

TITLE OF REPORT: Implementation of the Volunteer Plan – Annual Update

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

Summary

Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee previously agreed that that this Committee should receive an annual update of the implementation of the Councils Volunteers Plan 2013-17.

This report provides information about the number of volunteers, the types of volunteer roles, case studies (appendix 1) and the impact of volunteering in Gateshead's communities. The report also includes priority areas for future action.

Introduction

1. Vision 2030, the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy, sets out six big ideas to help achieve the vision for Gateshead. One of the big ideas is Gateshead Volunteers, enabling everyone to make a recognised contribution to their community. Gateshead volunteers has been a council priority since 2007 when Vision 2030 was agreed and is founded upon a strong history of volunteering in Gateshead, creating strong communities.
2. Vision 2030, Gateshead Volunteers, seeks to achieve the following outcomes:
 - a. The voluntary and community sector thrives within Gateshead
 - b. Vibrant, sustainable communities through a culture of supporting community and voluntary sector organisations in the delivery of local services
 - c. Volunteering recognised as important in career development
 - d. Volunteering frameworks that help volunteers develop their skills
 - e. Gateshead known as a national leader in promoting and supporting volunteering
 - f. Social responsibility is achieved through local businesses participating in supporting volunteers.
3. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/2017-2020/2021 states that the Council will continue to seek to mitigate demand pressures within services by capacity building within communities, including, where appropriate, work with partners and volunteers.
4. The Council Plan 2015-2020 identifies "Gateshead Volunteers" as one of our six big ideas focused on people and places.

5. Gateshead Council Volunteers Plan 2013-17 provides a strategic and structured approach to volunteering in Gateshead. It identifies principles, priorities and the infrastructure through which the Council will significantly accelerate and develop volunteering across Gateshead in the Council Plan period. The plan ensures that volunteers are supported effectively in areas such as training, skills, expenses and health and safety so that the principles of volunteering are not undermined.
6. The targets in the plan were to increase formal volunteering from 18% to 25% and to increase informal volunteering from 34% to 40% by 2017, an additional 20,000 volunteers. To reach this target it required an increase the number of volunteers by 5,000 each year.

Progress to Date

7. The volunteer plan originally identified five objectives to be achieved, these included:
 - Enable everyone to make a recognised contribution to their community and become the volunteering capital of England
 - Deliver economic growth and wellbeing
 - Volunteering activity adds value to local service provision, enabling neighbourhoods to have services that would not otherwise be provided and enhancing core public services.
 - Increase formal volunteering from 18% to 25% by 2017
 - Increase informal volunteering from 34% to 40% by 2017
8. Volunteering continues to grow and as it becomes better understood, there is now an opportunity to update the original volunteer plan objectives and principles whilst recognising current and forthcoming council budgetary challenges.
9. Communities in Gateshead continue to develop and evolve and therefore the need to provide support and guidance increases. Officers continue to monitor activities within communities and volunteering, recording the number of volunteers now occurs regularly.

Volunteer Recruitment

10. Since 2013 there has been a single point of access to volunteering with Gateshead Council. All documentation and an outline of the process are available online:
<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/People%20and%20Living/Volunteering/home.aspx>
11. The most popular requests relate to children & families, supporting vulnerable people and parks and open spaces. More volunteers are also becoming in supporting victims of the Anti-Social Behaviour, partly as a result of a project commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
12. The number of voluntary and community groups requesting support and accessing our service continues to increase. Currently there are over 100 volunteer roles available for individuals to choose from. All of these volunteer roles can be found on the Gateshead Council website. Support is tailored to the needs of each community organisation making a request.

13. The current estimate of the number of volunteers across council services and within the voluntary and community sector is as follows:

- Community Links – 60
- Countryside & Environment – 500
- School Governors – 1,200
- General School Volunteers - 900
- Community Centres – 800
- Youth Offending Team – 25
- Youth Council – 30
- Children Centres – 50
- VCS Organisations and others – 1,000
- Sports – 400
- Heritage, Events & general Culture - 500
- Libraries – 800
- Employee Volunteers – 50
- Private Sector Employee Volunteers – 250
- Jewish Community 1,500

Total – 8,065

14. The total of just over 8,000 represents a 77% increase (up from 6,230) from 2015, and means that approximately 24,200 additional residents are now participating in volunteering since the Plan was implemented in 2013, ahead of the 2017 target of 20,000 in the Plan.

15. There are now a total of 1,417 volunteers listed on Gateshead Council's Central Volunteer system. The Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering Team has developed strong links regarding volunteering opportunities with local education providers including Gateshead College, Newcastle College, Northumbria and Newcastle Universities.

16. As volunteering increases working in partnership is becoming increasingly important to ensure effective and efficient working. The Council is also careful to ensure there is clear delineation between volunteers and employees of the council. This ensures that volunteers and officers can work together.

17. The definitions are:

Employee – a paid role in which an individual undertakes specific duties within their job description which contributes to the statutory function of Gateshead Council.

Volunteer – an unpaid role which adds value to the Councils statutory function by undertaking non statutory tasks.

18. As services continue to develop and provide volunteer roles employees and volunteers continue to work alongside each other. The council coordinates much of this work through a steering group of officers where regular opportunities and information is disseminated and shared.

Gateshead Volunteers Month

19. Gateshead's fourth Volunteers' Month, took place in June. The aim of Volunteers Month was to:
 - Celebrate the positive contribution made by existing volunteers
 - Recruit more volunteers
 - Enable local people to contribute to their community
 - Confirm Gateshead's reputation as a national leader in volunteering
20. Throughout June, 101,170 hours were recorded on the volunteer totaliser which equates to £1.3m economic value. This is a 62% rise from last year.
21. £11,600 was allocated to 54 groups and organisations across Gateshead from the Volunteers' Month Grant Scheme. Various events were held during the month long activities. These ranged from community celebrations, Queens tea parties, training sessions and award ceremonies that gave recognition to the commitment made by Gateshead residents.
22. A celebratory event was held at the end of June in Trinity Square. Over 20 organisations took part in the event including, Citizens Advice Gateshead, Sight Service, Jazz NE and Age UK. Interactive volunteering opportunities were offered to local people on the date and the event was a great success. The Trinity Square management staff has informed the council that footfall for the day was 16,000, the highest footfall level of the month and for any event at Trinity Square.

Group volunteering and the Corporate Offer

23. To enable group volunteering to take place, a recruitment process was created. This enables volunteer activities to sit within the council's insurance policy for volunteering. This therefore avoids processing large numbers of individual requests. Work has begun on creating larger group activities with collective tasks and outcomes.
24. The most popular group volunteer opportunities at present are environmental projects or decoration tasks. These enable the volunteer teams to undertake a task where the end result creates a visible and tangible impact in a community or within a building.
25. The demand for group volunteer opportunities continues to grow.
26. Examples of organisations who have volunteered as volunteering teams include Virgin Media, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), The AA, and also Gateshead Council services. Case studies are attached at Appendix 1.

Corporate Volunteering Offer

27. Officers are developing a corporate volunteer offer to organisations and businesses who want their employees to volunteer as an activity within Gateshead.
28. Volunteering enables team building amongst their employees and also allows their employees to work in a different environment.

29. Where opportunities arise businesses are matched with a community group or organisation that requires volunteering assistance. In some cases this requires the creation of a bespoke package in partnership between all parties so that all expectations and needs are met.
30. Opportunities available to organisations could range from a one day set of activities but has the potential to be longer term depending on the needs of the parties involved.
31. Discussions are taking place with Virgin Media for example regarding how volunteering opportunities can be embedded within their corporate employee volunteer commitment.

Gateshead Council Employer Volunteering Scheme

32. In May 2014 the Gateshead Council Employees Volunteering opportunity was refreshed enabling employees to request up to 15 hours paid time to volunteer in Gateshead over a 12 month period. This needs to be matched by at least 15 hours pro rata of employees own time.
33. There are currently 44 employees registered as volunteers through the scheme. This is a 48% increase from 2015.
34. Employees are involved in various volunteering projects, these range from one to one support projects through to employees participating in a wider group.
35. Further discussions will continue within Senior Management Teams across the council to enable the message and opportunity to be cascaded down to officers throughout the council.

DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) Checks

36. DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) Checks are required when a regulated activity is undertaken which will be unsupervised. The Officer who is delivering the volunteer role needs to initiate the DBS application with the volunteer.
37. All council registered volunteers do not necessarily have to have a DBS check. This depends upon the specific volunteer role.
38. Voluntary and Community Groups need to initiate their own DBS checks for their own individual volunteers. This can be completed through Gateshead Council as an Umbrella Organisation; however organisations need to sign up to the agreement first. Once the agreement is signed Groups will be provided with online access to the council's portal for DBS applications.
39. The Neighbourhood Management & Volunteering Team can provide information and clarity on the DBS process but cannot process checks for roles the team are not delivering.

Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (NCVS)

40. Gateshead Voluntary Organisations Council dissolved in May 2016 due to financial difficulties. To ensure the voluntary and community sector in the Borough continued to have access to advice, guidance and an independent voice, the Council entered into an agreement with NCVS to provide some of the activities a Council for Voluntary Service typically provides. This was agreed as an interim arrangement whilst the Council consults with the sector and its partners on the approach to be implemented from April 2017.
41. The original targets set out within the Volunteers Plan (outlined in paragraph 6) included increasing informal and formal volunteering, and increasing volunteering overall by 20,000 volunteers by 2017. The Agreement with Newcastle CVS does not incorporate volunteering. In order to achieve the 2017 target, the Council took over the responsibility to aim towards an additional 5,000 volunteers in 2016. The support provided by the Council will include support to organisations regarding volunteer policies and management, individual support to volunteers, group volunteering opportunities and corporate volunteer experiences.

Future Actions

42. There are a number of priority areas for future action which have been identified in the delivery of the Volunteers Plan:
 - Refresh the Volunteers Plan principles and the objectives set.
 - Continue to develop and communicate the definition of an employee's role and a volunteers role throughout council services
 - Find ways to continue to support volunteers despite challenges which may arise from future budget proposals
 - Create a new management system to record volunteers, employee volunteers and volunteer hours contributed by voluntary groups are collated in one location.
 - Continue promotion of the Employee Volunteering Scheme.
 - Identify opportunities for group volunteering projects for teams
 - Ensure continued support and development for Friends of Groups throughout Gateshead.
 - Explore arrangements for joint working with other agencies and external organisations.
 - Consider how volunteers can add further value to current services provided by Gateshead Council.
 - Continue to develop and promote the corporate volunteer opportunities.
 - Continue to create a more diverse range of roles across Gateshead, working with Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service, communities and community groups to offer more choice to potential volunteers.
 - Consider volunteering roles in the development of new policies and strategies
 - Develop closer working relationships with Trade Unions regarding the creation of further volunteering opportunities.

Recommendations

43. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:
- i. Note and comment on the progress of implementation of the Volunteers Plan
 - ii. To comment on whether sufficient progress has been made on implementing the Volunteers Plan
 - iii. Consider the future actions as set out in paragraph 42

Lindsay Murray, extension 2794

Case Studies

All individuals discussed within these case studies have given permission for their information to be presented.

Case study 1 – Community Links, supporting vulnerable people – Individual Volunteering

Alan Ayre

Alan is the current Gateshead Volunteer of the Year and has offered regular, valuable, volunteer support since 2005 in a wide range of groups and on a 1:1 basis.

Alan has undertaken extensive volunteer training, including relevant Distance Learning subjects, in order to carry out his role efficiently, effectively and safely.

Alan trained as a Health Walk Leader and developed interesting, informative local history information which he uses, during the walk, to illustrate the changing face of Gateshead.

Alan invites participation from all group member and volunteers by asking them to share their own local knowledge.

Alan has enhanced the lives of many adults with learning disabilities by offering friendship, respect, the opportunity to share fun and rewarding activities and acknowledging their many skills and talents.

Alan has supported service users to be active members of their local community, show and develop their skills and extend their knowledge of the wider world.

Alan has volunteered alongside employees within Community Links throughout his period of volunteering.

Mary Ambury

Mary began her Community Links volunteer role in 2015 at Little Bites, a weekly enterprise café, run by people with learning disabilities, in Kibblesworth Millennium Centre.

The café provides opportunities for service users to develop employment related skills in the community.

Mary has developed excellent relationships with the service users and in August 2016 the Enterprise Lead Worker said

“Mary is an asset to our team, she is hard working, enthusiastic and always willing to go that extra mile. She is an excellent communicator and her positive approach to supporting people has enabled us, as a team, to develop strategies that have empowered people to obtain new skills”

Group Volunteering – Community Links

A group of NHS volunteers enjoyed a day volunteering at the Harvest and Help allotment in August. The event was organized by Community Links in partnership with the Durham University Community Engagement Team.

The NHS team enjoyed a day in the sun painting sheds, fences and preparing flower pots for planting. This practical support was of great benefit to the Enterprise members who provided a warm, friendly welcome to the team and shared their own gardening knowledge and skills.

Foodbank Collection – Community Links

7 Community Links service users and 2 volunteers supported a very successful Foodbank Collection in the Civic Centre in June where 159 kgs of food and £21.00 in donations was donated from Council employees and visitors to the Civic Centre. This activity provided the opportunity for service users to support their local community and the collection is much appreciated by Gateshead Foodbank.

Case Study 2 – The Cecily Douglas Memory Garden at Springwell Estate – Group Volunteering

Silverline Memories is a registered charity that focuses on improving the quality of life for people living with dementia and those that care for them by providing places to go and activities to participate in.

Silverline Memories expanded their services to Gateshead and began the project of transforming the abandoned Springwell Estate Community Garden into the newly named Cecily Douglas Memorial Garden. The site was then tidied and cleared with volunteers from AA insurance services in December 2015. The project was made possible by a team of volunteers who attended the garden on Wednesday 20th July 2016 to help paint fences and plant flowers and tidy unused spaces.

The project was associated with Marks and Spencer's and was named as an M&S #SparkSomethingGood Event. M&S donated flowers to support the garden.

“It was great to see volunteers of all ages and walks of life show up to help out at the garden and dedicate so much time and effort to improving the look of the site. They helped plant various different flowers, fruits and vegetables and some even got handy with a paintbrush and paint pot to make over the flowerbed fences. They have helped to create a drastic change to the once ran down and over grown garden by showing dedication and commitment. As a result of their efforts the garden is now a beautiful place for the friends, family and carers of those living with dementia and the general public to enjoy and look after. It has inspired younger generations to help out when it comes to bringing Gateshead's community together and helped dementia sufferers to find a new lease of life”

Case study 3 – Pelaw Youth Centre – Corporate Offer Volunteering

A team of 8 employees from Virgin Media attended Pelaw Youth Centre in June to complete some redecoration work within the building.

Risk assessments were completed and the required health and safety issues identified and considered. The main task for the day included painting the large community hall within Pelaw Youth Centre.

The Virgin Media employees stayed at the centre for the full day and interacted with the members of the youth centre who were also present.

The Youth Centre committee and users were extremely grateful for the work completed and now have a freshly painted large community hall that they can now continue to use for community based project work with groups and activities.

The volunteers explained that they appreciated the chance to work in a different environment on new tasks with colleagues whilst benefitting a project within Gateshead.

Virgin Media were so pleased with the project that they are currently in discussions with officers regarding a number of other staff teams within their organisation.

Case Study 4 - ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) Volunteer support – Individual volunteer role.

There are a number of individual residents within Gateshead who are subject to ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) which affects them in their own home. These cases are classified by officers as non-criminal.

The Gateshead Housing Company do not have the resource to support these residents. It is recognised that these residents need support and guidance in order to resolve problems.

The Community Safety Board (through the Police Crime Commissioner) awarded funding direct to the council to create an ASB volunteer led project to ensure that residents can be supported.

Working with Gateshead Housing Company, the Development Officer for volunteering developed the project where individual tenants could access support. Initially this project will only involve Gateshead Housing Company Tenants.

A tailored 10 week (20 hours) training programme was developed specifically for this project. The training includes counselling skills, listening skills, safety information and potential support services and stakeholders.

12 volunteers were initially assessed as suitable for the programme. Once fully registered they commenced the training in May 2016. Following the completion of the training, 5 volunteers were fully trained, DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) check cleared and were ready for placement.

Neighbourhood Management working alongside Gateshead Housing Company Estate Officers, matched the 5 active volunteers to cases that were referred to the project. Working alongside the identified Estate Officer, the volunteer then supported the individual by using the information they had been given and the training that they had received.

The volunteer support to the individual enables the Estate Officer to concentrate their time and effort on core service delivery. The volunteer then concentrates on the added value to the core service. This can demonstrate the cooperation between volunteers and employees and also ensures that the tenant is receiving support.

The volunteers involved in the initial stage of this project are also going to be part of the training for the 2nd stage of the project which is due to start in November 2016. The volunteers will be able to share their experiences with the new volunteers that will soon embark on the training.

Case study 5 – Individual Employee Volunteer

Employee volunteering take up has gradually increased over the year. More employees are becoming aware of the fact that they can claim up to 15 paid hours to use towards their own volunteer activity.

Employees who have registered through the scheme are involved in a variety of groups and activities. These range from youth football teams, school governors, to officers volunteering at homeless shelters.

An example of one of these volunteers is Helen Gaffney. Helen is a Community Engagement Officer within Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering. Helen is an active member of the 'Wrekenton Methodist Community Church organisation.

Over the years Helen has been involved at the church she has contributed countless hours. Helen completed the required documentation within the policy and provided the required 15 hours match. Once authorised to volunteer Helen was then able to take another 15 hours to continue her volunteer activity at the church.

Without the hours through the Employee Volunteering Policy Helen wouldn't have been able to complete some essential monitoring information and funding applications in the time required. This benefitted the group greatly.

Helen explains

“As an employee of Gateshead Council I think it is wonderful to have an employer who recognises the importance of volunteering and the benefits it has for the community and the individual”.

Case study 6 – Cedars Academy – Volunteer project

Within Gateshead central Library there is an Autism Hub. The Hub itself provides a drop in point to share information and receive help and advice.

The Hub is very successful and relies upon employees of the library and volunteers. Discussions have recently taken place between the Central Library and Cedars

Academy. After discussing the Hub with some of the 6th year pupils in the school, two of the students declared an interest in becoming involved in the project.

The students have autism and feel that they can support people who visit the Hub. The school also feel that in turn this will develop their own personal skills and be beneficial to them.

Support has been provided from the school and the Central Library to enable the two students to become volunteers. Using the central volunteer recruitment process the students will be registered as volunteers and will be supported by the Volunteer Coordinator for the Library service.

The Volunteer Coordinator working with the school teachers, volunteers and the manager of the project will develop a specific list of tasks. These will be tasks that the volunteers will deliver and will add value to those delivered by employees.

“This is an excellent opportunity for the pupils to get involved and will allow them to develop in confidence, while supporting the project”.

Case study 7 – Gateshead Older People’s Assembly (GOPA)

Gateshead Older People’s Assembly are hosting their AGM (Annual General Meeting) on Friday 7th October.

The group required volunteers for the following tasks:

- Assisting some of the members into the venue
- Showing members to their seats
- Pointing out where the facilities are
- Helping and supporting any queries from members

This is a “one–off” opportunity and would enable a volunteer to gain valuable experience in a short period of time.

Using connections already established with Gateshead College, the Development Officer for Volunteering approached Gateshead College. It was proposed that a small group of college students (within the area of care giving) becoming involved at the event as volunteers.

The students would be able to volunteer together to help with confidence. They would also be able to be involved in an event that is local to the college, meaning they do not have to travel far.

The relevant Gateshead College tutor identified an estimated 10 students that would fit the role. As a DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) Check isn’t required, and to prevent all the individual students having to go through the central process, a group Expression of Interest was processed instead.

This meant that the college tutor gave confirmation that all the students were suitable and would be supervising them on the day itself.

The college tutor explained:

“This is a fantastic opportunity for students to get involved within their local community. These students will be learning important life skills by talking to vulnerable people while also learning academically”.

The group are also benefiting by having a group of volunteers willing to support their AGM meeting which they wouldn't have had without the support from the Neighbourhood Management Team.

Case Study 8 Charden Pouo – Gateshead Older People's Assembly

Charden Pouo was referred to the Assembly by a member of the Culture, Communities & Volunteering team earlier this year. Charden is an asylum seeker from the Republic of the Congo and has been in the UK since January 2016.

Charden volunteers with us three days per week. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, he helps in our community café, the Cosy Crow. Charden's customer service skills are excellent and he makes everyone feel welcome. He is usually found in our dining area, taking orders, tidying tables, and making conversation with our customers. He's recently started cooking and his specialty is a pea and ham frittata. On Fridays, Charden helps at our tea dances, preparing afternoon teas and setting up the café.

Charden has quickly made himself an invaluable asset to the Assembly and the community. He is self-motivated, has a positive attitude, and is incredibly keen to learn. His English was already excellent when he came to us, but his skill in speaking Geordie has improved considerably over the past few months!

In July, Charden was recognised as the Assembly's Non-Member Volunteer of the Year.

The Cosy Crow community café operates on a pay what you can basis and is located in Deckham Village Hall. The café is open Wednesdays and Thursdays from 12:30 until 3 and all are welcome.