

WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE

9th June 2016

REPORT OF WASHINGTON AREA COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORK

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the Washington Area Community and Voluntary 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 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.

3. Washington Network Annual Report

- 3.1 In Washington the VCS is made up of a wide range of organisations ranging from independent local branches of national charities through to small, totally voluntary, community groups. Collectively these organisations provide Washington residents with a wide range of local services, activities and opportunities and have a significant role within community life here. The Washington Area Network Annual Report, attached as **Annex 1**, contains a range of case studies which both demonstrate the diversity of the VCS organisations operating in Washington and the range of services and support they provide, highlighting how they make a difference to residence lives.
- 3.2 This report also contains proposals to encourage collaboration with Area Committee to deliver shared priorities. In order for the Washington Area Network to become a collaborative partnership and continue to be a sharing and supportive network and assist/contribute to delivering Sunderland City Council and Washington Area Committee priorities, the Washington Area Community Voluntary Sector Network proposes the following:
- A Washington Community Plan is developed – to include a directory/mapping of all groups and organisations re interest, service delivery, sector and geographical - in order to be able to identify collectives and groups to support re collaborative work with regards to funding opportunities, Call for Projects and a joined up partnership approach to addressing the needs of Washington residents
 - The plan will also consider capacity to deliver, support needs, and capacity to collaborate
 - The plan will also consider how to implement a buddy/mentoring system to encourage the larger groups to support some of the more able – and willing – grassroots smaller organisations.

- The plan will also request Area Committee to utilise current procedures and protocols e.g. re SIB to encourage VCS collaboration and lead re delivering or addressing Sunderland Council and Area Committee priorities etc.
- Need to recognise the level of support and/or information sharing that different groups require. Some want to attend meetings and get a lot out of them, some just want to receive information, some need to know what support is available, some want regular bulletins, need to consider targeting information etc.
- The Network suggests/requests consideration of Network Facebook/Social Media
- Embed the 'volunteering' aspect of Community Volunteer Development Officer project in any new plans and proposals

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are requested

- To note the contents of the report and consider the opportunities and issues raised by the Washington ACVSN
- To agree the proposals as detailed under paragraph 3.2 above, and the Annual Report attached as **Annex 1**

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Introduction

Since the last VCS Network annual report in March 2015 voluntary and community organisations have continued to deliver important services for local people in an ever changing environment. During this period the VCSN has provided organisations with an ongoing opportunity to come together, support one another and participate in direct dialogue with the Area Committee, the wider city council and other strategic partners about the issues that Washington faces and responses to address these.

Taking account of the differing service areas the sector operates within, the diversity of the organisations' themselves, the VCSN, in partnership with city council, has tried to develop an agenda which meets the various needs of the individual partners. It is acknowledged that the Area Committee has enhanced this process and the VCSN is grateful that members have been keen to support the sector both in joint working but, importantly, by providing the sector with financial support to develop projects which mirror the committee's priority e.g. Home from Hospital and Support to VCS projects.

A challenging and changing environment for the VCS to operating within

The VCS in Washington, similarly to most areas of the city, operates in a changing and challenging environment. Whilst this has, to a degree, always been the case, and as a result organisations' have coped well with this, recent welfare benefit changes, reductions in local authority budgets and general pressure upon some service areas are creating ongoing challenges to which the sector will need to respond to.

As part of the process of operating within the current and future environment the VCSN, in line with Area Committee funding conditions, has strongly advocated a more collaborative approach. Whilst this has been a constant feature of localised partnership activity, the VCSN has identified this as an area of potential development. With this in mind, there has been an increase in the levels of collaborative bidding and subsequent working.

The smaller, volunteer lead organisations, are also adapting to the changing environment. The VCSN is currently in the process of supporting smaller groups to work in partnership with the organisations with more capacity both in terms of representation in joint bidding and delivery and ongoing support.

Washington VCS – bringing added value

As mentioned earlier the VCS in Washington is a fundamental part of the overall service provision offer to the residents of the town. Whether they are independent charities, the local branches of large national charities, or the small, very local, volunteer lead groups, Washington benefits significantly from the high quality services delivered, the external funding they attract and the opportunities they bring not only to their customers/services users but the many volunteers that they contain, and support.

The VCSN plays a pivotal role in supporting the sector by providing a local opportunity for groups and organisations to come together and provide a structure for the city council and sector to develop responses and strategies to address the issues which impact upon residents. It is acknowledged that by working in this way, the council is better placed to address issues within a partnership model as the local VCS has a wide range of skills and experiences that are not contained within the local authority.

The VCSN has identified the need to better involve the smaller, volunteer lead groups, not only within the activity of the network but also in the delivery of collective responses. By adopting this approach the sector becomes stronger generally and, importantly, the smaller groups, which are often the providers of direct services to those most in need, are made more sustainable. Therefore, to ensure that the sector is placed in the strongest position to bring its unique added value to the wider service offer, the Network will consider moving forward how best communications etc. between all VCS organisations in the future. We do however recognise that not all groups will want to be involved but the VCS representatives are keen to ensure that all groups get the opportunity to be involved if they wish to do so.

During the past year the VCS organisations operating within Washington have brought 10s of thousands of pounds of external grant aid into the town and this is now helping the sector deliver either their holistic services or bespoke projects. It is acknowledged that in the future the sector will need to generally maintain – if not increase, this level of support with the smaller groups striving to be less dependent upon council support.

Some examples of the different ways the VCS delivers in Washington

Members may recall that in the last annual report the VCSN provided a wide range of examples which demonstrated the depth and breadth of the activity of VCS organisations delivering in Washington. Whilst the network has chosen not to take the same approach this year, members can be assured that the same levels, if not higher, of service delivery by VCS organisations in Washington continues.

The following examples, whilst representing only a very small amount of the activity of the VCS in Washington, do provide an insight into Area Committee supported projects.

Individual Service specific

Bike Project – Washington Mind Case study

Marilyn is an over 60s cyclist and joined our cycle rides around Sept 2015, Marilyn has been taking part in our rides every week and has spoken how her fitness has grown and her confidence she expresses how much her mental health has improved and says that she feels like a different lady during and after her weekly cycle rides.

Marilyn comments on the fact that her family have noticed a difference in her and how happy she seems since joining the cycle rides

Information Management and co-ordination within sector

Washington Way to Wellbeing

Case study from Rest and Relaxation Complementary therapies

I received the information about the Washington Way to Wellbeing via a member of the Washington Mind staff. The application form was straight forward, easy to understand and didn't take long to complete. As part of the process, I was encouraged to add my organisational information onto www.wellbeinginfo.org which is a great FREE way of promoting my services to a wider audience.

I was awarded the charter mark and received a lovely certificate for my wall, which is noticed by customers to the spa.

Since being awarded the charter mark I receive information and links to resources from Washington Mind, under the Washington Way to Wellbeing, to local and national health campaigns. This is really useful to me and my clients.

Collaborative Working

The VCS in Washington has a long established record of working in a collaborative way. However, it is acknowledged that this is a model of service delivery which could be increased. Mirroring one of the area committee's priority areas five local VCS organisations developed a request for funding to address the levels of repeat hospital admissions by providing, in partnership, social services which seek to reduce isolation and address none health related issues.

The Home from Hospital Project is a partnership working and bidding relationship between The Millennium Centre, Springwell Village Community Venue, Washington Trust, Washington MIND and Easington Lane Community Access Point.

By working in this collaborative way, the project outputs will be significantly higher than would be the case within a single provider delivery model. Additionally, such a delivery process is more cost effective and, importantly, smaller organisations that would not have the capacity to deliver the total project are able to contribute to the overall project outputs. This approach increases their experience and, of course, their income levels which contributes to their overall sustainability.

Consortium working

Keep Washington Tidy (KWT) is a consortium of small local groups, collectives of volunteers and individuals who have an interest in the Washington environment and, in particular, litter and other related forms of environmental anti-social issues.

KWT is supported by the Washington Trust, Washington elected members, Gentoo, Northumbria Police, ASDA and Sunderland City Council.

The aim of KWT is to provide volunteers who are predominately interested in litter picking and the removal of fly-tipping with support, encouragement, access to partners, access to practical support such as equipment and an opportunity to come together so that they can provide one another with advice and share their experiences. KWT has supported over 80 volunteers to deliver numerous community litter picks and other community events which seek to improve the local environment.

The obvious temptation to turn KWT into a formal community group has been avoided as by using an innovative support model volunteers receive the support and assistance they need to deliver their primary activity (litter removal) without the requirement to create formal governance arrangements and the associated structures and processes.

KWT is seen as a slightly different way of working which is extremely reflective of the challenges that communities will face as a result of budget reductions which the city council and other local partners will have to implement in the future. KWT isn't a replacement for council services; instead it seeks to work in partnership with the local authority and bring extra value to the local environmental offer.

It should be made clear that many of the small groups which form KWT were involved in environmental voluntary activity before this project was launched. Equally, they would

continue to function without the support the project offers. However, this would be undertaken in an uncoordinated way, economies of scale would be lost, the attempts to raise public awareness of local environmental issues would be far less successful and the current growth in volunteer numbers would be reduced. Collectively, in the past year, KWT volunteers have collected over 1000 black sacks of litter from streets and open spaces in Washington.

Looking forward as well as back

Much of this document seeks to up-date the area committee regarding the ongoing significant added value VCS organisation, large and small, bring to Washington. Individually all organisations have their own plans for how they will continue to deliver, and grow, their specific services. Equally, in this regard, the Washington CVS is no different and currently the network is considering how it will meet the challenges it will face in the light of the challenging financial environment both its composite members and partners will face. Like any organisation the network needs to continuously develop and adapt to the environment in which it functions.

Next Steps

In order for the Washington Area Network to become a collaborative partnership and continue to be a sharing and supportive network and assist/contribute to delivering Sunderland City Council and Washington Area Committee priorities, the Washington Area Community Voluntary Sector Network proposes the following:

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Conclusion

The VCS in Washington has a range of strengths which support the priorities of the area committee. The sector delivers a wide range of services and activities to a wide range of individuals, many of which come from hard to reach groups. As other sectors reduce services in some areas the VCS is experiencing additional demand which creates pressure upon its resources.

Voluntary services within Washington support high numbers of volunteers and provide them with experiences which could not be found outside of the VCS. Often these volunteers are able to access high quality training which, along with their service delivery experience, place them in a stronger position to move onto paid employment with many volunteers becoming paid staff in the organisations they support.

The Washington VCSN Representatives acknowledge that they can only represent the sector with the ongoing support and experiences of the organisations which form the network. Therefore it is crucial that the network continues to grow in terms of attendance at its meetings to ensure that the many different views, unique experiences and ideas of the sector are fed into consultations etc.

Finally, more information about the work of the VCSN and the role of the representatives can be found at <http://www.wellbeinginfo.org/voluntary-sector-networks>