

# *Corporate Sustainability Lessons Learned*

Using environmental volunteering to contribute to the Global Goals

*PwC in the UK*

*September 2017*



Our Corporate Sustainability Lessons Learned publications are designed to share our experience of implementing our sustainability strategy, in order to allow others to learn from our successes – and our mistakes. This document focuses on a new approach we've taken to environmental volunteering which has sought to increase staff participation, to raise awareness of environmental issues and to encourage behaviour change in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the **Global Goals**.

Whilst our environmental volunteering has always been a popular staff activity, a review in 2012 revealed that it hadn't always been strategic and we hadn't measured the impact of our efforts as well as we might: many of our



Our environmental volunteering encourages behaviour change in line with the SDGs

volunteering days were organised by individual teams who sourced partners locally themselves, so we were only able to measure basic inputs and outputs.

We decided to develop a new approach. We geared up to increase participation, believing that we could magnify our impact by extending our reach to more employees: we set an ambitious target for 5,000 of our people to undertake one of our environmental activities by June 2017. We forged new partnerships with environmental charities that could help us develop learning modules with more of a focus on global environmental challenges and actions that can be taken to tackle them. Finally, we created new tools to measure our impact.

As a result, participation has grown year-on-year and is now a mandatory part of our new joiner graduate induction. We've also delivered tangible change in behaviours amongst our employees.

Here, we've outlined what we've learnt in the last five years, so others might benefit from it as they develop their own volunteering programmes.



## Environmental volunteering as part of our sustainability journey

Sustainability has been central to PwC for many years, driven by our purpose – to build trust in society and solve important problems. Our sustainability strategy is founded on some guiding principles – upholding high professional standards, being transparent, trusted and fair, fostering a culture of partnership and collaboration, valuing the longer-term consequences of our decisions, and leading by example to create a more sustainable future. We apply these principles to all areas of our business, including the way we engage with our local communities and how we approach the environment.

In 2012, we refreshed our community engagement programme, to ensure we were tackling the right issues for today's world: environmental volunteering was confirmed as one of three priority areas. It built on a previous programme of team-building which enabled around 600 people to participate each year. Employees appreciated the opportunity to do something different, but the educational components were quite light-touch and varied from one programme to the next. In addition, our environmental volunteering historically tended to frame issues in local terms, without connecting it to the bigger, global imperatives. For example, biodiversity was treated as a local conservation issue, rather than explaining how it contributes to global biodiversity and ecosystem services.

We decided to integrate formal learning into all our environmental volunteering and to include more information on the broader implications of each topic, using best practice in learning and development (see next page).

Our new approach had four key objectives:

1. **Education** - offer our people the opportunity to increase their awareness and understanding of important environmental issues – at a global and local level.
2. **Application** - encourage our people to interpret and apply the learning from the environmental volunteering in their day-to-day roles and lives, helping to reduce both PwC's and their own impact on the environment.
3. **Outcome focus** - measure the outcomes associated with our volunteering, not just the activity and number of staff involved.
4. **Scale** - achieve greater engagement and participation to scale the benefits.

“There has never been more pressure on our climate, oceans, rivers and land. Businesses have an important role to play in developing sustainability mindsets in workforces and society.”

*Bridget Jackson, Director of Corporate Sustainability, PwC*



Our environmental volunteering seeks to link global issues to local, individual actions

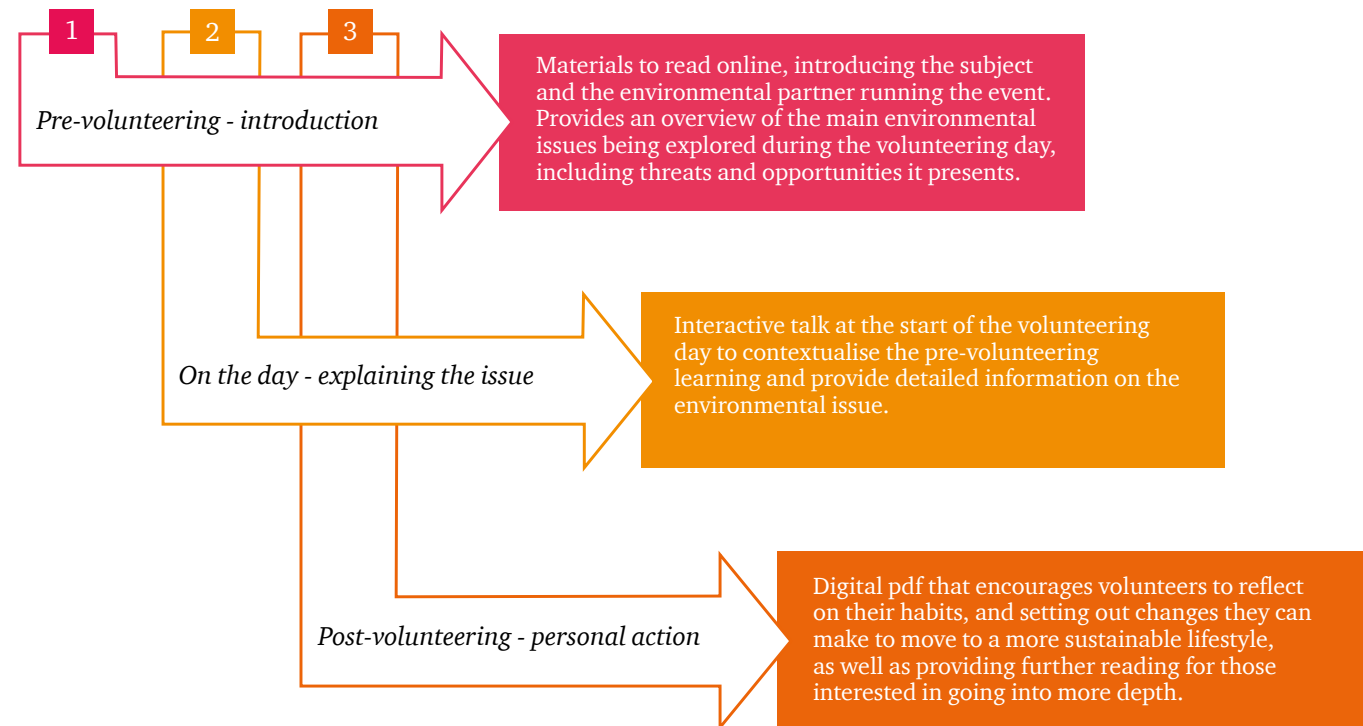
## Connecting our local volunteering with global environmental issues

In order to create impactful materials to accompany our environmental volunteering, we separated it into three distinct topics, and collaborated with both our Learning and Development and client-facing Sustainability and Climate Change experts<sup>1</sup> to build a suite of materials that connected the activity undertaken during the volunteering with a core global issue. Three focus areas emerged - each linked to an SDG:

- **Woodland management** - and the role it plays in carbon sequestration, as a way to tackle climate change (Global goal 13, Climate Action - target 13.3<sup>2</sup>)
- **Beach cleaning** - and the conservation of marine and freshwater sites (Global goal 14, Life below Water - target 14.1<sup>3</sup>)
- **Conservation work or freshwater testing** - and the contribution it makes to global biodiversity & ecosystem services (Global goal 15, Life on Land - targets 15.1 & 15.5<sup>4</sup>)

We wrapped learning around the volunteering in three stages – before, during and after: a digital publication allowed staff to read about the global issue before the event; a talk on the subject matter at the start of the volunteering day connected the global concern to the activity they'd be doing; a follow-up document was sent to volunteers inviting them to reflect on their own actions, and to embed their new knowledge into their day-to-day lives. We encouraged them to minimise waste and energy, think about how they travel and what they buy, and consider eating more plant-based food, for example - all supporting Global Goal 12<sup>5</sup>, Responsible Consumption and Production. We also suggested adapting gardens to support different flora and fauna.

**Chart 1**  
PwC three-step approach to creating sustainability mindsets through environmental volunteering



1. [www.pwc.co.uk/sustainability](http://www.pwc.co.uk/sustainability)
2. <https://dm.pwc.com/SDGSelector/Resources/13.pdf>
3. <https://dm.pwc.com/SDGSelector/Resources/14.pdf>
4. <https://dm.pwc.com/SDGSelector/Resources/15.pdf>
5. <https://dm.pwc.com/SDGSelector/Resources/12.pdf>

## Building the right partnerships

As environmental volunteering had been offered to our people for many years, we already enjoyed relationships with a few environmental organisations, who enabled us to offer conservation-related volunteering focussed in specific places. Our existing partnerships were with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, or **WWT**, (a conservation charity focusing on protecting wetlands) and The Conservation Volunteers, or **TCV** (a community volunteering charity that works with partners across the UK to improve green spaces and communities). We also worked with several broker organisations to source volunteering opportunities in London.

But, to offer environmental volunteering to all 30 of our offices across the UK and to be able to educate our people on the new topics we'd chosen (water and climate change), we needed to extend the partnerships. We established new relationships with a further five organisations:

- **The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**, the UK's largest nature conservation charity with over 200 reserves gave us geographic reach for our events focussed on biodiversity.
- **Groundwork UK**, a charity that engages communities in supporting and maintaining green spaces across the UK, gave us a partner to help scale our activities relating to biodiversity in urban areas, where many of our large offices are located. (Groundwork was also one of the founding PwC Foundation<sup>1</sup> charities).
- **Trees for Cities**, a charity that plants trees and greens cities throughout the UK and internationally enabled us to deliver activities related to climate change.
- **Marine Conservation Society (MCS)**, a charity dedicated to marine conservation and coastline protection provided the opportunity to conduct beach cleans and talk about litter and its impact on the oceans.
- **Earthwatch Institute**, an international environmental NGO that creates knowledge and inspires action through hands-on science and education, enabled us to engage our employees in research projects which explore the health of freshwater and coastal environments.



giving  
nature  
a home



**Trees for Cities**



1. Established in 2014

## Measuring our impact

As a professional services firm, it's perhaps not unusual that we had already established several mechanisms for measuring our volunteering. For example, for several years, we'd conducted annual community partner reviews to ensure our partnerships were working well for everyone. We'd also been using pre- and post-volunteering staff surveys to measure the change in skills, engagement and awareness of our people through quantitative and qualitative feedback. But as our environmental volunteering programme matured, we wanted to check that it was translating into behaviour change, so we created a new survey in 2016, sent it out to participants three months after they attended their volunteering day and used it to gauge how many people had taken action off the back of what they had learnt at our events.

We also created a short survey for each of the reserves that our volunteers visited. This was sent out directly after each volunteering day to capture feedback from those who had worked with our volunteers and enabled us to better understand the value of the work undertaken. In it, we sought to assess whether our involvement helped bring about benefits – such as cost savings, additional visitors to a site, enhanced and/or new habitats or a greater number of projects being completed.

**“It was rewarding to find out more about what RSPB does and to see how our volunteering work made a direct, positive impact.”**

*Anne-Marie Davies, PwC, Liverpool*

## Lessons learned

Our analysis points to a series of positive impacts, from which we've drawn some key lessons.

### 1. A streamlined and strategic approach has significantly boosted participation in our programmes

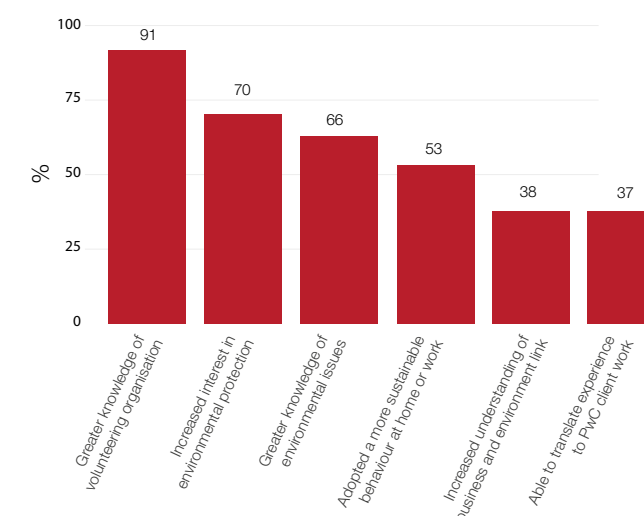
In 2012, our environmental volunteering was largely organised through two organisations and a series of brokers, who worked directly with teams of volunteers across the business to scope out an activity and organise their day. Since then, we've extended our partnerships and have brought the sourcing and scoping of all projects into a small central team, to ensure both the volunteers and environmental partners get the most from the experience. We've created an intranet site where our people can learn more about the organisations we work with, access guidance materials and FAQs, read articles and see photos from previous teams. We've embedded environmental volunteering into some key employee engagement moments, such as new joiner graduate events. We've standardised as many of our team communications as we can and used our Learning & Development platform to register volunteers, allowing us to reach and support far greater numbers without increasing the size of the core team which runs the programme.

Participation numbers have steadily risen since 2012, reaching over 1,500 a year over the last two years. Indeed, we exceeded our cumulative 2012-17 goal of reaching 5,000 people, and by June of this year 5,235 individuals had participated in environmental volunteering – compared to a workforce of around 20,000.

### 2. Taking part in environmental volunteering increases the environmental awareness of our people and their interest in protecting the environment

As you might expect, after their volunteering day, the vast majority of our volunteers (91%) felt they had learnt more about the environmental organisation they volunteered with and 66% said they had learnt more about environmental issues, such as climate change, pollution and ecosystem services. Perhaps more importantly, this also translated into an increased desire to protect the environment for 70% of them, as reinforced by their positive comments (see page 5). This has shown us that our people have an appetite to learn as part of volunteering, and that it can get them thinking more broadly about sustainability issues and the part they have to play. However, our surveys highlighted room for improvement in demonstrating the relevance of the issues to business, which was a secondary topic for us, to date.

**Chart 2**  
Environmental volunteer feedback results



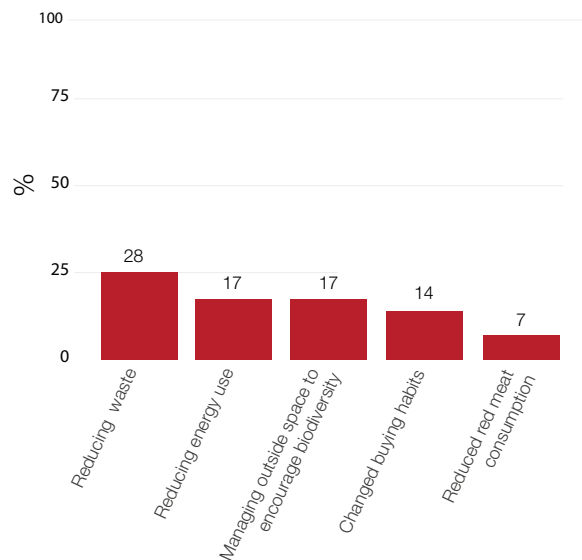
### 3. Taking part in environmental volunteering can lead to behaviour change

Overall our findings showed that 53%<sup>1</sup> of our volunteers go on to change at least one behaviour following their volunteering day. As shown in charts 3 and 4, increased recycling at work (38%) and reducing home waste (28%) were the behaviours that rose the most, followed by reducing energy use at work (18%) or home (17%) and encouraging biodiversity in outdoor spaces at home (17%). Interestingly, these changes are not necessarily the ones most correlated to the actions set out in our learning. Instead, people seem to have taken away the message to change in a general sense and have adopted better behaviours in more familiar areas (such as recycling).

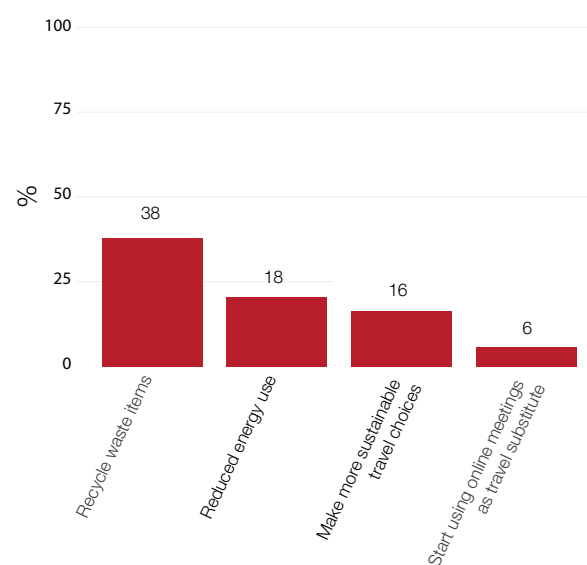
Our new approach to environmental volunteering has also coincided with a number of internal behaviour change campaigns which encourage people to substitute online meetings for travel or to better segregate and recycle office waste, so it's likely that these communications have influenced the way volunteers responded.

But it's encouraging to see that people have made lifestyle changes that are less familiar, too. Our surveys suggest that 14% of the volunteering participants have adopted new buying habits and 7% took action to reduce their consumption of red meat, for example.

**Chart 3**  
Employee post volunteering behaviour change at home<sup>2</sup>



**Chart 4**  
Employee post volunteering behaviour change at work<sup>2</sup>



**“I’ve become far more aware of the environmental impact of our actions and the part I can play in reducing that. We can all create a positive shift by making small changes such as using less plastic. It’s really opened my eyes.”**

*Bridget Kearney, PwC, Edinburgh*

**“Living around a hundred miles from the nearest beach, I never really understood or considered the impact our society was having on the marine environment, nor how easy it is to avoid damaging it.”**

*Aaron Chahal, PwC, East Midlands*

<sup>1</sup> See Chart 2

<sup>2</sup> Based on surveys sent 3 months post event for participants between Jan 2016 and March 2017. Also includes a quantity of retrospective surveys sent to earlier participants. N=490



#### 4. Focusing on employee awareness and behaviours still delivers significant value for environmental organisations

It's perhaps easy to under-estimate what environmental volunteering can achieve, because one group is only at the site for a few hours. But feedback from our environmental partners points to a significant, positive impact for those charities at the sites where our volunteers work. The charities see our people as a valuable resource that can make a tangible contribution towards their annual plans, helping them to achieve a greater number of projects in a shorter timeframe. Perhaps the trick is in having sustained relationships, which allow a bigger, cumulative effect of our people going to sites over an extended period of time. In the past five years, we've helped sites to increase their biodiversity, to restore, maintain and create habitats for wildlife, and to improve the overall site appearance – all of which has a knock-on effect of allowing the general public who visit such sites to get more from the experience, including schoolchildren.

For example, **Stave Hill** in London and run by **The Conservation Volunteers** has benefitted from regular PwC volunteer teams. In total, our people have delivered over 3,290 volunteer hours there since 2012, and the pond area has been completely refurbished, purifying the water and enriching the wildlife attracted to it. It's increased the opportunities for children attending the regular TCV Saturday eco-club to learn about and engage with nature. It's also saved TCV 470 mandays of work that they would have otherwise needed to deliver via smaller community volunteering projects over a longer period of time.

At **RSPB Lochwinnoch** near Glasgow, the work PwC teams have done to remove vegetation from wet areas of meadow has avoided nitrification of the reserve. Meanwhile, the removal of certain types of vegetation, such as reeds, has prevented the choking out of smaller, rare plant species that cannot compete.

For **MCS** and **Earthwatch**, our volunteer teams have enabled them to gather huge amounts of data from UK coastline and freshwater bodies, which in turn has allowed them to understand the actions needed to tackle pollution and other issues.

Working with **Trees for Cities** has helped to secure the healthy growth of woodland that will sequester carbon emissions and clean the air in Bristol, Leeds, Derby and Cardiff and is a small step in combatting climate change.

In addition, the financial benefits of our partnership provide unrestricted funds that can be used where they're most needed.

**“Year on year, without continuous support from partners such as PwC, it would be impossible to manage and maintain all the spaces we care for, which are enjoyed by thousands of people every week.”**

*Douglas Palarm, TCV*



PwC volunteering day with Trees for Cities, Berkshire



**5. Pioneering a new approach has engendered innovation and created new revenue streams for our environmental partners, too**

Over the five years since 2012, we've worked alongside our environmental partners to support them in delivering our new approach and measuring the impact of it. This has inspired them to reflect on their operations and the volunteering programmes they run with other corporates, resulting in them working with other businesses in new ways too. Each of our environmental partners has adopted elements of the PwC approach in their own way, but some examples include:

- **TCV** has introduced a 'Spaces to Grow' initiative, capturing internal data for reporting purposes, and allowing them to share the impact made at any sites with their corporate partners at the end of the year. They've also created a dedicated Partnerships Team to develop and find new ways of engaging corporate volunteers.
- **Earthwatch** is redeveloping its impact assessment process, influenced by their work with PwC. They're aiming to illustrate the impact of their programmes and extract outcome information from participant feedback to demonstrate behaviour change.
- **MCS**, **Trees for Cities** and **WWT** are developing their own learning materials and incorporating key messages which link back to their corporate partners' individual sustainability strategies. Similarly, Earthwatch is adding to their existing learning resources.

In fact, we're delighted that working with PwC has also enabled all our environmental partners to build new relationships with other businesses and potential corporate partners, using our materials and impact measurements as a way of illustrating what can be achieved.

**"PwC has an exemplary approach. Their impact extends past the incredible contribution they have made to our projects across the UK: we've also learnt from them, and used it to improve our entire corporate volunteering programme."**

*Rory Field, Trees for Cities*



We're helping our partners to innovate and protect the environment

## Next steps

There are several useful lessons stemming from this analysis for PwC too, and we'll be using them to improve our future programmes.

### **Stronger focus on the business impact:**

We're delighted that our volunteers come away from their experience with a greater knowledge and awareness of important environmental issues. But it is increasingly vital for our people to know about sustainability and be equipped to have conversations with clients on these issues. Environmental volunteering can play an important role in upskilling our people, creating sustainability mindsets. We intend to now take this to the next level by making the links with our client work more explicit. Specifically, we'll include more examples of clients impacted by the issues or taking action to resolve them in our learning materials. We'll also make it much clearer in our follow-up guides what our people can do to embed sustainability in their client work, as well as signposting to more business-relevant further reading.

### **Measuring the social benefits:**

Our new reserve surveys have highlighted benefits we had not thought about at the outset, such as the positive impacts on community health and wellbeing brought about through improving green spaces. Since our 2018-22 community affairs programme includes social mobility and health and wellbeing as priority areas, exploring these impacts further will be interesting and allow us to link our environmental volunteering more closely to our social programmes.

### **Extend our work on sustainable lifestyles:**

We know how difficult it is to change people's behaviours and habits, so we've been encouraged to see that environmental volunteering can act as a catalyst for more sustainable behaviours. Going forward, we'll explore the triggers for behaviour change and will make the messaging around desired behaviour change simpler and bolder. In addition, from 2018-22, we'll be working even more closely with suppliers such as our in-house catering provider, to

highlight other ways of adopting sustainable behaviours to our people, such as eating sustainable fish and plant-based diets. This will amplify the impact of our volunteering.

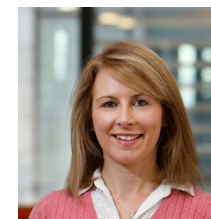
### **Raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals:**

The Sustainable Development Goals were agreed during the timeframe of our five year strategy, so in the early years we didn't talk about environmental issues using SDG nomenclature, even though the topics were in line with the goals. Now, as we look to our next five years, the Global Goals provide a useful framework for galvanising common action on important problems.

For these goals to be delivered, however, requires wide-scale awareness of them. It's an easy but important step for us to link our environmental volunteering much more strongly to the associated goals and we've started to do so, already.

## Get in touch

We welcome input from others who are on a similar journey and are happy to share their experience so we can all accelerate the transition to a more sustainable economy. Do feel free to get in touch with our Environmental Volunteering Lead, Maggie Robb, at [Maggie.Robb@pwc.com](mailto:Maggie.Robb@pwc.com).



For more information on our corporate sustainability programme, visit [www.pwc.co.uk/corporatesustainability](http://www.pwc.co.uk/corporatesustainability)

For more information on the Sustainable Development Goals, visit [www.pwc.com/globalgoals](http://www.pwc.com/globalgoals)



## Reducing the environmental impact of our volunteering

Traditionally, when we've run environmental volunteering, we've provided each participant with a branded t-shirt (left, below), partly to keep their own clothing clean as they worked and partly so we could identify team members easily when they were scattered over larger volunteer sites. Our people were invited to take these home with them at the end of the day. But then, as part of one of our other PwC sustainability programmes called **Going Circular**, and through which we've challenged ourselves to eliminate, recycle or reuse as much of the waste generated in our business as we can, we wondered if we could do something better.

Once we did a bit more digging, we discovered that not only were the white t-shirts

not very sensible for dirty outdoor work, but we were also using hundreds every year. Moreover, having asked our people what became of the t-shirt, most confessed that it sat in the bottom of a drawer where they felt too guilty to throw it out but didn't have a good use for it.

We decided to replace the t-shirts with hard-wearing tabards (right, below) that protect people's bodies and are highly visible, and to collect them back in at the end of the event so they can be eco-laundered and used again, and again. This new approach has reduced the raw material, water and carbon footprint of the clothing needed for our environmental volunteering and saved money, without any detrimental effect.



PwC volunteering day with Marine Conservation Society, North Queensferry, Scotland



PwC volunteering day with Trees for Cities, Englemere Pond Nature Reserve, Berkshire



#### About PwC

At PwC, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. PwC is a network of firms in 157 countries with more than 208,000 people who are committed to delivering quality in assurance, advisory and tax services. Find out more and tell us what matters to you by visiting us at [www.pwc.co.uk](http://www.pwc.co.uk).

#### About this publication

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