

Notes of VCS Assembly Steering Group

Wednesday 18th February 2015 12.00noon – 2p.m.

Present: Sue Ashmore, Julie Dodson, Cath George, Mike Gowland, Chris Orrick, Joe Jackson (chair), Rodney James, Ann Lyall, Liz Prudhoe, Ann Atkinson

Apologies: Sharon Spurling, Liz Chadwick

1. Notes of last meeting and matters arising

MG raised the need for clarification in relation to trustees referred to in the VCS Assembly Framework. There were trustees who were financially responsible if a shortfall in funding as well as having a legal responsibility and those that just had a legal responsibility.

Clarity was also needed in relation to individual representation on the Steering Group and in relation to elections if individual representing the organisation or organisational representation.

Action - AA to review and amend if appropriate Framework and Terms of Reference so clarity in relation to the above issues.

2. VCS Liaison Group

There was discussion related to the Third Sector Trends Survey that Tony Chapman from Durham University was to present to the VCS Liaison Group. It was recognised that there were not the resources to up date this study. It was stated that in terms of the current situation, it was the middle layer that was being squeezed most and that the timing of the survey would have an impact on the results. Also, the effects of the cuts could now be more apparent, as many organisations are now operating with a skeleton staff. The discussion then went on to the impact of European funds going to the bigger players and the need for infrastructure support to support the middle layer in particular. The LEP's are managing European funds but NCC needs to represent their views to ensure Northumberland gets a fair share from the fund. Currently there is a need for clarity in relation to accessing European funding. VONNE and infrastructure organisations are meeting with the LEP's to discuss this which will hopefully provide some clarity. VONNE have also been provided with £30,000 for development work to increase capacity and understanding in the voluntary sector. It was considered important that VONNE held a meeting in Northumberland. It was essential that there was someone from the Liaison Group to champion the VCS view and ensure that

money came back into the sector. It was suggested that a question should be asked to the VCS Liaison Group in relation to this.

It was queried how ambitious the Council are for their communities. There was felt to be the need for a Strategic Group to look at sustainability for everyone involving NCC, CCG's and the voluntary sector. Getting the right people round the table to work together with councillor backing, to map what we have got in terms of strategic plans and work together to deliver.

The presentation on the Third Sector Trends survey has had to be postponed to a future meeting as Tony Chapman is not available on 5th March. The VCS Assembly survey results were being presented to supplement this with up to date information on the views and concerns of VCS organisations.

Action – JD to send AA details of European Structure Fund for circulation.

Question to be asked of the VCS Liaison Group - 'What is Northumberland's position in relation to structural funds and other pots of money and how is it ensuring as a local authority that people in Northumberland benefit from it?'

Letter from Chair of the Assembly to VONNE to inform that want a briefing session on European Structure Fund in Northumberland.

3. VCS Assembly re-launch event.

Alnwick Gardens has a number of available dates in April. A speaker for the event is still being sought. It was felt that issues arising out of the survey could be used for the workshop. It was queried whether a politician would be able to present at the event because of Purdah. AA asked members of the group to consider a suitable title for the event.

Action - AA to check whether a councillor would be able to speak at the event and if not ensure that a senior officer could present instead.

4. Progress Report

AA provided the work plan as a traffic light report and stated that a lot of the activities were amber as ongoing activities and whether this sufficiently demonstrated activity. It was stated that providing a progress report as well would provide the detail of activities carried out since the last meeting. An

explanation of the traffic lights was suggested could be included on the work plan. Activities since the last meeting included:-

- 38 completed questionnaires to date of the VCS Assembly Survey.
- Individuals interested in joining the Steering Group through the survey have been informed that no vacancies currently but supportive of assisting development of networks in local area.
- Democratically elected Steering Group to be in place by June.
- Meetings held with Alliance Steering Group and Hexham Partnership in relation to progressing development of networks
- Distributed information about the Assembly and VCS Support Services to libraries, community centres and parish halls in the Tyne Valley.
- Database of members is being revised and updated. Currently stands at 190. 18 additional members through the survey and raising awareness at events. Will email out to members to check details are up to date. Also plan to send out details of Assembly to organisations known about that are not members.
- Website is being updated and revised with improvements to home page so more appealing. Framework agreement, notes of Steering Group meetings and Steering Group members are now on the website.

Action – AA to add explanation of traffic lights on the work plan

5. Health and Well Being Board – Welfare Reform Strategic Group

JD reported that a session on welfare reform and what it means for Northumberland led by Cllr. Scott Dickinson which included NETS (Northumberland Emergency Transition Support) work and other pieces of work, (which then went to Health and Well Being Board) showed that support was very fragmented. A Welfare Strategy Group (a sub group of the Health and Well Being Board) including financial inclusion and welfare reform is being formed to include councillors, senior officers and voluntary sector organisations. Work is currently taking place on the remit of the group and Kirsten Francis is the lead officer. JD stated she would circulate a paper about the Group and we would need to decide how to fulfil.

AL also stated that she had a meeting with Penny Spring, Director of Public Health, Barbara Edmondson from the CCG and Cynthia Atkins from Healthwatch on social prescribing. A pilot in Blyth apparently did not get off the ground. CCG's commissioned support planners from NCC to provide information about what was available in the area, to support patients. It was felt that there were opportunities to work together better with the VCS to deliver social prescribing as all working to ensure people get the services they

need. The plan is to hold an event and there is a need for a voluntary sector representative to sit on the planning group. AL felt it was important that the person attending was from health and social care and asked if this was appropriate for a Steering Group member or from the wider sector. There was felt to be a need for more information on the budget available to CCG's and what they envisaged from social prescribing. It was also queried why the money was not coming into the sector. It was suggested and agreed that Sharon Spurling should be approached to see if she would be willing to be the VCS representative on the planning group.

**Action - JD to send AA paper on the Welfare Reform Strategic Group for circulation.
AL to contact Sharon Spurling in relation to Social Prescribing Planning group**

6. Planned dates for future meetings

AA circulated the dates for future meetings of the Steering Group up to the end of the year to fit in with VCS Liaison Group meetings. All agreed that the dates were set at reasonable times and regularity.

7. AOB

None

Date of next meeting **Wednesday 15th April 12.00 noon – 2 p.m.**