

Item No. 17.	Classification: Open	Date: 19 January 2021	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Volunteering policy	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All wards: Council staff	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Alice Macdonald, Communities and Equalities	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR ALICE MACDONALD, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND EQUALITIES

Volunteers make a huge contribution to our borough. Covid has shown that more than ever; over 64 mutual aid groups have been formed and many more people are volunteering for the incredible voluntary and community organizations we have across our borough.

Southwark also has about 500 people who volunteer each year in a range of roles at the council making another significant contribution to our communities. Volunteering takes a range of forms from mystery shoppers to supporting at community events or taking part in reading schemes in local libraries. The purpose of this volunteer policy is to update how we, as a council, ensure that our approach to volunteering is open, transparent and fair, that volunteers have the right support and that across the council staff are equipped and able to support volunteers.

Volunteering has many benefits – it can provide valuable work experience, it can help increase wellbeing and address loneliness. We will ensure that volunteering is mutually beneficial for both the volunteer and the council and also be clear that it is never a substitute for paid work.

We are particularly keen to promote volunteering to specific groups for example young people affected by unemployment.

In 2021, working with our VCS partners like Community Southwark, we will be updating our broader volunteering strategy and approach to ensure that we continue to support volunteering across our borough. This policy will be updated to reflect any changes in this strategy.

This policy will also ensure we know more about our volunteers. This will include an annual survey of our volunteers and understanding who is volunteering with us so we can ensure we are reaching all groups in our communities. We will include in our annual engagement report information on

equalities monitoring information. We will ensure all staff know about the policy beginning with a civic ceremony to launch it officially.

I hope this policy will help increase knowledge of the scope of volunteering opportunities available at Southwark and increase awareness of the principles of good practice to support volunteers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the cabinet

1. That the draft volunteer policy set out in this report be agreed.
2. That the council adopts the following key commitments:
 - Our recruitment will be open, transparent and fair so that all residents have equal access to the opportunities available
 - All volunteers will be provided with a volunteer agreement which will set out the purpose of the role, describe the tasks and hours and days of volunteering role and any learning and development goals for the volunteer
 - The volunteer will have a named supervisor and be supported to deliver their role and provided with an induction to the organisation and a volunteers handbook
 - The volunteer will be reimbursed for travel and provided with expenses for lunch where they are required to work more than four hours.
3. That cabinet notes that volunteering is not a substitute for paid work and volunteers are never a substitute for a paid member of staff. The process of involving volunteers in our work should be mutually beneficial and the systems set out in the handbooks should support us to achieve this.
4. That cabinet notes that the criteria for volunteering includes work that is a short term project or initiative to carry out a specific task or time limited exercise, a new idea being tested, some additional research for a team, or additional service that staff are unable to deliver, or bringing an additional skill to the service. Volunteers can also act as independent advocates or support individual members of the community.
5. That cabinets notes the key role volunteering has in supporting people build their confidence and grow their wellbeing and Southwark can play a key role in this for residents though they way in which we construct and develop our volunteering opportunities.
6. That cabinet notes the guidance for managers which guides services in how to deliver best practice for volunteer roles and the volunteer handbook which sets out the rights and responsibilities for the volunteer.
7. That cabinet agrees that the next steps should be to:
 - Sign the volunteer best practice charter with a civic ceremony

- Include in the engagement annual report a section on volunteering in the council which also captures the equalities monitoring information about our volunteers
 - Use the annual review to ensure that our work on volunteers with the council is aligned with the Volunteer Strategy Action Plan.
 - Highlight to teams Southwark Stars awards and Civic awards which enable us to publically celebrate the commitment volunteers make
 - Draft a chapter in the manager's guidance on safeguarding when young people are volunteers
 - Work with colleagues and external organisations such as Community Southwark and Thomas Carlton Centre to develop an accreditation process for our volunteers.
8. That cabinet notes that the measures outlined in this report and the handbook and guidance addresses the actions required because of the BDO audit of volunteering at the council.
9. That cabinet notes that the policy and handbook underpin the principles in the volunteering strategy which are as follows:
- *Volunteering must be voluntary* – It must be a choice freely made by individuals under no duress.
 - *Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work* – The contribution of volunteers must add value but not be a substitute for work that should be paid.
 - *Volunteering is not free* –Volunteering is time freely given but it is not cost free. For volunteering to be meaningful volunteers need to be well supported and investment in volunteer management is important and valued. Volunteers should not be at a financial loss because of volunteering and out of pocket expenses where possible should be reimbursed.
 - *Volunteering is mutually beneficial* – Volunteering must be both a positive experience for the individual and also help to further the aims of the organisation.

Recommendation for the Leader of the Council

10. That authority be delegated to the cabinet member for equalities and communities to approve any final amendments to the volunteer handbook or guidance.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

11. This policy describes how Southwark will contribute to the delivery of the joint VCS and Council vision for volunteering in Southwark in its volunteering practice. The vision is:

'We want a Southwark where volunteering is easy to access, meaningful, mutually beneficial to all involved and valued by everyone in the borough.'

12. This vision is set out in the Council's volunteering strategy that forms the framework for how we will model best practice in the borough and the steps needed to fulfil the vision.
13. Southwark has a great history of people volunteering their time for the benefit of the Southwark communities; from the early days of the Settlements and the Boys Clubs youth provision to more recent volunteering during the London Olympics in 2012, and the mushrooming of mutual support as communities responded to local need during the COVID19 pandemic and lockdown. With over 64 mutual aid groups forming during the lockdown, volunteering remains an important part of our community fabric.
14. People giving their time free have enabled the voluntary and community sector to continue to meet the needs of the communities they serve and search for innovative solutions to societal problems. In 2015-16 there were over 44,000 filled volunteer and trustee positions in the borough. In total volunteers contributed over 5 million hours of their time - if this number was costed at the London living wage their contribution would annually cost over £47million.
15. While many people volunteer for charities and in community groups Southwark also has about 500 people who volunteer each year in a range of roles at the council making another significant contribution to the wellbeing of our communities and building the social capital that communities can draw on.
16. With such a variety of services provided by the council we are in a unique place to offer a wealth of opportunity to people wishing to volunteer. Recognising that there are almost as many reasons for people to wish to volunteer, as there could be opportunities, the key drivers are often about people wanting to use their skills or learn new ones; some people want to have more activity and social engagement in their lives and volunteer to bring new experiences into their life. People volunteer from all age groups some informally and others in a more formal and structured way.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. This policy will support the delivery of the following outcomes of the Volunteering strategy:
 - Increase knowledge of the scope of opportunities available
 - Increase awareness of the principles of good practice.
18. Adopting this policy and the procedures will enable the council to sign Community Southwark's Charter of best practice and model best practice in the borough.
19. The volunteering strategy and action plan is due for review in 2020. Any amendments will be reflected in updates to this policy. It is not anticipated

that the principles of how we support volunteers in the council will need to change significantly and will continue to be based on principles of openness, fairness and equal opportunity; as well as ensuring we have the right mechanisms in place to ensure that the experience is mutually beneficial.

20. The strategy review may result in a shift in emphasis of volunteering for different demographic target groups and this would be reflected in any volunteer recruitment strategy.
21. This policy has been written to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in our principles and practice to reflect the wide range of roles offered to potential volunteers from one off trading standards test purchasing activity to running regular reading clubs in our libraries or working to help make our events safe, or to support a particular project like our diabetes champions.
22. An audit of volunteering in Environment and Leisure services concluded that the effectiveness of our controls linked to safe guarding, payments and risk assessment as moderate as a consequence of an out of date volunteering strategy and risk assessments, a lack of clarity on the review of DBS checks and missing supporting documents.
23. It found that there is a risk of inconsistent volunteer practices across the council, lack of awareness of roles and responsibilities and a lack of sharing of lessons learned across the services.
24. BDO the auditors made a number of recommendations:
 - Undertake a review of the current Volunteering Strategy 2013-18 to bring this in line with the council's current strategic objectives and outcomes (corporate strategy).
 - Assign ownership to the council's overall volunteer programme.
 - Introduce a single but flexible council wide volunteer policy that supports the strategy or a coordinated approach to volunteer management across the services for sharing of good practice.
 - Produce a volunteer handbook or its incorporation in existing service handbooks.
25. In response the communities team have advised or taken the steps outlined below:
 - The strategy was reviewed in 2016/17 with a new strategy in place for 2017 to 2020 agreed by IDM in February 2018. Oversight is through a strategy steering group with the lead partner Community Southwark who are commissioned to provide volunteer service for the Borough. The strategy identifies promoting best practice as a core action and CS have produced a charter for organisations to sign up to.
 - With over 500 volunteers in a typical year it is not possible for one lead, however we have established a working group that brings leads in

different departments together on a regular basis and have drafted the guidance and handbook attached which we will update as best practice is amended.

- Drafted the handbooks and guides and set out the main objectives for our volunteer recruitment and support practice in this cabinet report
26. In particular the managers' handbook in Appendix 1 sets out the need for developing risk assessments, DBS checks where appropriate, and sets out systems for expense claims; all issues raised through the audit. The how tos in the managers guidance have drawn on best practice across the council again as recommended in the BDO audit.
 27. The Managers handbook sets out the process for recruitment and appointment processes that should address the issues raised by BDO on issues like previous convictions and DBS.
 28. As recommended by BDO this policy includes a council wide instruction about expenses and the guidance includes templates that will enable teams to process claims in a straightforward way.
 29. The recommendation by BDO relating to task outlines has been captured by the introduction of the volunteer handbook and volunteer agreement.
 30. We have pulled together a working group to ensure we have opportunities to learn from each other. Community Southwark and their volunteer manager have been and will remain a critical friend in this process ensuring that we remain on top of new trends and best practice, alongside colleagues from HR.

Policy implications

31. By offering quality volunteering opportunities at Southwark Council for Southwark residents we believe that this will help us to achieve the following Southwark fairer future principles:
 - Southwark Fairer Future Values - working for everyone to realise their own potential
 - Southwark Principles - Working for everyone to realise their potential.
32. In addition, the council sets out our ambition to grow the economy by supporting local businesses, investing in those setting up new businesses and tackling low pay and inequalities. The Council Plan sets out how we want to make sure that all Southwark residents have the opportunity to achieve their potential and that low income or lack of qualifications does not hold people back from securing good work. We will continue to invest in skills and employability, to ensure residents are equipped with the tools they need to find employment and to progress to better-paid work. Our volunteering policy supports this ambition.

33. Our guidance for managers (Appendix 1) and volunteers handbook (Appendix 2) and the new measures and process outlined in both also contribute to positive outcomes in investors in people.
34. With regard to young people strengthening our volunteer experience and commitment to encouraging people to volunteer will also support some of the ambition in both the youth service review and Southwark Stands Together to:
 - Improve the experience of young people with respect to meaningful work experience;
 - Develop networks within and beyond school that provide advice, guidance, and exposure to opportunities that helps them develop their aspirations and confidence and understanding linked to the world of work.
35. This policy supports our climate strategy, which sets out the importance of volunteering to delivery of our ambitions to meet the challenge of this emergency.

Community impact statement

36. In May and June 2019, a short consultation was undertaken to establish what teams in the Council have volunteers and understand more about volunteer management in their service. Through this, we were able to capture some basic information about numbers of volunteers and the processes employed to manage them. It emerged through this that many of the teams that have volunteers indicated that they do not have training in managing volunteers.
37. In January 2020, we held a workshop with the key officers who work with the volunteers. During this workshop, all officers were keen to have a more supported and standardised policy for working with volunteers, that sets out the guidelines but which manages to set out the basic principles from which teams could build practice that suited their individual requirements for volunteers. This reflected well the findings of BDO and facilitated the introduction of standards that would enable the council to meet the charter standards.
38. The teams also felt it would be beneficial to hold quarterly meetings, to discuss any issues or news from their volunteer management duties. The consensus was that they felt isolated and not supported in their volunteer management role and regular meeting would help them to speak to others carrying out the same role and share experiences and solutions.
39. Key stakeholders in the workshop event where;
 - Human resources
 - Communities Southwark

- Communities
 - Officers from each of the teams with volunteers; Libraries, Environment, Tenant Management, Child Sexual Exploitation, Adult and Childrens Services, Communities, Youth Offending Team, Trading Standards.
40. The scope of the workshop was to explore the following areas:
- Understanding best practice
 - Volunteering from HRs perspective
 - How Southwark Council needs a standardised process
 - Who our volunteers are
 - What we can do to make volunteering a good experience
 - Training for those who manage volunteers
 - The benefits of coming together to discuss the way forward
 - Improving services to better meet volunteering management best practice
 - The development of a single volunteering policy.
41. The Draft Volunteering Handbook and Management Guidance were distributed for comment and further recommendations. Appendices for the document have also been developed, to provide a standard process in which we will engage and manage our future volunteers.
42. All volunteers will be required to complete a Southwark Equalities monitoring form, which will help us to analyse the protected equalities characteristics and support the council to monitor how the use of volunteering is fair and supports equal opportunities.
43. Once the new measures are in place for six months the communities team will carry out a short survey of volunteers to understand the impact of the new processes. This will be repeated on an annual basis to ensure that the policy remains a useful tool to deliver best practice for our volunteers; and supports volunteers build their confidence and support the growth of their wellbeing.
44. Our initial analysis of the impact on communities suggests that
- We want to encourage young people to volunteer to develop a culture of active citizenship.
 - The Age friendly agenda and results from our work so far have indicated that older people need more opportunities to get involved in volunteering tackling isolation and supporting opportunities to meet people and have fun.
 - Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation in Southwark recommends volunteering as a good way to counteract feelings of loneliness.
 - We need to liaise with the Disability Forum that is held by Community Southwark and Southwark Disability Association to find out what disabled people feel the roles best suited to them are and think about

- how we can open our opportunities to everyone.
 - Volunteering is proven to alleviate feeling of isolation and loneliness and should be promoted to the LBGTQI + community through the LGBTQ Network.
45. Volunteering opportunities should be promoted to communities from the equalities protected characteristics.
- Southwark’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) network should be more proactive in encouraging take up of opportunities
 - Young people affected by unemployment and lower opportunities to gain work experience, take up of volunteering opportunities by young people
 - Age will not be an issue for people who volunteer at Southwark Council as we understand that people of all ages can benefit from volunteering
 - Black Asian and Minority Ethnic residents who are looking for work experience to populate CVs in a field of work that they have not had the opportunity to enter into previously
 - Disabled residents that may need DSE, DDA support to carry out a volunteer opportunity
 - People from ethnicities that reflect the population of Southwark, who would benefit from volunteering opportunities.
46. Key areas where the need to improve access and quality of opportunities are identified as:
- Southwark Website
 - Information to volunteer agencies
 - Opportunities advertised on the Source for distribution
 - My Southwark and social media
 - Southwark Publications
47. An Equality Analysis is set out at Appendix 3 this notes the positive impact of this policy. It goes on to note that Southwark Council would like to lead by example and implement the recommendations set out in the report from BDO. To produce and adopt policies and processes that will allow us to achieve the Southwark Good practice Charter that is overseen by our partners Communities Southwark and conforms to the NCVO guidelines of best practice in Volunteer Management.

Resource implications

48. All teams will need to set aside sufficient resources within their existing budgets to recompense volunteers as set out in the guidance. This is for fares within Southwark and for lunches where the volunteer works for more than half a day, in addition to setting aside sufficient resources for the training of volunteers both so they are able to carry out their duties but also grow in experience and knowledge.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Governance

49. The report seeks the cabinet's approval of the council's Volunteering Policy.
50. The council is a "best value" authority for the purposes of the Local Government Act 1999. It is under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Secretary of State has issued guidance to assist local authorities to perform this duty and specifically requires that councils should be responsive to the benefits and needs of voluntary and community sector organisations, as well as small businesses. The Volunteering Policy proposed for adoption here would seem to be facilitative of, or incidental to, the achievement of this objective.
51. The cabinet are reminded that the council is subject to the public sector equality duty in section 149 Equality Act 2010. The duty requires the council, in the exercise of all its functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
52. The duty is a continuing one.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC20/025)

53. The strategic director of finance and governance notes the recommendations of this report. The report and appendices seek to create a best practice environment for volunteering within Southwark. The report notes that specific existing resources should be allocated to areas of potential expenditure in services where volunteering occurs, noted examples are food and training.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Managers guidance
Appendix 2	Volunteer handbook
Appendix 3	Equality Analysis
Appendix 4	Volunteer Strategy

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Alice MacDonald, Equalities and Communities	
Lead Officer	Stephen Douglass, Director of Communities	
Report Author	Jessica Leech, Community Engagement Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	7 January 2021	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team		