

Better Together VCS Network County Durham
Better Together Policy Forum: Friday 6th July 2018, Durham Town Hall
MENTAL HEALTH

This will be the first in a series of six-monthly VCS led forums, which are themed on specific policy areas which affect our communities. According to the theme, relevant public sector partners and commissioners have been invited to participate with our colleagues from the VCS.

The wider objectives for the Policy Forums are to:

- Provide regular opportunities for the VCS to meet with elected members, heads of service and public sector members of the County Durham Partnership: to share intelligence, showcase good practice, and to identify opportunities and gaps in cross sector working relationships.
- Enable a wider cross section of VCS providers to engage with the Better Together Forum, as an opportunity to discuss policy, showcase good practice and meet with public sector partners.
- Enable more focused discussion and consultation which is relevant and current.
- Ensure a strategic overview from the voluntary sector about how public policy is affecting services in County Durham.

The theme of Mental Health has been chosen by the VCS organisations which take part in the Better Together Network. Some of the indicators in County Durham which have influenced this choice:

- Advice providers (DCC Customer Service points, CAB, Foodbanks, Housing providers, Welfare Rights etc) are reporting increasing rates of clients presenting for advice and help with complex mental health needs. This is an escalation on average referral rates. Partners are looking at the trends to try to identify what has triggered this change, potentially changes in welfare benefits (Universal credit/ Housing/ PIPs)
- The work which has been underway to integrate health and social care for elderly frail people, highlights the risks of isolation to the mental health of older people.
- The County Durham Partnership has made a commitment to designing public services so that they prevent high volumes of needs and demand for statutory services. Mental Health has been identified as a key issue which undermines confidence and both social and economic resilience in the County.
- Public Health is leading a Task Group (Mental Health at Scale) focusing on workforce development and awareness raising.
- Children and Young People's Services have picked up on barriers triggered by depression and stress which prevent families from engaging with local support activities (VCS Alliance)
- Teams Around Patients (TAPs), Wellbeing for Life, Active Durham and AAPs have all identified low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and stress as mental health issues which undermine and prevent people from getting more physically active, taking part in volunteering and involving themselves in social and economic activities.
- Healthwatch County Durham have identified mental health as their number one priority as the result of consultations with people across the County.

This Forum has been convened to look at how the public sector and the VCS are responding to mental health needs in the County, particularly through partnership approaches, how support is commissioned and what potential there is for services to be more aligned and responsive.