

25th March 2021

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.

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

- 3.1 The North VCS Network met via Microsoft TEAMS in December 2020 and March 2021. The Network has kept in regular contact sharing information and ideas.
- 3.2 The meetings included the following agenda items:
- Benefit/Debt/Advice Support Service – Pallion Action Group
 - North VCS Network Representation Selection Process
 - Moneywise Credit Union
 - SARA Project Update
 - Census Engagement Update
 - Networking and Information Share Opportunities
- 3.3 Regular funding bulletins have been provided to the Network to ensure VCS organisations are kept informed of funding opportunities available.
- 3.4 Winter COVID funding opportunity was circulated to the Network in November with an invite for VCS organisations to apply for funding to deliver support linked to the North Community Hub supporting residents to have a fantastic, safe and healthy Christmas as well as ensuring their general health and spirits are uplifted during Winter.
- 3.5 Mental Health & Wellbeing funding opportunity was circulated to the Network in February with an invite for VCS organisations to apply for funding to deliver to 2 Themes:
- Theme 1 – COVID-19 Young People Mental Health and Wellbeing Support
 - Theme 2 – COVID-19 Mental Health and Wellbeing Support
- 3.6 The North VCS Network became galvanised within days after the lock down was declared and transformed their services to ensure they continued to support those in need from across the North. Whilst many centres had to close services continued to be delivered but in different ways. Examples include food parcel delivery and collection points, activity

packs, on-line exercise sessions, cookery, quizzes, craft activities and training on social media.

- 3.7 Southwick Neighbourhood Youth Project, Sunderland Community Action Group, Sunderland North Community Business Centre and Friends of Fulwell as leads of the North Raising Aspiration Projects worked with the Council, CCG, Gentoo and resident volunteers to provide support for shopping, prescription pick-ups, befriending, dog walking and many more services for the North Community Hub. Hundreds of residents across the North have been supported, the network strengthened and identified what strong communities we have.
- 3.8 A key element of the Community Hub work was also asking local residents if they would be willing to volunteer to support the Hubs and be matched to residents. Due to the overwhelming support there are now many local residents registered on the volunteer platform willing to continue to support and volunteer within communities post COVID. Therefore the North VCS Network members were contacted to identify any volunteering opportunities they may have and the barriers to them supporting volunteers. These opportunities have been developed into a booklet which has had successful wide promotion to the registered volunteers with VCS organisations advising they are receiving requests to volunteer and support their projects.
- 3.9 As COVID-19 restrictions regularly change VCS organisations are advised to keep up to date via the Government website and VCS organisations from across the network share ideas on how they can re-open safely and offer services and activities to our communities within the restrictions. It is expected that activity programmes will look very different to previous years as the need to work within guidelines and restrictions are followed whilst respecting social distancing and implementing rigorous hygiene procedures.
- 3.10 Sunderland City Council in its continued commitment to support a thriving VCS in the city seeks to bring additional capacity to the sector through the recruitment of 5 Community Support Workers.

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.

Contact: Ruth Oxley, Area Network Representative.
Email: ruth@snyp.co.uk
Richy Duggan, Area network Representative
Email: sunderlandcommunityactiongroup@hotmail.com
Peter Curtis, Area Network Representative
Email: peter@northeastssport.co.uk