

1 April 2019

TITLE OF REPORT: **Review on Helping to Increase Support / Capacity of the Voluntary Sector: Evidence Gathering Session No. 4 – Oasis Community Housing – Supporting vulnerable people.**

REPORT OF: **Anthony Alder, Acting Strategic Director Communities and Environment**

Summary

This is the final evidence gathering session for this review of ways to help increase the support and capacity within the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in Gateshead.

Oasis Community Housing is a charity based in Gateshead that has over many years, delivered a range of services to some of Gateshead's most vulnerable residents.

Committee will hear from Oasis Community Housing Chief Executive, David Smith and Phil Conn, Head of Crisis Services.

“Basis” is a place-based concept the charity has developed in a number of areas across the country. The project which provides support, help and advice to homeless people or those facing homelessness. This innovative approach has created new ways of working, multi-agency collaboration and an effective community hub (Progress House).

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.

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

2. A summary of the first three Evidence Gathering Sessions

2.1 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.

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.

- 2.2 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.

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.

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.

- 2.3 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.

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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. The Context for Evidence Gathering Session 4

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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.

4. Recommendation

Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:

- Consider and comment on the information provided in the case study by representatives Oasis Community Housing in the context of the review of Council support.

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