

## **Notes of VCS Assembly Steering Group**

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015 12.00noon – 2p.m.**

**Present:** Sue Ashmore, Cath George, Mike Gowland, Joe Jackson (chair), Rodney James, Ann Lyall, Ann Atkinson, Sharon Spurling, Julie Dodson, Chris Orrick

**Apologies:** Sue Patience, Liz Prudhoe, Liz Chadwick.

### **1. Notes of last meeting and matters arising**

JD stated that Voices sat on the Youth Work Strategic Group and was willing to carry on to maintain stability. It was suggested that this should be reviewed in six months. There is currently a management review in relation to the service and whilst youth work in Northumberland works well on the ground, the purpose and role for the strategic group is not clear.

### **2. Steering Group Exit Strategy and Election process.**

The process was discussed and agreed including timescales. It was also suggested that equality was added in as a cross cutting theme. If there are any difficulties filling in positions, it was suggested that volunteers from the current Steering Group could remain until the full committee is recruited. It was agreed that the group should be called the Assembly Executive Committee.

**Actions – AA to send draft form for applicants to Executive Committee for comment. AA to raise awareness of election process at network meetings.**

### **3. Assembly membership and town/parish councils**

It was agreed that members of parish and town councils should be affiliated members with no voting rights as part of statutory organisations. They must also declare an interest if involved in areas where there might be a conflict of interest.

### **4. Feedback on meeting with Kirsten Francis re Liaison Group and European funding.**

AA reported that KF agreed that there was a need to increase council members knowledge and understanding of the VCS and that issues raised with the group would probably need to go to Policy Board if further action

required. To raise the profile of the Group and the sector and also to have influence, AL suggested to KF that the Statement of Intent is signed off by the Leader of the Council which was viewed positively. KF informed us that there may be political change in terms of portfolio holders and responsibilities of members.

Steering Group suggested that informal meetings are held with council members to inform them about the sector. It was thought that the group would be part of Economic Strategy who would have more influence in the Council and that there would be a need to cultivate that relationship.

AL reported on discussion in relation to European Funding. Big Lottery will match fund the £3.9 million across the four themes concerning those furthest from the labour market. The Lottery are looking for one lead organisation and whilst they would have liked a VCS organisation there is not one big enough in the county to take on this role, the liabilities are too great. Partners have to be made up of community and voluntary organisations. The County Council are interested in working with the sector and will look to take a lead. The WISE group are also interested in partners in Northumberland and NESEP are thinking about being a lead. A meeting is being held at Stannington on 21<sup>st</sup> May for potential partners. Expressions of interest in taking a lead are required in June and the Lottery will look at four potential leads in June/July. A full application will be required in September. £50,000 will go to the lead for development work. Funding is for 2 years and if going well will release funds for another 3 years. Funding is ring fenced for Northumberland and will need to evidence delivery through the sector.

## **5. Revised Statement of Intent and diagram of VCS/NCC relationship**

AA stated minor changes to the Statement of Intent. The revised simplified diagram was considered to be clear and understandable.

## **6. Initial feedback on the VCS Assembly Event, Linden Hall**

AA provided initial feedback on the Assembly event for Steering Group members to take away and digest. AA asked members to come back with any pertinent issues they considered should be a priority, although it was felt that this was something the new committee could address. From an initial look at the comments made, it was evident that volunteering was a significant issue for groups, the challenges, when volunteering is not appropriate, training and managing volunteers. An event on volunteering was considered to be an appropriate way forward.

It was felt appropriate to take to the Liaison Group the issues and challenges facing the sector arising from the event and identify what the Council can do to assist.

## **7. VCS Assembly work plan and progress report**

AA presented a note on progress since the last meeting and key activities to carry out over the next month or two.

## **8. Major issues affecting the sector**

CO felt that VCS groups were reluctant to seek advice and support early on when difficulties and when they eventually asked for support it was often too late. It was felt that groups probably saw it as a weakness to ask for support. There was a need to promote support/advice/ information /assistance and mentoring and provide peer support to smaller community groups. There was a need to keep an eye on what was happening in the sector.

CG suggested that NCC could take the lead in accessing pots of money that could assist the VCS sector.

## **9. A.O.B.**

JD reported that Voices sit on the Children and Families Trust and have introduced two standing items, issues and news from the sector and Safeguarding Board.

Next meeting **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July at 12.00 noon** at Northumberland CVA