

11th DECEMBER 2023

REPORT OF EAST AREA VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR NETWORK

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the East 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 East 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 East 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. East Voluntary and Community Sector Network (VCSN) Progress Report

3.1 The East VCS Network met in September at St Michael's Community Centre, and in November at the Raich Carter Centre.

3.2 The meetings included the following agenda items:

- Welfare Support
- Makem Money – Community Foundation funding opportunity
- Free First Aid Courses from the British Red Cross
- Networking and Information Sharing Opportunities

3.3 Members of the Network agreed to return to meeting monthly commencing on Thursday 7th December. The Network representatives regularly consult with the Network members to ensure that the agenda items reflect their requirements.

3.4 Sunderland City Council (SCC), in partnership with All Together Better (ATB) secured funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for a grants scheme for Sunderland's Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) to grow the 'Links for Life' (Social Prescribing offer) across the City. The scheme was designed to build upon learning gathered through the warm and welcoming spaces to ensure a consistent offer of support and activities to bring residents together, enable active engagement, and improve health, wellbeing and financial resilience. Throughout September, members of the Network who signed up to the Links for Life pledge were invited to apply. Successful projects will deliver Links for Life activities from January 2024, this will be supported by a digital platform which will facilitate information sharing and referrals

3.5 Members of the Network received information on the Free membership scheme with Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance (SVSA) and were also invited to attend 'Lets Communicate' online event with SVSA in November 23.

3.6 The Network received an update on progress made on the staff recruitment for SVSA, they also received information on the support offered to the sector, including the support offered to the sector on funding applications. Information was also received on the Social Value opportunities and the volunteering support offered.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are requested to:

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

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