

24th March 2022

REPORT OF NORTH AREA VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR NETWORK

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the North 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 North 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 North VCS Network is made up of over 100 local groups and strategic local/national/regional partners. The network meets on a regular basis in order to share good practice, support one another and receives regularly updates as part of an information share e bulletin.

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

- 3.1 The North VCS Network met via Microsoft TEAMS in June, July, September, October and December 2021 and in person in March 2022.
- 3.2 The meetings have included the following agenda items:
- Community Wealth Strategy and VCS Alliance Update
 - North Community Support Worker Introduction
 - Digital Employment Tool
 - Energising Sunderland Project
 - Sunshine Cooperative – CLLD Update
 - Sunderland Community Action Group – CLLD Update
 - IAPT Awareness Update
 - North Community Hub Update
 - Love Amelia
 - Home Group Service
 - National Building Society – Support to Young People
 - Kooth Service
 - North Youth Offer
 - Southwick Village Green Preservation Society
 - Crowdfund Sunderland
 - VCS Alliance Support and Structure
 - Networking and Information Share Opportunities
- 3.3 Regular funding bulletins are provided to the Network to ensure VCS organisations are kept informed of funding opportunities available.

- 3.4 Consultation was held with North VCS Youth groups regarding the services and activities they delivered and what activities young people wanted to access, a video was produced presented to the February Neighbourhood and Community Board attended by representatives of youth groups and young people.
- 3.5 A collaboration of North Area VCS groups came together to submit an application to Community Resilience for Targeted Covid Community Champions Project. This application was successful and the partnership is working well ensuring those important Covid messages are reaching residents from the North Area.
- 3.6 Organisations from across the Network are beginning to deliver more of their much needed services as restrictions change. Activity programmes continue to look very different to ensure organisations are working within government guidelines to keep everyone safe by respecting social distancing and implementing rigorous hygiene procedures.
- 3.7 Following significant consultation with the Area Voluntary and Community Sector Networks, a Sunderland VCS Alliance has been formed to support a strong, vibrant, and accessible VCS which both influences and supports delivery of key services in the city. The Alliance is sector-led through the five Area VCS Networks and financially supported by Sunderland City Council, Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group and Gentoo, alongside external funding secured via the ESIF Community Led Local Development Programme. The Alliance is building upon the importance and strengths of area-based VCS structures and networks, increasing capacity in the sector wherever possible, to support the delivery of the ambitions of the Sunderland City Plan, Neighbourhood Investment Plans, Sunderland Community Wealth Building Strategy and the Community Led Local Development Strategy.

The VCS across Sunderland have worked tirelessly for decades and particularly throughout the pandemic, the VCS Alliance is committed to working hard to ensure the VCS is supported and strengthened over the coming years, working with other Anchor Institutions across the city.

The strategic aim of the Alliance is to develop a VCS Strategy and Delivery plan which results in significant investment for the sector. The Alliance has already worked hard to submit a funding application to the UK Community Renewal Fund, growing volunteering and work placement opportunities across the sector.

The Alliance will ensure the VCS has a strategic voice in the city to inform the design, implementation and delivery of services including commissioning opportunities of those partner organisations to support delivery of the City Plan, Neighbourhood Investment Plans and Community Wealth building Priorities.

The Sunderland VCS Alliance website can be located here: [Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance - Sunderland City Council](#) where you can read the VCS Alliance Delivery Plan, minutes of meetings, meet the team and access information, advice and resources.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are requested

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

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