

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS LIAISON WORKING GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Working Group** held at the The Cramlington Youth Project, Middle Farm, Cramlington, Northumberland NE23 1DN on Thursday 04 January 2018 at 2:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor W Pattison (Chair)

COUNCILLORS

A Hepple
B Pidcock

C Seymour
A Sharp

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

S M Ashmore
R Firth
A Gibson

J Jackson
A Lyall
S Spurling

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

K Francis
J Roll
T Kirsop

Principal Inclusion Policy Officer
Democratic Services Manager
Community Regeneration Manager

Also in attendance:

A Atkinson Northumberland CVA
G Evans Northumberland Domestic Abuse Service
I Anibil Rose Regeneration
Dr J Sellick Rose Regeneration
R Hall Cramlington Youth Project
A Conway Citizens' Advice Bureau

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12. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D Towns.

14. NOTES

RESOLVED – that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group held on 07 September 2017 be received and noted.

15. SERVICE PROVISION - CRAMLINGTON YOUTH PROJECT

Rob Hall, Cramlington Youth Project gave an overview of the achievements of the Project with the aid of a film which highlighted the wide range of activities available to young people. The Trust is a registered charity which employs 4 fulltime and 14 part time staff as well as numerous volunteers. The service had received many awards and between 200 and 300 young people attended every week.

Key areas for future targeting of services would be the Syrian refugees now settling in Blyth and Cramlington and 30 year olds plus disabled young people.

The Youth Project had also raised £150k to date to develop a property at Chirton Head at Kielder. This had received planning permission and generated tremendous support. The development would be completed this year and would be a much needed and exciting addition to the Service.

Following the presentation, discussion ensued and members were invited to view the facilities after the meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr Hall for his presentation.

RESOLVED that the information be noted

16. UPDATE ON CITIZEN'S ADVICE BUREAU

Abigail Conway, CEO gave a verbal update about changes in the Citizen's Advice Bureau as requested at the last meeting.

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The service had now amalgamated into one county-wide service which was heavily supported financially by Northumberland County Council and the Town Councils, support which was crucial to the service.

Ms Conway described the many ways people could access advice apart from face-to-face meetings and reported that between 37,000 and 43,000 problems had been reported over the last year, the vast majority of which had been solved. The problems covered a wide variety of topics.

Northumberland CAB was an independent local charity, not part of the national CAB but relied on information and toolkits from the national organisation, particularly to help assess the impact of the service, for which they paid a membership fee.

By using a treasury measure, a saving to the public purse had been estimated at £480,000 (for Northumberland County Council services); £73,000 (for NHS services) and £1 million (for DWP services). £5.5 million debts had been written off benefitting 5,600 clients, noting that the average debt in Northumberland was £9,000.

The three main issues concerned benefits, PIP claims and medical assessments. Mental Health issues were huge and a meeting had been arranged with NHS to discuss the following week.

Days of opening had been reduced but hours extended on the working days and remote support was being trialled with volunteers. Members of the Group were asked to forward any suggestions for drop in sessions. Member surgeries and doctor's surgeries were suggested.

Members suggested that it was crucial that a stronger message sent out to the public on how to contact CAB for advice, particularly given the pending Universal Credit roll out in November/December this year, which it was anticipated would cause concern for many people. Leaflets or information could be disseminated via social media by partners also. Tony Kirsop suggested circulation of a briefing to Town and Parish Councils through NALC.

A member raised whether councillors (and town and parish councillors) could be trained as Gateway Officers and, with access to supervision, give advice at their surgeries. Ms Conway would follow up after the meeting.

A member queried why there was not a South East Northumberland or a NCC representative on the Board. Ms Conway replied that the CAB were currently looking at recruitment. An NCC representative was not necessary but would be welcome. Volunteers and staff would also be represented.

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The Chair thanked Ms Conway for her verbal presentation.

RESOLVED that the information be noted

17. SOCIAL VALUE ENGINE

Ivan Anabil, accompanied by Dr J Sellick, Rose Regeneration gave a verbal presentation on Social Value Engine, as requested at the last meeting.

He explained that social value was not always recognised or evidenced in bids and it was hoped to help make a case to funders by better evidencing just what extra social benefits projects working with communities and the voluntary sector did bring by the use of the Social Value Engine (SVE) as developed by Rose Regeneration in collaboration with East Riding Council.

An explanation of the background and process was given.

Outputs were identified based on performance targets of the project and outcomes using the indicators of a sustainable community known as the Bristol Accord. The most appropriate financial proxy could then be identified for the outcome. An assessment was also made of deflators ie, results that could occur that were not a result of the project. Rose Regeneration were currently working with 18 public sector bodies and the tool was now embedded within a number of organisations locally and nationally including Northumberland CAB.

The Blyth Tall Ship project had used it as part of its monitoring and evaluation for the Heritage Lottery Fund and they had received very positive feedback from the funders regarding this tool.

The challenge was to get more organisations to use the tool.

The SVE was a very straight-forward and useful tool and important when setting up projects but required good outcome data collection systems for projects already up and running. It gave an understanding of the social value of a service. NCVA was required to do a little more work to achieve the end result but early indicators showed that for every £1 spent on the VCS Assembly it provided £5.48 of value.

The Chair thanked Mr. Anabil for his presentation.

RESOLVED that the information be welcomed.

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18. UPDATE ON DOMESTIC ABUSE

As requested at the last meeting, Georgia Evans, Manager of Northumberland Domestic Abuse Service provided an update on the background to the service and the work carried out to date to support victims of domestic abuse.

NDAS had been in place for two years and covered all of the county with different projects and pilots to attract funding. The service had grown from 6 staff to 18 not all front line and all were qualified to the required standard. The service was now looking to provide an independent Advocacy Service for those whose lives had been seriously affected by domestic abuse. Looking forward the service aimed to target support identified by need rather than risk. They had received 12 awards with regard to the services they offer..

The service, a charity was funded through a patchwork of 22 funding streams, this supported a refuge and outreach work, work with children affected by domestic abuse and also a service exclusively for male victims.

However, many of these funds were coming to an end and in particular the level of Big Lottery Funding would be reduced in August 2018 thereby reducing the capacity of the back office. Funding streams which lasted one year were deemed to be impractical in terms of waiting lists, training and practicalities of providing a sustainable service.

The continuation of the services was reliant on a successful bid working with Changing Lives to the NCC tender for countywide Domestic Abuse Services. However Ms Evans reported that she was very sorry to say the NDAS tender to NCC had been unsuccessful.

The big concern was that the application had been deemed non-compliant because it was too cheap, it fell below a threshold for costs that NCC procurement had deemed was needed to be able to run the service. They were challenging the decision as this had not been made clear within the procurement process. Also as the existing provider they had accurate experience to base costs on and felt the process was flawed and not in the best interests of public funding. She was very concerned about the future of the service which would end on 31 March 2018 and raised concerns regarding:

- The potential loss of the only male service.
- The short notice given by the Council to end the contract;
- The reason of 'non-compliance' given for the decision and the lack of opportunity to be heard;
- The effect on TUPE'd staff;
- Data protection;

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- The loss of continuity of staff for clients;
- The future for those on the referrals list

The decision had been through an initial challenge but they had been informed that the decision stood. However they were persisting and were going back with a detailed submission.

Members of the Group expressed their concerns and asked a number of questions around:

- accountability and commitment of the large successful organisation whose remit was housing not domestic abuse
- the transition plan for clients and staff within the timescale
- potential loss of specialised staff
- whether the procurement process and decision could be legally challenged.

RESOLVED: that the Chairman take the matter up with the portfolio holder and Chief Executive and inform members of the Group of the outcome.

19. NEW PROCESSES AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURES

Jackie Roll, Democratic Services Manager gave a presentation about the role of Democratic Services and the decision making processes of the Council and answered a number of questions from members of the Group.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

20. NCC ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE VCS

- The Principal Inclusion Policy Officer advised that the VCS consultation funding had been extended for a year. To help shape the future of any further funding in subsequent years a consultation process would be launched on Monday 8th January. This would go out through the VCS Assembly, Town and Parish Council's, NCC Website and members. It would provide information on what had been delivered to date, ask about people's experience of the services, the funding and whether there were any areas/aspects that should be considered for the future
- Northumberland CVA circulated a summary report of their delivery of the commission over the last 4 years. A link was provided in order to enable wide circulation
- It was agreed the report should be circulated to all members as it would be of interest

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RESOLVED that the information be noted and circulated to all elected Members

21. WORK PROGRAMME

Items for inclusion on the next agenda:

- A presentation about Universal Credit be arranged for the next meeting
- Update on domestic abuse contract

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

22. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 3 May 2018, at a venue in Haltwhistle.

**COUNCILLOR W PATTISON
CHAIR**

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