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## **POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - INFORMATION ITEM**

**SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE COUNCIL'S  
EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING SCHEME**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING**

### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an update on the progress to date of the council's Employee Volunteering Scheme since its launch in October 2021.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain. This is the definition commonly accepted across the UK and used by the Welsh Government. Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) recognises that many of its employees already volunteer in their local communities and believe that volunteering not only provides employees with opportunities to develop new skills but also provides vital support for organisations and groups, which contributes to the wider resilience of the community.
- 2.2 Whilst hindered slightly by the restrictions associated with the pandemic, there has been progress in the delivery of the scheme since its launch, with the focus on establishing and refining the associated processes and general promotion of the scheme amongst employees.
- 2.3 We know that community groups need additional volunteers to sustain their activities, if we can tap into the vast number of employees and remove as many barriers to participation as possible, we will be supporting the continuation of community organisations that provide vital services for our residents.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the committee note the report provided for information.

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The scheme provides the organisation with a means of demonstrating our commitment to supporting sustainable, resilient communities through volunteering.

## **5. THE REPORT**

### **5.1 Background**

5.1.1 Following the response to the initial crisis caused by the pandemic, where 400 staff members volunteered to be matched with vulnerable people to provide practical support, Caerphilly CBC recognised the positive contribution that an Employee Volunteering Scheme could make in encouraging employees to continue to take an active role in their communities.

5.1.2 Following several months of planning and consultation with employees and key partners, the scheme was fully endorsed by CMT and finally launched digitally in October 2021 with all the supporting documents and information posted on the employee Intranet site.

5.1.3 The Scheme essentially operates in two parts; long term volunteering undertaken on a regular basis in employees own time over a period of time and day/part day opportunities that employees can released from their daily duties to support activities or event that benefit the population of Caerphilly. There is a leave of absence allocation associated with long term volunteering undertaken in employees own time of a maximum of 2 days in any 12-month period, to be agreed between employee and manager.

5.1.4 Caerphilly Cares was an active member of the internal working group established by Corporate Policy to develop the Employee Volunteering Scheme and following the launch it was agreed that the Caerphilly Cares team would be responsible for the delivery of the scheme, acting as a point of contact for employee and manager queries. The Caerphilly Cares team are also well placed to utilise existing relationships with community groups and organisations to identify projects/activities that could benefit from additional volunteers and promote these opportunities to staff.

### **5.2 Monitoring of the scheme**

5.2.1 The scheme was developed using the online Volunteering Wales system (hereafter referred to as VW) to record and report on volunteer engagement and most aspects of volunteer management including recording data on induction, DBS checks and basic personal information of all volunteers registered. The system is managed locally by CVCs, GAVO in the case of Caerphilly, on a Wales wide basis and is contract managed by the WCVA. Welsh Government and the WCVA are keen that the platform becomes the main mechanism for the public to search for and register with volunteering opportunities in Wales.

5.2.2 All staff expressing an interest in volunteering are directed to register with VW, with support provided by the Caerphilly Cares team. Over the course of the year the team have also signposted opportunities internally and those based with community partners for support via GAVO (local CVC) to establish provider pages/accounts.

5.2.3 Whilst there are quantitative measures in place including number of employees signed up, volunteer hours contributed, leave of absence taken etc. it is worth noting that the

level of 'take up' of the scheme needs to be viewed within the context of the current environment and should not be the main measure of its success. Many departments are operating at capacity and the wider community (including employees) continue to struggle with the implications of the pandemic on many levels in addition to the emerging cost of living crisis, therefore volunteering may not be at the forefront of people's minds. That said, the fact the policy is in place and the support that has and will be developed to support opportunities for staff can only be viewed as a positive.

### **5.3 Progress to date**

- 5.3.1 Working with GAVO and the WCVA, Caerphilly Cares was set up as a provider on the Volunteering Wales platform (VW), initially with 1 live opportunity namely community support volunteer (known as the Buddy scheme). 2 members of the team received training in using the system to upload and monitor opportunities.
- 5.3.2 When registering with VW a personal profile or account is set up for each user, which is then linked to the opportunity they would like to join. However, the system currently does not allow for the differentiation between CCBC employees and other members of the public linked to any one opportunity. To remedy this, a 'Caerphilly Member' opportunity was created and all staff registering to volunteer were asked to join this in the first instance before being linked to the appropriate opportunity (activity) they were volunteering with. This has created an additional administrative task for volunteers but to date has been the only workable option to ensure the numbers registered can be accurately monitored.
- 5.3.3 To support the promotion of the scheme the team; linked with Communications to produce a visual infographic which gives information on the scheme 'at a glance', worked with a local charity to produce a video case study, included articles on the positive aspects of volunteering in the staff 'Wellbeing @ Work' bulletin and 'Make one small change' campaign emails as well as circulating information via 'all user' email communications.
- 5.3.4 Face to face interaction has been limited but the team was able to deliver a Volunteering Expo Event, which was open to all staff to attend in early July 2022. This was the first large scale opportunity the team had to talk to staff about the scheme and it has provided a good springboard on which to base further engagement.
- 5.3.5 2 successful team building activities were held engaging staff in practical activities in the outdoors, linked to community based projects in Ynys Hywel (tree planting) and Bargoed (Tarragan community allotments). The development of further opportunities for team building and other day/part day opportunities will be a focus for the team in the next year as they provide a good 'taster' for those who have not volunteered previously or feel they haven't the time to commit outside of the working day.
- 5.3.6 Following the involvement of Willmot Dixon employees (house build contractors) in the distribution of Free School Meals alongside council staff, there will be further exploration of opportunities to engage our private sector partners (in particular, contractors) in volunteering for the benefit of the community. The duties Willmot Dixon staff could support were slightly limited due to GDPR concerns but were nevertheless appreciated in the efforts to ensure the meals were delivered in line with the schedule.
- 5.3.7 As of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022

- 46 employees registered on the Caerphilly Cares provider page on Volunteering Wales
- 29 active 'Buddies' offering support to vulnerable people registered on Volunteering Wales
- 16 opportunities linked to the provider page including CCBC based opportunities such as YOS team and Veteran hub, as well as external organisations such as the Foodbanks
- 2 Team Building activities in community settings promoted via Volunteering Wales with 14 employees registered

#### **5.4 Volunteering Expo Event**

5.4.1 Following the initial launch online and some other ad hoc promotion, a larger scale Volunteering Expo event was held on 7<sup>th</sup> July to provide a platform on which further promotion and staff engagement in the scheme could be based. In addition to the event a survey was developed for those who could not attend on the day.

5.4.2 The event, open to all CCBC employees, was held in The Hive (former canteen area) at Ty Penallta with invitations to all CCBC managed volunteering opportunities (including the Youth Service, Social Services, Leisure and Education) as well as those based with partner and community organisations to promote their available opportunities. The event afforded the opportunity to undertake consultation with staff including current levels of volunteering, barriers and factors that would encourage volunteering amongst staff.

5.4.3 The following provides an overview of the outputs following the Expo event:

- 8 third sector-based projects offering opportunities attended
- 7 internal projects offering opportunities attended
- 40 members of staff and Cllrs attended on the day
- 61 responses (to date) to the survey circulated for those unable to attend the event
- Event provided an excellent networking opportunity for all attendees including 2 organisations linked with funding providers, 2 registered with Dewis Cymru
- Main barriers reported were lack of time or feeling unable to commit to regular hours
- Main factors to encourage volunteering was to ability to volunteer in work time & finding local opportunities
- 52% respondents to the survey were aware of the scheme, with a further 25% reporting they had some awareness of the scheme however certain service areas not represented.

5.4.4 Feedback from surveys and the engagement event revealed that being able to volunteer during work time and for a local cause, were the key factors that would encourage employees to volunteer. Employees also reported that volunteering has given them the opportunity to build on or learn new skills that have been useful in the workplace. This also benefits the organisation and supports staff retention levels at time when recruitment is difficult across the board.

5.4.5 We now have a clearer picture of all the volunteering opportunities available within the organisation and key contacts for these and will be looking to develop an internal

network group to share best practice, learning, training etc as well as ensuring the standardisation of policies & procedures for any opportunities offered by CCBC. By taking a co-ordinated approach, we can better respond to need within the community and the organisation.

- 5.4.6 In addition to opportunities directly managed by the Council, several departments/teams link with third sector partners to manage volunteers on their behalf (e.g. Waste management with Keep Wales Tidy, Families First with Parent Network amongst others) demonstrating the further impact volunteering has on the organisation, which may not have been immediately obvious.

## **5.5 Funding accessed**

- 5.5.1 In November 2021 Caerphilly Cares was successful in securing funding from the WCVA's Strategic Volunteering Grant 2021/22 for pilot projects to support the establishment of the Employee Volunteering Scheme. The funding was used to supplement support provided by the GAVO volunteering team, with additional paid hours for an existing part time member of staff. The WCVA was very impressed by CCBC's approach to volunteering and whilst the pilot phase funding was issued on a short-term basis (ending in June 2022) the Caerphilly Cares team have recently submitted a further application for the next phase of the funding and are awaiting a decision on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

## **5.6 Challenges encountered**

- 5.6.1 The main challenges have been delays or restrictions in engagement both with employees and community organisations due to Covid, either practically or due to high levels of the virus in the community. This prompted the digital approach to promotion taken during the initial stages prior to and following the launch, which facilitated communication with large numbers of staff but perhaps not the impact achievable with the preferred, personal approach.
- 5.6.2 Despite engagement and consultation prior to launch, there appeared to be a lack of knowledge of the detail of the scheme, particularly in relation to the leave of absence entitlement within HR. The team had several enquiries to clarify if the leave was paid or unpaid, which were feedback to a HR manager and queries have since ceased.
- 5.6.3 Owing to the redesign of the intranet following a tender process, Caerphilly Cares does not yet have a presence on the intranet. Therefore, details of the scheme and the associated documents are hosted on the Policy pages of the intranet. These pages are not visually appealing or easily accessible and remedying this will be a priority going forward. The intention is to create a user-friendly page that will display the supporting information with links to the volunteering opportunities available (internally and with external organisations) grouped by area of interest for example; heritage, education, environmental based opportunities.
- 5.6.4 There were some initial teething issues with registering employees on Volunteering Wales, as the IT security filtering system was blocking or delaying the registration process, leading to confusion and frustration among employees. Working with the WCVA, Team Kinetic (providers of the system) and our corporate IT team these issues were eventually resolved however the team continue to monitor this as/when new employees are engaged.

## **5.7 Future development**

- 5.7.1 The main objective for team going forward will be to grow the Employee Volunteering Scheme ensuring quality volunteering opportunities that benefit the volunteer & the community. Developing skills in the use of Volunteering Wales platform and including this as a tool for managing all CCBC opportunities; linking with WCVA and GAVO volunteering team to support training and learning for those staff managing volunteers/opportunities who aren't familiar with the system.
- 5.7.2 The next phase in the development of the scheme will expand on some areas of work identified during the last year, including but not limited to: development of an overarching volunteering policy & strategy, engaging the private sector (particularly large scale contractors) in volunteering for community benefits, establishing an internal network of providers and standardising our procedures/policies so there is a universal offer and quality experience for volunteers.
- 5.7.3 This work will be done in partnership with GAVO to offer technical advice/support to our team and other departments as part of the network, particularly in relation to policy development. This policy would be reviewed regularly to ensure it was fit for purpose and reflects current legislation and best practice.
- 5.7.4 Focus on the development of opportunities for teams (or individuals) held during the working day. The ability to take part in volunteering during work time due to a lack of available personal time was the main barrier to volunteering identified during consultations with employees.
- 5.7.5 Further face to face promotion of the scheme particularly targeting those staff that do not have access to email/intranet and frontline workers, with more site visits to depots and corporate settings (outside of Penallta House) where staff are based or work from as part of agile working arrangements. Catering staff will be taking part in the Cooking Champion scheme launching in September, undertaking volunteering in the community during work time (day release) and their own time. This project will provide a good case study for employees/managers in frontline services, offering insight into how the scheme can work for non-office based staff.
- 5.7.6 Now that restrictions have eased in the community, further targeted engagement with community organisations that could benefit from additional volunteers or volunteer hours to support their activities or projects.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

- 5.8.1 Despite hinderances largely related to the pandemic, activities undertaken during this first year of the scheme have provided a firm basis for the development of volunteering work linked to the Employee Volunteering Scheme to be built on. Whilst the council has for some time both offered a range of volunteering opportunities and utilised volunteers in its service delivery, there has not been a co-ordinated approach taken to promotion, recruitment, and delivery of these. The team now better understand the barriers and factors that would encourage staff to volunteer and are reviewing how the scheme can be adapted to reflect these findings.
- 5.8.2 The learning from this year's delivery has informed the development of Caerphilly Cares work plans for 2022/23, resulting 2 members of the team focussing on the

development of all aspects of volunteering work within the organisation, linked to the needs identified within the wider community.

- 5.8.3 Promotion/support for teams to take part in day/part day volunteering activities (day release basis) will provide a good opportunity for 'tasters' for those who have not volunteered before and/or feel unable to commit their personal time, as well as an excellent visual means of the Council demonstrating its commitment to our communities.
- 5.8.4 The Scheme offers the potential for positive impacts on both the volunteers, people in receipt of support from volunteers and the organisation. By increasing the number of opportunities accessible and the quality of the experience for volunteers, the impacts will be greater.

## **6. ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 Continuation of corporate support for the Employee Volunteering Scheme and wider work to develop volunteering for the benefit of the community and the organisation.
- 6.2 Caerphilly Cares team will continue to co-ordinate this work, linking with key stakeholders both internally and externally.

## **7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 Report is for information purposes only, however a full IIA of the Scheme was completed prior to the launch.

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Caerphilly Cares has been successful in attracting funding to deliver the service, which includes the overseeing of the Employee Volunteering Scheme.
- 8.2 An application to the WCVA's Strategic Volunteering Grant (phase 2) has been submitted and if successful will offer additional support from GAVO in the development of the scheme. However even if this unsuccessful, the scheme will continue to operate. The panel are scheduled to convene on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 with a decision anticipated shortly after.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 This report has been sent to the Consultees listed below and all comments received are reflected in this report.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 None.

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Consultees:

Dave Street, Corporate Director Social Services and Housing  
Ed Edmunds, Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services  
Sue Richards, Head of Education Planning and Strategy  
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Steven Harris, Head of Financial Services & S.151 Officer  
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Hayley Lancaster, Senior Communications Officer  
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation)  
Tina McMahon, Community Regeneration Manager  
Paul Cooke, Senior Policy Officer  
Cllr Carol Andrews, Cabinet Member  
Chairman and Vice Chairman of the relevant Scrutiny Committee