EAST SUNDERLAND AREA COMMITTEE **Item 3 (a)**

7 APRIL 2014

REPORT OF THE EAST VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) AREA NETWORK ANNUAL REPORT 2013 / 2014

1.   Purpose of the Report

1.1   The report provides Committee with an annual report (Annex 1) on the activities of the East Area VCS Network during 2013 / 2014.

2.   Background

2.1   To develop the capacity and influence of the 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   East Area VCS Network delegates will present an annual report (as this is the last meeting of the municipal year) to the Area Committee meeting informing Members of activity, progress, issues and concerns of the sector.

3.   Recommendation

3.1   Members are requested:-
         (a) To note the contents of the annual report submitted by the East Area VCS Network.

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East VCS Area Network Annual Report 2013 / 2014

The East VCS Area Network has hosted nine meetings during 2013 / 2014, with over 70 organisations being represented at the monthly meetings.

Throughout the year the East VCS Area Network has been on a journey of change. The East Network is unique, in that it accommodates it's meetings in partnership with the East Sunderland Area Forum. To help members understand the difference between the role of the Area Forum and the VCS Area Network a workshop was held to allow the three VCS representatives and Area Chair to understand why organisations attend the Network, and want they wanted to gain from the Area Network. The feedback led to a number of improvements being made, which have included:

1) E-Bulletin Service

To strengthen the flow of information shared across the Network membership, an e-bulletin service was established in September 2013. The bulletin shares information with approximately 180 community contacts in the East. Information distributed promotes local events, employment, training and funding opportunities, and key messages from the East Area Committee and Council.

2) Forward Plan

A forward plan was established and shared with the Network, which indicates the Area Committee priorities, and how these feed into the Area Boards along with key dates. This enabled the Network to organise and plan their agendas to complement the work of the Area Committee to ensure that the relevant priorities or services where discussed at the Network to enable the delegates to feed issues / suggestions into the Area Committee or Area Boards, where applicable, and represent the views of the sector.

3) East Sunderland Area Forum

Network representatives and East Area Forum's management committee have been working together to reduce confusion between the two 'bodies', and align processes to make future meetings of the Network work better for attendees and the membership. This will see improvements being made to the running of the meetings including a new look agenda, opening up the membership of the Network and one Chair throughout the meeting. Work has been on-going to refresh the terms of reference for the Network to make them fit for purpose and inform the city wide approach being developed as part of the VCS Relationship Transition Project.

4) Community News

East Network organisations have shared their good news stories and services throughout the year in East Community News. This has established a mechanism enabling VCS organisations to promote their services to local residents, raising awareness of provision in wards.

5) Funding

To promote access to funding opportunities in the East (e.g. SITA and Community First) information has been shared via the e-bulletin service and at a monthly meeting on external funding. All Community First panel leads are members of the Network and opportunities to access the funding has regularly been circulated around the area which has assisted panels in terms of receiving applications for the funding available.

6) Supporting Delivery of Area Committee Priorities

To encourage the Network membership to participate in the delivery of Area Committee priorities, a matrix was circulated to the full membership. The matrix asked the organisations to express their interest against each area priority or SIB funded project. This resulted in the Network being able to organise task groups, as and when needed, to support area arrangements and deliver positive actions against the East work plan. This has involved:-

i) Supporting the better than basic signage project for the coastal path, by hosting a working group which has feed into the East Place Board, held public consultation events, as well as working with local primary schools to design historical circular walks around Hendon and Ryhope to promote the signage project, connecting the community to the coast, and vice versa.

ii) Gateway I: Improving the visual appearance of the main roads leading into the City Centre, the Network organisations were consulted on proposed plans for Hylton Road and the roundabouts at Ryhope, which was fed into the East Place Board to help inform thinking around the future art features in the neighbourhoods.

iii) Gateway II: Improving the visual appearance of the shopping centres across the East area by Network organisations being commissioned to completed surveys with local traders to establish their perceptions of the environmental characteristics of the centres, as well as, their top three priorities to address. The Network organisations, then worked alongside Place Board Councillors to deliver workshops for each shopping centre, feeding back survey results to those who participated. The survey and workshops have informed the schedule of works which will see improvements made to road markings, street furniture and shops fronts.

iv) Walk and Talk / Love Where You Live Programme, over 25 Network organisations expressed an interest in participating in the programme, working alongside local Councillors and the community to deliver position action across communities.

v) Supporting the transformation of adult social care, the Network supported a mapping exercise of service provision for older people. The information gained has been fed into the online directory, which will not only promote local services but will assist the Council to identify gaps in service provision.

7) Guest Speakers

14 guest speakers have attended the Network during 2013 / 2014, delivering talks on a variety of subjects, for instance:-

Changes to Library Services: The Council consulted and involved the Network in supporting the Council in the new way of delivering library services. This resulted in the Network organisations working with local Councillors to establish book clubs, community book reservation scheme and implement the Council's Surplus Building policy to bring empty buildings back into use.

Sport and Leisure Services: The Council delivered a presentation on how their can help sports clubs to: retain their existing members, expand and market themselves, and apply for funding, strengthening links to external funding opportunities that have been secured to improve sports facilities in East Sunderland.

Corporate Procurement: The Council encouraged the Network members to sign up to Sunderland Buy First scheme and participate in the procurement process, to enable the organisations to tender for contracts. Key messages received from the Network on the procurement processes have been relayed back into the Council to improve systems e.g. simplifying the process and paperwork and consideration of timescales to allow quality bids to be submitted.