

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 19 October 21	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Supporting active communities – A volunteer strategy for Southwark 2021 - 24	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All Wards	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Alice Macdonald, Equalities, Neighbourhoods and Leisure	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR ALICE MACDONALD, CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE

Southwark is a borough built on community spirit and action and we have seen that more than ever during the Covid pandemic.

People from across our borough came together to volunteer - supporting their neighbours, delivering thousands of food parcels, tackling loneliness. We saw an increase of 250% in volunteering in just one year. As well as social value, volunteering also brings huge economic value to our borough – contributing over £65 million to our economy.

I want to say a huge thank you to all of the volunteers, community groups, faith organisations, TRAs, mutual aid groups and everyone who pulled together to get us through this incredibly difficult time.

We are committed to continuing to support volunteering and this strategy sets out how we will do this. Our priorities are to increase diversity amongst our volunteers, improve pathways to work and to focus on volunteering amongst young people. We will work to increase awareness about volunteering, increase support to organisations who host volunteer and work to make volunteering, inclusive, accessible meaningful and valued

Thank you to everyone who helped us develop this strategy especially Community Southwark who co-produced it with us.

We want Southwark to be a borough where everyone contributes and I hope this strategy will enable us to support everyone to get involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Cabinet adopts the following vision for volunteering in the borough.

We want Southwark to be a place where everyone feels confident to help and support their neighbours and local groups by getting involved in their communities. We want to build a Southwark where everyone has access to volunteering, so individuals and the places where we live, work, worship and visit can thrive.

2. The cabinet agrees that the priority for change we wish to affect through this work over the next three years are increasing diversity among volunteers, improving pathways to work through volunteering and continuing to focus on young adults volunteering. In particular we have set out the following outcomes for the strategy to deliver:

- More people from our Black Asian and ethnic minority communities engage in volunteering
- The diversity of Trustees on VCS boards increases
- More people accessing employment through the experience gained by volunteering
- More organisations offer opportunities to volunteers
- Improved experience of volunteering through support of host organisations
- Residents feel supported in their neighbourhoods by active communities
- Young adults are active volunteers.

3. That cabinet approves the following key objectives for the strategy for the next three years 2021 to 2024 that will enable us together with our key partners to deliver our vision and these outcomes.

- a) **Increase awareness and knowledge of volunteering:** We want to raise the profile of and celebrate volunteering. We know that people cannot take up opportunities if they do not know about them. We want everyone to have access to volunteering, and feel that this is an activity they can take part in, a normal part of life, and gain the benefits from this way of taking part. We want people to feel valued for their contributions to supporting their communities thrive.

- b) **Provide appropriate support to organisations that host volunteers:** Volunteers are often the backbone to organisations; they provide the much-needed support in so many different areas. Many grass roots organisations and community groups are volunteer led and are only able to function because of volunteers. We want to make sure all groups and organisations who have volunteers are fully supported through best practice and reward and recognition
 - c) **Make volunteering, inclusive, accessible meaningful and valued:** We want to ensure volunteering is open to all. We know that currently the profile of who volunteers does not reflect the profile of the borough and that therefore many people do not access the benefits being a volunteer can bring. We want to change this. People who want to give their time should be able to easily find an opportunity and access volunteering no matter where they are from, live or their protected characteristics. Many look to volunteering to enhance their work skills and we want to support organisations to ensure their volunteering programme can create appropriate pathways into work.
4. That Cabinet approves the action plan that sets out how we will deliver this strategy attached as Appendix 2.
 5. That the Cabinet notes that this strategy development has been led by Community Southwark in partnership with the council and other key Voluntary Sector organisations and passes on its thanks for this collaboration.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. We are using the definition of volunteering set out by London Stakeholders Volunteering Forum which states volunteering is:

‘any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives.’
7. Since 2012 the Council has worked with firstly the Volunteering Centre and then Community Southwark to produce a volunteer strategy for the borough. Each strategy has been developed at key points in time when the landscape for volunteering has undergone significant shift and the current time is not an exception. The last strategy ended in 2020.
8. The purpose of the strategy is to reflect the needs and aspiration for volunteering and community based social action across the borough. The new strategy for 2021 to 2024 shifts the focus to ensure that needs of volunteers as well as host organisations are both equally reflected in the

way forward and the action plan that will be developed following the adoption of the vision and aims. In addition there is recognition that not all communities access formal volunteering opportunities equally and the focus of the work over the next three years will be how we change this, as well as supporting in particular Black, Asian, and minority ethnic community led groups and their volunteers that deliver benefit for their communities.

9. The Voluntary and Community sector in Southwark is diverse. In 2019 there were over 1,324 registered charities in the borough and a further estimated 3000 – 4500 unregistered community groups. In 2021 there were over 45,086 filled volunteer positions in the borough, 4,626 of these are trustees and 1,066 corporate volunteers. Over 6 million volunteering hours were completed which at the rate of London living wage brings an economic contribution to the life of the borough worth over £65 Million.
10. During COVID19 we saw a huge increase in the uptake of volunteers; pre Covid19 at Community Southwark there were about **200** volunteers a year attending the volunteer advice appointments and around 40% of these went onto actively volunteer. From March 2020 to April 2021, following the first lockdown, there have been over **700** volunteers, an increase of **250%**.
11. During the pandemic, there was a huge increase of small grass roots organisations coming together to support their communities. The majority of these were mutual aid groups. 65 mutual aid groups formed in Southwark all working together to support their neighbours and communities. In addition, nationally hundreds of thousands of volunteers stood up to support the NHS through Good Sam programme.
12. The pandemic brought many challenges to organisations, changes to income being the top issue, but also needing to navigate new ways of working, online provision, covid19 risk assessments, addressing the needs of digitally excluded clients and residents, and keeping volunteers engaged. This too affected the nature of volunteering, impacting who and how people could take part.
13. During the pandemic the VCS and faith sectors showed extraordinary flexibility and agility and commitment to the communities they serve. They enabled communities to be fed, cared for peoples wellbeing, ensured that their communities were not left isolated and lonely and this increased level of volunteering and social action contributed to these outcomes.
14. Again, the community in Southwark is showing how it cares through its emerging response to the Afghan refugee crisis. It is important that we value and recognize all these contributions to make Southwark a better kinder place.
15. The pandemic amplified how important volunteering is to individuals and communities. It brings people together. Volunteers benefit through being active, meeting new people, gaining new skills and feeling part of a

community. Volunteers support their communities by reducing isolation, bringing hope, support with tasks and administration.

16. Without volunteers many organisations would not function and many people would suffer and so it is imperative and vital that we encourage and create an open for all strategy that makes Southwark an even better place to belong. Volunteering is a lifeline for many in our communities.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

17. This vision and the aims have been developed co productively with Community Southwark, the volunteer steering group and series of workshops involving volunteers and organizations that work with, support and engage volunteers reflecting the principles of the Approach to Community Engagement set out in 2019 in particular putting people at the heart of our decision making through collaborative working.
18. This paper sets out the first steps to deliver one of the sixteen recommendations in the Community Support Alliance Cabinet report October 2020. This states as follows:

‘Recommendation 7 – Encouraging and Supporting Volunteering - The partners will work with Community Southwark on a joint piece of work on encouraging and supporting volunteering. This will include how we can develop volunteers that reflect the demography of local communities, and what we can offer volunteers (e.g. functional skills training, career pathways for younger volunteers)’.

19. The priorities and outcomes of the strategy reflect this recommendation.
20. The governance of the strategy will remain two fold. In the first instance through our contract with Community Southwark involving delivery of the action plan and co-ordination of the strategy, which will be monitored quarterly by the commissioning team.
21. This strategy will be overseen by a volunteering strategy group, but its membership will be refreshed to better support the delivery of our new vision. This means ensuring that there is representation on the group from organisations representing people with different protected characteristics to ensure that we do not lose focus on being inclusive or supporting organisations being accessible and meaningful. We want to ensure that there are a range of organisations taking part such as those seeking volunteer opportunities such as Southwark Works, groups that deliver services through volunteers such as Link age and community based volunteer led organisations. In addition we will seek representation from a volunteer.
22. Our approach to the membership will also focus on partners and membership being able to take leadership of particular outcomes supporting everyone address the change we wish to see.

23. In this way we believe the steering group will be better able to contribute to the delivery of the action plan and steer and grow the work through their respective experience and the lens they bring to bear on the discussions.
24. We have really benefited in our discussions to develop the strategy and action plan from participation from the volunteer co-ordinator at SLAM, and an organisation that supports young people with autism gain work experience and wish to further grow this way of working.

Policy framework implications

25. The volunteer strategy acts as a supporting policy to a number of key strategies for the council, and a number that have arisen as a response to the COVID pandemic, our work to support recovery and response to the death of George Floyd.
26. The work to support and evolve further a culture of volunteering and embed best practice for volunteers is one of the pillars of the VCS strategy. The report 'Common Purpose Common Cause' outlines a tripartite approach to increase collaboration and co-production to improve commissioning, working with communities. Common Purpose Common Cause and the grant making that underpins it seeks to mobilise community action and make the best use of community resources, universal services, community capability and volunteering, local knowledge and spaces. It acknowledges the value of developing the skills of volunteers and highlights that 'Volunteering is what makes the VCS unique'. The report makes a resolution to:

'enable individuals and groups to be agents of change, ready to shape the course of their own lives. We will achieve this by supporting volunteering and other forms of social action. We will facilitate different ways of supporting more people volunteer.'
27. This mirrors the recommendation on volunteering set out by Community Support Alliance.
28. The report 'Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation in Southwark' recommends volunteering as a good way to counteract feelings of loneliness.
29. The aims of this strategy are linked to developing stronger pathways to work and focusing on fairness and equal access, with a particular emphasis on the needs of young people and people from our Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities. This can play a part in the delivery of outcomes set out in the economic renewal action plan and Youth New Deal and the commitments for a jobs first economic renewal and focus on young people.

30. In October 2020 the cabinet agreed *'that the following principles should be incorporated into the council's values that inform all the work we do across the council, with their final wording to be set out in the refreshed Council Plan; that we will:*

- a) Always work to make Southwark more equal and just*
- b) Stand against all forms of discrimination and racism.'*

The new aims focus on addressing the underrepresentation of our Black and Asian and minority ethnic communities in our cohort of volunteers and supporting small grass roots community organisations which are often led by Black, Asian and minority ethnic community members better.

31. Southwark Stands Together is a long-term programme of positive action, education and initiatives for the council to work in solidarity with Southwark's communities and the council's staff to tackle racism, injustice and inequality. It has a number of work streams including on employment and a focus on the experiences of young people. Within the SST programme our volunteering strategy can support the following outcomes:

- a) Support residents from diverse backgrounds to access quality employment opportunities including apprenticeships, internships and careers information, advice and guidance.*
- b) Implement a structured work experience programme for young residents. Improve the experience of young people with respect to meaningful work experience;*
- c) Develop networks within and beyond school that provide advice and guidance and exposure to opportunities that helps them develop their aspirations and confidence and understanding linked to the world of work.*

32. In addition the culture team has commissioned Olmec to deliver a black on board programme to increase the diversity of culture and arts sector governance boards in the borough, funded through SST work programme. This activity compliments the delivery of one of the volunteer strategy outcomes and the volunteer strategy steering group will work closely with the culture team aiming to reflect some of the learning in other sectors.

33. This review of the volunteer strategy refocuses the work on volunteering to reflect changing council priorities, and significant life course events over the last two years such as the COVID pandemic, closure of the economy, and the spotlight on racism, systemic inequality and injustice.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

34. This strategy supports the growth and nurturing of community power and recognises that communities have a wealth of knowledge and assets within themselves, which acts as a foundation stone for this work. Volunteering is a key pillar of thriving communities and this strategy is written to contribute to how we can practically support our communities

and neighbourhoods thrive, be more resilient to the shocks that they could face be great places to live and work and be places where everyone can have pride and feel that they belong.

35. Our analysis suggests we should continue the policy as equality and health analysis demonstrates that the policy shows no potential for discrimination and we have taken all appropriate opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics.
36. 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.
 - A refocus of our strategy to develop improved pathways to employment within the volunteer offer should benefit in particular young adults and over 50s who are more vulnerable to claiming benefits.
 - 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 and will have a positive impact on communities identified as being vulnerable to loneliness such as the LBGTQ+ community, young people, older people and people with disabilities.
37. Actively working to increase the participation of our Black Asian and minority ethnic communities in volunteering should have a positive impact on the life chances and health and wellbeing of our Black Asian and minority ethnic communities.
38. Improving the diversity of people engaged in volunteering should support the fostering of good relations between people with different characteristics.
39. The aims of the policy and the vision set out the clear aspirations to deliver more inclusive and accessible volunteering.
40. Equality and Health analysis suggests that this policy will have a positive impact on communities with protected characteristics of age, disability, race, religion, sexuality as well as people facing socio economic disadvantage.
41. The continued support and investment in volunteering protects and enhances the capacity of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector deliver a range of positive outcomes for people who live in Southwark.
42. The equality and health analysis demonstrates that the policy shows no potential for discrimination and we have taken all appropriate

opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics.

43. Attached as an appendix is the health and equalities impact analysis.

Climate change implications

44. The work on this strategy has been carried out largely before the implementation of this new requirement to consider the impact of policy on climate change as part of our decision making process and therefore did not form a core part of our considerations when engaging with communities and organisations.

45. However the survey results showed that for the organisations that took part the third most frequent activity was linked to environmental activity. Volunteer activity that supports improvement in our environment is a significant form of volunteering, and the range of activity is wide. Much of the volunteer engagement is around enhancing the environment and green spaces. In this sense the policy supports our work to deliver our climate change ambitions through promoting environmental social action, increasing awareness of environment, and encouraging greater knowledge, respect and engagement with nature.

46. As we deliver the strategy the following are also considerations that would have a positive impact on our climate change strategy.

- Working from home when role enables
- Travelling by bus or train (fares reimbursed)
- Making cycling an option for travel and providing space to keep bicycle locked up
- Promote local volunteering so that walking is an option.

47. One of the key ways of promoting inclusion and opportunities is through taking key themes such as climate change as focus to promote and encourage social action and volunteering, encouraging people to get involved in activities such as improving green spaces, sustainable travel, our parks and encouraging biodiversity; throughout the lifetime of this strategy we will take advantage of hot topics such as climate change as it aligns with news cycles and council priorities.

48. This reflects our learning from the community volunteering response to the pandemic and more recently the Afghan refugee crisis. This approach will inform the ways in which we will deliver the work streams, integrate the various work streams where we can.

Resource implications

49. There are no financial, budgetary or staffing issues. The delivery of the strategy is already part of existing work streams as is the contract for Community Southwark who will act as lead partner for the work on the

action plan.

Consultation

50. We have worked closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector to develop the work so far. This began in the summer 2020 with the Community Support Alliance review that identified volunteering as one of the key considerations to continue to support communities going forward. In December 2020 we began a series of discussions with the volunteering strategy steering group on developing the engagement plan for drafting the new strategy and reviewing the outcomes of the engagement as it has taken place.
51. Community Southwark conducted two surveys one targeted at organisations using volunteers, and one focused on public who could be or were volunteers themselves. With 24 and 49 responses respectively. The organisations that took part some had less than 10 volunteers others more than 50 and covered the full range of service areas from health to homelessness, environmental projects, and children and young people. Interestingly they noted that the majority of their volunteers were in the 31 to 40 age range but more likely to be white and female.
52. Organisations identified their needs as training, resources, funding and networks.
53. We hosted two workshops one with 22 attendees and one with 20. The Community Southwark Annual Survey with 116 responses also included a section about the volunteering services they provide which will be used to inform the action plan.
54. Volunteer survey participants were mainly white and female. They identified the barriers to volunteering were mainly not knowing about the opportunities to volunteering and their own work commitments. The value it provided were new experiences, keeping busy, meeting people and gaining confidence.
55. For the first session of the workshop we worked on developing a deeper understanding and divided the audience into three groups, those who have never volunteered to explore the barriers to volunteering, volunteers to look find out more about their experiences of volunteering and organisations so we could understand better the support they need.
56. The second session explored what some of the solutions could be and set the priorities for action.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Governance

57. There is no specific duty requiring local authorities to establish a volunteer strategy, but local government legislation over the years has included a number of measures aimed at promoting the involvement and empowerment of communities served by Councils, including the Local Government Act 1999 and the Localism Act 2011. The report identifies the benefits such a strategy bring to the council in carrying out its full range of statutory functions. In that regard section 111 of the Local Government 1972 gives a local authority powers to do “anything ...which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions”. Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 is also relevant in that it enables a local authority to do anything that individuals can generally do which would include the introduction of such a strategy.
56. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, in making this decision the Cabinet must comply with its public equality duty which requires it to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the 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.
57. The community impact statement set out in the report and the Equality Impact Analysis prepared and attached identifies relevant matters to be taken into account in discharging that duty.
58. Whilst there is no duty on the council to consult residents in relation to formulating this strategy, the report demonstrates how the council has taken account of the views of relevant groups and individuals in the community and Cabinet is advised to consider the outcome of this consultation in making this decision.
59. The establishment of this strategy is an executive function reserved to Cabinet, which includes the “approval of policy and procedures governing the Council’s relationship with the voluntary sector”.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC21/035)

58. The strategic director of finance and governance notes the recommendations of the report concerning the volunteer strategy and vision for Southwark 2021 to 2024 and the associated action plan.
59. It is also noted that the delivery of the strategy is already part of existing work streams and the report creates no new commitments for services. Delivery will be contained within existing resources.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Volunteer strategy 2017-2020	Communities Division Environment and Leisure Department PO Box 64529 London, SE1 5LX	Jessica Leech 07985 113 786
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=302&MId=7016&Ver=4		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Equality and Health analysis
Appendix 2	Strategy and Action plan 2021 to 2024

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Alice Macdonald, Equalities, Neighbourhoods and Leisure	
Lead Officer	Stephen Douglas Director of Communities	
Report Author	Jessica Leech Community Engagement Manager	
Version	Final	
Dated	8 October 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
Climate Change	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	8 October 2021	