



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: Bethany Allsop
Volunteer Strategy Project Lead, NGDP
Graduate Management Trainee/Ian Ashmore
Head of Environmental Regulation

Contact: Bethany.Allsop@sheffield.gov.uk

Report of: Richard Eyre, Director of Street Scene & Regulation

Report to: Waste and Street Scene Policy Committee

Date of Decision: 22nd March 2023

Subject: Environmental Volunteering Strategy

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? 1199				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, give details as to whether the exemption applies to the full report / part of the report and/or appendices and complete below:				
<p><i>"The (report/appendix) is not for publication because it contains exempt information under Paragraph (insert relevant paragraph number) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)."</i></p>				

Purpose of Report:

In 2022 members agreed a budget increase to improve various aspects of our Street Scene, 28k of this was allocated to produce a new volunteering strategy based on local environmental improvement work.

This work has given the Council significant opportunity to consult with environmental voluntary groups who improve their local Street Scene, and to deliver a number of quick wins which have made considerable improvements to the way we support volunteers.

This report outlines the findings that have informed the strategy to the committee and seeks approval of the strategy and related action plan.

Recommendations:

That the Committee:

- Approves the strategy and action plan to continue the progress made with supporting environmental volunteering.
- Supports the investigation for funding for a permanent role to carry on this work.

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Environmental Volunteering Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Environmental Volunteering Survey Analysis
- Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Lead Officer to complete:	
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.
	Finance: James Lyon
	Legal: Patrick Chisholm
	Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton
	Climate: Jessica Rick
	<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>
2	SLB member who approved submission: Richard Eyre
3	Committee Chair consulted: Joe Otten
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.
	Lead Officer / Name Ian Ashmore
	Job Title: Head of Environmental Regulation
	Date: 15 th Feb 2023

1. PROPOSAL

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Sheffield was named England's Greenest City (Green Cities Report, 2021, see references) and as the 'Outdoor City', Sheffield has a rich and diverse array of groups engaged in environmental volunteering, and businesses and individuals across the city, are doing great work to improve local areas.
- 1.1.2 In 2022 members agreed a one-off investment to improve various aspects of our Street Scene, £28k of this was allocated to produce a new Environmental Volunteering Strategy. To clarify what level of support we can offer now and in future and define our approach to supporting and empowering different levels of community capacity across the city. Focusing specifically on encouraging and working with volunteers on local environmental improvements outside of formal public open spaces and parks where 'Friends of' Groups often already exist and are supported by the Council's Parks and Countryside department (see appendix 1 for Environmental Volunteering Strategy).
- 1.1.3 As part of the approval to produce a new Strategy, commitment was given to consult with voluntary groups across the city to understand the barriers they face in volunteering and how to empower more people to get involved in caring for their local environment. The results of this consultation alongside the delivery and testing of several 'quick win' projects aiming to make it easier for people to get involved, has led to the development of five key themes which will underpin the new Environmental Volunteering Strategy for the next 3 years:
- 1) Improving our communication, and creating more space for consultation with community groups
 - 2) Making our offer more accessible, inclusive, and promoting equality
 - 3) Improving the appreciation, recognition, and support we give to volunteers and voluntary groups
 - 4) Improving and better utilising our partnerships with key stakeholders to work together and reach shared goals
 - 5) Ensuring our processes put people at the heart of what we do, and ensure joined-up working with colleagues across the Council

1.2 The Value of Volunteering:

- 1.2.1 Volunteers are a real asset to their communities, the environment, and to the Council and our goals for the city. In 2019, Voluntary Action Sheffield equated the economic value of the voluntary sector in Sheffield to be £125 Million per year (VAS, 2019, see references). Furthermore, the number of people in Yorkshire and the Humber who volunteer at least

once a month was 44% in 2020/21 (Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport, 2020-21, see references).

- 1.2.2 Recent statistics also show that interest in environmental volunteering is on the rise, from 2014-2019 the amount of time volunteers contributed to conservation activities in the UK increased by 61% (JNCC, 2021, see references). Exact figures on the number of volunteers engaging in specifically environmental volunteering in Sheffield is difficult to estimate due to a lack of data and the high proportion of 'below the radar' and informal volunteering. However, we have identified and mapped around 157 environmental voluntary groups operating in the city who we are aware of.
- 1.2.3 Environmental volunteering takes on many different forms, from the smaller, daily efforts from residents sweeping up outside their front doorstep, to taking part in large scale conservation projects- caring for our local environments should be something that everyone can get involved in. Sheffield also has a particularly impressive number of residents engaged in litter picking. Sheffield's largest environmental volunteer collective, Sheffield Litter Pickers hosts over 4.3k members. With our recently expanded litter picking equipment provision, in just 3 months volunteer litter pickers have collected around 360 litter pickers and nearly 4,000 bags. Once these bags are filled, this amounts to around 150,000 litres of litter, or 2 double decker buses full of rubbish. This amount of litter would cost the Council or Local Area Committees between £6,700-£13,500 to cover the staff time needed to remove this from local communities.
- 1.2.4 Recent government statistics indicated it costs £699 million per year to keep the streets clean of litter in the UK (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2019, see references below). With recent budget cuts and less resource available, as a Council it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain environmental standards and so it is vital that we work in partnership with groups and volunteers who care for our environment. The Council relies on the hard work and dedication of environmental volunteers who are our 'eyes and ears' in communities, reporting fly-tipping and graffiti, as well as getting hands on in removing litter and making our communities cleaner and more attractive.
- 1.2.5 From data collected via a survey of 71 volunteers, respondents completed an average of 10 hours a month totalling around 8,400 hours a year (see appendix 2 for full results). Some volunteers even reported completing over 20 hours a week alone. These hours represent only a small sample of the environmental volunteer networks across our city, meaning the total number of volunteer hours dedicated to environmental efforts will be far greater.
- 1.2.6 Furthermore, from the survey, 93% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering positively improves their mental wellbeing (see appendix 2 for full results). In the context that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England

(MIND, 2020, see references) promoting and supporting more people to volunteer could therefore promote greater mental wellbeing in the city, whilst reducing pressure on our mental health services.

1.3 **The need for change:**

- 1.3.1 Whilst some staff working across the Street Scene do engage with volunteers as part of their role, e.g., answering basic queries and supporting the provision of equipment, this is currently quite limited and could be improved to better harness the potential of our diverse networks of voluntary groups across the city. There has long been a co-ordinated effort in SCC to work with 'Friends of' groups linked to parks, but this has not existed in a consistent way for other initiatives outside of parks despite the scale of 'non-parks' green space or Street Scene in the city.
- 1.3.2 From a sample survey with voluntary groups, 52% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that Sheffield City Council supports the work they do as a volunteer (see appendix 2 for full results). We believe that through defining our vision for the future of environmental volunteering across our city, we can work towards shared goals, encourage more people to engage with us, and deliver better support for volunteers.
- 1.3.3 From informal feedback, it is clear that some volunteers perceive the Council as a barrier, instead of a partner who empowers and enables them. Our lack of a permanent, single point of contact to support volunteers causes inefficiencies and greater pressures on our frontline staff, whilst leaving volunteers frustrated by lengthy response times and feeling undervalued. This lack of engagement with volunteers poses a future risk that the Council will become increasingly out of touch with volunteers on the ground. This has also contributed to some voluntary activities going on without our knowledge, leading to potentially unsafe fly-tipping and waste removal, cleared waste being left in unsafe or disruptive places, and waste being left out for long lengths of time - which can cause customer complaints and environmental health issues.
- 1.3.4 A lack of permanent resource and strategic direction to support environmental volunteering across our Street Scene has also meant that several 'quick wins' have been missed to improve relationships with community groups. A key example of this being the new installation of litter picking hubs in local libraries, something that volunteers have been asking for to improve accessibility of volunteering for years, but the Council has not been able to deliver due to a lack of resource to investigate and deliver this change.
- 1.3.5 The Council also recognises that Sheffield does not have equal access to clean and safe local environments, and that people across the city face a variety of complex barriers which can prevent them from being able to participate in caring for their local environment. Environmental Health staff have found that the areas which we receive the least number of environmental issues reported by residents compared to the actual level of detriments found, also tend to be more deprived areas. This

disconnect indicates that the Council needs to do more to remove barriers exacerbated by socio-economic issues to support environmental volunteering and empower people to care for their local environment. Working closely with Local Area Committees, we have the opportunity to engage with communities, delivering targeted support to empower residents from diverse backgrounds and experiences to volunteer and work together.

- 1.3.6 Throughout the engagement work supporting the creation of this strategy, improvements have been made to Council-volunteer relations, however this must be sustained to not lose the good progress made. If we do nothing, this poses the risk that volunteer relations will return to the status quo, leaving the Council out of touch with communities and unable to harness the full potential of environmental volunteers within the city.

1.4 **Proposal**

- 1.4.1 The Street Scene Environmental Volunteering Strategy will be a public facing document which summarises the findings from the volunteer engagement project and sets out a clear position and ambition for the future.
- 1.4.2 The proposed way forward outlined in the strategy and report is to continue to improve the way we provide support for voluntary groups, using the feedback gained during the discovery and consultation phases of this work to create a new 'business as usual' model. We will aim to promote an enabling relationship which supports groups to be autonomous and self-sufficient, whilst providing a dedicated Council resource to help facilitate this.
- 1.4.3 This report requests approval for the Street Scene Environmental Volunteering Strategy. In alignment with the strategy, senior management within Street Scene and Operational Services will investigate the resourcing of an additional, part-time operational role to continue to champion this work and provide a single point of contact for environmental volunteer enquiries across Street Scene.

2. **HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?**

2.1 Corporate Plan:

- 2.1.1 The Corporate Plan has the ambition that *'every community in Sheffield should be a great place to live, with excellent local services, access to high quality green spaces, and a great local centre'*. By committing to promoting and supporting environmental volunteering we will be contributing to a cleaner and more attractive Street Scene across the city, as more people will be able to do their bit in caring for their local area. Through working with communities and Local Area Committees we will target our support to help tackle environmental inequalities across our city.

- 2.1.2 The Corporate Plan states that *'We want all people in Sheffield to feel safe, happy, healthy and independent: to love living here'*. By improving access to environmental volunteering, we are enabling more residents to reap the benefits of volunteering and spending more time outside in their communities.
- 2.1.3 The Corporate Plan recognises that *'Our green spaces are not always of the same quality as in other areas of the city, impacting on use of green spaces and other opportunities for physical activity. We need to capitalise on the strengths that our communities have demonstrated throughout the pandemic, involving people in designing the solutions to these challenges that will work for their places, and contribute to some of the big challenges the city faces, such as climate change and health inequalities'*. Encouraging and working better with volunteer groups and doing more to ensure environmental equality, not just re green spaces but also on the Street Scene is a core element of these proposals.
- 2.1.4 It is Sheffield City Council's ambition to be *'A more effective council, focused on the performance of our services and delivering the improvements the people of Sheffield deserve'*. These proposals help us deliver this by striving to learn and work together, taking a customer eye view of our services and the environment they are delivered in, to achieve more cost-effective outcomes for volunteers and residents.
- 2.1.5 The Council must *'Make sure that we are equipped to seize the opportunities and rise to the challenges of the coming years. We know that not everything we do as an organisation works and that decisions are taken too far from the people affected by them'*
- 2.1.6 Working more closely with voluntary groups will enable us to adapt our services to reflect the needs of communities. By tailoring our services to reduce the amount of volunteer time spent on attempting to navigate complex Council systems, we can make the most of the time and efforts of dedicated volunteers improving their local environment. Enabling more voluntary environmental improvements to be delivered, reducing pressure on our services.

3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 3.1 Under the Best Value Statutory Guidance, the Council has a statutory duty to consult with people likely to be affected by any proposed changes (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011, see references). We also have a requirement to consult with the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 3.2 SCC's Involvement Guide describes the 3 different levels of involvement and we have delivered these for this report:
- 3.2.1 **Inform**
We have engaged with volunteers and voluntary groups across the city to inform them of our plans to improve the way we work with volunteers via the creation of a strategy.

3.2.2 **Consult**

Information gathering has also taken place by collecting feedback through informal interviews and meetings, and through a feedback survey.

3.2.3 **Involve**

When environmental voluntary groups were invited to attend an Environmental Volunteer Networking Event, this was used as an opportunity to ask them to feedback their views on what needs to change.

3.2.4 A number of our 'quick wins' projects were co-produced in partnership with key voluntary groups such as Sheffield Litter Pickers, who were equal partners in the design of litter picking hubs in libraries. We worked in partnership with key groups and were able to foster effective working relationships throughout the project.

4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 We believe there are inequalities in engagement on environmental volunteering in the city and it is known that this disparity could exacerbate health and other inequalities.

4.1.2 The consultation work completed during the project reached a wide range of people and groups, including those who are underrepresented in environmental spaces or who face barriers of access. The 'quick wins' delivered including the launch of litter picking equipment in local libraries sought to make it easier for everyone to get involved in volunteering. A tailored approach has also been taken to listen and support groups who face different barriers, including trialling a project supporting young people with SEND to access volunteering.

4.1.3 The overall equality impact will be positive, the project aims to improve the way we work with volunteer residents across different backgrounds and areas across Sheffield. This has involved engaging with groups across the city to understand the specific barriers they face and help devise viable solutions that aim to benefit everyone. More details can be found in Appendix 1.2.

4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 The work that environmental volunteers do transforms the quality of local environments across Sheffield, often at just the cost of the provision of bags and litter pickers and waste removal by our contractors.

4.2.2 The strategy relies on the goodwill of volunteers and other stakeholders. It is recognised that Amey support the service and the activity of the volunteers and community groups, this is currently provided out of goodwill and is not part of a contracted supply. There would be financial

implications that would need to be considered if Amey withdrew their support.

- 4.2.3 Funding for the future permanent role to carry on this work will be considered and if appropriate that evaluation may lead to a paper to the Strategy and Resources Committee.
- 4.2.4 The wider financial benefits of environmental volunteering are not easy to quantify, however our current understanding indicates that by empowering and supporting environmental volunteering, the Council can ensure wide-ranging benefits which can positively impact not only local environments, but also the livelihoods and wellbeing of residents.

4.3 Legal Implications

- 4.3.1 Local Authorities have various duties to help maintain the local environment. This includes the activities suggested in this report. Under Part 4 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA), local authorities have a statutory duty to keep relevant land free of litter and refuse. Section 33 of the EPA provides for the offence of fly tipping. The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 requires local authorities to take such steps as may be necessary to secure so far as practicable that their district is kept free from pests.
- 4.3.2 The activities envisaged are ones which are provided by existing services, already being undertaken on some level to comply with statutory duties and utilising statutory powers to do so, however this strategy seeks to build on and improve this work.

4.4 Climate Implications

- 4.4.1 Whilst this strategy investigates how we can better support volunteering for environmental improvements such as litter picking, the link to carbon emissions and mitigating climate change is less obvious. However, through our sample survey we found that 83% of volunteers said that they take part in environmental volunteering because they care about the planet and climate change (see appendix 2 for full results). This indicates a high level of interest in climate issues in these groups.
- 4.4.2 Due to the high-level nature of the strategy, we are unable to complete a full Climate Impact Assessment, however we have used the Climate Impact Assessment Team's guidance to ensure we consider the relevant climate factors and how we can work to reduce our climate impact. When making proposals to improve the way we work with volunteers, the Council must consider the climate impact of the proposals and how it affects the Council's ambition of becoming a net-carbon city by 2030.
- 4.4.3 The work associated with the strategy however should impact climate change in the following positive ways:
 - Promoting public interest in environmental volunteering and caring for our environment/the planet more generally.

- Supporting volunteers who care for and plant trees in our neighbourhoods, which absorb CO2 through photosynthesis.
- Supporting groups who care for our rivers, including conservation work which helps protect our city against increased flooding as a result of climate change.
- Considering the emissions and climate impact of our 'quick wins', including reducing the carbon footprint of our litter picking equipment by utilising our libraries fleet of drivers to deliver equipment to local libraries, where residents can walk or travel significantly less distance to collect equipment.

4.4.4 When specific projects are determined by the Climate Impact Assessment Team to require further investigation, we will complete a full Climate Impact Assessment using the Climate Impact Assessment Tool, so we can clearly report on the climate impact and ensure we are reducing the impact wherever possible.

4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 There are no other implications arising from this proposal.

5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 **Option 1: Do nothing option/continue without a strategy**

5.1.1 Given the investment into Street Scene environmental improvements, and the high-profile nature of environmental issues in the city, as well as the value that volunteers bring to our environment and local communities, it is crucial that the Council has a clear understanding of the needs of communities across Sheffield and that it shapes our future ambitions.

5.1.2 One alternative that was considered was to halt future work on improving environmental volunteer relations and continue without a strategy to guide future work. This would mean relying on the good progress made during the engagement projects but committing no further resource or action.

5.1.3 However, there is a significant risk that public perception of the Council would be damaged as the work so far has raised expectations for how we work with voluntary groups. It is essential to have a plan to guide our future work with environmental voluntary groups and take hold of the untapped potential that strong relationships with environmental volunteers could bring, doing nothing is therefore not an option.

6. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 The Council recognises the importance of encouraging participation in caring for and improving our local environment, and that due to budget pressures it is not possible to maintain high standards for our environment across the city alone. Supporting voluntary groups to do the amazing work they do and making it easier for more people to get involved is a priority if we want to improve the lives of people in Sheffield.

- 6.2 We believe that through defining our vision for the future of environmental volunteering across our city, we can work towards shared goals and deliver better support for volunteers. We will shape mutually beneficial relationships where volunteers are more likely to report issues to us instead of acting without our support, which has proved dangerous and often costs the Council more money to rectify issues.
- 6.3 Progress has been made on identifying and forming relationships with environmental community groups. Now that these groups have been identified, there is now great opportunity to utilise these connections to harness the knowledge and experience they have, to consult on and better inform our policies and ways of working across the Street Scene.
- 6.4 Our intended outcomes are to continue to work towards our vision for environmental volunteering in the city,

‘To empower and enable all residents of Sheffield, regardless of their background or the area in which they live, to take pride in their local area and work together to care for our environment.’

References

Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011. Best Value Statutory Guidance, available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5945/1976926.pdf

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Voluntary Action Sheffield (VAS), 2019. State of the Sector Report, available at: <https://www.vas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/VAS-State-of-the-Sector-Report-2019.pdf>

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