

17 June 2019

TITLE OF REPORT: Review on Helping to Increase Support / Capacity of the Voluntary Sector: Final Report

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Summary

This final report sets out the findings and recommendations of Corporate Resources review of ways to help increase the support and capacity within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Gateshead.

The views of the Committee are being sought on this report and suggested recommendations.

1. Introduction

1.1 At its meeting in October 2018, Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the scope for a review to help develop the understanding of the type of support required by Gateshead's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), where it is needed the most and why, and in the light of this, where the Council's role, support and resources may best be focussed to maximise impact. The aims of the Review were agreed as:

- establish the extent and nature of the types of support the Council currently provides to the VCS across a spectrum of service areas
- how this activity is resourced and coordinated
- assess the effectiveness of this Council support in helping the VCS address the needs of Gateshead residents.

1.2 The review is facilitated through a series of Evidence Gathering sessions.

2. Review Methodology

2.1 The review comprised four evidence gathering sessions. Evidence was sought from the internal council services, including Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering, Economic Development Service, Care, Wellbeing and Learning Service, Comfrey Project Brighten Ryton Environmental Group, Dunston Family Church, Tyne and Wear Community Foundation, The Ballinger Trust and National Lottery Community Fund and Oasis Community Housing.

2.2 All of the sessions included a presentation by each of the groups / organisations listed followed by a Q and A session.

3. A summary of the Evidence Gathering Sessions

- 3.1 Session 1 (held 3 December 2018) provided Committee with a summary of Gateshead VCS infrastructure and the Council support still available to the sector. The information provided highlighted the estimated number of charities (876 registered with the Charity Commission) and other similar organisations (750-1000 other VCS organisations) operating in Gateshead's communities. It outlined the Council's significant financial support available for organisations through grants, contracts and commissions and Non-Domestic Rate relief. It also highlighted the Services offering Information, Support and Guidance and the Council's role in promoting, co-ordinating and brokering over 8,000 volunteer roles and volunteers.
- 3.2 Dr Jo Price, Chair of Trustees at the Comfrey Project, also presented to Committee offering an insight into the work of her charity in Gateshead, and how working together with the Council is making a difference to the lives of Gateshead's refugees and asylum seekers.
- 3.3 Session 2 (held 21 January 2019) included presentations from Brighten Ryton and Dunston Activity Centre highlighting the excellent work that both organisations undertake in their respective localities. Committee discussed how the organisations could work better with the Council and other partners.
- 3.4 Aiden Lawson, Chair of Brighten Ryton, informed Committee of its role in supporting the Council to improve the local environment in Ryton, highlighting examples of work in local cemeteries, parks and improvements for some local heritage sites. The Group has provided almost 9,000 volunteer hours and fund raised more than £30,000 in its first two years of operation. It aims to expand its scope and increase its impact in future years and highlighted some areas where its efficiency could be enhanced through an improved interface with the Council.
- 3.5 Ed Nicholls, Chair of Dunston Family Church, talked about the Church's steep learning curve after taking on the responsibility for Dunston Activity Centre (and volunteer library) following a recent Asset Transfer from the Council. The Church through its volunteers and employees aims to improve the well-being of the local community through local activities and the provision of community space. Ed talked about how the organisation has had to learn about Governance, due diligence, health and safety, financial and business planning, developing capacity and operating a community café. Whilst the Centre is doing well, financial sustainability remains a challenge as the Church always looks to offer services at lower cost or free.
- 3.6 Session 3 (held 4 March 2019) included presentations from three key local funders (Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, The Ballinger Charitable Trust and the National Lottery Community Fund). The funders covered:
- What they do and the opportunities they provide
 - How they currently support the sector
 - What outcomes/priorities they would like to see
 - How Gateshead compares regionally/nationally regarding their funding programmes
 - How could their impact in Gateshead be increased?
 - What can partners (like the Council) do to maximize take up/increase effectiveness of their resources in Gateshead

- What can/should VCS organisations do themselves/collectively to increase take up/effectiveness – highlighting any common failings that restrict local take up.
- 3.7 The presentations were followed by a short discussion covering some of the collective learning and recommendations to maximize the combined potential for working with Gateshead’s communities.
- 3.8 Some of the key feedback and top tips from the session included:
- Always read the guidance thoroughly before applying – if in doubt get in touch.
 - Ensure the organisation and the project are eligible.
 - Have all information required ready at the time of submission.
 - Ensure accounts/bank statements are timely and accurate and unrestricted reserves are beneath any eligibility threshold.
 - Use data, local intelligence and consultation to demonstrate community needs (avoid duplication).
 - Wherever possible try to get other funding to support your project.
- 3.9 A Members’ Seminar is being organised for early July to offer all ward councillors a further opportunity to hear about some of the financial assistance available to Gateshead’s Voluntary and Community Sector.
- 3.10 Session 4 (held 1 April 2019) Since 2011 Basis@Gateshead (Basis) has welcomed more than 750 people annually. The individuals that Basis supports are in need of information, advice, guidance, advocacy and practical support. They also need a safe space to work out what’s causing their problems and how best to set about trying to tackle them.
- 3.11 Now located at Progress House, Warwick Street, Gateshead. Basis has become the place where people with multiple, complex and overlapping needs go to begin their journey into housing, recovery and wellness. Basis is the only service in Gateshead offering day provision for people sleeping rough as well as assistance around accessing and maintaining housing.
- 3.12 As Basis is the only service in Gateshead providing day provision for rough sleepers the charity is in a unique position. Clients visit Basis because they want to, it is a safe space and a place of community for them. Over the last seven years staff have built up trust and a relationship with individuals who are considered hard to reach. This relationship enables help and support to be built around the individual rather than refer out and run the risk of traumatising them further or losing them as they fall through service gaps. This service is one example of the targeted collaborative provision required as part of the Council’s Thrive agenda.
- 3.13 In October 2018, the charity moved into brand new premises in central Gateshead. The new premises, formerly the probation service office, aptly named ‘Progress House’ gives the space to be able to carry out all of the services residents need and enables partner services to be able to work from the same location thereby creating a joint service to those facing homelessness and multiple needs. The service hub/homelessness proto-type approach:

- Brings in a system-wide perspective with the individual at the centre
- Rather than passing the (often traumatised) person around the system, accumulating support workers, we draw in partners and services to a place that the person feels comfortable
- This includes Housing Options, GP Federation, Mental Health services, Drug and Alcohol services, and other third sector orgs
- It's co-ordinated by a Link worker, part funded via the Gateshead Innovation Fund
- We will be adding services involved in the multi-disciplinary team over the next 12 months
- We track individual service user stories using our database InForm, and we will be doing an evaluation and learning framework with partner agencies over the next three months
- Present learning at the end of year one and two

3.14 Many of the individuals supported through the service hub will have multiple and complex needs such as poor physical health, mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions and will have spent time in the care system or prison system or both. This means targeting precisely the kind of people the council would consider vulnerable and most in need, and who a significant proportion of council time and money is currently spent on.

4. Findings, issues and challenges arising from the review

- The review reaffirmed the need for a vibrant community and voluntary sector in Gateshead that is support and capable of meeting the challenges facing Gateshead's residents in the future.
- There is a need to ensure longer term support is available from the Council which cultivates relationships and reassures community and voluntary sector organisation that they can rely on the Council for advice and help.
- The community asset transfer programme has seen significant success in helping community organisations operate community facilities to deliver services for local residents.
- Need for dedicated interface/contacts within the Council – including key front-line services (particularly where the interface is integral to the work of the Group – for example some Street Scene Services/planning and highways?). This is required to ensure decisions can be made by the relevant service, relatively quickly – it also helps to build a positive working relationship.
- Annual plan or similar to be agreed and endorsed by the Council – including assigned responsible officers for specific activities, as above, (to agree any adjustments/amendments, etc) – would help with timetabling key decisions/permissions – allowing the Group to have more accurate plans. This will also help the Council to plan its work if done effectively.
- Annual plan would facilitate greater synergy and timetabling of partnership approach – would maximize windows of opportunity for works to be undertaken (summer months, avoiding nesting season, etc)
- When Council and community efforts combine the synergy and impact can be fantastic (for example, coinciding cutting and strimming in cemetery)
- Speed/responsiveness of the Council – frustration with the time taken/delay in getting permissions/agreement to undertake works – sometimes legitimate due to legal process, sometimes multiple service involvement and sometimes staff sickness (as well as other things) – but could we be better?

- Perception of overbearing bureaucracy – particularly around Conservation and Licencing issues experienced – legalities, consultation periods, permissions, etc. Can this be mitigated with better information up front re realistic timescales (for both parties)?
- The Council's relationship/interface with (ethos towards) voluntary organisations needs to reflect a partnership arrangement (to maximize joint efficiency/shared resources and available skills, knowledge and capacity). Volunteers should be seen more as partners not as contractors or a threat to employment.
- Is there need to train/brief Council staff (particularly those in key interface positions) about how a better more productive relationship can be achieved? Remove any stigma, perceptions of job insecurity, etc) as above
- Review how the Council's Insurance arrangements work for/with volunteer activities – could this become more inclusive/less risk averse – redesigned to accommodate such work not respond to request for the work (turn it around completely).
- Organisation/rigour of the Group and its monitoring of activity was praised (and may be exclusive to Brighten Ryton currently) – whilst not necessarily required to the level of Brighten Ryton it is food for thought for other community organisations to become more organised and planned in approach
- Recruiting and retaining volunteers was still an issue for a number of community groups across Gateshead, especially where specific skills are required.
- Securing funding is becoming an increasing challenge for many community groups and charities across Gateshead.
- Specialist advice is required for a number of groups across the borough, in particular governance, legal advice, business and financial planning, health and safety to name some areas.
- Co-ordination between NCVS and Gateshead Council needs to continue to be managed to ensure the skills and expertise of the team compliments the work of the Neighbourhood Management and Volunteering Team and other support services
- This service hub approach is a central part of our future sustainability plans for Basis@Gateshead – and we also see this model as being potentially replicable across the NE: we are committed to it.
- This Basis model is helping us build the evidence base needed to show external partners that delivering out of Basis@Gateshead is a more successful and cost effective way of reaching those facing housing crisis either at their crisis point, or in many cases before things get too bad.
- Basis is a great example of how the VCS can collaborate and integrate with public services to reach the most vulnerable in our communities in a more efficient and effective way.
- As staff from partners will be based at Basis@Gateshead we anticipate they will save costs of being based in their own premises, and less money and time will be wasted signposting vulnerable people to different services, locations and experts.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Commit to provide clear single points of contacts to community organisations, and explore providing the autonomy to provide advice, support and definitive decisions as required.

Recommendation 2 – Encourage community organisations that the Council is supporting to provide an annual plan, particularly relevant with Friends of or environmental groups.

Recommendation 3 – Be clear and more transparent regarding Council fees and charges, so community organisations understand the costs and the reasons why the fees exist.

Recommendation 4 – Explore ways to improve the relationships that exist between the Council and the community and voluntary sector to encourage greater collaboration / joint working, addressing common challenges faced by residents, avoid duplication or competition and enable the Council to consider where best to invest its community development and financial resources.

Recommendation 5 – Seek ways to encourage community groups to work together, support each other and share resources and ideas.

Recommendation 6 – Develop further the Council's Volunteers Plan – Helping Out - to ensure there is clarity about the roles of volunteers, the relationships with volunteers and paid employees.

Recommendation 7 – Assess the support required by volunteers to enable them to help out effectively, safely and with the knowledge, training, advice and relevant permissions – primarily aimed at volunteers that directly support activities delivered with the Council and on Council property.

Recommendation 8 – Review the Council's insurance arrangements to ensure volunteer groups are adequately covered for the activities they are participating in and the system to obtaining cover is as efficient as possible.

Recommendation 9 – Consider ways to increase capacity across the community and voluntary sector to better secure funds from a range of sources rather than be dependent on the various forms of Council funding.

Recommendation 10 – Ensure the Council's resources to support Gateshead's communities are targeted in a way that ensures the activity delivered as a result of the funding will support Thrive.

Recommendation 11 – The Council should continue to proactively liaise with external funding partners, to maximise opportunities to invest in Gateshead.

Recommendation 12 – Monitor the delivery of the contract to support the Community and Voluntary Sector (currently held by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service) to ensure it continues to provide the advice, support and networking required by the sector in partnership with the Council

Recommendation 13 – Within the current contract to support the Community and Voluntary Sector, continue to support the development of OurGateshead to ensure it provides the service required by Gateshead residents and the community organisations represented on the website.

Recommendation 14 – Review the Gateshead Offer – which provides guidance on where to seek support for community and voluntary organisations in

Gateshead and define its commitment to find the most effective way to define its relationship and support to the sector to deliver Thrive.

Recommendation 15 – Increase publicity and communications through all means possible to raise awareness, share and celebrate the fantastic range of activities that take place across Gateshead.

Recommendation 16 – In line with the Council's Public Service Reform work, consider further place based / community hub opportunities for collaborative work between the Council, its partners and the community and voluntary sector.

Recommendation 17 – Consider increasing the capacity building resource within the Council to ensure the community and voluntary sector is adequately supported to meet the demands of Gateshead's communities in the future.

6. Recommendation

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- Consider and comment on the information provided in the report and the findings and recommendations.
- Agree the final report be presented to Cabinet for consideration

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