

Washington Area Committee

7th January 2010

Report of the City Services Directorate

Area Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Networks and Volunteering in Your Area.

1. Why has it come to committee?

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Area Committees of progress and proposed future development regarding the involvement and representation of the Voluntary and Community Sector [VCS] within the new Area Arrangements, enabling a more proactive level of participation in the delivery of the Local Area Plans.
- 1.2 This report will also inform Area Committees of the intention to celebrate the contribution of volunteers within each of the five areas of the City and to seek feedback from Committee on arrangements for area based celebrations

2. Background

- 2.1 VCS organisations provide an important route for individuals to become actively involved in their communities. This ranges from helping out with the local youth club to being a member of the Management Committee of the local Community Association. This results in more empowered and involved citizens who are contributing to the aims of the Sunderland Strategy, LAA and Local Area Plans.
- 2.2 Sunderland Community Network [SCN] is the vehicle for representation of the VCS to the Sunderland Partnership and, in the 2009 – 2013 Business Plan is seeking to engage smaller community based organisations. This aligns with the City Council's Area Arrangements which seek to involve local communities.
- 2.3 In order to achieve an environment where local people feel that they are able to have a say in decision making (NI 4) and where our local VCS organisations are thriving and vibrant (NI 7) the City Council, in partnership with SCN, has developed the Area VCS Networks.
- 2.4 Sunderland City Council is also committed to increasing levels of volunteering in the city (NI 6) by encouraging residents to become involved in volunteering opportunities both within the statutory and VCS organisations. Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship and essential to democracy, as recognised in the Sunderland Compact Volunteering Code of Practice. This commitment is recognised by Elected Members at Ward, Area, and at a City Wide level.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 The Vice Chairs of all five Area Committees have agreed to co chair the inaugural Area VCS Networks with a nominated VCS representative. The networks will be unique as they will be made up of VCS organisations operating within the five distinct areas.

- 3.2 Area VCS Networks will be established following a series of inaugural meetings throughout all five areas in December 2009. The Area VCS Networks have been invited to nominate three individuals to represent the sector at area committee level, this will include the VCS vice chair of the Area VCS Network. City Services (Community Development function) will administer the nomination process. SCN will ensure individuals from the organisations are supported to take their place on the three agreed VCS places on Area Committees.
- 3.3 Nominated individuals will represent the views of the VCS within their areas (rather than their own organisational interests) thus providing an opportunity for all VCS organisations within the areas to have a nominated and supported representative at Area Committee.
- 3.4 The Council will support the Area VCS Networks by officer involvement from the Council's Community Development function; this involves a dedicated Area Community Coordinator for each of the five areas of the City. This role is distinctly different to the role of the Area Officers, based in the Office of the Chief Executive. The Area Officers will continue to support Area Committees however the two council functions will be complementary as in the first instance the Area Community Coordinator in the Community Development function will ensure VCS organisations are supported to become involved in the Area Committees and associated Local Area Plan delivery arrangements.
- 3.5 Sunderland City Council and partner organisations from the Sunderland Partnership co-ordinate and fund an Annual Volunteer Celebration hosted by the Mayor of Sunderland at the Seaburn Marriott Hotel in National Volunteers Week [June 1st to 7th]
- 3.6 To complement the annual volunteer event in 2010, it is proposed that area based celebrations are also held to ensure as many volunteers across the city are recognised for their contribution. The area based celebrations will be co-ordinated through the Area Committee process and held prior to the annual city wide celebration at the Seaburn Marriott Hotel. This will provide an opportunity for the Area Committees to thank volunteers for the invaluable contribution they make to their area.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 To note this report as an update on the position of the Area VCS Networks and provide feedback in relation to the area based Volunteer celebrations.

5. Background papers

- 5.1 None

6. Contact Officer:

- 6.1 Jane Hibberd, Assistant Head of Service (Community Development)
Tel 561 4587 jane.hibberd@sunderland.gov.uk