

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

VCS LIAISON GROUP

NOTES of the meeting of the **VCS Liaison Group** held at East Bedlington Community Centre, 16 & 17 Station Road, Bedlington, Northumberland, on Thursday 30 May 2019 at 2:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor C Seymour (Chair)

COUNCILLORS

L Bowman
A Sharp (part)

D Towns

VCS REPRESENTATIVES

J Jackson
A Lyall

A Perrett
J Wyness

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

H Bowers
K Higgins
L Sprudd
J Stewart

Democratic Services Officer
Senior Policy Officer
Director, Northumberland Sport
Strategic Housing Manager

Also in attendance:

G Armstrong
A Atkinson
C Homer
J Tindale

Royal British Legion
Northumberland CVA
Culture, Arts and Leisure Portfolio Holder
Deputy Clerk, East Bedlington Parish
Council

Ch.'s Initials.....

01. CHAIR'S OPENING COMMENTS

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

Tribute was paid to Councillor Bernard Pidcock who had passed away and would be sadly missed. Councillor Les Bowman who had recently been elected was welcomed to the group.

02. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference for the VCS Liaison Group, as agreed by Council on 24 May 2017, were reported for information.

RESOLVED that the VCS Liaison Group membership and terms of reference be noted.

03. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Parry, Simpson and Stow and VCS representatives, S Ashmore, A Conway, R Firth and T Machnicki.

04. NOTES

RESOLVED that the notes of the meeting of the VCS Liaison Group held on Thursday 17 January 2019 be received and noted.

05. SERVICE PROVISION

East Bedlington Community Centre

Jenny Tindale, East Bedlington Parish Clerk informed the group of the facilities and the functions of the centre which had originally been built in 1886 and used as a dance hall, Co-op and Labour Exchange.

Following grants and investments the building was refurbished and opened in 2012, providing accessible facilities for the whole of the community which included room hire; various activities; delivering services to groups and more recently live music and dancing.

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Finding Trustees with due diligence and governance had been difficult but a Manager/Facilities Coordinator had recently been appointed.

The Centre worked with Job Centre Plus and volunteers who offered training. It had taken 2 years to establish local residents groups as engagement had been difficult.

The community centre worked in partnership with the Parish Council and collaboration with other outside agencies to deliver quality services.

The Chair thanked Mrs Tindale for her presentation.

Royal British Legion

Gail Armstrong, Chair of Blyth Branch was in attendance to give an overview of the service provided by the Blyth Branch of the Royal British Legion.

The Blyth Branch had been in existence for a year and provided a safe venue and comradeship for members. The current membership of the Blyth branch was 92.

Ms Armstrong had initially been employed in the Royal Navy as an Engineering Mechanic during the Falklands War and had seen the effect on colleagues when they had returned. She stated that often part of the younger generation of service people were forgotten about.

During the first year she had met a lot of community groups. Last year had seen the biggest ever Poppy Appeal and funds raised at the Branch launch party and other donations had helped to finance a standard and bearer. Work was also carried out with schools and young people and a breakfast club was provided every Sunday for members and members' families. She explained how a young homeless person had been helped to get his life back.

Volunteer support was also provided at branch level which offered home visits, hospital visits, help with shopping, etc and online support with Veterans Gateway, Changing Lives and Help for Heroes. Social evenings were held at the Seahorse pub in Blyth which included branch meetings and welcomed people to come along.

Mrs Armstrong explained that as many branches were closing, the boundaries of branches were being reconfigured. She hoped that the second year would be as successful as the first year and to look out for them at the Northumberland Live Event which was being held in Blyth.

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(Councillor Sharp joined the meeting at this point).

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

06. STATE OF THE SECTOR

Ann Atkinson, Development Officer, Northumberland CVA gave a presentation on the State of the Sector in Northumberland in 2018.

The group was informed that it was important that the VCS Assembly and wider public services had an understanding of issues facing the VCS organisation, the sector and the people they supported. As a result three workshops had taken place at voluntary and community sector network meetings in Northumberland. Forty seven people had participated in the workshops; thirty two organisations had paid staff and fifteen were volunteer led.

The results of the workshops included challenges faced and some of the key findings included better collaboration and recruitment of volunteers.

Ways in which the VCS could support organisations included preparation for opportunities for partnership working; reporting to the Health & Wellbeing Board; collaborative working; safeguarding training for volunteers and staff; email forum for VCS and social media training; quality assurance; Northumberland Funding Guide and working with regional partners - VONNE and Community Foundation.

It was hoped that partnership working would build the sector to be in a stronger position.

Some discussion ensued on economies of scale, the need to avoid duplication; partnership working between the sector and NCC; training and sharing of information.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

07. VCS AND EMPLOYMENT AND INCLUSIONS WORKSTREAMS PLANNING

A brief update was provided on workstream thematic areas proposed at the previous meeting with the purpose of progressing areas of work to meet the aims of the statement of intent..

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The following key thematic areas were identified by officers as strategic priorities:-

- Financial wellbeing
- Health and wellbeing
- Communities, spaces and places
- Children and young people
- Transformation
- Employment and inclusion

A remit for each theme had been drafted with a VCS and NCC lead identified for each one. The identified leads will be consulted on the purpose and actions to achieve aims. This will be further developed for the next meeting of the VCS Liaison Group.

Anne Lyall, Northumberland CVA stated that it was important that the VCS Liaison Group was involved but expressed concern at the period in between meetings, and therefore a need for active workstreams.

A report would be brought back to the next meeting in September.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

08. VCS INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION UPDATE

The group were provided with an update on the VCS Infrastructure Support Commission.

The commission was procured by NCC and awarded to Northumberland CA for the period April 2019 to March 2021. The contract required a more strategic approach to four key areas to support VCS capacity to operate safely and legally; improve confidence and ability to secure funding; ensure communications keep organisations fully informed of key issues and opportunities; manage the Northumberland VCS Assembly and promote awareness of VCS issues with NCC. The overall aim is to build capacity across the sector and develop a strong VCS partnership to respond to new funding opportunities and deliver effective services.

Anne Lyall, Northumberland CVA stated that the strategic aim would be slightly different than previous, and service provision would mainly be aimed around funding, support and advice and communications. A broader approach would be taken with regard to opportunities through the North of Tyne Combined Authority Inclusive Growth funding which would give more emphasis to

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partnership working. The aim was for the sector to be in a stronger position in two years time.

RESOLVED That the information be noted.

09. NORTH OF TYNE COMBINED AUTHORITY VCS ENGAGEMENT

The group was provided with feedback from NTCA VCS engagement and consultation events which had been held in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland.

Consultation events on the theme of Inclusive Economy in March were well attended by VCS representatives in all areas. Most of the responses related to communications, the capacity of the sector and how the sector would be represented in NTCA governance.

An initial meeting between NTCA and VCS leads had taken place to discuss a response to the findings, and further consultation meetings would be held. The new Mayor had acknowledged feedback on social impact, the support of plans around a Good Business Pledge and the potential of a partnership agreement between the Authority and the Sector.

The group was advised that the Sector would be represented on the Inclusive Economy Board and in the Scrutiny function. Proposed VCS representatives on the Inclusive Economy board and the Scrutiny Committee had been suggested and would be approached in the summer. It was expected that the Inclusive Economy board would be convened in the Autumn.

A North of Tyne Better Together Accord/Partnership had been produced in an initial draft form for consultation with VCS leads, similar to the Greater Manchester Accord. The draft would be used as a starting point for development at subsequent meetings.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

10. BORDERLANDS UPDATE

It had been agreed to have regular updates on the Borderlands Initiative.

The Borderlands partnership included five local authorities - Cumbria, Carlisle, Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders and Northumberland. The Partnership had been invited by the UK Government to submit a proposal for

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the first Rural Growth Deal in the country. This unique growth deal would straddle the Scotland/England Border and complement the North of Tyne Devolution Deal.

£195 million would be invested in the English local authorities (as part of a £345 million total) for which Northumberland will be Lead Accountable Body. Thematic Programmes Boards will be established to implement delivery. Some of the initial projects in the pipeline included a mountain bike innovation centre at Peebles; Carlisle Station Gateway; Chapelcross Energy Park and Berwick Theatre and Conference Centre.

In response to a concern regarding members being updated about projects and the amount of money invested by NCC, Councillor Cath Homer, Portfolio Holder of Culture, Arts, Leisure and Tourism stated that the Combined Authority needed to make sure there was some kind of communication and was confident that would be done.

The Borderlands Growth Deal had to be an accountable body and Heads of Terms should be agreed in June. It was hoped there would be an announcement at the end of June with subsequent engagement with the sector.

It was requested that the Borderlands Update be kept as an agenda item for future meetings.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

11. NORTHUMBERLAND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STRATEGY 2018 - 2028

Lee Sprudd, Director of Northumberland Sport gave a verbal update on the Northumberland physical strategy.

Northumberland Sport had taken a whole system approach on the development of a 10 year physical activity strategy. Inactivity levels were still high with 28% of over 16's being inactive with an aging population that would put pressure on resources.

A life course approach had been taken in the development of the strategy and three consultation events with key stakeholders had taken place. 'Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life', 'Living Well' and 'Ageing Well'.

Feedback from the consultation identified a need to work together through local and national campaigns taking into account the geography of Northumberland

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with the engagement of key stakeholders. A developed coordinated approach would be taken to promote opportunities with sign-posting and working with professionals.

The Physical Activity Strategy would be presented to the Health & Wellbeing Board in June and a further report would be brought back to the group.

In response to a query regarding the Board, it was stated that an independent Board (the Northumberland Sport Board, a 'partner neutral' partnership primarily funded by Sport England) had been recruited based on skills and competencies. Details were available on their website at www.northumberlandsport.co.uk.

(Councillor Towns left the meeting at 3.50 pm).

A comment was raised in relation to loss of play facilities within Seaton Valley. Mr Sprudd explained that protecting playing pitches was a statutory obligation which came under the remit of Sport England to support Northumberland County Council. Mr Sprudd also explained that an independent audit of the Country's Indoor Facilities had also been recently completed, which identified any strategic gaps in provision and would be used to ensure the needs of our communities were addressed.

It was hoped that the Strategy would attract young people and become a lifestyle choice.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

12. NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSING STRATEGY

Julie Stewart, Strategic Housing Manager gave an overview of the Northumberland Housing Strategy which was currently out for consultation.

The group was informed that the draft Housing Strategy had been approved for consultation by Cabinet in June and also circulated to all parish and town councils and various organisations for their views.

The current Housing Strategy for Northumberland had been in place from 2013-2018 and now needed to be refreshed to reflect different legislation and to take into account the Northumberland Local Plan. It was hoped the Strategy would help to deliver the aspirations of the Council and communities.

The reviewed priorities in the updated Strategy linked in with the Health & Wellbeing agenda; Physical Strategy and Housing.

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The priorities identified within the updated strategy were;

1. Growing Our Communities
2. Supporting our Residents
3. Improving Homes and Communities

The draft Housing Strategy sought views on the priorities and enforced the Council's aspirations for growth.

A link to the consultation would be forwarded to the group.

In response to a query regarding homelessness, it was advised that there were gaps in service provision, in relation to mental health and addictions.

Further information would be forwarded to Councillor Bowman.

RESOLVED - that the information be noted.

13. FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES UPDATE

The Group was informed that the final rounds of the European Social Fund was now open. Details could be found on the Northumberland CVA website.

A query was raised in relation to the Prosperity Fund. Information would be sought from the External Funding Team.

REPORT OF THE SERVICE MANAGER - DEMOCRACY

(i) VCS Liaison Group Work Programme

Future agenda items would be discussed at a pre-meeting.

It was suggested that future agenda items on service provision could be provided at Network meetings. Some discussion took place and it was stated that it was important to have representatives from the community to hear about their service and activities.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled to take place at Seahouses Hostel on Thursday 5 September 2019.

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RESOLVED that the information be noted.

COUNCILLOR C SEYMOUR
CHAIR

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