

Revenues & Benefits Annual Community Activities Report 2008/9

The purpose of this report is twofold, one is to examine the community activities undertaken over the past year, and assess their impact on our community. The second is to look at our available resources and plan the activities we will undertake over the coming year. The Council's Community Plan, Charter Mark criteria 6 and last year's RB Community activities plan have been used as the basis for this exercise. This will help us to target scarce resources and get the best use from them.

We need to develop clear parallel lines where we are interacting with community and voluntary groups. We need to be able to define clearly what a core business activity is and what a non-core business activity is.

We support the social, economic and physical impact on the community through the Community Plan, the department's service plan and the things we do at service level.

We need to evidence the physical at a local level better than we currently do. We do a lot but forget to evidence it because we just do it as a matter of course. We have started to have meetings alternately at either of our sites where we encourage staff to walk when the weather is good, or car share when it's bad.

The Charter Mark sub group is tasked with identifying areas for development; again this should be done taking the Community Plan and Criteria 6 into consideration.

The Criterion is concerned with the Revenues and Benefits Services interaction and impact on the community. With this in mind we need to show that as a service we:

- Have reviewed and are aware of our impact and potential usefulness in the local and national communities we serve; and
- Have made some contribution to enriching the social or economic life or the physical impact of those communities, beyond the strict requirement of excellent service delivery, through positive, discretionary initiatives and imaginative use of resources.

We need to identify the above at the following levels:

- Corporate
- Departmental
- Service
- Individual

We already do some things at each level and we also need to identify what we could potentially do at each of these with the resources available to us.

This information forms the basis of the annual action plan. It also helps us to monitor what we do and our progress.

This is the fourth year we have produced a community activities action plan. Some of our activities are regular and embedded within the services, some are new, and some activities have ceased as they were single events or had a specific lifespan. Some of the activities have built and expanded over time - the Trident placement scheme and green issues would fall into this category. One such item is the Carbon Management strategy which the Council has undertaken with the Carbon Management Trust.

One thing we need to do now that our activities are more mature is to consult on this report and our plan. Through the views and feedback from staff, the public and partners we may gain useful information to enhance and extend our activities to enrich the community.

Appraisal of activities undertaken in 2007/8

□ Corporate

The Council put into practice several initiatives including the transport and travel plans, recycling policies and the Carbon Management Strategy. We played a full part in these events with staff from the department joining corporate groups dealing with the travel and recycling issues. Staff joined the Friendly Faces scheme which paired them up with immigrants in the Borough to help them settle in. Staff have also taken on the mentoring of young people and we have supported the initiative. We also support staff to take on Magistrate and School Governor duties.

The Council also set-up a group to look at home working which the department has taken on board

□ Departmental and Service

The department supported the revamp of the Council's website to make it more accessible and easily navigable for all. This included the launch of Browsealoud software which is a text to speech system.

A home working pilot initiative was successful and has been rolled out further in the department.

We continue to support the Trident education scheme providing annual placements for senior school pupils in the Borough as part of their work experience. We ask the students for feedback and use this to tailor the programme to meet their expectations. We also take placements from the local higher education college and have formed a good relationship with TNG to provide placements for the long-term unemployed to help them return to work.

We continue to employ A' Level and University students in the summer recess as we have in past. We have not made any formal arrangements with particular colleges or universities as we always get more requests than we can handle. Unless this changes we will leave the situation as it is.

The department supports several regular charitable activities which include the Mayor's Charity, Macmillan, The Race for Life and the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust.

We allow staff to use the photocopier, advertise events in the staff bulletin and encourage them to participate in and sponsor events.

□ **Individual**

We set in place a mechanism similar to the above where staff would like support for a one-off event. Staff apply to their manager and permission is granted to use various facilities. These could include the conference room at lunch time to sell tickets or merchandise. We would also advertise the event via the staff bulletin and posters etc.

The full list of activities is in the accompanying plan.

Looking back at our original plan we have succeeded in meeting and, in some cases, exceeding our expectations. In many cases staff, partners or the Council have put suggestions forward that have helped us to meet these. Building long-term relationships with the voluntary sector and partners is key to our achievements. The number of community activities undertaken by staff grows each year and without their commitment and enthusiasm many of the activities would not succeed.

Community activities discussed and included in the 2008/9 plan

□ **Corporate**

The Council has moved forward its policies on transport, travel and recycling and has completed a Carbon Management audit. This has resulted in the Carbon Management Action Plan and we have staff who are "Energy Champions". We have regular collections for waste paper, cans, cardboard etc. The Council is also promoting a local walking strategy and a Healthy Workforce Group has been set up to push issues and ideas forward. A number of corporate groups have been consolidated to reduce staff travelling.

The Friendly Faces and Young Mentors Scheme is proving successful and the Council has started a "Worklessness" initiative to encourage more long-term disabled and disadvantaged people into employment. The department is supportive of these initiatives.

Resident's feedback to the Council was that they wanted a councillors' surgery in the local area (Whelley). We have made our offices available for a regular councillors' surgery and provided private interview rooms and portable loop systems to help the hard of hearing.

□ **Departmental and Service**

The home working pilot has been completed and several staff are now working from home. We have also looked at people with medical conditions to see if it would be useful to them. We are looking to extend the number of staff working from home throughout the year. We are also looking at the possibility of more staff working from our own and partner's offices nearer to where they live. This will reduce congestion, travelling time and provide services nearer to customers. It should also reduce the number of staff vehicles parked in the streets outside our base.

Staff within our service and those of partners have each been trained in form filling for several organisations making it possible for one person to visit customers. This supports the elderly and vulnerable and in effect allows us to take the service to them. The reduction in journeys helps ease congestion and fits in with our carbon management strategy.

We conduct an interview with each student on the Trident placement scheme on the first day to find out what their expectations are. If there is anything specific they want to learn whilst they are with us we will do our best to accommodate this. A wider range of activities has now been identified from the feedback students have given us. This should make placements more relevant and enjoyable for students.

We continue our relationship with TNG and will continue to place people within our own service, department and the wider council when possible.

We continue to support numerous charitable activities on a regular and ad-hoc basis. The number of ad-hoc requests have increased since we put the staff support request system in place. To date no requests have been turned down.

We have 2 portable loop systems that are available to community and voluntary groups with no charge.

□ **Individual**

The department has supported a member of staff undertaking counselling qualifications by funding the course. This decision was taken as the counselling is for members of the community including individuals, prisoners and other groups. Another member of staff supporting young people has been granted time off with pay for training. In both instances the members of staff demonstrated their skills have been useful in the workplace.

Consultation

We will consult and gain feedback on this report and action plan through:

- The Citizens/Readers' Panel
- Staff
- Partners

We will also update the plan at regular intervals.