

14 October 2015

**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 (VCS) 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 the Networks 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.

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

The Coalfield VCSN has met four times since the last Area Committee in June 2015.

**3.1 June 2015**

**The Care Act**

Alan Caddick of Sunderland City Council updated on the new Care Act and asked for support in helping to relay the information into the community. The Council is holding ongoing consultations focusing on how to adapt to the changes, updating stakeholders and key organisations. Once further information has been received from Government, an update will be given. A discussion took place and members agreed it is important to work with people on a local level and update them in ways relevant to the community.

**Green Green Grass of Home Project**

Members of the Network were updated on the four events planned for the first week of the school summer holidays. The days are part of the Area Committee Health and Greenspaces programme and a number of members of the Network are involved in the design and delivery of the events.

**Sustainable Communities**

Dean T Huggins from Sustainable Sunderland updated the group about community energy. He explained that it is possible to save 15% on energy bills by using very low cost measures. The organisation is working on collective purchasing and bulk buying options for community groups. Dean encouraged groups to attend an event which would give information on how to save money on building costs.

**Update from Place and People Board**

The draft priorities for the coming year were discussed. Members were pleased that they had been able to have an input to the priorities and that support for volunteering and community groups was of great importance.

**July 2015**

**Live Life Well Service**

A presentation on the Live Life Well Service was given. The service will engage with the local community and provide advice and support to residents to improve their wellbeing. There is a need to start building on assets that are in the community and see how services can work with the Live Life Well Service. The Coalfields mentor is Jan Milner who will attend VCS Network meetings.

### **Concerns**

One of the Network Representatives had attended a Food Bank Network meeting where Joan Reed gave a talk about Universal Credit and was shocked at some of the implications of this. It was noted that ShARP are working closely with the Council and there is a citywide strategy to raise awareness. The group were concerned about the impact of the new arrangements on local residents and felt it was important to do all possible to prepare families for the changes. ShARP will be delivering workshops around September time. The City Council will also hold awareness raising presentations.

### **Aug 2015**

#### **Environmental Health**

Colin Rudd from the Environmental Health team at Sunderland City Council gave an update on the service. The two main areas of discussion were illegal tattooists, and Food Hygiene. Colin asked that members of the group provided any information or intelligence they may have about these issues.

#### **Houghton Feast**

An update on the arrangements for the 2015 Houghton Feast was given, and groups were encouraged to become involved in the Saturday Parade.

#### **Volunteer and Community Support**

The group discussed a major priority for the Area Committee which would be discussed at the September People Board meeting. Volunteer and community support is seen as an important area for development at a local level and the group held a discussion about what they feel the gaps are. All suggestions were noted and fed into the People Board for their consideration. It was noted that it is important to provide a locally focused project and not duplicate or displace anything already available to the area. The Volunteer Centre gave a summary of what they can provide and some members signed up to the Centre as a result of the discussions.

### **September 2015**

#### **Community Learning**

An update was given on the Family, Adult and Community Learning (FACL) funded programme of training which is available to improve education and mental health. The courses take two approaches a) Workforce Development – to increase awareness and understanding of mental health issues, and b) Community Learning – for those aged 19 and over who are experiencing mild to moderate symptoms of depression, anxiety and/or problems sleeping. A Live and Learn programme was circulated and members were encouraged to share the information with colleagues and clients/service users.

#### **Volunteer and Community Support**

An update was given on the development of this priority which had been further discussed at the September meeting of the People Board. All of the comments and concerns discussed by this group at the last meeting had been fed into the People Board and considered during the development of their project proposal. The VCS Network are pleased to hear that the Board and Area Committee recognise the value of the work of the

sector and the proposed future support. Members of the group who were not members of Voluntary and Community Action Sunderland (VCAS) were encouraged to sign up.

### **Events and Celebrations**

The VCS Network Representatives encouraged the group to consider events and celebrations important to them and the possibility of arranging and delivering a programme of community activity during the coming year. Ideas and suggestions were requested and the example of the recently delivered Green Green Grass of Home events was given as a successful way of working in partnership.

### **Raising Awareness of VCS Network Representatives**

The three Representatives have drafted information about what the Network is, along with a brief biography of themselves. This will clarify and promote the purpose of the Network and how the nominated Representatives can support the sector. A leaflet will be produced and circulated to stakeholders.

The Coalfield VCS Network meetings continue to be well attended and are seen as the recognised route for local organisations to receive and share information with Sunderland City Council, statutory and voluntary sector partners and each other. On average 30 – 35 people attend the meetings and over 100 are on the mailing list.

## **4. Recommendations**

### **4.1 Members are requested**

- To note the contents of the report
- To continue to support the Sector when developing and implementing actions against local priorities

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