

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Cabinet Advisory Group** held at Northumberland County Blind Association, Reiver House, Staithes Lane, Morpeth, NE61 1TD on Thursday 3 March 2016 at 10:00 am.

DRAFT

PRESENT

Councillor E Burt (Chair) In the Chair

COUNCILLORS

J Lang	G Sanderson (part)
V Jones	A Wallace
A Sambrook (part)	

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

C George	A Lyall
J Jackson	G Scott

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

H Bowers	Democratic Services officer
M Bracken	Democratic Services Apprentice
K Francis	Principal Policy Officer
T Kirsop	Social Enterprise Manager

Also in attendance

A Atkinson – Northumberland CVA

A Kidd – Northumberland CVA

T Watson – NCBA

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from Councillor Watson and S Ashmore, C Ashworth, J Dodson, A Evans, R Firth and S Spurling, VCS Representatives.

Ch.'s Initials.....

15. NOTES

The notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Working Group, held on 10 December 2015, were agreed.

16. SERVICE PROVISION – NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY BLIND ASSOCIATION

Visual impairment simulation spectacles were circulated to members of the group to give an insight to conditions and daily difficulties faced by people with different types of visual impairment. The group was informed that impairment could have a huge impact on the person's emotional, physical well-being and suffer psychological impact in that they could become de-skilled and isolated. In order to avoid this, the association provided services such as;

- 1 to 1 counselling sessions
- Telephone help line for advice and information
- Home visits by trained volunteers with a DBS and Sight and Guide Training
- Support groups
- Support to local libraries

It was stated that the association was hoping to broaden their service area in addition to Morpeth, the location of their base, as they hoped to deliver services all over the County. Also, the association working alongside RNIB provide training to those with an impairment on how to use new technology including iPads and Phones in the hope that they would remain socially interactive and independent.

All funding for the association came from charity fundraising, donations and grant giving bodies. All equipment provided by them was paid for through a previous grant and then if the equipment would benefit a person, they could then purchase it themselves. However it was noted that if a magnifying glass was requested in order to read, the item would be provided.

It was announced that members wished to gather information concerning the number of hours spent volunteering by individuals in the association and the economic saving. Mr Watson stated that their team of 100 people spent 8-15 hours volunteering per week and numbers would effectively amount to £2100 saving per week. If the service was to be provided by the Local Authority it would cost approximately £100k per year. He also clarified that RNIB collected statistics and that they could be provided to the group.

In response to a question it was stated that most people suffering from an impairment were not affected by the welfare reform as they were mainly ages 65+ however, for those who were younger were unemployed and on benefits.

Ch.'s Initials.....

It was questioned whether the number of volunteers helping younger people with diabetes had risen and it was advised that no change was evident, but that RNIB might have that information and most help provided to those of a younger age had a genetic defect.

The chair referred to the importance of raising awareness of visual impairment and how using contrasting colours and a larger font in local libraries could benefit individuals.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

17. THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERING

Ann Kidd from Northumberland CVA gave a brief overview on the value of volunteering (presentation attached with the notes) and described the 3 types of volunteering which was vital to facilities including;

- Charities
- Civil Societies
- Local Communities
- Sports Clubs
- Libraries
- Hospitals

She referred to the Kings Fund, an independent charity which stated that approximately 3 million people currently volunteered for health, disability and welfare organisations, the same number as the combined NHS and Social Care Fund.

A statement from Andy Haldane, Chief Economist of the Bank of England was circulated for the group's information.

Mrs Kidd referred to the trustees' annual report at Bell View, Belford and provided information on volunteers' hours and the estimated value. She also referred to Age UK Northumberland annual report which provided information on the Welfare Rights advice team and Carers Northumberland who provided monthly volunteering figures. Since January 2016, Real Deal Plus provided volunteers for projects which included the soup kitchen and furniture restoration etc.

She advised that evidence suggested that volunteering had a value to individuals over and above financial benefits such as;

- Physical/ mental health and well-being
- Self-esteem
- Social Contact
- Reduction of stress
- Increase in life experience

Ch.'s Initials.....

Following the presentation, the following comments and queries were raised:

- The need for volunteers
- The amount of time given by volunteers
- The VCS had met with Siobhan Brown, Head of Transformation last year to discuss the role the VCS could play in the delivery of services and were disappointed despite several emails, had no response from them regarding further joint work with the VCS Assembly and the CCG
- Different approaches of distributing information, e.g., patients groups or the Health & Well-being Board
- The Council put contracts on the NEPO website and VCS organisations should ensure they were registered in order to access opportunities
- The item to be taken forward to Chairs Group for the relevant scrutiny committee
- The VCS infrastructure and KPIs
- Social funding and access
- Examples of what types of work could be offered

RESOLVED That the item be taken forward to the relevant scrutiny committee and the information be noted.

18. VCS ISSUES ARISING FROM NETWORK MEETINGS/EVENTS

Anne Atkinson, Northumberland CVA referred to issues with cross bordering health care in the north of the county.

The VCS Assembly were involved with partners in the council led Asylum Seekers and Refugees Working Group and welcomed involvement in working groups where they could make a contribution.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

19. EUROPEAN FUNDING BID

Members were updated on the European Funding.

LEADER funding had gone through the first process and was finally open however, DEFRA had changed the bid to capital only and were only funding capital items.

The Big Lottery – joint work had been carried out between NCC and the voluntary sector with NCC taking the lead. Hannah Garrad, Policy Officer was working with several members. Five or six organisations had been involved, e.g., Northumberland CVA, BRIC, ESCAPE, CYGNUS and Voices

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and bids were to be submitted by May. Funds available were £3 million over 3 years with the potential to extend to 6 years.

Reference was made to the LEADER which fundamentally covered rural areas of the uplands, lowlands and north Pennines. In the urban areas the scheme would be called Community Led Local Development and would only be made available in the most deprived areas.

A cross-border local action group would be developed to include parts of North Tyneside to develop a strategy for that particular area, hopefully by the end of August 2016 which would be worth £1 million per year.

Following the presentation, the following comments and queries were raised:

- European Funding being dropped should there be an 'out' vote in the referendum
- A CLLD report had identified a lot of areas for potential development.
- Support from the VCS would be important in order to support a successful Tall Ships event.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

20. NCC ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE VCS

Kirsten Francis, Principal Inclusion Policy Officer advised that the Council budget was soon to be determined which might have some impact on the VCS budget.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

21. VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group Work Programme. (Work Programme enclosed with the notes as Appendix A).

Members requested the following issues be brought forward for possible inclusion within the Work Programme:-

(June)

- Tall Ships Ltd Blyth
- Arts and Culture

(September)

- Community Chest – it was stated that the Community chest forms were not easy to and suggestions were made as to how the group could improved guidance and forms
- How the Council works, eg, Cabinet and Scrutiny

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RESOLVED that the Work Programme, be noted and the items listed above be placed on the referrals document for Chairmen's Group.

17. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of the future meetings were noted. It was suggested that the next meeting of the VCS Liaison Cabinet Advisory Group take place at BTS in Blyth.

18. URGENT BUSINESS

A document was circulated to the group with information on the outcomes from commissioned services 2015/16.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

**COUNCILLOR E BURT
CHAIR**

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