



Report to Joint Consultative and Safety Committee

Subject: The Council's Volunteering Leave Policy

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1. Purpose

To present a revised Volunteering Leave Policy, and to invite comments and recommendations from the Joint Consultative and Safety Committee (JCSC) for consideration by the Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee (ACSC) prior to policy implementation.

2. Introduction and background

The Refresh Board received an initial report on 16 December 2015 on the current Volunteering Leave Policy. This highlighted the lower than desired take-up of the current policy (**Appendix 1**), due to uncertainty over what it entailed, and highlighted a number of points:

- The current policy is outdated and requires alteration to align with current situations, such as the closing of the Gedling CVS.
- The current scheme is prohibitive to the majority of volunteering roles available, which mostly occur in smaller continuous roles.
- Very few people knew of the scheme, and few were confident they could find a relevant one-day volunteering opportunity without help.
- Clarification that volunteering can only qualify if it occurs within Gedling Borough.
- The new policy should be monitored to evaluate uptake and success.

The Refresh board then recommended a wider change in policy than had been suggested, to reflect a policy that would reward employees for undertaking a certain numbers of hours volunteering within the year, rather than providing time off from work for them to find volunteering opportunities.

This reflected the relative difficulty in finding significant numbers of available '*one-off*' volunteering opportunities, when most roles tend towards regular but shorter commitments.

After consultation with Service Managers the proposed draft policy has been amended to retain the opportunity to make use of the existing '*one-off*' option alongside the newly-proposed '*sustained*' option.

3. Proposal

Taking account of the Refresh Board's recommendations, it is proposed that;

- The core basis of the policy be revised to *reward* employees who undertake a minimum predetermined number of hours per year volunteering by allocating an additional one day's annual leave
- The scheme highlights the commitment to only offering the scheme to those who volunteer within Gedling, in order to promote stronger links with the community while developing staff wellbeing
- The general surrounding policy be rewritten to reflect these changes, with the full revised policy shown at **Appendix 2**
- The scheme be promoted through Community Relations to identify potential opportunities available, as well as highlighting and promoting successes within the scheme

4. Financial Implications

Should the scheme achieve its desired effect of increasing volunteering numbers, and because it will reward people who already volunteered locally who previously were not eligible, each service area may face increased costs needing to cover extra leave allowance. In some areas this may be only an "opportunity cost" (time not spent on other things), however in areas that require absence to be back-filled (for example Waste Services and parts of Leisure Services) then there will be additional direct cost.

However, it is anticipated that any additional costs will be accommodated within the current approved budget, but the take-up of the scheme will be monitored and any arising budget implications will be considered during the budget process.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1: Current Volunteering Leave Policy

Appendix 2: Proposed new Volunteering Leave Policy

6. Background Papers

Report to Refresh Board, 16 December 2015

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that the JCSC:

- Considers the revised draft policy statement shown at **Appendix 2**.
- Makes recommendations to the Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee which will subsequently consider whether to adopt the policy statement.

Volunteer Policy

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.

1. Eligibility

All employees who work under a contract of employment (whether full or part time) for Gedling Borough Council are eligible.

Self-employed contractors and/or those working under a contract for services are excluded from the scheme.

2. Additional leave entitlement for volunteer work (Volunteer Leave)

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.

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).

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.

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.

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.

3. Approved Volunteer Work

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. Approved volunteer work will fall within one of the following categories:

- 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.
- Work arranged by the individual employee.

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.

Approval of voluntary work arranged by the individual will be at the discretion of the line manager with guidance from STEPs if required.

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.

Volunteer work which will generally be approved is:

- For a charity;
- For a school within the Gedling Borough Council area;
- That arranged through a Volunteer service (for example, CVS);
- For a community group within Gedling Borough Council area.

Volunteer work which will not generally be approved (even if for a charity) is:

- Any party political activity or which promotes any particular political party;
- 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;
- Any activity which may bring Gedling Borough Council into disrepute;
- Promotion of religion (either generally or any particular religion);
- For a profit making organisation.

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.

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.

4. Administration of the scheme

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

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.

All applicants 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).

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). 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 STEPs the Policy may be changed at any time (subject to the prior approval of SMT).

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

5. Evaluation/outcomes

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 (but any participation will be voluntary promotion of the scheme is not a condition of the leave being allowed).

All employees who take Volunteer Leave are invited to complete the feedback portion of the attached form; comments from their manager are also invited. This will assist STEPs in evaluating the scheme and making any improvements.

All employees who participate in the scheme are asked to seek feedback from the organisation for whom they worked (form attached). Again, this is to help evaluation of the scheme and make any improvements which would benefit both the volunteers and the organisations who use them.



VOLUNTEERING LEAVE POLICY

1. General Introduction

1.1. Background

Volunteering within the community is a rewarding action, supported by Gedling Borough Council. The Volunteering Leave Policy shall allow Gedling employees the opportunity to take up to one day of leave, to promote volunteering.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the Volunteering Leave Policy is to increase the number of employees volunteering within Gedling Borough, by both rewarding current volunteers and encouraging new opportunities.

This follows the council priority to: "Promote and encourage employee and community volunteering and residents' involvement in local activities." By encouraging volunteering within the Borough it will help employees forge stronger links to the local communities they serve by building stronger relationships.

Another key aspect behind promoting volunteering is to help further staff development and wellbeing – as volunteering has been identified by the NHS as helping to provide a better quality of life, improved self-esteem and other benefits to the individuals who undertake volunteering.

2. General Policy

2.1. Eligibility

The policy shall be applicable to all employees (whether full or part time) of Gedling Borough Council who work under a contract of service (employment).

2.2. Implementation

Employees can qualify for additional leave through two different routes. It is up to the employee to choose either the option defined at 2.2.1 or 2.2.2.

Only a single working day's leave may be taken in each leave year (April to March), therefore employees are only permitted to submit application through one option. For part-time employees calculating leave as hours, the amount of hours allowed per year will equate to their average working hours per week divided by five. This will be viewed as an "average working day" for the purpose of this policy.

Volunteering work shall only be eligible for consideration through the policy if it has taken place within Gedling Borough.

2.2.1. 'Sustained' Volunteering

If an employee has completed a minimum of 40 hours' volunteering within Gedling Borough, over the course of a single leave year, then they shall be entitled to receive an additional extra (average if part-time) working day's annual leave.

This work must be completed within their own time, and should an opportunity occur within normal working hours it is expected to be worked in an employee's flexi time or be agreed with their line manager to ensure that it does not replace time spent working.

The volunteering hours must be evidenced to their manager by a formal letter from an official role within the charity, organisation or community group that they have volunteered for, confirming they have performed this work.

2.2.2. 'One-Off' Volunteering

An employee may wish to take part in an appropriate (defined in 2.3) volunteering opportunity that occurs during the week. If this occurs on their normal working day they may be allowed time away from work as follows;

A full time employee can take up to a single working day's (up to 7.5 hours) leave on which to volunteer upon.

A part time employee may take volunteering leave as an average working day as described in 2.2.

This leave must be taken during the employee's standard working hours. Employees shall be unable to use this scheme to carry out volunteer work at the weekends or during evenings unless those times form part of their normal work pattern.

2.3. Appropriate Work

Volunteering Leave must be approved by the employee's line manager to ensure that there is appropriate cover; the line manager will also approve the nature of the volunteer work.

The items listed below are indications of what may or may not be approved; however the list is not exhaustive. In the event of uncertainty over a proposed volunteering role, refer to the Service Manager. In the case of any disagreement the Council's Grievance Procedure will be applied.

2.3.1. Approved Work

Volunteer work (within the Borough) that shall generally be approved will fall within the following categories:

- For a charity;
- For a school;
- For a community group or club;
- Opportunities arranged through a volunteer service, or those promoted by the council itself, such as community clean ups.

2.3.2. Non-Approved Work

Volunteer work which will not generally be approved:

- Any political activity, or action which promotes any particular political party;
- For any organisation whose aims and objectives conflict with the interests of Gedling Borough Council, or where there is conflict with the employee's job role;
- Promotion of religion (this would not necessarily rule out charitable work such as foodbanks);
- For a profit making organisation;
- Any activity which may bring Gedling Borough Council into disrepute.

3. Administration

Administration will be aimed to be kept to a minimum, with all involved expected to take a common sense approach.

Employees wishing to take volunteering leave, either via the 'Sustained' or 'One-Off' options, must provide to their line manager evidence in the form of a formal letter from an official role within the charity, organisation or community group that they have volunteered for, confirming they have performed this work.

Volunteering Leave must be taken within the usual annual leave year (1 April through to 31 March the following year) and cannot be carried over to the following leave year if unused.

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.

4. Evaluation

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

For those not using the electronic system, their managers shall note the amount of volunteering leave taken, and then pass this information on to the Community Relations Service Area annually in order to monitor the take up of the policy.

Employees will be invited to provide feedback to their manager and the scheme about their experiences, which will help evaluate the scheme.