

# Minutes

## Northumberland VCS Consortium

10.00 a.m., Thursday 24 September 2009  
Age Concern, The Round House, Ashington

### Present:

Rodney James	Chair of VCS Consortium
Bob Langley	Community Action North'land/NSP Board
Julie Dodson	VoiCeS
Charles Tremeer	Volunteering Northumberland
Moira Macfarlane	CABx
Jill Robson	Jobcentre Plus
Becca Kay	observer Jobcentre Plus
Christine Bone	GONE
Janice Rose	NCC/NSP
John Maude	North Country Leisure
David Francis	Community Action Northumberland
John McGough	NCDN/NSP Exec
Cath Carnaby	Women's Health Advisory Centre
Vanessa Proudlock	FONDT
Mike Dungworth	Community & Voluntary Action Blyth Valley/NSP Board
Peter Robinson	Church of England
Sandi Downing	Carers Northumberland
Thom Bradley	CVA Blyth Valley

### In attendance:

Neil Bennett	Capacitybuilders
George Courtice	Sector Development Officer
Lynda Watson	Contract and Compact Officer

### Apologies:

Sheila McGuckin	Wansbeck CVS
Julia Lyford	North'land Comm. Development Network
Georgie Cruddas	SixtyEightyThirty
Maria Stella	N'land Multinational & Minority Ethnic Grp
Lesley Hill	Northumbria Youth
Carol Southam	VoiCeS (substituted by Julie Dodson)
Margaret Lacey	Action for Children

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## 1. Welcome

## Actions

Rodney James welcomed those present and introductions were made.

## 2. Minutes and actions from last meeting (26 June 2009)

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true and accurate record.

### Matters arising:

As part of the county council's general review of officer engagement in partnership working, it had decided to withdraw Susi Goncu and Lynda Fakir from VCS Consortium affairs and for Janice Rose to take the lead. It was agreed that Kirsten Francis would be included in the Consortium's distribution as there would undoubtedly be those occasions where the officer responsible for the locality team and a key component of the review would make a valuable contribution to our understanding of council thinking.

There was concern that progress, albeit slow, over establishing community forums had not been sufficiently well publicised.

## 3. Update of NCC Review of relations with NCC

It was reported that the joint review group had met fortnightly over the summer months and that the next meeting was due on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Consultation with the sector would follow. A paper had been produced by Kirsten Francis which set out the framework for a common commissioning process. It was this paper which was likely to form the basis of the consultation.

Discussion surrounded a number of different elements:

- The need for the wider relationship to be included – engagement with policy framing, charging for services, rate relief etc.
- The importance of keeping the sector informed about the review and to feed information both ways. This had not worked particularly well to date. The wider sector was not being sufficiently informed of the progress of the NCC Review and that members of the group had a responsibility to disseminate information. FONDT had an item in its July newsletter and DF planned to produce an article for the forthcoming CAN News.
- The process was complicated and made more so in the absence of agreed budgets.
- There was pressure from all sides for decisions to be made by December to allow organisations sufficient time to implement changes.
- This urgency should not stop the review from looking at the longer term. It was important that the ground rules for several years ahead were agreed.
- Were other public bodies included? No, except for those services delivered by the Care Trust on behalf of NCC, but it would be relatively easy to encompass others in due course. GC to circulate the terms of reference of the review and to ensure that communication was improved.

GC

- It was important to protect smaller organisations and those services which might be in danger of being forgotten.

#### 4. Volunteer management programme

The background to the bid was explained and how two main themes evolved from the deliberations of the task group and the consultant's report: identifying and nurturing volunteer managers/coordinators for smaller orgs in rural areas and building a better understanding of safeguarding issues. CT explained that they were considering introducing an associate status for registration with lower entry hurdles. DF wondered whether the current requirements were too restrictive. The Stronger Thematic Partnership seemed a natural home to explore these issues. We were expecting to learn the outcome of the bid by the end of September.

#### 5. Consortium presence on Partnerships and other bodies

A breakdown of the current membership of the 4 Thematic Partnerships + the PIF was distributed. This identified Consortium reps as well as other members from the VCS. It was suggested that we should adopt a similar approach to the one used for identifying NSP reps but this idea was not pursued.

Stronger Communities. **It was agreed** that George Courtice should represent the Consortium and join the nine other VCS members present.

Place Shaping. **It was agreed** that GC would approach Groundwork as well as Northumberland Home Improvement Agency. **GC**

Health & Wellbeing. **It was agreed** that Cath Carnaby would continue as the Consortium's rep. Other VCS members on the partnership (Sandi Downing and Liz Prudhoe) would liaise over the nomination of a vice-chair.

Economic Prosperity. **It was agreed** that Julia Lyford would continue to represent the Consortium. It was suggested that social enterprise needed a stronger voice. The presence of both FONDT and JL was considered sufficient.

**It was agreed** that Anne Lyall would represent the Consortium on Northumberland Employability and Work Service (NEWS) and would become a member of the Consortium.

Safer Northumberland Partnership. **It was agreed** that GC would approach Georgie Cruddas of Sixtyeightythree to represent the Consortium. JR indicated that both it and Victim Support were already on the partnership. GC to explore this. **GC**

Performance and Improvement Forum. **It was agreed** that George Courtice would continue to represent the Consortium. He had been joined by Jen Hall/Rachel Turnbull from the CABx who were there in their own right.

City Region. The two focus groups – transport and employability – needed input from the VCS in Northumberland. Anne Lyall's membership was

endorsed for the employability group and LINK was considered the most appropriate network for the transport group. GC to liaise with Liz Prudhoe.

**GC**

## **6. Review of Consortium Business Plan**

GC accepted that little progress had been made on this since the last meeting but that he intended to move things forward in October. Bringing active networks together was the key if the main role of the Consortium was to be an interface between the sector and public bodies.

## **7. Reports back and updates:**

### **i) Neil Bennett, Capacitybuilders**

Neil stated that there were no issues currently arising from the Consortium's self-assessment process. Neil introduced Capacitybuilders as a non-governmental public body charged with improving the performance of delivery organisations through more effective advice and support. He ran through a number of its current programmes:

- Consortium Development Grant (funds SDO post)
- Modernisation Grant 1 (recipient Volunteering N'land)
- Modernisation Grant 2 (bursaries)
- Volunteer Management programme (awaiting decision)

Capacitybuilders has launched a new support providers' website [www.improvingsupport.org.uk](http://www.improvingsupport.org.uk) which is a repository for all kinds of useful resources. Our Consortium is required to provide information to the site via VONNE.

The Office of the Third Sector has asked for an evaluation of ChangeUp for two periods 2004-08 and 2008-11. The conclusions for the first period are about to be published.

Neil emphasised that Capacitybuilders had changed its original approach. It was now delivering directly to frontline organisations – but always made its funding support conditional on local consortia endorsing, supporting or selecting delivery agents. In this respect consortia might find that managing delivery on behalf of funders was a potential source of income contributing to their sustainability. The long term future of Capacitybuilders was more uncertain. The Conservatives have already identified it in its list of quangos to be cut.

### **ii) NSP**

DF reported from the NSP Executive. Much of this was taken up by the comprehensive area assessment of the county, led by the audit commission, which decided to include neither green nor red flags partly because of the massive changes which local government had undergone. BL reported that the cancelled Board meeting in June meant that momentum was lost in the development of the new partnership structures and had made life difficult. The review of the Sustainable Community Strategy would start soon and it was planned for many layers of contribution to be captured to ensure shared

ownership in what would be the senior strategic policy directing partnership working for the next few years.

**iii) VCS Learning Consortium**

JMcG reported that the 60 member Northumberland VCS Learning Consortium recently explored its role, purpose, governance, representation and function. In response to a comprehensive questionnaire, it received a clear mandate to continue to a second stage in its development. It has recently been successful in brokering arrangements for partners to put bids together for the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, and has been successful in winning a contract to help deliver formal and informal learning.

**iv) Sector Development Officer**

Fifteen bursaries were offered to VCS orgs interested in further collaboration or merger and it is likely that 14 will be taken up allowing each to receive £1000 worth of free advice. Round 2 of the programme is imminent.

Two important surveys were published providing a wealth of information for the VCS. A breakdown of the Place Survey findings at an Area and Community forum level were soon to be available.

It is the turn of Northumberland to host the next meeting of the Regional Infrastructure Development Group (RIDG). Wednesday 4 November at 10.00 am followed by a buffet lunch at the Round House, Age Concern, Ashington. All VCS members are invited.

**All to note**

**v) Compact Developments**

The National consultation 'Refreshing the Compact' runs until 12 October 2009. A VCS event had been held on 16<sup>th</sup> September and a response had been drafted, to be circulated.

Although the NCC Review of the Third Sector had to date been focused on grant funding, discussion would move on to Commissioning and procurement issues probably at the turn of the year. In preparation for this I would like to gather illustrations of experiences VCS organisations have had. If necessary they can remain anonymous. Please get in touch [lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:lyndawatson@ca-north.org.uk)

**All to note**

**vi) Personalisation of services**

The meeting briefly discussed the likely impact of this policy change on the sector and the communities it serves. It was agreed that Lynda Watson liaises with Sandi Downing to produce an article for wide dissemination outlining how the changes might affect users and the sector. The meeting was reminded that, although much of the information related to adults, the impact was likely to affect children and young people as well. It was agreed to invite Fiona Horsman or Sue Marrs from the Care Trust to our next Consortium meeting.

**LW/SD**

**GC**

**vii) Becca Kay from the Jobcentre Plus introduced herself as new to her post and explained that she would be working closely with the VCS.**

**The next meeting will be held on 18 December at St James Centre, Alnwick. 10.00am.**

**All to note**