

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Tuesday, 16th August, 2011

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Phil Mould (Chair), Councillor Mark Shurmer (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Peter Anderson, Andrew Brazier, Andrew Fry, Bill Hartnett, Gay Hopkins and Alan Mason.

### Also Present:

Mrs T Buckley and Mr R Colebrook (Co-opted representatives from UNISON).

### Officers:

H Arnold, H Bennett, J Bough and E Cartwright

### Committee Services Officer:

J Bayley and M Craggs

### Minute 66

#### STAFF VOLUNTEERING POLICY

The Committee received the draft staff volunteering policy for pre-scrutiny. The Committee's co-opted representatives from UNISON attended the meeting to speak on this item.

Members were advised that the staff volunteering policy would provide officers with an opportunity to undertake 16 hours of volunteering every year during working hours. Officers would be matched to placements and permission would need to be obtained from the employee's manager. The opportunity to participate in voluntary placements would not replace existing opportunities for staff to act in roles such as a school governor's post.

A similar policy had been introduced in recent years at Bromsgrove District Council. The impact of the policy had not yet been monitored, though it was understood that the number of officers who had utilised the opportunity to volunteer had been relatively low, ensuring that requests to volunteer had not undermined service

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delivery. However, feedback received from members of staff who had participated in voluntary placements had been largely positive.

Concerns were expressed about the potential benefits of staff participating in voluntary placements rather than attending work. Council staff were considered to be a valuable resource and therefore any placements needed to represent value for money for both the Council and local residents. However, it was noted that through volunteering an officer could make a valuable contribution to local voluntary and community sector organisations and the local economy whilst the officer could develop transferable skills that might be utilised to deliver services more effectively at the Council. Furthermore, the contingencies of the service would be prioritised.

Placements would not automatically be approved. The needs of the service area in which the officer worked would be prioritised by managers when considering applications to volunteer. Managers would also have the authority to reject proposed placements which were not considered likely to add value.

Members noted that the policy would need to be promoted effectively to ensure that officers were aware of the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities. As part of this process information about the policy could be provided during staff briefings and in the Council's online staff magazine. It was also suggested that members of staff from Bromsgrove who had participated in the scheme could be invited to brief Redditch based staff about the process.

The Committee's co-opted representatives commented that the unions would be largely supportive of the introduction of this policy. The appropriate timing for the introduction of the policy would need to be considered carefully, as many Council staff would be involved in the Council's transformation programme and would potentially be affected by the introduction of shared services. In this context many staff might welcome the opportunity to participate in volunteering activities which could help them to develop their skills and thereby improve their future career prospects.

### **RECOMMENDED that**

**subject to noting Members' comments as detailed in the preamble above, the Staff Volunteering Policy be approved.**