

16 JUNE 2021

REPORT OF WEST AREA VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR NETWORK**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The report provides an update with regards to the West 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 are in place 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 West 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 West VCS Network is made up of over 70 local groups, as well as strategic local/national/regional partners. The network meets in the West on a regular basis to share good practice and support one another. The network feeds into a virtual network and feed into and receives weekly updates as part of an information share.

3. West Area Voluntary and Community Sector Network (AVCSN) Progress Report

- 3.1 The West VCS Network met virtually Wednesday 19th May 2021. At The meeting the network welcomed presentations on the Good Vibes and West Area Youth Activities project and the West Improve Digital Skills project. An update was also provided on the VCSE Alliance with progress to date and next steps.
- 3.3 A collaboration of West Area VCS groups came together to submit an application to Community Resilience for Targeted Covid Community Champions project. This application was successful and the partnership is working well ensuring those important covid messages are reaching residents from the West Area.
- 3.4 June is the Month of Community to celebrate community connections and get to know each other a little better. A collaboration of West Area VCS groups are coming together to deliver a range of activities throughout June which includes the BIG Lunch.
- 3.5 Organisations from across the network are starting to deliver more of their much needed services as restrictions start to ease further. Activity programs still continue to look very different to ensure organisations are working within government guidelines to keep everyone safe by respecting social distancing and implementing rigorous hygiene procedures.
- 3.6 Community Chest and Walk and Talk budgets have supported the VCS to deliver activities and support to residents across the West.
- 3.7 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 <https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/18424/Sunderland-Voluntary-Sector-Alliance> where you can read the VCS Alliance Delivery Plan, minutes of meetings, meet the team and access information, advice and resources.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Members are requested to note the content of this report.

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