

9 March 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 twice since the last Area Committee in December 2015.

3.1 January 2016

Devolution/Combined Authority

The Deputy Leader of Sunderland City Council, Cllr Harry Trueman, gave a presentation regarding the Combined Authority. The North East Combined Authority (NECA) comprising Durham, Northumberland and the five Tyne & Wear councils - was formed in April 2014 to drive economic growth in the area.

In exchange for devolved powers and funds, Government requires an Elected Mayor to be established. The Mayor would be elected in 2017 and chair a Cabinet (of the Combined Authority) made up of the constituent council leaders. The Cabinet would make decisions about spending on the issues and functions within the Combined Authority's remit

Cllr Trueman asked for feedback and views from people within the voluntary sector as it is one of the most important sectors.

Universal Credit

Information regarding Universal Credit was circulated to the group and a brief discussion took place regarding what the changes mean for local people. Issues were also raised regarding other benefits/issues and the effects of sanctioning on individuals and families. Members felt it would be helpful to find out what support was available to understand this and other welfare issues. Network members requested that the Welfare Rights team from Sunderland City Council, and the benefits advice service from ShARP attend the next meeting to inform members about the services they provide.

February 2016

Coalfield Summer Activity Programme

Members of the Network discussed a programme of activity over the summer months from June to September 2016. Ideas included:

- Outdoor and healthy play/activities
- Healthy cooking/eating activities to provide meals during school holidays
- Celebration events and street parties to mark the Queen's Birthday
- 2016 Olympics and Paralympics themed activities

Network members proposed that there would be two ways to deliver the programme, giving all groups and partners the opportunity to become involved. If funding should be made available, the three VCS representatives will co-ordinate and manage a programme of activity, with the support of the Area Community Officer. Further information is contained within the finance report at Item 6.

Welfare and Benefits Advice in Coalfield Area

Colleagues from ShARP and Sunderland City Council Benefits Advice team attended the February meeting to discuss what support is available in the Coalfield area.

ShARP provide 1st tier welfare advice and can be contacted to offer information, advice and guidance on all welfare or finance related issues. They have begun to deliver in a number of local settings, including foodbanks. Clients can access face to face or telephone appointments in a range of locations. Help with budgeting or savings can also be given. A new service is providing advice in GP surgeries with effect from April 2016.

Sunderland City Council Welfare Rights Officers work closely with ShARP and can offer support to help residents to receive their correct benefits entitlements, receive assistance with benefits and other support before starting work and while working, challenge benefit decisions through mandatory reconsiderations and tribunal appeals, representation at Employment Tribunals and also deal with debt problems

Mining Heritage Programme

The mining heritage workshops, arranged as part of this project have generated lots of interest from local groups/residents. Network members were offered the opportunity to take part in developing the sculpture being created as part of this work. A total of 17 workshops are taking place across groups of all ages.

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
- To consider the proposal for Summer Activity Programme

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