

## MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>TO:</b> MSDC CABINET	<b>REPORT NUMBER:</b> MCa/20/22
<b>FROM:</b> Cabinet Member for Environment, Culture and Wellbeing  Cabinet Member for Thriving Towns and Rural Communities	<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b> 03-10-2023
<b>OFFICER:</b> Tom Barker – Interim Director for Communities & Wellbeing	<b>KEY DECISION REF NO.</b> CAB448

### EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING POLICY

#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 As keenly demonstrated throughout the pandemic, volunteers are an integral part of an active and engaged community and we see the difference volunteers make across our districts every day. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, as part of the Community Action Suffolk Stakeholder Group for the Suffolk Volunteering Strategy, are committed to strengthening and promoting volunteering across the communities we live and work in.
- 1.2 Between March 2020 and May 2021, around one in three VCFSE organisations reported a decline in the number of their volunteers. This considerable decline chimes with recent experiences of VCFSE groups across our districts, as well as wider evidence that challenges around volunteer recruitment levels are being exacerbated by the current challenges we are facing with the potential of volunteering “*stunted by a lack of resources and support*”.
- 1.3 Cabinet is asked to note and support the proposed draft Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) Policy in Appendix 1

#### 2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 To note the report

#### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To note and support the implementation of the Councils first Employer Supported Volunteering Policy

#### REASON FOR DECISION

- 3.2 Through research carried out by the National Council of Voluntary and Community Organisations (NCVO), we know that paid work is the number one reason why people do not volunteer. In response to this, by working closely with VCFSE organisations through an Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) scheme, the

councils can strengthen the support and trust between residents, communities and key anchor organisations, whilst also benefitting staff wellbeing, building the strength and capacity of the VCFSE sector and aligning with its own Community and Wellbeing strategies.

#### **4. WHAT IS EMPLOYER SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERING (ESV)**

4.1 ESV is where employees can take paid time off to volunteer in their local communities during working hours. Employees can choose to use their volunteering time to support a charity or community group of their own choice or to take up an opportunity provided by the councils. In its broadest terms, it is a way for the councils to demonstrate corporate social responsibility whilst developing and enabling its people to 'give something back'.

4.2 Activities that employers may actively support and encourage staff to volunteer in typically include, but are not limited to:

- Supporting a charitable fundraising event such as a marathon, cycle ride
- Charity Trustee
- Coaching and/or one-to-one mentoring
- Skills workshops
- Schools career talks
- Community youth projects
- Supporting charity infrastructure
- Offering work experience
- Volunteer days e.g. River or Park cleaning
- Team building exercises

4.3 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils currently states the following in the existing Learning & Development policy:

“Volunteering is encouraged and is proven to increase a sense of mental and physical wellbeing; it can also provide a great opportunity to develop new skills or hone existing ones. If you choose to volunteer this will be as an individual rather than in your professional capacity, (i.e not as part of your role or representing the Councils), however all opportunities to develop skills will be supported where possible and business needs allow.”

4.4 Beyond this statement, the Councils currently have no formal policy on volunteering in place and do not actively offer any provision for employee supported volunteering. In contrast to this, many similar organisations, including Suffolk County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, East Suffolk District Council and other Local Authorities, support their staff to volunteer or engage with voluntary bodies through employer supported volunteering.

## 5. BUSINESS CASE

5.1 There is a strong business case for the Councils to implement an ESV scheme, which has potential to deliver positive impacts for both the Councils and the local community, as well as wellbeing benefits for those undertaking volunteering, creating a win-win situation for all involved. Recipient organisations gain skills, advice and expertise whilst employees achieve a sense of giving back and making a difference. In return, the councils enhance their employer brand and reputation with their employees, residents and wider society. Through an ESV scheme, the councils can support their work towards creating social value and contribute to their outcomes. In information they provide, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development outline some of the benefits of ESV to be:

- ✓ helps develop skills – from soft skills such as leadership, communication and presentation skills, to professional skills such as advising businesses and providing pro bono support.
- ✓ is a viable alternative to other forms of employee development – a development opportunity in the community can be more beneficial than classroom learning and is usually cheaper.
- ✓ builds employee engagement – volunteering fosters a sense of pride and satisfaction, and employees are appreciative of being given time off work to support their community.
- ✓ helps improve brand and reputation – businesses must contribute to the communities in which they operate to be socially responsible.
- ✓ supports access to skills otherwise inaccessible to community organisations – many charities and community groups could never afford to pay for the skilled support they receive from the business community.

5.2 These benefits are further evidenced by studies that show, for example Volunteer Now report that 82% of 200 public and private sector employers participating in ESV believe morale and motivation of employees is enhanced by their ESV, improving their staff recruitment and retention. By increasing employee engagement rates through ESV, this may also support an increase in productivity, with engaged employees being 17% more productive. Increased productivity ultimately increases customer service, level of innovation and positive outcomes in public services and staff advocacy.

5.3 It is proposed to introduce an ESV policy for the Councils, which will give employees entitlement to apply for the equivalent of 3 working days paid ESV leave in any given financial year to participate in voluntary activities during working hours. This leave would be over and above any annual leave or statutory holiday entitlement and at the agreement of the line manager, within operational demands. The councils ESV will focus on creating opportunities for the workforce to collectively engage in:

- ✓ Social action days/events which have a direct impact on local communities within the districts.
- ✓ One off volunteering opportunities that involve short and specific tasks that are easy to start and complete. Examples include delivering careers talks in schools, running

a CV or interview skills workshop, or a team challenge day such as river and park cleaning.

- ✓ Longer-term opportunities that make a sustainable commitment to support voluntary and community sector organisations by participating in initiatives that take place over longer periods. Examples include coaching and mentoring, working on community projects, or taking on positions of responsibility such as a sports coach, school governor or charity trustee.

5.4 It is worth noting that uptake levels of ESV opportunities are expected to be relatively low, with only 10% of volunteers that took part in NCVO's Time Well Spent study reporting that their volunteering was through ESV and The London Benchmarking Group calculating engagement in employee volunteering to be 14.3%.

5.5 This is also evidenced by Suffolk County Council's uptake levels, where out of their workforce of over five thousand people, between 01 October 2021 – 01 April 2022 only 81 instances of Volunteering (Paid) were taken by 61 different staff members, amounting to approximately 1.6%. Prior to this period, between 24 October 2019 – 04 October 2021 there were 113 instances of Volunteering (Paid) taken by 59 different people across the council, amounting to approximately 2.3%.

### **Location and Added Value**

5.6 It is recommended that staff are encouraged to volunteer within the districts wherever possible. This will be done through promoting volunteer opportunities with charities who are based within the districts or specifically looking for volunteers within Babergh and Mid Suffolk on a dedicated intranet page and through internal communications such as Working Together.

5.7 A calendar of team activities to take place within the districts will also be scheduled and promoted to staff across the organisation to get involved with. This will provide good sources of external communications/promotion for the councils, as well as building cross team relations, all whilst directly supporting VCFSE groups within our districts.

5.8 By promoting both individual and team ESV activities within the district, we will help ensure that the ESV policy helps to build additional value of volunteering, providing new opportunities for staff to get involved in within our communities.

5.9 Alongside this additional value, we also seek to recognise the value of any existing volunteering that staff carry out which then in turn also supports staff wellbeing. From a staff survey carried out through Working Together, 41% of 59 respondents already volunteer. Within this survey, the following comments were made, which seem particularly relevant to how the policy is shaped:

- *"I live in Norwich and volunteer locally here. If I do an overnight shift for Samaritans, would I be able to use my volunteer leave the following day to rest and recover?"*
- *"The 3 days time off will allow me to be able to take the girls camping for longer - at the moment I don't have enough annual leave to take them for long at all, so this sounds great! I very much hope this will apply to volunteering based outside of the district since I'm based in Ipswich!"*
- *"The benefits and positive effects of volunteering on individuals also positively impact how I feel about the rest of my life, including my job."*

- *“I spend a lot of time at my desk, so would love to find more hands on/outdoor/people centred volunteer work.”*
- *“Would be more likely to volunteer in Breckland or West Suffolk as opposed to BMS”*
- *“I would like the policy to allow for TOIL if a volunteering activity happens at the weekend, for example if I had to spend a whole of a Saturday at a first aid course for Guides I could then take a day off as I've lost part of my weekend and allow time to rest and recover”*
- *“The additional leave would help me spend some time obtaining a level 2 in sailing so I could in turn be awarded a scouting permit to take seas scouts out on sailing dinghies during some weekend days during the summer.”*
- *“I used to run a student cookery class at Framlingham College for university preparation. I think basic cooking skills are important for everyone to have.”*

5.10 It is recommended that the volunteering allowance is not limited to new volunteering and individuals are also able to use it to support their existing volunteering. Where staff would like to use their volunteer leave allowance to volunteer outside of the districts, this should be considered at the discretion of their line manager based on whether the activity supports the staff member's wellbeing and/or development.

## **6. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN**

6.1 A council wide ESV policy would be in line with the strategic priority *“All our communities are attractive, successful and connected places for people to live and work”* which sits over the Communities' delivery plan.

6.2 Furthermore, The Suffolk Volunteering Strategy 2021 - 2024 (of which Babergh and Mid Suffolk are stakeholders) suggests that volunteering boosts wellbeing and personal growth, builds skills in the individual and strength in the community and helps to make our communities resilient and cohesive places to live. Two of the key objectives of the strategy are to support people to volunteer and to engage employers and business leaders in providing and promoting volunteering opportunities.

6.3 An ESV policy would contribute significantly towards these objectives, working towards the outcome of *“All our communities are attractive, successful and connected places for people to live and work”*. leading by example and demonstrating that employees are establishing and strengthening their connections within the within Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

## **7. IMPLEMENTATION**

7.1 The ESV policy will be held by the HR Organisational Development Team. During the launch and implementation of the policy, the Communities Team will provide support in promotion, including liaising with the voluntary sector and identification of volunteering opportunities.

7.2 Case studies which can be used as positive promotion both to the workforce and communities will be identified to include on a dedicated ESV intranet page. To monitor and analyse the uptake and impact of ESV, the Communities Team will source a quarterly update on uptake from HR through absence reports pulled from Oracle, which will be reported to SLT under the Communities Team's KPIs.

## **Team Volunteering**

- 7.3 Managed appropriately the team volunteering opportunities and social action events would provide an opportunity to call to action/mobilise a number of the workforce in a collective effort to support an identified community project. Dependent upon the nature of the project there would be the potential to link in with partners to deliver a high impact, visible and reassuring approach to an identified community need.
- 7.4 This approach will aid the workforce volunteers in feeling a sense of achievement and being an integral part of a collective force for good, as well as having a positive impact on the community and demonstrating the how the council is putting the community at the heart of service delivery.
- 7.5 Volunteering opportunities such as these may be staffed by teams as part of a team building exercise, or by staff from across a range of services to strengthen cross team communication and relationships.

## **Individual Volunteering**

- 7.6 The ESV policy will make provision for individual staff members to identify potential volunteering opportunities within the districts which would be undertaken during working hours. Where an individual wishes to undertake an individual volunteering opportunity they must refer to the employee volunteering policy and seek line manager approval before any commitment is made.
- 7.7 Following assessment of the individual opportunity including appropriate risk assessments, the Council may consider that this is suitable for social action, and it may therefore be offered on a Council wide basis.

## **Promotion of Opportunities**

- 7.8 The Communities Team will work with HR & OD as well as Community Action Suffolk (CAS) to promote ESV opportunities to staff members through a launch week of events and information sharing. In November 2022, the Communities Team participated in a day of volunteering for a registered charity which will provide an ideal case study opportunity.
- 7.9 Looking forward, Community Action Suffolk hold a database of VCFSE organisations that offer ESV opportunities and will be able to support line managers in identifying suitable team opportunities. Examples of both team and individual volunteering opportunities will be promoted on a dedicated ESV intranet page with additional communication support provided via internal communication channels.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The cost to the councils on employees embarking on an ESV will be the opportunity cost of staff time spent on an ESV placement rather than fulfilling their substantive post. Therefore, the role of the line manager as identified within the report, is vital to ensure that ESV placements are carried out having ensured the impact on day-to-day council work is minimised
- 8.2 Finance have provided an estimated cost of £312,000 for 3 days (equivalent to 22.2 hours) leave for all staff. This is an estimate as it would depend on peoples working patterns/the days chosen for annual leave. The table below provides a breakdown of

this estimated cost to the councils against average percentage uptake in national findings and SCC uptake levels.

Number of days paid leave for volunteering	1 day	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days
100% uptake	£104,000	£208,000	£312,000	£416,000	£520,000
20% uptake (if levels are above average)	£20,800	£41,600	£62,400	£83,200	£104,000
10% uptake (based on NCVO findings)	£10,400	£20,800	£31,200	£41,600	£52,000
2.3% uptake (in line with SCC)	£2,392	£4,784	£7,180	£9,568	£11,960

8.3 The financial implication to the councils may be balanced against employee skill development and engagement. The report “On the brink of a game changer?” found that over 80% of those who took part in volunteering reported increased community awareness, 65% had increased communication skills, and 59% reported an increase in confidence. Other research has shown that 80% of employees who took part in volunteering said the experience made them happier, and 100% said they felt proud to work for the company as a result.

8.4 Furthermore, by being able to offer staff time and skills to VCFSE groups and absorbing the financial cost associated with this, the councils will be supporting voluntary and community organisations to build their capacity without the additional constraints on their resources that would be without this support.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## 10. RISK MANAGEMENT

10.1 Key risks are set out below:

Key Risk Description	Likelihood 1-4	Impact 1-4	Key Mitigation Measures	Risk Register and Reference*
The Councils wanting to place 20-30 people in one go where the VCFSE group is only able to manage smaller groups or individuals	1	2	A variety of opportunities across different VCFSE groups will be available to provide suitable placements for all options.	ESV Business Case
The Councils not being prepared to pay direct costs and the VCFSE group	2	2	It could be explored whether teams are able to use some of their training budget towards expenses incurred	ESV

being unable to continue unless full costs are recovered			to the VCSFE specifically in relation to the ESV activity.	Business Case
The Councils wanting a one-off activity where the VCFSE group wants a longer-term commitment	2	2	It will be built into the policy that employees are able to use their ESV allowance either as a whole block of time or spread it across the year in smaller chunks, in order to meet both of these demands.	ESV Business Case
Council employees wanting to do non-specialised activities where the VCFSE group want to utilise specialised skills of employees	1	2	Clear communication between employees and VCFSE groups identifying what can be offered through ESV. Promoting both specialised and non-specialised opportunities.	ESV Business Case
Primary aim of the Councils being team-building where the primary aim of the VCFSE group is to benefit their organisation	1	2	A discussion with the relevant VCFSE group should be held when looking to utilise ESV as a team building exercise so that it aligns with benefits to the VCFSE group.	ESV Business Case

*\*ESV Business Case*

## 11. CONSULTATIONS

- 11.1 Consultation has taken place with Community Action Suffolk, who have indicated their support and agreed to both help identify suitable opportunities and support with promotion when the policy is agreed and launched.
- 11.2 Both SLT, HR and People Board have been consulted
- 11.3 Employees have also been consulted via 'Working Together'.

## 12. EQUALITY ANALYSIS


- 12.1 The new Policy affects the entire business of the Council and potentially all wards and is aimed at increasing opportunities for all employees and the VCFSE. There would be no negative impacts on any groups with protected characteristics. The policy does not impact or exclude any of the protected characteristics defined under the Equality Act 2010.



### 13. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no negative Environmental impacts directly associated with this report.

### APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Draft Employer Supported Volunteering Policy	 Employer Supported Volunteering Policy - Attached
(b)	
(c)	
(d)	

### 14. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Employer Supported Volunteering | Factsheets | CIPD
- Suffolk volunteering strategy ([communityactionsuffolk.org.uk](http://communityactionsuffolk.org.uk))
- What does ESV participation look like? - Time Well Spent: Employer-supported volunteering | News index | NCVO
- Why are 200 million hours of corporate volunteering going unused each year? — onHand - The Volunteer and Climate Impact Platform. ([beonhand.co.uk](http://beonhand.co.uk))
- Employer-Supported-Volunteering-Guide-for-Employers.pdf ([volunteernow.co.uk](http://volunteernow.co.uk))
- The Business Benefits of Employer-Supported Volunteering ([socialgoodconnect.org](http://socialgoodconnect.org))

### 15. REPORT AUTHORS

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