



Health Scrutiny Meeting – 8th February 2022

Review of Lunch Clubs in Merton

1. Original Project description

- 1.1 An independent review of lunch club provision was presented to the Community & Housing Strategy, Improvement and Development Board on Thursday 27 February 2020. This presentation included an overview of lunch clubs in LBM covering the challenges and opportunities, with focus on improving future financial viability and overall quality of provision for customers.
- 1.2 The value and contribution of lunch clubs for users, communities and LBM was recognised and acknowledged. With tightening resources, it was agreed as important to strengthen the forward capability of lunch club provision across the borough of Merton by promoting the development of plans that look to increase the financial and operational sustainability of each club, with a plan that is bespoke to each lunch club.
- 1.3 The key objective was that by improving individual lunch club performance and financial viability, there would be reduced levels of dependency on LBM funding required to maintain and grow overall capacity across the borough.

2. Original Project scope

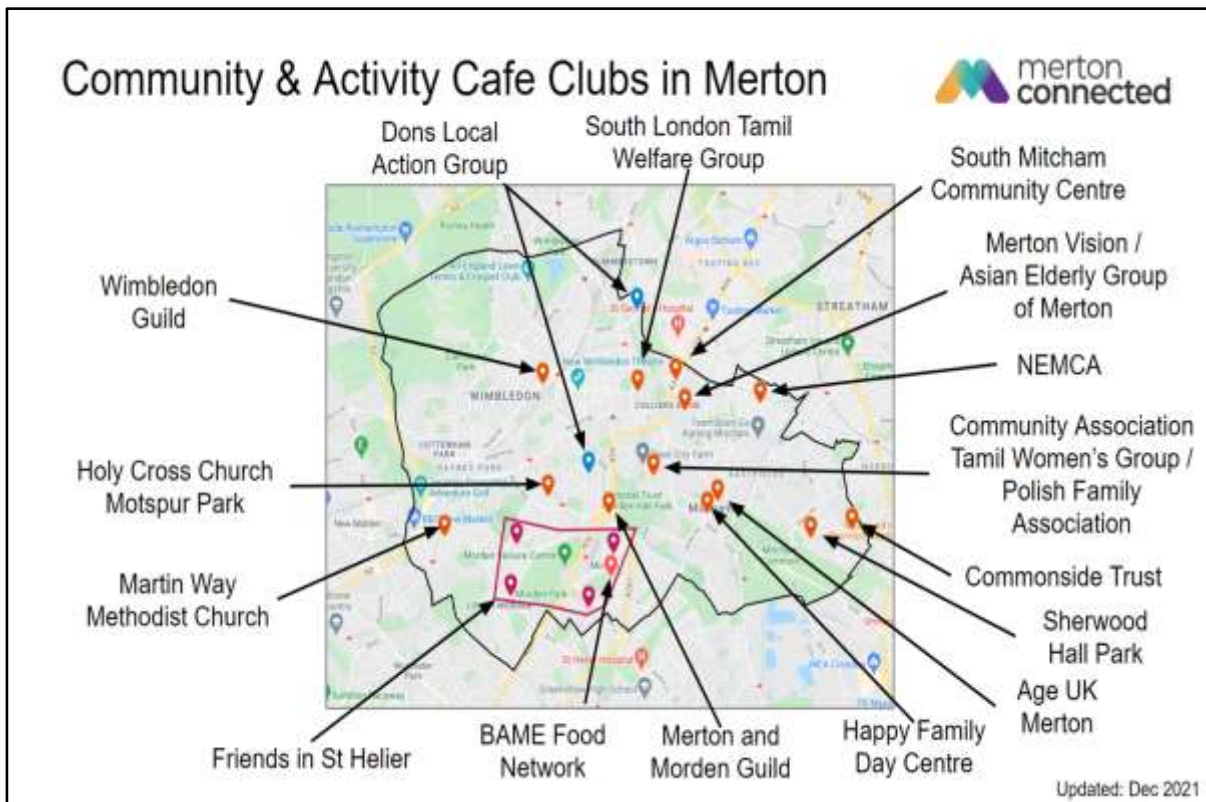
- 2.1 Phase 1 – Independent review of current lunch club provision. Building on available information and intelligence, independently review 14 lunch clubs in the borough and provide summary 'initial findings' review document by 27 February 2020.
- 2.2 Phase 2 – Based on findings of Phase 1, work with LBM, MVSC and lunch clubs to develop appropriately detailed business sustainability plans for prioritised lunch clubs by end of March 2020, or later if agreed.
- 2.3 Phase 3a – Q1 (April to June 2020) – Funded transition period. Work with lunch clubs that are seeking funding and / or looking to increase capacity. Develop action plans. Develop funding model that responds to needs, releasing funds based on agreed and scheduled activities to be in place at the beginning of Q2.
- 2.4 Phase 3b – Q2 to Q4 (July 2020 to March 2021) – Monitoring of funded action plans based on:
 - agreed and scheduled activities (from Phase 3a)
 - the clear understanding that there no funding from April 2021
 - agreement that any funding grants received will release committed funds of the same value for possible redistribution to other lunch clubs, or reduction in overall funding envelope from LBM in year.

3. Impact of the Covid Pandemic

- 3.1 As a result of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, many of the lunch clubs were unable to operate for periods during 2020 and 2021.
- 3.2 It was agreed with LBM that the whole project would be re-calibrated with flexibility to maintain as much momentum as possible, whilst recognising the challenges during the pandemic. The original budget envelope was maintained, but was 'stretched' to allow engagement and progress to reflect how the unfolding pandemic restrictions and concerns played out.
- 3.3 Regular reviews with LBM were maintained with updates of progress.

4. Move to an online workshop model of engagement

- 4.1 Following review and progress reporting it was agreed to move to creating a more networked approach, including lunch clubs taking more direct involvement in looking at collaboration and sharing of best practice.
- 4.2 The online workshop structure was developed to:
 - encourage lunch clubs to share the challenges and successes that they are experiencing.
 - provide real, tangible benefits to lunch clubs on the call.
 - understand how Merton Connected can add value to the work lunch clubs provide, to help them build on their successes and overcome the challenges.
 - support movement to greater sustainability by reducing or removing concerns around planning for the future.
- 4.3 Regular Lunch Club Roundtables developed with invitations to 14 lunch clubs, 3 food distribution groups and one housing association. Sharing thoughts, plans and good practice, encouraging collaboration - approximately every six weeks:
 - issues - managing through lockdowns, transitional services moving out of lockdown, covid cases within staff and service users, volunteers, transport.
 - welcome new members including Dons Local Action Group and Sherwood Hall Park
 - sharing Merton-based projects including Warm & Well In Merton, Merton Moves, Benefits Assessment Service
 - AgeUK Merton hosting a FiSH on Fridays event with Friends in St Helier



5. Maximising the potential of volunteering

- 5.1 With resourcing, not just funding being a challenge for a number of particularly small lunch clubs, the opportunities for more volunteer support was developed as part of the programme.
- 5.2 Regular Lunch Club Volunteer Managers' Network meetings - every 3months, with a rotating chair:
- source of collaborative experience and thinking across organisations with varied capacity and capability
 - created strong bond and focus on issues around volunteers and volunteer management
 - sharing good and best practice
 - Friends in St Helier has redesigned volunteer engagement
 - Friends in St Helier recruited driver volunteer through Dons Local Action Group
 - Merton Vision more engaged in volunteer management
 - opportunity and network scanning to stimulate different perspectives, for example:
 - [Datwise courses](#) - digital data collection for charities
 - Innovate UK [Healthy Ageing Challenge - Designed for Ageing - Innovation Funding Service](#)
 - [VOICE / National Innovation Centre Ageing](#)
 - ongoing interest in Volunteer Passport plans (WIP)

6. Current levels of attendance, activities and engagement

6.1 Whilst accepting that overall progress and initial plans have needed to be significantly changed due to the pandemic, the planned outputs remain in place.

- generally around 1/3rd of invited individuals / organisations attending roundtables/meetings
- most clubs are running - multiple challenges emerging from covid. Open/Closed/Notice period, capacity and charging
- as of Oct 21, of the 16 clubs - 11 were open with 9 providing lunch. Four clubs had not reopened - venue access, staffing issues - one had moved to an afternoon tea model, two do not provide lunch

7. Plans going forward

7.1 The funding for the original project ceases at the end of March 2022. Not all the originally anticipated outcomes have been delivered, but there remain a number of opportunities building on the work and progress of the project to date, including:

- continuing to support volunteer recruitment and management as the foundation for activity, including at Trustee level.
- engaging with community specialists, e.g inviting Merton Community Transport to discuss transportation options
- regular focus on sustainability issues of good governance and financial management
- exploring further funding opportunities for existing clubs, including bidding and operating more collaboratively, including via Merton Giving
- find a better name for the group. If they are called Lunch Clubs / Community Cafes, that is what people think they do. They all do so much more.

8. Summary

8.1 The review of lunch clubs in Merton and the original plans for progress, including less reliance on LBM funding support, have been severely hampered during the period of the pandemic. There does remain a lot of opportunity and challenge for individual lunch clubs. The facilitation of an active network and an underpinning collaborative approach does provide the basis of existing lunch clubs evolving into the post pandemic period.

Simon

Simon Shimmens
CEO Merton Connected

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