



## Belfast City Council

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Report to:         | Development Committee  |
| Subject:           | DSD Volunteering Strategy Consultation Response                  |
| Date:              | 16 September 2009  |
| Reporting Officer: | Marie-Thérèse McGivern, Director of Development, Ext. 3470       |
| Contact Officer:   | Barbary Cook, Policy and Business Development Manager, Ext. 3620 |

### Relevant Background Information

The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Development Committee details of a consultation by The Department of Social Development on their new Volunteering Strategy, 'Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future'. The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views on a series of proposals to support and develop volunteering in Northern Ireland. The proposals are in response to research on volunteering in NI commissioned by the Department and carried out by the Volunteer Development Agency in 2007. The closing date for responses is 9 October 2009.

The consultation document and a summary document have been sent to policy staff within the Council for comment. Staff from Health and Environmental Services, Parks and Leisure, Corporate Services, CIT and Development (including Community Services) provided comments which have been included in the response document.

The response has also been passed by COMT on 2 September 2009.

The draft consultation response is also attached in Appendix 1. The consultation documents are available at

<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/consultations-join-in-get-involved.htm>

### Key Issues

The DSD strategy 'Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future' describes a high-level strategic direction for the future support and development of volunteering in Northern Ireland. In the main, it concentrates on the ways in which DSD can ensure this future support and development.

No detailed action plan to support the implementation of this strategy has yet been developed and without this, the Council cannot respond in detail as to how it might be expected to support and develop volunteering in the future.

The draft response to the consultation welcomes the proposals and notes that the Council would be interested in early involvement in the future implementation discussions that may follow the confirmation of the strategy.

|                              |
|------------------------------|
| <b>Resource Implications</b> |
|------------------------------|

|      |
|------|
| None |
|------|

|                        |
|------------------------|
| <b>Recommendations</b> |
|------------------------|

|  |
|--|
| Members are asked to note the content of the attached consultation response. |
|--|

|                          |
|--------------------------|
| <b>Decision Tracking</b> |
|--------------------------|

|   |
|---|
| No decision tracking as the report is for notation only |
|---|

|                           |
|---------------------------|
| <b>Documents Attached</b> |
|---------------------------|

|  |
|--|
| Appendix 1 - Consultation response – Department of Social Development on their new Volunteering Strategy, 'Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future' |
|--|

# Appendix 1



## **Belfast City Council**

### **Belfast City Council Response to the DSD consultation on the new Volunteering Strategy, 'Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future'. August 2009**

Belfast City Council is committed to supporting volunteering. We note that volunteering in various services, for example community services, leverages in considerable resources to the Council and enables extensive and needs-based service provision.

The Council notes and welcomes the proposals as outlined in the consultation document. We note that the proposals relate to, in the main, the ways in which DSD can ensure the future support and development for volunteering across Northern Ireland.

No detailed action plan to support the implementation of this strategy has yet been developed and without this, the Council cannot yet respond in detail as to how it might be expected to support and develop volunteering in the future. The Council would be interested in early involvement in the future implementation discussions that will follow the confirmation of the strategy. We welcome the intention to work with local government in terms of implementing the strategy.

The detailed action/implementation plan needs to be properly resourced and oriented to the communities which volunteering supports, for example funding for organisations and groups to set up the appropriate management and quality assurance systems.

There needs to be a strong connection between local organisations and communities and the local and regional volunteering support infrastructure. Information and resources must flow into the communities that need them.

The volunteering strategy needs to reflect the needs, motivation and values of volunteers. This includes maintaining a sensitive balance between these needs and varying levels of formality both in terms of legislative protections, but also, for example, the developing skills agenda around accreditation which may only be relevant to certain kinds of volunteers.

It should be noted that high levels of bureaucratic barriers may discourage and demotivate volunteers in more marginalised communities.

We would make the following detailed suggestions to a small number of the proposals:

### **Chapter 1 Key Performance Indicators**

The Council would add a key performance indicator to this section. The current KPIs focus on increasing volunteering and improving the infrastructure to support volunteering. We would suggest adding a KPI to measure the degree of positive impact which the volunteering has, not least to ensure that an increase in the quantity of volunteering does not come at the expense of the quality of that volunteering. This would particularly be relevant to Council's service provision to ratepayers.

*'An increase in the degree of positive impact which the volunteering has on or for an organisation.'*

### **Chapter 2 Definition**

The definition of volunteering is:

*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.*

We would suggest the following change:

*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.*

We note that 'the environment' includes the physical environment as it relates to the Council's responsibility for parks and leisure services areas, where there is a current and growing role for volunteers.

### **Objective 1 Volunteering: Recognising the Value and Promoting the Benefits**

In general, with regard to these objectives, we would note the importance of consolidating current levels of volunteering and the quality of that volunteering as well as encouraging the further growth of volunteering.

In addition, it would be positive if the strategy confirmed the benefits of volunteering for those who engage in such activity, in terms of increased self esteem and personal and social development.

*5. Encourage young people to become involved in volunteering and help them develop skills and gain experience through their voluntary activity.*

The Council would support the engagement of young people early on, for example through the Council's Youth Panel.

*7. Support the development of a Northern Ireland wide volunteering database and associated website to support new and existing volunteers and volunteer involving*

*organisations and provide the key information point for volunteering opportunities.*

Though the Council supports the promotion of and publicity for volunteering, we think there are serious privacy and data protection issues for volunteers in local communities who may not wish their names or other information about them to be placed on a database.

*10. Promote and encourage Employer Supported Volunteering within Government and across the public sector.*

We suggest that further engagement with employers is necessary to explore these issues in greater depth.

## **Objective 2 Volunteering: Enhancing Accessibility and Diversity**

*17. Review mechanisms to encourage people with disabilities to become involved in volunteering.*

Change to ‘Review and ensure mechanisms encourage people with disabilities to become involved in volunteering.’

*19. Encourage volunteering among older people and other under represented groups.*

We think that this objective could be strengthened in order to ensure the effective encouragement of volunteering among older people in particular. We would recommend that DSD consider appropriate marketing and support, varied recruitment methods (different for 50+, 60+, 70+), covering out of pocket expenses, promotion of benefits of volunteering for older people and flexible levels of commitment (given that a reasonable number of older people are carers or child minders). We note that this may be covered later in the detailed action/implementation plan.

*20. While ensuring the protection of children and vulnerable adults, explore ways to mitigate any negative impact of policy/legislation on the recruitment of volunteers.*

The Council notes that the protection of children and vulnerable adults in and with volunteer involving organisations should include ongoing education and support that explains protection issues and processes. The protection of children and vulnerable adults must be the primary concern. Though we recognise the need to address any potential negative impact of policy/legislation on the recruitment of volunteers the full obligations of the protection processes must be met. In addition, consideration should be given to supporting organisations in terms of the costs of vetting etc.

In addition, the Council has comprehensive equality and good relations policies and practices in place. Any proposals with regard to enhancing accessibility and diversity should be implemented in line with existing equality and good relations practices.

The Strategy should also give thought to including references to those on benefits and how they might be able to volunteer without affecting this, for example people who are long term unemployed, for whom paid work is not a good option.

### **Objective 3 Volunteering: Improving the Experience**

*22. Encourage and support volunteer managers and volunteer involving organisations to improve their volunteer management practice and gain relevant accreditation.*

Change to ‘Encourage and support volunteer managers and volunteer involving organisations to improve their volunteer management and support practice.’

Organisations need to improve the ways in which they support volunteers and not only manage them. In addition, the Council notes that a strong focus on accreditation is not relevant to smaller community-based organisations and indeed may cause the future development of a two tier system where organisations that neither want nor can support accreditation would be seen to be providing less good volunteer support than those that wanted to and could, with those without accrediting processes in the lower tier.

*24. Support volunteers involved in management committees to enhance their skills and knowledge base and improve their volunteer experience.*

*26. Support significant regional cultural and sporting events to involve and recognise volunteers.*

*27. Build volunteer management skills in the faith based sector to increase volunteer recruitment and retention.*

The Council notes that volunteers in all volunteer involving organisations should be given, if they wish it, the chance to improve their skills and knowledge base, not only those on management committees. We note that in 24, 26 and 27 particular kinds of volunteers and particular sectors are being highlighted and would suggest that these details would be better addressed in a detailed action/implementation plan, rather than choosing one particular area to highlight in the overall strategy.

*34. Encourage funders, where appropriate, to ensure the quality of volunteer involvement and management is of an effective standard when considering funding an organisation or awarding a contract where volunteers play a significant part in delivering services.*

The Council notes that this should be seen as a support and developmental process rather than a strict condition of receiving funding, especially with regard to smaller community organisations.

The Council notes that it will be important to emphasise the need to improve the volunteer experience in preparation for the 2012 Olympics. In addition, it may be necessary to reference key issues such as tackling anti-social behaviour where public authorities will rely on greater volunteer input to deliver on key targets.

### **Objective 4 Volunteering: Supporting and Strengthening the Infrastructure**

Include an additional objective: *to ensure that there is investment in implementing the strategy directly in local communities and not solely a focus on developing the local and regional infrastructure of volunteer support agencies.*