

27 September 2023

REPORT OF COALFIELD AREA VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR NETWORK

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the Coalfield Area Voluntary and Community Sector Network

2. Background

2.1 To develop the capacity and influence of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across the City, Area Networks have been established and delegates represent each Area Network at Area Committee taking forward issues on behalf of the whole VCS in the area, reporting on area priority delivery by the VCS, and reporting back, providing a two-way flow of communication.

2.2 Coalfield Area Network delegates will present a report to each Area Committee meeting informing Members of activity, progress, issues and concerns of the sector.

2.3 The Coalfield VCS Network is made up of over 100 local groups and strategic local/national/regional partners. The network meets on a regular basis to share good practice, support one another and receives regularly updates as part of an information share e bulletin distributed via the Sunderland VS Alliance.

3. Coalfield Voluntary and Community Sector Network (VCSN) Progress Report

3.1 The Coalfield VCS Network met in June, July and September 2023 at Easington Lane Community Access Point (ELCAP)

3.2 The meetings have included the following agenda items:

6th June 2023

Welfare Support & First Tier Providers

A PowerPoint was shared by Alison Aisbitt & Julie Egan giving an overview on welfare rights & financial wellbeing.

This included:

- Why advice & support is so valuable to our residents.
- Sunderland welfare rights advice provision-VAR
- The three-year financial resilience programme which recognises the links between financial & wider wellbeing
- First & second tier specialist advice services

Houghton Thai Boxing

Jake introduced Thai Boxing & shared a video of him competing the previous weekend. In the 6 months of forming his own club, Jake has been able to leave his previous job to train full time. He is looking to form partnerships with the VCS Network and to signpost for support. Jake advised that reasons for taking part in sessions include improving fitness, overcoming addiction and helping with mental health. Houghton Thai Boxing is currently operating from the former Houghton Carpet shop.

4th July 2023

Digital Inclusion Plan

A PowerPoint was shared by Nicol McConnell giving an overview on Sunderland's Digital Inclusion Plan. Below are the key links with Nicol referenced-

- Access to devices
- Improve digital skills and knowledge
- Designed for All

Holiday Activity Programme

Poster and details of children and young people's summer activities shared with group. There was a range of activities across all wards available. VCS groups encouraged to share information with all residents.

August – No meeting

5th September 2023

Elemore Park

A verbal presentation was received from Anthony Hindmarsh from Elemore Park. Anthony updated the group regarding the developments at the park and regarding the recent music festival at the site. The site has a coffee shop available and there are future developments including walks, cycling hubs etc.

ELCAP ambitions

Gemma O'Brien provided an update to the group regarding proposed building improvements to ELCAP. Images of the improvements drawn up by architects were shared with the group. ELCAP are looking to secure funding to complete the work.

All meetings continue to be well attended with over 28+ organisations represented. The information sharing element of the meetings are very useful and allow VCS organisations to develop information and knowledge of activities and services available for local residents.

Coalfield Area Representative Update

Emerly Christie has stepped down from her role at The Old Rectory and subsequently her role as Coalfield VCS Representative. The VCS network would like to thank Emerly for the contribution she made in her time as a VCS Representative.

3.3 Members of the Network joined Sunderland Council and the Sunderland Integrated Care Board (Health) for breakfast on Thursday 15th June 2023, to discuss future opportunities to work together in the city, developing community hubs and our community support offer for residents. The following themes were consistently discussed at each table with a high amount of consensus over the challenges or opportunities associated with the themes. Members of the network were asked to sign the pledge for Links for Life

In summary they were:

- Funding,
- Opportunities to network and collaborate,
- Potential and challenges of Links for Life,
- Capacity in the sector
- Attitudes to the NEPO portal.

- 3.4 Moving forward from the Warm and Welcoming spaces, we are working closely with the sector to extend and co-produce the 'welcoming warm spaces'. Members of the network have been informed there will be launch for a new call for projects in September, to enable the community support offer to move into 'Links for Life' – Sunderland's social prescribing community support programme. The programme will build on the learning from the warm and welcoming spaces, ensuring we are able to offer services and support within our communities – support and activities which bring residents together, enable active engagement and improve health, wellbeing and financial resilience. The opportunity has been shared with the VCS network and the closing date is 29th September 2023.
- 3.5 Members of the network continue to welcome funding opportunities and social value opportunities from SVSA. The Area Arrangements team are working in collaboration with the Sunderland VCS Alliance (SVSA) and wider Council services and partners to bring forward social value from investments and from businesses delivering in the city, to support the voluntary and community sector. The Area Arrangements team and the SVSA are also working together to understand where local community services are currently being delivered within the area, to support resident community resilience and wellbeing.
- 3.6 The Network representatives regularly consult with the Network to ensure that the agenda items reflect their requirements.

4. Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA) update August 2023

- 4.1 Since securing charitable status in April, the Sunderland VS Alliance asked the sector across Sunderland for a view on current needs and gaps in service offer. Following the completion of the surveys and further work with the Alliance Strategic and Operational Boards, funding priorities have been agreed which will inform future funding applications as follows:
- Older peoples' services
 - People with disabilities
 - Young people (the need for more youth services)
 - Veterans
 - People affected by the cost-of-living crisis
 - People furthest from the job market,
 - Refugees
 - Mental health services
- 4.2 The Alliance has secured £45,000 ICB funding via VONNE to employ a Capacity Mapping Officer as part of a regional piece of work to review social prescribing and look at best practise for Sunderland and the Northeast region. The Alliance are working hand in hand with the Links for Life programme team to provide recommendations which will improve communities and prevent escalation of specialist services, to benefit the outcomes for local people.
- 4.3 The Alliance is part of the Community Foundations Participatory Grant process developing funding opportunities for grass roots voluntary and community groups. Launch date to be confirmed.

- 4.4 The Alliance will launch their membership scheme in October and will be promoting to all of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations in Sunderland, asking them to register.

The Alliance will also be:

- Recruiting, inducting, and training new staff
- Re-launching their website (with a membership hub)

- 4.5 The Alliance working hard to secure the following members for the Alliance:

- A Treasurer
- Trustees
- Operational Board members

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Members are requested

- To note the contents of the report and consider the opportunities and issues raised by the Coalfield VCSN.

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