

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS LIAISON GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held at Wansbeck CVS, Ashington, on 5 March 2015 at 2.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor L. Grimshaw (Chair) In the Chair

COUNCILLORS

V. Jones
J. Reid
G. Sanderson

E. Simpson
A. Wallace

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

A. Atkinson
M. Gowland
J. Jackson
M. Johnson

A. Kidd
A. Lyall
L. Prudhoe
S. Spurling

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

M. Bird
K. Francis
T. Kirsop
C. Maddison

Team Leader, Democratic Services
Principal Inclusion Policy Officer
Social Enterprise Manager
Apprentice, Democratic Services

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R. Gibson, A. Sambrook and VCS Representative Cath George.

Ch.'s Initials.....

12. NOTES

The notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Working Group, held on 4 December 2014, were agreed.

13. VCS REPRESENTATION AT THE MEETING

Copies of an updated list of nominated VCS Representative members for the Liaison Group were circulated at the meeting. Members were informed that there was one more representative to join the Liaison Group, who was yet to be elected.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

14. CURRENT SUPPORT SERVICES

M. Johnson and A. Kidd, Wansbeck CVS, provided an in-depth verbal update with regard to the current support services. A document which detailed the statistics between April 2014 and 4th March 2015 was circulated at the meeting (copy attached to the filed notes).

The team had had 26 surgeries countywide from Haltwhistle to Berwick. They had a positive second visit to Bellingham, after an active resident had spread the word about the visit to local groups and organisations. This successful second visit led to the invitation of a third visit. It was hoped that Councillors would help support these visits by spreading the word in their local communities.

The Friends of Bellingham Play Park had already secured funding totalling £50,000 however it would be difficult for them to secure any further funding for this particular project, as the land was owned by Bellingham Parish Council, as they would need to apply.

The CVS website had been redeveloped in order to make it more user friendly. This was important as the promotion of services was mainly conducted through the website.

There had been events in Morpeth and Alnwick to try and recruit more volunteers, a total of 43 organisations were involved. 63 6th form and college students attended the Morpeth event, and 31 attended in Alnwick. As this was a good opportunity to recruit volunteers, more fares were being organised. There were now 140 opportunities on the Wansbeck CVS website, and it was being updated daily.

In order to ensure that organisations would receive adequate assistance, but were still able to operate independently it was important to establish an appropriate balance. The main advice that the Wansbeck CVS offered was about funding.

The chair offered thanks for the in-depth, comprehensive presentation.

A member expressed concern about electronic correspondence to rural areas, as some links in emails might not be always be accessible depending on levels of local Broadband access. The Group were advised that consideration was given to the number of ways in which the work could be promoted; many local halls and parish/town councils were visited and posters were put up in local areas. It was also important that VCS groups joined mailing lists.

It was confirmed that, although it was called the Wansbeck CVS, it actually operated countywide. Wansbeck CVS had been commissioned to deliver all VCS support services across Northumberland. To avoid further confusion, they would now be operating as Northumberland Community and Volunteering Action, but the original name would be retained as it was their registered charity number. It was important to publicise this message to avoid any misunderstanding that the service was only for the use of people in the Wansbeck area; an email would be sent to County Councillors from Northumberland Community and Voluntary Action to make them aware of the change.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

15. NORTHUMBERLAND VCS ASSEMBLY - PRESENTATION

The Group received a presentation on the Northumberland VCS Assembly from A. Lyall and A. Atkinson (Wansbeck CVS). Key details included the objectives, governance networks, priorities, information sharing, influencing planning and policy and funding applied for and received (copy of the presentation attached to the filed notes.)

Some of the areas covered in the presentation included:

- Purpose of the Northumberland VCS Assembly
- Objectives of the Assembly
- Governance – VCS Steering Group / Liaison Group
- Governance - Networks
- Priorities

A query was raised with regard to structure, and it was clarified that the assembly was made up of VCS representatives. The steering group had a

governance structure, but was not yet democratically elected, although it was hoped that it would be in June 2015. A number of representatives from the steering group met with County Councillors to form the Liaison Group.

RESOLVED that the presentation and the Group's comments be noted.

16. DISCUSSION ABOUT STATEMENT OF INTENT

A revised version of the Statement of Intent was circulated at the meeting (copy attached to the filed notes).

A discussion took place with regard to the revised Statement of Intent. Key points raised during the discussion were as follows:

- The Statement of Intent was in a reasonable position now, however it was felt that it needed a reviewing process to be built in, including timescales
- It was highlighted that if the Council Administration were to change, the Statement of Intent might need to be updated. It was felt that it could be refreshed every 2 years or so.
- The document was jointly owned, therefore needed to be clear and meet all needs from both sides wherever possible.
- The high standard of good practice sought would be achieved through commissioning to deliver services to operate effectively, and the contract would be monitored
- The statement focused on what was intended to happen, and how and what structures needed to develop to enable this
- It would be useful if a visual chart of the structures could be provided.

To conclude it was agreed that the language used in the document should be amended to ensure greater clarity and transparency about the aims, and it as:

RESOLVED that the information be noted and further consideration be given to the statement at a future meeting of the Liaison Group.

17. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES – EUROPEAN FUNDING

A. Lyall (Wansbeck CVS) introduced this item, and informed the Group about future opportunities for European funding.

The Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) had held a number of workshops.

An overview had been brought together about what the European Funding could offer to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Groups had been referred to the VONNE website for more information and signposting had been arranged also to other key websites

There was a total of £460 million worth of European funding available, therefore the VCS were keen to work with Northumberland County Council to maximise the amount of funding that Northumberland could achieve.

Further questions were asked to which the key responses were:

- Cross border working with Durham could provide benefits for Northumberland in the Tynedale corridor area; partnership working could enable access to the substantial funding available
- Big Lottery funding was a safe option as it was match funded, whereas for European funding the money had to be spent in advance then claimed back
- Funding opportunity options would be further considered.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

18. NEXT STEPS

The following next steps were agreed on:

- Professor Tony Chapman would be invited to a future meeting to talk about his 'Understanding the State of the Sector' study, which had been funded by the Northern Rock Foundation. This would assist in understanding how Northumberland was fairing currently, for example healthy/strong/areas of concern/areas requiring support. Ms Kidd had also done local surveys which would be also be considered at a future meeting.
- The revised Statement of Intent would be presented to a future meeting, and include a structure chart
- Other possible items might arise from the Assembly Steering Group's survey

RESOLVED that the information be noted and that A. Lyall would send agenda items to M. Bird (Democratic Services) in due course.

19. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings in 2015 (subject to Council agreement in April as part of the overall committee timetable) were noted. To conclude, the chair thanked Wansbeck CVS for their hospitality and then closed the meeting.

**COUNCILLOR L GRIMSHAW
CHAIR**