

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS LIAISON GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held at Seahouses Hostel, 157 Main Street, North Sunderland, Seahouses, NE68 7TU, Northumberland, on Thursday 5th September 2019 at 2:00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor C Seymour (Chair)

COUNCILLORS

L Bowman
T Cessford
J Lang

A Sharp
K Stow

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

S Ashmore
J Jackson
T Machnicki

M Ormston
A Perrett
J Wyness

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

H Bowers
K Higgins
W Scott

Democratic Services Officer
Senior Policy Officer
Cultural Development Manager, Active
Northumberland

Also in attendance:

A Atkinson
Y Carter
K Leadbitter

Northumberland CVA
Northumberland Community Bank
Hostel Warden

Ch.'s Initials.....

15. CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and requested a round of introductions.

16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Homer, Towns and VCS representative, A Lyall.

17. NOTES

RESOLVED that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Group held on Thursday 30 May 2019 be received and noted.

A query was raised in relation to minute number 13 - Funding Opportunities Update. In response, the Senior Policy Officer stated that the Government had not carried out any further consultation but would follow this up.

18. SERVICE PROVISION

Kare Leadbitter, Hostel Warden provided a brief background of the services provided by the hostel and hall.

The hostel had originally been an all girls school and vicarage. Children had been fostered by the vicar who had also brought disadvantaged children for holiday. In the 1980's the vicarage was demolished and the hostel and hall was rebuilt and refurbished in 2017 . The hostel was charity run and received a bursary which was used to help disadvantaged families and also provided self catering accommodation. The hall was open to various groups, eg, art groups, scouts.

Mrs Leadbitter was thanked for providing information about the hostel and hall.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

19. VCS Induction and Work of the VCS Infrastructure Commission Update

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Ann Atkinson, Development Officer, Northumberland CVA provided an update on the work of the commission to date and an induction to the voluntary and community sector for councillors and council staff. Information regarding public sector induction was circulated to the group and summarised.

VCSE organisations were defined as having a consultation or formal set of rules and separate from the state and private sectors. Profits were reinvested in the organisation or used for the benefit of the community and organisations were independent in determining their own course.

The Charity Commission was responsible for registering and regulating charities in England and Wales and held them to account.

The sector was a major employer in the UK and employed 880,000 people. The total income of all charities was around £48 billion higher than the total income for the Higher Education sector of £36 billion. Nearly 4 in 10 people volunteered formally with a group, club or organisation.

There were over 1000 registered charities in Northumberland and research indicated that there were an additional 3.66 'below the radar' organisations per 1000 head of population. These organisations were very small organisations, community groups etc.

Northumberland CVA was a support and development organisation for the VCSE. Northumberland CVA currently held the commission from Northumberland County Council to provide services such as supporting organisations to operate safely and legally; improving confidence and the ability to secure funding; ensuring communications with the VCSE, public and private sectors kept organisations fully informed, managing the Assembly and promoting awareness of VCSE issues with Northumberland County Council.

The Assembly provided a voice for the sector, providing network opportunities across the county by sharing information and good practice, raising the profile of the voluntary sector and views and concerns with strategic decision makers.

It was requested that the induction to the VCSE, be made available to councillors and county council staff.

In terms of work in relation to the Commission, a health check for new organisations had been introduced to ensure they were operating safely and legally and working in partnership with Northumberland County Council safeguarding training had been provided to 70 people.

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Northumberland CVA had been approached by the Stakeholder Engagement Lead at Farrans, a private company clearing the old power station site in Cambois, to identify how support could be provided to the community in the area. Following a successful Asset Based Community Training event, the company wished to continue their work with Northumberland CVA to further engage with the community to identify projects and ideas for investment, based around the needs of the local community.

Five large countywide VCS organisations had met to consider the appetite for better partnership working in readiness for emerging funding opportunities. Funding advice and funding bid training continued to be in demand and had been provided in two sessions held in April and June. VINE, an email network forum for organisations to share concerns, voice opinions and contribute ideas had been introduced. A paper had been prepared for the Health and Wellbeing Board on the role of the VCS in supporting delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and wider agenda.

The VCS sat on the CCG Social Prescribing Steering Group and had identified the role the VCS could play in delivering social prescribing.

A member congratulated the work of the VCSE and informed the group that the Council was in the process of employing a Voluntary Coordinator which would hopefully link in to the sector.

Some discussion took place regarding hardship during the school holidays.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

20. Report of the VCS Workstreams

Ann Atkinson, Development Manager, gave an update on the workstream thematic areas which had been discussed at the VCS Liaison Group meeting in May.

A remit for each theme had been drafted and a VCS and NCC lead identified for each one. It was important that the group were able to make some impact in terms of working together to move things forward

The following six themes had been identified:-

- Financial Wellbeing - Residents knowing how to access advice, information and products and recognise the importance of early intervention to prevent issues escalating

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- Health and Wellbeing - services were co-produced and co-delivered and funding directed to areas of need
- Community spaces and places - asset based approaches were used at a local level to ensure access for all
- Young People - involved in co-production, development and access to opportunities to build resilience, well being and provided with work and training opportunities in Northumberland
- Digital Transformation - ensure organisations could utilise digital technology to develop access information, communicate and deliver services more efficiently
- Employment and Inclusion - workforce trained and developed to meet current and future opportunities

The first meeting would take place on 2 October.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

21. Northumberland Culture Strategy

Wendy Scott, Cultural Services gave an overview of the strategy and its implications and opportunities for the sector.

An agenda paper from a recent meeting of Northumberland Culture Network was circulated to the group and a link to the Cultural Strategy would be emailed to members.

The strategy was delivered at international and national level. At regional level the strategy was supported by the North East's 12 regional authorities, 5 universities, the Chamber of Commerce and the arts and heritage sectors.

The Cultural Strategy *Our Creative Landscape 2018 - 2030* was underpinned by 5 aspirations:-

1. Placemaking and identity
2. Education and learning
3. Health and Wellbeing
4. Economy and Growth
5. Partnership and Collaboration

The Northumberland Culture Network had been referred to in a Government White Paper as good practice and adopted by other local authorities.

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Northumberland Culture Network included key partners and organisations and met four times a year.

A number of seasonal events had taken place over the year with the Great Northumberland Winter Festival recently being launched.

The strategy was linked in with health and wellbeing through different forums and projects offering value for money to residents.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

22. MHCLG Communities Framework

The Local Communities Framework briefing note set out the direction of future work across government to strengthen communities and the impact it might have on Northumberland communities. (**Appendix A**).

Four pillars had been identified to shape the government work in the Local Communities Framework context:

- Trust, connectedness and local pride
- Active citizenship and local control
- Shared community spaces
- Shared prosperity, with no community left behind.

The substantive parts of the report related to the civil society and social sector.

Some discussion took place and concerns were raised on the following:

- Whether the County Council had assessed implications or indicated support
- Town parish and councils had not been consulted on the White Paper
- Funding, fees and charges

It was proposed that the report be brought back to the meeting in January and kept on the agenda as CLG set out more clearly how it would have a 'national conversation' with communities. An invite will be sent to Janice Rose for further discussion.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1) the information be noted;
- 2) the report be brought back to the meeting in January

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23. Updates

1) Economic Inclusion and Northumberland Community Bank

Yvonne Carter, Northumberland Community Bank gave a brief outline of how the bank operated. Leaflets were circulated to the group.

Northumberland Community Bank (NCB) was launched with support and funding from the County Council and drawn its origins from Tynedale Community Bank and the The Credit Union for South East Northumberland (CUSEN) with whom they merged in April 2017.

The bank was a cooperative and not for profit organisation offering banking services for the people of Northumberland. It offered small loans from £300 to £15,000 with varying interest rates, providing an alternative to banks and high interest loan providers, encouraging people to save what they could and borrow only what they could afford.

The community bank had a small number of staff and 2 apprentices.

New products had been introduced, including a debit card account designed to help financially vulnerable people, ATM and online transactions. It was hoped that some partnership organisations would cover charges in order that costs would not be passed on to the most vulnerable.

Mrs Carter was thanked for the information.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

2) Northumberland Lottery Consultation

The group was informed that the Northumberland Lottery was still in its early stages and its implementation had been considered by Cabinet in August. The licence application was still in progress and an update would be given to the group in January.

It was felt that the voluntary and community sector should have been involved and had not been consulted. The Senior Policy Officer was asked to feedback the group's concerns regarding partnership working and communication.

Some discussion took place of the intention of the lottery and the group raised concerns around gambling and the effect this could have. The group was

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advised that the report had been presented to Scrutiny where members had been reassured that safeguards would be put in place. The lottery would promote engagement with communities and benefit specific charities.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

3) North of Tyne Combined Authority

An update was given on the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

A partnership accord between the Combined Authority and the sector had been drafted for consultation and the final version would have the input of a VCS ambassador and VCS leads. The Accord was based on similar commitments made in other devolution areas, such as Greater Manchester, to establish a new relationship and set out common aims across the sectors.

Work had commenced on the Good Work pledge and a number of consultation events would be held in the autumn, with a view to the pledge being finalised. Work was continuing on the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (from 2020). A link to funding events/Adult Education Budget devolution market engagement events would be forwarded to the group.

Working Homes was a North of Tyne programme for which NCC was the Lead Accountable Body, delivering a partnership of housing providers, LA's and training providers (Bernicia, Karbon, Newcastle Futures, Northern Learning Trust, NCC Housing, North Tyneside Housing, and Your Homes Newcastle) to support 1,650 social housing residents to find work, between April 2019 and March 2022.

The North of Tyne Returnships programme was a partnership of NTCA with Northumberland Carers, North Tyneside Carers' Centre and Newcastle Carers to support people with caring responsibilities into employer led pathways to work. NTCA had improved the funding and delivery would start in late autumn.

RESOLVED - that the information be noted.

4) Borderlands

Progress was being made in relation to the Heads of Terms document which had been signed. A lot of business cases were being developed with £324 million being available.

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Specific reference in the Heads of Terms had been made in relation to Alnwick Gardens and investment in a new Berwick Theatre and Conference Centre and a 10 year capital growth deal at Hadrian's Wall.

A member felt that there had not been enough communication regarding some of the projects and requested that members were kept up to date.

The Borderlands Partnership would be holding its second Borderlands Conference on Monday 25 November at Slaley Hall, Hexham. A newsletter would be circulated on the second Borderlands.

RESOLVED - that the information be noted

5) Funding

The final rounds of the European Social Fund was expected to be launched from September with engagement work taking place in preparation.

A LEP engagement event would be taking place in Newcastle in September. Members were advised to consult the NELEP and VONNE websites for further information.

RESOLVED - that the information be noted.

24. VCS issues arising from network meetings/events

The group was informed that Pegswood hub which provided support for young children was now operating solely with volunteers and no longer had paid staff.

Increased food poverty in West Northumberland was evident with an increase in the use of the food bank. Over the same period last year, 363 households had been supported compared to 425 this year.

The Chair requested that the review of the decision making process for grants and commissions and provision of information be chased up with the relevant officer.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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25. NCC issues that may impact on the VCS

The group was informed of the Council's Brexit and Devolution Working Group which was trying to mitigate any potential risks.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

26. REPORT OF THE SERVICE MANAGER - DEMOCRACY

(i) VCS Liaison Group Work Programme

Future agenda items would be discussed at a pre-meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

27. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 9 January 2020 in Alnwick.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**COUNCILLOR C SEYMOUR
CHAIR**

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