

Norfolk VCSE System Leadership Group

Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2015 at Signpost House, Dereham

Present: Jon Clemo, Pip Coker, Cindee Crehan, Richard Draper, Jane Evans, Ruth Gripper, Joyce Hopwood, Natalie Jode, Janka Rodziewicz, Tim Sweeting, Daniel Williams.

Apologies from: Amanda Hedley, Dan Mobbs, Amanda Nelson.

1. Welcome and introductions

Members of the group introduced themselves. Richard Draper informed the group that as changing circumstances have led to increased demands on his time, he will not be able to continue as a member.

Jon Clemo summarised the origins of the group: Community Action Norfolk (CAN) and Momentum (Norfolk) are working together on VCSE Engage, a programme of engagement between Norfolk County Council (NCC) and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE). Their successful bid for this work included a focus on:

- the need to develop appropriate interfaces for engagement between the VCSE and NCC;
- the importance of transparency and accountability to the sector;
- and the need to engage widely with the sector.

Underpinning this is a strong evidence base to draw on, and structures that allow the sector to draw on its expertise. The System Leadership Group (SLG) is intended to provide a forum to allow high-level, strategic engagement with NCC. Its purpose is not to replace existing specialist forums, but to bring together and draw on their expertise and networks.

2. Matters arising

Daniel Mobbs suggested short member profiles to help the group and wider sector get to know members. The elected members present pointed out that they had prepared statements for their election. It was agreed that Community Action Norfolk will pull together short profiles based on existing information and clear these with group members before publishing online. Jon Clemo checked that members were aware of and happy with the intention to also publish their contact details online and they agreed that they were.

ACTION: Ruth Gripper to pull together member profiles. SLG members to check these for accuracy and Community Action Norfolk to publish, along with contact details, on their website.

3. VCSE representation

Jon Clemo introduced this item, highlighting two points:

- the need for an effective link and mandate between VCSE representatives on the Health and Wellbeing Board and the wider sector now that the Joint Health, Social Care and Voluntary Sector Strategic Forum, which had previously elected such representatives, no longer exists
- the immediate issue of a vacancy arising as Richard Draper, one of the three existing VCSE representatives on the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), is stepping down.

Richard Draper commented on his role as a VCSE rep on the HWB. He said that Norfolk is looked on as good practice in terms of VCSE representation. The VCSE impact has been considerable and he is keen that this influence continues. The current reps (Richard, Joyce Hopwood, Pip Coker and Daniel Mobbs (as substitute)) between them carry lots of expertise, a strength which is recognised by the HWB and which we should try to maintain with the new rep. He cautioned that being a VCSE rep does involve lots of work, with lengthy papers for meetings.

Richard went on to highlight his role as a champion for the HWB priority of the social and emotional wellbeing of children under 5, which brings additional work. The role of champion is not attached to the VCSE rep role. Cindee Crehan pointed out that Richard also chairs the Children and Young People sub-group and the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership Board sub-committee, both of which connect back to the HWB. She argued that the VCSE rep role being vacated by Richard should remain a role with a specialty in children and young people. Richard Draper echoed this, saying that although the link does not have to be made in exactly the same way, with one person taking on all those roles, it does need to connect somehow.

Richard explained that he reports back to the sector through Momentum (Norfolk) but does not always feel well-informed in terms of receiving input from the sector. He suggested that the appointment/election of representatives should be staggered, so that the three posts are not all renewed at the same time, so as to maintain continuity and build on the experience of the current reps. Pip Coker and Joyce Hopwood both expressed a wish to continue in their current roles where they feel they are making real progress on which to build.

The group had a further discussion about the level of work involved in working with the HWB and how this should be managed going forward. Tim Sweeting observed that VCSE reps to the Board were champions for a HWB strategic priority (Joyce Hopwood for dementia, Richard Draper for the wellbeing of children under 5) and that there was a weight of work which comes attached, which is being done effectively on a voluntary basis. Members emphasised that the sector is keen to work with the HWB but would like to see a similar level of commitment from statutory partners. It is important to have a high-calibre VCSE rep but it can be difficult to find people who are able to make such a big time commitment.

Pip Coker pointed out that the VCSE reps have a pre-meeting once the meeting papers have come out. This will be at the end of October and would be the occasion to receive input from the wider sector. Dan Mobbs is attending the November HWB meeting for the sector.

The group discussed the term any VCSE rep serves and the need for continuity as well as accountability. It was thought that when the reps were initially elected by the Joint Health, Social Care and Voluntary Sector Strategic Forum this was for a three year term. It was suggested that reps should be elected for three year terms but on a staggered basis, so that one role changes each year.

It was agreed that VCSE rep accountability should run through the SLG and that Community Action Norfolk and Momentum (Norfolk) would support reps in communicating with the sector. It was agreed to bring a paper to the November SLG meeting, setting out how the VCSE rep appointment process and timescale could work going forwards, bearing in mind the points raised during the discussion. The SLG will revisit the issue in January in order to appoint a replacement for Richard Draper in his role as VCSE HWB rep and agree a timeline going forwards. The group agreed to write to the chair of the HWB to inform him of this decision.

ACTION: bring paper to November SLG meeting setting out suggested process to mandate VCSE reps on HWB, including timescale and linkages. Add HWB rep appointment to forward planner for January meeting.

ACTION: SLG to write to Brian Watkins, chair of the HWB, to inform him how the VCSE reps will be appointed and accountable in the future.

ACTION: Ruth Gripper to coordinate scheduling of a pre-meeting before the next HWB and any input from the wider VCSE.

4. Ways of working

The draft Terms of Reference and Conflict of Interest policy were considered.

The Terms of Reference were discussed in some detail. Members felt that mention of integration and prevention in the document, although welcome, missed out the important role the sector plays both in early intervention and in working with individuals in crisis. It was also observed that some parts of the voluntary sector do not think of their work in these terms, and that the language used in the Terms of Reference should be accessible and relevant to all.

The group discussed what would be an appropriate term for membership. It was felt that elections/appointments on an annual basis would not offer the continuity and strength of relationship that would be required for the SLG to function to best effect. Daniel Williams suggested that a three year term had precedent, but that accountability was not just about the time-frame but also about making sure the election process was more robust. Tim Sweeting observed that accountability was not just about the election process itself, but about opportunities for people to feedback to the group throughout the year. Richard Draper added that having annual elections to the group when the HWB rep would be appointed for a three year term would cause a logistical nightmare. He added that the group should hold members to account for their active participation, and that this should be included in the Terms of Reference.

Cindee Crehan said that with the initial election having only recently taken place, and with the group still evolving, it was important to go back to the sector at the end of the first year to review and reaffirm the work of the group. Cindee also suggested the issue of casual vacancies should be addressed in the Terms of Reference.

It was agreed that membership would be a three-year term, but that there would be a refresh in the first year.

Daniel Williams said that during that first year the group should give careful thought to the choice of themes and how members are appointed to each theme. Jane Evans agreed, she said she had stood as an elected member because carers were not represented among the themes. She said that the Terms of Reference should make clear that the group also had the ability to co-opt additional specialist members.

Natalie Jode emphasised the paramount importance of the group and its members feeding back to the wider sector. Every member of the SLG should be informed by, and able to report back to, a wider constituency. Natalie said it is also important that SLG minutes and all communications are written in accessible language.

Richard Draper suggested the group should develop a communications strategy, to include members' responsibilities in providing formal and informal feedback. Natalie Jode pointed out that the sector needs to know who the group is and how they can feed in to it, and that this should also be part of the communications strategy.

ACTION: circulate amended Terms of Reference and agree by email. Election of chair to go on agenda of next meeting. Review of Terms of Reference to be included in forward planner as part of twelve-month review process. Review of themes of the group to be included in forward planner for discussion at a meeting in early 2016; this should relate to the HWB discussion.

ACTION: agreement of review and renewal process to be included in the forward planner and discussed at a future meeting. This will set out timescales going forward.

ACTION: SLG to develop a communications strategy including details of how the sector can feed in to the group; discussion of the strategy to go on agenda of next meeting. CAN will produce a summary report of each SLG meeting alongside the minutes, to help members communicate with their networks.

The Conflict of Interest Policy was discussed at length. Members were keen to ensure that the group was not compromised by any conflict of interest or perception of a conflict of interest. Transparency and the proper management of any potential conflicts of interest were deemed to be of the utmost importance to the group's effectiveness.

Joyce Hopwood queried Daniel Williams' current role. Daniel welcomed the question and explained that he is now a consultant, and is an elected member of the group. He emphasised that he was very keen for the group to get its approach to conflicts of interest right, to avoid any doubts about his or any members' integrity.

Richard Draper observed that similar principles applied to all members of the group, whether a charity chief executive, a consultant or chair of a forum. Membership of the group could

bring advantage to their own organisation, in bringing influence and making members well-informed. The key question, he said, was whether members were open and honest in their dealings.

Janka Rodziewicz suggested there was a need to have a complaints procedure setting out how such concerns would be dealt with.

Tim Sweeting highlighted that it was not just about getting the policy right but deliberately, continuously and pro-actively opening up opportunities for people to hold members accountable.

It was agreed that conflicts could arise both as a member of the group, as a result of a member's substantive role (be that as a charity chief executive, voluntary chair of a forum, or consultant) or as an individual and that the policy should be amended to make it clear that it covered any and all of these areas. This issue should also be revisited as part of the 12-month review and election process.

It was observed that conflicts do arise and that the essential thing is how they are managed. This requires complete openness by members in registering their interests and a commitment to ensure they are kept up to date. It was agreed that the policy should also set out how any concerns could be raised and how they would be dealt with.

ACTION: circulate amended Conflict of Interest policy and agree by email. SLG members to submit completed declaration of interest forms for publication. Review of Conflict of Interest policy to be included in forward planner as part of twelve-month review process.

5. Issues and action log

The group were happy with the concept and format of the log as a way of monitoring progress and keeping issues under review. It was agreed that this should be in black and white and A4 size so that it can be easily printed.

6. Engagement with NCC

Jon Clemo recapped some of the engagement that has taken place so far with NCC around 'reimagining services,' and the consistent messages from the sector that this should not be structured simply around individual service areas. He highlighted concerns from the sector about NCC upheaval over the recent period and the heavy workload of colleagues at NCC.

The idea of holding some workshops around particular cohorts or personas had been met positively by NCC and was the subject of discussion. Jon Clemo informed the group that he and Cindee Crehan were due to attend a meeting at NCC the following day (23rd Sept) to discuss current NCC thinking around this year's budget-setting and about the engagement process around the budget for the following years.

It was mentioned that there have been early indications from children's services that NCC may want to deliver more of those services directly, and that this will have a knock on effect on commissioned services and wider investment in the voluntary sector. There was concern

that this approach was not based on outcomes and exploring this further was a key concern for the SLG. Weakness in NCC systems and processes was also highlighted as an issue of concern for the sector.

The group agreed that there were two separate elements to the role of Community Action Norfolk and Momentum (Norfolk) as VCSE Engage leads: supporting the dialogue between NCC and the VCSE, and responding to (potentially challenging) the content of what NCC wishes to communicate.

The group discussed the issue of cross-subsidy which is being highlighted by the sector as a key concern. Daniel Williams said that statutory partners need to understand the considerable additional community support which the VCSE brings, and that any economic assessment needs to consider the value being added by the VCSE. This was a message that the SLG really needs to push at this stage. Many VCSE organisations are putting considerable effort into their fundraising and community engagement strategy.

Tim Sweeting observed that fundraising for co-investment is very different to fundraising to subsidise the public sector, and that the latter cannot be expected to work. Natalie Jode said that the strange combination of an investor, funder, competitor, partner dynamic was difficult to manage. Jane Evans said that the group had a responsibility to be open and honest in the messages it took to NCC, and that they had a similar responsibility.

Jon Clemo thanked the group for their comments and said he would report back once the meeting had taken place.

Action: Jon Clemo and Cindee Crehan to report back to the group after the meeting.

7. Forward plan

Jon Clemo asked the group if there was anything they wanted to highlight prior to the full discussion of the SLG work plan at the next meeting.

It was suggested that the group should not spread itself too thin but choose a small number of areas where it wants to make a difference. Reimagining services was mentioned as one area.

Working with the NHS was also mentioned, particularly over what is likely to be a challenging winter period. The links between the NHS and social care were discussed and Daniel Williams said he was keen for statutory providers to engage with the VCSE, not just commissioners, about how we work better together. Richard Draper said that often it was systems and structures which acted as a barrier to working together; Cindee Crehan added that they take up a lot of resource. Joyce Hopwood said that in her role as dementia champion she proposed abolishing all existing committees and starting afresh, and that this had proved very effective.

Natalie Jode highlighted that the SLG themes included both groups of people (eg older people) and sectors (eg arts and culture; health and wellbeing). She suggested that over the next 12 months the group should develop a three year vision setting out what success would look like. This would ensure the group has consistent ambitions rather than deciding activities

on an annual basis with no long-term strategy. Jane Evans echoed the idea of beginning with the end in mind.

Jon Clemo observed that in his experience as a sector the VCSE is good at setting out ambitions but not very good at articulating their detail. This would be part of the journey for the group. He said that there were emerging themes but the group would need to tease out exactly what its role was and what it was looking to achieve.

Action: discussion of a three-year vision to be included on the agenda of the next meeting.

8. Future meetings

The group were positive about the idea of holding open briefing sessions but agreed that it would be best to wait until the new year to do this.

Not all members are able to make the proposed date for the November meeting and so this will be arranged by email.

Action: Ruth to put briefing sessions into forward planner and circulate Doodle poll to agree date of next meeting.