



Northumberland

County Council

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5 JUNE 2019

VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) SUPPORT SERVICES COMMISSION

Report of: Paul Johnston, Executive Director of Place

Cabinet Member: Cath Homer, portfolio holder for Culture, Arts, Leisure and Tourism

Context

1. Since Local Government Reorganisation, the Council has commissioned a single contract to deliver support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The previous contract was awarded to Northumberland CVA in 2014 for a three year period valued at £137,500 per annum. In October 2018 Cabinet approved re-commissioning for a two year period, with a contract value of £100,000 per annum.
2. A commissioning process was undertaken following the Cabinet decision, utilising the outcomes of the consultation with the sector and wider stakeholders in early 2018. Following the competitive procurement exercise, Northumberland CVA was awarded the grant with a contract start date of 1st April 2018. This was a competitive process, but the award of the contract to the incumbent allows a degree of continuity, particularly regarding management of the VCS Assembly.

Commission

3. Consultation with the sector and other key stakeholders in 2018 identified that the most valued activities that the Sector would like to see continue are development of the Assembly as an effective influencer, coordination of the VCS input the County

Council's VCS Liaison Group, regular Funding Fairs, support and advice communications, and support for volunteering.

4. The specification took into account the key findings of the consultation but designed it to require a more strategic approach to ensure the contractor is responsive to the changing local and wider context in which the sector operates, particularly with regard to opportunities through the North of Tyne Combined Authority Inclusive Growth ambitions, and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund - as successor to European Structural Investment Funds, along with other opportunities for funding and partnership. The aim is to position the sector to be in a stronger position in two years time to be more responsive to the new VCS and funding landscape.

5. The overall strategic aim of the commission is *'To maintain the continued development of a vibrant, independent and sustainable sector that will work in partnership with NCC and other partners to ensure the best outcomes for individuals and communities of place, interest and identity in Northumberland'*, through delivery of four strategic objectives:
 - 1) Support Northumberland VCS organisations capacity to operate safely and legally
 - 2) Improve the confidence and ability of Northumberland VCS organisations to secure funding
 - 3) Ensure communications with the voluntary, public and private sectors keep organisations fully informed of key issues and opportunities
 - 4) Manage the Northumberland VCS Assembly and promote awareness of VCS issues with Northumberland County Council

6. The commission and its subsequent monitoring also takes into account the wider context of other resource supporting the capacity of the sector. For example, NCC currently acts as Lead Accountable Body LAB for a £3.5m National Lottery Communities Fund Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, branded as Bridge. The programme is a partnership of seven Northumberland VCS organisations, led and managed by Voices Northumberland. The programme secured £3.5m for 2016-19, and has recently secured an extension of £2.2m. Ensuring the Bridge programme works alongside the commission will fully maximise resource for capacity building in the sector. The impact of the reduction of the financial support requires monitoring, but it is expected that working effectively with Voices Northumberland will mean a reasonable amount of resource will be deployed to increase capacity in the sector. It will be ensured that both NCVA and Voices work in alignment with any other investment into the sector.

7. A number of thematic workstreams are underway arising from the VCS Liaison Group to progress the aims of the commission, led jointly by NCVA and NCC officers, under the headings; Financial Wellbeing, Health and Wellbeing,

Community Spaces and Places, Children and Young People, Digital Transformation, and Employability and Inclusion.

Monitoring

8. Regular reporting against commission aims is being agreed by NCC and the contractor, with monthly progress updates and more detailed quarterly reports. These will not include prescriptive Key Performance indicators, but will require the contractor to demonstrate how it is delivering actions to achieve the strategic intent of the commission.
9. Officers will continue to monitor and support the contractor, and give a fuller report to OSC when a suitable timescale has allowed a fuller assessment of progress to date and any impact of the reduced budget of the commission.

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APPENDIX

[VCS Infrastructure Support Services Commission Specification Dec 2018](#)