

CABINET MEETING – 13th July 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report: Partnership working with the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance

Author(s): Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities

Purpose of Report:

To receive an update on the Sunderland Voluntary Community Sector Alliance (“the Alliance”) and to approve future partnership working between the Council and the Alliance.

Description of Decision:

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the progress to date in relation to the establishment and operation of the Alliance within Sunderland;
2. Authorise the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Vibrant City and the Director of Finance, to take all necessary action to support the transition of the Alliance to an independent Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO); and
3. Authorise the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Vibrant City and the Director of Finance, to agree and implement the detailed terms of a partnership and funding agreement with the Alliance.

Is the decision consistent with the Budget/Policy Framework? ***Yes**

If not, Council approval is required to change the Budget/Policy Framework

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

The proposal will continue to maximise the support and capacity of the voluntary sector in Sunderland by collaborative working with the Alliance.

The Council and wider partners aim to develop place-based services and area-based initiatives and the success of this will be built on the skills and strength of our voluntary and community sector (“VCS”) partners supported through the Alliance, so this report formalises future arrangements for collaboration and joint working.

A strong VCS and proactive Alliance will support and enable local outcomes for residents and contribute to outcomes and delivery within the City Plan.

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

It is recognised that having a strong and supported VCS is a key aspect of delivering successfully within communities for many locally based activities and programmes for residents for the Council and wider partners. In addition, it is considered that the Alliance

has a critical role in supporting the development of a robust VCS within the City.
Therefore, no other options are recommended.

Impacts analysed;

Equality ☒ **Privacy** ☒ **Sustainability** ☒ **Crime and Disorder** ☒

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28 day Notice of Decisions? Yes

PARTNERSHIP WORKING WITH THE SUNDERLAND VOLUNTARY SECTOR ALLIANCE

Report of Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To receive an update on the Sunderland Voluntary Community Sector Alliance ("the Alliance") and to approve future partnership working between the Council and the Alliance.

2.0 Description of Decision (Recommendations)

- 2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Note the progress to date in relation to the establishment and operation of the Alliance within Sunderland;
2. Authorise the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Vibrant City and the Director of Finance, to take all necessary action to support the transition of the Alliance to an independent Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO); and
3. Authorise the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Vibrant City and the Director of Finance, to agree and implement the detailed terms of a partnership and funding agreement with the Alliance.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In February 2020 Cabinet resolved to support the voluntary and community sector ("VCS") in Sunderland to develop an independent Alliance in partnership with other city partners. To enable this the Council entered into a partnership agreement with Gentoo and the Integrated Care Board ("ICB") to support the initial set-up of the Alliance, including the appointment by the Council of a manager and five Community Support workers on behalf of the Alliance.
- 3.2 Two-year funding was secured from the EU Community-led Local Development programme (CLLD) to deliver a community support worker project with additional match funding provided from the Council, ICB and Gentoo. The match funding covered the costs for an Alliance Manager to lead and develop a service offer as part of the development of an independent charitable organisation. The CLLD funded project came to an end in April 2023.
- 3.3 Throughout the community support worker project and creation of the independent charitable voluntary sector alliance, citywide support has been made available to over 350 organisations in Sunderland. 172 have received intensive support to develop governance and management, policies, and procedures, undertake funding searches and applications and financial planning and service development; this includes:

- 7 groups have been supported to become Charitable Incorporated Organisations
- 12 groups have become constituted and redeveloped
- 153 groups have received intensive support around service development and financial sustainability and growth

3.4 In November 2022 a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was independently developed for the Alliance and an application for charitable status was submitted to the Charity Commission. The Alliance received registration as a CIO on 24th April 2023.

3.5 This now means that the Alliance can operate independently. They will now build on the successful work of the CLLD community support worker project and continue to develop its service offer to support the sector to sustain capacity.

3.6 A key focus of the Alliance will be attracting additional funding and investment to grow the sector in line with Links for Life (formally known as social prescribing) and place-based service delivery, where meeting the gaps in service at a neighbourhood level which will benefit residents.

4.0 VCS supporting community delivering

4.1 Throughout the pandemic and more recently during the cost-of-living crisis, it has been made clear that local service delivery within communities, working collaboratively with partners including the voluntary and community sector, recognising lived experience and maximising use of community assets, is the most productive and effective way to support our residents in the city and importantly access and support some of our most vulnerable residents.

4.2 Sunderland Health and Care Alliance is supporting the development of social prescribing model for Sunderland, called 'Links for Life'. The vision for Links for Life is that residents can access support services and activities locally, within their own communities, either through self-referral or through a designated link worker. The services accessed will be delivered by a range of partners including the voluntary and community sector in partnership with statutory service providers.

4.3 The delivery of the Covid community hubs and most recently the warm and welcoming spaces, has enabled the Council to understand where the service gaps are in the city through mapping community assets and services, linked to resident needs data, drilled down to household level. Our greater understanding of community needs will inform future service and programme provision and support needs of our VCS partners.

5.0 The Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance

5.1 There is a clear aim and vision to continue to support and grow the VCS in Sunderland. There will be a key focus on enabling the sector to secure long-term sustainable income, through external investment, formal commissioning arrangements, as well as social value which supports the delivery of the city's Community Wealth Strategy. The Alliance cannot do this alone and requires the long-term commitment of the City Board partners, including the Council.

- 5.2 The VCS in Sunderland, should they want to engage with the delivery of local commissioned services, must continue to develop and be 'commission ready', with all policies and procedures in place, as may be required via Council procurement requirements and ICB regulations when bidding for public sector contracts. To ensure VCS partners understand this and requirements around it we recently held a large-scale event with the VCS partners in collaboration with the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance and other health partners.
- 5.3 The event was a huge success. The event included training workshops and discussion groups, as well as launching the commitment to support VCS in Sunderland to become registered Living Wage employers.

6.0 Area Committees

- 6.1 Area Committees support the VCS and have recently finalised their Area Plans for 2023-2026, working collaboratively with services and partners, including the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance, public and private sector. Area Committees have reviewed local data and listened to resident feedback from Community Hubs/Warm spaces and lived experiences. This has ensured that the Area Plans reflect key local priorities and help to influence the delivery of services and activities at a local level, which help residents and communities to become more resilient.
- 6.2 Area Committees work closely with the VCS organisations within their geographical localities in collaboration with the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance. Area Committees are committed to support the resilience of the sector to ensure continued delivery and enhancement of services and activities at a local level.

7.0 Partnership Agreement proposal with the Alliance

- 7.1 The Community Support Workers who were initially appointed by the Council for the community support worker project as part of the CLLD funding have now all left Council employment, following the end of their fixed term contracts. The Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance manager who was also contracted with the Council will now transfer by virtue of TUPE to the Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance now that it is legally established.
- 7.2 To ensure a robust and structured partnership between the Council and the Alliance it is proposed that a partnership agreement is developed which will operate on a non-exclusive basis. This agreement will clearly outline the respective responsibilities of each party and the public benefits and social outcomes to be delivered. Subject to the determination of existing external funding opportunities being sought by the Alliance and the respective funding contributions from other city partners, it is anticipated that the Council will provide an annual grant to the Alliance based on agreed public benefits and social outcomes.
- 7.3 The detailed terms and structure of the partnership agreement, the amount of the potential financial assistance to be provided, the relevant outcomes to be achieved and the duration of the agreement will need to be determined in due course by the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Leader, the Portfolio Holder for Vibrant City and the Finance Director. In addition, the final award of any grant funding will be subject to compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (where applicable).

- 7.4 The outcomes of the Alliance will change and flex over time as the needs of communities change and that of wider partners in the delivery of community-based services and programmes. A priority for the Council will be to ensure that outcomes align and support the delivery of the City Plan.

8.0 Reasons for the Decision

- 8.1 The proposal will continue to maximise the support and capacity of the voluntary sector in Sunderland by collaborative working with the Alliance.
- 8.2 The Council and wider partners aim to develop place-based services and area-based initiatives and the success of this will be built on the skills and strength of our VCS partners supported through the Alliance, so this report formalises future arrangements for collaboration and joint working.
- 8.3 A strong VCS and proactive Alliance will support and enable local outcomes for residents and contribute to outcomes and delivery within the City Plan.

9.0 Alternative Options

- 9.1 It is recognised that having a strong and supported VCS is a key aspect of delivering successfully within communities for many locally based activities and programmes for residents for the Council and wider partners. In addition, it is considered that the Alliance has a critical role in supporting the development of a robust VCS within the City. Therefore, no other options are recommended.

10.0 Impact Analysis

Introduction

- (a) **Equalities** – A strong VCS across the city will ensure wider and more accessible services and support for residents. Subject to Cabinet approval, a full equalities impact assessment will be undertaken in due course in relation to the detailed partnership terms.
- (c) **Sustainability** – local accessible services and support points across the city with VCS partners with digitally supported programmes will reduce travel requirements and provide more electronic service access. Future development of community assets will take account of sustainability as part of any work or improvement programmes
- (d) **Reduction of Crime and Disorder – Community Cohesion / Social Inclusion** – A strong, local and connected VCS will operate in partnership for the benefit of its community, this will improve partnership working and support the tackling of local issues including ASB and crime which residents may face in their areas.

11. Other Relevant Considerations / Consultations

(a) **Co-operative Values** – linked to the community wealth strategy, working collaboratively with the voluntary and community sector, listening to lived experience and asset-based community development etc

(b) **Financial Implications** – All financial implications will be agreed and structured within the Partnership Agreement as noted in paragraph 7.2.

Funding of the Partnership Agreement will be met from existing approved budgets and any additional secured external funding.

(c) **Risk Analysis** – There would be significant risk to the future delivery of local services and place-based initiatives without an active, strong and supported VCS

(d) **Employee Implications** – With the VS Alliance becoming independent as a CIO there will be a need to TUPE transfer of the relevant staff currently employed by the Council to the Alliance.

(e) **Legal Implications** – As set out above, the detailed terms of the partnership and funding arrangements between the Council and the Alliance will be determined in due course taking into account the factors stated above. The final award of any grant funding to the Alliance will be subject to compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

(f) **Policy Implications** – n/a

