

Scrutiny Committee – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011

## 7. Task and Finish Review – Employee Volunteering Scheme

*Lead Officer:* Emily McGuinness, Scrutiny Manager  
*Contact Details:* emily.mcguinness@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462566

### Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee are asked to agree that it is not appropriate to proceed with an Employee Volunteering Scheme at this time for the reasons outlined in this report.

### Purpose of Report

At their December meeting, members of the Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider the merits of introducing an Employee Volunteering Scheme. A meeting of this Task and Finish Group was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 and this report outlines the issues members discussed and their subsequent recommendations.

### Background

As stated, a meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011. Following an invitation to all non-executive members of the Council to participate in the review, the following members attended the meeting:

**Councillor Carol Goodall**  
**Councillor Angie Singleton**  
**Councillor Sue Steele.**

The issue of an SSDC Volunteering Policy was first discussed by the LSP with a view of all partners adopting a volunteering policy. Following this commitment by the LSP, the following action was included in the SSDC Corporate Plan:

#### Theme 4: Ensure Safe, Sustainable and Cohesive Communities

**4.25 South Somerset Together Partners agree a joint volunteering policy by the end of 2009 to allow their staff to volunteer more, to make sure their staff have the training needed to volunteer and to allow volunteers from the voluntary organisations to join in their staff training and development.**

To facilitate this, the LSP established a Task and Finish group. This group researched best practice nationally and locally from both the public and private sector and drew up a draft Employee Volunteering policy along with a checklist for use by partner organisations wishing to introduce such a policy.

This draft strategy was considered by the Management Board at SSDC and it was agreed that the issue should be referred to SSDC's Scrutiny Committee for members to consider the relevance of introducing such a scheme, and if one was to be introduced, what should it contain.

The Task and Finish Group discussed the valuable role volunteers play in the community and that this is set to increase as the Big Society becomes a reality. However, they questioned the definition of 'volunteering' if employees are being paid for their time and

felt that many staff already provide their time outside of the work environment and an Employee Volunteering scheme would not recognise their efforts.

It was also perceived that it would be difficult to justify the introduction of such a policy promising up to 30 days of paid extra capacity at a time when staff are being asked to consider changes to their terms and conditions to address the budget shortfall. Members also questioned whether there actually is such capacity in the organisation bearing in mind the impact of the Lean Programme.

Members acknowledged that in the current financial climate, SSDC will have to make cuts in our Community Grants Programme in order to deal with reduced resources and that instead of providing financial support, we could provide 'support in kind' through an Employee Volunteering Scheme. However, members felt that an Employee Volunteering Scheme was not the best way to do this and that alternative forms of support should be sought as part of the core business of the Council.

In 2010/11 SSDC made £100,000 worth of savings across our Community Grants budgets and a further £50,000 of savings is proposed in the 2011/12 budget. In order to minimise the impact, early discussions were held with the voluntary organisations affected. Over the past year we have worked closely with these organisations to help them seek alternative sources of funding, and develop revised business models to ensure they become less dependent on public sector funding. The Council will continue with this approach.

For many charitable organisations, their work focuses on vulnerable people who are unable to pay for services and such organisations will always require some level of public subsidy. For organisations like the Citizen's Advice Bureau SSDC funding ensures that those most in need are getting the help and advice needed. Through early intervention on issues such as debt and benefits, the longer term costs of supporting these people further down the line are greatly reduced, for example through avoiding homelessness.

There are a number of ways in which SSDC can help organisations "in kind", and this has always formed a key part of our Area Development Service. As well as offering specialist advice and support around funding, grant applications, business planning and income generation, officers are on occasion able to help tap into other corporate expertise such as finance, legal and property services and pass this onto community groups. In addition, we publicise a 'menu of non-financial support' which includes things like free meeting room hire, small amounts of printing and spaces on in house training where available.

Bearing all this in mind, the Council is currently doing as much as can be expected to support the work of the third sector in difficult financial times and could see no added value in introducing an Employee Volunteering Scheme.