Northumberland VCS Assembly Framework

Northumberland VCS Assembly has been established to provide an inclusive, independent and influential voice for the voluntary and community sector in Northumberland. This document sets out the vision, aims and objectives of the Northumberland VCS Assembly and the structures in place to support delivery. It is essential that the Assembly has ownership and buy in from the sector. Also that the actions identified are acted upon to achieve results that support the defined outcomes for the Assembly. Terms of reference are detailed in Appendix 1 and Values and Beliefs in Appendix 2.

Vision

By informing, engaging with, coordinating and championing the views of the voluntary and community sector, Northumberland VCS Assembly will provide an inclusive, independent and influential voice with our public sector partners and strategic partnerships to shape and respond to the challenges and opportunities facing the sector.

Aim

To increase and strengthen the collective voice of the community and voluntary sector in influencing and shaping decisions that are important to the sector in Northumberland.

Objectives

1. Provide a structure and mechanisms for effective communication and engagement.

2. Provide opportunities for mutual support and learning to build the sector from within.

3. Provide effective communication and engagement, coordination and improved working relationships with the public and private sectors.

4. Ensure that the collective views of the VCS have influence on planning and policy decisions in Northumberland and the region.

5. Provide leadership for the collective voice of the VCS.

6. Promote and raise awareness of the Assembly to contribute to improving unity within the sector.

7. To improve working relationships between VCS and public and private sectors.

The following details mechanisms that will be used to deliver the objectives. A detailed work plan sets out the actions and timescales for delivering the objectives.

Objective	Delivery mechanisms
1. Provide a structure and mechanisms for effective communication and engagement.	- Geographical networks/Forum meetings - VCS Assembly events - Ad hoc workshops - VCS Assembly Executive Committee - Bulletins, briefings, publications, web pages

2. Provide opportunities for mutual support and learning	•	Geographical networks/Forum meetings
	•	VCS Assembly events
	•	Ad hoc workshops
	•	VCS Assembly Executive Committee
	•	Bulletins, briefings, publications, web pages
3. Provide effective communication and engagement, coordination and improved working relationships with public and private sectors.	•	NCC/CS Liaison Group
	•	Public and private sector engagement
4. Ensure that the collective views of the VCS have influence on planning and policy decisions in Northumberland and the region.	•	NCC/VCS Liaison Group
	•	VCS Assembly Executive Committee
	•	Officer and member support in NCC
	•	Public sector engagement
	•	Intelligence gathering
5. Provide leadership for the collective voice of the VCS.	•	VCS Assembly Executive Committee
6. Promote and raise awareness of the Assembly to contribute to improving unity within the sector.	•	Promote existing and new Networks
	•	Promote VCS Assembly membership
	•	Events
	•	Promotional material
	•	Website
7. To improve working relationships between VCS and public and private sectors.	•	Forums/Networks
	•	Events
	•	Information sharing
	•	NCC/CS Liaison Group
	•	Public and private sector engagement

Outcomes

The following details the outcome measures to be used to assess the success in achieving objectives.

- The VCS is represented and is influencing planning, policy making and service delivery at strategic levels as a result of infrastructure support activities.
- There is information and intelligence sharing, partnership working and collaboration between VCS organisations and the private and public sector.
- The VCS in Northumberland has a collective profile and presence.
- The VCS in Northumberland is better informed.
- Sectors work together better to achieve best outcomes for individuals and communities in Northumberland.

VCS Assembly Membership

Membership of the VCS Assembly is free and open to VCS organisations, networks and forums and anyone working for such organisations in a paid or unpaid capacity including voluntary sector trustees. The VCS Assembly comprises a broad and diverse range of VCS organisations working in Northumberland, it includes for example:-

- Voluntary organisations
- Community groups
- Charities
- Faith groups
- Cooperatives and mutual societies
- Tenants and residents associations
- Housing associations
- Social enterprises
- Not for profit membership associations, local branches of national organisations
- Service user led organisations
- Trustees of voluntary and community sector organisations

Members will abide by and promote the aims, values and principles of the VCS Assembly

Role of the Northumberland VCS Assembly

The VCS Assembly is independent, open and inclusive and is proactive on issues that are important to the sector. All meetings, events, consultations and activities are for VCS members and agendas are set by the members. Statutory partners may be invited as guests to participate from time to time.

Closer links with the Council and public sector bodies will ensure a greater awareness and understanding of the two sectors, how changes affect them and opportunities for increased collaboration. In terms of links with the private sector we will aim to have a greater understanding of what each other has to offer, our needs and future plans. Northumberland CVA as the commissioning body will support the implementation and delivery of the Assembly.

VCS Assembly Executive Committee

The VCS Assembly Executive Committee provides leadership, accountability and is responsible for progressing the general development and direction of the Northumberland VCS Assembly. The Assembly whilst currently governed by a Steering Group will develop into a democratically elected body, the Executive Committee. It is responsible for ensuring that the Assembly's work is carried out according to this Framework and to oversee, support and take part in the implementation of the Assembly's work plan. (Terms of reference of the Executive Committee are detailed in Appendix 1).

The VCS Assembly Executive Committee will meet formally on at least a quarterly basis, but as and when directed by circumstances or the needs of the group. The quarterly meetings should be timed to allow information and debate prior to the meeting with elected members of Northumberland County Council at the NCC/VCS Liaison Group.

Networks

The capacity of the VCS to work collectively will be strengthened by the development of new networks and the promotion and involvement of existing networks which will provide an opportunity for information and intelligence sharing, discussion, influence, celebration of achievements, sharing of good practice, cooperation and joint endeavours. Networks help develop more awareness of the context within which we all work. Networks will actively collaborate with the Assembly Executive Committee and keep them informed of issues and concerns of the sector in their network. All VCS Assembly members can raise issues for the VCS Assembly to consider and where appropriate actions will be taken forward on behalf of the sector. Members will have the opportunity and be encouraged to contribute views to local, regional and national consultations. If scenarios arise where voting may be required, one vote will be available to each member of the Assembly. Based on issues and concerns raised by the VCS, priorities will be identified for the VCS Assembly and specific pieces of work undertaken to further the Assembly's aims and objectives. However these will remain flexible and depend on what the sector requires and the need and resources available to support them.

Organisations and individuals who are currently not part of networks will be encouraged to become a part of a network related to their area of work or geographical location or a member of Northumberland VCS Assembly. Where they do not exist, it is anticipated that new geographical networks will be developed to ensure that all individuals and groups are linked to a geographical network. Some limited funding will be made available to existing geographical networks to enable them to meet on a quarterly basis with a representative from VCS Support Services in attendance. An item on the agenda of quarterly meetings will consider the priorities and support needs facing members of networks which can then be collated and taken to the Executive Committee of the Assembly and where appropriate NCC/VCS Liaison Group meetings with the Council. This will ensure that all groups and individuals have a voice. It will enable a move towards a more collective and accountable way of working whilst working with effective routes of involvement that are currently in place.

NCC/VCS Liaison Group

The NCC/VCS Liaison Group established with Northumberland County Council comprises members of Northumberland County Council and Northumberland VCS Assembly. Representation on the NCC/VCS Liaison Group at the joint meeting will be drawn from the VCS Assembly Executive Committee and includes eight members of the Committee and eight elected members of NCC. Meetings of this group will provide an opportunity to share knowledge and understanding of roles and improve cooperation between the two sectors. Information of relevance arising from these meetings will be shared with the VCS. Representatives will have responsibility to feedback to their networks.

Communication and Engagement

Full Assembly meetings of all members will take place twice a year.

Topic based events/workshops will be flexible, responsive and timely.

Events will provide an additional means of engaging with the sector, getting them involved and coming together to have their say on important issues for the sector and for the communities they serve.

In addition there will be group emailing, e-bulletins, policy briefings, research publication and web pages delivering information to groups and individuals electronically.

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Appendix 1 – Northumberland VCS Assembly Executive Committee Terms of Reference

Role of VCS Assembly Executive Committee

The VCS Assembly Executive Committee provides leadership, accountability and is responsible for progressing the general development and direction of Northumberland VCS Assembly.   It is also responsible for developing and monitoring the framework and work plan to ensure delivery of commissioned outcomes.

The responsibilities of the VCS Assembly Executive Committee are to:-

1. agree the vision, aims and objectives of the VCS Assembly Framework within the commission.
2. agree the work plan, monitor and ensure implementation, to achieve commissioned outcomes.
3. develop, monitor and review governance arrangements to ensure transparency and accountability to Assembly members.
4. agree and progress priorities identified through networks, forums, meetings and other communication channels.
5. provide guidance, support and advice around the strategic developments of the VCS Assembly.
6. raise awareness and the profile of the VCS Assembly and encourage membership.
7. communicate progress of the Executive Committee's work to the VCS, Council and public sector.
8. ensure representation and influence in planning, policy and strategy that impacts on the Sector.

Membership

- Membership will be invited from across the spectrum of Northumberland's VCS with a maximum of twelve members who are committed to attending meetings (outlined within the Framework). Whilst it is recognised that there will be instances when attendance is not possible, membership will be reviewed if individual attendance drops to below 50%. Members will be democratically elected to the VCS Assembly Executive Committee ensuring that the spectrum of voluntary organisations and networks are adequately represented. The intention is to have a workable and focused group who are committed to their role and are able to provide a range of perspectives from their experiences, knowledge and linkages.
- Reasonable travel expenses will be reimbursed for all Trustees/Volunteers and if any other members are unable to meet the travel costs through their own organisations these will also be considered.

Time Commitment

- Meetings at least four times a year to coincide when possible with the NCC/VCS Liaison Group meetings and at other times as required.
- Specific tasks/areas of work may be carried out outside of the meetings. Sub groups will have the responsibility to take forward actions or where appropriate to identify

and collaborate with existing groups/networks/partnerships that may be well placed to take forward actions and developments, thereby avoiding duplication. Drawing on the strengths that already exist and working in ways that respect and engage partners, simple reporting mechanisms will be put in place.

Articles of Association

- Executive Committee members will abide by and promote the values and vision of the Assembly.
- The Chair will be elected by the Assembly Executive Committee and can be a member of the Committee or if appropriate, an independent chair could be considered.
- The host organisation will provide secretariat support to the Assembly Executive Committee.
- All agreements will be mutual and aim to ensure consent. In the event of conflict, any voting will be one person one vote with the Chair having a casting vote at a quorate meeting when the quorum is four.
- The commitment that individuals with be making is acknowledged. If a member is unable to attend they can input their views in other ways e.g. email, discussion with members.
- Other colleagues from the sector may be invited, if appropriate and with the agreement of the group, contribute to specific tasks or act as a critical friend.
- If there is a perceived conflict of interest members will declare it, not be involved in discussion and may be required to withdraw while the matter is dealt with.

Chairing

The Chair of the Assembly Executive will be elected by Assembly Executive Committee. The role of the Chair is to:-

- chair meetings and ensure that the business is covered efficiently and effectively. Meetings should be focused and to time and enable participants to have an opportunity to share their views.
- be available to take on a specific Assembly representative role where necessary and to delegate to another member of the Assembly Executive Committee if appropriate.
- be a figurehead for the Assembly and Assembly Executive Committee, represent it and promote its role.
- liaise with the host organisation to draft agendas of the Assembly Executive Committee and other appropriate papers and review and develop the Assembly's workplan.
- work with the host organisation to ensure agendas are acted upon.

Role of the host organisation and its relationship with the VCS Assembly Executive Committee

The relationship between the Assembly Executive Committee and the host organisation is key to the success of the Assembly.

The host organisation will be responsible for:-

- the day to day running of the Assembly, its communication infrastructure, developing its governance and implementing the work plan as agreed with the Assembly Executive Committee in accordance with funding agreements.
- providing secretariat support, including producing papers for meetings, writing up minutes, communication and carrying out actions agreed.
- holding, maintaining and keeping secure the database of members of the Assembly.

To develop and maintain the relationship between the Assembly Executive Committee and host organisation:-

- the host organisation and Chair will meet regularly to discuss issues around the hosting of the Assembly.
- the host organisation will share information on the financial and other resources allocated to the Assembly.

In turn, the Assembly Executive Committee is held to account by members of the Assembly

Relationship between the Assembly Executive Committee and the funder(s) of the Assembly

The Assembly Executive Committee will:-

- influence the funder as to the direction of its funding for the Assembly.
- be a voice on issues within the funder's control and sphere of influence.

To carry out its role, a representative of the funder(s) will be invited to attend its meetings.

These terms of reference will be reviewed in April 2016.

Appendix 2   Values and Beliefs

The VCS Assembly is sector driven, for the sector by the sector, providing leadership and accountability, bringing organisations together to represent the VCS voice. We consider that collective action is more influential than a series of individual voices and that cooperation between people generates shared strength through the pooling of ideas and resources. We value our own learning and learning from each other and operate with openness and transparency. Equality is intrinsic to the way we conduct our business and positive action is taken to enable involvement of groups that are marginalised or excluded.