



**Report to:** Development Committee

**Subject:** Development of a Volunteering Charter

**Date:** 17 February 2015

**Reporting Officer:** Cate Taggart, Community Development Manager, ext 3525

**Contact Officers:** Clare Mullen, Community Resource Unit Manager, ext 3770

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Belfast City Council currently offers volunteering opportunities across a range of departments which bring many benefits to both the individuals involved and Council. The Volunteering Strategy for NI describes volunteering as “the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.”
1.2	This definition refers to both formal volunteering (carried out with, or under the auspices of an organisation/group) and informal volunteering (carried out outside an organisation, often at neighbourhood level but outside the immediate family). It comprises the widest spectrum of activity, for example, community development, arts, sport, faith based, education, neighbourliness, youth, environmental, health and direct care.
1.3	The unique quality of volunteering, as an activity, is its ability to shape and change itself to the needs of the community. In public services, volunteers bring a range of expertise to particular tasks or projects. Their expertise should complement the skills of staff. In many instances, volunteers can develop the range of support to users that cannot be provided solely by paid staff.
1.4	The volunteering opportunities Council currently offer cut across a number of departments notably; Development, Parks and Leisure, Health & Environmental Services and Human Resources.
1.5	Volunteers are involved in supporting our community centre programmes, our play service, through our play programmes and through the Belfast Youth Forum. Additionally, volunteers support our parks and open spaces; and complement the work of Zoo staff through carrying out surveys and environmental work; they enable council to offer summer scheme opportunities to a greater number of young people than would be possible without them. Within the Development department alone Council benefitted from 73,693

	volunteer hours during 2013/14.
1.6	Volunteer involvement works best when there are good procedures, clarity of roles, mutual trust and support between paid staff and volunteers. The Development Department, through Community Services, has been leading on developing volunteering within council.
1.7	Community Services has developed its own volunteering framework in line with the Investing in Volunteers quality standard to support volunteering hours within its projects and facilities. This work has been undertaken in partnership with Volunteer Now, the lead organisation for volunteers and volunteering in Northern Ireland.
1.8	This framework has allowed for the development of a number of procedures including specific volunteer role descriptions and the production of a draft guide to involving volunteers for use by Community Services staff. This framework and the associated procedures provide the basis for the development of a corporate policy and procedures.
1.9	Community Services has also been involved in promoting volunteering opportunities within council at events such as Belfast Metropolitan College's Volunteering Fair in October 2014. Officers are also working with the Older People's Reference group to develop and deliver the Age-Friendly Belfast Older Volunteer Awards. The Service has also begun work with Volunteer Now on a volunteer impact assessment which will measure the impact of volunteers on the community and play centre service users.
1.10	More recently, as part of her priorities to celebrate and showcase the Heroes of Belfast, the Lord Mayor asked officers to consider how Council can recognise the contributions made by volunteers to life in the city.
1.11	As a result the Lord Mayor has asked the service to consider how BCC might develop a Volunteering Charter as a key contributor to the recent motion at SP&R in September 2014 for the development of a Compassionate City Charter as a vehicle to encourage city leadership and bring together efforts towards increasing compassion through local initiatives, policy and projects.
1.12	This paper outlines how such a Volunteer Charter might be progressed in Council.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Community Services has been working in conjunction with Volunteer Now to agree how we might develop a draft volunteering charter for BCC. An illustrative draft Volunteer Charter is attached for member's consideration.
2.2	This volunteering charter will underpin Belfast City Council's role as a civic leader in providing a statement of principles and good practice around volunteering. It is a set of guiding principles that sets out the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the organisation. These principles will be used as a framework to develop more detailed policies and procedures that reflect needs and circumstances.
2.3	Additionally the volunteering charter will support greater recognition of volunteers

	and volunteering within council and provide a clear basis from which to build on the work begun by Community Services. It would also aid the roll out of a corporate volunteering policy and guidance for the effective involvement and management of volunteers.
2.4	A volunteering charter is a formal document that sets out the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the organisation. A volunteering charter would support greater recognition of volunteers and volunteering within council and provide a clear basis from which to build on the work begun by Community Services. It would also aid the roll out a corporate volunteering policy and guidance for the effective involvement and management of volunteers.
2.5	It is envisaged that the charter will outline the key principles and underpinning ethos of volunteering which may include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocating Council's commitment to their volunteers by agreeing to abide by the principles of volunteering and the rights and responsibilities chosen by volunteers across the organisation</li> <li>- The charter would provide reassurance for volunteers that a minimum set of standards will be met by Council.</li> <li>- Raises the standard and quality of volunteering provided by Belfast City Council.</li> <li>- The charter is a terms of reference for those responsible for managing volunteers in ensuring full support of and commitment to volunteering in the organisation.</li> <li>- At present there is no corporate volunteer policy or consistent volunteer management and support procedures and the development of a charter provides the basis for having in place a corporate approach to volunteering across the various departments.</li> </ul>
2.6	Community Services has examined the process by which other volunteer charters have been developed across other organisations and as part of this, have looked at models in Salford, Edinburgh whilst taking advice from Volunteer Now who have previously worked with the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) in Northern Ireland to develop its volunteering charter. This is based on the Trade Union Congress and Volunteering England's joint Charter for Strengthening Relations Between Paid Staff and Volunteers. The attached draft reflects this practice.
2.7	To ensure a corporate approach to embedding the guiding principles in the practice of services involving volunteers it is proposed that a cross-council officer working group is established to refine the charter and identify actions needed to support the development of a corporate volunteering policy. This group will invite officers from those sections which currently involve volunteers as well as Chief Executive's and Human Resources.
2.8	As the Charter would primarily be for and about volunteers, it is imperative that volunteers are involved in the design of the Charter and have some sense of ownership of the document. It would therefore be proposed to establish a focus group of volunteers who would contribute to the development process of the Charter.

### **3**

### **Resource Implications**

3.1	The development of a volunteering charter for council would have limited budget implications for Volunteer Now's facilitation at a cost of £500 which is within the current Community Service budget.
3.2	However, if Council adopt this good practice model for volunteering, officers would need to formally assess any potential additional cost implications, for example, in relation to the proposed standard of support for travel and subsistence costs incurred by volunteers, training for BCC officers and volunteers, etc.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	A volunteer charter for council would recognise that volunteers involved by council should reflect the diversity of the communities that council works with and for.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	<p>We recommend the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- That committee consider and adopt the draft Volunteer Charter</li> <li>- Note and agree the proposed approach to refine the charter and identify actions needed to support the development of a corporate volunteering policy.</li> <li>- Note the immediate and potential future budget implications.</li> </ul>

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Cate Taggart, Community Development Manager	

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
RCN – Royal College of Nursing	

<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
Appendix 1	