

**Northumberland VCS Assembly – West Northumberland Network  
21 May 2015 at Hexham Community Centre**

**Ann Atkinson – Development Officer, VCS Assembly** welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief outline of the remit of Northumberland CVA including:

- Providing leadership for the voluntary sector via the VCS Assembly Steering Group and the VCS Liaison Group (which meets with NCC on a regular basis)
- Regular bulletins to its members with information on funding opportunities, volunteering opportunities etc
- Offering help to new organisations just setting up on governance etc
- Network for Trustees + opportunities for training and support (contact [Jackie.auld@northumberlandcva.org.uk](mailto:Jackie.auld@northumberlandcva.org.uk) for more details)

**It was agreed that a Volunteer Recruitment Fair would be a useful event** –Ann Atkinson to relay this back to Anne Kidd at Northumberland CVA for action.

Visit <http://www.northumberlandcva.org.uk> and <http://vcsassemblynorthumberland.co.uk> for more details including how to become a member of the Assembly

**Rachel Turnbull of Northumberland Advice Network** gave a short talk on the work of the NAN:

- Funded by Big Lottery
- Offers advice on benefits, housing etc
- Useful website with downloadable resources

<http://www.northumberlandadvicenetwork.org.uk>

**Sarah Kerrigan of Northumberland Advice Network** talked about their social policy roll –

- coordinating social policy details across all organisations in the network
- Job Seeker's Allowance sanctions – have produced a leaflet directed at claimants on how to protect themselves against sanctions
- Have secured agreement from local DWP managements to look at the issues around sanctions, especially those facing claimants in rural areas

**Terms of reference of the group**

Inter-group discussions:

- Networking – important to be able to share information inter-group
- Who to contact? Informal chatting opportunities and how to get people to keep coming to the meetings. A speaker? Different focus at each meeting?
- Meetings do not need to be chaired but someone should take responsibility to do the agenda etc. Keep it informal!
- Benefits issues – all dealing with it and need training, especially Welfare Rights training
- Smaller community groups run by volunteers – how to get in touch with them and should they be included?
- Voluntary and community organisations encompass more than is represented today – eg arts organisations – do they need to be included?
- Training for all volunteers at different levels
- Balance needed between terms of reference and benefits to the group – if the benefits are good enough people will come back

- Job to be done in raising awareness
- Quarterly meeting with NCC (next one 5 June) – do our meetings need to tie in with this cycle? **ANN TO ADVISE ON NCC MEETING DATES**
- Opportunity for issues to be in the agenda for NCC
- If networks are all different in nature and not covering the same issues, how does this all feed into NCC?
- Four groups – streamline by perhaps taking top three issues to the Assembly and then feed to NCC
- The group is Hexham-focussed – **need to encourage people from the whole of West Northumberland to join – suggestions of other individuals/organisations to Jude please**
- Updates from other groups?
- 6-monthly meetings more effective as people would be more focussed.
- Possibility of a mix of 6-monthly meetings interspersed with smaller “focus” meetings (Hexham Youth Initiative was cited as an example – major conference every two years for people working with young people with four to six lunchtime meetings a year, usually with a speaker

**Georgia Evans of Northumberland Domestic Abuse Services** (formerly 608030) talked about the current situation and the challenges facing the service:

- They have a good Trustee group and welcome any Trustee training opportunities
- All staff have been served with risk of redundancy notices
- Majority of funding ran out in March, remainder will run out in June
- Unable to take on any new referrals
- Big Lottery funding application in – due to hear mid-July
- Working to look at meeting future needs of ALL victims of domestic abuse so may move away from being a women-only service
- Looking at options for refugee space for men
- Children’s services – no specialist services across Northumberland
- Looking at setting up a pet fostering service – pets cannot be taken in a refuge
- New referrals are being directed either to the police or Victim First which is Police Commissioner Vera Baird’s victim support service

**It was agreed that this is one of the issues to be taken to the CVA Liaison Group**

**Georgia to provide a letter template and a list of suggested recipients so that individual members of the group can write to Guy Opperman etc**

Other issues highlighted by group:

- Reduction in amount of social care available to individuals
- Sanctions on Job Seeker’s claimants
- DWP Social Fund – what’s happening with it?
- Universal Credit – its introduction will hit many people hard
- Domestic violence against disabled people

**Suggest to NCC that they write to Vera Baird to set out a strategy for domestic abuse and how and when this will be delivered**

**Guy Opperman be invited to next meeting**

**Heather Alabaster of Alabaster publishing – contact her with details of your organisation so it can be included in the next Golden Guide publication**

Date of next meeting to be advised subject to Guy Opperman’s availability