

# **Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

**Date: 30 April 2013**

Agenda item: 9

Wards: All Wards

## **Subject: Scrutiny review of volunteering in Merton**

Lead officer: Julia Regan, Head of Democracy Services

Lead member: Councillor Peter Southgate, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Forward Plan reference number: na

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### **Recommendations:**

- A. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission considers and endorses the report arising from the scrutiny review of volunteering in Merton, attached at Appendix 1; and
- B. That the Commission agrees to forward the review report to cabinet for approval and implementation of the recommendations, by means of an action plan to be drawn up by officers and relevant partners working with the Cabinet Member(s) to be designated by Cabinet.

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To present the scrutiny review report on volunteering in Merton to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission for endorsement and to seek agreement to forward the report to Cabinet for approval and implementation of the review recommendations.

### **2. DETAILS**

- 2.1 The Commission, at its meeting on 17 July 2012, discussed the use of volunteers in the library service and agreed to establish a task group in order to investigate other opportunities for the council to involve volunteers and to facilitate service delivery other than through direct provision.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission appointed a small task group to carry out the review. The task group's report is attached at Appendix 1.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission can select topics for scrutiny review and for other scrutiny work as it sees fit, taking into account views and suggestions from officers, partner organisations and the public.

### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED**

- 4.1 In carrying out its review, the task group questioned representatives from Volunteer Centre Merton, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Making Colliers Wood Happy and Merton University of the Third Age as well as talking to council officers and Cabinet Members.

4.2 Appendix 1 of the task group's report lists the written evidence received and Appendix 2 lists the witnesses at each meeting.

## **5. TIMETABLE**

5.1 The task group was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission and so this report will be presented to its meeting on 30 April 2013 for the Commission's approval.

5.2 The Commission will then send the report to the Council's Cabinet on 10 June for initial discussion.

## **6. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 None for the purposes of this covering report. Any specific resource implications will be identified and presented to Cabinet prior to agreeing an action plan for implementing the report's recommendations.

## **7. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None for the purposes of this report.

## **8. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 It is a fundamental aim of the scrutiny process to ensure that there is full and equal access to the democratic process through public involvement and engaging with local partners in scrutiny reviews. Furthermore, the outcomes of reviews are intended to benefit all sections of the local community. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed as part of the review process and is available on request from the Scrutiny Team (020 8545 3864).

## **9. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None for the purposes of this report.

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None for the purposes of this report.

## **11. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

11.1 Appendix 1 – task group review report on volunteering in Merton.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1 Notes of task group meetings.



London Borough of Merton

# **Report and recommendations arising from the scrutiny task group review of volunteering in Merton**

**Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

**April 2013**

### **Task group membership**

Councillor Peter Southgate (Chair)  
Councillor Iain Dysart  
Councillor James Holmes  
Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender  
Councillor Judy Saunders  
Councillor Debbie Shears

### **Scrutiny support:**

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### **Acknowledgements**

The task group would particularly like to thank the representatives of Making Colliers Wood Happy, Merton University of the Third Age, Wimbledon Guild, Volunteer Centre Merton and Merton Voluntary Service Council who took the time to come and talk to us about how they work with volunteers. We would also like to thank the council officers and Cabinet Members who shared their experiences and thoughts with us.

All contributors are listed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this report.

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## **Foreword by the Review Chair**

The starting point for this review was a report to the Commission on the use of volunteers in Merton's library service. Because this turned out to be so successful, members thought there might be scope to use volunteers in providing other council services – subject to the lessons learned from the library service in how to use volunteers correctly.

Merton has a large and varied voluntary sector, much of it thriving without any help from the council. It rapidly became apparent that our original remit was too narrow; it was council-centric rather than volunteer-centric. We learned to appreciate the value of volunteering *per se*, even when it has nothing to do with the provision of council services. Volunteering fosters social cohesion, it is an expression of civic values and responsibilities. Volunteering is worth supporting because it helps to build the type of society we want to see in Merton.

The second thing we learned about volunteering is that the volunteers themselves benefit just as much as those they help. People may turn to volunteering because something in their lives has changed, often with a jolt – redundancy, retirement or bereavement are common triggers. Volunteering can help them rebuild their lives by providing a sense of purpose and meaning. Put simply, it can give them a reason to get out of bed in the mornings.

Merton is justifiably proud of its voluntary sector, which plays a major role in our civic life. It is to the credit of the council that it has maintained funding to the voluntary sector while neighbouring authorities have cut theirs. But budgetary pressures ahead mean we will look increasingly to the voluntary sector to supplement council services we can no longer fund in full. If we want to keep what we value and build social cohesion, we must fund the voluntary sector properly.

This has been one of the most rewarding scrutiny reviews I have chaired, and for that I would like to thank the members of the task group – especially Cllr Gilli Lewis-Lavender who joined me on all our site visits. But my deepest thanks are reserved Julia Regan who supported us through many meetings and managed to distil a succinct report from our lengthy discussions.

**Peter Southgate**  
**Chair of the Task Group**

## **Executive Summary**

The task group was set up in order to investigate further opportunities for the council to involve volunteers and to facilitate service delivery other than through direct provision. However, early on in the review, compelling evidence was received of the benefits that volunteering brings to the volunteers themselves as well as to the local community and the economy. This led the task group to explore the council's role in facilitating and supporting volunteering in the local area as a whole rather than focussing solely on council services.

The report is evidence based, drawing on and reflecting the wide range of written and oral evidence received. The task group questioned representatives from Volunteer Centre Merton, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Making Colliers Wood Happy and Merton University of the Third Age as well as talking to council officers and Cabinet members. Task group members visited Wimbledon Guild, the Acacia Intergenerational Centre and the New Horizon Centre to speak to staff and volunteers about the volunteering activities at those centres.

The task group found that a considerable and growing number of people are taking part in volunteering activities. Although the majority are aged 50+, younger people are increasingly becoming involved.

The motivations for volunteering are as varied as the volunteers themselves and may include making a contribution, keeping busy, meeting people and making friends, acquiring new skills and increasing their employment prospects.

The task group found that volunteering offers considerable benefits to the volunteer, the organisation receiving their services and to the local community. It also found that there are many different ways in which volunteers already contribute to council services.

The task group has made a number of recommendations aimed at supporting and celebrating the valuable roles that volunteers undertake in the community and to help communities and the Council to achieve maximum benefit from this work. It has also recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission promotes volunteering and prompts innovation by receiving an annual progress update.

The task group's recommendations run throughout the report and are listed in full overleaf.

## List of task group's recommendations

	Responsible decision making body
<b>Recommendation 1</b> (paragraph 16)	
We recommend that data on volunteering, collected in 2012 from the annual residents survey and the council's staff survey, should be analysed to plot variations in volunteering and to build a more detailed profile of volunteering activity in Merton.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 2</b> (paragraph 35)	
We recommend that future Mayors consider continuing to give out a Mayoral crest pin badge to residents and staff who have made a significant contribution to the community, including those who have made a significant impact through volunteering. Clearly this will be at the discretion of the Mayor. We would, however, recommend that the Mayor has a simple set of criteria for giving out these badges.	Mayor of Merton
<b>Recommendation 3</b> (paragraph 43)	
We recommend that Cabinet consider the provision of a certificate to recognise the volunteer's service to the Council and to provide a form of reference for prospective employers. It is proposed that there would be regular award ceremonies at which these certificates would be given out by the Mayor.	Cabinet Mayor of Merton
<b>Recommendation 4</b> (paragraph 44)	
We recommend that Cabinet give consideration to the provision of an offer from Merton Adult Education for those volunteers who need support with CV writing and interviewing skills.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 5</b> (paragraph 46)	
We recommend that Cabinet should investigate the costs and benefits for volunteers who make a significant contribution to council services receiving reduced prices for some library and leisure services.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 6</b> (paragraph 62)	
We recommend that the web-based approach to advertising volunteering opportunities should be complemented by use of My Merton and other low-tech mechanisms for those who do not access the internet, including using banners and touch points.	Cabinet



<b>Recommendation 7</b> (paragraph 63)	
We recommend that Volunteer Centre Merton and the Council encourage volunteers to use social media (such as Twitter and Facebook) to share their experiences of volunteering in order to raise public awareness and to encourage a wider range of people to become volunteers.	Cabinet Volunteer Centre Merton
<b>Recommendation 8</b> (paragraph 68)	
We recommend that the Council work with Merton Voluntary Service Council to continue to support voluntary sector groups' volunteering activities by identifying and signposting potential sources of funding.	Cabinet Merton Voluntary Service Council
<b>Recommendation 9</b> (paragraph 71)	
We recommend that Merton Voluntary Service Council provide information (or a link) on its Merton Connected website to help local volunteering groups make contact with other groups within the borough, to encourage them to share experiences and for advice and support.	Merton Voluntary Service Council
<b>Recommendation 10</b> (paragraph 73)	
We recommend that councillors should get involved with volunteering groups in their wards, promoting the work that the groups do and helping them to forge links with other groups doing similar work.	All councillors
<b>Recommendation 11</b> (paragraph 77)	
We recommend that the Council's Communications Team contact Merton University of the Third Age to discuss how they can help with publicity. Options to consider should include My Merton, resident association magazines and ward newsletters.	Cabinet Merton University of the Third Age
<b>Recommendation 12</b> (paragraph 79)	
We recommend that Cabinet support work to explore the feasibility of developing a "United Way" in Merton so that there is one-stop-shop approach to making charitable donations, whereby a fund is built up which can then be used to give grants to local good causes.	Cabinet
<b>Recommendation 13</b> (paragraph 80)	
We recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission continue to monitor the implementation of the Merton Partnership's Merton Volunteering and Community Action Strategy 2012 – 2014 and beyond.	Overview and Scrutiny Commission

<b>Recommendation 14</b> (paragraph 87)	
We recommend that the Council's Corporate Management Team continue to look for new and innovative ways to involve volunteers in order to supplement service provision. Progress on this should be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on a regular basis.	Corporate Management Team  Overview and Scrutiny Commission
<b>Recommendation 15</b> (paragraph 88)	
We recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission should take an ongoing interest in progress on volunteering and should ask the lead Director (currently the Director of Community and Housing) to bring an annual update on behalf of the Council's Corporate Management Team and the Merton Partnership	Overview and Scrutiny Commission
<b>Recommendation 16</b> (paragraph 90)	
We recommend that in the assessment made for awarding contracts, where relevant and appropriate, Cabinet consider requiring officers to have a criterion that will take into account the extent to which contractors already use volunteers and their proposals for future use as a means of enhancing the services provided.	Cabinet

## Report of the Volunteering Scrutiny Task Group

### Introduction

#### *Purpose*

1. The Commission, at its meeting on 17 July 2012, discussed the use of volunteers in the library service and agreed to establish a task group in order to investigate other opportunities for the council to involve volunteers and to facilitate service delivery other than through direct provision.
2. The task group's terms of reference were:
  - to examine what motivates people to volunteer and what might put them off;
  - to understand and learn from the experience that the voluntary sector has of recruiting, training and supporting volunteers in a wide range of roles;
  - to consider how best to encourage volunteering in Merton, and what the council can do to facilitate and support it;
  - to identify potential barriers to using volunteers in a wider range of council services and make recommendations on ways to overcome these, whilst also identifying where their use may be inappropriate.

#### *What the task group did*

3. The task group has had seven meetings at which a wide range of evidence has been considered including:
  - an academic study of the impact of volunteering in Merton
  - information from Directors about how volunteers are currently deployed by the Council
  - information from other councils' websites illustrating the wide range of available volunteering opportunities
  - websites and newsletters demonstrating good practice in a variety of different settings
4. Witnesses at task group meetings included representatives from Volunteer Centre Merton, Merton Voluntary Service Council, Making Colliers Wood Happy and Merton University of the Third Age so that different models of volunteering could be discussed.
5. Task group members visited Wimbledon Guild, the Acacia Intergenerational Centre and the New Horizon Centre to speak to staff and volunteers about the volunteering activities at those centres.
6. Appendix 1 lists the written evidence received by the task group and Appendix 2 lists the witnesses at each meeting.
7. This report sets out the task group's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The task group's recommendations run throughout the report and are set out in full in the Executive Summary at the front of this document.

## What is volunteering?

8. The Merton Compact Code on Volunteering defines it as any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) or to benefit the environment.
9. During this review we have found a number of different models of volunteering. The main distinction generally made is between formal and informal volunteering:
  - formal volunteering refers to people who volunteer with official groups, clubs or organisations
  - informal volunteering refers to people who give unpaid help to other people, usually friends or neighbours or people with similar interests
10. We found further distinctions around the extent to which the activity is formally organised and who the beneficiaries are. Beneficiaries may be a small number of individuals, the local community or a wider community. The examples below illustrate the diversity of models of volunteering:

<u>Neighbourhood Watch</u> <u>Street Champions</u> Volunteers act as “eyes and ears” for the community	<u>University of the Third Age</u> Volunteers lead classes and activities for other members
<u>Making Colliers Wood Happy</u> Volunteers take part and lead on activities aimed at building a sense of community and personal happiness	<u>Merton Libraries</u> Volunteers provide services and activities that complement work done by paid staff
<u>Wimbledon Guild, Merton and Morden Guild, Age Concern UK (Merton)</u> Volunteers work in a wide range of roles, including the charity shop, running IT classes and counselling services	<u>Olympics</u> Volunteers trained and deployed on range of activities including stewarding, ticketing, athlete escorts, drivers, medical assistance...

11. Appendix 3 contains a list of Merton Council and related services that currently use volunteers.

## How widespread is volunteering?

12. Volunteer Centre Merton quoted from a study estimating that one third of the adult population were involved in formal volunteering activities nationally in 2010.
13. An academic study carried out by Roehampton University in 2005 (full reference in Appendix 1) assessed the scale and scope of volunteering in the London Borough of Merton:
  - regular formal volunteering – 26% of over sixteens, average 106 hours per person per annum
  - regular informal volunteering – 36%, average 72 hours
  - civic activities - 3% of over sixteens, time not known.
14. As part of the monitoring of the Community Plan, Volunteer Centre Merton provides information on the number of volunteers recruited and placed each year.
15. We understand that data is currently being collected from the Annual Residents Survey, the Merton Council staff survey and an on-line survey to identify current levels of volunteering locally and to explore perceived barriers to volunteering. Merton Voluntary Service Council will report in March 2013 on the results of the Residents Survey and the online survey.
16. **We recommend that data on volunteering, collected in 2012 from the annual residents survey and the council's staff survey, should be analysed to plot variations in volunteering and to build a more detailed profile of volunteering activity in Merton. (recommendation 1)**
17. We heard from a number of sources, including Volunteer Centre Merton, that the majority of volunteers are aged 50+ but that young people are becoming increasingly involved in volunteering activities. We heard from Merton Voluntary Service Council of new and innovative models being explored with potential for opening up volunteering opportunities to a wider range of people. These include short bursts of activity, known as micro-volunteering and on-line volunteering that can be done at any time from any location. These approaches are being taken forward as part of the Merton Partnership's Voluntary and Community Action Strategy.
18. Several witnesses informed us that there has been an increase in the number of volunteers, including instances where the supply had been much greater than expected:
  - Merton library service intended to recruit 144 volunteers in 2011/12 and actually recruited 512,
  - by 10 October 2012, Volunteer Centre Merton had received more than 50 offers from Team Merton volunteers (former Olympics volunteers) to help as stewards on Bonfire Night.

19. The Bonfire Night example above indicates that the positive experience of volunteering for the Olympics may have a lasting impact.
20. We welcome the extensive campaign “Shout About Your Volunteering”, launched by Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) in January 2013 to raise the profile and encourage more people to volunteer. We also welcome MVSC’s decision to fund a business engagement manager post at Merton Chamber of Commerce to encourage businesses to get more involved in the local community.
21. A previous task group, the Recession Scrutiny Task Group 2009/10, considered the impact that the recession has had on the supply and profile of volunteers. The task group found that many voluntary sector organisations had increased their use of volunteers – partly to help in dealing with increased service demand and reduced funding but also in response to an increase in the number of people offering to volunteer.
22. The Citizens Advice Bureau told the Recession Scrutiny Task Group that the profile of volunteers had changed and become more diverse, including some who were volunteering in order to acquire the skills and confidence to move into paid employment.

### **The volunteer – motivation and benefits**

23. We are convinced that it is important to look at volunteering from the perspective of the volunteer, rather than the council or other employer, if we are to understand motivations for volunteering.
24. It is clear that there is a wide range of motivations for volunteers and that these vary from person to person. Motivation may include wanting to give something back, keep busy, pursue interests, gain skills or to find work.
25. We heard that Volunteer Centre Merton's experience of interviewing applicants for formal volunteering opportunities is that in recent years motivation has changed and around 50% of volunteers are now looking to gain skills that will help them to find employment and/or enhance their CV. This is particularly so for young people.
26. Similarly, given the wide range of volunteering opportunities available, some volunteers will want to carry out basic tasks and others will be seeking an opportunity to be more creative or to develop work-related skills and experience.
27. Some people may volunteer to carry out an activity that they are passionate about (such as sports coaching) or where they have some professional expertise (such as accountancy or teaching). Others may volunteer because they have time on their hands and/or wish to acquire new skills. Others may wish to start with simple duties (making drinks or washing up) and may only be able to offer a limited number of hours.
28. Volunteer Centre Merton's data for 2010 shows that volunteers' top areas of interest were children and youth, education and literacy, elderly, health and mental health. These matched available volunteering opportunities. Volunteer Centre Merton expect that interest in sports activities is likely to increase post-Olympics.
29. What volunteers gain from volunteering will depend on why they volunteer and what activities they undertake. Potential benefits include:
  - meeting people and making friends
  - increased self confidence
  - enjoyment
  - satisfaction from doing something worthwhile for the benefit of others
  - new skills or knowledge
  - improved employability – work experience & skills & confidence
  - improved physical and/or mental health
30. The 2005 study of volunteering in Merton found differential impacts on older and younger volunteers. High impact factors for younger people were employment skills, social skills, new friends, building trust and appreciating other cultures. There were fewer but no less important impacts for older people – keeping active, new friendships and social activities. Other factors affecting impact were the length of time in the role and the demands or stresses of the role.

## Should we reward volunteers?

31. We understand that where volunteers are employed in a formal role, it is good practice for the organisation to make sure that they feel valued and that they are an integral part of the organisation. Wimbledon Guild have ensured that the culture of the organisation is to welcome the volunteer and involve them (where they wish to be involved) in training, staff meetings and suchlike. They also spend time getting to know the individual and supporting them with professional development or other goals.
32. Volunteer Centre Merton suggested a number of specific actions that an organisation could take in order to thank the volunteer:
  - telephone just to thank them
  - write an article about them in your newsletter
  - have a photographic display of all your volunteers
  - send a 'thank you' note to the volunteer's employer (if employed) for sharing such a treasured resource
  - print volunteer recognition certificates
  - invite to an annual volunteer's award ceremony
  - nominate for local or national volunteer awards
  - ask the Mayor to host a formal reception in the Mayor's parlour
33. We commend the Council for taking the initiative in encouraging recognition and reward of volunteers through the Civic Awards (in partnership with Wimbledon Guardian) and the Merton Partnership's Volunteer Awards. We understand that a review of volunteer recognition is currently underway within Merton Voluntary Service Council as part of the Volunteering and Community Action Strategy and a report will be available shortly.
34. The current Mayor of Merton, Councillor David Williams, has adopted community service as his theme for the year and has been giving out Mayoral crest pin badges to residents and staff who have made a significant contribution to the community, including those who have made a significant impact through volunteering.
35. **We applaud this initiative and recommend that future Mayors consider continuing to give out a Mayoral crest pin badge to residents and staff who have made a significant contribution to the community, including those who have made a significant impact through volunteering. Clearly this will be at the discretion of the Mayor. We would, however, recommend that the Mayor has a simple set of criteria for giving out these badges. (recommendation 2)**
36. We had some discussion about the merits of other more formal ways of thanking volunteers or offering rewards. In having that discussion we were mindful that the definition of a volunteer is that their services are



offered for free. We were also mindful that volunteers all have different motivations for volunteering and different perceived benefits.

37. We believe that although volunteering offers its own rewards – enjoyment, self esteem and opportunities to develop skills that could lead to employment – it is worth considering the provision of rewards (additional to those outlined above) in some circumstances.
38. We heard of two specific examples where volunteers were offered tangible rewards and prestige:
  - ongoing use of the Olympic London Ambassadors for events (already being used at Wembley and St Pancras International), who will be offered inducements such as discounts on theatre tickets.
  - the Northern Ireland Service Corps <http://nifoundation.net/volunteering/> aimed to establish volunteering as an attractive and prestigious activity through caps, badges and membership cards.
39. We want to ensure that the principle of civic duty is stressed and that rewards are not to be given without some link to the input received (either the number of hours or the contribution made to enhancing council services) so that the reward is “earned”. We also want to ensure that a divide isn’t created between those who receive incentives and those (particularly informal carers) whose work does not receive formal recognition.
40. It has been suggested that young volunteers may welcome baseball caps and badges as a reward for voluntary service. We discussed this but didn’t reach a conclusion on the matter.
41. Given that a growing proportion of volunteers are seeking to develop skills and experience to help them find paid employment, we propose that rewards to those people should contribute to that goal. Rewards could include letters of reference, certificates and support with CV writing and interviews.
42. We believe that it would be helpful for the Council to design a certificate that would both recognise the contribution made by the volunteer and constitute a document that the volunteer could give to a prospective employer as a form of reference. The volunteer would be informed at the outset of the number of hours and level of commitment (punctuality, reliability, politeness, helpfulness etc.) that would be required to gain a certificate.
43. **We therefore recommend that Cabinet consider the provision of a certificate to recognise the volunteer’s service to the Council and to provide a form of reference for prospective employers. It is proposed that there would be regular award ceremonies at which these certificates would be given out by the Mayor. (recommendation 3)**

44. **We further recommend that Cabinet give consideration to the provision of an offer from Merton Adult Education for those volunteers who need support with CV writing and interviewing skills. (recommendation 4)**
45. We believe that there may also be merit in giving further consideration to offering those volunteers who make a contribution to council services reduced prices for some council services.
46. **We therefore recommend that Cabinet should investigate the costs and benefits for volunteers who make a significant contribution to council services receiving reduced prices for some library and leisure services. (recommendation 5)**

## **Benefits to employers and the wider community**

47. We understand that volunteering activities make a significant contribution to the UK's economy:
  - Voluntary Centre Merton quoted from a study estimating that in 2010 approximately 16.3 million adults participated at least once a month, contributing an estimated 5000 million hours of volunteer service and an estimated £52 billion to the economy.
  - The Merton 2005 study estimated an overall value of £100m for formal and informal volunteering and that for every £1 invested in formal volunteering, at least £5 is created in economic value.
48. Volunteering is high on the political agenda and is important to all three political parties. The attraction is about more than economic value, with volunteering being seen as a contribution to community cohesion and to both physical and mental wellbeing. The government's vision of the Big Society is about transforming the relationship between the citizen and the state, with a reduction in the role of the state and greater responsibilities for individuals and communities.
49. Baroness Neuberger's 2008 review of volunteering in health and social care public services as the Government's Volunteering Champion, explicitly cited benefits that volunteers bring to organisations, in her view "putting people at the heart of services – to allow individuals to collaborate with each other and create people centred services".
50. Councillor Nick Draper, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, described how aspects of the Council's library service were being shaped by volunteers bringing their own skills and interests to bear on activities offered in the libraries. He also provided an example of volunteers being used flexibly for the benefit of more than one organisation - Deen City Farm and the Priory Chapter House worked together to use the Farm's volunteers to remove excess sand from the Chapter House and spread it on the farm's walkways.
51. The potential benefits that volunteers bring to organisations are therefore considerable, including:
  - ambassadors for the service
  - hearing diverse points of view
  - cost effectiveness
  - enthusiasm
  - different approach to service delivery
52. However, the deployment of volunteers does incur some cost for the organisation. Financial costs include insurance, recruitment, induction, training, staff time to supervise and co-ordinate, cost of recognition and reward.

53. The Wimbledon Guild and Merton Citizens Advice Bureau gave evidence to a previous scrutiny review (the Recession Task Group) about the need for financial and other support from within the organisation. Both employ a member of staff to recruit, co-ordinate and take responsibility for the training and development of volunteers.
54. The organisation should also consider the impact on paid staff and the need for the culture of the organisation to, in Wimbledon Guild's words, "embrace the volunteer". Several witnesses emphasised that volunteers should not be used as substitutes for paid staff but to support, supplement and complement the services that they provide.
55. Volunteer Centre Merton stressed the importance of including staff in shaping volunteer opportunities from the outset in order to reduce misunderstandings and to build commitment and support for the volunteer programme. Volunteering England and the Trades Union Congress have developed a charter that sets out the key principles on which volunteering is organised and how good relations between paid staff and volunteers are built.
56. Organisations should also bear in mind that volunteers cannot be assumed to behave in the same way as a paid workforce - there is no compulsion to turn up and some volunteers can be unreliable, so contingencies may be required. We also heard that turnover can be an issue – the Acacia Intergenerational Centre now has 2 or 3 volunteers remaining from the 9 or 10 initially recruited. The library service has fared better, with an 83% year on year retention rate of volunteers.

## Role of Volunteer Centre Merton

57. Volunteer Centre Merton(VCM) is part of a network of over 300 volunteer centres co-ordinated and accredited by Volunteering England. VCM has been active in Merton for over 20 years, currently recruiting and placing over 3,000 Merton residents each year.
58. VCM's core services are to provide:
- brokerage between volunteers and placement (volunteer is interviewed to establish profile of skills and experience and to find an appropriate match for their skills and interests)
  - marketing volunteering to encourage local residents to participate, working in partnership with the Council's Communications Group
  - good practice development
  - working in partnership to develop local volunteering opportunities
  - leading role in the strategic development of the local volunteering infrastructure
59. Tailored support can be agreed between VCM and client organisations. Recent work that VCM has undertaken to add value to council services includes the Volunteers in Merton Libraries model and the work with Leisure Services to recruit sports and 2012 volunteers and the London Ambassadors for the Olympics and Paralympics. VCM is currently working to retain those volunteers to support future events in the borough.
60. Volunteer Centre Merton professionalises volunteering and provides an essential pan-borough network. Without this, recruitment of volunteers would be piecemeal, with each organisation left to find its own volunteers.
61. We endorse the approach taken by Volunteer Centre Merton (and set out in the Merton Partnership's Volunteering and Community Action Strategy) to using the web for information sharing and making contact.
- 62. We recommend that the web-based approach to advertising volunteering opportunities should be complemented by use of My Merton and other low-tech mechanisms for those who do not access the internet, including banners and touch points. (recommendation 6)**
- 63. We further recommend that Volunteer Centre Merton and the Council encourage volunteers to use social media (such as twitter and facebook) to share their experiences of volunteering in order to raise public awareness and to encourage a wider range of people to become volunteers. (recommendation 7)**

## Role of the Council

64. Our main focus at the outset of this review was to investigate opportunities for the council to make wider use of volunteers. However, early on we heard compelling evidence of the benefits that volunteering brings to the volunteers themselves, the local community and the economy. These led us to explore the council's role in facilitating and supporting volunteering in the local area rather than focussing solely on council services.
65. We believe that the Council should recognise the value of volunteering per se in terms of fostering the well-being of the volunteer as well as the client. This is consistent with the Council's responsibilities under the Health and Wellbeing Act. The Council should therefore support volunteering even when it has no direct relevance to the delivery of council services, because of its wider benefits to public health (mental and physical) and to social cohesion.
66. Such support could include recognition, signposting of funding sources, promotion without interference. We want the Council to work flexibly in conjunction with such groups rather than having a "them and us" approach. An example of this approach is the Health Walks scheme which is co-ordinated by the Council, with the walks themselves being led by volunteers.
67. We heard evidence of the how helpful relatively small sums of money to "pump-prime" or to fund specific equipment could be:
- Making Colliers Wood Happy received funding for a community gardening project to pay for insurance, tools and plants. Merton Priory Homes have provided funding for 5 hours of community development activity per week. Making Colliers Wood Happy pays key volunteers such as the choir master and the organist, funded through membership charges.
  - The Ageing Well Eastfields project at the Acacia Intergenerational Centre has provided initial funding and a project worker to set up activities with a view to them being run by the groups themselves in future
  - University of the Third Age charges a small membership fee to meet its administrative costs
68. **We therefore recommend that the Council work with Merton Voluntary Service Council to continue to support voluntary sector groups' volunteering activities by identifying and signposting potential sources of funding. (recommendation 8)**
69. We also became aware of the scope for organisations and groups of volunteers to support and learn from each other. For example, when we spoke to organisers of Merton University of the Third Age and of the

Acacia Intergenerational Centre, each identified benefits that would accrue from such contact:

- Acacia Intergenerational Centre would benefit from University of the Third Age's experience and advice on setting up groups
  - Merton University of the Third Age would benefit from being able to hold some of its activities at the Acacia.
70. On our visit to the New Horizons Centre we found that they have a number of links with local churches and other groups and that the premises are used regularly by the London Chinese Association.
- 71. We therefore recommend that Merton Voluntary Service Council provide information (or a link) on its Merton Connected website to help local volunteering groups make contact with other groups within the borough, to encourage them to share experiences and for advice and support. (recommendation 9)**
72. Ward councillors have access to a wealth of local knowledge about what is going on in their ward. They are therefore well placed to help local groups to make mutually beneficial contact with each other, therefore playing a key role in supporting local volunteering.
- 73. We recommend that councillors should get involved with volunteering groups in their wards, promoting the work that the groups do and helping them to forge links with other groups doing similar work. (recommendation 10)**
74. We discussed whether it would be helpful to recommend the appointment of a councillor champion for volunteering. We weighed up the advantages, in particular of having someone to spearhead action, against the disadvantages of the possible over-bureaucratising and heavy workload of the role.
75. We agreed that at present the Overview and Scrutiny Commission would take on this role through its monitoring of the implementation of our recommendations as well as our recommendations that it monitor the implementation of the Merton Partnership's Volunteering and Community Action Strategy (recommendation 13) and to receive an annual progress update from the lead Director (recommendation 15).
76. When asked how the Council could help, the Chair of Merton University of the Third Age said that it would be very helpful to be able to publish a short article in the Council's magazine in order to raise awareness and publicise activities.
- 77. We therefore recommend that the Council's Communications Team contact Merton University of the Third Age to discuss how they can help with publicity. Options to consider should include My Merton,**

**resident association magazines and ward newsletters.  
(recommendation 11)**

78. We were pleased to hear that the Chief Executive of Merton Voluntary Service Council is exploring the feasibility of bring the “United Way” to Merton. We understand that in the United States, the United Way is a coalition of charitable organisations that join together to pool fund raising efforts for non-profit groups. Most United Way fund raising focusses on the workplace through employee payroll donations and employer matching funds.
79. **We recommend that Cabinet support work to explore the feasibility of developing a “United Way” in Merton so that there is one-stop-shop approach to making charitable donations, whereby a fund is built up which can then be used to give grants to local good causes. (recommendation 12)**
80. **We also recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission continue to monitor the implementation of the Merton Partnership’s Merton Volunteering and Community Action Strategy 2012 – 2014 and beyond. (recommendation 13).**



### **Council services and volunteers**

81. We have been impressed by the variety of different ways in which volunteers already contribute to council services – Appendix 3 sets out those that have been brought to our attention.
82. The Library Service has worked in partnership with Volunteer Centre Merton since 2010 and has been extremely successful in recruiting volunteers to support staff in a range of different roles from meeting and greeting customers, shelving and delivering activities and events as well as training. Volunteers have delivered “added value services” such as language courses which staff would not have the resource time or expertise to deliver. Volunteers have enabled staff to focus their time and attention on customer service and core professional duties.
83. Volunteer Centre Merton told us that there is very real potential to work with other council services to replicate the success of the Volunteers in Merton Libraries model.
84. Another, very different, example of volunteer involvement in council services is the recently introduced Street Champions Scheme. This scheme encourages volunteers to act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the community, by reporting environmental problems to the Council. It is envisaged that by reporting problems, they will help the council sort out issues quickly and effectively.
85. We welcome the principle of residents volunteering to do more to enhance council services. We were informed that the Council’s Corporate Management Team is currently discussing ways in which this could be achieved. Although some of their proposals are at an early stage, these have been shared with us and we would like to see these interesting and innovative projects taken forward.
86. We were particularly interested in exploring how the work of the Neighbourhood Watch and Street Champions Schemes could be extended to develop a “good neighbours” ethos that would look out for elderly and vulnerable residents and could raise concerns if, for example, they hadn’t been seen for a while.
87. **We recommend that the Council’s Corporate Management Team continue to look for new and innovative ways to involve volunteers in order to supplement service provision. Progress on this should be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission on a regular basis. (recommendation 14)**
88. **We further recommend that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission should take an ongoing interest in progress on volunteering and should ask the lead Director (currently the Director of Community and Housing) to bring an annual update on behalf of the Council’s**

**Corporate Management Team and the Merton Partnership.  
(recommendation 15)**

89. We would also like to extend the enhancement of council services by encouraging the use of volunteers in council services that are provided through contracts with other organisations.
90. **We therefore recommend that in the assessment made for awarding contracts, where relevant and appropriate, Cabinet consider requiring officers to have a criterion that will take into account the extent to which contractors already use volunteers and their proposals for future use as a means of enhancing the services provided. (recommendation 16)**

## **Concluding remarks**

91. We found that a considerable and growing number of people are taking part in volunteering activities. Although the majority are aged 50+, younger people are increasingly becoming involved.
92. The motivation for volunteering is as varied as the volunteers themselves and may include making a contribution, keeping busy, meeting people and making friends, acquiring new skills and increasing their employment prospects.
93. We have been impressed by the extent to which volunteering offers benefits to the volunteer, the organisation receiving their services and the local community.
94. We believe that it is important to recognise and reward the contribution made by volunteers. We acknowledge that there are many different ways in which this can and is already being done. We made recommendations to extend this, including through the development of a certificate that would recognise services to the Council and can also be used as a form of reference for prospective employers.
95. We welcome the valuable work of Volunteer Centre Merton and Merton Voluntary Service Council in raising awareness of volunteering opportunities and experimenting with new ways of involving volunteers.
96. We were pleased to hear that there are many different ways in which volunteers already contribute to council services. We would very much like to encourage the Council to continue to explore new and innovative ways of working with volunteers in order to enhance and supplement service provision.
97. We have therefore recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Commission receive a report on this and continue to take an interest by receiving an annual progress update from the Council's Corporate Management Team and Merton Partnership.

## **What happens next?**

98. This task group was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Commission and so this report will be presented to its meeting on 30 April for the Commission's approval.
99. The Commission will then send the report to the Council's Cabinet on 10 June 2013 for initial discussion.
100. The Cabinet will be asked to provide a formal response to the Commission within two months.
101. The Cabinet will be asked to respond to each of the task group's recommendations, setting out whether the recommendation is accepted and how and when it will be implemented. If the Cabinet is unable to support and implement some of the recommendations, then it is expected that clearly stated reasons will be provided for each.
102. The lead Cabinet Member (or officer to whom this work is delegated) should ensure that other organisations to whom recommendations have been directed are contacted and that their response to those recommendations is included in the report.
103. A further report will be sought by the Commission six months after the Cabinet response has been received, giving an update on progress with implementation of the recommendations.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: written evidence**

Volunteering in the public services: health and social care; Baroness Neuberger's review as the Government's Volunteering Champion, March 2008

Assessing the impact of volunteering in a London borough; Brian Thomas; Centre for Non Profit and Voluntary Sector management, Roehampton University, Voluntary Action: The Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research, Vol 8 No. 1, 2006

Scouts Bob-a-Job week is back as Britain learns to value volunteering again, Daily Telegraph, 14 May 2012

Volunteering in Children's Centres: results from a volunteer questionnaire survey carried out in 2011 by 4Children for Family Lives

Information from websites of other councils, showing range of opportunities for volunteering – Somerset, Bury, Kent, Surrey

Information from Merton Departmental Directors on how volunteers are deployed currently

Presentation from Volunteer Centre Merton – "Volunteers. Adding Value to Your Service", 10 October 2012

Volunteer Centre Merton Newsletter , Autumn 2012

Merton Volunteering and Community Action Strategy 2012 – 2014, Merton Partnership.

Recommendations of the Recession Scrutiny Task Group

Recommendations of the Parks and Open Spaces Scrutiny Task Group

Merton U3A website text – description & list of groups

Merton U3A newsletter

Merton Street Champions Scheme – extract from website

We Will Gather – extract from website

Lambeth Council – snow wardens scheme – extract from website

## **Appendix 2: list of oral evidence**

### **Speakers:**

- Andy Norrell, Chief Executive of Volunteer Centre Merton, 10 October 2012 and 10 April 2013
- Sarah Hannigan, Recruitment and Placement Manager, Volunteer Centre Merton, 10 October 2012
- Beau Fadahunsi, Capacity Building and Training Manager, Volunteer Centre Merton, 10 October 2012
- Hayley James, Volunteering Strategy Programme Manager, Merton Voluntary Service Council, 10 October and 19 December 2012
- Councillor Nick Draper, Cabinet Member for Community and Culture, 31 October 2012
- Keith Spears, Making Colliers Wood Happy, 31 October 2012
- Judith Williams, Chair of Merton University of the Third Age, 20 November 2012
- Councillor Mark Betteridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Implementation, 19 December 2012 and 10 April 2013
- Bec Yusuf, Merton Voluntary Service Council, 19 December 2012
- Simon Williams, Director of Communities and Housing, 24 January and 7 March 2013
- John Dimmer, Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnership, 24 January 2013

### **Visits**

Wimbledon Guild, 3 December 2012 – Councillors Peter Southgate and Gilli Lewis-Lavender met with Elisabeth Morris, Volunteer Co-ordinator and Jane Plant, Head of Social Welfare Department.

Acacia Intergenerational Centre, 17 December 2012 – Councillors Peter Southgate and Gilli Lewis-Lavender met with Kim Norden, Manager.

New Horizon Centre, 9 January 2013 - Councillors Peter Southgate and Gilli Lewis-Lavender met with Andy Hodge, operations manager, Jenny Hill, Chair of the Commonsides Trust and Jackie, a volunteer who helps with the lunch club.

### **Appendix 3**

#### **List of Merton Council and related services that currently use volunteers**

##### Community and Housing

Library service

Friends of the Libraries

Social care - pilot project with Merton Seniors Forum looking at volunteers acting as lay assessors in care homes

Adult social care - preventive programmes in the voluntary sector.

##### Environment and Regeneration

Friends of parks groups.

Community gardening projects, licence so individuals, residents groups and businesses can maintain grass verges - All England Club have joined this scheme

Individuals, resident groups, Tree Wardens to water trees and plant and maintain bedding around street trees.

Dog Watch - dog owners report incidents of environ crime and crime related incidents.

Tree wardens are a group of volunteers monitoring the borough's tree stock acting as eyes and ears and working closely with the Parks staff to ensure healthy trees . They are also involved in accessing funds not available to the borough for the planting of new stock.

Volunteers helping with creation of new greenspaces and conversion to foodgrowing .

The Street champions initiative - volunteers act as the eyes and ears in streets and neighbourhoods

Community safety - numerous examples of volunteer effort in this area including the mediation service and work in responding to domestic violence.

Neighbourhood Watch scheme

##### Children, Schools and Families

Schools make extensive use of volunteers: providing adult cover for trips; providing additional adults for specific activities such as small group reading  
School governors are all volunteers

Schools expect young people to volunteer as part of their contribution to school life, be it on school councils, as peer supporters, prefects etc.

Early Years - Volunteers provide peer support (i.e. for breast feeding mums, befriending etc) and support activities in our 11 centres and visits.

Youth Service - Much of the non statutory youth provision in the borough is totally dependent on volunteers i.e. uniformed clubs, church youth groups etc.

Merton Youth Service uses younger and older volunteers and for young people this sometimes progresses into accredited training and employment.

Youth Justice - volunteers on the Referral Order Panel

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