

Cheshire West & Chester Volunteering Strategy

1. Introduction

Cheshire West & Chester Council recognises the valuable contribution that volunteering makes to building a strong and cohesive society, a means for combating social exclusion, and an important contributor to the delivery of high quality public services. We believe that volunteering can deliver excellence in public services, support strong communities and contribute to growth in the economy. It also plays a key role in supporting many of the council's priorities in areas such as Health, Crime, Education, Social Care and Employment.

Volunteering has an increasingly important role in Central Government policies. It is essential in delivering community involvement and engagement envisaged by the new Government's policies in relation to the Big Society.

The major strength of volunteering in Cheshire West is the active level of volunteer related initiatives and commitment to volunteering. The 'Our Community' survey conducted in 2010 identified that 25% of local people give unpaid help to an individual, group or organisation at least once a week. This is equivalent to 1 in 7 people or just over 82,629 people in the Cheshire West area volunteering on a regular basis.

We recognise that volunteers should not replace paid workers; they represent added value as well as bringing a fresh perspective, focus and stamina to groups. Additionally, volunteers contribute an essential aspect of accessibility for service-users who may otherwise remain excluded.

This strategy sets out how we will encourage and support volunteering in our own organisation by providing opportunities, support and good management, and how we will ensure fairness and consistency in our work with volunteers. It will enable volunteers to know where they stand and offer security in terms of knowing how they will be treated. It will also help paid staff to understand their role in relation to the management of volunteers.

2. Purpose of the strategy

This strategy has two elements;

- Develop a co-ordinated corporate approach to volunteering within Cheshire West and Chester Council. This will include providing a set of policies and guidance that will inform, enhance and support each department's approach to recruiting, selecting, managing and recognising volunteers. In addition the strategy will increase awareness of the benefits and value of volunteering, including the

benefits to local communities, to individuals, service users, and organisations. **A copy of our Volunteering Policy can be found in Appendix 1**

- Establish a Corporate Employee Volunteering Scheme for Cheshire West & Chester Council. We recognise that many employees undertake volunteering activities in addition to their paid employment. In order to encourage and promote this we have developed an Employee Volunteering Policy that includes providing paid time for staff to volunteer. **A copy of our Employer Supported Volunteering Policy can be found in Appendix 2**

3. Benefits of volunteering

We believe volunteering plays a vital role in making communities work and provides important benefits on a number of levels.

Benefit to the individual – Volunteering brings a number of benefits to the individual. It can enable a person to build their confidence; acquire new skills and experiences; and provide a step to employment or training. Research has shown that volunteering improves a person's physical and mental well-being.

Benefit to the council - Volunteers can bring a different perspective to our work, often one that reflects the views of the local community. They bring credibility by giving their time for free which suggests the work we do is of value to local people. Voluntary work is a vital means of support in the delivery of services and activities which in turn enhance people's lives and choices. In addition, members of the public are more likely to identify with members of their own community. This is apparent if those communities are seldom heard.

Benefit to the community - Volunteers, by coming together, build up social networks and develop new friendships resulting in an increased sense of trust and understanding of one another. Volunteering strengthens communities through people taking responsibility and giving their time to improve the overall quality of life for themselves and others.

4. Current situation

The Council currently supports volunteering in a number of ways:

- Offering opportunities for service users, residents and individuals to be involved in the work of the Council and also contribute to the design and development of services.
- Provision of investment in infrastructure organisations such as Centres for Voluntary Action who support the development of organisations, services and policies.
- Supports the development of volunteering opportunities.
- Provides funding to voluntary organisations.

- Committed to working to the Volunteering Code within the Compact

In addition to the personal, community and organisational benefits that volunteering brings it also makes a significant financial contribution. During Volunteering Week 1 – 7th June 2010 an attempt was made to try to identify the number of people who volunteered for the Council that week. The outcome provided a snapshot which identified that during that week 190 volunteers contributed over 250 volunteer hours in total. If this time was calculated on the national minimum wage it would equate to an economic benefit of £1450.00 in one week. This figure has more significance if we apply it to the findings of “Our Community” survey of 82,629 people in Cheshire West & Chester volunteering for a minimum of 2 hours every month. If this voluntary time was costed at national minimum wage rate this would be a minimum financial annual benefit of over £12m per annum to the local area. This estimate is conservative as many of the volunteer roles undertaken are skilled and would command a higher hourly rate.

5. Definition of Volunteering

The term volunteering includes formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation and campaigning. Volunteers are defined as people who give their time without being legally obliged to do so and without pay or other reward. For the purpose of this strategy, volunteering is defined as

“Any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment”

Volunteering England’s Helping Out survey 2007

6. Good Practice principles

Cheshire West & Chester Council will ensure that people who give their time and effort volunteering for the Council will be treated fairly, consistently and with respect. The good practice principles outlined below will be used to ensure that there is a consistent approach to our work with volunteers.

- Volunteers are not to be left out of pocket or put at risk of being financially worse off as a result of their involvement in service improvement.
- Managers and volunteers will discuss and agree on the terms of involvement prior to committing to it.
- Volunteers are given the right information at the right time to be able to make an informed choice about how and on what terms they want to be involved.
- The contribution volunteers make can be recognised and valued in a range of ways such as being thanked, provided with positive feedback and acknowledgement, volunteer recognition schemes and events, staff time, practical

assistance, and opportunities for appropriate training, personal development or seeing the impact of the work and changes made as a result of involvement.

- A wide range of volunteers, with different needs and experiences are encouraged and supported to be involved.
- Volunteers in receipt of benefits should be provided with the up to date information / guidance and support from appropriate agencies to prevent a breach of their benefit conditions.
- Paperwork to claim payment and reimbursement is kept to a minimum. Where paperwork is necessary to safeguard both the service provider and the volunteer, it should be accessible and easy to understand.

7. Volunteer Opportunities

Cheshire West & Chester Council currently offers a number of opportunities for service users, residents and volunteers to be involved in the work of the council and also contribute to the development of services and policies. Although not an exhaustive list these opportunities include.

Culture & Recreation

Archives – Collections, Cataloguing

Arts & Festivals- Arts Workshops, Cheshire Rural Arts Network (26 venues) School Of Rock Arts Project

Green Spaces - Conservation, park management etc

Leisure Development Sports projects - Leisure Facilities

Libraries – [“Books on Wheels” \(home delivery to housebound readers\)](#), [“Friends” of individual libraries \(organising community events and involvement\)](#)

Resources

Partnership & Area working - Local Community Group Representatives, Community Learning Champions, Maintenance/Tidy Up, Youth activities, Social/Sport Activities

Regulatory services - Market Surveillance, Support to Business, River Dee Project

Children & Young People

Family Support Workers

Children Centres

Parent Partnership Service

Independent Parent Supporter

Parent representatives

Environment and Community

Street scene - street tidy, environmental clean ups

Waste Strategy - Home Composting/Love Food Hate Waste

Adult Social Care and Health

Independent living centres

Day centres

We will continue to try to identify current opportunities and increase further opportunities for volunteering.

8. Equal opportunities

Cheshire West & Chester Council is committed to achieving Equal Opportunities for all our citizens. This commitment extends to all our existing and potential volunteers and we welcome everyone from our community as a volunteer. We will not discriminate against our volunteers on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, race, religion or belief or nationality. Furthermore we value difference, and recognise the value that different backgrounds, skills, outlook and experience of our volunteers bring to the organisation.

9. Good practice in volunteer management

In order to ensure that staff who manage volunteers for Cheshire West and Chester Council understand the support and information they are expected to provide to volunteers, we have produced a Volunteering Policy (**Appendix 1**) and Guidance for Managers of Volunteers (**Appendix 3**) The policy and guidance provides information and good practice guidance around the following areas:

- Recruitment & Selection
- Volunteer expenses
- Induction & training
- Health & safety
- Supervision and management
- Volunteer role description, person specification & agreements
- Safeguarding guidance such as Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks in line with government guidance and confidentiality.

- Complaints

10. Recruitment & Selection

A variety of approaches will be used to recruit volunteers, including those from communities that are seldom heard. We will work in partnership with local Volunteer Centres to advertise volunteer opportunities locally. This will be done through advertising local opportunities on the Do –It Volunteering website (www.do-it.org.uk). We will also develop a dedicated Volunteering webpage on our intranet and internet website that will hold information, guidance and required forms regarding volunteering. We will also raise awareness of volunteering opportunities through voluntary, community and faith groups, schools & colleges.

People interested in becoming volunteers with us will be invited for an informal talk with the appropriate contact person to explore whether there is a match between what is needed and what is being offered by both parties – the potential volunteer and the Council. They will be given general information about the organisation and specific information on the volunteer role in which they are interested. Those individuals who are still interested in volunteering after this meeting will be asked to complete a simple registration form and supply a written reference, and then if appropriate will be offered an interview.

11. Working with groups of volunteers

Cheshire West & Chester Council recognises the valuable work of local groups of volunteers such as ‘Friends of’ groups, community volunteers etc, who give their time freely and help the Council in our service delivery and seeks to continue to work in partnerships with these groups in a consistent and supportive way. In order that there is mutual understanding of the relationship by both parties we will develop a protocol to help foster positive relationships between the Council and the groups by clarifying what type of help groups can expect from the Cheshire West & Chester Council and what the Council expects from the groups.

12. Recognition & Value

It is important that the contribution and commitment of our volunteers is properly supported and acknowledged. We will work with partners and departments to hold an annual celebration to thank all volunteers for their contribution. This will be held jointly with partner organisations and be in line with national initiatives and events

13. Volunteer Strategy Action plan

In order to ensure that the issues, actions and aspirations identified in this strategy are realised, an action plan has been produced. The action plan identifies clear actions that we believe need to be undertaken if we are to achieve our ambitions. We wish to make sure that all our service areas make a commitment to this work and have a coordinated and consistent approach to its delivery. To develop this strategy a steering group made

up of representatives from various departments, such as Partnerships, Adult Social Care and Health, Culture & Recreation, Area Working, Children's Services, Research & Intelligence and Voluntary Sector representation has been established and will continue to meet to drive this agenda forward and deliver the action plan. The action plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis with internal staff, volunteers and external partners.

DRAFT