitate this process, we suggest that each role is described on an individual webpage. To assist the query, roles will all be sorted by their category (education, skilled labour, health...) so volunteers can find the information they are looking for easily. Furthermore, the search can be refined by location, skills needed, availability required or simply by keywords. To achieve this result, the descriptions need to be standardised i.e. the same template should be used for all the roles, indicating:

- Job title
- Job rating (ease of application, see in Restructuring the Processes – p. 20)
- Organisation
- Time (duration, days of the week, number of hours)
- Location
- Mission description
- Personal requirements (skills needed, experience, certification(s), age)
- Support provided
- Contact details

Volunteers should also have the ability to save the opportunities in a list accessible on their dashboard or share them through email, Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.

Creating a Dashboard

An added value to the platform would be the addition of a dashboard. This page would recapitulate all the volunteering missions realized by the volunteer. It would show the number of hours volunteered, the organisation they volunteered with, potential offers and the reviews they received. This dashboard is only accessible and to be used by the registered user.

To enhance the sense of community on the platform and encourage interactions between members, there should be the possibility for all members to be reviewed and recommended. In order to be fair, the reviews and recommendations would work reciprocally.

Volunteers would be able to rate organisations regarding the experience they had as much as the organisations' ability to rate volunteers and groups of volunteers on their implication, attitude or reliability during the mission. That feature might require a systematic moderation from the Council before being displayed online.

Potential offers could be suggested based on the experience the volunteer has withheld within the volunteering experience and the volunteer has the ability to directly apply from his/her dashboard.

Gateshead Council's Scope of Action

Council's scope of action would now include:

- Moderating offers: opportunities will be posted directly by the providers but the Council will still be able to review and delete or modify them if necessary
- Detailing roles: as it is currently available, the different roles will be listed and explained in details in a designated section
- Posting information regarding events hosted, news from the Council, changes in the processes or on the platform
- Updating the content
- Managing traditional applications: in person or phone expression of interest

Restructuring the Individual Recruitment Process

As highlighted by some volunteers on the survey as well as during interviews, the main deterrent of the volunteering recruitment process is the amount of stages they have to go through, as well as the amount of time spent between those stages. Emphasis has been made on the pointlessness of asking for references, in particular for a volunteering opportunity as simple as picking up the litter or cutting the grass. As a result, in order to respond to that congestion of steps in the recruitment process, we propose to classify every volunteering job according to its ease of application:

- A1: roles only requiring registration
 - E.g. Litter picking
- A2: roles requiring basic training and/or instructions
 - E.g. Grass cutting, painting
- A3: roles requiring specialised skills and references
 - E.g. ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) volunteer support project
- A4: roles requiring a Disclosure and Barring Service (**DBS**) check and/or certification
 - E.g. Jobs involving children, disabled or caretaking

Consequently, the more responsibilities and engagement within the job opportunity, the higher the requirements for the Council. The objective is to ease and speed the recruitment process, in particular for jobs as simple as litter picking for which only the minimum requirements should be asked such as a generic Immigration check and requesting acknowledgement of limited liability on behalf of the Council. References shall only be asked for roles with responsibility and ethical considerations, such as interacting with children or skilled work, which obviously requires maximum precautions. This classification should result in an improved volunteer retention rate and ease the recruitment process of less-skilled jobs.

Empowerment of Community Groups

Currently within the Council, volunteers are required to follow a very systematic process to get any task approved. Bureaucracy has a significant effect upon the Council's operation and the volunteer's ability to achieve tasks within a timely manner. This complicated web of communication, creates a lot of difficulty for the employees of the Council but also for the volunteers on the ground. For instance, a volunteer from a local community group highlighted those issues when he/she explained how slowed down he/she was by all Council's procedures, in order to get anything approved. The idea of potentially switching some responsibilities to local communities, fulfilling the operational capabilities excited

him/her greatly. Indeed, he/she explained how local community groups know better about the area itself and consequently about what work needs to be completed.

This is not the only demonstration of how the communication process has caused significant delays for projects delivered by volunteer community groups. For example, we interviewed an individual in charge of a group of volunteers who gave us an example of the difficult communication process between the Council and local communities. As referred to in the qualitative section, a metal sign needed to be repaired. They needed some mortar of different colours and were advised to make several biscuits of different types of mortars, of different colours in order for them to pick the one to apply. As a person in charge of a local community, he/she should be able to proceed by himself/herself and should know the right mortar to use on a metal sign, he/she spotted damaged and planned to repair. Moreover, this very issue is still unresolved due to the lengthy procedures and numerous authorisations needed through different departments of the Council, demonstrating the frustration of the community group leader.

Therefore, in an attempt of reducing this complicated procedure and authorisation process, we suggest passing responsibility and accountability towards the volunteer community groups, with the hope of creating a philosophy of empowerment that can continue for years to come. Not only will this have a significant impact upon reducing time delays, additional time will be saved within the Council workforce. Cross-department interference will be prevented, allowing the staff to follow and implement other leads, which could have a monumental impact upon the Council's productivity and efficiency level.

How would this work? Understandably this ideology and culture of empowerment does not happen overnight nor would it be guaranteed to work. However, by selecting a few groups in different areas across Gateshead, which are loyal and trustworthy to the Council, there is the opportunity to offer these community groups the option to take accountability over the decisions within their designated field/area over a trial period. In terms of accountability/responsibility, it is important not to overburden the community groups all at once. For example, if it were a community group involved with the maintenance of a park, only offering control of a small section before offering more, which can be determined through regular reviews and evaluations with a member of the Council. Other areas of accountability may involve budget allocation for the materials and equipment over the course of a year or the training and development of other volunteers within the group.

Monitoring the transfer of responsibility from the Council to community groups can be done in a number of ways. Firstly, reviewing the community groups at periodical points within the year, starting with relatively short intervals such as quarterly or perhaps monthly, until the Council's inspection achieves all requirements before proceeding to extend to an annual inspection in time and meeting performance standards. Secondly as mentioned before in this section, allow the group to manage a small segment/area before proceeding to allow

the group total control over an entire community, which can only be achieved once adequate/sufficient evidence of competence has been provided.

Thirdly, creating a mentoring scheme that can be associated to the Council or a private entity, which allows the group to work with professionals, improving the necessary skills and experience expected by the Council in order to be considered competent to manage the community activity in the future.

In addition to the timing and efficiency benefits resulting from a potential empowerment, some financial costs could be prevented. To highlight this issue further a volunteer with a strong experience in grass cutting using mechanical equipment, who had to clean a cemetery in his area asked permission from the Council. Instead of being granted permission, the volunteer was required to register to a class on how to cut grass. Furthermore, not only had the volunteer previously learnt the skills and techniques necessary before the training course, but the training cost the Council £250. A sum of money that could have been saved if any background and experience checking had been taken into account. On top of that, the certification that he had to acquire in order to maintain the cemetery had not been presented to him, even 5 months after the training.

As pointed out by several people, handling external groups of volunteers and the operation of such activities could be eased by the improvement of the communication process between the Council and community group volunteers. Ideally, this would consist of having only one point of contact between the Council and the community group, which is currently hindered through numerous levels of bureaucracy and cross department interferences. Therefore, the nominated Council member for a designated group would have the authority to make decisions for any request the community group approaches with, whether or not the decision involves permissions, equipment, volunteers or funds. That individual would be in charge of all the local communities in a specific area of Gateshead and would have to fulfil any requirement those communities or the Council would have set. As a result, the communities would not have to get in touch with any department within the Council other than the nominated Council member for the group, which increases the productivity and efficiency for both entities without requests being lost within an enormous bureaucratic system. In fact, the nominated Council employee in contact with the group would be, among other tasks also in charge of assessing the level of empowerment given to the community groups by the Council. This enables those involved within the Council to assess how well managed, organised and sustainable each community group is, whilst also being in a position to judge the amount of operational and financial responsibility the community groups deserve.

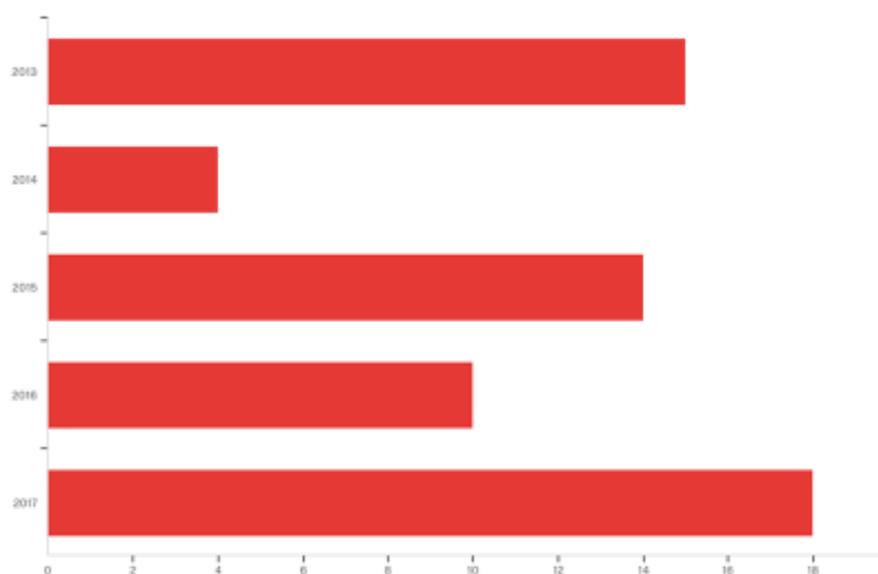
Conclusion

Ultimately, the current recruitment process of volunteers at the Council is outdated. The very process aimed at propelling the Council to become a national leader within volunteering has now become a hindrance. Designed in 2013 to achieve the Council's vision and operate within an environment that is now almost 5 years old, the current process is unable to handle a vast flow of applications and if the same practice continues, issues of sustainability will arise. Employees of the volunteering division are forced to concentrate upon processing the vast amounts of applications, causing delays and frustrations to many applicants before the volunteering has even started. Therefore, creating a platform will improve the efficiency of the recruitment process, whilst allowing employees the time and freedom to pursue other ventures, such as empowerment schemes like the one mentioned within this report. Finally, a digital platform will have profound benefits across the organisation, although until bureaucracy is addressed within the Council, the same question may be asked in another 5 years if the Council fails to maintain and change to the environment around them.

Appendix

Questions regarding the Gateshead Council volunteering recruitment processes

Q1 - When did you first register as a volunteer at Gateshead Council?



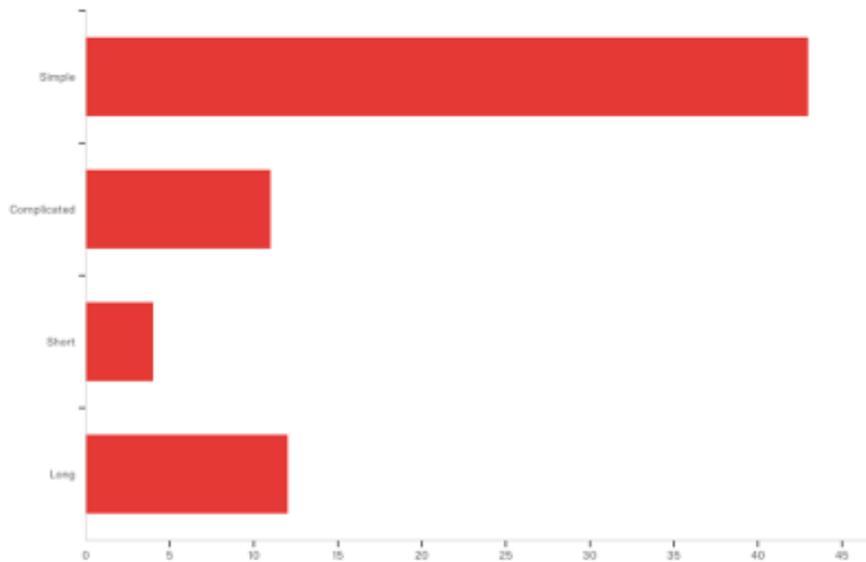
Q2 - How long did it take you to complete the registration (from the Expression of Interest to the volunteering)?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	1-3 days	47.54%	29
2	One week	11.48%	7
3	Two weeks	8.20%	5
4	More than two weeks	32.79%	20
	Total	100%	61

Q3 - I am satisfied with the recruitment process.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Strongly agree	36.07%	22
2	Agree	36.07%	22
3	Neither agree nor disagree	16.39%	10
4	Disagree	6.56%	4
5	Strongly disagree	4.92%	3
	Total	100%	61

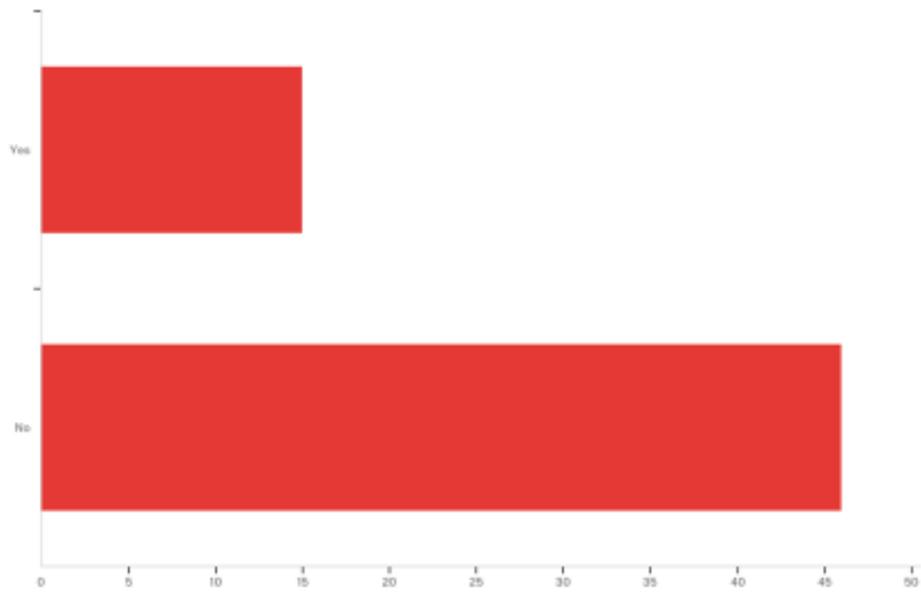
Q4 - How would you describe the recruitment process (Tick all relevant boxes)?



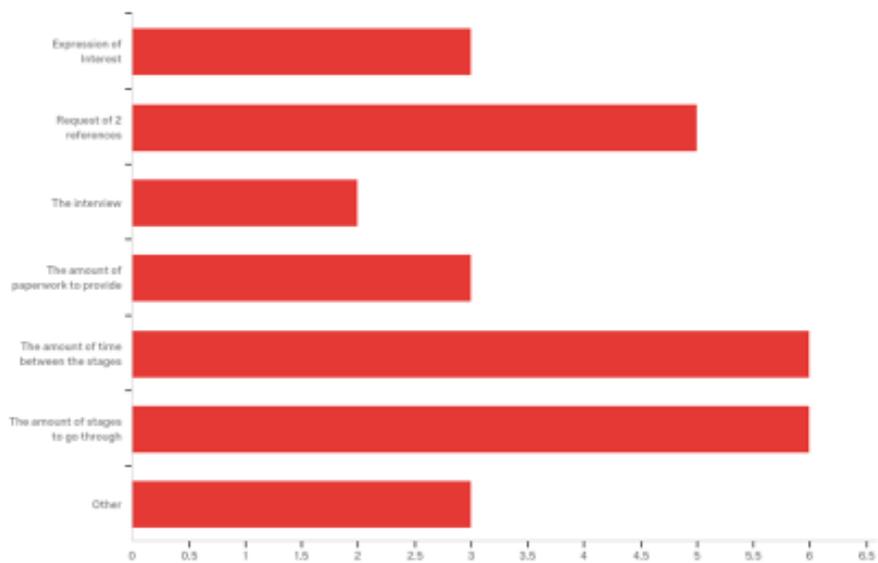
Q5 - Was the information available regarding the application process relevant?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	91.80%	56
2	No	8.20%	5
	Total	100%	61

Q7 - Did the process deter you in any way?



Q8 - If yes, at what stage were you deterred (Tick all relevant boxes)?



Information availability

Q5 - Was the information available regarding the application process relevant?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	91.80%	56
2	No	8.20%	5
	Total	100%	61

Q6 - Was the information available regarding the application process useful?

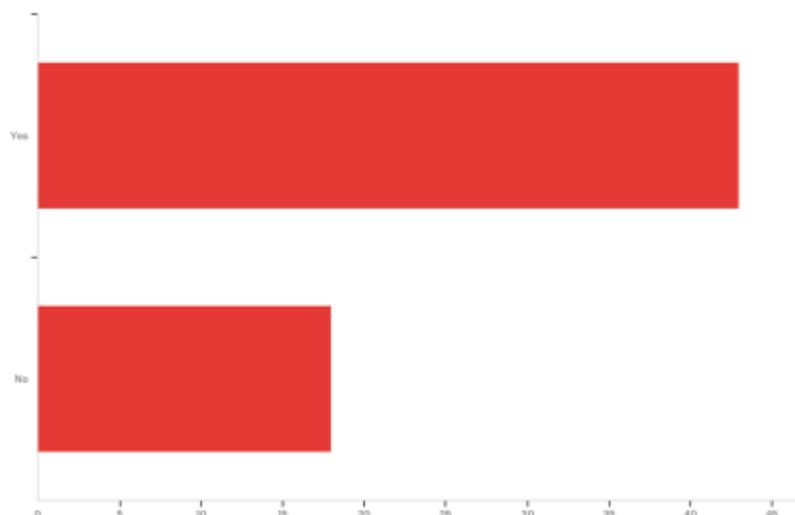
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	88.33%	53
2	No	11.67%	7
	Total	100%	60

Q19 - Did you find the information regarding the different volunteer roles?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	86.89%	53
2	No	13.11%	8
	Total	100%	61

Volunteering experience

Q10 - Are you still volunteering?



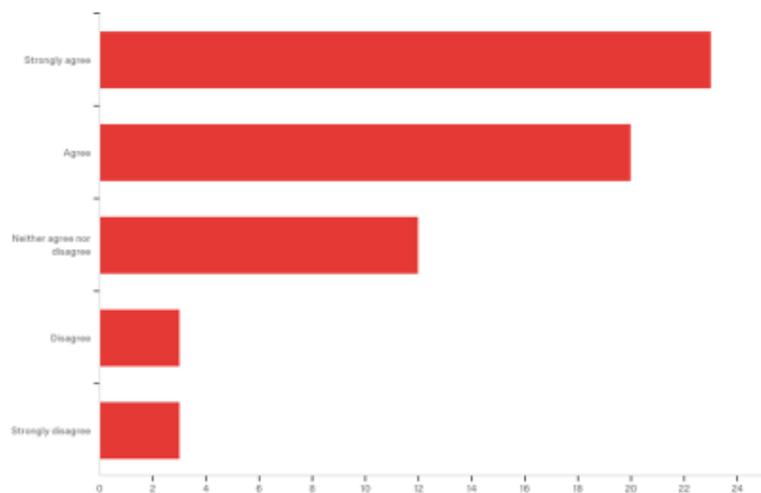
Q11 - If yes, please highlight one of the following reasons (Tick all relevant boxes):

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I enjoy working with the Gateshead Council	24.29%	17
2	Personal rewards	22.86%	16
3	I want to give back to the community and help people	47.14%	33
4	Other	5.71%	4
	Total	100%	70

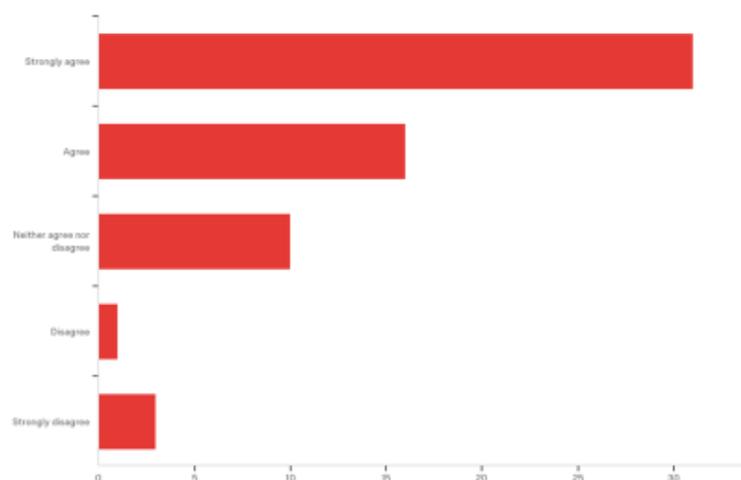
Q12 - If no, please highlight one of the following reasons (Tick all relevant boxes):

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Time constraints	11.54%	3
2	Other commitment	26.92%	7
3	I had a bad experience	11.54%	3
4	The organisation	15.38%	4
5	Other	34.62%	9
	Total	100%	26

Q13 - I find Gateshead Council easy to work with.



Q14 - I found the volunteering experience enjoyable.



Online application possibility

Q15 - Would an all online application process system be appealing to you?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	78.69%	48
2	No	21.31%	13
	Total	100%	61

Demographic

Q27 - What is your gender?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	39.34%	24
2	Female	60.66%	37
	Total	100%	61

Q28 - Which category below includes your age?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	18-25	22.95%	14
2	26-35	18.03%	11
3	36-49	3.28%	2
4	50-64	29.51%	18
5	65+	26.23%	16
	Total	100%	61

Q29 - What is your highest grade of school completed?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	GCSE/O' level	26.23%	16
2	A level/BTEC	29.51%	18
3	Undergraduate Degree	19.67%	12
4	Postgraduate Degree	13.11%	8
5	Specialist (PHD)	11.48%	7
	Total	100%	61

Q31 - Current employment status.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Part-Time	24.59%	15
2	Full-Time	22.95%	14
3	Not employed	52.46%	32
	Total	100%	61

Q32 - If not employed:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Carer	3.13%	1
2	Homemaker	6.25%	2
3	Unemployed	3.13%	1
4	Student	18.75%	6
5	Retired	68.75%	22
	Total	100%	32