

WASHINGTON AREA COMMITTEE
15th June 2017

REPORT OF WASHINGTON AREA COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORK

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The report provides an update with regard to the Washington Area Community and Voluntary 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 and reporting back, providing a two-way flow of communication.
- 2.2 Washington Area Network delegates will present a report to each Area Committee meeting informing Members of activity, progress, issues and concerns of the sector.

3. Washington Network

- 3.1 In Washington the VCS is made up of a wide range of organisations ranging from independent local branches of national charities through to small, totally voluntary, community groups. Collectively these organisations provide Washington residents with a wide range of local services, activities and opportunities and have a significant role within community life here.
- 3.2 At the last meeting the Area Committee supported the Network in encouraging collaboration with Area Committee to deliver shared priorities, and recognised capacity issues and the need for statutory partners to support the sector.
- 3.3 The Washington Network's Annual Report was presented at the last Area Committee in March. It has been circulated to all Network members. The key points of the report remain a focus going forward for the sector:
- The challenging and rapidly changing environment – budget reductions across the board, service reconfiguration, greater levels of competition for grants and other funding, higher operating costs and increasing administration requirements all of which contribute to the range of challenges VCSOs face on a daily basis.
 - The VCS in Washington has a long and successful history of working with its public and statutory partners. For these relationships to continue to flourish going forward, each individual partner will need to understand, perhaps more than in the past, how their activity positively and less positively impacts upon the other.
 - Concern from VCS organisations that there is a wider perception that the voluntary sector is somehow able to fill the gaps left by other partner service withdrawals or reductions. The expectation of VCS capacity needs to be kept realistic.
 - The VCS in Washington significantly contributes to Area Committee priorities both in terms of its own day-to-day service delivery and by work funded by the Area Committee either to individual projects and, increasingly, collaborative funding of partnership activity. The clear link between area priorities and Area Committee funding opportunities is very much welcomed by the sector and it is hoped that such an approach will continue. However, the sector recognises it is short-sighted to concentrate only upon Area Committee funding and alternative funding streams will need to be identified and pursued.
 - The VCS in Washington has a long history of working together though it is accepted that the smaller local groups have less experience of this approach. The sector has embraced the Area Committee's desire to encourage and support collaborative working. It has been demonstrated that even the most collaboratively focused work

requires a lead agent to be in place. The degree of collaboration work will vary upon the nature and focus of the work, time restraints and number of partners involved.

- The increase in collaborative working has achieved a range of benefits for both the sector and the Area Committee - collaborative bidding reduces competition and the associated administration that multiple applications would require and allows projects to be delivered by collectives which individual VCS organisations could not deliver in isolation. There is also a need to develop an increase in collaborative bids to external funders which build upon the experiences of the bids to the Area Committee. Finally, collaborative bidding and project delivery in Washington has supported the inclusion of smaller organisations which have benefitted from working in partnership with bigger VCSOs's.
- The Washington Area Network is an important mechanism for communication, joint planning, consultation and joint work between the local authority and local VCS. However, there are other significant partners delivering within Washington whose links to the network need to be improved so that they too are able to work in a more joined up way. Therefore, it is hoped that during the next 12 months' work is undertaken to improve the links between the Washington Area Network and the wider state and statutory sector.
- Caution is required regarding the perceived capacity of the sector as there is a growing feeling that there is an assumption that service gaps created by the budget reductions of other partners will be filled by the sector. Therefore, managing expectation appropriately is an important process for the Network to continue to advocate.

3.4 The Washington Community Plan is being developed and progress against two key priorities is as follows:

- Volunteer Plan for Washington. Partners have met and agreed to support the development of a shared approach to volunteer support and co-ordination, had met. The focus is on 5 key aims:

- Taking stock of volunteering in Washington – lots going on
- Sharing best practice
- Exploring economies of scale
- Need to support the smaller grass roots organisations and groups
- To inform the wider audience via the area Network.

The group remains open to other organisations joining and is keen to contribute to working and exploring economies of scale as a priority – as an example explore options for joint training budgets and programmes for all volunteers.

- Washington Partnership. Active partners have established a collaborative partnership group and have indicated a commitment to work together to take forward both shared priorities of the sector and the Area Committee priorities. Key priorities identified for the sector are support for volunteering, skills and employment, health and well being and NEETs. The group agreed future meeting would be on a needs basis as and when opportunities for collaborative bids etc. were identified. Opportunities to develop a collaborative bid approach for Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding (European funding) are being discussed.

3.5 Area Committee is also asked to note the appointment of a new Area Network Representative. Following the resignation of John Rostron, Jemma Amer was duly appointed at the last meeting. The Network noted John's contribution and thanked him for all his hard work on behalf of the sector.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Members are requested

- To note the contents of the report and consider the opportunities and issues raised by the Washington ACVSN

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