

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Cabinet Advisory Group** held at The Buffalo Community Centre, 55 Regent Street, Blyth, Northumberland, NE24 1LL on Thursday 1 December 2016 at 2:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor E Burt (Chair)

COUNCILLORS

V Jones

A G Sambrook

A Wallace

J C Woodman

ALSO PRESENT

V Tyler

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

S M Ashmore

R Firth

A Gibson

J Jackson

A Lyall

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

M Bird

H Bowers

K Francis

T Kirsop

Team Leader, Democratic Services

Democratic Services Officer

Principal Inclusion Policy Officer

Community Regeneration Manager

Also in attendance:

A Atkinson – Northumberland CVA

E Cartie, Manager, Buffalo Community Centre, Blyth

Ch.'s Initials.....

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Lang and also from VCS representatives - L Atkinson, C, George and S Spurling.

14. NOTES

RESOLVED – that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group held on 1 September 2016 be received and noted.

15. SERVICE PROVISION –THE BUFFALO CENTRE, BLYTH

Eileen Cartie, Centre Manager gave a brief history of the building and the centre which had provided multipurpose community facilities for local people since 1974. The aim of the centre was to improve the conditions and wellbeing of the community by providing lifelong learning and recreational activities for the young and old for over 43 years.

The centre worked in partnership with other local providers both from the voluntary and statutory sector and was supported by the big lottery.

All members of the community from babies and young people to the elderly and disabled, unemployed and single parents used the centre with activities such as youth projects, dance clubs, martial arts and women's groups.

Following the presentation questions/comments and responses were as follows:

- The success of the centre was down to the volunteers and training;
- There were no young people on the Board of Trustees but they could vote on the Management Committee;
- How were people attracted to the centre? Many people who visited were local and the black ethnic minority women's group had been attracted by Migration Matters with some of them becoming volunteers. There were also some Polish and Romanian workers and the centre had good links with the Angelou Centre and Mosques;
- It would be a good idea to have a service in community centres where people with a disability could go to as a 'safe place', e.g., BRIC; The Chair suggested that could be included on the work programme;
- What work was involved with offenders? Male offenders took part in community payback and women hubs where they came in to do training. There was also parenting projects, parenting training and confidence building.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Chair thanked Mrs Cartie for the information and was pleased to hear what had been achieved.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and an item on safe places be added to the Work Programme.

16. INFORMATION ON THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

Following a request at the last meeting, Mike Bird, Democratic Services provided a verbal update on the decision making process of the Council.

A flow chart was circulated to the group which showed the political management structure and the different committees.

Mr Bird explained that the beginning of the process started with a referrals list which was continually updated by Democratic Services. Any new items for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committees or Cabinet Advisory Groups had to be added to this list. The referrals list was presented for decision to the Chairmen's Group which met once a month. The referrals list allowed for forward planning and once it had been agreed by Chairmen's Group the process began for items to be referred to the relevant committees.

Cabinet Advisory Groups were not public meetings and met at an early formal stage of the decision making process to look into issues and work on developing and recommending policy. However Overview and Scrutiny Committees were legally required and held in public except on some rarer occasions when some items might need to be heard in private if confidential information was to be considered.

Cabinet Advisory Groups and/or Overview and Scrutiny Committees could make recommendations to Cabinet which consisted of 10 members: seven Portfolio Holders from the majority political group with responsibilities for different council service areas, and the three leaders of the opposition groups. Cabinet could make decisions and policy on matters which were within the budget and policy framework however if a decision was to be made outside of the budget and/or policy framework, it had to be referred to Council, e.g., budget and members' allowances.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees held Cabinet to account by pre-scrutinising the decisions it was due to consider, and could also develop policy and recommend it to Cabinet for approval.

There were various other council bodies whose business was not organised through this referrals process. This included planning and licensing committees which took decisions in a separate quasi-judicial decision making process, and area committees which were advisory.

Ch.'s Initials.....

Following the presentation questions/comments and responses were as follows:

- If members wanted to suggest an agenda item for this group, it was important a month or more notice was given in order for Chairmen's Group to agree it and to then set the agenda. Any suggestions should be sent to either Tony Kirsop or Heather Bowers;
- What was the responsibility of the Business Chair and Deputy Business Chair? It was explained that the Business Chair chaired full Council and Chairmen's Group and led in ensuring that council business was transacted. The Deputy Chair supported this and dealt with other management issues;
- Where did the working groups fit in? A lot of the work was structured, and groups were designed so themes could fit. If there was any doubt about which committee an issue should be referred to, the Chairmen's Group decided the reporting path
- It would be useful to know who the Chairs of Scrutiny, the Local Councillor or Parliamentary Liaison Officers were. Some parliamentary outreach work had recently been carried out with schools during Local Democracy Week;
- How long it took for a decision to be made and consideration of any urgent business
- How the majority of council business at formal committee meetings took place in public, but there were seven categories of exemptions in which the press and public could be excluded
- Clarification of Purdah.

The Chair thanked Mr Bird for the information provided.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

17. EUROPEAN FUNDING

The Community Regeneration Manager updated members on the Building Better Opportunities Project which had recently been secured for the county at £3.4m with the involvement of partner agencies and an induction event was to be held in the first quarter of 2017 for staff. An holistic approach would be taken with the 3 year programme which would help bridge gaps and provide support to those people needing to access the jobs market.

The Principal Inclusion Policy Officer referred to a recent bid from North Tyneside Council which had been declined based on value for money and advised that a meeting had been organised to look at bids.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

18. VCS ISSUES ARISING FROM NETWORK MEETINGS/EVENTS

Ch.'s Initials.....

Ann Atkinson, Northumberland CVA advised members of an event being planned in March for the voluntary and community sector in relation to an asset based community development approach to health and well-being which focused on individual and community strengths. She would report back at the next meeting with more details.. It was hoped to invite the public sector and Health and Wellbeing Board.

Mrs Atkinson referred to a request from NCC made for an Equalities representative from the VCS which had been provided and nothing further had been heard. Also a report on the impact of Brexi on NCC had not yet been shared. The Community Regeneration Manager advised that he would chase this up.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

19. NCC ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE VCS

The Principal Policy Inclusion Officer advised that the election in May might bring some uncertainty around future budgets as the next Administration might choose to bring in some changes, depending on their priorities etc. Therefore some contracts that come to an end in March 2017, might have a 6 month extension to cover this period.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

REPORT OF THE SERVICE MANAGER - DEMOCRACY

20. VCS Cabinet Advisory Group Work Programme

Members were asked to note the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group Work Programme for 2016-17 which was enclosed with the notes as Appendix A.

Items suggested for inclusion were:

- Safe places for vulnerable people

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

Ch.'s Initials.....

21. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meeting would be Thursday 23 February 2017 at 2:00 pm. It was suggested that the meeting be held at The Spetchells Centre, Prudhoe.

22. URGENT BUSINESS

A member referred to the recent allegations surrounding football and discussion took place regarding DBS checks and safeguarding. It was stated that current coaches should be encouraged to continue and some sort of tracking programme could be put in place where people could be tracked if they changed employment.

It was suggested that the concerns of the group could be addressed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

COUNCILLOR E BURT

CHAIR

Ch.'s Initials.....