

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Gateshead Volunteer Plan Refresh - A New Approach  
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### Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress to improve the opportunity to volunteer in Gateshead and consider a draft volunteer plan for 2018 – 2021. The plan offers a new set of commitments to support residents and community organisations in Gateshead to help each other out.

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### 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.
2. The 2013 plan also incorporated a pathway to process volunteering requests. Since the creation of the plan there are over 1,800 residents registered with the Council with over 8,000 volunteers helping out across our communities.
3. Volunteers in Gateshead provide help to a range of council services, most notably in the environmental, social care, health and sport and community centre areas.

### Analysis of the 2013 Volunteer Plan

4. The Volunteers plan has provided a co-ordinated approach to volunteering in Gateshead. The plan was structured around key principles which aimed to support volunteers as well as organisations delivering volunteer opportunities.
5. The plan aimed to make Gateshead the “Volunteering Capital of the UK”, whilst this was an ambitious target, it is not possible to substantiate progress towards this vision; it has clearly generated significant interest and recognition in volunteering which has resulted in the increases reported.
6. The plan and systems for the management of volunteering projects has remained largely unchanged since 2013. The result is that some of the systems and processes that support the recruitment and retention of volunteers are now difficult to manage efficiently due to the increasing volume of volunteering requests and the capacity available to process the requests.
7. It is timely to review the plan, the Council has recently adopted the Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives, and this will now supersede the current Council Plan. The pledge “*Support our communities to support themselves and each other*” is very at the heart of the Council’s approach to volunteering.

8. The current process is also highly dependent upon a system which requires officers to service the system; this dependency causes delays and inefficiency both internally and with community organisations and partners.
9. In addition, it has always been acknowledged that the Council's arrangements and systems only cover a fraction of the volunteering that takes place across Gateshead, many communities and community organisations co-ordinate their own volunteering opportunities and have their own effective systems and processes for managing these.

### **Current picture of Volunteering in Gateshead as at March 2018**

10. Registered Council volunteers have increased from 50 (2013) to 1,853 (2018).
11. Currently an estimate of over 8,000 volunteers (2018) active within Gateshead as a whole across all types of services and projects. There was as estimated 4,000 in 2013.
12. Corporate Volunteer Days continue to grow in demand, an estimated 2,000 (2018) individual volunteers have taken part in corporate and group volunteering activity since 2013. The estimated economic value to the Gateshead community of corporate and group volunteering activity is estimated at £125,943. Each individual volunteer has an economic value £104 per day.
13. Formal volunteering target of an increase to 25% achieved 51.9% this is a 188% increase on the target. Informal volunteering target of an increase to 40% achieved 67% this is a 97% increase on the target
14. The Neighbourhood Management & Volunteering Team currently support over 100 groups and organisations from Gateshead's VCS around the development of volunteer roles and matching of suitable volunteers.
15. Gateshead's fifth Volunteers' Month, took place in June 2017. Throughout June, 106,189 hours were recorded on the volunteer totaliser which equates to £1,380,457 economic value. This is a 5% rise from 2016. Volunteer's month will return in 2018 with both the totaliser and the volunteer's month grant.
16. General areas of volunteering include: Countryside & Environment, Sport & Leisure, Vulnerable Adults, over 50's, children & young people, community centres, Schools, cultural activities, community safety, community resilience, and others.
17. There are currently an estimated 25 Friends of groups at various locations throughout Gateshead. With an average of 15 members per group this is an estimated 375 volunteers. These groups all have their own individual aims and objectives as well as support needs.

### **Research – Consultation and Involvement**

18. Initial research into volunteering was conducted by Northumbria University on behalf of the council which concluded in September 2017. It revealed that the process for administering volunteering was too bureaucratic and a "digital platform will have profound benefits for the organisation".

19. To develop this area of work 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.
20. Through technological advancement there is now the opportunity to consider how we embrace modern technology to assist in the demands for efficient volunteering support. This also enables residents and community organisations to manage their own volunteering needs more efficiently.
21. Stakeholder sessions are currently underway; this includes sessions held with councillors on 22 January 2018. A summary of which is included at appendix 1.
22. Further sessions have taken place with volunteer co-ordinators (internal to the Council and external) and volunteers. A summary of the findings are attached at appendix 2.
23. The aim of a new online system is to:
  - Empower individuals to apply and take responsibility for their volunteering requests
  - Empower community organisations to take responsibility for their volunteering needs, advertising, recruitment and selection
  - Reduce the time taken for Volunteer applications to be processed by council officers
  - Reduce the time taken for volunteers to be aligned to volunteer opportunities
  - Create a system that provides users spatial information regarding volunteering activity and opportunities
  - Create a system that can provide users with information based on theme, age, activity, skills, competency and time required
  - Create a system that can manage the increase in volunteering requests that can be monitored by officers and users

### **A new Volunteers Plan for Gateshead**

24. It is proposed to change the language associated with the next version of the plan. One of the findings of the research was that when many residents were asked whether they volunteer the answer often given was no. Even though it was known that these residents did volunteer in a range of ways, when the question was re phrased to do you help out? The answer given was more often than not yes. With this in mind it is proposed to give the new volunteers plan **Helping Out in Gateshead**. This again supports the Council's approach to helping everybody to thrive. The draft plan is attached at appendix 3.

### **Recommendations**

25. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
  - Comment on the engagement and feedback received so far that is helping to define the brief for new volunteer system as set out in paragraphs 19 – 24.
  - Comment on the revised Volunteers Plan – Helping Out in Gateshead described from paragraph 25 onwards and attached at appendix 3.

A summary of the feedback from the consultation with councillor' feedback at the from OSC October 2017

- need a tool that makes it easier to volunteer
- continue to learn from other organisations
- accept the various levels of volunteering
- understand the motivations and factors that influence volunteers
- engage with people who don't or haven't volunteered
- use case studies to share and promote what volunteers do and they benefit they create
- records of achievement, development of CVs and points / experience that can count towards gaining entry of educational courses / obtaining qualifications
- who will operate the system / how
- future costs
- links to other organisations e.g. JCP
- areas of need / expertise
- ongoing development support to groups – the Gateshead offer
- speak to people who don't currently volunteer and find out why

### Feedback from workshops with internal & external volunteer coordinators

#### Coordination of funding

- Collaboration among like-minded groups
- Empower groups to help themselves
- Helping Voluntary Groups with Official Tasks (Governance)
- Governance
- Supporting independent
- Grow volunteering
- Independent support for groups re: volunteering
- Volunteer help
- Enabling Voluntary Groups to Become Self-Sufficient (if they want)
- Helping People Understand What They Have
- Keeping Volunteers/Voluntary Groups Safe (Legal)
- Helping Communities Create Voluntary Groups

#### Money

- Need Core Funding
- Difficulties to secure funding
- Business Support

#### Obstacles to volunteering

- Not everyone is comfortable with IT
- Digital inclusion
- Accessibility
- Managing Volunteering Hours
- Reduce paperwork
- Streamlining the process
- Volunteer Role Loyalty
- Anticipating Volunteer Numbers

#### Person-centred volunteering

- matching willingness to contribute to opportunities to do so
- tailored training, tailored support
- Benefits of being a volunteer
- service-centred volunteering

#### Recording and Rewarding Achievements

- Professional recognition + support. I'm a volunteer coordinator - get me out of here!
- Appreciation
- Volunteer retention

#### Volunteering how and why?

- Gateshead Council - do you understand VCS and volunteering?
- What is the role of the CVS in serving the people of Gateshead?
- Be led by VCS not council - bottom up
- Getting away from meaningless targets.
- Importance of Being Earnest (with your ethos)