

14th March 2024**REPORT OF WASHINGTON AREA VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR NETWORK****1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the Washington 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 Washington 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 Washington VCS Network is made up of over 70 local groups and strategic local/national/regional partners. The network meets on a regular basis to share good practice, support one another and receives regular updates on relevant opportunities.

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

3.1 The Washington VCS Network met in person in February 2024

3.2 The February meeting included the following agenda items:

- Health Weight presentation
- Enterprising Sunderland – Business Start Up
- Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance membership
- Network and Information Share Opportunities

3.3 Sunderland City Council Active Sunderland, Weight Management Support Officer delivered a presentation on the healthy weight programme, which is a free 26-week offer supporting residents in Washington with healthy weight and wellbeing. The programme is self-referral which offers one to one appointments every 6 weeks and is based within The Millennium Centre.

3.4 North East Business Innovation Centre shared information on Enterprising Sunderland. The programme delivers one to one sessions and workshops on how to start your business. They can also come into the community to do specific workshops tailored to what organisations/groups may want, for example, turning a hobby into a business. As part of the programme, there is access to an online platform called 'Smarter' which is available until March 2025.

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- 3.5 Members of the Network received information on the free membership scheme with Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA) and information was provided on the support available.
 - 3.6 Members of the Network shared information on emerging issues they have faced over recent weeks, including increased numbers of home schooled children and level of need when attending sessions, working families affording school holiday childcare and recent changes in community banking requirements causing issues for some groups.
 - 3.7 Partners from Washington Mind, Groundwork, Choice and Headway Wearside updated on new services they have available.
 - 3.8 The Network were reminded that the meeting is to meet their needs and asked to feedback to their representatives should they have a particular request, to ensure that the agenda items reflect their requirements.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are requested

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

5. VCS Rep Contact

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