

MERTON'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR AND VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY



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Foreword

Merton has a proud history of supporting its diverse voluntary and community organisations. There are over 650 voluntary and community organisations in the borough working to improve the quality of life for everyone who lives, works, studies or does business here. This Strategy is intended to embody our commitment to working together with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to benefit everyone in the community.

As the Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities and Chair of the Merton Compact Board, I am keen for the Council and the Merton Partnership to do all we can to support Merton's thriving VCS especially during these challenging times of reduced funding and increased demand.

The Strategy has been jointly developed by members of the Merton Partnership. Representatives from Merton Council, the wider public sector, business and the voluntary sector worked together to produce the Strategy. It was a collaborative effort built on partnership working and focused on listening to what the sector told us was important. It is relevant to both large charities and to small community groups.

The Strategy sets out our vision for working with the Voluntary and Community Sector. The Delivery Plan outlines the practical steps we will take to realise that vision. In our drive to deliver high quality services to our residents in a challenging climate, we will work closely with our partners to ensure that we can respond to changing needs and aspirations. Our intention is to support and enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to develop and deliver better outcomes for local people in Merton.



Councillor Edith Macauley MBE

**Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Engagement and Equalities and
Chair of the Compact Board**

Background

Merton has a vibrant and active voluntary and community sector (VCS) working across a multitude of areas. The VCS in Merton is a strong asset for the borough providing a range of services particularly to vulnerable citizens, enhances community cohesion, contributes to wellbeing and enhances the skills of volunteering.

The shrinking state, cuts to public sector funding, challenges to the reputation and trust in which the voluntary sector is held and growing demand and the complexity of needs of the users have propelled the need to review and evolve the relationship between the funders, stakeholders and the voluntary sector.

In grappling with the financial and demographic challenges of the moment, commissioners are not only rationing resources, but increasingly changing the way they work, with many looking at shared services or commissioning cross-borough working.

The sector and the Merton Partnership have a strong and mutually supportive relationship. A number of members of the Merton Partnership support the sector through substantial grants, commissioned services, notional funding and business rate discounts. The sector draws substantially from other sources, in particular unpaid volunteers.

The Merton Partnership has agreed the need to refresh and merge the Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Strategies to ensure they are relevant and reflective of the current climate. A steering group drawn from members of the Merton Partnership was set up to oversee the development of the new Strategy that:

- Sets out the partner priorities for the sector and the resources available
- Sustains a thriving and dynamic sector by equipping them with the skills and support needed to adapt to the new climate
- Acknowledges and builds on the sector's social value in Merton.

The steering group met monthly over the Summer of 2016 to examine a number of issues relevant to the development the new Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Strategy. The group discussed the following questions:

- What does the VCS look like in Merton, its diversity, scope and scale?
- What should be the objectives and priorities for the Voluntary Sector and Volunteering strategy 2016 -19?
- How might the relationship between the VCS and partners need to evolve?

- How can we increase the number, diversity and quality of volunteering opportunities and recognise the impact and value of volunteering in the local communities
- Can we use the Social Value Act 2012 more effectively to deliver value for money, recognise the expertise and skills of the sector and maximise social value in Merton? What steps are necessary to ensure the CVS is ready to access such opportunities?

Methodology

Writing the strategy required developing a clear understanding of the local and national context and the challenges and opportunities it presents. The strategy was informed by a number of research methods including:

- Interviews and workshops with key stakeholders of the borough to gain an understanding of their needs, challenges and priorities
- A consultation and engagement exercise to inform the strategy priorities at the Merton Partnership Annual Conference 2016
- A review of national and international best practice and policy developments in the area
- A literature review of relevant strategic documents of each partner to ensure priority alignment and strategy coherence
- An analysis of key demographic changes and their impact on demand alongside the services provided by the sector
- Establishing the resources available to the sector from the Council and the CCG notional funding, grants, business rate discounts
- Gaining an understanding of alternative funding sources available and their priorities
- Understanding and exploring the role and benefits of community assets and reviewing existing policy
- The current state of the VCS in Merton with details such numbers of employees, volunteers, outputs, turnover and sources of funding through commissioning a State of the Sector survey
- Understanding the scale and type of volunteering activities in the borough

- Best practice examples from other organisations, including successful corporate social responsibility relationships and innovative income-generation methods .

The Voluntary and Community Sector in Merton

Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) commissioned the [2016 State of the Sector](#) Research with financial support from the Merton Partnership. This research was designed to gain greater insight into the state of the voluntary, community and faith sector in the borough. In total 80 organisations participated in the research with 120 interactions across the various methods used.

The Sector Locally

Merton has a large and growing voluntary and community sector. The number of people who receive support and advice from the sector continues to rise year on year. A significant proportion of organisations are unincorporated. There is a growth in smaller organisations with little or no long term funding.

The Picture Locally:

- 658 Voluntary and Community Organisations in Merton
- 2,183 trustees of registered charities
- 3% growth in clients supported between 2013 and 2016
- 813,680 people supported in 2015 across 80 organisations
- Large increase in Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) as a new legal entity
- Almost a quarter of organisations are unincorporated exposing trustees to more risk
- 16% of organisations engaged were established in the last 3 years
- Merton has a long established resilient sector with 46% having been established over 21 years
- Compared to the 2013 research, the percentage of social enterprises and Community Interest Companies has risen by almost 5 per cent in this 2016 sample. This could be an indicator of people trying new models of sustainability and job creation, advocated by successive governments since 1998.

The State of the Sector Survey Findings

The State of the Sector survey highlighted the number of unincorporated organisations thereby exposing their trustees to greater risk. The increased size of the sector plus the nature of these challenging times highlights the pressures on current trustees and the need to find more high calibre trustees with the right skills in the future. Surprisingly, despite the funding reductions, there was less evidence than expected of consolidation within the sector or increasing levels of partnership working to share costs and collaboration to bid for work. The increase in the number of new organisations with no funding suggests that the nature of support provided to the VCS needs to change to take account of this.

The State of the Sector survey found that the clear areas for organisational development include fundraising, tendering, communication, monitoring, evaluation, and strategic leadership and planning.

Key Strategic Aims

Building on the findings of the State of the Sector Survey and after consultation with the sector, the steering group agreed that equipping the sector with the tools needed to thrive in the current climate is of paramount importance.

Five key aims were identified and recommendations were agreed to implement them.

1. Support for the Sector to Change and Adapt

The harsh financial climate necessitates a change in approach by the sector. There is a need for the sector to look for alternative sources, including income generation. There is pressure on trustees to take a long term financial view and carefully consider the options available to them – including downsizing and merger. This potentially requires organisations to develop a different set of skills and the Merton Partnership wants to support them to proactively change and adapt.

We will do the following to ensure that the sector is equipped to face challenges:

- a. Review the support offer to Merton's VCS organisations to improve their business planning, fundraising strategies and expertise, underpinned by good governance and financial management;
- b. Support Merton's VCS organisations to improve collaboration and set up partnerships and consortia to extend their scope and reach, underpinned by due diligence, contract readiness, contract and performance management, evaluation and impact measurement;
- c. Review the support offer to smaller and more informal groups;
- d. Develop a joint approach to promoting the role of trustees and improving their skills to lead and govern VCS organisations;
- e. Support Merton's VCS to improve enterprise acumen to grow the social enterprise market, underpinned by structural/financial support to encourage business-like innovation and risk taking;
- f. Further develop the JSNA to become a dynamic tool for the VCS and decision makers in understanding and addressing local needs;
- G. Develop a more strategic approach across the Merton Partnership to increase the provision of affordable, flexible premises.

2. Maximising Income and Funding Generation

As resources diminish and competition increases, the VCS is increasingly looking to new and innovative ways to generate income and operate more efficiently.

The total amount of funding allocated to the Voluntary Sector from Merton Council alone in 2016/17, including cash grants/commissioned services, notional funding and discretionary rate relief was valued at over £12 million.

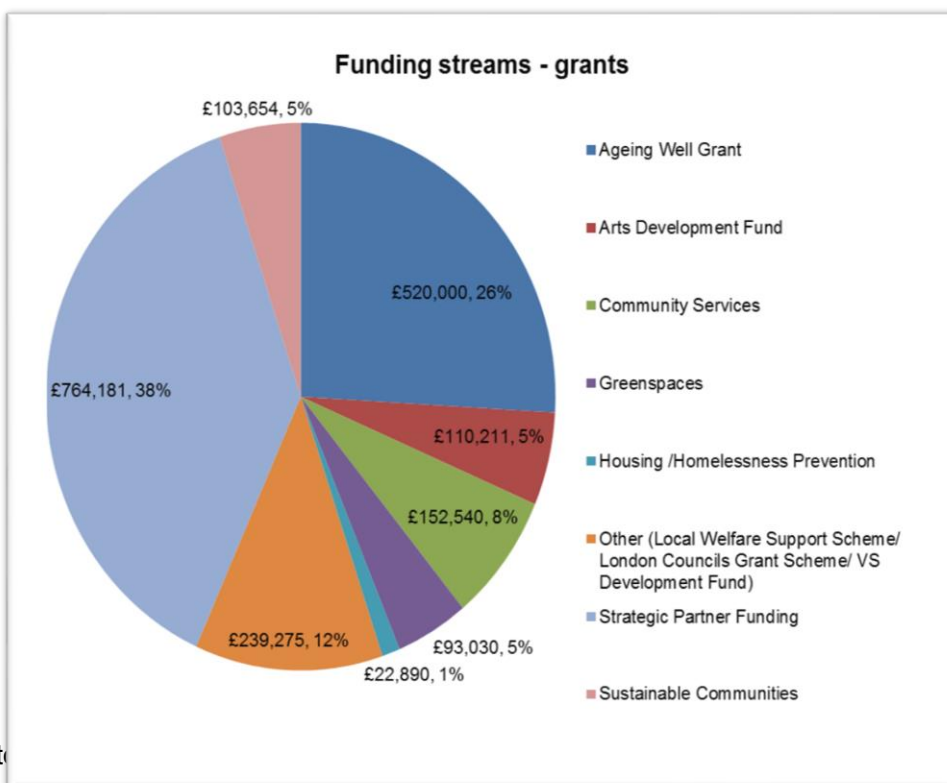
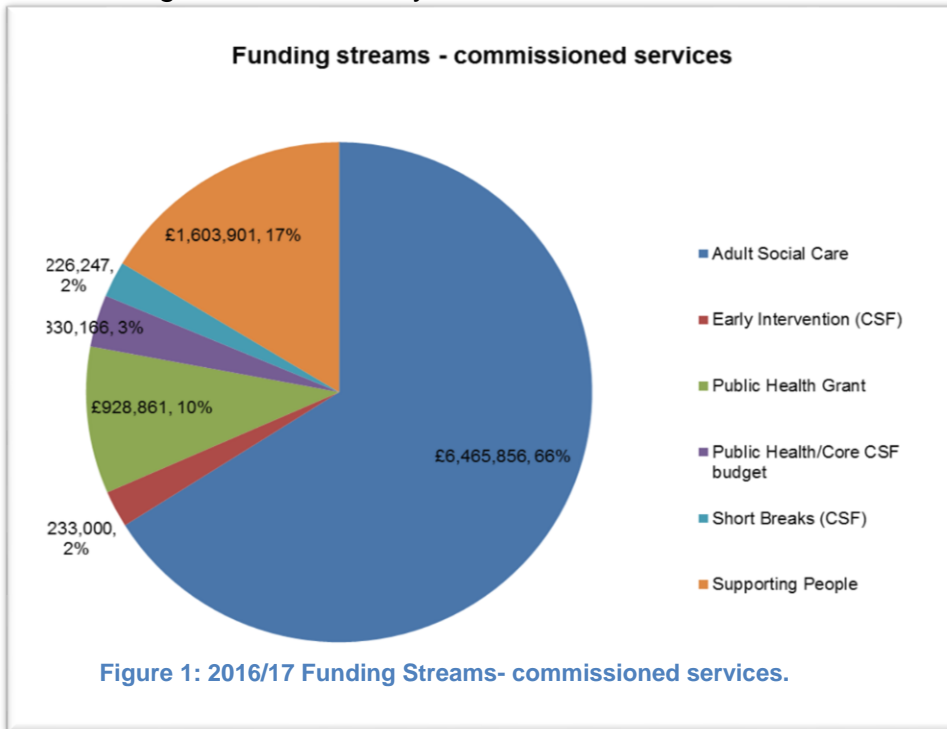


Figure 2: 2016/17 funding streams- grants

The number of organisations with no sustainable funding sources has increased in the borough. 40% of organisations thought their income from grants and unrestricted funding sources was likely to grow despite on-going cuts in public sector funding and the increased competition for dwindling resources.

We will support MVSC to support organisations to seek out alternative funding outside of the public sector and to increase their chances of successfully bidding for work in competition with VCS organisations outside of Merton and against the private sector.

We will do this through:

- a) Revive and market the Merton Community Fund to attract funding from local residents and businesses;
- b) Encourage and foster collaborative working and the sharing of resources in the sector;
- c) Support VCS organisations to look at alternative approaches to income generation;
- d) Ensure that there is clarity from the public sector on funding priorities and how funding is allocated;
- e) Strengthen our partnerships with business in order to increase their support via corporate social responsibility pledges;
- F) Seek opportunities to develop and access social investment opportunities.

3. Commissioning and Social Value

There is a clear need and opportunity for public sector commissioners to work more effectively with the sector and to look to exploit opportunities within the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012.

The Social Value Act

The Social Value Act requires public bodies to think about how they can improve the economic social and environmental well being of an area through the services they commission. The Act is a tool to help commissioners get more value for money out of procurement. It also encourages commissioners to talk to their local provider market or community to design better services, often finding new and innovative solutions to difficult problems.

With grant funding levels reducing, the sector is increasingly looking to win contracts to deliver services from public or private sector bodies as an alternative income generation stream. The group examined how Merton Council and other bodies in the Merton Partnership can ensure that before starting the procurement process, commissioners think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

The voluntary sector is perfectly placed to deliver services that provide additional social and environmental benefits to Merton such as providing training for the unemployed; creating supply chain opportunities for SMEs and social enterprises. Public bodies can create opportunities to develop third sector organisations; and make facilities (such as school libraries, leisure facilities or computers) available to excluded VCS groups.

The following steps were agreed to achieve this aim:

- a) Secure political and executive backing from members of the Merton Partnership to seek additional social value through the commissioning process and to identify and recognise the social value delivered by Merton VCS organisations;
- b) All commissioners, where appropriate, to provide guidance to organisations through training, soft market testing and one to one meetings to encourage them to apply and to sign up to our procurement framework;
- c) All commissioners, where appropriate, to engage and meet with organisations at the early stages of the commissioning process and ensure Social Value is considered at the design stage and built into the tender process;
- d) Make it an option to include Social Value as part of the bid evaluation process through its inclusion in the scoring criteria;
- E) Ensure that opportunities to seek Social Value are reviewed at all levels of governance.

4. Increasing Volunteering

Volunteering is associated with increased wellbeing and a strong sense of civic pride. Volunteers make a valuable contribution to the national and local economy and an immeasurable difference to the lives of service users. Volunteering also brings multiple benefits to volunteers themselves, including better career prospects and improved mental and physical health.

The number of new volunteers recruited in Merton has increased by 8% from 2,462 in 2014/15 to 2,831 in 2015/16. Retaining and increasing the numbers of volunteers in the borough was agreed as a key priority. Whilst Merton has higher than average levels of volunteering the steering group felt there should be an ambition to increase volunteering to match or exceed the highest levels in London.

The Merton Partnership will work to increase volunteering by taking the following steps:

- a. Promote and support the recruitment of volunteers across the Merton Partnership;
- b. Develop models of public service delivery that create additional volunteering opportunities;
- c. Continue the recognition of volunteers and volunteering programmes and promote them throughout the borough;
- d. Develop further the communications plan to raise the profile of volunteering & community action in Merton;
- e. Promote a consistent model of evaluating the contribution and value of volunteers for the VCS;
- f. Maximise and promote the benefits of volunteering for volunteers, in particular seeking routes into paid employment;
- g. Ensure local public and private sector organisations are engaged and supported to creatively deliver their corporate social responsibility agenda and actively promote their employee volunteering programmes.

Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Strategy Recommendations and Delivery Plan

The Merton Partnership Executive Board will monitor the progress of the Strategy Group Recommendations on an annual basis. The Compact Board will review the implementation of the actions on a bi-annual basis.

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
<p>1. Support for the sector to help it adapt and change</p>	<p>1. Review the support offer to Merton's VCS organisations to improve their business planning, fundraising strategies and expertise, use of digital technology, underpinned by good governance and financial management;</p> <p>2. Support Merton's VCS organisations to improve collaboration and set up partnerships and consortia to extend their scope and reach, underpinned by due diligence, contract readiness, contract and performance management, evaluation and impact measurement;</p>	<p>Review priorities, resources and approach to commissioning support to the sector through the Strategic Grant programme to better reflect the issues identified in the State of the Sector survey.</p> <p>Explore how the Wilson Centre can become a place where multiple organisations providing different services are located- an exemplar in partnership working and resource sharing.</p> <p>Merton Partnership to look at opportunities through the One</p>	<p>Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Team, LBM.</p> <p>Public Health team, CCG, NHS and MVSC</p> <p>Merton Partnership Executive</p>

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
	<p>3. Review the support offer to smaller and more informal groups;</p> <p>4. Develop a joint approach to promoting the role of trustees and improving their skills to lead and govern VCS organisations;</p> <p>5. Support Merton's VCS to improve enterprise acumen to grow the social enterprise market, underpinned by structural/financial support to encourage business-like innovation and risk taking;</p> <p>6. Further develop the JSNA and launch the Merton Observatory to become a dynamic tool for the VCS and decision makers in understanding and addressing local needs</p> <p>7. Develop a more strategic approach across the Merton Partnership to study the increase the provision of affordable, flexible premises.</p>	<p>Public Estate programme to review how the public sector collectively uses its public estate and supports the VCS to deliver increased social value.</p> <p>Support VCS management of community assets to enhance strategic planning, sustainability and service delivery.</p> <p>Strengthen VCS strategic representation and co-production, including for small groups</p> <p>LBM will engage the VCS and partners in the future development of the JSNA / Merton Observatory</p> <p>Ensure that the support package available to the sector is fit for all their needs.</p>	<p>Board</p> <p>Environment and Regeneration Team, LBM and Policy, Strategy and Partnership Team, LBM.</p> <p>MVSC</p> <p>PSP, Commercial Services and MVSC</p> <p>Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Team, Public Health and MVSC</p> <p>MVSC and PSP team</p>
2. Maximising funding and income generation	<p>8. Revive and market the Merton Community Fund to attract funding from local residents and businesses;</p>	<p>Identify capacity to re-launch the Merton Community fund and review the approach to securing CSR contributions from</p>	<p>MVSC and Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Team</p>

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
	<p>9. Encourage and foster collaborative working and the sharing of resources in the sector</p> <p>10. Support VCS organisations to look at alternative approaches to income generation</p> <p>11. Ensure that there is clarity from the public sector on funding priorities and how funding is allocated</p> <p>12. Strengthen our partnerships with business in order to increase their support via corporate social responsibility pledges;</p> <p>13. continue to develop and access social investment opportunities</p>	<p>businesses and community giving.</p> <p>Ensure that commissioners publish information about grant levels and priorities as early as practicable to allow the sector to plan ahead.</p> <p>Further develop our relationship with local business to increase their support.</p> <p>Contact significant funders to better understand how Merton VCS can be more competitive in winning bids through meet the funder sessions and one-one application surgeries with funders.</p> <p>Ensure that business rate relief to charities is well publicised</p>	<p>PSP team</p> <p>MVSC and Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>MVSC</p> <p>Corporate Services, LBM</p>
<p>3. Commissioning and social value</p>	<p>14. Secure political and executive backing from members of the Merton Partnership to seek additional social value through the commissioning process and to identify and recognise the social value delivered by Merton</p>	<p>Secure agreement to the approach from LBM's Cabinet in January 2017 and the CCG Executive Board. Update the Council's Standing Orders</p>	<p>Commercial Services Team, LBM</p>

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
	<p>VCS organisations</p> <p>15. All commissioners, where appropriate, to provide guidance to organisations through training, soft market testing and one to one meetings to encourage them to apply and to sign up to our procurement framework;</p> <p>16. All commissioners, where appropriate, to engage and meet with organisations at the early stages of the commissioning process and ensure Social Value is considered at the design stage and built into the tender process;</p> <p>17. Make it an option to include Social Value as part of the bid evaluation process through its inclusion in the scoring criteria;</p> <p>18. Ensure that opportunities to seek Social Value are reviewed at all levels of governance</p>	<p>accordingly.</p> <p>Produce guidance and training for commissioners on the use of the Social Value Act including the development of a model approach for measuring and evaluating social value.</p> <p>Review mechanisms built in at departmental and corporate levels, and through the thematic partnerships such as the Sustainable Communities Board</p> <p>Engage early with the VCS to prepare them to bid for services where they strongest e.g. address the alcohol and drug dependence issues in the borough</p> <p>Use the Social Prescribing pilot to commission VCS organisations to improve health outcomes in the east of the borough.</p>	<p>Commercial Service and MVSC</p> <p>Public Health team</p>

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
4. Increasing volunteering	<p>19. Promote and support the recruitment of volunteers across the Merton Partnership</p> <p>20. Develop models of public service delivery that create additional volunteering opportunities</p> <p>21. Continue the recognition of volunteers and volunteering programmes and promote them throughout the borough</p> <p>22. Develop further the communications plan to raise the profile of volunteering & community action in Merton</p> <p>23. Promote a consistent model of evaluating the contribution and value of volunteers for the VCS</p> <p>24. Maximise and promote the benefits of volunteering for volunteers, in particular seeking routes into paid employment.</p> <p>25. Ensure local public and private sector organisations are engaged and supported to creatively deliver their corporate social responsibility agenda and actively promote their employee volunteering programmes.</p>	<p>Promote and utilise the Volunteer Merton online volunteer recruitment hub (one stop shop) to ensure individuals, groups and organisations have a single access point to volunteering and community action in Merton.</p> <p>Ensure that new initiatives such as Merton social prescribing pilot include the development of volunteers as an element for its sustainability.</p> <p>Merton Council's Health Champions programme, run in partnership with Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) and One <u>You</u> Merton, encourages individuals in the borough to volunteer their time motivating other residents to make realistic health changes to benefit their long term health</p> <p>Volunteers undertake a wide variety of roles in Merton Libraries including meeting and greeting, supporting children's activities, helping customers use</p>	<p>MVSC</p> <p>Public Health team</p> <p>Public Health team</p> <p>Merton Libraries</p>

Strategic Priority	Steering Group Recommendations	Actions to Implement the Strategy	Organisation Responsible
		<p>the IT facilities and helping to promote libraries in the community.</p> <p>Ensure that large contracts include a commitment to CSR such as employee volunteering schemes.</p> <p>Continue to promote the ValueYou 100 hours volunteering discount card scheme.</p> <p>Hold an annual Merton Partnership Volunteer Awards ceremony</p> <p>Explore the potential of volunteering 'passports' to demonstrate volunteers' experience and skills and encourage employers to involve volunteers in their work, to the mutual benefit of the volunteer and the business.</p> <p>Work with the Merton Partnership to promote their employee volunteering programmes</p>	<p>MVSC</p> <p>MVSC and LBM</p> <p>Merton Partnership</p>