

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 21 July 2021

Somerset West and Taunton Volunteering Policy and Procedure

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillors Cllr Ross Henley and Cllr Marcus Kravis

Report Author: Lisa Redston – Economic Development Manager

1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1. The report seeks approval of a suite of policies and procedures that will allow for recruitment, management, and support of volunteers by SWT.
- 1.2. The report explains the requirements to formalise and adopt corporate policies and procedures to ensure robust governance procedures are in place that safeguard both volunteers and SWT, and to ensure volunteers are supported and managed effectively.
- 1.3. The report presents a suite of documents that have been drafted including:
 - Volunteer Handbook (Appendix A)
 - Volunteer Managers Handbook (Appendix B)
 - Data Protection and Client Confidentiality Policy (Appendix C)
 - Equality and Diversity Policy (Appendix D)
 - Safeguarding for Volunteers Policy (Appendix E)
 - Health and Safety Policy (Appendix F)
 - Lone Working Policy (Appendix G)
 - Bullying and Harassment Policy (Appendix H)
 - Volunteer Agreement (Appendix I)
 - Flow Chart for Volunteer Recruitment (Appendix J)
 - Volunteer Application Form (Appendix K)
- 1.4. Further documents will be produced to support the recruitment and management of volunteers including:
 - A Business Case Template and checklist for new volunteering schemes
 - Guidance on problems solving (e.g. Grievance and Disciplinary procedures)

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Executive is asked to approve the adoption of the SWT Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures attached to this report.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1. The Somerset West and Taunton Volunteering Policies and Procedures have been prepared in response to creating a supportive, effective, and efficient team of volunteers.
- 3.2. A risk assessment has been carried out to assess any risk to volunteers, SWT or the wider community.
- 3.3. Potential risks have been addressed by the proposal to adopt Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures which will be underpinned by essential training for both staff and volunteers on policies, procedures and obligations and ongoing support for volunteers when delivering their role.
- 3.4. Insuring volunteers – Volunteers are covered by SWT current liability cover. Public Liability will cover third parties that are injured, or their property damaged due to a negligent act made by an employee or a volunteer working for the Council in connection with the business. SWT Employers Liability insurance also covers volunteers for work-related illness or injury. Volunteers are required to be working for the Council in connection with the business while under the Council's direct control or supervision with full training, support, and management of the volunteers in place. Training will cover health and safety to use their regular building and IT equipment.
- 3.5. Health and Safety - A risk assessment for each venue or location of activity will be completed before assigning work or tasks to volunteers. Volunteers will receive Health and Safety training and adherence to the Volunteer Health and Safety policy (Appendix F) will form part of the Volunteer Agreement (Appendix I) signed by the volunteer.
- 3.6. SWT IT equipment and software – If access to SWT IT equipment, software or email addresses are required for volunteers this will be considered as part of the Data Protection Assessment during development of the Business Case for each volunteering opportunity. SWT IT officers will be consulted on provision of resource, and risks associated with access to SWT shared systems, and data protection. Volunteers will be trained in and agree to the SWT Volunteer Data Protection and Client Confidentiality Policy (Appendix C)
- 3.7. GDPR data breach – A full Data Protection Assessment will be carried out as part of the Business Case for each volunteering opportunity. Volunteers will receive GDPR and client confidentiality training and adherence to the Volunteer Data Protection and Client Confidentiality Policy (Appendix C) will form part of the Volunteer Agreement signed by the volunteer.
- 3.8. Employment Hub data breach - Data relating to Employment Hub activity and case management will be stored on the externally procured Client Management System 'Makerable'. Data is stored on servers housed in secure data centres located in London, England. The data is encrypted at REST and stored in AWS S3 buckets. Please see the Makerable Data Storage Information (Appendix M). Volunteers will not be able to access all client data, access will be limited to the data stored relating to cases in the Hub they are assigned. SWT are considered Data Controllers and will have overall responsibility and liability for compliance with UK GDPR legislation.
- 3.9. Client confidentiality and Safeguarding – Client confidentiality will be considered when developing the Business Case for any volunteering opportunity. Where Volunteers will be handling sensitive or personal information in relation to individuals the volunteers will

be asked to sign a Data and Confidentiality Agreement as part of their Volunteer Agreement (Appendix I). In this scenario volunteers will also be required to volunteer to have an extended DBS check, which will form part of the Volunteer Agreement (Appendix I).

- 3.10. Nature of advice given – Depending on the volunteering role there is a risk that incorrect advice is given by volunteers to members of the public. Volunteers will receive full training to know the limits of their support role and when to signpost to an advice agency. Regular supervision sessions, training and best practice communication systems will support the volunteers to give accurate and quality support. These requirements are defined in the Volunteer Managers Handbook (Appendix B).
- 3.11. Volunteer welfare – All volunteer roles will receive regular 1-1 supervision as set out in the Volunteer Managers Handbook (Appendix B). In some cases, dependant on the nature of the volunteering role, volunteers may receive disclosures or information that could be distressing. In this case Volunteer Managers should provide regular ‘clinical supervision’.
- 3.12. Unable to recruit volunteers - Based on the experience of the WS Hubs, recruitment of volunteers is not considered to be a barrier. In addition, the recent COVID crisis has enabled many people to become volunteers for the first time and wish to continue in this capacity. SPARK Somerset will provide a pipeline of volunteers to SWT and support in the design of roles and volunteer job specifications.
- 3.13. Loss of external funding for Employment Hubs – If Volunteering Policies and Procedures are not adopted by SWT the Employment Hub scheme will be unable to meet delivery targets agreed with funders, potentially resulting in loss of remaining funds, and the claw back of funds already paid to SWT for the delivery of the Hubs.

4. Background and full details of the report

- 4.1. Background – Community Employment Hubs
- 4.2. The requirement for the adoption of corporate volunteering policies and procedures has been prompted by the SWT Economic Development Community Employment Hub project.
- 4.3. The Employment Hub project will provide an agile local service delivered by volunteers and managed by employed SWT staff (Employment Hub Co-ordinators already in post) that will:
 - Address the embedded worklessness within the most deprived areas of Somerset West and Taunton and the West Somerset Opportunity Area.
 - Deliver effective measures to make sure jobs and training are widely accessible to communities whose risk of exclusion has been increased during COVID-19.
 - Provide opportunities for people to develop skills via volunteering to increase their progressions toward employment.
 - Increase equality of access to employment information, advice, and guidance
 - Deliver proactive measures, through a holistic approach in partnership with key organisations such as the CAB, DWP, Mental Health and Disability Support Partners, Child Care providers, Employers and Education Providers to address barriers to access to employment and training opportunities.

- 4.4. Across the country around 12.7 per cent of workers are employed in low paid work and living in poverty and around 56 per cent of people living in poverty belong to a work household (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2020) The majority of low paid workers are employed in 'poor-quality work' (i.e. low pay, part time or zero hour contracts etc) such as sales, leisure and tourism which form a large proportion of the employment opportunities across the Somerset West and Taunton district and are therefore most likely to be affected by COVID-19.
- 4.5. Community Employment Hubs are proven to be an effective delivery model for volunteer based delivery of support in local communities, working alongside key organisations such as the CAB, Mind and Job Centre Plus, as well as education and training providers and local employers to provide a holistic package of support to help people back into education, training or work, or to help those wanting to change career paths. In terms of effectiveness during 18 months of delivery of Community Employment Hubs in the former West Somerset area 564 people accessed and gained positive outcomes.
- 4.6. Given their location at the heart of each community the hubs, through their volunteers, can engage those hardest to reach, including those without qualifications, training, or experience and those with health conditions and disabilities. The issues behind the figures are often complex but the success of the employment hubs to date has been the holistic approach that the volunteers in the hubs are able to take to address individual need.

4.7. **A summary of the economic context and impact of COVID 19 on local economies and issues of unemployment:**

- Oxford Economics were commissioned in July to produce a report based on the economic impact in Somerset. The following scenarios do not take into account the November 2020 or January 2021 lockdowns:
- Oxford Economics has forecast the impact of the pandemic and associated lockdown measures on the Somerset economy. The baseline scenario finds that by 2025 GVA will be 1.8% lower than pre- pandemic forecasts. This outcome is based on an 8% decline in 2020 followed by a 7.4% increase in 2021 and continuing growth (albeit at a slower pace) up to 2025.
- Under the baseline scenario it is estimated that there will be over 10,000 jobs lost in 2020, with the unemployment rate increasing to 5% (from 3% in 2019). The unemployment rate is forecast to fall from this 2020 peak year-on year up to 2025 with a return to pre-pandemic levels by 2022. The claimant counts in Somerset rose significantly between March and August of 2020. As changes are introduced to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self Employment Income Support Scheme throughout the summer it is likely that fewer workers will be furloughed, and whilst some will go back to work, this is likely to lead to an increase in claimants. However, the extension of the UK furlough scheme to March 2021 could delay a more significant drop in employment.

4.8. **Requirement for Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures**

To enable a range of volunteering opportunities to be offered by SWT and to ensure robust governance is in place that safeguards volunteers and SWT, it is important that policies and procedures are adopted corporately.

4.9. **Benefits of offering Volunteering opportunities**

- Provides opportunities for people to develop skills via volunteering to increase their progressions toward employment. The Policy and Procedures ensure volunteers are provided with valuable training to complete their role, work experience and references to go on to apply for a variety of roles within the job market.
- Provides volunteering opportunities for people that improve their mental and physical health and enable them to be an active contributor to their community.
- Ensures the community can benefit from a range of services provided by volunteers and expand SWT services beyond those provided by SWT employees.

5. Links to Corporate Strategy

- 5.1. The adoption of Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures will support delivery of the following Corporate Objective in particular:

Our Environment and Economy - Encourage wealth creation and economic growth throughout the District by attracting inward investment, enabling research and innovation, improving the skills of the local workforce and seeking to ensure the provision of adequate and affordable employment land to meet different business needs.

- 5.2. The provision of volunteering opportunities by SWT will support the delivery of Corporate and Operational objectives across the organisation through the expansion of SWT services and project delivery.
- 5.3. The Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures will enable delivery of the Community Employment Hubs that form part of the SWT Economic Recovery and Growth Plan.

6. Finance / Resource Implications

- 6.1. The policy states that the financial impacts including any internal resource requirements, of any volunteering scheme should be found via current departmental budgets, or through external funding opportunities.
- 6.2. A business case for each volunteering opportunity will be prepared by the SWT department looking to host volunteers. The business case template will provide a checklist of all elements to be considered before recruiting volunteers. This will include the financial impacts or risk of any volunteering scheme.
- 6.3. There are some Public Liability and Employee Liability Insurance implications from the adoption of the Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures. The Councils current policies will require amendment (see 3.4). Any additional costs are being explored and will be presented in the Council report. The adoption of clear policies and procedures, and training programmes for volunteers will help to reduce any increased costs.
- 6.4. Volunteer expenses are covered in the Volunteering Policy and Managers handbook.
- 6.4.1. In the business case for each volunteering opportunity the financial impacts of the potential for volunteers to claim expenses will be considered. Expenses will not be claimed via the itrent system but paid directly as a BACs payment.

- 6.4.2. Expenses will be monitored by the SWT employee managing the volunteers and approved following the E5 Finance system approval scheme of delegation.
- 6.4.3. The policy suggests, in line with other LA volunteering policies, that mileage could be claimed by the volunteer at the rate of 45p per mile, if the volunteers home address is more than 2 miles from their home address. If volunteers have limited mobility or other accessibility requirements this will be assessed at point of recruitment on a case by case basis, with any additional expenses factored into the business case.
- 6.5. In the business case for each volunteering opportunity the requirement for use of IT and mobile phone equipment must be considered. In some cases, IT equipment and support resource could be provided via the SWT IT department. Alternatively, equipment and IT support could be procured externally, or provided via donations to the project.
- 6.6. The following financial considerations will be factored into the business case for any volunteering opportunity.
- Any requirement for DBS checks and any costs associated.
 - Any requirement for PPE and costs associated.
 - Any requirement for SWT employed staff management, supervision, and administration.
 - Any costs associated with training for required for volunteers – such as IT, confidentiality and GDPR, equality and diversity, use of equipment and health and safety.
- 6.7. There are financial implications if the Corporate Policy and Procedures are not adopted in relation to the Community Employment Hubs project. The project is fully funded via the DWP, Business Rates Retention and HPC Employment and Skills s106 funds. The funding has been awarded based on a volunteer model of delivery and co-ordinator support. Targets of client numbers have been agreed in relation to the funding and if volunteers are unable to be recruited and the targets met, this will have consequences on the funding agreed and the funding for the SWT employed co-ordinator's posts.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. All documents are being reviewed by SHAPE legal to ensure that any risks relating to Employment Law are removed or mitigated.
- 7.2. UNISON are being consulted on the draft policy and procedures the drafts will be presented to UNISON on 15th June. Initial feedback from UNISON will be fed into the policy and report to Members. The JNCB will meet on 20th July at which point the Policy and Procedures can be formally agreed. This is one day prior to the Executive meeting, therefore the decision made by UNISON will be provided as a verbal update at the Executive meeting.

8. Climate and Sustainability Implications

- 8.1. SWT's aim through adopting the Volunteer Policy and Procedures is to achieve a more connected service with the local community whilst providing experience and training to members of the community.
- 8.2. The Volunteer policies and procedures will ensure that Volunteers are allocated work their nearest volunteering opportunity avoiding undue travel to help reduce carbon emissions. Volunteers will be encouraged to use public transport or walk to their place of activity.
- 8.3. Use of volunteer models to deliver blended access to services including face to face and online/telephone client discussions will reduce unnecessary travel by clients.
- 8.4. Volunteering opportunities provided by SWT can help to expand SWT services that improve the environment, and could be used to support tree planting, litter picking and wild meadow maintenance.

9. Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

- 9.1. Client confidentiality will be considered when developing the Business Case for any volunteering opportunity. Where Volunteers will be handling sensitive or personal information in relation to individuals the volunteers will be asked to sign a Data and Confidentiality Agreement as part of their Volunteer Agreement. In this scenario volunteers will also be required to volunteer to have an extended DBS check, which will form part of the Volunteer Agreement (see Appendix C and E).

10. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 10.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been drafted and will be submitted in full with the report to the Executive/Full Council. See Appendix L
- 10.2. The evidence supporting the report indicates that the more vulnerable sections of our communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and that the increase in unemployment, expected rise in homelessness and business closures will see further impacts. By adopting the Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures SWT will provide opportunities for those who have been impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic to access new opportunities.

11. Social Value Implications

- 11.1. By adopting the Volunteer policies and procedures and creating volunteer opportunities address some of the key underlying challenges around social mobility and inclusion. The benefits of volunteering are widely reported including improving skills and therefore supporting improved social mobility, helping people into jobs, supporting business growth and job creation, improving digital and physical access to learning and employment, and delivering affordable housing.

12. Partnership Implications

- 12.1. SWT officers have worked in partnership with SPARK to design and deliver the suite of Volunteering policies and procedures to ensure they are robust in terms of governance and provide the necessary support for volunteers to carry out their roles safely and effectively and feel a welcome part of SWT service delivery.

- 12.2. SWT will continue to work with SPARK who will provide a pipeline of volunteers to SWT and advertise opportunities on behalf of SWT.

13. Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 13.1. The Volunteer Policies and Procedures include guidance for Volunteer Managers and Volunteers to be supported within their role. This is intended to have a positive influence on the quality of life and health and wellbeing of volunteers, staff and therefore the service users including residents and businesses.
- 13.2. Volunteering and helping others can help reduce stress, combat depression, give mental stimulation also achieving workplace experience, increased network links, personal satisfaction and importantly build confidence and self-esteem.
- 13.3. The main outcome of epidemiological research undertaken by the British Medical Journal regarding the association between volunteering and mental wellbeing found that those participants who engaged in volunteering regularly appeared to experience higher levels of mental wellbeing. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/8/e011327>

14. Asset Management Implications

- 14.1. There are no asset management implications that relate directly to this report.

15. Data Protection Implications

- 15.1. Where information has been obtained through consultation with individuals or organisations we have:
- only collected the data necessary to produce the Volunteer Policies and Procedures
 - secured permission to use the information and opinions
 - acted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- 15.2. SWT IT equipment and software – If access to SWT IT equipment, software or email addresses are required for volunteers this will be considered as part of the Data Protection Assessment during development of the Business Case for each volunteering opportunity. SWT IT officers will be consulted on provision of resource, and risks associated with access to SWT shared systems, and data protection.
- 15.3. GDPR data breach – A full Data Protection Assessment will be carried out as part of the Business Case for each volunteering opportunity. Volunteers will receive GDPR and client confidentiality training and adherence to the Volunteer Data Protection and Client Confidentiality Policy will form part of the Volunteer Agreement signed by the volunteer.
- 15.4. Client confidentiality and Safeguarding – Client confidentiality will be considered when developing the Business Case for any volunteering opportunity. Where Volunteers will be handling sensitive or personal information in relation to individuals the volunteers will be asked to sign a Data and Confidentiality Agreement as part of their Volunteer Agreement. In this scenario volunteers will also be required to volunteer to have an extended DBS check, which will form part of the Volunteer Agreement.

16. Consultation Implications

- 16.1. SWT officers have consulted extensively with SPARK Somerset and Volunteers that have worked within the West Somerset Employment Hubs prior to the Covid 19 pandemic to understand the needs of volunteers, along with the requirements of organisations that host and manage volunteers. Officers have also consulted with other neighbouring local authorities to understand any best practise that could be adopted by SWT.
- 16.2. As per 7.2 consultation with UNISON will begin on 15th June 2021.
- 16.3. The adoption of Corporate Volunteering Policies and Procedures will not require any wider public consultation.

17. Scrutiny/Executive Comments / Recommendation(s)

17.1. Not applicable at this time.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – If requested**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Ad-hoc

List of Appendices (delete if not applicable)

Appendix A	SWT Volunteer Handbook
Appendix B	SWT Volunteer Managers Handbook – to follow
Appendix C	SWT Data Protection and Client Confidentiality Policy
Appendix D	SWT Equality and Diversity Policy
Appendix E	SWT Safeguarding for Volunteers Policy
Appendix F	SWT Health and Safety Policy
Appendix G	SWT Lone Working Policy
Appendix H	SWT Volunteer Bullying and Harassment Policy
Appendix I	SWT Volunteer Agreement
Appendix J	SWT Volunteer Recruitment Flow Chart
Appendix K	SWT Application Form
Appendix L	Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment
Appendix M	Data Security for App based Client Management System Makerable

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