

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**VCS LIAISON GROUP**

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held at the Haltwhistle Youth Club, Hillside, Haltwhistle, Northumberland, NE49 9AU on Thursday 03 May 2018 at 2:00 pm.

**PRESENT**

Councillor W Pattison (Chair)

**COUNCILLORS**

A Hepple  
K Parry  
B Pidcock

C Seymour  
A Sharp

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

C Homer, Culture, Arts and Leisure Portfolio Holder

**VCS REPRESENTATIVES**

S M Ashmore  
R Firth  
A Lyall

J McGough  
J Wyness

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

H Bowers  
T Kirsop

Democratic Services Officer  
Community Regeneration Manager

**Also in attendance:**

A Atkinson  
A Banks  
A Dean  
A Lawson  
E Richardson  
M Wilson

Northumberland CVA  
Haltwhistle Youth Club  
Haltwhistle Community Partnership  
Community Regeneration Officer  
Senior Manager, Specialist Services - Poverty Lead  
Haltwhistle Swimming Pool

Ch.'s Initials.....

## **01. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

## **02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Stow, J Jackson, G Smith and S Spurling.

## **03. NOTES**

**RESOLVED** – that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Group held on 04 January 2018 be received and noted.

In response to a comment regarding the Update on Domestic Abuse item, the Chair advised that a letter will be circulated to members from Councillor Veronica Jones on the procurement process. The new provider, Places for People would be invited to attend the next VCS Liaison Group meeting in September.

With the agreement of members, the order of service provision was varied as an officer was required to leave for another appointment.

## **04. SERVICE PROVISION:**

### **HALTWHISTLE SWIMMING POOL**

Councillor Alan Sharp informed the group that he had been involved with the pool since becoming a councillor. The pool first opened in the 1970's as a result of a number of fatalities in the River Tyne. The people of Haltwhistle and the Town Council raised the money to build the swimming pool which had been a huge task. The pool was the only outdoor swimming pool in Northumberland.

The Sports Centre attracted 80,000 people every year and the purpose of the meeting was to promote the pool and its facilities.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Authority contributed approximately £60,000 a year and the Town Council, over £30,000, which was 30% of the precept. As there was an area of deprivation in Haltwhistle, pricing charges had to remain competitive.

The swimming pool would not have been achieved without the dedicated help of many councillors in the 1970's and the committed staff who worked beyond what they should and often voluntary.

Maxine Wilson, Sports Centre Manager gave a brief history of the swimming pool. The NCB had given the land to the local people and with a loan of £160,000 from Northumberland County Council and £20,000 from Haltwhistle residents by running coffee mornings and discos etc, the swimming pool was built. The pool had always been ruled under the governance of a voluntary committee and was the only outdoor pool in the north east which had been extended with funds from Sport England. Without charity and grants the pool would have struggled. There were always fundraising events with a lot of support from people in rural areas.

The pool was also used by schools and generated £70-80,000 per annum, attracting between 24 - 25,000 visitors a year (over 20 weeks). On hot days the outdoors pool was very busy with a great atmosphere.

Employment was offered to young people, as well as the Management Committee and volunteering.

Indoor and outdoor activities were provided and very well supported. As the pool was situated in a rural area it was hoped to have local people trained. The staff were very dedicated and went out of their way to help one another.

Following the presentation, members raised questions whether the pool was disabled friendly, and how the pool was managed. It was confirmed that there were disabled facilities and Ms Wilson explained that the manager of a similar pool in Shap had been to visit to see how the pool was run and had taken away some useful advice.

## **HALTWHISTLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP**

Andy Dean, Haltwhistle Community Partnership explained that the partnership came about as a result of a study and was set up to support community development and regeneration in Haltwhistle and had celebrated its 20th birthday last year.

The partnership had achieved a lot over the first 10/15 years, including employment related work and tourism.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Based in Westbourne House, the partnership became the place for private accommodation for local businesses and now contained a cafe on the ground floor and a business upstairs which had created 8 jobs.

The Partnership had also acquired the Water Tower building, which was part of the wider regeneration of Haltwhistle station. The Water Tower was a listed building which the partnership took on and following refurbishment was occupied by a new business. During that time Young and Sweet (Haltwhistle Youth Club) started a partnership which operated a weekly drop in and monthly lunch club. The number of people who attended and benefitted was fantastic. However, more recently, funding had changed which made it more difficult.

Approximately 10 years ago, the Partnership managed to acquire property in Market Place and rooms above the offices were being converted into much needed affordable homes.

The Partnership had a role with Young and Sweet and helped acquired the bungalow which supported the community garden, 'Zig-Zag' which helped people with mental illness and depression.

## **HALTWHISTLE YOUTH CLUB**

Ayesha Banks informed the group that in 2012 the youth club was set up as a charity and moved to the Water Tower building which they rented from Haltwhistle Partnership. Hillside was the new youth club building which worked with young people from year 5.

The youth club applied to the Authority for the bungalow and it had taken over 2 years from applying to completion because of legal issues. However, the partnership had helped with the asset transfer.

When the bungalow was purchased in November last year, the youth club had worked hard to get everything up and running. There were now 7 sessions a week involving a number of activities during the holidays. At the front of the building was a garden which was an important project and fund raising had just been carried out for this.

Activities were planned at the beginning of every term which involved structured learning for youngsters, the majority being based around young people's needs with a lot of support by Haltwhistle Town Council and NCC Youth Services.

Approximately 110 young people attended the youth club every week with new members every week and other community groups.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Following the information, members were invited to view the swimming pool after the meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for their valuable input.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted

## **05. VCS INFRASTRUCTURE UPDATE ON CONSULTATION**

Tony Kirsop, Regeneration Manager gave a verbal update on the VCS consultation and explained the key findings.

- There had been 85 responses to the consultation which was double the response to the last consultation
- Satisfaction with Support Services - the graph at 3.1 showed the average satisfaction percentages across all support services
- 3.5 Preferred Option for Delivery - the current contract was for £137,5000 to deliver VCS Support Services throughout Northumberland
- Budget - there was strong support to keep the budget as it was but it was recognised that times were tough

With reference to Support for Buildings and duplication of funding, it was pointed out that the work done with communities and community buildings was not part of the commissioned work from NCC and additional funding was secured to do that work up and above the NCC Commission.

The role of the assembly needed to be examined and promoted. When the VCS Liaison Group was first set up a Statement of Intent was drawn up, which was very valuable and could be reviewed if needed. Previously the group had been able to make recommendations to Cabinet through the Cabinet Advisory Group mechanism but the sector was unsure where the information went to. It was hoped that future meetings would be more valuable.

In response to a query regarding European Funding and Brexit, it was advised that a meeting would be taking place in May to look at the impact. Currently in Northumberland there was a 3 year project being run by the County Council, which had been running for 18 months and delivered in Northumberland by the sector.

It was requested that a brief report be presented to the group in relation to the North of Tyne Devolution and Brexit.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Some discussion took place in relation to the North of Tyne Devolution and the Borderlands deal and the Regeneration Manager informed members that Janice Rose, Corporate Policy Manager had recently given a presentation to Parish and Town Councils on the current position regarding the North of Tyne Devolution deal and would request her to attend the next meeting in September.

He further advised that the Minister responsible for the North of Tyne Devolution deal was now the new Home Secretary. The new Secretary of State would look at the consultation, governance review and consider all feedback and information to consider if he felt that there was sufficient weight for a new authority. If this was accepted it would be up to Parliament to pass a third order to make the devolution deal. It was anticipated that this would take place in June and an interim mayor would be elected for a 9 month period.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted

## **06. UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

Emma Richardson, Specialist Services Poverty Lead gave a presentation on Universal Credit.

Universal Credit was a single monthly means tested payment which would replace Income Support; Child Tax Credit; Working Tax Credit; Income based JSA; Income based ESA and Housing Benefit. Any new claim would now be a claim for Universal Credit.

The Service was rolled out nationally in February 2017 and was scheduled for Northumberland in November/December 2018.

Universal Credit included all claimant groups - single/couples/families with up to 2 children. The exceptions were tenants who resided in specified accommodation and temporary emergency accommodation.

Families with more than 2 children would continue to claim existing legacy benefits.

The one monthly payment for the whole household would cover living costs with a standard allowance with additional elements for housing; carers; childcare; disabled children and ill or disabled adults.

Ms Richardson explained the timeline from the first day of making a claim to payment.

Ch.'s Initials.....

All claimants had to adhere to a 'claimant commitment' with a work coach around required work related activity, update online activity journals and to respond to information sent by DWP. Failure to adhere to the 'claimant commitment' was likely to result in a sanction.

The biggest changes would be online claims; claims issued in arrears via the single monthly payment; no limit on work hours with payment reducing as earnings increased; housing costs paid directly to claimant. However, Council Tax Support still had to be applied for separately to the Council.

The impact of Universal Credit in other areas was 73% of Universal Credit tenancies were in arrears; 62% of private landlords were unwilling to rent to Universal Credit tenants; 285 of landlords had evicted a Universal Claimant in the last year. Food banks had seen a 52% increase in demand over the last 12 months.

In Northumberland, by 2022 approximately 37,000 people in Northumberland would be in receipt of Universal Credit. There was approximately £10 million in rent to be collected from claimants. Families and those with existing health conditions would be worse off and there would be increased pressure on health services and social care.

The Authority was focusing on a fully integrated picture and understood the wait from making a claim to payment; the financial impact and digital inclusion. Housing and homelessness prevention, health and wellbeing and the connection to skills and employability.

Ms Richardson explained the Universal Credit Steering Group's priority areas and the sources of information

Following the presentation members raised concerns in relation to the elderly accessing information on line, people with numeracy and literacy skills, landlords evicting claimants, minimum wage and broadband speeds in rural Northumberland.

It was advised that the report from the Steering Group would look at low wages and distance speeds, working in partnership with the DWP.

Further concerns were raised by the group regarding employment problems in Haltwhistle, people not being able to complete forms without help, ensuring resources were signposted, the disproportionate impact on the vulnerable and families on low wages and disadvantaged groups being financially excluded.

Ch.'s Initials.....

A member stated that the roll out should be halted and Universal Credit would not work. People would suffer, particularly victims to domestic violence. There were currently 390,000 people being sanctioned by the DWP and other people not receiving any income or benefit or Council Tax benefit. There had been no risk or impact assessments.

The Chair thanked Ms Richardson for the informative presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**07. VCS ISSUES ARISING FROM NETWORK MEETINGS/EVENTS**

Ann Atkinson, Northumberland CVA referred to the Statement of Intent which enabled the VCS to participate at a strategic level and present a voice for the VCS in Northumberland. The activities of the group was to promote partnership working and the VCS should be should be involved in the strategy and assembly as a voice.

An issue was raised in relation to funeral poverty and discussion took place in relation to costs. It was hoped that funeral directors would sign up to a funeral pledge.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

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

The VCS infrastructure consultation would be complete and the information brought back to the September meeting.

It was stated that the Chair, Regeneration Manager, J Jackson and Councillor Homer would hold a meeting to discuss the role of the assembly and whether they could influence decision making within NCC.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**09. WORK PROGRAMME**

Items for inclusion on the next agenda:

- Places for People
- Update on the VCS consultation
- Presentation on the North of Tyne Devolution and Borderlands

Ch.'s Initials.....

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 6 September 2018, to be held in the Spetchells Centre, Prudhoe.

**COUNCILLOR W PATTISON  
CHAIR**

Ch.'s Initials.....