

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **VCS LIAISON GROUP**

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, on 4 June 2015 at 2.00pm.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor E. Burt (Chair) In the Chair

#### **COUNCILLORS**

J. Lang  
V. Jones  
J. Reid

G. Sanderson  
V. Tyler  
J. Watson

#### **VCS REPRESENTATIVES**

C. George  
J. Jackson

A. Lyall  
S. Spurling

#### **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

M. Bird  
K. Francis  
C. Maddison

Team Leader, Democratic Services  
Principal Inclusion Policy Officer  
Apprentice, Democratic Services

Also in attendance

A. Atkinson – Northumberland CVA

T. Chapman - St Chad's College, Durham University

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**RESOLVED** that the membership and terms of reference, as agreed by County Council on 20 May 2015, be noted.

Ch.'s Initials.....

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## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors Sambrook and Wallace, and also from VCS Representatives M. Gowland and L. Prudhoe.

## **3. NOTES**

The notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Working Group, held on 5 March 2015, were agreed.

## **4. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Cllr Watson advised that he was Chairman of a youth project, and that this was stated on his Declaration of Interest form.

Cllr Tyler stated that she was involved with Northumberland CVA, and this was declared on her declaration of interests form.

VCS Representative J. Jackson was independent chair of the Standards Committee for Northumberland County Council.

## **5. THIRD SECTOR TRENDS – THE CURRENT STATE OF THE SECTOR IN NORTHUMBERLAND**

Tony Chapman, Durham University, gave a presentation on Third Sector Trends in Northumberland. A study had been carried out, 'The Northern Rock Foundation Third Sector Trends Study'. The key areas covered by Professor Chapman included how much continuity and change there was in the sector, how the resource mix in the sector was changing, who were the 'winners and losers' in the sector, and the future of the sector. (Copy of presentation attached to the filed notes.)

Several questions were raised and comments made with regard to the presentation, of which the key details were:

- The cause of the apparent reduction of contracts indicated on the graphs was mainly due to organisations being too small to be eligible for contracts. It was also an indication that some organisations might have felt that there were barriers that would make it difficult for them to apply. Some grants had also evolved to become more similar to contracts.

- Due to the stricter application forms for the County Council's Community Chest grant, it was identified that separation was needed between the purchasing of goods and investment in community cohesion.
- The outcome of small investments in community cohesion was intangible. There was a question about how to measure the happiness generated and community cohesion resulting from small investments, however there were examples of long running clubs, for example bowling, which if they remained cohesive and cared for had a positive effect on the people involved
- One issue with the VSC was how they could continue to be sustainable after they had received their funding. Developing capability and a quality framework were key issues
- Funding could be attained for equipment but not for revenue requirements such as building costs and salaries; this was found to be a common situation across the sector
- Good governance was a key requirement for the sector; it was important for VCS organisations to have strong Board members who were able to recognise any problems facing their organisation if they arose. There were organisations who could offer space, help and support for trusteeships
- There was a split between more and less socially deprived areas as VCS organisations in more economically advantaged areas had tended to maintain their income in recent years, whereas other areas had been affected more by the reduction in grants available
- Although National Government were keen on the idea of similar, small charities being grouped together to form bigger charities, in reality as these small charities were set up by individuals with their own objectives and aspirations, so merging them might not necessarily be as successful as planned. There was evidence that larger organisations found it easier to work together.
- There were good examples of small VCS organisations that made a significant contribution to people's health and well-being, for example arts clubs.

The chair expressed thanks to Mr Chapman for his interesting and informative presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted and a further update be provided to a future meeting

## 6. UPDATE ON THE BIG LOTTERY OPT IN

Kirsten Francis, Principal Inclusion Policy Officer, gave an update on the Big Lottery Opt in.

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There was quite a significant opportunity around a piece of joint work between Northumberland County Council and the local voluntary and community sector in connection with the next round of European funding. This funding was for a sum of £3.5 Million, and would be spread over 3 years, with the possibility of an extension of 3 more years. A strong output would be needed in order to secure funding. A realistic target was for 10% of beneficiaries to be successful in gaining employment. The process was a competitive one, and this initiative would be open to public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

An advisory steering group had been set up, and were due to have their inaugural meeting soon.

There would be several phases of application to the funding. The 1<sup>st</sup> Phase would see initial bids due in beginning of June 2015, to be completed and submitted by September 2015. 1-4 applicants would then be selected. Two bids would then be awarded the funding, and a further two would receive a resource to help develop the bids further.

In response to a query about the council's capacity to engage in such an intense bid, the council would be stretched by the task, but it was hoped that they would be successful. Positive feedback had been received from the voluntary and community sector, indicating their willingness to assist in the bid process.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted, and that the Update on the Big Lottery Opt in be a standing item in future meetings.

## 7. STATEMENT OF INTENT

Kirsten Francis, Principal Inclusion Policy Officer, circulated an updated version of the Statement of Intent, along with a chart. (A copy of both are attached to the filed minutes.)

Members were advised that the only change that had been made to the document since the previous meeting was underlined. Democratic Services would circulate a copy of the Statement of Intent to members who were not present at the meeting, and any queries should be raised with the chair.

It was also noted that the procedural next steps for formally signing off the statement, for example by Cabinet, would be discussed and confirmed at the next Chairmen's Group meeting.

**RESOLVED** that the Statement of Intent be accepted, unless queried further with the chair, and referred to the Chairmen's Group meeting to confirm the next steps.

## 8. NEXT STEPS

The following comments were made:

- As the membership had changed, the new members of the VCS Liaison Group were more familiar with the VCS.
- The VCS Assembly that took place in May 2015 had raised some issues that could be the basis for discussion at future meetings.
- Once the process of election to the VCS Assembly was complete, the members of the assembly would be able to identify priorities of the sector and bring to the VCS Liaison Group for discussion. It was advised that they should be ready in time for the September meeting.
- Although the intricacies of Community Chest applications were not within the remit of the VCS Liaison Working Group, as concerns had been raised at this meeting about revenue and capital funding, clarification would be sought at the next Chairmen's Group meeting about whether this Liaison Group could discuss this element of the Community Chest, or if not which other committee/group could.
- An future agenda item was requested about the social impact of investment
- It would be useful if the availability of the Community Chest could be greater publicised; this would be raised with the Locality Team
- It was noted that Wansbeck CVS had been renamed to Northumberland CVA. This was welcomed as it was important to make it clear that the service provided was for the whole county rather than just the Wansbeck area.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## 9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates of future meetings in 2015 were noted. It was suggested that the next meeting of the VCS Liaison Working Group take place at the Northumberland CVA offices. It was also clarified that unless otherwise advised, all future meetings would be held at 2.00pm, with the venues alternating between County Hall and VCS premises.

## 10. URGENT BUSINESS

Gratitude and appreciation were expressed by VCS Representative J Jackson in relation to Councillor V Tyler and Kirsten Francis' excellent contributions to the VCS Assembly meeting in May 2015, which had had a big impact. Thanks

were also given to other members who attended and the council for their support in highlighting issues, which was beneficial.

If more information or any clarification was needed, or a visit to Northumberland CVA was requested, then members could contact either A Lyall or A Atkinson.

The chair thanked everyone, and closed the meeting.

**COUNCILLOR E BURT  
CHAIR**