

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

Cabinet

19 November 2001

**Enhanced opportunities for Council employees -
Time off for work in the community**

Report of the Chief Executive

1. Purpose of Report

To propose the introduction of a scheme to allow employees paid leave to undertake voluntary work within the community, provided no additional cost falls on the Authority, with a view to enriching their role and enhancing retention opportunities.

2. Summary

This report discusses a proposal that Council officers are encouraged to take the opportunity to become involved in voluntary work within the local community which is relevant to the work of the Council and the Community Plan priorities.

3. Recommendations

It is proposed that from January 2002 employees are allowed up to one day's (7.2 hours, or their regular commitment) paid leave per year to participate in voluntary work within the community. Directors will authorise the leave which will be dependent on service needs.

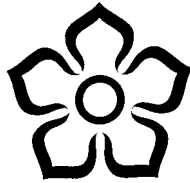
Members are asked to agree a scheme whereby employees who do not have to be replaced are allowed to participate in volunteering activities consistent with the Community Plan priorities, subject to service needs.

4. Headline Financial and legal Implications

The financial implications are related to the loss of time of employees participating in the scheme. Direct costs may occur depending upon the recommendations as adopted in (3) above. If 3.1 was adopted a further report would be required on service and cost implications.

5. Report Author/Officer to contact:

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. Report

- 1.1 Leicester City Council has been approached by an organisation, Leicestershire Cares, proposing that the Council be involved in a national challenge event organised by local Cares programmes. The aim of the event was to encourage companies to release employees to undertake one-off tasks for local community organisations. This raises the issue of the opportunity for Council employees to support community initiatives that will bring the Council more into the life of the community and also assist with employee development.

Many major local businesses are contributing to the scheme. (*Appendix B*)

- 1.2 Leicestershire Cares is an organisation associated with Business in the Community and supported by many of the largest businesses in Leicester and Leicestershire. Employee volunteering is a growing activity because:-
- (a) there are increasing expectations on employers to play their full part in the community; and
 - (b) there is increasing recognition by employers that an empowered local community provides an inclusive, healthy and competitive environment for organisations to recruit and retain staff.

- 1.3 Volunteering can also provide creative opportunities for training and development activities in the context annual appraisal and development schemes. The key advantages offered by employee volunteers are:-

- ♦ time
- ♦ skills
- ♦ access to new networks

- 1.4 There are direct benefits to the city arising from a flourishing volunteer sector, particularly when backed by volunteers from local businesses. For example, initiatives are already being taken in the city in:-
- Raising educational standards.
 - “Right to Read” schemes listening to children’s reading.
 - Offering work experience and preparation.
 - Braunstone Community Association work experience.
 - Work preparation for the homeless.
 - Establishing a city-wide Credit Union.
 - Building community capacity in voluntary and community groups.
 - Professional help and advice from local Professional firms.
 - Improving community safety.
- 1.5 There is an obvious resonance with the City Council’s vision for Revitalising Neighbourhoods, and Members may see advantages in offering the City Council’s staff some support for joining this voluntary effort alongside others. In considering release, Directors will anticipate its relevance in the developmental needs of their staff. However, this is a matter for the individual member of staff concerned.
- 1.6 In Leicester’s context active encouragement could be given to supporting social and economic regeneration especially in disadvantaged communities. This would complement work being undertaken through voluntary organisations, New Deal for Communities, EAZ, Governing Bodies and Revitalising Neighbourhoods. Specific projects, for example, could be developed around Children Looked After or Gifted and Talented Children. All six Community Plan priorities offer opportunities for involvement: indeed, the June 2002 Action Week will be centred on “Leicester Cares 4 the Environment”. As the scheme matures, the aim is to build sustained partnerships with local activities and to seek measurable outcomes.
- 1.7 Recent reports have suggested that “firms that encourage employees to do their bit for the community are rewarded by better job performance and higher morale. Community volunteer work helps to attract and retain high-quality staff as well as increasing employee motivation and skills.” *Sunday Times 5 August 2001*. This scheme forms part of the Council’s recruitment and retention initiatives which are being developed to deal creatively with emerging problems.
- 1.8 In view of the significant pressures on budgets at the present time, it is suggested that the operation of the scheme be kept informal at the discretion of Directors whose managers will facilitate leave wherever possible ensuring that the needs of the service come first and subject to:-
- adequate notice;
 - supporting a Leicester Cares scheme or other charitable activity directly assisting the community in ways which are consistent with the Community Plan priorities.
 - evidence from the beneficiary of the value of the volunteering support;
 - no additional costs falling on the Authority.

- 1.9 Currently, paid leave is available to Council employees who serve on public bodies, such as school governors, undertake jury service and act as special constables and members of the Territorial Army, and this proposal would extend this principle.
- 1.10 Progress of the initiative will be monitored throughout the first year of implementation and a report produced.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

1. Financial Implications

The financial implications are related to the loss of time of employees participating in the scheme. It is not possible to estimate take-up of the scheme but it is likely to be limited to those employees with a specific interest in a particular charity.

Members will note that a choice of three ways forward is given, including not to proceed. However, costs can be limited to a loss of productivity by allowing only those employees to participate who do not have to be replaced directly by another employee when absent. This is inequitable so far as employees who have to be replaced are concerned but to include the latter would result in additional costs which would bear on front line services and be unquantifiable, albeit the take-up of the scheme would be anticipated to be low.

2. Legal Implications

The Head of Legal Services suggests that the areas the Council may wish to consider are:

1. Vicarious Liability/Assumption of Responsibility

It is important that it is made clear in any arrangements that the Council has no part to play in the actual voluntary work itself. The Council should ensure that employees are free to work for their charity/volunteer organisation of their choice and it is not for the Council to endorse, approve or in any way appear to support the charity. It must be made clear to employees that any work carried out is not in the course of their employment with the Council and therefore any liability or responsibility for any acts or omissions during the voluntary work rests either with the employee or with the charity concerned as appropriate. The time given is, in a sense, no different from annual leave in that employees would not expect the Council to take any responsibility for events arising during their holiday. If the Council were to involve itself in any way in the recommendation of certain charities there is a danger that the Council assumes a duty of care to ensure that such charities are safe places of work, albeit as a volunteer for their employees. It is more difficult to see how it could be made clear to any charities that the Council makes no representations as to any of its staff.

2. Discrimination

Clearly the process of deciding whether or not to allow staff to take time-off to undertake this work must be exercised consistently. The recommendation would be that there are criteria established, which can be objectively justified if necessary in order to avoid successful complaints of discrimination concerning the way in which the discretion has been exercised.

3. Working Time

The Council will be familiar with the method of calculating working time and the disregarding of the time engaged in certain activities.

4. Disciplinary Offence

It would be prudent to ensure that there is an appropriate rule in place to the effect that it is an act of misconduct and/or gross misconduct to misuse such days. It may be appropriate to include this in any policy that is introduced and to require “volunteers” to sign an agreement that they will adhere to such a policy. It may also be necessary to consider whether or not to include some reference to the responsibility of staff not to bring the name of the Council into disrepute whilst on a volunteer day. The following paragraph may be suitable:

“Whilst the Council is not in any way responsible for your actions whilst on a volunteer project, nor will you be representing the Council in an official capacity, it may be inevitable that the organisation for which you will be working will be aware that you are an employee of the Council and inevitably this reflects on the Council’s reputation. You should remember therefore that any actions on your part should maintain the highest standards in accordance with the employee Code of Conduct.”

3. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equal Opportunities	Yes	The voluntary work selected by employees could well involve special groups within the community.	
Policy	Yes	This report will impact upon the conditions of service for employees.	
Sustainable and Environmental	No		
Crime and Disorder	No		
Human Rights Act	No		

4. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

The Local Scheme of Conditions of Service available on the intranet.

5. Consultations

Legal services, Personnel Managers' Group, Trades Unions.

Departments have been consulted and concerns noted are that there may be additional costs in some areas due to cover and loss of service, unless the requirement for no additional cost be applied stringently.

6. Report Author

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Appendix A

Entry for Conditions of Service

TIME-OFF FOR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

Employees will be allowed up to one day's leave (7.2 hours) paid leave per year to participate in voluntary work within the community. The leave will be authorised by Directors subject to:

- The overriding needs of the service.
- Adequate notice.
- The employee is supporting a charitable activity that will directly assist the community and is relevant to the work of the Council and in consistent with the Community Plan priorities.
- There is evidence from the beneficiaries of the value of the volunteering support, and that the employee will derive developmental benefit from undertaking the role.
- There are no additional costs falling on the authority.
- The employee signing an undertaking acknowledging:
 - 1) that the Council bears no responsibility for them or their actions whilst on this special leave.
 - 2) That they accept the responsibility as being seen as an employee of the Council and that they should conduct themselves in accordance with the employee code.

Appendix B

Organisations contributing to the scheme.

Advantica Technologies Ltd
Alliance & Leicester plc
AstraZeneca
BBC Radio Leicester
Business in the Community
Caterpillar (UK) Ltd
De Montfort University
East Midlands Development Agency
Everards Brewery Limited
HSBC Bank plc
KPMG
Leicester City Football Club plc
Leicester Mercury Group Limited
Leicestershire Constabulary
Leicestershire County Council
Leicestershire Health Authority
Leicestershire Learning & Skills Council
Leicester Sound Limited
Lloyds TSB Bank plc
Loughborough University
NEXT Retail Ltd
North West Leicestershire Council for Voluntary Services
Pedigree Masterfoods
Samworth Brothers Ltd
Trent Motor Traction Company Limited
University of Leicester
Voluntary Action Leicester
Walkers Snack Foods Limited