

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**VCS CABINET ADVISORY GROUP**

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held at the William Elder Building, 56-58 Castlegate, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1JT on Thursday 07 September 2017 at 2:00 pm.

**PRESENT**

Councillor W Pattison (Chair)

**COUNCILLORS**

A Hepple  
K Parry  
B Pidcock

C Seymour  
A Sharp  
D Towns

**VCS REPRESENTATIVES**

S M Ashmore  
J Jackson

A Lyall  
G Scott

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

K Francis  
H Bowers

Principal Inclusion Policy Officer  
Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance:**

A Atkinson – Northumberland CVA  
J Bell - Berwick Youth Project  
J Lake - Berwick Community Trust  
J Pannell - North Northumberland Voluntary Forum

**01. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

Ch.'s Initials.....

## 02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Stow and VCS representatives R Firth, A Gibson, J McGough, S Spurling and J Wyness.

## 03. NOTES

**RESOLVED** – that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Cabinet Advisory Group held on 22 June 2017 be received and noted subject to the addition of apologies from Councillors Seymour and Towns.

## 04. SERVICE PROVISION - BERWICK COMMUNITY TRUST

Julien Lake, Berwick Community Trust gave an overview of the service with the aid of a presentation. The Trust was a locally community controlled registered charity which employed 18 staff with a core staff team of 7 and 2 apprentices. Turnover last year had been £458,796k with a net surplus of £28,736. The Trust supported work on the Barracks, the harbour, Neighbourhood Plan and Coastal Community Team.

The Here for You project supported customers both employed and unemployed with job search and activities and employability skills including with the Salvation Army and Four Housing Group. Other services included supporting families, CoRE legacy fund, Community Asset Development, Childcare staffing, Saturday Club and Young Carers, the College Project and the running of the building.

Funding had been secured for the bulk of 2017 including a DWP grant to deliver Flexible Support. So far 613 people had attended appointments in 2017 with a total of 2455 in 2015. There had been 1070 registrations and 638 jobs since January 2013. Funding from the DWP had just ended but the Trust was confident there would be further funding. Support was provided with CV preparation, interview skills and job search.

The Trust also provided support to families to help overcome specific challenges and aimed to assist families with multiple and complex needs. Support to date had helped 16 families and more than 40 children and issues such as lack of employment, financial exclusion, non attendance at school and families with health problems were addressed.

365 food parcels had been supplied in 2016 with 217 up to 31 August 2017 which was up from 110 for the same period in 2016. This year the Trust had supported 233 adults, 137 children over the age of 5 and 36 under the age of 5.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The food bank placed demands for space and time on the Trust and volunteer input was hugely valuable.

The Trust had acquired a building in Tweedmouth and were working with Northumberland College to provide a fit for purpose FE facility in the centre of the town. It was hoped that the building would open in January 2019 and significant funding was still required.

The Trust supported work on the future Barracks, assisting the harbour in seeking funding and were part of CAAG, the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Housing Working Group and also led the development with NCC and BTC of the Berwick Economic Plan.

Following the presentation, discussion ensued and the following points were raised:

- How families were referred to the Trust? This was usually through different organisations but mainly referred through Children's Services;
- Was there signposting for additional support? There was signposting at the food bank to CAB particularly with benefits, debt advice, or legal issues;
- Was there liaison with Social Services? Yes, mainly from Children's Services;
- Members raised a number of concerns regarding the change to the services of CAB. Particularly in relation to Universal Credit. It was suggested that the Liaison Group make representations about the serious loss which would have a massive impact on both rural and urban areas;
- A member stated he had been requested to investigate what was happening with the service and queried whether it was possible to investigate cross-party and report back. The Chair stated that would be discussed and would advise;
- No consultation had taken place with the county, parish councils, councillors or communities. The changes to the CABs would not improve the services for elderly people who would not have IT and preferred face to face appointments.

Ann Lyall, Chief Executive Officer would try to obtain a statement from the Trustees about the plans for the future of the CAB and share that information with the group.

Kirsten Francis, Principal Policy Officer stated that it would be beneficial to receive some explanation. She added that the changes could be advantageous by using more technology and understanding the drivers for the changes.

The Chair thanked Mr Lake for his presentation.

Ch.'s Initials.....

John Bell, Berwick Youth Project gave an overview of the activities and achievements of the Project which was established in 1995 to provide and support young people in the Berwick area. The core functions of the service provided support for young people and in May 2016 the Project celebrated 21 years of service.

He referred to the frustration of lack of some services in the area and referred to a recent domestic abuse incident where a young woman had been taken to the nearest women's refuge at Northallerton by two members of staff as a result of lack of response from the police.

The Project also helped raised awareness in mental health; accommodation and support.

Mr Bell explained that in two decades of being in the same post, a variety of strategies had been produced which had little impact on the day to day work which needed to be carried out. Inevitably those strategies had common themes that were recycled every few years. Very often the response to a new strategy and the funding that accompanied it, was to fund Development Workers. Those were often short term positions with little perceived impact, which could divert funding away from the 'coal-face'.

Expenditure for the year was £250k and mainly used on staff, largely from the immediate Berwick area. There were 4 full time staff, qualified to degree level in housing or youth services and lived locally.

Information was circulated by Mr Bell which he urged members to read and included case studies of young people.

A booklet was produced last year commemorating 21 years of the Berwick Youth Project which invited young people to give their case studies and engage with the Youth Project.

The Project had been able to continue the employment of their full time Youth Work Team Leader following the ending of their Service Level Agreement with the County Council's Youth Service following restructure.

The Project no longer received any funding from the County Council for youth provision and over the last 2 -3 years the organisation and Barnabas (based in Morpeth) had lost two supported care providers in Northumberland, however the Project had managed to secure a grant of £25,000 in October last year.

Ch.'s Initials.....

The Project was very grateful to the continuing support from the Children in Need appeal, however when the organisation was doing well that could sometimes work against them as they were seen to be a well managed organisation.

Until last year, the Project had held the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and since created the Northumberland Challenge in partnership with the County Council's Youth Services, which was free of charge.

When the Project first started up it was the County Council's youth work representative by default as there had been no representatives in Berwick. However even though the organisation no longer received funding from the County Council, a partnership still existed as they were still the County Council's representative in the Berwick area.

Following the presentation, discussion ensued and the following points were raised:

- A member was concerned with the planned changes to supported housing and the reliance on assistance with benefits and assessments and the care and support cases traditionally allocated for housing benefit which would cause a problem;
- It was suggested that the Berwick Youth Project contact the Police and Crime Commissioner to make them aware of details;
- In response to a query regarding Palace Street East, Mr Bell stated that they had applied to acquire the former Community Centre under Community Asset Transfer. However it had been discovered that the building had not belonged to the Council but held to the Charity Commission. With the help of their MP, the Charity Commission had provided their view on the matter and a response was awaited from the Council as to a way forward. There were no ownership or lease arrangements.
- It was queried whether any work had been done to the building, Mr Bell stated that in the last 6 months there had been problems with pigeons and the last quote received to have the pigeons removed was £13,000. A further quote had been sourced and received for £3,000 however, no money had been received from the County Council;
- In response to a query, Mr Bell stated issues were very rarely encountered with cross party working;
- A member queried if the VCS Liaison Group could assist the organisation of any obstacles; Mr Bell said there were not many opportunities for partnership building. He had attended many hours in strategic and development meetings where nothing had come to fruition but would keep an open mind;
- It was suggested that an e-bulletin be sent out to organisations to raise the profile of the Berwick Youth Project;

Ch.'s Initials.....

- In response to a query regarding the effect of social media to youth working, Mr Bell stated that many young people would not put themselves forward if they did not have access to wifi. However, the 11-12 year old were more likely to get involved with youth community projects

The Chair thanked Mr Bell for his verbal presentation.

Jane Pannell, North Northumberland Voluntary Forum (NNVF) was in attendance. A leaflet was circulated to the group for information.

The NNVF had originally been named Berwick Voluntary Forum and in 2016 changed its name to North Northumberland Voluntary Forum.

The Berwick Voluntary Centre provided office accommodation to Citizens Advice, Community Action Northumberland and Berwick & District Friends of Dementia. A range of rooms were available to hire depending on need from mediation and counselling in a comfortable and welcoming environment to a hot-desk office. Regular users of the centre was the Tribunal Service where hearings could be held locally.

Accommodation was also offered to commercial businesses and a solicitor practice used the accommodation which enabled customers to access legal services as well as the facilities of the building.

Quarterly network meetings were held in Wooler, Belford and Seahouses as well as Berwick and information was sent to member organisations on a monthly basis.

The NNVF had undertaken a facilitator role in Glendale called Stronger Together with up to 35 people at meetings. The purposes were to broker better understanding and relations in communities where there had been some tension and, in recognition of the sparsity of populations meant that it was hard to feature on the radar of large funding organisations, forge a coherent and comprehensive view of what was needed to help lead to vibrant and healthy communities. As a result of that work, they were talking with a range of people and agencies and communities and would be putting together an application for a feasibility study with a view to a major bid for a larger scale project for the whole of North Northumberland.

This year an annual awards event had been funded by the Simpson McCreath Trust, General Mills and Gibson Malt Foundations which presented awards to groups/individuals outstanding in the voluntary sector.

Ch.'s Initials.....

It was hoped to enhance the warm hub and continue to support their space and give access to as many people as possible. It was also hoped to provide pre-natal opportunities through a warm hub in Wooler.

The Chair thanked Ms Panell for her presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and an update be brought back to the Group regarding the changes of CAB.

## **06. SOCIAL VALUE ENGINE**

Kirsten Francis, Principal Policy Officer informed the group that social value was not always recognised or evidenced and it was hoped to help make a case to funders and other parts of the Council by better evidencing just what extra benefits projects working with communities and the voluntary sector did bring by the use of the Social Value Engine (SVE). The Council had been working with North East Riding and Rose Regeneration who had developed the social value engine.

An explanation of the process was in the attached presentation.

Ann Atkinson, Northumberland CVA explained the process of using the social engine tool for the VCS which was used to improve performance, inform expenditure and highlight added value. Once a new project was started and the outputs and inputs submitted, the tool would measure the costs of an activity. An exercise had been carried out for support services which NCVA provided. (A bulletin was circulated to the group which detailed the social value calculation for the VCS Assembly.)

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 i.e. results that could occur that were not a result of the project.

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 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 the Principal Policy Officer and Mrs Atkinson for the useful information provided.

Ch.'s Initials.....

**RESOLVED** That a practical demonstration of a project being inputted to the system be given at the next Liaison Meeting so member could better understand how it worked in practice.

**07. NEW PROCESSES AND COMMITTEE STRUCTURES**

The group were informed that this item had been deferred to the meeting in January.

**08. ASSET BASED AND COMMUNITY CENTRED APPROACH TO HEALTH & WELL BEING**

Ann Lyall from NCVA explained that an asset based approach involved people from local communities taking control and using their skills, experiences and knowledge and physical assets to improve the population's health and hopefully bring people in control of their lives.

An event had been held in March in Alnwick which had been very well attended and had been attended by the former Director of Public Health, Penny Spring and a number of network events had been held on asset mapping in Northumberland.

Following the event in March, a lot of interest had been shown in this approach. As a result Trevor Hopkins from Asset Based Consulting had been brought in to carry out training in the use of some of the techniques, processes and strategies. One approach was appreciative inquiry focusing on the strengths of communities .

VCS had been asked to join the Empowering people and Communities group led by health to look at how the VCS, health , local authority and other partners could work together to improve health and wellbeing of communities using this approach This was a positive move but required commitment and action r

A small grant had been invested in North Northumberland and it was hoped to improve social and community cohesion. NCVA had just secured funding from the Redman Trust to use an asset based approach to tackle poverty in neighbourhoods.

Training would be offered to voluntary and community services who operated in the poorest areas and which were more likely to be in the most vulnerable position. A focus on community organisations to strengthen communities would help address areas of deprivation and reduce poverty.

Ch.'s Initials.....



Next steps - to hold another event around asset based approach to Health and Well Being .and hope that partners would get involved.

**RESOLVED** - That the information be noted.

#### **08. VCS ISSUES ARISING FROM NETWORK MEETINGS/EVENTS**

In response to a question regarding the Social Value Engine, the Principal Inclusion Policy Officer advised that this had not yet been signed off and it was thought that this would be used as part of a commission. The tool was being used quite widely in other places. NCC would be looking to work with the assembly and the cost for the licence was £400. The Chair requested a demonstration at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** - That the information be noted.

#### **09. NCC ISSUES THAT MAY IMPACT ON THE VCS**

The Principal Inclusion Policy Officer advised that she would be consulting about future VCS commission and looking for value for money.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### **10. WORK PROGRAMME**

Items for inclusion on the next agenda:

- An update regarding the CAB
- Update on domestic abuse
- Funding from the Council
- A practical demonstration of a project being inputted into the SVE system

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### **11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday, 4 January 2018, at a venue in Cramlington.

Ch.'s Initials.....

**COUNCILLOR W PATTISON**

**CHAIR**

Ch.'s Initials.....