

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director (Communities) (Introduced by Executive Member (Early Intervention))	Executive Cabinet	Thursday, 24 February 2022

Volunteering Policy

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. To review and consider the revised Volunteering Policy in Appendix 1 for implementation across Chorley Council.
2. To present the funding requirements of the volunteering programme.

Recommendations to Executive Cabinet

3. To agree to the implementation of the Volunteering Policy (2021), with any suggested amendments signed off by the Executive Member.
4. To agree to fund the requirements of the volunteering programme as defined by the policy.

Reasons for recommendations

5. To bring the Volunteering Policy in line with Chorley Council's consistent commitment to supporting individuals into a wide variety of valuable volunteering experiences that help to achieve our key aim around developing clean, safe and healthy communities as outlined in the Corporate Strategy.

Other options considered and rejected

6. Not updating the Volunteering Policy was an option that was rejected as the current policy is not fit for purpose.

Corporate priorities

7. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all		A strong local economy	
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Clean, safe and healthy communities	✓	An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area	
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Background to the report

8. The Volunteering Policy was last updated in 2015, since which time volunteering has formed a recurring key measure of success within the Corporate Strategy. The Community Resilience Framework 2020/21 (Communities Team, Chorley Council) highlights the importance of changing dialogue between public services and communities to systematically strengthen community capacity by helping communities overcome barriers and capitalise on their own assets; volunteering forming a key approach to tackling this. This is amongst a landscape of public funding cuts, reduced services, changes to the unemployment landscape, and rising inequalities and cost of living.
9. A review of the 2015 Volunteering Policy found opportunities to outline a more ambitious approach to internal volunteering at Chorley Council, to bring it more in line with Chorley Council's consistent commitment to supporting individuals into a wide variety of valuable volunteering experiences that help to achieve our key aims outlined in the Corporate Strategy.
10. The Shared Senior Management Team were able to view a drafted version of the Volunteering Policy on 7th July 2021. The feedback received shaped a redraft of the Volunteering Policy, which was accepted at a subsequent SSMT on 6th October 2021.

Rationale

11. Chorley's communities have an intrinsic wealth of knowledge and assets, which Chorley Council strive to understand and nurture alongside key community stakeholders, with the aim of supporting these communities to respond well to the challenges they face, and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for our residents. Volunteering, be it formal, informal, micro, long-term, one-off, discrete, or part of a wider group, is fundamental to achieving these aims and cultivating thriving communities.
12. Volunteering also has the potential to provide a multitude of benefits to the volunteer, by engaging with valuable experiences that equip them well with the skills and attributes to navigate challenges within their own lives. From maintaining good health, building relationships and support systems, employment opportunities, supported training and education opportunities, an appreciation for how to navigate and influence public services, and an increased confidence to engage in community reciprocity, a volunteer can explore and improve insight into their agency and personal resilience.
13. The Chorley community response to Covid-19 emphatically endorses these principles, with an overwhelming demonstration of the quantity, diverse skill set and varied levels of readiness of volunteers who came forward to support the community through the developing crisis, and the effectiveness of the community mobilisation and response to meet its own need, with the support of the Council and other organisations and businesses.
14. Undoubtedly, Chorley benefits from the broad and varied types of volunteering happening in the borough, which help to meet recurrent social needs such as befriending, travel, physical activity groups, mental health support, environmental issues, youth activity, event support and recently the overwhelming response from the local community in volunteering to support the Covid-19 response and recovery.
15. The revised Volunteering Policy (2021) is centred on an appreciation of the value of volunteering both to the local community and to the individual, and aims to encourage and support a wider variety of internal and external volunteering opportunities, with an enhanced volunteer experience supported by Chorley Council.

Key Changes

Centralised Volunteer Pathway

16. To create a safe, measurable and consistent approach to volunteering, a centralised approach is needed. Currently service areas are managing volunteers in isolation and storing their data locally, this process presents significant risk, with no central point of reference for how many volunteers are deployed across the council, the roles they are undertaking and assurance in how volunteers are being consistently supported. Consistency is an essential tool in delivering high standards of health, safety, safeguarding, and quality of experience. By centralising the volunteer pathway, consistency is much easier to deliver and monitor.
17. Through the new pathway all volunteering enquiries and requests to undertake Council volunteering roles will be directed to the Employability and Volunteering Coordinator (E&VC). The E&VC will manage the digital records of all volunteers which will be stored in a compliant centralised location. Requiring all volunteers to pass through the E&VC allows information to be quickly located and shared where appropriate within the organisation.
18. The E&VC will also be able to monitor completion of volunteer inductions and training, delivered primarily using The Learning Hub online platform, to ensure that volunteers are prepared and able to perform their roles safely and to a high standard in line with Chorley Council's values and expectations, thus minimising risk to the council in terms of health, safety and reputation. Appropriately trained volunteers will then be better equipped to support their own outcomes and understand desired outcomes for the community.
19. A centralised pathway allows for the ability to capture all the contributions that volunteers are making across Chorley Council, creating monitoring, analysis and evaluation opportunities for measuring the impact of volunteering across the organisation. This will enable the E&VC to continue to develop a well-informed and effective approach to engaging volunteers.

Broader Scope

20. The Volunteering Policy will encourage service areas to be more ambitious in integrating volunteering and work placements within their service delivery. The aim is to develop an embedded volunteering culture within the council where volunteering is valued across less traditional areas and considered a fundamental tool in enhancing community support and delivering key council aims.
21. Volunteering will form part of business planning across all service areas, with each Service Lead tasked with considering how volunteering and work placement opportunities could be creatively utilised to complement the work of paid staff in the delivery of key service outcomes. Service areas will therefore also be required to allocate a budget for volunteering to cover the costs of DBS checks, expenses and training requirements.
22. Where volunteering is inappropriate or not possible in certain service areas, considerations will be identified and noted within the business plan.

Person-Centred Approach

23. The Volunteer Pathway begins by prioritising the individual's skills, interests, experiences and goals using a Volunteer Expression of Interest Form. Exploring an individual's assets and incentives provides an excellent opportunity to explore creative approaches, add value to volunteering opportunities and maintain volunteer motivation, while also providing insight into development opportunities.

24. Whereas formally a volunteer would make contact with the council and the E&VC would be required to approach service areas to ask if a volunteering role could be created for them, service areas will now be required to submit Volunteer Role Profiles to the E&VC following the business planning process. The E&VC will utilise this catalogue role profiles to match with volunteers approaching the council, to find a role that suits the volunteer's skills, experiences, interests and motivations.
25. Each volunteer will have an assigned Volunteer Supervisor within the service area they are deployed who will oversee the volunteer's role specific induction and training and, for regular volunteering roles and work placements, arrange regular 1:1 meetings. The Volunteer Supervisor will be suitably trained to act as a mentor for the volunteer. Regular meetings will allow the Volunteer Supervisor to regularly assess the suitability of the role for the volunteer, suggest development opportunities and oversee the volunteer's wellbeing. The result should see a volunteer who is happier and more motivated in their role, and increased retention levels.

Work Placements

26. Work Placements have been proven to be an essential tool for employability support, distinct from other forms of internal volunteering due to the focus on developing employability skills for these individuals. Separate specific guidance for work placements has been included in the policy, with the intention of encouraging service areas to also consider developing a range of volunteering roles for work placement volunteers so that they can develop these skills. A bank of diverse work placement roles aimed at equipping volunteers with skills such as time management, customer focus and interpersonal skills will provide the E&VC with the necessary tools to improve outcomes for those engaging with the Employability Service.

Community Volunteering Referral Partnership (CVRP)

27. The CVRP is a new process that we are proposing to implement to minimise the reputational risk to Chorley Council of signposting an unchecked individual to a volunteer group or organisation. Chorley Council must undertake due diligence to ensure volunteer groups and organisations uphold the highest levels of integrity and best practice in order to safeguard their volunteers and those they work with. The CVRP agreement stipulates the duty of care voluntary groups and organisations must uphold for each volunteer referred through the partnership by outlining ten key standards.
28. Community groups and volunteer organisations wishing to receive volunteer referrals through Chorley Council must adopt and evidence compliance with our Community Volunteer Referral Agreement before becoming a Community Volunteer Referral Partners. Rather than being an onerous task for groups to undertake, these are standards we would encourage all community groups to adopt, and there will be support available throughout the process in being able to achieve compliance with the standards via tools and guidance available on the Chorley Council website, through the Community Training Programme and the Communities Team.
29. A symbol of recognition will be developed for organisations to display which highlights their compliance with the CVRP.
30. The Communities team will develop and monitor any outcomes associated with the CVRP and will use the first year of the partnership as a benchmark.

Climate change and air quality

31. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

32. An Integrated Impact Assessment of the policy has been undertaken. The assessment determined that the revised policy's volunteer centred approach encourages a broader scope of volunteering opportunities to account for a wide range of needs and preferences amongst Chorley's residents. The revised policy also encourages services to use the volunteer recruitment process to adapt volunteering opportunities to suit the individual's changing needs and circumstances. Finally, the volunteer process will be managed centrally by the Employability and Volunteering Coordinator which allows for analysis, and ongoing insight into the impact that the revised policy is having in meeting the diverse needs of Chorley's residents, allowing for greater levels of responsiveness to meet these needs.

Risk

33. A risk register for volunteering has been created on GRACE. The main strategic risks are highlighted in points 16, 22 and 27 and are predominantly reputational.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

34. Management of the volunteering process will be completed in house within existing resources. Some roles will require DBS checks and some training budgets, these will be met within existing service and HR budgets.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

35. Members have the discretion to adopt the revised Volunteering Policy as per the recommendation. They should be satisfied to do so is reasonable and the policy meets the stated outcomes of the council in order to demonstrate best value. The body of the report explains the proposed changes to the policy and addresses how corporate priorities will be met.

Background documents

36. SSMT 06.10.2021 – Volunteering Policy

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