

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Cabinet Advisory Group** held at Headway Arts, Headway ArtSpace, The Old Church, Waterloo Road, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 1BY on Thursday 2 June 2016 at 2:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor E Burt (Chair) In the Chair

COUNCILLORS

J Watson

J Woodman

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

A Gibson

A Lyall

C George

G Scott

J Jackson

S Spurling

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

K Francis

Principal Policy Officer

K Norris

Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance:

A Atkinson – Northumberland CVA

T Burton – Headway Arts (part)

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chair referred to the membership and terms of reference agreed by County Council on 4 May, which had been circulated with the agenda, and advised of the following change:

Councillor J Woodman to replace Councillor H G H Sanderson

It was also noted that C Ashworth was no longer a VCS representative and had been replaced by Avril Gibson, Northern Learning Trust as the Employability Representative from the Northumberland VCS Assembly. Lewis Atkinson from

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Community IT Academy was the new representative for Infrastructure Organisations but was unable to attend on this occasion.

RESOLVED - that the information be noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lang, Jones, Sambrook and Wallace.

3. NOTES

Clarification was provided that item 17, The Importance of Volunteering, would be taken before Chairmen's Group to be referred to the relevant Scrutiny Committee for information and discussion.

RESOLVED – that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Working Group held on 2 June 2016 be received and noted.

4. SERVICE PROVISION – HEADWAY ARTS, BLYTH

Tom Burton, Associate Artist, was in attendance in place of Allie Walton-Robson who was unable to attend. He provided a power point presentation on the service provision of Headway Arts and stated that:

- At Headway Arts they believed passionately that arts were a highly effective tool for personal development, motivation and individual expression and a potent catalyst for community cohesion and social change.
- Their mission was to offer high quality arts and culture participation opportunities for communities in Northumberland and beyond.
- Their aims were to produce high quality artwork; create environments where art could take place; provide life-long learning, training and employment opportunities; offer platforms for expression and exploration of creativity; proactively encourage engagement and representation of excluded groups; offer a means to contribute to the cultural life of communities; initiate informed debate and influence policy-making.
- Their values were that everyone was equal and everyone was different; participation in the arts enabled personal development and social inclusion; participation in the arts was an entitlement for everyone; creative contribution was of high value irrespective of background of the person; all participants had the right to make choices and determine their own creative engagement.
- In 2013 Headway Arts moved into the former United Reformed Church on Waterloo Road.
- Their vision over the next 5 years was to establish Headway ArtSpace as a venue for regional significance, a multi-use space for Blyth and beyond and to include those who got the least opportunity to participate.

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- Details of big lottery funding, performances, adult education, forthcoming events/projects and cross cutting work were provided.

Following the presentation questions/comments and responses were as follows:

- Those who attended the centre were mainly adults with learning difficulties but there were also some school sixth form students from various schools across Northumberland.
- European qualifications were in the early stages, the groups had met for the first time in Italy.
- The building was specifically for Headway Arts but work was being done to develop it into a community venue.
- Headway Arts was an independent company and it did not receive assistance from mainstream theatres.
- The 'Stars' group worked as a theatre company and there were approximately 10 or 11 members.
- They had been successful in attracting funding, one of the reasons being they were unique in the area.
- Many years ago there had been an organisation called Headway which was part of the NHS.
- There were no other similar companies in Northumberland although some schools had good arts programmes which worked well for children with disabilities.
- One of the members, Tim, had been attending Headway Arts for 24 years. The centre was open 4 days a week, Monday to Thursday. Some members came one day each week, some came every day.
- The question of how to best help was subjective but the main issues were good solid funding, more publicity and cultural integration.
- So far £130,000 had been raised for the conversion of the building.

The Chair thanked Mr Burton for his time and stated that some very positive work had been done. She said it had been a fascinating and interesting presentation and asked for that to be conveyed to his colleagues.

RESOLVED – that the information be noted.

5. ARTS AND CULTURE

Fiona McKeown, Cultural Development Officer, provided an overview of the work done by the Arts, Culture and Heritage Team. She referred to her colleagues Wendy Scott and James Fell with whom she worked on cultural development across the county stating that they worked with a wide range of strategic and delivery partners to provide opportunities for participation and engagement in order to develop the partnership. They supported and managed core funding of various venues throughout Northumberland including

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the key venues of Alnwick Playhouse, The Maltings, Berwick, The Phoenix Theatre, Blyth and Queens Hall, Hexham.

Work was also carried out on cultural education and details were provided of various qualifications which could be obtained. Reference was also made to:

- Northumberland Arts Development (NAD) which provided support and advice to arts initiatives and organisations within Northumberland.
- Discussions with Culture Bridge North East in order to create closer links between schools and art organisations.
- The Schools Culture Network.
- Culture 16.
- The Arts and Heritage Newsletter which provided information on key activities and projects, training and funding opportunities and good news stories.
- Supporting the culture programme for the forthcoming Tall Ships event in which Headway Arts was also involved.
- Revival of the Blyth Carnival.
- Supporting museums across the County including Woodhorn.

The Chair then invited comments/questions, the responses to which were as follows:

- With regard to additional funding being brought in when investment had been made, the Principal Policy Officer said that did happen and the partnership between the Council and Voluntary Sector worked extremely well, often changing people's lives.
- With regard to education and older members of the community, reference was made to a project in a Pegswood Care Home. It was noted that dancing and movement for older people was very beneficial, particularly for those with dementia due to its repetitive nature.
- A Cultural Strategy had been drafted, two of the key areas being health and wellbeing and employability. Discussion took place regarding how the strategy would link in with other strategies and how it had been developed. It was noted that the strategy had been out to consultation and needed to be signed off but it was felt that it would be beneficial to bring it to the Group for information.
- It was part of the funding criteria to work in partnership with other organisations but any suggestions to create better links would be welcomed. The Chair stated that everyone should be included in the distribution of the aforementioned newsletter and it was agreed that Democratic Services would forward email addresses of the Voluntary Sector to the Cultural Development Officer.

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- It was suggested that the draft strategy should also be emailed to members of the voluntary sector.
- Reference was made to the Active Northumberland website which contained cultural information and would be useful to read.
- The Cultural Development Officer agreed that it would be beneficial to her to receive the e-bulletin of the Voluntary Sector.

In summary the Chair stated it was very important to work together and thanked the Cultural Services Officer for the update she had provided.

RESOLVED

1. That the information be noted.
2. That the Democratic Services forward email addresses of the Voluntary Sector Representatives to the Cultural Development Officer for their inclusion in the Arts and Heritage Newsletter.

6. VCS ISSUES ARISING FROM NETWORK MEETINGS/EVENTS

(a) Commissioning Services and the VCS

The Principal Policy Officer stated that she had been expecting Ross Morrison, Senior Procurement Specialist, to be in attendance but in his absence would provide an update. She referred to joint services with Northumbria Health and said that all of the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) was moving to Due North. The move to a new portal would be beneficial as all opportunities would now be in one place. Northumberland had moved earlier because of contractual arrangements and unfortunately, in that short window, some opportunities for the voluntary sector had been missed for which apologies were conveyed.

Comments were made regarding the lack of communication about the move and how to sign up. No discussion had taken place at the last meeting of the Group on 3 March yet the transfer date was 23 March. The lack of communication had been very disappointing. Further discussion ensued and assurance was sought that, should a similar situation arise, due notification be provided. The Chair requested that a report providing full details of how the situation had occurred be provided to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that a report be provided to the next meeting giving details of the situation regarding the transfer to Due North.

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(b) Employer Supported Volunteering

Ann Atkinson referred to raising awareness about opportunities for Employer Supported Volunteering and the potential for such schemes to be piloted in a few organisations. It was about the sector taking a leading role in supporting organisations, looking at skills and considering what support they could receive from businesses.

Further details could be provided upon request.

Reference was made to an event taking place on the morning of Wednesday, 22 June at Kirkley Hall.

Questions, comments and responses provided were as follows:

- The Council did not actively encourage employees to undertake volunteer work but it was thought there was a process in place should a request be made. However, that was more about civic duties such as magistrates and T.A.
- Some organisations allowed 3 to 4 days per year for volunteer work and it was felt this was something the Council should consider in order to lead by example.
- The VCS felt it was their job to try and engage organisations but acknowledged that it was difficult and it needed to be clear on what was required.
- Access to training would need to be clarified.
- It was suggested that an icon could be put in place within the staff advertiser on the website entitled 'support for your voluntary sector' so groups could perhaps get finance officers to look at their accounts.
- The VCS would advertise volunteering opportunities.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the issue of how the Council could support the VCS through staff volunteering activity be raised with Chairmen's Group.
- 2) The VCS advertise volunteering opportunities.

7. EUROPEAN FUNDING BID

a) Building Better Opportunities

The Principal Policy Officer referred to a shared initiative between the Council and small organisations and stated there was an opportunity to receive up to 5 years funding. Bids for the second phase had been submitted and the outcome would be known by July/August.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

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b) Community Led Local Development

This was an initiative which would be happening in the South East but had been operating in the rural North for 10 years. It was in the early stages and work was being carried out with people in the South East on the Local Development Strategy. There was a strong focus on employability, workshops had taken place and a survey had been put out by the Assembly. Interviews would be taking place over the next few weeks with 30 to 40 organisations from the public and private sector, which would result in the draft strategy. Although there was still a long way to go, expressions of interest had been received for people to sit on the local action group to decide on how to best deliver the strategy.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

c) Fishing Local Action Group

Funding was for coastal communities but needed to have a strong association with fish and needed 50% match funding. It was envisaged there could be one or two initiatives in key places. It was noted that the Council had done well to get to get through the first stage and was now through to the second stage.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8. **NCC ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE VCS**

a) Community Regeneration Team

The locality team was being merged with the Social Enterprise Team to become the Community Regeneration Team and would pick up work on the Community Chest and Parish/Town Councils. The team members were Ann Lawson, Iain Hedley and Tony Kirsop.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

b) Coastal Communities Fund

This covered an area from Berwick to Blyth with up to £9 m being available. Officers were looking for a pro-forma to come forward for initiatives for coastal communities. There had been a number of successful bids but there was no advantage to having had funding awarded in the past. Links and information would be forwarded to the Assembly.

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It was noted that good projects got funded and match funding was extremely important. The Community Chest would be discussed at the next meeting. The Chair stated that if projects were to be match funded, they could come out of the Community Chest and it was beneficial for members to support the schemes.

RESOLVED

1. That the the information be noted and links and information be forwarded to the Assembly.
2. The Principal Policy Officer work with the Chair to take a report to the Chairmen's Group to ensure opportunities could be maximised.

9. VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP WORK PROGRAMME

The Principal Policy Officer referred to the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group Work Programme which was enclosed with the notes as Appendix A. She requested that if members had any items they would like to add they contact herself or the Chair.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings were noted. It was suggested that a venue in the north of the county be booked for the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

**COUNCILLOR E BURT
CHAIR**

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