

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023**

**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 in June, July, September, October and December 2022 and March 2023
- 3.2 The meetings have included the following agenda items:
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
  - Sunderland City Council Weedkilling Pilot
  - ICOS Employability Project
  - Kooth Update
  - Sunderland City Council Support to the Sector – Social Value, Grants and Social Prescribing
  - Area Funding and Online Application Process
  - Wearside Women in Need – Findaway Project
  - Warm Spaces Updates & Funding Opportunities
  - Learning & Skills Service Update
  - NECA
  - Digital Careers
  - Cultural Spring
  - Foundation of Light Update
  - Networking and Information Share Opportunities
- 3.4 At recent meetings the voluntary sector organisations present have raised the issues their local communities are facing with the cost of living crisis and especially those delivering warm spaces are seeing a rise in people attending and needing intensive support.

- 3.3 Regular funding bulletins are provided to the Network to ensure VCS organisations are kept informed of funding opportunities available.
- 3.4 The Network received the Area Committee Call for Projects for youth activities and applications were submitted underwent assessment and consultation and Area Committee decisions were made in July 2022 regarding the applications. All successful applicants have now received offer documentation.
- 3.4 The Network representatives regularly consult with the Network to ensure that the agenda items reflect their requirements.
- 3.5 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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