

Children, Sports and Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Title:	Review of Westminster Volunteering Services
Report of:	Senior Policy Officer
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Sports, Leisure and Open Spaces
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Better City, Better Lives: A More Connected City
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1. Executive Summary

This report provides an update to the Committee on the design and implementation of the Westminster Volunteering Brokerage service.

The City Council is committed to making it easy and rewarding to volunteer in Westminster. The new Team Westminster Volunteering Strategy 2014-2019 will provide a host of new services which will contribute to the delivery of the core Better City, Better Lives commitment to increase the number of people who volunteer in the city.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- With regard to the Volunteer Brokerage Service, where should the Service Provider and Westminster City Council target outreach to increase levels of volunteering in Westminster
- With regard to the Volunteer Brokerage Service and Time Credits Service, where can volunteers make the most difference in Westminster and raise the profile of volunteering services.
- How can the Council and its Service Providers retain volunteers and incentivise more repeat volunteering.
- With regard to the Council using volunteers as part of service delivery, are there aspects of service delivery which are unsuitable for volunteers to be involved in

3. Background

3.1 Better City, Better Lives

Westminster has strong volunteering and social action traditions. As part of the Better City, Better Lives programme, the council is committed to make Westminster a more 'connected' city where everyone feels more involved in their local community and it is easy for people to make connections with one another and vital services. Volunteering and social action are important tools to delivering a more connected Westminster. Recent research undertaken by the Council has shown that our volunteering services are important to residents. During July 2014, a survey was sent to a group of existing volunteers and inactive, but previously registered volunteers. 165 people responded between July 17th- 25th 2014. The headline findings of this research study were:

- The biggest attraction to volunteering for those aged 25-34, and 35-44 is to gain or improve skills (63% and 67% respectively).
- The biggest attractions to volunteering across all those surveyed are to help other people (68%) and to share skills or knowledge (55%).
- The most popular way of being informed about volunteering is through a website, with nearly three in five (58%) respondents saying they prefer this channel. This is followed by email at 25% however, among 25-34 year olds, 44% say they would prefer email.
- Our research found much evidence in support of the current brokerage model – nearly four in five (76%) felt it was easy to search for volunteering opportunities and seven in ten (68%) felt there was a good range of opportunities available.

Further detail on residents' interest in volunteering is attached in Appendix 1.

In March 2014 the Council published Year 2 of Better City, Better Lives - our five year plan for making the city safer, healthier, more enterprising and more connected. This set out the ambition that, by 2018 everyone should feel more involved in their local community, find it easier to make connections with one another both virtually and in person, and to feel more connected to jobs, services, information and decisions affecting their community. Whilst we recognise that the vast majority of volunteering happens without the Council's involvement, the Council has made a commitment to support over 1,000 people to volunteer, support 40 prestigious events with volunteers and create opportunities for up to 100 people to become sports volunteers.

At the heart of Better City, Better Lives is the conviction that everyone has a role to play in the Westminster community. We believe that those who live, work or visit the city should take responsibility for making a positive contribution to the community. What this means for the council is that we need to make it easy for residents and people who work and study in the city to volunteer and support local good causes.

3.2 Existing Volunteering Services

At present, the Council commissions three specialist programmes designed to provide a diverse range of fun and rewarding opportunities for residents, staff and workers to volunteer in Westminster.

§ Tailored volunteering opportunities

One Westminster delivers the city-wide core volunteering brokerage service for the Council. This service enables anybody who lives, works or studies in Westminster to get involved with a wide range of volunteering opportunities

ranging from administration to mentoring and charity trusteeships. The contract consistently exceeds its performance targets. Between April 2013 and April 2014 this programme helped 868 people to volunteer and is on target to support over 1000 during 2014/15. Since the start of this financial year, there have been a total of 255 placements for this quarter, which has exceeded by 2% the target of 250. The cumulative target (April-Dec 14) so far for placements relating to the final year of the contract is 774 against a target of 750, exceeding the target by 3.2%. As such we are on target to be over 1000 by the end of this financial year.

§ **Events based volunteering**

One Westminster also run City Guides, which enables people to volunteer at high profile events by providing a mobile tourist information service to visitors. City Guides was promoted at a highly successful event held at Lord's Cricket Ground in January and has since supported Chinese New Year, the premiere of Die Hard Five, the BAFTAs and a range of smaller community events across the city. Between April 2013 and March 2014, 120 new City Guides were recruited with 2615 hours of volunteering fulfilled and 39 City Guides first aid trained. One Westminster staff are working to raise the profile of City Guides with both potential volunteers and event organisers to ensure the programme supports more events and more volunteers during 2014-15 and 2015-16.

§ **Sports volunteering**

'A City Transformed Through Sport' is a sports volunteering programme also run by One Westminster on behalf of the City Council. The programme supports volunteers and sports clubs to increase the levels of volunteering in sport and physical activity in Westminster. It seeks to reduce barriers to volunteering and offers subsidised sports coaching courses to help people towards employment.

3.3 Volunteering Services Post- 2015

Whilst our existing services provide a solid base Westminster has an opportunity to both modernise and build on the existing service offer. As such and based on our insight that people volunteer for a variety of different reasons and in a wide variety of different ways, there are four priorities which the Volunteering Strategy will seek to deliver:

- Providing high quality information to make volunteering accessible;
- Providing great opportunities and developing 'volunteer-ready' community groups;
- Recognising and rewarding achievement;
- Leading by example.

In addition to providing strong local leadership, the City Council will also play a role in commissioning the core services which will underpin volunteering across the city. Following the launch of the new Strategy in March 2014, the Council will be commissioning a host of new services that support volunteering in Westminster in addition to those listed above.

§ **Flagship Volunteering Service**

This will comprise Team Westminster Ambassadors (formerly City Guides) and Team ActiveWestminster (formerly Sports Volunteers) and a new programme: Team Westminster Community Action.

- Westminster Ambassadors will provide people with the opportunity to volunteer at high profile events and in busy tourist destinations within Westminster. Volunteers will be an on-street presence, performing a variety of roles as agreed with event organisers and space managers.
- ActiveWestminster Volunteers will be embedded in sports and physical activity providers across the City. Volunteers will perform a variety of different roles and where appropriate will be supported to gain recognised coaching qualifications.
- Westminster Community Action will provide people with a series of targeted, community based volunteering events. This will require the Provider to organise an annual programme of events and create a pool of enthusiastic local volunteers to get involved.

Officers carried out an open procurement exercise over summer 2014 but were concerned that the specification used did not accurately reflect the future design of the service and subsequently withdrew the procurement. Officers are now repeating the procurement exercise with a revised service specification based on detailed supplier feedback. The Procurement exercise is currently open for tender and interested organisations are invited to bid to run the service by 26th January 2015. The service specification for the procurement of this service is attached in Appendix 2.

The contract is for three years with possible 2 year extension clause and it is thought will cost around £120,000 per year.

§ **Westminster Time Credit Service**

In order to reward and incentivise people to get more involved the Council is commissioning a Time Credit scheme that will aim to help connect residents with their neighbours, local community groups and services. Time Credits are a means of exchange whereby volunteering is rewarded with paper or electronic time credits as a reward for contributing time to their local community, where people use credits to purchase events, training and leisure services.

The procurement of the Westminster Time Credits service is progressing as part of a pan London framework against which locally or thematically specific service can be called off. The Council has now received bids from all interested organisations and is now in the process of evaluating these before awarding the contract to the successful Provider. It is expected that the contract will be awarded during February 2015. Service is expected to commence from May 2015, after which date residents will be able to earn Westminster Time credits for their efforts. The service specification for the procurement of this service is attached in Appendix 3.

It is intended that this scheme will commence in early 2015 is budgeted to costs approximately £90,000 per year. The contract will be for three years with possible 2 year extension clause.

§ **Volunteering Brokerage Service**

In order to increase the number of people volunteering within local areas, the City Council will deliver a new Volunteering Brokerage service, which builds

on our experience running this service for the past three years and modernises our approach.

This will comprise a digital service which provides a list of general and miscellaneous volunteering opportunities on a web portal; and a targeted outreach service. It is intended that this scheme will commence early in 2015/16 financial year and the future of this Volunteering Brokerage service is key to the success of volunteering in Westminster over the next five years. This contract will cover three years with two year extension period and so will cover the life of the new Westminster Volunteering Strategy. It is expected that a new combined service, focused on securing high numbers of volunteers, will be able to help more than 1,000 people to volunteer every year.

The national website for volunteer brokerage is provided by IVO (commissioned by the Cabinet Office) which advertises opportunities to volunteer and allows users to apply for volunteering opportunities near their area. Officers have contacted IVO and held initial discussions about creating a more localised version of this website for Westminster to fulfil the ambition to introduce a more digital self-serve approach to our local offer. It is intended that the future of targeted local outreach will be structured to maximise the impact volunteering can have on the lives of individuals who get involved. For example, they may involve supporting people who are out of work to volunteer or people at the start of their retirement to maintain social connections and activity.

The service will also be responsible for generating volunteering opportunities for individuals to get involved with. It is proposed that these would be best targeted in key strategic areas where the Council would like to see additional voluntary activity in support of core provision. Examples in this regard could involve volunteers visiting isolated elderly people or mentoring unemployed people. The service would not actively coordinate such programmes but would instead support other organisations to develop valuable volunteering opportunities.

The key reasoning underpinning these changes are:

- We want to increase the number of volunteers as part of the Council's new volunteering strategy.
- We are committed to creating a new web portal so that people can find out about and apply for volunteering opportunities from anywhere at any time.
- We want to use this opportunity to boost the profile of the service so that more residents know of the opportunities it provides.

Additionally, the Council provides a number of opportunities for local volunteers to get involved in the delivery of its services. These roles are designed to add value to our services and ensure that they are responsive to local people. Additionally, there are a number of identified benefits for increasing the use of volunteers in delivering council services:

- It involves local people in local services
- Leads to improvement in quality and capacity of services
- It is a positive and practical use of Westminster City Council services as community facilitators
- Gives opportunities to acquire new skills and experience

The Council is clear that volunteers add value to service delivery and are not a way to cut costs through staff reductions. For example, Westminster Libraries and Archives have a well-established programme of volunteer work. There are around 200 volunteers at any time, undertaking around 12,000 hours of work each year. Volunteers help to deliver library services with support for homework clubs, the summer reading challenge, reading groups, events, ICT help, bibliotherapy groups, English language sessions, adult learning, general library help, Bookstart, cataloguing and indexing, Archives and more. Similarly, many essential services to vulnerable families are delivered by volunteers. Homestart, Befriend a Family, The YOT Reparation Programme, Children's Centres, Parent Champions, Boost Mentoring, FAST and the Volunteer Centre Befriending Scheme are all great examples of schemes where specially trained volunteers provide a range of targeted support directly to those who need practical and emotional support to move forward in their lives.

4. Health and Wellbeing Implications

Volunteering services help to promote the following Health and Wellbeing Priorities:

- § Promoting healthy life – Volunteers develop their skills and gain a sense of purpose which in turn has a positive impact on their sense of self-esteem.
- § Fostering social cohesion and engagement, and reducing isolation – Volunteering is a good way to meet people. This can be vital for older volunteers and people who might be isolated or not particularly integrated into society.
- § Reducing worklessness and promoting health through good quality work – Volunteering can give people the skills and confidence needed to help them find jobs.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 Once all the initiatives are in place the annual commitment for Volunteering will be £331,500 p.a. In 2014/15 the Council has committed £206,500 to Volunteering initiatives from the £1.9M Voluntary Sector Budget.
- 5.2 In light of this, and in order to deliver this strategy, the financial commitment during 2015/16 for volunteering will be £356,500 to reflect the phased implementation of certain new initiatives. From 2016/17 onwards the annual cost of delivering the strategy is £341,500.
- 5.3 The current total budget for centrally managed voluntary sector services is currently £2.1m. This budget has historically include provision to cover emergent risks within the voluntary sector, particularly where changes in funding environments may destabilise important local voluntary groups. This provision was made possible by sound financial planning and efficiencies generated through contract re-lets in previous years. There were no major calls on these provisions during 2014/15 and it is considered that the level of risk within the portfolio is substantially lower than a year ago. As such part of these monies were now re-aligned during 2013/14 to the corporate priority of increasing levels of volunteering as outlined in Better City Better Lives. Furthermore, it is proposed that the budget will be reduced in future years as part of the Council-wide savings programme by £244,000. This would not affect

frontline service provision and leave a small contingency flexibility for any additional or unexpected costs arising in a largely de-risked portfolio in the future.

- 5.4 Although it is not possible to quantify, it is expected that the implementation of this strategy and commitment of £341,500 p.a. represents a social investment for the Council that will benefit individuals, communities and the local economy. Furthermore it can be expected that this social investment will help the council deliver against medium to long-term challenges across a range of service areas. In rolling out the strategy, each individual investment decision will be expected to maximise the return on investment for Westminster and provide an indication of any expected financial saving for the council which could be expected as a result of committing that resource.

6. Risks and Mitigations

- § There is a risk that some of the procurement timescales could slip. To mitigate this, clear timetables for the procurement and implementation of each service have been drawn up and regular updates are provided to the Cabinet Member for Sport, Leisure and Open Spaces.
- § There is also a risk that using volunteers as part of service delivery could be misconstrued as replacing paid positions within the Council with volunteers. The Council is consistently clear that whilst voluntary activity is recognised as a key means of developing skills and improving employability, it is considered wholly inappropriate for volunteering to be used to exploit individual labour. This understanding is at the core of the Westminster's approach to volunteering and guides all decisions taken in accordance with this strategy.

**If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the
Background Papers please contact Callum Whittaker x8025
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Appendix 1 – Volunteering Survey 2014

Appendix 2 – Flagship Volunteering Programme Specification

Appendix 3 – Time Credits Specification

BACKGROUND PAPER

[Team Westminster Volunteering Strategy 2014 - 2019](#)