

Street Scene Environmental Volunteering Strategy



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1.0 Executive Summary

The Council recognises the value that volunteers bring to their local environment and their communities, we have identified over 150 dedicated voluntary groups across Sheffield who are giving their time to care for our environment.

Through engaging with these groups, the following strategy has been produced to guide the way we will support and enable environmental volunteering across Sheffield for the next 3 years.

Our vision for the future of environmental volunteering in Sheffield:

‘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.’

This strategy focuses on the following key recommendations:

- 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

Through the actions referred to in this Strategy, year on year we aspire to:

- Increase the number of volunteers who feel empowered to volunteer for their local environment;
- Increase the percentage of volunteers who feel that the Council supports the work they do;
- Increase the percentage of volunteers who are clear about what the Council can do to support them;
- Reduce the percentage of environmental volunteers that feel they face barriers preventing them from volunteering;
- Organise at least one environmental volunteer recognition event each year;
- Improve customer satisfaction levels for environmental volunteer enquiries.

2 Introduction

2.1 Why do we need a strategy?

We are fortunate in Sheffield to have a diverse tapestry of dedicated environmental voluntary groups across our city who are engaged in all aspects of improving our local environment.

Sheffield City Council's Parks and Countryside Service has built long-standing relationships with community groups who care for parks, woodlands, and greenspaces in the city. Beyond our parks and greenspaces, we do not have a strategic direction for how we work with voluntary groups who care for the environment in their neighbourhoods and communities.

We believe that through defining our vision for the future of environmental volunteering across our city, we can work towards shared environmental goals for our city and support more people to get involved in their improving local environment.

This strategy covers our vision and approach for supporting and enabling environmental volunteering across the Street Scene for the next 3 years.

2.2 Definition of an environmental volunteer

There are many definitions for volunteering, however for the purposes of this document, a volunteer is defined as an individual who offers their time, experience, knowledge, and skills towards advancing a cause or completing a task, without financial gain and using their own free will.

In the context of this strategy, environmental volunteering covers any voluntary activity which an individual or group may participate in to help improve the appearance or condition of our environment. For example, litter picking around a local neighbourhood, creating a community garden, supporting conservation efforts, removing graffiti, or caring for our Street Trees.

Our approach to supporting volunteering is to empower communities and individuals to make a difference in their community, giving them the tools and guidance to work independently from the Council, on the issues that matter to them.

3 Environmental Volunteering in Sheffield

Our city has a diverse range of groups caring for their local environment. Our strategy needs to ensure that our approach serves all communities and community groups across Sheffield, from volunteer collectives such as Sheffield Litter Pickers (totalling over 4,500 members on Facebook), to smaller groups and individuals transforming local pocket gardens in their neighbourhoods. We have mapped over 150 different environmental voluntary groups doing amazing work for their local environments across Sheffield. From data collected via a survey of 71 volunteers, volunteers claimed to complete around 700 hours of volunteering every month, or

8,400 a year. 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.

3.1 Why do people volunteer?

Volunteering in our local environment is a powerful way to look after our physical and mental health, not to mention the positive impacts we can have on the environment, nature, and our local wildlife. In our survey conducted with environmental volunteers in Sheffield, 93% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering positively improves their mental wellbeing.

The Covid-19 pandemic provides a clear example of the power of volunteers coming together across our city to serve their local communities and provide vital support. 94% of respondents in our survey said that volunteering helps them to feel connected to their communities, uniting people and empowering them with a sense of ownership over their local spaces.

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). One reason for this may be due to public awareness of the climate crisis, with more people wanting to support the cause to care for our planet. Sheffield is no exception. Through our survey we found that 83% of volunteers said that they take part in environmental volunteering because they care about the planet and climate change. This indicates a high level of interest in climate issues in these groups.

3.2 What we currently offer for volunteers

Historically, the offer from services working across the Street Scene for volunteers who support our local environment has been limited, due to a lack of dedicated resource, capacity and limited co-ordination of engagement.

Whilst some staff across the service do engage with volunteers as part of their role, e.g., answering queries and supporting the provision of equipment, we recognise that we have a great deal of work to do to better harness the potential of our diverse networks of voluntary groups across the city.

From our survey of volunteers, 52% of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that Sheffield City Council supports the work they do as a volunteer. Whilst 27% of volunteers either disagreed or strongly disagreed. 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.

4.0 The Vision

Within the context of the Council's Delivery Plan and our Values, we have sought to establish a vision for environmental volunteering in Sheffield.

Our vision, which has been developed through consultation with community groups across the city, and from the testing of 'quick wins', is:

'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.'

To support us to achieve this vision, we have divided our goals into themes that have been identified as the key areas for improvement, following consultation with volunteers and community groups.

1) Communication and Consultation with Community Groups

- *We will be transparent and accessible to volunteers and communities*
- *We will consult with voluntary groups on changes that affect volunteer relationships or how volunteers operate*
- *We will provide clear information to support people to look after their local environment*

2) Accessibility, Inclusivity, and Equality

- *Our improved approach will result in people finding it easier to get involved in environmental volunteering*
- *We will understand of what volunteering looks like across the city*
- *We will listen to diverse groups and work to understand their experiences*
- *We will work to support environmental equalities across the city*

3) Volunteer Support, Appreciation, and Recognition

- *We will show appreciation and support volunteers to do the work they do*
- *We will recognise and celebrate achievements together with communities*

4) Partnerships with Key Stakeholders

- *We will be an enabling Council that connects local groups to support shared goals and a whole city vision*
- *We will signpost to others and share best practice*
- *We will work together to target preventative and educational programmes to promote anti-littering and pro-volunteering efforts*

5) User-Centred Processes and Internal Co-working

- *The Council will work collaboratively with internal colleagues to ensure that our approaches are joined-up*
- *Our processes will be designed with customers in mind, and will be easy to understand*

Theme 1: Communication and Consultation with Community Groups

It was identified early on in this project that a key area for improvement is improving the way we communicate with volunteers. We also recognise the need to create more space for volunteers to be consulted with.

Communication

48% of volunteers in our survey either agreed or strongly agreed that they were clear on what the Council can do to support them, with 30% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This indicates that there is still a way to go in terms of how we explain our offer to volunteers.

1) Social Media:

Social media is an efficient way to promote messages to our communities. To spread the word and share the work we are doing to support environmental volunteering, we posted tweets and photos advertising our volunteer events and shared updates on changes to our service.

2) Website:

We identified the '[Organise a litter pick](#)' webpage as a key communication tool that could be improved. We made changes which were co-produced with the chairs of the Sheffield Litter Pickers to ensure that the advice on our website is clear and reflects best practice for volunteers.

3) Single Point of Contact:

Volunteers also voiced frustration that their queries are often passed around to multiple officers and departments, meaning that they often have to repeat the same conversations and cannot build lasting relationships with officers.

Through the creation of the Project Lead role, a clear point of contact has been available for volunteers wanting to get in touch with the service. Informal feedback from volunteers indicates that this has been seen as a great improvement to the common challenge they faced of being unable to find the right contact to resolve their specific query.

4) Widening Communication

We recognise that finding the right information on the support we deliver sometimes relies on members of the public having access and knowledge of what is available to them. We accept that diversifying the way we communicate with volunteers and communities is something that needs to be improved to widen participation in environmental volunteering.

Consultation

Engagement was conducted through getting out into communities and seeing first-hand the work that volunteers do and the challenges they face. Consultation was conducted via an online survey sent out to attendees of the Environmental Volunteer Celebration and Networking Event, which asked volunteers for their feedback on their experiences as a volunteer and for suggestions on how the Council could improve the support it offers. Several quick wins were also co-produced by voluntary groups, allowing decisions to be made by communities for communities. Increasing consultation with our networks of knowledgeable volunteers and engaging with our communities is key to ensure we deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

Recommendations:

| We will pursue the following actions: | To support us to achieve these aspects of our vision: |
|---|---|
| Ensure that consultation with voluntary groups is organised for any new changes in Street Scene which directly impacts the work of volunteers. | <i>We will consult with voluntary groups on changes that affect volunteer relationships or how volunteers operate</i> |
| Establish a mailing list with interested environmental volunteers to hear about events/news. | <i>We will provide clear information on what people can do to help look after their local environment</i> |

| | |
|---|---|
| Identify and support with volunteers who are engaged with Graffiti Removal , looking into the production of a code of conduct. | <i>We will provide clear information on what people can do to help look after their local environment</i> |
| Establish a single point of contact for volunteer queries. | <i>We will be transparent and accessible to volunteers and communities</i> |
| Work with communities to find creative ways of promoting volunteering to diverse communities | <i>We will be transparent and accessible to volunteers and communities</i> |

Theme 2: Accessibility, inclusivity, and equality

Volunteering in our local environment is a powerful way to look after our physical and mental health, not to mention the positive impacts we can have on the environment, nature, and our local wildlife. So, it is important that we make these activities inclusive and available for all residents of Sheffield. It is important to recognise that not all groups in the city face the same barriers which may prevent them from getting involved in their local environment. Barriers may include financial restraints, time commitments, and a lack of knowledge of how to get involved.

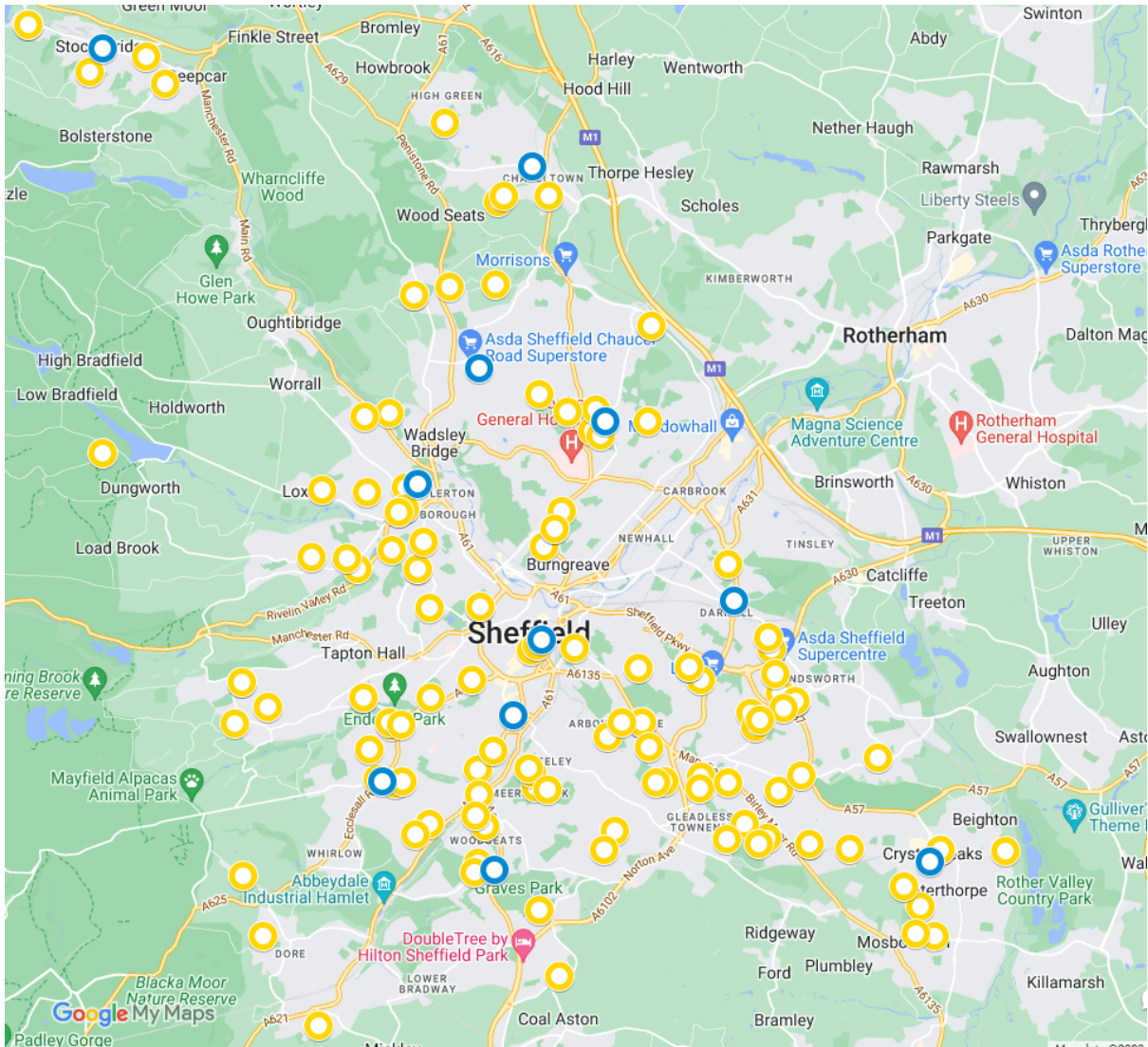
Accessibility of equipment

From initial conversations with key voices in environmental volunteering in the city, the administrators of Sheffield Litter Pickers told us that a key barrier for volunteers wanting to get involved in caring for their local environment is the accessibility of the equipment needed to do so.

Free litter picking equipment was previously only available for collection from one Amey depot in the city. This caused some accessibility issues for individuals who had trouble travelling across the city and this barrier may have been preventing some volunteers from taking the first step to getting involved in litter picking in their community. To improve this, we made litter picking equipment available to collect from all 12 Council run libraries across the city to enable volunteers to access the equipment more easily.

3 months on since our launch on 24 of October 2022, volunteer litter pickers had collected around 360 litter pickers and nearly 4,000 bags from libraries. This amounts to around 150,000 litres of litter, or 2 double decker buses full of rubbish. This amount of litter would have cost the Council £6,700-£13,500 to clean up themselves.

We also developed this offer further by providing stickers which allowed volunteers to label their bags of collected litter as a 'Community Pick'. This allows us to promote litter picking more widely, giving groups the opportunity to write a personal message on the stickers to promote their specific group. This also reduces the risk of these bags being perceived by members of the public as fly-tipping



This above map indicates the postcodes of volunteers who have collected litter picking equipment from library hubs since their launch in October 2022.

Improved Inclusivity and support for diverse groups

As a Council we work to meet the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty to: advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimization, and foster good relations. We want to create an environment where everyone, regardless of their background can access volunteering and feel empowered to do so. To do this, we need to listen to communities.

Pilot Collaboration with Sheaf Training

Sheaf training deliver support to young people with SEND. In partnership with them we found an opportunity to support their vision of preventing their young people from

becoming NEET (not in employment, education, or training) by supporting them to access volunteering.

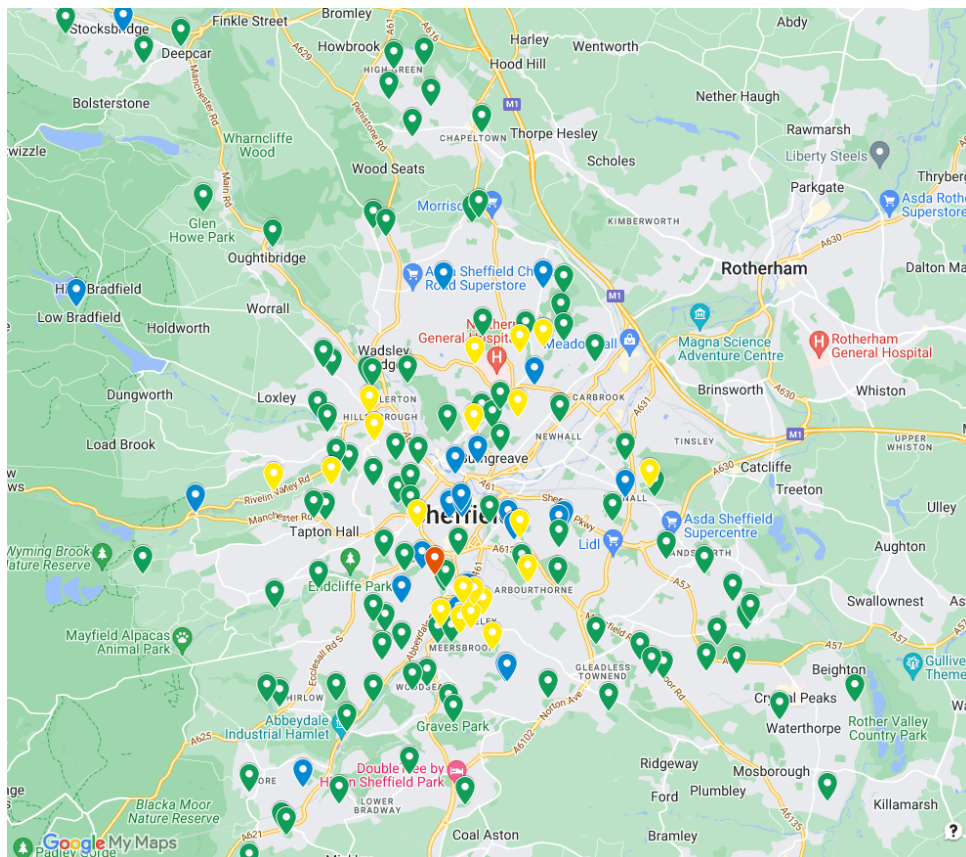
Working with the education officer at Amey and partners at the Sheffield Litter Pickers- we supported the coordination of a community activity day where young people were supported to attend their local library, listen to a talk on litter and volunteering, and get involved in a community litter pick and walk.

This pilot project will inform future work looking to support more young people with SEND to become more active in their local communities across the city, which we can support by connecting organisations with voluntary groups.

Environmental Inequality

We want to ensure that there is equal access to volunteering across the city and ensure that even those in more disadvantaged or isolated areas are supported and encouraged to get out there and care for their environment.

To do this, we firstly need to understand what volunteering currently looks like in Sheffield. To support this, we have produced a list of all the current environmental community groups which we were able to find through word of mouth and researching online.



In the map above, 157 groups in the city are shown. Green pins indicate a group is a 'friend of' a park or greenspace, yellow pins indicate a community gardening group,

red pins indicate a TARA (Tenant and Residents Association) who are active in their local environment, and blue pins indicate all other general environmental groups.

These groups were found by consulting key stakeholders and researching online for groups active on social media. This map is iterative and does not necessarily capture all groups in the city, however new groups can be easily added to the map when identified in future.

After understanding the spread of environmental volunteering, we can work closely with LACs (Local Area Committees) to understand the key barriers in each area to provide tailored support and outreach.

Week of Action

To improve the spread of environmental volunteering opportunities across the city, we also trialled a new way to initiate greater community action in targeted areas, via a 'Week of Action' in Attercliffe.

During the 'Week of Action':

- Volunteers removed over 16 bags of litter during a community pick around Attercliffe Village.
- The Oasis Academy coordinated their own litter pick around their school grounds and the Olympic Legacy Park. 26 of their Year 7 students collected 5 bags worth of litter.
- A voluntary river activity was managed by the River Stewardship Company (RSC) supported students from Sheffield Hallam University (SHU), and employees from the surrounding local businesses to take part in river maintenance and habitat conservation at Sanderson Weir.
- The SCC Graffiti Team removed 28sqm of graffiti in the Attercliffe area.

This Week of Action showed what can be done when we work in partnership with the community, Local Area Committees, and voluntary groups in supporting targeted work in areas across the city.

Recommendations:

| We will pursue the following actions: | To support us to achieve these aspects of our vision: |
|---|---|
| Regularly update the map of environmental voluntary groups , reaching out to new contacts as they arise. | <i>We will understand what volunteering looks like across the city</i> |
| Work with Local Area Committees to support volunteering initiatives in targeted areas across Sheffield. | <i>We will work to support environmental equalities across the city</i> |

| | |
|--|--|
| Continue to monitor and review the accessibility of equipment , including considering extending provision to further community hubs/libraries. | <i>Our improved approach will result in people finding it easier to get involved in environmental volunteering</i> |
| Ensure our staff and partners are prepared to cater for specific needs of diverse groups, via staff training and working in partnership to share best practice | <i>We will listen to diverse groups and work to understand their experiences</i> |
| Attract and foster more members of diverse groups to volunteer by building relationships with community groups and co-producing new ways to promote volunteering in previously excluded communities. | <i>We will listen to diverse groups and work to understand their experiences</i> |

Theme 3: Volunteer Support, Appreciation, and Recognition



Informal feedback received from volunteers and voluntary groups indicates that many volunteers feel underappreciated for the work they do. Some say that they feel ignored by the Council and its staff. In our survey with environmental volunteers across the

city, 73% of volunteers either agreed or strongly agreed that they generally feel appreciated for the work they do. However, only 52% either agreed or strongly agreed that the Council supports the work that they do. It's important to the Council to address this and improve the way that volunteers feel about the support they receive from the Council.

On 19 January 2023 the Council hosted its first Environmental Volunteers Celebration and Networking event. This event sought to trial a new way to thank our environmental volunteers for the hard work they do in caring for their local environment across the city. The event aimed to provide space for groups to network with one another, share learning, and give vital feedback to Council Officers.

Over 100 representatives from over 48 different voluntary groups across the city attended.

We also used the event to promote participation in a survey about the experiences of environmental volunteers.

76% of respondents said they would be interested in attending a similar event in the future. Feedback for the event was generally positive, however feedback indicated a preference for a wider variety of speakers, shorter presentations, and more time for networking in future events. This feedback will be used to inform future iterations of the event.

Recommendations

| We will pursue the following actions: | To support us to achieve these aspects of our vision: |
|--|--|
| Plan regular Volunteer Recognition Events . | <i>We will show appreciation and support volunteers to do the work they do</i> |
| We regularly share and celebrate successes of volunteer groups and co-working with the Council on social media and in the press. | <i>We will recognise and celebrate achievements together with communities</i> |

Theme 4: Partnerships with Key Stakeholders

Throughout the research for this strategy, a number of partner organisations were identified as being both active players in environmental volunteering, or having the potential to become more involved.

The benefits of environmental volunteering extend beyond reducing litter and harm to our environment and can be an incredible tool against issues that we are facing as a city as we recover from the pandemic and support residents through a cost-of-living crisis. Loneliness and poor mental health, poor physical health, environmental inequalities, anti-social behaviour, and an increasingly polarised society- are all issues that require partnership working. There is therefore huge opportunity to unite

with key partners in the city and promote environmental volunteering as a tool against wider social issues.

Recommendations

| We will pursue the following actions: | To support us to achieve these aspects of our vision: |
|---|---|
| Actively engage with partners across the city, taking a whole system approach to tackling social issues that more environmental volunteering could support, e.g., increasing the number of NEET people accessing volunteering | <i>We will be an enabling Council that connects local groups to support shared goals and a whole city vision</i> |
| Collaborate with schools, universities, local businesses, religious and community organisations, youth clubs etc to encourage more people to get involved. | <i>We will work together to target preventative and educational programmes to promote anti-littering and pro-volunteering efforts</i> |
| We actively share resources and signpost to other organisations who are doing amazing work. | <i>We will signpost to others and share best practice</i> |

Theme 5: User-Centred Processes and Internal Co-Working

Reporting processes

A key part of the support we offer for volunteers who care for their local environment is that we work with our partners to efficiently remove the waste collected. Volunteers told us that the Council's online reporting processes to get waste collected after a community pick were clunky and there were often delays in collection if they made reports via third party apps such as Fix My Street.

A pilot trialling a new way of integrating FixMyStreet, a user-friendly service and a favourite amongst our volunteers, with the Council's customer services software was launched in November on a test basis and is now operational for all the public to use.

This has sped up the time for us logging requests from volunteers via this app significantly, and to get their waste collected after a community pick in a more much timely manner - keeping our streets cleaner and making our processes more efficient.

Co-working

We recognise that the Council, as a large organisation delivering a diverse range of services, can sometimes be confusing and challenging to navigate.

Through the initial project, we have already seen progress in joined-up working on supporting environmental volunteering across the Council. One example of this is that we have improved our 'Organise a Community Pick' webpage to include contact details for relevant Council officers who can support community picks on Housing, Parks, and Allotments land.

Recommendations

| We will pursue the following actions: | To support us to achieve these aspects of our vision: | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20%; padding: 5px;">Street Scene</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Attend regular meetings between colleagues from different service areas, e.g., & Regulation, Parks and Countryside and Housing to discuss co-ordinating activities to support environmental volunteering.</td> </tr> </table> | Street Scene | Attend regular meetings between colleagues from different service areas, e.g., & Regulation, Parks and Countryside and Housing to discuss co-ordinating activities to support environmental volunteering. | <i>The Council will work collaboratively with internal colleagues to ensure that our approaches are joined-up</i> |
| Street Scene | Attend regular meetings between colleagues from different service areas, e.g., & Regulation, Parks and Countryside and Housing to discuss co-ordinating activities to support environmental volunteering. | | |
| Conduct a full review into our web form reporting processes for litter pick collections, to ensure that forms are user friendly and fit for purpose | <i>Our processes will be designed with customers in mind, and will be easy to understand</i> | | |

5.0 Measuring Success and Tracking Progress

Through the actions referred to in this Strategy, year on year we aspire to:

- Increase the number of volunteers who feel empowered to volunteer for their local environment;
- Increase the percentage of volunteers who feel that the Council supports the work they do;
- Increase the percentage of volunteers who are clear about what the Council can do to support them;
- Reduce the percentage of environmental volunteers that feel they face barriers preventing them from volunteering;
- Organise at least one environmental volunteer recognition event each year;
- Improve customer satisfaction levels for environmental volunteer enquiries.

6.0 Closing Words

Volunteers bring immeasurable value to their local environments and their communities. This Strategy aims to recognise this and to define our vision for the future of environmental volunteering in Sheffield, so that we can work towards achieving shared environmental goals for our city and support more people to get involved in improving their local environment.

We hope that this Strategy clearly articulates our commitment to better supporting environmental volunteers and we look forward to developing stronger relationships with volunteers and voluntary groups across the city over the coming years.

References

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), 2021. UK Biodiversity Indicators, available at: <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ukbi-a2-conservation-volunteering/>

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