

REVIEW OF VOLUNTEERING

Presented by the Corporate Director

SUMMARY

Volunteering is an important and vital aspect of the Authority's business. Nearly all provision of activities has a volunteering element. As such, officers are suggesting that this would be a valuable topic for Scrutiny to explore. Basing this exploration on the current dynamics of the volunteering programme, potential weaknesses, avenues to explore to expand the programme and making volunteering as diverse as possible. This has to be mindful of delivering the needs of all the individual elements, business and personal requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Members Approve:
- (1) a number of the bullets from the draft terms of reference included in paragraph 7 as the basis for further investigation and as part of phase 1 of this scrutiny area; and
 - (2) subject to if (1) above is agreed then refer the draft terms of reference to the Executive Committee in the next cycle for approval.

BACKGROUND

- 1 Volunteering increasingly forms an important and distinct element in the delivery of services by many private and public sector organisations. At an intrinsic level, volunteering demonstrates a strong commitment to human values of support and empathy, which provides stimulus and reward, 'the 'economics of well-being'. On a practical level, it can ensure that jobs are completed in a more effective way due to the additional resource volunteers provide. One of the things that is harder to measure is the enormous social value that volunteering brings to individuals and communities.
- 2 In 2022 volunteers contributed over 19,480 hours, up by more than 45% on the previous year. This demonstrates continued dedication and enthusiasm of volunteers in helping to ensure our Park is a safe and enjoyable place for visitors and wildlife. Unfortunately, we are not yet back to pre-pandemic levels with 2022 hours around 30% less than at the end of 2019.

- 3 Currently we have over 1,400 volunteers on our database. Over 300 volunteers recorded as active during 2023 so far. 2022 volunteering hours helped us to retain our Green Flag awards at 10 of our sites in 2023. Although we are aware of volunteering in many forms, we are not always able to capture this data and the figures we estimate are well below the reality of the situation. With many people volunteering unofficially or through partnerships who do not report their volunteering hours back to the Authority. One area in particular we struggle to get data is the ethnicity of our volunteers with 17% of registered volunteers choosing not to disclose their ethnicity. 21% of volunteers have disclosed that they belong to an ethnic minority. It would be interesting to do a study into how this compares to other charities in England / the UK. The gender make-up of volunteers has changed and it is now much more inclusive with the addition of new categories including trans male, trans female, non-binary and prefer not to say.

8% of volunteers considered themselves disabled. 1% of volunteers are aged 0-16, 14% aged 17-25, 32% aged 26-44, 33% aged 45-64 and 20% aged 65+.

- 4 Volunteering currently supports Myddelton House Gardens, Rangers, Geographical Information Systems, Fisheries, Holyfield Hall Farm, Stanstead Marina, Learning and Engagement, Sport and Active Recreation, and Events. The ratio of volunteers to equivalent full-time Authority staff is 1.1:1. Volunteers also support events at our Leisure Services Contract (LSC) venues including internationally important events such as anniversary events for the London 2012 Games, 2023 Commonwealth Games and 2023 ICF Canoe Slalom World Championships. In addition, there are a number of joint volunteer programmes still in development. They represent partnership working with Major Event organisers, National Governing Bodies and smaller voluntary groups or partners to facilitate Lee Valley Regional Park volunteer involvement. Current partnerships include educational establishments (schools, colleges and university students), litter picking groups, walking groups, conservation groups / charities, sporting charities, historical societies, corporate groups, retirement homes and local police.
- 5 We have volunteers from almost every London Borough and Hertfordshire district, and most Essex districts. Some travel from as far afield as Wales to contribute to our programme, particularly when we are hosting international sports events, while others can walk from their home to litter pick around their local green spaces.
- 6 In order to make sure that our volunteering programme is providing our volunteers with the best experience we retain the Investing in Volunteers accreditation – the national standard for organisations who maintain quality volunteer management programmes. We have held this standard for over 15 years and our next renewal is due in 2024.

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 7 If the Committee agree that a Review is required then draft terms of reference could include a number of bullets below:
- audit current provision across the Regional Park including roles and demographics in-house and to include the collection of data for venues that fall within the LSC (managed by Greenwich Leisure Limited);

- investigate ways in which to encourage volunteers and partner organisations to report their volunteering hours and demographic data to the Authority so that we have a more accurate picture of what volunteering within the Park;
- investigate how our data compares to similar organisations / charities across the UK;
- investigate how our data using new gender categories compare to that of the Office of National Statistics;
- removal from list of volunteers who have made no recent contact and keeping data list relevant and up to date;
- assess the potential for additional roles and opportunities to expand;
- investigate new and innovative ways to incorporate new partnerships into our programme based on the increasing interest we have received;
- investigate how the Authority fully maximises funding opportunities for volunteers;
- investigate how links from riparian boroughs are fully exploited to maximise the opportunities for local communities to access the Regional Park via volunteering;
- raise awareness of the volunteering activities taking place with Members of the Authority to enable them to actively participate in relevant activities taking place;
- closer contact/involvement with volunteers by Board Members;
- evaluate the cost and health benefits generated for volunteers within the Lee Valley Regional Park;
- future proofing the volunteer programme and reaching a wider diverse participant;
- benchmark against regional statistics.

8 Due to limited capacity in the Volunteers Team which consists of 1 full-time member of staff and a couple of part-time volunteer admin, Members are asked to consider a phased approach to this scrutiny area and discuss what they would think are the most important aspects for review during phase 1 of this scrutiny area.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9 There are no environmental implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10 There are no financial implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

11 There are no human resource implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12 There are no legal implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 13 There are no risk management implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 14 There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LSC Leisure Services Contract