

Minutes

Northumberland VCS Consortium

10.00am on 24 February 2011
The Community Centre, Hexham

Present:

Rodney James (Chair)	Chair of VCS Consortium
Thom Bradley	CVA Blyth Valley
Kirsten Francis	Northumberland County Council
Charles Tremeer	Volunteering Northumberland
Bob Langley	NSP Board
Julia Lyford	Northumberland Community Development Network (NCDN)
David Francis	Community Action Northumberland
Georgie Cruddas	SixtyEightyThirty
Anne Lyall	Wansbeck CVS
Sandi Downing	Carers Northumberland
Andrew Gooding	FONDT/Lynemouth Community Trust
John McGough	NCDN/NLEAP
George Courtice	Sector Development Officer

Apologies:

Carol Southam	VoiCeS
Moir Macfarlane	Northumberland CABx
Peter Robinson	Church of England
Julie Davenport	Northumbria Daybreak/NSP
Mike Dungworth	CVABV/NSP
Julia Knox	Jobcentre Plus

1. Welcome, Minutes and matters arising from the meeting of 10 December 2010, at Age UK, Ashington.

Rodney James welcomed those present and noted the apologies received (see above). The draft minutes were agreed as a true record. Matters arising from those minutes:

1 Local Enterprise Partnerships progress. The application covering the seven local authorities in the region, outside Tees Valley, was successful and the North East LEP is being established. The North East Economic Partnership (NEEP), covering the whole region, is also being established. Both are business sector led. How the voice of the

VCS is to be fed into NELEP has still to be determined but it is likely that VONNE will provide a mechanism at the level outside the county. Within the county, the NSP will provide the main mechanism for engagement.

2a The outcome of the Scrutiny Cttee's intervention over VCS funding was raised. There had been no change in the total reduction planned over a full year for support services but there was a delay of 3 months in implementing it and a new commissioning arrangement shortly to be described in agenda item 3. The manner in which the Council reached these decisions were considered by some to be in breach of the 2 year agreement signed by the leader of the Council in May 2010, to be in breach of the Northumberland Compact, to have been based on inadequate evidence and to be contrary to the provisions of Public Law. After discussion, it was agreed that the SDO should explore the possibility of pursuing this further by seeking, in the first instance, advice from NAVCA's Public Law project. **Action GC**

4 Northumberland Strategic Partnership Bob Langley reported that the thinking now was for a fairly small leadership group, likely to have one person from the VCS. It would identify 3-4 realistic priorities. Partnership groups would then be established to deliver them. In addition to these, the family of NSP partnerships would include an economic regeneration group, the Community Safety Partnership and the FACT. It was assumed that the VCS would contribute to all these.

The County Council has announced that it will no longer be funding the hosting costs for Community Forums, or their support via the Locality Team. The same is likely to be the case for the three Area Partnerships – although they may wish to continue by raising their own resources, in-kind or otherwise. The Locality Team will be reduced in number from 6 to 3.

The last joint (Board and Executive) NSP meeting of the outgoing arrangements will be on March 30.

It was suggested that although the NSP would be limiting the ground it covers, it could offer more opportunities for partners to contribute. The challenge will be for them to keep tabs on everything which is going on. BL stressed that it was incumbent on partners/VCS to press for involvement.

It was suggested that as the Council withdraws from supporting Community Fora, the sector could put its weight behind them. There is huge variation across the county in terms of their development so it is best to have a conversation with the Locality Team. It was proposed to discuss the issues with Ailsa Coverdale during April.

BL referred to Sally Thomas' community development report published last November and wondered where it stood in terms of Council adoption. Kirsten explained that the Corlett report from Adult Services had pushed things back but that the next meeting of the Stronger Community Partnership would address it.

2. County Council's Proposals over Commissioning Support Services

This item was moved up the agenda

Kirsten Francis presented an overview of the process. The PowerPoint



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well as the more detailed proposal can be found here.

Essential elements are:

- A single commission for all support services including provision of Consortium
- A competitive grant process, with evidence of collaboration and a single lead agency.
- A 3 year arrangement (subject to ability to pay clauses) with 6 monthly monitoring.
- Widely advertised but open only to the not-for-profit organisations.
- Require evidence of achieving quality standard
- The timetable starts at the receipt of comments back on March 14 and ends at the start date of delivery on July 1st.

There followed a discussion:

It was confirmed that although in general it was VCOs which were being supported, for volunteering support, individuals were also included.

It was observed that the process appears to be moving away from investing in support services to part-purchasing them. The question remains as to which part?

Quality standards. No particular one was required but evidence of the value of the one held.

It would be good to see "co-production" somewhere in the plans rather than just "influencing".

Pleased to see the reference to "communities" as important recipients of support. When the Localism Bill comes into being this could have a major impact of where and how support is carried out and could well change the previous emphasis.

The relationship between the lead agency and other delivery partners is important. Any agreement between them needs to be widely understood by beneficiaries.

In theory a single body could be successful but it would have to demonstrate that it could deliver the range of services over the whole county.

The financial constraints make it quite a challenge to expect all interested parties to identify priority services. This will undoubtedly see some services disappearing. It was disappointing to see the Council move away from a model of investment to a quasi-purchasing model which insisted that the sellers collectively agree the services to be sold. Not sure that this is what Prof Chapman had in mind.

KF confirmed that this was a grant and that appraisal of applications would be based on a scoring system. She might approach VONNE to contribute to this.

There was a danger of this commissioning proposal creating unnecessary divisions within the support sector. Had the Council agreed to the proposals? KF: The Scrutiny working group has cross-party support and there is every confidence that the intended investment will be safe and productive. The final amount over a full year is currently planned at £283k but KF is hopeful that this might end up at nearer £300k. It will be confirmed before the invitation to apply is due on April 25th.

The approach could encourage real partnership working and help standardise the offer in all parts of the county. It was an opportunity.

The 6 outcomes listed provide the basis of a truly effective partnership with NCC by providing solutions for both parties.

The nature of the change required is substantial and the timescale might cause problems. KF doesn't underestimate the challenges involved.

Is there any danger that Adult Services might not see eye-to-eye with Transformation and that the sector would be caught in the middle? KF: Funding was the responsibility of Adult Services and relationships (which included links with support bodies) with Transformation. Commissioning clearly involve both – but mainly Transformation.

KF invited comments on the proposals to be sent to her by March 10 (note earlier date than given in handout) in preparation of the planned feedback meeting of March 17th.

Action all those interested

3 David Burnby's report on workshop of 4 February

The report concluded strong general support for the continuation of the Consortium but it had to have greater sector ownership and buy-in. His recommendation that a single development and support organisation should emerge to deliver support services across the county, and service the Consortium, came as a surprise to some. It was suggested that the report would be a useful reference document in future deliberations about the Consortium.

4 Immediate Steps Forward

David Francis had confirmed that CAN was willing to hold the fort until the end of June when the commissioning arrangements would be clearer. Meanwhile it was agreed to adopt the essentials of the core principles outlined in Burnby's report.

- Open membership
- Accountability (to the wider sector)
- Effective and transparent lines of two-way communication
- Diversity of sector reflected in membership and governance
- Clear leadership and effective management

The membership of the Consortium Board was agreed to be based on the themes, networks and interests of those listed in the “thoughts” paper (Appendix 2 p19 of Burnby’s report). **Action GC**

Meetings would need to be arranged to consider collaborative responses to the new commissioning proposals and Consortium members will need to be updated. It was likely that during the period April to June greater reliance would have to be made of email communication.

5 Joint Strategic Liaison Group

The transition of the Consortium Reference Group to a broader strategic group, made up of both VCS and public bodies, had been mooted at the meeting in December. This was to allow it to embrace issues which were of importance but not necessarily picked up under the Compact. **This was agreed**

Consortium members currently attending the Reference Group further agreed that a LINK perspective on the implications to the sector of GP Commissioning and progress with engaging with it would be useful to hear at the forthcoming Reference Group meeting.

6 VCS representation on North Area Partnership

GC reminded the Consortium that it had agreed that the most suitable body to decide this was the North Area VCS Network which had met on two occasions during 2010. Latterly GC had been sitting on this Partnership. With GC departing at the end of March, and with the future of Area Partnerships to be decided, it was proposed that Marc Johnson, a community development officer, based in Alnwick take on this role on an interim basis. **This was agreed.**

7 Future Meetings

Much depends on the outcome of the new commissioning arrangements – at least in terms of the resources available. It would be helpful if there was an occasion when potential applicants shared their ideas with the whole Consortium – perhaps in late April early May. Meanwhile a meeting of those interested in providing support services would be offered to all members and arranged for the second week in March.