

To: Communities Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

By: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community Services and
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Date: 9 July 2010

Subject: Volunteering

Classification: *Unrestricted*

Summary:

This report outlines the significance of volunteering in Kent and the activity sponsored by KCC to promote this. The contribution made by volunteers and volunteer managers in KCC services is also highlighted and the report concludes with a section on the employee volunteering scheme in the council.

Members are asked to *note* and *comment* on future direction and priorities.

FOR INFORMATION AND COMMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 Volunteers contribute significantly to the value of services across KCC, and can also bring benefits to the volunteer – in terms of gaining confidence, skills and a route to employment. Healthy communities have local residents involved in the life of the neighbourhood, encouraging participation to increase a sense of belonging and local pride. Projects and charitable causes succeed where enthusiasm drives people to mobilise others and bring in resources.

1.2 In order to promote these benefits the Kent Volunteers partnership was set up by KCC 11 years ago with the aim of promoting volunteering across the county and making voluntary opportunities available. The Kent Volunteers Advisory Group, chaired by the Chairman of KCC provides a county steering group for this work and membership includes representatives from KCC directorates as well as representatives of statutory and voluntary organisations and volunteers. This includes Jobcentre Plus, Police, Health, Connexions, St John, Kent Council for Voluntary Youth Services, Volunteer Centres, Kent Wildlife Trust, Attend (hospital care), and Vitalise (disability support).

1.3 The following sections give emphasis to three strands of activity that have been underway over the past 12-18 months :- promoting and facilitating volunteering in the county; encouraging and supporting managers of volunteer schemes within KCC and brokering access to volunteering opportunities for staff.

2. Volunteering in the County

Direct recruitment

2.1 In readiness for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games, Kent Volunteers, KCC Sport, Leisure and Olympics and the Volunteer Centres in Maidstone & West Kent have developed the Kent eVent Team, a scheme to enable volunteers to be involved in one-off events that need volunteers, including KCC and District Council events as well as a wide range of charitable organisations. The scheme has recruited over 1000 volunteers of all ages and matched them to over 70 events. The experience of volunteering and the training offered will enable Kent residents to be well equipped to serve with the 70,000 volunteers needed for the Games.

2.2 Kent's bid for Kent Community Action funding was jointly developed by CFE and Communities under the umbrella of the Integrated Youth Support Subgroup of the Kent Children's Trust and a range of partners including Kent's local 'v' team are involved. The Kent pilot sets out an ambition for 4,000 young people aged 14-16 (from 13 pilot schools) to work towards 50 hours of volunteering by offering opportunities that support their learning, appeal to their interests, and allow them to design, develop and deliver their own projects.

Facilitating recruitment by others

2.3 The recession has affected voluntary organisations in a number of ways and there has been an increase in demand on many voluntary services as well as a shortage of specialist volunteers to fulfil key roles such as trustees, and of skills in finance, fundraising, IT and HR. In response to this, KCC funded a campaign during the autumn 2009, which aimed to recruit these skills and we have worked with targeted voluntary organisations, volunteer centres and businesses to raise awareness of the need and to direct potential volunteers to opportunities. The campaign page on kent.gov was viewed nearly 2,000 times during the campaign period accounting for nearly 8% of all page views and nearly 57% of people who visited the campaign page went on to view other pages within the volunteering section on kent.gov.uk. Feedback from the voluntary sector itself has been positive so the campaign will continue to exist online and has now become part of kent.gov.uk's core content within the Kent Volunteers section.

2.4 An innovative project that is also well underway involves Jobcentre plus (JCP) and the Volunteer Centres in the Maidstone & Malling area. JCP staff are being briefed on the value of volunteering as a pathway to work and are now linking their customers to appropriate local voluntary opportunities.

2.5 Many small voluntary organisations want more experience and confidence in engaging with the media to promote their activity and over the last 2 years KCC has funded a series of workshops led by multi – media journalists with a follow up after the training to advise on practical implementation. 50 small voluntary organisations have benefitted and evaluation indicates a positive return on investment in terms of recruitment and profile.

2.6 Over the years, other statutory agencies have also benefitted from Kent Volunteers advice on areas of activity where volunteers can contribute and most recently this has resulted in the recruitment of a volunteer co-ordinator to progress the work which will enhance the community impact of Kent Fire and Rescue Service.

Small grant scheme

2.7 While there are many external funding streams available to voluntary organisations, and colleagues in KCC advise the voluntary sector on these opportunities, there is no easy way to obtain small amounts of money to directly recruit volunteers or help volunteering flourish. £25,000 of KCC's 2010 funding was therefore used in 2009/10 as a one-off opportunity to set up & offer grants of £500 to 50 voluntary groups in Kent. This has brought real benefit to communities either with bringing in more volunteers, such as by Ashford & Tenterden Samaritans, or extending a youth group in Littlebourne, or offering specialist training for Cruse bereavement volunteers in Swale as well as developing new services such as a 'Time Bank' in Thanet.

3. Volunteers and Volunteer Managers in KCC

3.1 The number of Volunteers directly managed in KCC services is growing, both in terms of increasing the cohort in the Youth Service or the Adult Services and in new schemes such as Kent Greeters which has had the quality validated by the awarding of the 'Inspire' mark in recognition of a service that fits with the wider tourist agenda for the 2012 Games. Appendix 1 lists the KCC managed schemes which involve volunteers and it is a broad range. An anecdotal example of how volunteering can improve confidence through the transition of a young mother from Children's centre volunteer to learning Champion volunteer gives credence to this.

3.2 Managing volunteers is not as simple as it sounds – it involves all the proper management processes of recruitment, retention; training and supervision; motivation and managing performance but without the securities of employment law or continuity. In addition many of our volunteers work with vulnerable adults and children with all the necessary safeguarding checks that this involves.

3.3 On 8 June 2010, a conference was held to bring these volunteer managers together, address issues of mutual interest and share good practice. Opened by the cabinet member for Community Services and the Managing Director, the new KCC guidance document 'Engaging Volunteers – a starter toolkit' was also launched at this event. We were joined by national speakers with workshops led by voluntary partners; feedback is positive and has identified more staff who wish to join the KCC Volunteer Manager's Network.

3.4 Good practice in the recruitment and management of volunteers contributes to a stable and effective team. Two units in KCC have already achieved the national quality standard of 'Investing in Volunteers (the Youth Offending Service and Learning Champions in Adult Education) and the Environment & Waste unit is on target to also achieve the award.

4. KCC's Employee Volunteering scheme

4.1 The KCC employee volunteering scheme is now well-embedded in the KCC Strategy for Staff, allowing staff to use 2 of their 5 days off-site training entitlement for volunteering. KCC was the first local authority in the country to develop a scheme such as this and we regularly advise other local authorities and government. The benefits to the staff and to the community are tangible. The scheme involves identifying personal outcomes, so we can see how volunteering fits into learning such as teamwork, project planning and understanding the customer. Voluntary organisations see our staff differently and we too learn much from working in a different way.

4.2 Employee volunteering provides an opportunity for sustainability and change. For example, senior staff from Highways volunteered in an environmental project with young offenders serving custodial sentences. There were many benefits from this, not least changes in preconceived views and as a legacy, successful employment for some of the young offenders within Highways.

5. Conclusions and priorities for 2010/11

5.1 The concept of volunteering is a complex topic: we have particularly learnt the importance of ensuring a supply of well managed good volunteering opportunities; appropriate 'matching' of skills; and the potential value of volunteering as a confidence building process and a route back to employment. The authority now has a national reputation and staff involvement in the trustee board of Volunteering England, the national volunteering development agency, ensures that KCC's voice is heard and that we benefit from a wide network of knowledge and opportunity.

6. Priorities for 2010-11

- Continue to support and promote the Kent Event team, ensuring we keep abreast of the opportunities within the 2012 volunteering strategy for Kent residents to get involved.
- Roll- out the Jobcentre Plus Pilot to others areas across the county – whereby claimants may be directed to volunteering opportunities.
- Contribute to events involving volunteer development run by KCC and key partners – for instance to run a workshop at the KASS voluntary sector commissioning conference. Showcase, with Volunteer Centres, volunteering opportunities across the county at the County Show.
- Develop the KCC Volunteer Manager's Network involving new members and meeting identified issues and needs.
- Work with KCC volunteers to ensure consistency in good practice. For instance, KASS involves volunteers in adult care and disability day opportunity centres.

Although different user groups, there is synergy between the volunteer management.

- Continue to grow the employee volunteering scheme encouraging more sustainable links with voluntary organisations.
- Develop secondments/placements within voluntary organisations as an integral option in the Graduate Development Scheme

6. Resource Implications

6.1 None.

Recommendations:

Members of the Communities Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- (i) Note the activity outlined in this report
- (ii) Comment on the priorities for 2010-11

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*Background Documents:
Engaging Volunteers – a starter toolkit*

www.kent.gov.uk/volunteers