



Open Letter from the North Staffs Voluntary Sector Chief Officers' Group (VSCOG)

November 2017

To whom it may concern

The leaders of many of Stoke-on-Trent's voluntary sector organisations wish to express their grave concerns at the findings of the recent Care Quality Commission review about the failings in care given to elderly patients.

The review specifically highlights poor public sector co-ordination, high levels of mistrust between statutory partners and the absence of an overall strategy. While certainly damning, the conclusions have, sadly, not come as a shock to local voluntary sector leaders as our experiences over many years have often mirrored the findings of the CQC.

Additionally, while the focus of the CQC report is "people over 65", it is our common experience that the findings would be similar in other areas of NHS and care provision for people under 65. While the finger is clearly being pointed at local public sector failings, we would want to acknowledge that this is within a national context of massive austerity cuts in public spending.

Local voluntary sector organisations help to support many of the city's most vulnerable people and, while our public sector colleagues will regularly highlight the immense amount of invaluable care we provide, often the voluntary sector feels that engagement, consultation and strategic commissioning is very poor. For example, very recently some local NHS commissioning to the voluntary sector has been cut, resulting in at least one local mental health charity about to close its doors forever. Funding cuts have been made without any evaluation of their wider impact, or in consultation with other strategic partners. In one case, it was acknowledged that a funding cut was purely arbitrary with no relation to amount of care being given.

However, in the face of such challenging findings many voluntary sector leaders are still ready to play their part in supporting our colleagues in the NHS and adult social care. We want to join you in being part of the solution. Our sector offers value for money, significant reach into the communities we serve, volunteers, speed of response, and the ability to add value and stretch resources. We can also demonstrate long-term commitment to the city and its people. Please include us, we feel we have much to offer and we would be happy to meet with you to work towards a collaborative approach in tackling some of the key risks and issues that affect our communities.

Yours sincerely

Lloyd Cooke – CEO, Saltbox – chair of VSCOG

Endorsed by:

- Peter Bullock – CEO, Age UK North Staffs
- Will Boyce – CEO, Approach;
- Cathy Jones – CEO, Asist
- Martin Peake – Business Development Manager, Beat The Cold
- Lynne Wealleans – Director of Policy and Engagement, Beth Johnson Foundation
- Helena Evans – CEO, Brighter Futures
- Chris Pointon and Natalie Ornelas – Senior Officer and Deputy Senior Officer, Children and Families Staffordshire
- Simon Harris – CEO, Citizens Advice Staffordshire North and Stoke on Trent
- Mandy Rollins – CEO, Disability Solutions West Midlands
- Charlie O'Dell – CEO, The Dove Service
- Wendy Hocking – CEO, The Gingerbread Centre
- Sonia Roberts – CEO, Landau
- Karen Wilson – CEO, North Staffordshire Mind
- Carole Stone – CEO, North Staffordshire Voice for Mental Health
- Danny Flynn – CEO, North Staffs YMCA
- Kay Glover – CEO, Savana
- Andrew Thompson – CEO, VAST
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