



Report to Cabinet

Subject Volunteer Leave Scheme

Date 27th September 2011

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1. Purpose of the Report

To seek approval from Cabinet for the introduction of an Employee Volunteer Leave Scheme.

2. Background

SMT have been considering the benefits of encouraging employees to participate in volunteering and to develop relationships with community groups.

The benefits of enabling and encouraging employees to participate in volunteering activities is seen as a key strategy for improving employee satisfaction and commitment to their organisation. At the presentation for the Sunday Times 'One to Watch Award' – Best Place to Work in the Public Sector, many of the successful organisations showcased their volunteering schemes and felt that these had been significant contributors to their high scores in the survey.

HRMagazine recently published an article by Malcolm Scovil - CEO of LeapCR who said:

'Inventive employee engagement: Sometimes you need to go beyond the work environment for team bonding, and this doesn't just mean a few pints down the local. Allowing employees to volunteer can support a positive company culture as well as personal development plans. From one-off group volunteering events to help bonding and skill development, to long-term commitments to a local charity that provides opportunities for individuals and teams to donate their professional skills, all these activities not only benefit the charities but also learning & development and engagement levels.'

A scheme which releases employees to support local groups will also have benefits in adding to their capacity. Employees might be able to bring their own expertise to help a community organisation, or get involved in a practical project that the group wants to do. This scheme has benefits not only to employees but also to communities and volunteer organisations throughout the borough.

STEPs (Employee Engagement Group) were asked to investigate the potential benefits of a Volunteer Scheme and how one might operate for Gedling. Members of the group researched schemes with other organisations and following consideration of various options are proposing the attached scheme for approval.

One of the concerns of STEP is that the time taken to administer such a scheme could be considerable; one authority employs an 0.5 FTE position to do this. The scheme proposed is deliberately low maintenance with both employees and managers expected to act responsibly and sensibly; it has to be taken on trust that an employee who is granted Volunteer Leave uses the time for this purpose.

3. Proposal

The parameters of the scheme are set out in the attached draft policy; line managers are expected to authorise both the fact of the leave proposed and the voluntary work which the employee intends to undertake. It is recognised that there may be times when the manager is not sure whether the work/organisation proposed is within the remit of the scheme – they should refer that issue to STEP who will advise (with reference to Chief Executive if in doubt).

The scheme is for leave to be taken rather than allowing employees to undertake voluntary work during work hours. This is to avoid Gedling Borough Council being responsible for ensuring compliance with the employment legislation which applies whilst the employee is at work. If the work is undertaken during an employee's holiday then they are responsible for ensuring their own safety.

Releasing employees to participate in this scheme has resource implications, and it is important that its value is assessed in some way. It is proposed that employees who participate in the scheme seek feedback from the organisation they work with. This information can be used to inform improvements to the scheme and to present an overall evaluation of its benefits for SMT and Members.

UNISON are represented on STEPs, and are supportive in principle of this scheme. They are currently being consulted on the specific scheme and any comments received will be feedback to Members at Cabinet.

4. Resource Implications

One issue which has not been addressed in the attached document is budgetary implications. A proportion of employees work in positions which have to be covered by paying overtime/temporary cover whilst they are on holiday; in these cases the manager may not be able to authorise the additional time due to not having sufficient budget to pay for the required cover budget. This cost is not known and difficult to anticipate while the scheme is so new. If it is decided that the Council cannot afford the additional cover then the scheme will discriminate against those employees – and maybe the ambit of the scheme should be made clear that it excludes those employees.

5. Recommendation

It is recommended that the attached Employee Volunteer Scheme is approved.



Gedling Borough Council – Employee Volunteer Scheme

This Policy sets out the parameters for the Volunteer scheme. Very briefly, this scheme affords all employees the opportunity to take extra leave in which to undertake approved voluntary work.

Eligibility

1. All employees who work under a contract of employment (whether full or part time) for Gedling Borough Council are eligible.
2. Self employed contractors and/or those working under a contract for services and those on casual employment contracts are excluded from the scheme.

Additional leave entitlement for volunteer work (Volunteer Leave)

3. All eligible employees who work full time (37 hours per week) may take up to a maximum of 1 day's leave (up to 7.5 hours) in addition to their standard leave entitlement.
4. All eligible part time employees may take one day's additional leave in proportion to their part time contract (so, for example, an employee working 18.5 hours would be entitled to an additional maximum of 3.75 hours; an employee working 22.5 hours would be entitled to an additional maximum of 4.5 hours).
5. Volunteer Leave **MUST** be taken within the usual leave year (1 April though to 31 March the following year) and cannot be carried over to the following leave year if unused.
6. Volunteer Leave must be taken during the employee's standard working hours which means that the majority of employees will be unable to use this scheme to carry out volunteer work at the weekends or during the evenings; however those whose normal hours include shift work and/or work during

weekends and/or evenings will be able to take Volunteer Leave during any period during which they would normally work.

7. Any volunteer time worked over and above the employee's entitlement under this scheme will be undertaken in the employee's own time and shall not be eligible for overtime or flexi time.

Approved Volunteer work

8. Volunteer Leave must be approved by the employee's line manager to ensure that there is appropriate cover; the line manager will also approve the volunteer work.
9. Approved volunteer work will fall within one of the following categories:
 - i) That signposted through the STEPs group; this will usually be a group activity which STEPs will advertise seeking a number of volunteers for a specific task (this may be, for example, clearing a community area, or the creation of a garden); those volunteers will then contact the group responsible for the work (charity/school etc) to make the arrangements.
 - ii) Work arranged by the individual employee.
10. All volunteer work signposted through STEPs will be approved volunteer work and Managers will be expected to approve the additional leave PROVIDED there is sufficient cover.
11. Approval of voluntary work arranged by the individual will be at the discretion of the line manager with guidance from STEPs if required.
12. All volunteer work must be within the Gedling Borough Council boundaries and for the benefit of the community as a whole or for a group within the community.
13. Volunteer work which will generally be approved is:
 - i) For a charity;
 - ii) For a school within the Gedling Borough Council area;
 - iii) That arranged through a Volunteer service (for example, CVS);
 - iv) For a community group within Gedling Borough Council area
14. Volunteer work which will not generally be approved (even if for a charity) is:
 - i) Any party political activity or which promotes any particular political party;

- ii) For any organisation whose aims and objectives conflict with the interests of Gedling Borough Council, or where there is a conflict with the employee's job role;
- iii) Any activity which may bring Gedling Borough Council into disrepute;
- iv) Promotion of religion (either generally or any particular religion);
- v) For a profit making organisation.

15. The above are indications of the types of volunteer work which may be approved or not approved; these are not exclusive. Any manager who is unsure whether the proposed volunteer work falls within or outside the scheme should refer to Steps. In the event of any disagreement the decision of Steps is final.

16. Volunteers and Managers should note that Gedling Borough Council's insurance will NOT cover any volunteer work carried out during an employee's leave, including Volunteer Leave.

Administration of the scheme

17. The aim is to keep administration to a minimum; all involved are expected to take a common sense approach.

18. All employees undertaking volunteer work must pay their own travelling and other expenses which they may incur; no travel, subsistence or any other expenses claim may be made from Gedling Borough Council.

19. All applications for Volunteer Leave will have to complete a form (attached) which must be signed by their line manager; this is to both approve the date and time of the Volunteer Leave and to approve the type of volunteer work proposed (if in doubt Managers should refer to STEPs – steps@gedling.gov.uk).

20. Once the Volunteer Leave has been completed the form (with the feedback completed) should be sent to Steps to use to review the scheme (see below).

21. The scheme will be reviewed after 12 months by STEPs and may be continued in its current format, continued with changes to this policy, or discontinued altogether; if deemed necessary by STEP the Policy may be changed at any time (subject to the prior approval of SMT)

22. Volunteer Leave shall be recorded on the electronic flexi system by a 'V'.

Evaluation/outcomes

23. All employees who undertake Voluntary work under this scheme are encouraged to take notes/photographs and may be asked if they wish to participate in promoting the scheme and/or Gedling Borough Council
24. All employees who take Volunteer Leave should complete the feedback portion of the attached form; comments from their manager are also invited.
25. All employees who participate in the scheme are asked to seek feedback from the organisation for whom they worked (form attached). This is to help evaluation of the scheme and to improve it where any improvements would benefit both the volunteers and the organisations who use them.