

**LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM**

**A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF**

**VOLUNTARY SECTOR FUNDING PROCESSES**

**2004/2005**

## **FOREWORD BY PANEL CHAIR**

This review was agreed as a priority by the Scrutiny Commission, owing to various issues raised about future support to the voluntary sector in Merton and has been undertaken so that recommendations can be input to the 2006/7 grants process.

The Government has set out an agenda for the sustainability of the sector in 'Change Up' and this needs to be addressed locally. Also Merton has been developing its local Compact with the voluntary sector.

In the light of these local and national developments this review was set up and conducted by three members of the Regeneration and the Public Realm Scrutiny Panel. The review took place between August 2004 and May 2005.

A best value review of the Council's support for the voluntary sector was undertaken in 2001. Since then there have been cuts to the funding of the sector and concern has been expressed about a lack of resources. Although most of the recommendations from the review have been either progressed or implemented, there is still some more work to be done, particularly with regards to a corporate funding strategy and accommodation for voluntary groups.

The task group decided to conduct interviews with funding officers, external partners and umbrella voluntary organisations and send out a questionnaire to groups via the MVSC newsletter, to gain maximum participation in the review. We are grateful for the cooperation of all the organisations who contributed to this review and gave their time to come and speak to us.

The Compact has made very good progress on taking forward issues regarding partnership working and several areas have been highlighted in our report. In particular transparency in the grants process and funding by all partners needs to be demonstrated, particularly for new groups. One other issue that was highlighted was play schemes funded by different partners.

The task group were pleased that the Funding and Procurement sub group of the Compact are prepared to take forward the work on aligning grant funding with key priorities, as this has been a very contentious issue in the past concerning historical funding. The voluntary sector needs to be treated as an equal partner and consulted at all stages in any policy decisions by partners and this should be done through the Compact.

The recommendations in the report will be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission and Cabinet for endorsement. The panel is sure that these recommendations will be endorsed and progressed.

Finally I would like to thank the fellow members of the panel and officers for ensuring the review reached its conclusion.

**Councillor Su Assinen**

**Chair of Review Task Group**  
**TASK GROUP MEMBERSHIP (drawn from the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel)**

**Councillor Su Assinen (Task Group Chair)**  
**Councillor John Dehaney**  
**Councillor Dot Kilsby**

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**Rob Moran, Head of Regeneration**  
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**Acknowledgements:**

The Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review, through preparing reports, attending meetings to answer questions and submitting views for consideration.

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## REPORT SUMMARY

A review of Merton's voluntary sector funding procedures has been conducted, so that key outcomes can be fed into the forthcoming voluntary sector grants allocation process for 2006/7.

A Task Group of four councillors from the Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel undertook the review and arranged a series of meetings to hear evidence from voluntary sector umbrella groups and grant funding partners. The views of individual voluntary organisations were also sought through an item included in Merton Voluntary Service Council's newsletter.

The Task Group has also considered progress with implementing the Merton Compact, which is a partnership agreement between the London Borough of Merton, Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust (PCT) and the voluntary and community sector. The Police have also signed up to the Compact and other organisations are likely to follow suit.

Following its review, the Panel has made the following key recommendations:-

- 1. It is important to highlight that there needs to be adequate resources for the voluntary sector infrastructure alongside services in Merton and that this includes external as well as Council funding;*
- 2. There should be development of a corporate funding and support strategy for voluntary and community organisations and the voluntary sector should be consulted on this;*
- 3. More clarity should be given to the grants process in order to provide ease of access for groups applying for funding, through promotion of a clear central contact point/corporate lead;*
- 4. Transparency in grants funding should be demonstrated, so that all groups can see that the process operates in a fair way, through objective application of the funding criteria;*
- 5. There is a need for mapping of various types of services across the borough – it is suggested that initially this should be of the services provided within community centres;*
- 6. There should be an insistence that organisations which provide advice should have, or be working towards, an appropriate Quality Mark accreditation;*
- 7. Consideration should be given to a new approach to leisure funding and charging for services, with a view to addressing the disparity between Safer Merton schemes being offered free to participants and Summer Playschemes making a charge for participation;*
- 8. The Compact Funding and Procurement Sub-Group to be recommended to pursue the issue of potential imbalance in current grant funding to ensure that funding matches key priorities;*
- 9. There should be a review of voluntary sector accommodation provided by the Authority, within an agreed timescale.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Each year in Merton, key issues are identified which are scrutinised through a review process. A review aims to address areas of weakness or poor service, through making recommendations to improve outcomes for the local community. Elected Members undertaken these reviews, working together in task groups.
- 1.2 The Regeneration and Public Realm Scrutiny Panel Members raised the issue of voluntary sector funding and the Overview and Scrutiny Commission approved this issue as a priority review. The key issues to be looked at were:-
- The criteria for grant funding, given the fact that the Council is likely to become more reliant on the voluntary sector in the future;
  - Current funding processes, to ensure that all groups are funded in a fair way, with consistency in application of criteria;
  - The possibility of funding new groups, rather than the groups which have been traditionally funded in the past, to demonstrate that there is not a 'closed door' policy to grant funding at Merton.
- 1.3 Three councillors were given responsibility for undertaking the review: Councillors Su Assinen, John Dehaney and Dot Kilsby.
- 1.4 Review terms of reference and review programme were approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission. These set out the parameters for the review focus and identified key witnesses and stakeholders to be engaged with. (See Appendix A)

## **2. THE PROCEDURE FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW**

- 2.1 The Task Group met 8 times between August 2004 and May 2005. Councillors held meetings during the daytime and the evenings.
- 2.2 Councillors agreed that they should meet with funding officers, external partners and 'umbrella' voluntary organisations, as well as consulting local groups on their perceptions of the current voluntary sector funding process, to ensure a fully participative approach.
- 2.3 Research has also identified some work on voluntary sector funding in other authorities which has been highlighted by the Task Group where appropriate as examples of good practice.

## **3. VOLUNTARY SECTOR: NATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

- 3.1 The Home Office has introduced its initiative for maximising the potential of voluntary organisations, with its 'Change Up' agenda. This framework, which has emerged as a result of consultation and close working between Government, the local public sector and the voluntary and community sector, sets out a ten year vision for building the

capacity of frontline organisations and putting in place the infrastructure support they need. It identifies key actions required to turn the vision into reality.

- 3.2 Capacity building and infrastructure provision requires considerable investment. Government has invested £8m of an £80m fund set aside for catalysing improvement and reorganisation of infrastructure support for the next two years. In addition, £125m has been committed as a one-off investment fund to support Futurebuilders, which was established to assist voluntary and community sector providing organisations in public service work. The Government is working with representatives from the voluntary and community sector to establish how these resources can best be used. However, sustainability can only be guaranteed if other funders ensure their investment reflects the capacity needs of frontline organisations and funds the infrastructure that supports them. The costs of infrastructure support should also be included in contracts and grant payments to frontline organisations.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Task Group has borne the above national framework in mind when undertaking the review.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES AND CONSIDERATION OF EVIDENCE**

##### **4.1 a) Consultation Through Merton Voluntary Service Council Newsletter**

- 4.1.1 MVSC offered to include an article on the review in an edition of their regular newsletter, so that local voluntary organisations would have the opportunity to contribute views on the grant funding process.
- 4.1.2 Detailed responses were received from the following organisations who currently receive grant funding from Merton and the Task Group appreciates their input:
- Merton community Transport
  - Carers Support Merton
  - Jigsaw4u
- 4.1.3 The key issues to emerge from consulting the voluntary sector groups were:-
- The advantages of 3 year funding in terms of being able to plan services in advance;
  - The need for advance notice and more publicity for possible funding streams;
  - The problem with lengthy application forms for very limited funding and the benefit of a two-stage application process (initial expressions of interest and then a more detailed application);
  - The importance of equal access to funding;

- The need for the voluntary sector contribution to local services to be fully recognised;
- Levels of monitoring to be equitable across the sector and proportional to funding allocated;
- The need for investment funding for sustainability and regeneration to allow continuation of essential services, as well as development of new initiatives to enhance the life chances of the local community;
- The importance of funding for development of essential voluntary sector infrastructure

#### **4.2 b) Meetings With Voluntary Sector Officers**

4.2.1 Members met with voluntary sector officers and learned that the current funding and support levels are around £1.8m, which includes grant allocations, notional rent, transport and payroll facilities.

4.2.2 There was discussion about the 2001 Best Value Review of the Council's Support for the Voluntary Sector. The Task Group considered an update provided on the progress made against each Review recommendation. The majority of review recommendations have now been implemented. However, a key recommendation still requiring work is the establishment of a corporate policy for voluntary sector funding and this issue is in the current work programme for the Regeneration Division.

4.2.3 With three funding streams currently operating, there are different priorities depending on the department concerned. This could result in some groups falling between different priority streams.

4.2.4 There are currently approximately 50 groups being funded by the London Borough of Merton and three year funding has been introduced to allow groups to plan ahead. However, to be eligible for three year funding, groups must demonstrate that:-

- The organisation is at least three years old;
- There are sound financial management systems in place;
- There is a realistic forward plan;
- There is a monitoring system in place to allow analysis of information on current users;
- There are targets for potential new users;
- There is a management committee with a mix of old and new members.



### **4.3 c) Meetings with Voluntary Sector Umbrella Groups**

#### **Voluntary Sector Liaison Group**

4.3.1 The Task Group was advised that several voluntary sector groups feel that a continual reduction of funding could begin to impact on the viability of their organisations. Also, there needs to be a clearly defined principle about what core support is, as the lack of funding opportunities for this can be a disincentive to growth. The point was also made that there had been extensive consultation about the introduction of three year grant funding and so change to this system would not necessarily be welcomed.

#### **Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC)**

4.3.2 A meeting was held with MVSC on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2004. The Task Group heard that there are too many organisations asking for funding and insufficient resources to meet the requests. In addition, trusts and the Lottery are tightening their funding criteria and it is difficult to acquire funding for staff. It was therefore very important to involve the voluntary sector in setting funding priorities following the introduction of the Voluntary Sector Compact.

4.3.3 MVSC highlighted the fact that it administers a community development fund pot which is fairly small but through which it can assist groups through granting small sums of money for specific activities.

#### **Merton Volunteer Bureau (MVB)**

4.3.4 Members learned that, due to current grant funding processes, MVB had to apply to two separate funding streams for different aspects of their work. There can be a lack of clarity about who to approach within the Authority when trying to promote new developments in the voluntary sector, with grant funding procedures operated in different Council departments. The system could benefit from identification of a clear central contact point and corporate policy lead.

#### **Merton Unity Network (MUN)**

4.3.5 MUN is an umbrella group, which encourages black and ethnic minority groups to come together and offers support to them. This support covers a range of services, including bereavement, refugees, school exclusions, new families arriving in the local area. There is a need to have strong liaison between local authorities and the voluntary sector and the Task Group was advised that some authorities have a dedicated voluntary sector officer unit. It is also vital to have transparency in grants funding, so that all groups can see that the process operates in a fair way, applying criteria objectively.

### **Ethnic Minority Centre (EMC)**

- 4.3.6 The EMC aims to improve the lives of all ethnic minority communities in Merton. Advice, support and activities covers a range of areas, including education, health, capacity building, consultation on key issues. EMC works with both the local community groups and with service providers, including the local authority, PCT and the police. EMC provides a voice for bme communities and act as an advocate for their needs and a channel for access to key services.
- 4.3.7 EMC does not provide funding to other groups but does help to identify possible sources of funding and assists with applications. Small amounts of funding can be secured from the police for events such as one day conferences for International Women's Day and other events. A race and hate crime conference will be taking place in the near future. EMC accommodation at Vestry Hall is offered to smaller groups to use for free, including use of PCs and training opportunities. Around 70 organisations are members of EMC. Information is disseminated through a quarterly newsletter and elections for appointment to the management committee take place every 2 years(membership includes 2 Merton councillors).
- 4.3.8 Health related work is undertaken with bme communities who cannot easily talk about their health issues to health professionals or access services. A range of awareness days are organised, for example for men covering mental health and prostate issues. So a lot of partnership work is undertaken, including involvement with young people.
- 4.3.9 EMC moved to 3 year funding from April 2005 which they have acknowledged will assist with forward planning. However, the view is that there should be more transparency on funding available to bme organisations, including clarity on levels of funding and notional rents. There are other funding opportunities available but sometimes the information comes out too late to allow for an application to be made.
- 4.3.10 The importance of good dissemination of information and a raising of awareness was emphasised, as well as assistance with making applications. Websites could be a good way to share information. MVSC has a website and EMC website is being launched soon.
- 4.3.11 The Task Group Chair advised that the Compact's *Funding and Procurement Sub-Group* will look at the imbalance of current funding and how to shift funding in terms of priorities, rather than on a historical basis. The review would recommend the Sub-Group to pursue this area.

### **4.4 d) Meetings With Funding Partners**

4.4.1 The following funding partners were consulted with and asked to outline their priorities for approving grant funding and their future objectives.

#### **Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust (PCT)**

4.4.2 The PCT's role is not only to commission a full range of primary health services in the NHS, but also to provide a variety of community services to improve the health of the local population. Promoting good health and preventative strategies are important to reduce the need for acute health services and release capacity for local service delivery.

4.4.3 Members learned about how the Health Improvement Fund (HImp Fund) operates. This provides funding for health initiatives in the voluntary, community and statutory sector. Integral to the funding is the addressing of inequalities in health and improving patient experience. Training in how to apply for funding is available and the scoring of bids received is undertaken independently, with feedback provided for unsuccessful applicants. However, the HImp fund is short term funding for a maximum of three years only. The Task Group therefore highlighted the need for the PCT working closely with Community Care and Children's Services at Merton to help sustain successful projects.

4.4.4 The importance of partnership working was highlighted. The wider community can work together to prevent ill health in the localities, through the PCT's healthy communities team and a community development focus. The team works with groups to help identify needs and service gaps and jointly develops projects for improving health.

4.4.5 Other initiatives include the Merton Horizons Healthy Living Initiative which focuses on Graveney, Cricket Green, Phipps Bridge and Figges Marsh wards. This is a community led project through local community centres, which delivers healthy living advice and support through exercise, pharmacy advice, welfare guidance and mental health advice. The project is linked to key PCT targets.

#### **Safer Merton**

4.4.6 The Task Group met with Safer Merton representatives who outlined the role and remit of Safer Merton. Safer Merton discharges a joint statutory duty held by the local authority and the police to reduce crime and drugs. It is jointly chaired by the Chief Executive of Merton and the police Chief Superintendent. An audit of all partner data is regularly undertaken on patterns of crime and disorder and then priorities are consulted on. An audit has just been undertaken for the period 2002 to 2005. Performance against specific targets set to reduce areas of crime and disorder is measured. Although not all targets have been met for this period, some notable successes were highlighted. The Task Group were informed that some more focus group work is needed in areas such as reporting of hate crimes

(domestic violence, race crime, homophobic crime). The third party reporting scheme will be relaunched in September/October 2005.

4.4.7 Merton is now designated the 4<sup>th</sup> safest borough in London. Prolific offenders account for 40% of all crime and there is a 70% success rate in this area. CCTV services (a police initiative with funding from the Mayor of London) have currently been introduced in 10 Merton wards so far.

4.4.8 There was funding provided for youth diversionary schemes under the Safer Merton Youth Champions Group/Merton Youth Services Activities Programme in 2004 which ran from July to September. Applications for small grants (£3k on average) were accepted from 19 groups. The Scheme, which offers free participation, was advertised on the Safer Merton website, by MVSC and Merton Youth Services and was subsequently evaluated in terms of crime reduction percentage change. Due to its success, funding for 2005 will be capped at £5k with the possibility of some year-long schemes. The free participation highlights the disparity and contradiction with leisure summer playschemes which make a charge. It was agreed that the review would highlight this issue and recommend a new approach to leisure budgeting.

#### **London Borough of Merton Community Care Services**

4.4.9 The Head of Community Care emphasised the link between health and social care, together with a need for increasing focus on the voluntary sector to deliver services as part of shift away from care at high need end of the spectrum towards more at intermediate care level. The overarching aim is to enable people to live as independently as possible, to minimise need for hospital/residential care, and to support carers.

4.4.10 A bid for funding is being prepared through the Older People's Partnership Board with a need to demonstrate how preventative initiatives will be brought in. However, despite the shift of thinking in the Adult Social Care Green Paper towards prevention, it is important to recognise that the voluntary sector in Merton cannot be utilised much more without considerable capacity building taking place.

4.4.11 A 3 tier model is being proposed, with locality based hubs and lower level prevention work through voluntary sector organisations. This will require good quality information and a unified system for sharing data. At the top end, the PCT and community care services provide for high level needs. The shift is therefore back to intermediate social/community care services. Money saved by people not requiring residential long term care can be used in other ways. Appropriate funding for the independent sector is therefore crucial – in effect “mainstreaming” of the voluntary sector.

4.4.12 Most social care groups are on 3 year funding but even that timeframe may not be sufficient. A mainstream voluntary sector is needed to provide a substantial basis for services and promote innovation.

However, the priority for Merton is to deliver the budget savings identified for 2005/6. Nevertheless, work is under way (PCT - Angela Gibson) to establish intermediate care services by July, although the benefits are unlikely to be seen until the year end. The ultimate aim is for nobody to go to a day centre but to move towards mainstream activities and employment/training. Also there is a need to tap into skills such as those held by older people to aid preventative strategies – the bid will develop this aspect. Volunteer training is available but there needs to be work done to encourage people to volunteer in the first place, to draw people into the system.

4.4.13 Merton, unlike authorities such as Croydon, does not have strong networks set up and does not have neighbourhood renewal funding to develop them. But partnership boards are becoming more empowered and focused which is welcomed.

4.4.14 There is a need to identify health/social care needs earlier and other departments could therefore be part of the locality based hubs e.g. libraries could be information centres for local communities.

4.4.15 If the funding bid is successful, it will result in £1m over 2 years. Even if the bid does not succeed, the process will have resulted in a focus of thinking about ways to develop more equal partnership working with the voluntary sector, disinvestment at the high care needs end and a shift towards intermediate care.

#### **4.5 e) Consideration Of Work Undertaken By Other Authorities**

4.5.1 Members considered reports from other authorities who have looked at the issue of voluntary sector funding processes. These include Braintree District Council, Suffolk County Council, Leeds City Council, West Sussex County Council and Portsmouth City Council. In particular, Members were impressed with the Funding Codes of Good Practice developed by Portsmouth City Council.  
([www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk](http://www.portsmouthcc.gov.uk))

4.5.2 The Merton Compact outlines code principles for:-

- Consultation and Policy Appraisal
- Funding, Procurement and Commissioning
- Black and Minority Ethnic Organisations
- Community Organisations
- Volunteering
- Governance

4.5.3 The Compact Working Group has agreed that, whilst it is important not to lose momentum on implementing the Compact's Codes, it is better to start with a focus on the Funding and Procurement Code, rather than

trying to progress them all at the same time. The Funding and Procurement Sub-Group has therefore commenced meetings to take forward this work.

## **5. THE FINDINGS OF THE TASK GROUP**

5.1 The Task Group Chair met with the Cabinet Member for Care Services to update him on the review progress and to discuss potential recommendations with him. The Cabinet Member also attended a task group meeting and welcomed the increasing emphasis on partnership working between the voluntary sector and the Council.

5.2 Members considered a progress report on implementation of the Merton Compact, the approved and signed partnership agreement between Merton Council, Sutton and Merton PCT and the voluntary/community sector. The Funding and Procurement Sub-Group has commenced meetings and other groups will follow. The Task Group emphasised the importance of maintaining a focus on equalities through progressing the Compact.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 A number of key issues have emerged from the review process which the Task Group agreed to highlight as follows:-

- ◆ There should be emphasis on the need for cross-borough partnership working through South London voluntary sector councils network, e.g. for sharing resources, good practice, advice, training etc;
- ◆ There is a need to flag up the issue of the role of Council representatives on voluntary organisations and the potential conflicts of interest which may occur. (The Task Group suggests linking with Legal Services who are leading on Member Development so that members are aware of the issues);
- ◆ The importance of facilitating equalities as indicated in Compact. An officer meeting with the Diversity and Community Engagement Manager was held, where the following points were raised:-
  - Voluntary sector groups were positive about the Compact;
  - The issue of funding to particular groups and the timeframe in which the Council expected them to contribute to corporate objectives was sometimes seen as unrealistic and unreasonable when compared to the level of grant allocated. Groups may have limited capacity and use volunteers generally. So, Council expectations may be too high;
  - There is concern that some groups fall outside of the process. There should be a look at the population profile for the whole borough to determine whether all sections of the population are represented as appropriate to their specific needs. E.g. Irish, South Africans;
  - One or two cases of voluntary groups imploding due to lack of good management or weak infrastructure have occurred. Council should share responsibility with MVSC to assist in absorbing clients into other

groups with a sympathetic ethos, so that groups do not disappear through falling by the wayside;

- There is some concern about those groups who have to deal with a time gap between funding coming to an end and new funding stream coming in, where continuity of service needs to be maintained but reserves of funds may be limited or even non-existent;
- New groups should know that they can apply for grants and how;
- The grants funded by Education, Leisure and Libraries are important as they contribute to increasing social cohesion.

6.2 It was agreed that review recommendations will be cross-referenced to the Compact which will be taking forward a considerable number of the key issues, such as providing clarity to the process and ensuring fair and equal access to funding and support. The following recommendations have emerged from the review process:-

1. *It is important to highlight that there needs to be adequate resources for the voluntary sector infrastructure alongside services in Merton and that this includes external as well as Council funding;*
2. *There should be development of a corporate funding and support strategy for voluntary and community organisations and the voluntary sector should be consulted on this;*
3. *More clarity should be given to the grants process in order to provide ease of access for groups applying for funding, through promotion of a clear central contact point/corporate lead;*
4. *Transparency in grants funding should be demonstrated, so that all groups can see that the process operates in a fair way, through objective application of the funding criteria;*
5. *There is a need for mapping of various types of services across the borough – it is suggested that initially this should be of the services provided within community centres;*
6. *There should be an insistence that organisations which provide advice should have, or be working towards, an appropriate Quality Mark accreditation;*
7. *Consideration should be given to a new approach to leisure funding and charging for services, with a view to addressing the disparity between Safer Merton schemes being offered free to participants and Summer Playschemes making a charge for participation;*
8. *The Compact Funding and Procurement Sub-Group to be recommended to pursue the issue of potential imbalance in current grant funding to ensure that funding matches key priorities;*
9. *There should be a review of voluntary sector accommodation provided by the Authority, within an agreed timescale.*

## **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 The review has not looked at grant funding levels for specific groups but has focused on improving the ease of application, the dissemination of information and the implementation of the Merton Compact. The Compact will take forward much of the review findings.

Members do not therefore consider that the review recommendations represent any major resource implications. However, the report will be passed to Corporate Services for evaluation of any resource implications before being presented to Cabinet for final approval.