

Minutes

Northumberland VCS Consortium

1.30pm, Thursday 23 April 2009
St James' Church Hall, Alnwick

Present:

Rodney James (Chair)	Chair of VCS Consortium
George Courtice	Sector Development Officer
Thom Bradley	CVA Blyth Valley
Susi Goncu	Northumberland County Council
Lynda Fakir	Northumberland County Council
Jill Robson	Jobcentre Plus
Charles Tremeer	Volunteering Northumberland
Christine Bone	GONE
Cath Carnaby	Women's Health Advice Centre
John Maude	North Country Leisure
Carol Southam	VoiCeS
Moira Macfarlane	Northumberland CABx
Sarah Lowes	Northumberland County Council
Julia Lyford	Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN)
Nick Flight	Audit Commission (Comprehensive Area Assessment)
Sue Andrew	CAN minute taker

Apologies:

Aileen Alexander	Age Concern
Peter Robinson	Church of England
Sandi Downing	Carers Northumberland
David Francis	Community Action Northumberland
Julie Dodson	Action for Children
Fay Cooper	Northumberland Strategic Partnership
Sheila McGuckin	Wansbeck CVS

Action

1. Welcome

Those present were welcomed by the Chair. Apologies were noted as above. *[NB Neil Bennett of Capacitybuilders had sent his apologies by phone but this was only picked up after the meeting]*

2. Minutes and actions from last meeting (12 March 2009)

Minutes of the last meeting were accepted as a true record.

Matters arising:

Pentagon Partnership

G Courtice is attending a meeting with the Partnership at the beginning of May and will report back to the Consortium on progress on the issue of City Regions.

GC

It was reported that the Pentagon transport seminar at Stannington involved transport issues covering the whole county.

The Tyne & Wear City Region had decided that VCS representation on the Board was no longer the priority it once was. GC would explore the implications of this.

GC

Performance Reward Grant

The final amount flowing to Northumberland still had to be determined because it was based on the area's performance in relation to 12 different targets. The VCS needs to continue to strive to ensure that the partnership as a whole benefits from any final reward allocated. The first payment is expected to arrive towards the end of the year or early next. It was agreed that G Courtice draft a letter to the new NSP board to urge an early agenda inclusion for this.

GC

4. Compact Volunteering Code

A slight change of wording, as identified at the March meeting, had been implemented in the Code. Awaiting NSP endorsement.

5. LINKs

LINKs has recently widened its role to include transport. A Business Case is to be presented and no further funding has yet been received.

6. Business Plan

G Courtice is working on the Business Plan and is to liaise with the Steering Group on this.

3. Update on arrangements for selection of Consortium representatives to NSP structures

As details of the job descriptions for the roles on the Board and Executive of the NSP had now been received, G Courtice is to

send out an invitation to all VCS organisations for nominations. Once received back, a selection panel will choose 3 Board Members from the trustees/directors nominated and will shortlist the Executive nominations of senior staff or directors for final voting by VCS members of the Consortium via a secret ballot process.

The signature of both the Chair of the Board of the organisation and the nominee would be required.

All six representatives should be identified by the end of May/start of June. It was agreed that the Selection Panel should number between between 3 and 6. Members keen to be involved in the Selection Panel should contact G Courtice.

All to note

The person specifications, responsibilities and role received from NSP will be added to by the Consortium. Comments were invited on this.

All to note

Discussion centred on how best to involve board members in Consortium business and it was agreed that Consortium members should consider arranging joint meetings of trustees/directors of member organisations.

All to note

4. Modernisation Grants and Targeted Support.

A paper on the Modernisation Grants was tabled. Members were invited to discuss this with their organisation as a prelude to the planned June workshop. Publicity on this would be forthcoming in the very near future. GC explained the eligibility criteria used to determine those areas entitled to the Targeted Support excluded Northumberland because the percentage increase in claimant count between Jan 08 and Jan 09 did not place it in the top 50 of the 149 top tier authorities.

6. Prudhoe Community Partnership application to Capacitybuilders' Capital Fund.

A letter from Capacitybuilders asking for views on the application from the Prudhoe Partnership proposing a move to the library buildings and associated refurbishments had been received by the Consortium. As it reflected the priorities of the business plan and due to the short deadline, G Courtice responded favourably. The outcome of the Berwick and Seahouses applications will be followed-up.

GC

7. Report Backs

Project update A paper prepared by Fay Cooper was tabled. Individual projects had met their targets and most had exceeded them. It was noted that although some projects had made significant contributions, they had not received any funding for 2009-10. Some have ceased activity, while others have evolved and relied on other sources of funding.

D Francis was pursuing the promised continuation funding for some 150 organisations. Letters to each recipient were expected to be sent out over the next few days.

Capacitybuilders' Resilience Fund was always planned to help oil the wheels of the negotiations with the new authority over the forthcoming review. Suggestions as to how it should best be spent were invited.

All to note

As Cllr Isobel Dent was now the portfolio holder responsible for Community in the new authority's cabinet, it was agreed that she should be invited, together with the locality officers and Stuart Lawson, to future meetings. It was further agreed that there was a need to clarify the importance of continued grant funding to avoid some of the unintended consequences arising from competitive tendering.

NSP report: In the absence of our representatives, G Courtice, who attended the last meeting as an observer, reported that the process of forming the new Thematic Partnerships was moving forward, as were the Area Partnerships although, these, together with the Community Forums, were about to enter a period of "moderation" where a common framework was hoped to be thrashed out. There was a need to spell out how these new partnerships structures related to the new authority. The Consortium also needed to identify which organisations within the sector could offer what.

It was suggested that the Consortium might establish working groups to shadow the Thematic and Associated Partnerships. Health and Care might be the starting point. G Courtice will endeavour to prepare a briefing paper on the subject.

GC

LAA report: It was reported that the last CIG meeting had been cancelled but that the 2008-2011 paper had been signed off by the Minister. The detailed findings of the Place Survey had still not been published but were expected in early May. This will provide a baseline on which a number of the designated targets will be compared - including NI6 (volunteering rate) and NI4 (ability to influence local decisions).

Volunteering Northumberland: Charles Tremeer reported that a series of Volunteer Roadshows start at the beginning of May in the north and west of the county to raise the profile of activity. C Southam offered to publicise these in the last of the Safeguarding Roadshows to be held in Powburn and Haltwhistle.

The Recession: Jill Robson from Jobcentre Plus explained that the recent increase in Job Seeker Allowance claimants appeared to be tailing off and that there was now individual support for those who had been in specialist occupations. Meanwhile there was no reduction in effort to ensure that the longer term unemployed continue to be supported at the same intensity.

5. Comprehensive Area Assessment

As Marion Talbot was unable to attend, Nick Flight, also from the Audit Commission, gave a presentation about the Comprehensive Area Assessment and the role of the VCS in it.

8. Next meetings

The next meeting will be held in Tynedale Function Room, Hexham Auction Mart on Friday 26 June at 10.00 am.

All to note

The remaining meetings in the year are|:

Thursday 24 September, Age Concern, Ashington

Friday 18 December, St James's Church Centre, Alnwick