

28 September 2022

Coalfields Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Network Report

The Coalfields VCS Network have met on 3 occasions since the last Coalfields Area Committee. The meetings have taken place at Easington Lane Community Access Point and have been well attended. The meetings have been chaired by Councillor Julianna Heron and have been co-chaired by the Coalfields VCS Representatives.

The network has welcomed several speakers at the meetings.

7th June 2022

Presentations delivered as follows:

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – James Garland and Alison Copsey gave a presentation to the group on the UKSP and Multiply funds.

5th July 2022

Presentations delivered as follows:

Weedkilling Pilot – Gabby Campbell, Sunderland City Council

Holiday Activities for Children and Young People – Organisations successful with the NF funded projects provided an update of activities available for children and young people over the school holidays.

6th September 2022

Presentations delivered as follows:

Stop The Loan Sharks – Laura Mawson, England Illegal Money Lending Team gave a presentation to the group on the impact of loan sharks and training opportunities available.

Sunderland City Council, Social Value, Grants & Support – Helen Peverley Area Arrangements Strategic Manager gave a presentation on social prescribing and future grant opportunities.

Community Chest – Pauline Hopper, Sunderland City Council Area Community Development Lead (Coalfields) gave a presentation on the Community Chest online application.

Sunderland VCS Alliance Update

The Sunderland VCS Alliance is progressing with its move to become independent from Sunderland City Council as a Charity/charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) which will take 4/6 months to be established. A proposed staffing structure has been presented to the strategic board for consideration and two Funding and Contract Officer Posts will be advertised. The Sunderland VCS Alliance has recently appointed a Business Support Officer. The Sunderland VCS Alliance will continue to support to grow the capacity of the VCS sector and Sandra Stephenson (Coalfields Area Community Support Worker) continues to support local groups.

The Sunderland VCS Alliance website will include a membership only area, where groups will be able to access fact sheets, FAQ's etc.

The Coalfields VCS network continues to be well attended with approximately 35 groups regularly taking part in meetings. The information share agenda item always provides a lot of information to the groups attending and often provokes discussions about issues/challenges residents in the Coalfields Locality are facing.

During these discussions we have identified that the holiday activities for children and young people have prevented holiday hunger and that in some sessions we had families turning up, who weren't the correct age to access activities, so their child could be fed as they were struggling. Staff handled the situation sensitively and provided a packed lunch for these children and signposted families to local food banks and for welfare support/household fund.

All organisations are concerned about the cost-of-living crisis and how this will impact on residents and in some cases the increased cost of utility bills for VCS organisations.

The Coalfields VCS network would like to take this opportunity to thank Sunderland City Council – Coalfields Area Committee for their ongoing support and providing funding opportunities for local VCS groups and organisations.

VCS Representatives to Area Committee

Wendy Cook

Amy Watson

Emerly Christie

Eileen Bewick