

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MERTON PARTNERSHIP'S WEBSITE

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report  
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## **Abstract**

The project team developed a web-based communications system for the Merton Partnership, a local strategic partnership (LSP) in London, England. We conducted research on the Partnership's past and current issues, interviewed the partners, and interviewed IT professionals and project managers from other LSPs to obtain technical advice on e-government systems. This project provided the Partnership with a web-based tool that enables them to communicate more efficiently.

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## Executive Summary

The London Borough of Merton is one of thirty-two boroughs in the Greater London Authority. In 2002, the Borough formed a local strategic partnership (LSP) called The Merton Partnership. The Partnership brings together officials from a number of organizations in the public, private, and voluntary sectors of Merton. In this way, the various public service organizations in the Borough can work together to improve the quality of life in Merton.

As a large organization, communication among the members of the Merton Partnership and the organizations that they represent can be rather difficult. Besides their quarterly meetings, the members rarely speak to each other unless they need to. This lack of frequent communication is largely due to busy schedules and the fact that some members of the Partnership find it difficult to contact other members, but the lack of a good communications medium also plays a part. While e-mail can be very efficient, it is not always very effective.

Additionally, Merton's community is largely unaware of the Partnership's existence. Aside from those directly involved with the Partnership, very few know why it exists or what its goals are. Unfortunately, the Partnership cannot meet its goals without participation from the community. The partners need a way to interact with the community. They need to let the public know why the Partnership exists and what it can do for the citizens of Merton. In addition, they need a way to collect input from the community.

In order to assist with communications amongst the members of the Partnership, their organizations, and the community as a whole, the Merton Partnership has decided that it needs a website. The Merton Council asked our team to work with the Partnership to develop and implement this website.

The Council required that we split the website into two parts. The first part, a private area for the members of the Merton Partnership, would provide them with a new means of communication between their quarterly meetings. The second, public part would contain information that would help the community understand the Merton Partnership. Together, these two pieces would form one website that would help the Merton Partnership achieve its goals.

Before the team could begin development, we needed to discover what members of the Partnership expected to get from their new website. We expected that their desires would vary greatly, but we felt that speaking to the partners would give us a clearer picture of what would

benefit the organization as a whole. Once we had the information that we needed, we could find common ideas and determine which features would satisfy the majority of the Merton Partnership.

In addition to interviewing the partners, the team spoke with a number of consultants and IT professionals. These interviews provided us with the technical knowledge required to implement the new website. In addition, the consultants were able to inform us of any U.K. laws that may affect our website, most notably the Freedom of Information Act and the laws concerning personal information on the Internet.

Finally, we spoke with project managers from other partnerships. These discussions helped us determine which features have been beneficial to other partnerships and which have failed to make a difference. As a result, we were able to weed out a number of potential features before we wasted time by implementing them for the Merton Partnership.

Once we had gathered all of the necessary information, we began to develop the new website in an iterative fashion. We implemented a small part of the website and asked for feedback. We made changes and the cycle continued until we were satisfied with that part. Then, we moved on to the next feature. In this way, we were able to ensure that the website met the Council's usability and accessibility guidelines, that it contained the important features, and that it was pleasing to the eye.

The website that we developed currently offers a number of features that the partners requested. These include a private forum for discussion, a contact directory, a library of documents that members can add to in the future, and information about all of the organizations represented in the Partnership. Additionally, the website features text, reports, and important documents about the Partnership itself, the Community Plan, and each of the five subgroups defined by the Community Plan. This information is available to both the members of the Partnership and the public community.

Although we have implemented the majority of the features the Partnership has asked for, we feel that the site is incomplete. Currently, the public has no way to interact with the website. No public forums, comment boxes, or feedback forms exist. Members of the community must express any questions or suggestions that they have via e-mail, telephone, or post. In the future, we recommend that the Merton Council will expand the website to improve community interaction.

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# 1 Introduction

Local governments are complex structures that include many branches and interact on a daily basis with a host of individuals and organizations in the communities that they serve. Effective and timely communication is essential if such complex organizations are to succeed in achieving their goals, which ordinarily include the equitable provision of high quality services, such as education and housing, and the resolution of community problems, such as crime and pollution. Increasingly, local governments in the US and Europe are turning to technology, and web-based systems in particular, to enhance their communications abilities. Such web-based systems, often referred to as e-governments, provide the individual branches and organizations of the larger structure a constant, up-to-date resource for information.

The Merton Partnership is a municipal government organization established to coordinate and improve public services and to develop a higher quality of life in the borough of Merton. The Partnership consists of twenty representatives from thirteen different organizations. The complexity of the Partnership makes it difficult for the organizations to communicate with each other about goals, ideas, and problems. In order to solve this problem, the Partnership meets quarterly to discuss the various issues that face them. Additionally, the Council posts documentation of every meeting and of major accomplishments on the Merton Council's website for public access. Although, these word documents serve as a reasonable record of service, they are not an effective communication tool. Ideally, the Partnership would have a more sophisticated system that allows for the real time exchange of information and provides access to more extensive sources of information. Consequently, the Partnership is interested in evaluating how a website might serve as an "electronic front door" to the work of the Partnership and allow each member and key service provider in the local area to communicate more effectively with each other and with the community.

The entire community of Merton benefits from the services of the Merton Partnership. Conversely, the people living and working in Merton may suffer should the Partnership fail to achieve its goals. The lack of a good communication system may result in sub-par performance and have a negative impact on the community. Improving the Partnership's toolset will allow its members to work more efficiently.

The goal of this project was to develop a website that would improve communication among the members of the Merton Partnership, their organizations, and the community. We conducted an extensive review of the literature (see Section 2 below) to determine the kinds of

communication problems that typically occur in local government partnerships and to identify the kinds of solutions that they have tried before. In addition to this review of the literature, we:

- Interviewed the members of the Merton Partnership to determine what they would like the site to contain and how they intend to use it.
- Interviewed project managers from other local strategic partnerships to learn what systems have worked well for their websites in the past as well as which systems should be avoided.
- Determined, with the aid of IT professionals working with the Merton Council, the technical information necessary for the successful construction of this website.

Based on the information that we collected, we developed a prototype website for evaluation by the members of the Partnership. This prototype incorporated the majority of the features that the members of the Partnership had requested during our interviews. We then modified the prototype based on the feedback received. In this iterative fashion, we were ultimately able to develop and implement a new communication tool that allows the members of the Merton Partnership to communicate effectively and in a timely fashion with each other.

## **2 Background**

In order to develop a web site that would improve communication among several organizations and the members of the community they represent, we needed to research and understand various subjects, ideas, and methods. In what follows, we will provide information about the structure and function of the Merton Partnership, why communication is important in the government, and what actions governmental organizations are taking in order to improve communication. Additionally, we will provide examples of systems that have and have not worked in the past. All of these topics provided a foundation for the successful completion of this project.

### **2.1 Merton Council**

The Merton Council – which oversees the London Borough of Merton – consists of five subdivisions, each of which deals with one aspect of public works in the Merton area: the Chief Executive, Corporate Services, Children/Schools and Families, Environment and Regeneration, and Community and Housing. Lesser subdivisions and councils exist within these primary divisions (Merton Council, 2006b). There are sixty members working as part of the Council, with thirty members from the Conservative Party, twenty-seven from the Labour Party, and three non-affiliated residents of Merton Park (Merton Council, 2006c). Currently David Williams, a conservative member, lead the Council (Merton Council, 2006e).

The council and its various subcommittees hold meetings in Merton’s civic center; these meetings are generally open to the public, though some are restricted (Merton Council, 2006f). Typically, these meetings focus on issues such as education, social services, council taxes, and crime (Merton Council, 2006g).

Simply stated, the goal of the Merton Council is to make the London Borough of Merton a “better place to live, work and learn” (Merton Council, 2006b). With recent staff policy changes (Trades Union Congress, 2001) and the addition of new public ventures, Merton is said to be “improving well” when compared to other boroughs (Merton Council, 2006g). Sustainability, maintenance, and improvements of housing, transportation, education, employment, leisure facilities, and environmental support are all on Merton Council’s agenda for future endeavors. For more information on the Council and its operations, see Appendix A1.

## **2.2 Local Strategic Partnerships**

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are common in local authorities around England and Wales. There are over 360 LSPs in England. Although LSPs operate at a local level, central and regional governments support them. These partnerships bring together representatives from the local legislative, community, volunteer, and private sectors. LSPs play a vital role in the delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the Community Strategies. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy aims to improve the most deprived neighborhoods, while the Community Strategy aims to improve the entire local authority district. LSPs address local problems, allocate funding, and discuss strategies and initiatives to solve these problems.

The structures of individual LSPs vary tremendously, but the overall structures are determined at the local level. How long a particular partnership has been established, how many organizations are involved, and the amount of community and voluntary involvement all cause variation in structure. Determining which structure to follow is a very important process because the differences in structures can influence the effectiveness of each individual partnership. The partnerships need to determine what works best for their particular situation. Using appropriate structures will allow partnerships to concentrate on delivering their objectives and goals to the community (Communities and Local Government, 2005a).

They try to promote cooperative work and community participation, while discouraging the idea of agencies working alone. Failure to work together at the local level is one of the primary factors inhibiting the effective and equitable delivery of public services to meet community needs (Communities and Local Government, 2005a). Groups or organizations that separate themselves from partnerships often experience problems such as a lack of communication, the inability to complete projects, and a failure to work efficiently. This is particularly ironic since their goals are to help improve the communities.

## **2.3 Merton Partnership**

The establishment of the Merton Partnership, a local strategic partnership, occurred in January of 2002, and the first meeting took place in 2004. With twenty partners, the organization brings together members of the private, public, and volunteer sectors in the Borough of Merton (Merton Partnership, 2006). The members, or partners, consist of the Merton Council, the House of Commons, Merton Police, Wimbledon Fire Station, Sutton & Merton Primary Care Trust, Merton College, Merton Voluntary Services Council, Merton Chamber of Commerce, London

South Learning & Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus, Merton Racial Equality Partnership, Merton Unity Network, Merton Interfaith Forum, and representatives of the voluntary sector (Davis, 1997). Table 1 below represents the current positions and corresponding organizations, which comprise the Merton Partnership.

Position	Organisation
Leader	Merton Council
Chief Executive	Merton Council
MP for Mitcham and Morden	House of Commons
MP for Wimbledon	House of Commons
Borough Commander	Merton Police
Borough Manager	Wimbledon Fire Station
Chief Executive	Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust
Principal	Merton College
Chair	Merton Voluntary Services Council
Chair	Merton Chamber of Commerce
Chief Executive	London South Learning and Skills Council
Assistant District Manager	Jobcentre Plus
Chair	Merton Racial Equality Partnership
Chair	Merton Unity Network
Chair	Merton Interfaith Forum
CEN Representative	Merton Vision
CEN Representative	Volunteer Centre Merton
CEN Representative	Carers Support Merton
CEN Representative	Merton Citizens Advice Bureau

Table 1: Members of the Merton Partnership, February 2007 (Idea Knowledge, 2007)

The Leader, Chief Executive, and Trade Union Representative of the Council hold positions in the Partnership. In addition, the Leader of the Council acts as Chair of the Partnership.

The two Members of Parliament (MP) who currently represent Merton in the House of Commons are Stephen Hammond, of the constituency of Wimbledon, and Siobhain McDonagh of Mitcham and Morden (United Kingdom Parliament, 2006). While the two members represent the same borough, their political interests differ in many respects. Mr. Hammond is a member of the Conservative Party while Ms. McDonagh is a member of the Labour Party. Both have interests in

health. As the Shadow Minister of Transport, Mr. Hammond is also interested in foreign affairs and transportation. Ms. McDonagh is interested in welfare reform, housing, and quality of life (Dods, 2006).

The Borough Commander of the Merton Police is Chief Superintendent Michael Wood (Merton Council, 2006h). As commander, he is part of the Merton Partnership against Crime (MPAC). This partnership, like the Merton Partnership, includes members of various community organizations such as the Council, Merton College, and the Merton Community Safety Trust. Every three years, this group produces a strategy for the community. In the 2002 publication, the partnership focused on reducing the involvement of young people in crime, drug- and alcohol-related crimes, hate crimes, disorders and anti-social behaviors, burglaries, street crimes, and motor vehicle crimes (Metropolitan Police Authority, 2002). The Borough Commander of the Fire Brigade, Andy Roberts, is also a member of the MPAC.

Caroline Taylor is the Chief Executive of the Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust. A Primary Care Trust (PCT) is a local organization that receives funding from the government. The Trust's primary purpose is to "deliver high-quality, accessible and affordable services to improve the health of the people of Sutton and Merton" (Sutton and Merton Primary Care trust, 2006). As the overseeing body of health in the borough, the PCT consists of fifty-six practices, eleven clinics, seventy-seven pharmacists, thirty-five optometrists, and seventy-two dentists (Sutton and Merton Primary Care trust, 2006).

The current principal of Merton College is Sally McEnhill. The College hopes to "provide opportunities for learning and personal and professional development and so make a difference to the communities they serve" (Merton College, 2006). Colleges in the United Kingdom are quite different from colleges in the United States. For example, most of the students at Merton College are between the ages sixteen through nineteen and tend to be part-time students. In the United States, students attend high school full-time at this age and college afterwards. Universities in the United Kingdom are similar to American four-year colleges, though many offer three-year programs as well (Merton College, 2006).

The Merton Voluntary Services Council (MVSC) is a part of a network of councils for voluntary service in England. MVSC develops and supports the voluntary sector in Merton including five main services: services, development, liaison, enabling representation, and strategic partnership. The organization is a registered charity run by paid staff under the management of volunteers who are both directors of the company and trustees of the charity. Overall, their primary

focus is to lead and organize the voluntary groups in the Merton area allowing them to have an equal role in the Merton Partnerships (Merton Voluntary Service Council, 2006).

The Merton Chamber of Commerce (MCC) is “The Voice for Business and Enterprise in Merton” (Jobcentre Plus, 2006). Established in 1992, MCC is an independent non-profit organization led by a Board of Directors. The board consists of representatives of the local business community and ensures that all business sizes and sectors are represented equally.

Jobcentre Plus is a government agency, which is a part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Jobcentre Plus helps the unemployed find jobs while helping employers fill vacancies. The agency tries to motivate the unemployed and economically inactive people to join the workforce (Jobcentre Plus, 2006).

The Learning and Skills Council is responsible for funding and planning education and training for six million people aged sixteen and over in England (excluding those in higher secondary education and universities). Its goal is to make England better skilled and more competitive by improving the skills of young people to ensure an excellent workforce. The Council has a budget of £10.4 billion (Learning and Skills Council, 2006).

Merton Racial Equality Partnership (MREP) is an independent voluntary sector organization funded by the Merton Borough, the Commission for Racial Equality and the City Parochial Foundation. The MREP currently has two paid workers who work to eliminate racial discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and to promote good relations among people of different racial groups (Merton Council, 2006i).

Merton Unity Network (MUN) was established in 1994 with a vision of “valuing diversity and working in partnership to strengthen the bonds of humanity and encourage greater participation in all aspects of community life” (Merton Unity Network, 2006). The Network represents the views, experiences, and needs of Merton’s black and minority ethnic communities. MUN consists of members from minority communities and relies on an executive board for governance (Merton Unity Network, 2006).

The Interfaith Forum was founded in 1987 to promote good relations among people with different religious beliefs and backgrounds. Currently, the Forum has representatives of the following religious backgrounds: Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian. The network plays an important role in the successful coexistence of different religious beliefs in the diverse cities of England (Inter Faith Network, 2006).

The Community Engagement Network (CEN) currently holds four seats on the Merton Partnership. Comprised of representatives from different organizations, the CEN represents the voluntary sector as a whole. Until formal elections in 2007, four interim representatives sit on the Partnership board.

The Partnership is organized into three tiers. The twenty members of the Merton Partnership comprise the first tier. These officials are charged with providing governance and leadership for the organization. The second tier, the executive board, is responsible for determining implementation policies (i.e., how things will actually be done). All of the Board's power is delegated by the Partnership as a whole. Finally, five thematic subgroups comprise the third tier: Sustainable Communities, Safer and Strong Communities, Healthier Communities, Older People, and Children and Young People (Merton Partnership, 2006). These groups report to the executive board and oversee the numerous delivery groups that work toward the goals and projects of the organization. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the layout and structure of the Merton Partnership.

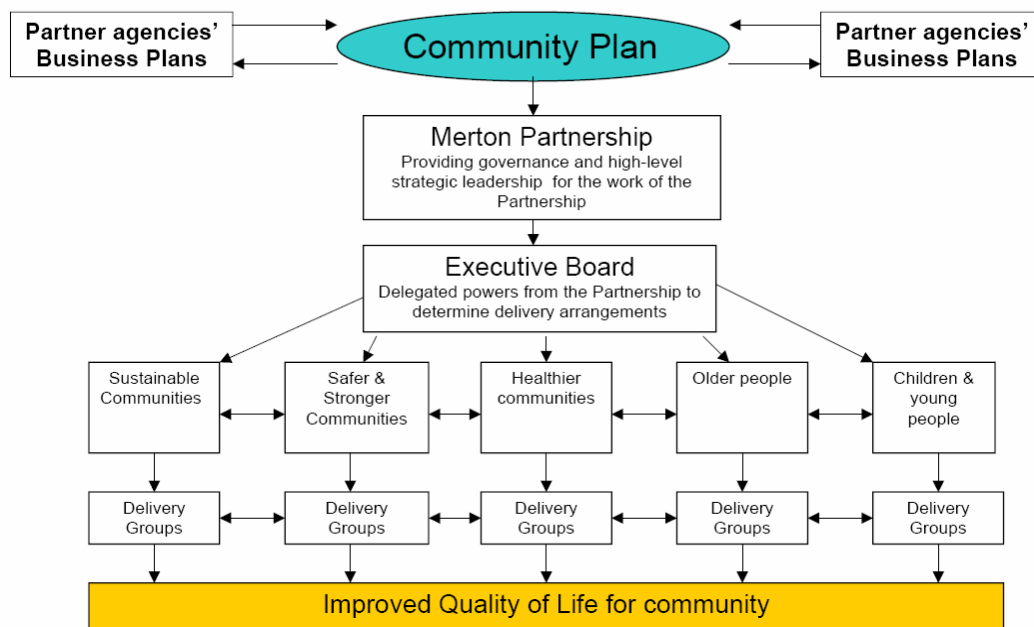


Figure 1: Structure of the Merton Partnership (Merton Partnership, 2006)

The main duty of the Merton Partnership is to coordinate decision making among the various service delivery groups (e.g., local housing, police, etc.) to ensure the borough moves toward

the economic, social, and environmental health and welfare goals of the community. To this end, the Partnership collected input from the local residents and developed the Neighborhood Renewal Strategy and the Community Plan. These documents act as a roadmap for future projects and improvements to the Borough (Merton Partnership, 2006).

Understanding the purpose, membership, and organization of the Merton Partnership was crucial to the success of the project. Each member of the Partnership has his or her own goals, desires, perspectives, and political pressures. In order to help the Partnership communicate better, we needed to consider all of these aspects.

## **2.4 The Community Plan**

The Merton Partnership established Merton's Community Plan. Drafted in 2005, the plan maps out the next nine years of strategy to improve the life for everyone living and/or working in Merton. The plan was designed around the ideas and desires of the local community expressed in 2004. Businesses, public service organizations and citizens of Merton have had over sixty meetings preparing the final draft of the plan. The plan focuses on the elderly, children, and the development of safer, stronger, sustainable communities. The goal of the Community Plan is to make Merton a stronger, healthier, and happier place to work and live by the year 2015.

Many aspects within a community affect the citizens' quality of life. Housing conditions, the environment, the local economy, and transportation of Merton must improve in order to raise the quality of life according to the community plan. Many people living in Merton cannot afford the costs of local housing. The community also suffers from overcrowding. There is not enough affordable housing nor are there adequate opportunities for housing the disabled. Figure 2 below illustrates the plan's key targets for solving these problems (Merton Council, 2006a).

### **KEY TARGETS**

- Provide 370 more homes a year between 2007/08 and 2016/17 - many will be affordable homes
- By 2010, all council homes to meet the Government's decent homes target

**Figure 2: Housing Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)**

Merton is also striving to improve the environmental conditions in the city by creating a more diverse environment with more plant and animal life as well as better approaches to waste management and energy generation, conservation, and distribution. A major problem in London is the excessive amounts of carbon that citizens and businesses are emitting into the atmosphere.

These emissions add to growing public concerns about global warming and other health and livability issues. The borough would like to explore alternatives to the current energy systems, but the alternatives are expensive and many Merton households are already having difficulties meeting their energy needs. The community plan faces these challenges with the following objectives as listed in Figure 3 (Merton Council, 2006a):

#### KEY TARGETS

- By 2013 to recycle at least 33 per cent of household waste
- By 2015 to increase the percentage of residents surveyed who are satisfied with parks and open spaces to 61 per cent

Figure 3: Environmental Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)

Today, Merton recycles about twenty-three percent of household trash but the community feels it can do a better job.

Increasing numbers of people in Merton are seeking work. Ironically, as more and more workers find jobs outside of Merton, local businesses are struggling to find skilled employees. Unsatisfactory travel options and lack of parking also contribute to low employee retention. Within the next ten years, Merton plans to create a local economy consisting of diverse local businesses, greater job opportunities, and more citizens working in Merton. Residents hope that redeveloping Mitcham Centre will create more jobs as well as a better working environment and economy in Merton. Figure 4 lists the key targets of the plan (Merton Council, 2006a):

#### KEY TARGETS

- By 2015 to achieve a borough-wide employment rate of 78 per cent
- By 2015 to reduce the percentage of people of working age claiming key benefits to 9 per cent

Figure 4: Economic Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)

As stated previously, transportation is a problem in Merton, specifically in the east. The west has a well-developed transport system while the east has recurring traffic and congestion problems along with poor roadway conditions. Merton is concerned with smog and unfit school routes for children and plans to revamp the bikeway routes around Merton center as well as develop better pedestrian-friendly facilities. Additionally, Merton is working with the school departments to inform the youth of alternative, non-polluting forms of transportation, or “green transportation.” By 2015, Merton wants to increase the use of green transportation (Merton Council, 2006a).

Merton's plan for a safer, stronger borough is an effort to ensure that the diverse population coexists amicably, with respect for the rights and customs of their neighbors. Although the overall crime rate in Merton has decreased over the past few years, there is still considerable concern about street crime. Community leaders have been lobbying hard for efforts to reduce violence in the streets, binge drinking, and other antisocial behavior, which they attribute largely to the younger members of the population. Figure 5 contains a summary of Merton's key targets concerning crime (Merton Council, 2006a):

#### KEY TARGETS

- By 2015 40 per cent fewer crimes (British Crime Survey Offences) will be committed in Merton
- By 2015 the percentage of residents surveyed who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together to have increased to 87 per cent

Figure 5: Safety Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)

Merton plans to develop a police squad for every ward in the borough whose objective is to identify the people responsible for the crime in the area. The police will be working on different approaches to reduce crime and drugs on the streets of Merton. The new crime policies are designed to create a safer and more livable Merton.

Improving health and healthcare is another target of the community plan. Merton is identifying the problem areas of the health services and devising plans to tackle these issues. Figure 6 lists the key targets (Merton Council, 2006a):

#### KEY TARGETS

- By 2015 reduce the difference in life expectancy between people who live in the eastern and western parts of the borough
- By 2010 halt the year on year rise in obesity among children under 11

Figure 6: Health Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)

Merton plans to create more healthcare choices for the community and to reduce waiting times at hospitals. Merton wants to reduce the number of smokers as well as the number of people who suffer from obesity. According to the community plan, the many doctors, nurses, therapists, and other healthcare professionals will work together to create a wider range of healthcare provisions across the borough.

The elderly and the young within the borough face different problems. Although the elderly are healthier than ever, there are still concerns about incomes and access to services. Over the next nine years, the community plan will focus on the delivery of the government's National Service Framework for the elderly, which lays the framework for services provided for citizens over fifty-five years of age. Currently the number of elderly supported to live at home is seventy-four per one thousand people. One of Merton's key targets is to increase this number from seventy-four to ninety.

As for Merton's youth, the community feels it needs to work hard to ensure each child will reach his or her full potential. The community wants to provide services to help Merton's youth succeed and overcome any obstacle they may face, such as learning or financial disabilities. The top five issues concerning and pertaining to the younger population are crime, bullying, drugs, anti-social behavior, and lack of extracurricular activities. In addition, the community feels that the academic performance of Merton's youth is below par. With these issues in mind, the Partnership created the targets in Figure 7 (Merton Council, 2006a):

#### KEY TARGETS

- By 2015 the number of children aged 16 achieving the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grade A\*-C to meet or exceed the national average
- By 2010 the rate of teenage conceptions in Merton will have reduced by 50 per cent

Figure 7: Youth Targets (Merton Council, 2006a)

In conclusion, the community plan lists the major issues of concern amongst the community and outlines goals and objectives to correct them in the upcoming years. By the year 2015, with the guidance of the community plan and the Merton Partnership, the Borough of Merton hopes to have a strong economy, an efficient transportation system, and a diverse coexisting community. The citizens will be healthier and happier with well-educated children and the elderly will be more independent.

## **2.5 Communication in the Government**

Effective communication within the government is essential for several reasons. Effective communication not only strengthens the government, but also provides a better life for the citizens and allows the government to inform the community of opportunities that are available. All branches of government need to be aware of new information as quickly as possible. Good

communication will allow government departments to work together and complete objectives and attain goals faster. An increasing problem in governments is that they only try to communicate effectively in times of crisis, when good communication should be a part of their daily processes. This practice makes it difficult to respond appropriately and efficiently in an emergency when good communication is most important. Communication needs constant improvement. Doing so will enable the government to respond more efficiently in times of need. All governments must have a budget, a plan, and a strategy for communication (Mackay, 2006).

The community also needs to play a role within the government. Many governments establish ward committees that allow the government to hear the community's voice. With these committees in place, the government is better able to provide for its citizens. The government has been working to improve communication internally and externally. As technology has advanced, there are new and improved ways to communicate. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become a common practice within large organizations and governments. ICT is primarily concerned with the use of technology in managing and processing information, particularly in large organizations. The process of bringing technology into the workplace has helped businesses and governments strive toward a better system of communication and greater efficiency (Mackay, 2006).

Technology has become a part of everyone's life and can enhance or even replace speaking and writing. The advancements of ICT and the success it has brought to businesses will provide an opportunity for governments to develop a new form of communication known as "e-government." E-government will use the ideas and principles that have made businesses more efficient. It will use the technology to improve the distribution of governmental services and make the government more accessible to citizens, partners, and employees. It will provide a way to bring together the government and citizens to build a partnership. A combination of the Internet, technology, business processes, and human resources are required for e-government to work. Governments will also need leadership skills, an understanding of e-government, and strategies to overcome any barriers that arise. As technology advances people tend to set their expectations higher. The more people become accustomed to a better lifestyle, the more they expect from their governments (Mackay, 2006).

Departments that resist change and do not adapt to the information technology era will cease to exist. They will eventually find it impossible to keep up with the ever-changing advancements in technology. For example, the average government consists of fifty to seventy

departments. If someone needs to register the birth of a child, he or she will have to deal with multiple organizations. Instead of the organizations communicating with each other, their members expect the new parents to handle all of the details themselves. This holds true for nearly any process involving the government, making citizens' lives unnecessarily difficult since the majority of services require complex collaboration between different departments (Silcock, 2001).

In 2001, MAXI, a payment system operated by the state of Victoria in Australia, and Singapore's e-Citizen Centre were the first two sites to begin using e-government. During this time, many other governments had plans to begin using e-government. For several years, the British government had been looking for a way to bring together a joined and modernized government (Silcock, 2001). In March of 1999, the Modernizing Government White Paper helped to formulate Britain's idea of modernizing government by altering the public service sectors. When Dr. Jack Cunningham from the Cabinet Office launched the White Paper, he said, "We will make sure that government services are significantly improved so that they reflect real lives and deliver what people really want. Better provision of better services available from government at all levels is central to the approach of modernizing government" (Silcock, 2001, p. 91). The Prime Minister vowed that by 2002, citizens should be able to conduct one quarter of all transactions between themselves and the government electronically. This would raise the amounts of electronic transactions to fifty percent by 2005 and one hundred percent by 2008. He said, "I want the UK to be the world's leading Internet economy. Businesses and individuals across Britain are responding to this challenge, getting the UK online" (Silcock, 2001, p. 91).

As governments further developed their e-governments, they introduced Grid Security Infrastructure (GSI). GSI is an example of security demand on public sector networks. In order to protect information, GSI uses "a number of security levels determined by the confidentiality of information being transmitted, such as classified and restricted" (Silcock, 2001, p. 95). Governments need to consider these security measures when they start developing their personal e-government systems (Silcock, 2001).

Recently, e-government has made several advances. E-government has six dynamic stages: information publishing/dissemination, official two-way transactions, multi-purpose portals, portal personalization, clustering of common services, and full integration and enterprise transformation. The main users of e-government include Spain, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Council for Excellence in Government, 2006). There may be others beginning to explore the idea of e-government, but they may only be in the first or second stages of the process.

London is working diligently to complete the process of implementing a fully functional e-government. A London-wide agency called London Connects is working to bring together local, regional, and central governments to encourage the delivery of the e-government agenda across the capital. This agency works with the Greater London Authority, London Councils and other service providers and agencies. London Connects has been working with the Merton Council for a few years trying to complete this process. They have worked together to make several advances (London Connects, 2004).

The Merton Council has implemented several aspects of the e-government agenda that the Merton Partnership wants to establish. The Merton Council has a “one-stop shop” offering direct online access and linking to information on all local authority services through the web, public access to online reports, minutes, agendas, and future meeting schedules that are updated daily. It also provides every councilor with the option to have an easily manageable set of public web pages that he or she can choose to maintain or have maintained for them. The Merton Council also offers public reporting, applications, and tracking of environmental services, such as waste and street management, online. There is also online receipt and processing of planning and building control applications. The Merton Council has created a way to share trading standards data among councils for business planning and enforcement purposes. It has advanced its e-government tremendously while working with London Connects, but there is room for improvement (Merton Council, 2006c).

The Merton Council uses many different types of online resources to update, share, and trade information. One specific resource, used by sixty different countries around the world at more than 2,200 institutions (but not the Merton Council), is BlackBoard. BlackBoard has proved to be an effective and reliable resource. Typically, professors use this system as a means for sharing, providing, and receiving information from students, but it can also be adapted for different circumstances. Professors may grant Teacher Associates (TA) access to sites in order to obtain information provided by the professors. Government agencies could use BlackBoard to communicate with each other and with their communities. It could prove to be useful not only in education but also in the government (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2005; Blackboard Incorporated, 2005).

Governments are already using other web-based resources, including web sites. These websites include updated calendars, message boards, administrative tools, newsletters, e-mails, forums, etc. Each website varies, but overall they have the same outcome and effect. These websites can be selective or public, depending on their intended use. Effective and efficient, these

websites contain a number of aspects that the Merton Partnership is looking to utilize (City of Boston, 2006; MembersFirst Incorporate, 2006; Merton Council, 2006c).

## **2.6 California Case Study**

A case study in California looked at 454 municipal governments and their use of web technology. The purpose of the study, which was published in *Designing Web Technologies for Local Governance Reform: Good Management or Good Democracy?*, was to determine if web technology has the potential to support governance reform. Although some parts of the study do not pertain directly to this project, there is helpful information concerning government's use of web-based communication. According to the study, web communication is important because it "facilitates communication across distances, across time, and across disparate social groups and institutions" (Musso, 2000).

This case study is relevant to our project because it "focuses specifically on municipal applications of World Wide Web technology" (Musso, 2000). The study found that cities with government websites have a larger and more politically active population. Compared to cities that do not have municipal websites, this population tends to be younger, better educated, and higher paid (Musso, 2000). Another interesting fact is that over half of all city websites are "maintained by either a city or a partnership between a city and a private agency" (Musso, 2000).

The study expresses the overall positives and negatives of the municipal websites. Forty-four sites offer comment boxes that enable users to send electronic queries and comments to city officials. However, electronic comment boxes are a poor substitute for direct e-mail access because "they do not allow citizens to contact specific officials, and they probably are less likely to receive a direct response" (Musso, 2000). Also "designers of local municipal web sites are not aware of the value of creating a nexus of links that enable citizens to address a range of governmental problems and to understand the manner in which local governments interact" (Musso, 2000).

Lastly, the study suggests that chat and bulletin board functions are good ways to promote horizontal communication, or communication among numerous groups. Direct communication links to several different types of community groups and organizations create a richer network of horizontal communication (Musso, 2000).

Overall, the study shows that the most websites facilitate routine interactions between service providers and the community but do not allow direct citizen participation. "The data suggests that municipal Web pages are not designed to improve communication with city officials.

The quality of communications access, moreover, fails to exploit the new possibilities afforded by the Internet. Most sites appear to perform a telephone book function, merely repeating the information already commonly available in the government pages of most directories” (Musso, 2000).

The Merton Partnership faces similar problems, failing to utilize web technology. However, about twenty percent of the active California municipal sites take advantage of the electronic communications capabilities of the Internet. Our team looked at some of these good examples of web communication while designing the website for the Merton Partnership. However, we found that these pages were not exactly what the Merton Partnership desired. As a result, we did not use many of their features.

## **2.7 LSP Performance Management**

Since local strategic partnerships have complex agendas, they must have a way to manage their methods of communication and organization for everyone in the partnership. Often, this is defined as performance management. All LSPs need effective performance management. Since LSPs have different histories, structures, cultures, activities, resources, and goals, they need to reflect these things in their performance management arrangements. They need a system that is consistent and manageable. An effective strategic performance management system enables the partnerships to identify metrics that allow them to link performance measures to business and governmental strategies. Performance management also improves communication and planning, which enhances the partnership’s ability to deliver successful services. Performance management system focus on three key performance indicators: “reviewing outcomes, reviewing partnership working, and improving planning” (Communities and Local Government, 2005b). LSPs can add significant value to their internal and external communications by managing these indicators (Communities and Local Government, 2005b).

Of the three performance indicators, this project specifically deals with “reviewing partnership working.” The performance management strategy should evaluate how efficiently all the structures and processes in the partnership are working by evaluating metrics such as “leadership, policy and strategy, inclusivity [sic], use of resources, and internal processes” (Communities and Local Government, 2005c). It evaluates strengths and weaknesses and helps the partnership identify what metrics need to be improved. Adopting measurement systems not only allow the partnership to perform better, but also allow them to communicate information to each other and to the

communities more effectively. Improving these metrics results in a more effective and efficient partnership (Communities and Local Government, 2005c).

Local Strategic Partnerships face many problems when using performance management systems. The composition of the partnership can lead to several problems. For example, the fact that voluntary organizations are not forced to participate may affect the progress of a Partnership. Since the majority of LSPs consist of sub partnerships, many problems often arise. These subgroups often do not share the same goals. Some groups may put their individual goals over the overall goals of the Partnership and this may hinder the overall success of the Partnership. Another problem includes trying to get everyone to conform to the idea of using a performance management system. Often, partnerships have trouble overcoming all of these problems. However, accomplishing this task can lead to an efficient and successful partnership (Communities and Local Government, 2005d).

Performance management software can help overcome these problems by saving time and effort. This makes it easy for organizations with tighter time and budget constraints, such as those in the voluntary sector, to participate. A software-based system can also provide a sophisticated analysis and easy access to a variety of reports and data for multiple purposes, which enables many groups with different goals to work toward the same overall goals. Many LSPs are using these software-based performance management systems to improve multiple aspects of their partnerships (Communities and Local Government, 2005e).

The Wigan Leader's Form, a local strategic partnership in Greater Manchester, England, uses performance management software. They are using the PerformancePlus package. This software provides links between goals, objectives, and actions. It also uses a sophisticated and complex Information and Communications Technology (ICT) system for tracking and reporting progress. This system allows the members of the partnership to access the status of other members' progress. The system will enable them to work more effectively and allow the partnership to work as a team to complete their overall goals and objectives. This system provides the community with current issues concerning the partnership and allows the community to have input or even become involved in the process, since they have a better perception of what goals the partnership is trying to accomplish (Communities and Local Government, 2005e).

Another example of this type of software-based system is Middlesbrough, England's LSP Driver. This system provides an integrated approach to performance management that includes a focus on outcomes and the overall performance of the LSP. It also provides analysis of qualitative

and quantitative data and timelines. All of these aspects will enable members of the partnership to see how effectively they are working together to complete their goals. A partnership might be unaware they are working inefficiently until they are shown areas that need improvement (Communities and Local Government, 2005f).

In order for LSPs to assist their community's needs, they first need to improve how the partnership functions. If the LSP cannot communicate, share ideas, and work together, they will be unsuccessful. Since LSPs are very complex, they must be constantly improving to achieve the best possible results. Software-based systems can enable them to communicate easily, share ideas, and examine their overall strengths and weaknesses. These aspects are crucial in the overall development of any LSP.

Since software-based systems have helped improve some LSPs, the South East Forum for E-Government (SEFEG) is working on an e-LSP project. SEFEG is a regional grouping of Local Authority Partnerships addressing the e-government agenda. Their project aims to provide support and common ICT tools for local strategic partnerships in the southeast region of London. SEFEG believes that providing these tools will improve the effectiveness of LSPs and strengthen the local performance management. SEFEG conducted a series of meetings and workshops across the southeast region to determine information and support needs of LSPs. They found that LSPs are looking for one place that provides easy access to strategy documents, outcomes, targets, indicators and core data sets. They will use all of this information to produce their sustainable Community Strategy and will enable them to monitor their performance in completing their objectives. SEFEG also found that LSPs are looking for "a support arrangement to provide training and guidance material on policies, conferences and briefings supplemented by a website to share information, contacts, documents and best practice advice. This site would also act as a portal to the best from the plethora of government statistical websites" (Hampshire & Armstrong, 2006).

SEFEG has proposed a model system for implementation at the county or sub-regional partnership level that aids in the sharing of documents that contain proposed projects, targets, strategies, deliverables, milestones, and defining indicators. It provides core data sets at small area levels or point data when applicable to allow analysis at levels below district. This model needs to be flexible enough to work with and add value to any existing software. The proposed system uses "XML and a web services approach to collect data from partners and to allow it to be used by GIS, performance management tools or the digital dashboard solution to be delivered by a cooperating e-innovations project" (Hampshire & Armstrong, 2006). The proposed model also includes a support

site, where LSPs can support one another. This model has established an initial networking between the LSPs, but an annual budget is required to maintain this site.

Networking is one of the most important aspects of support for LSPs. By providing LSPs with contact details, networking would enable them to share documents and hold on-line discussions. LSPs in the South East region of London are starting to implement this type of system into their partnerships. The research conducted by SEFEG concludes that this system should increase overall effectiveness of the partnerships by bringing all aspects together and permitting communication to occur easily between the members of the partnership, local strategic partnerships, and the communities (Hampshire & Armstrong, 2006).

## **2.8 Worcester Consortium**

Local Strategic Partnerships are popular in England and Wales. The United States does not have LSPs, but does utilize similarly structured organizations. For example, the Worcester Consortium (WC) brings together thirteen member colleges and universities located in central Massachusetts. The Consortium is a not-for-profit organization with a voluntary membership. All members work together to advance individual member institutions' missions and enhance their ability to provide higher education. The Worcester Consortium is composed of several sub departments, as are LSPs; unlike LSPs that bring together departments with varying goals and agendas, every department in the Worcester Consortium focuses on the same goal, improving education (Worcester Consortium, 2006).

The Worcester Consortium website provides no information about the tools used internally by its members. Professor Chrysanthe Demetry, the WPI representative committee member to the WC Faculty Development department, provided information regarding her knowledge of the internal business of the Worcester Consortium and provided further contact information. Professor Demetry stated that she had little information regarding the Worcester Consortium or how its members view and use their website. A staff member at the Consortium leads the Faculty Development department. Demetry stated that this leader communicates to the group via listserv, which is a communication tool that offers its members the opportunity to post suggestions or questions to a large group of people simultaneously. They also conducted meetings several times a year and once a year coordinated a speaker on the topic of teaching and learning (Demetry, 2006).

We contacted Cynthia Young, the Worcester Consortium Information Services Coordinator, and she stated that the Worcester Consortium is currently redesigning their web site and determining

new ways to communicate with their members via the Internet. This project started during the middle of January 2007. The thirteen members of the WC mainly participate through committees. All committees use listservs to communicate when needed. Cell phones and conference calls are regularly used. Sometimes, the WC uses the WPI website and commercial hosts for online presentations and meetings. WC conducts surveys through web forums that they create using FrontPage, a drag-and-drop website editor. The WC has not used online chat rooms or bulletin boards, but they are considering these tools for future developments. Faxing used to be common, but with technological advances, this method of communication has become rather primitive. Currently, phones and emails are the most common form of communication.

The Consortium plans to build an extranet, which will enable all the committees to work together efficiently on projects. It will also provide them a way to stay up to date with all new information. The Consortium would have explored these ideas sooner, but found that they were too time-consuming and costly. As technology has advanced, it has provided multiple opportunities to help increase the efficiency of organizations such as the Worcester Consortium. Implementing an interactive website will provide an easier way for all committees to stay in touch and communicate regularly about important issues. While communication in a smaller organization is important, communication in a more complex organization is even more important (Young, 2006).

## **2.9 Social Software**

Social software is software “which supports, extends, or derives added value from, human social behavior” (Coates, 2005). Among examples of social software are applications that allow people to communicate via the World Wide Web. While such products have existed since the invention of the Internet, only recently have they become available and used widely. Three categories of social software exist, based on the number of contributors and their intended audiences. One-to-one tools are efficient for private communication between two parties. In contrast, many-to-many software usually contains a database accessible to the public containing information submitted by several authors. Finally, one-to-many tools exist to allow one author to distribute data to a number of readers (Wikipedia, 2006).

How user-friendly a particular program is often determines its popularity. The typical computer user is often unable, or unwilling, to learn how to use a complex program. As a result, more advanced users have developed simple alternatives. For example, consider the creation of websites. Originally, one needed to possess the knowledge of at least one programming language to

create a personal website. Now, many drag-and-drop editors allow users to streamline this task. In addition, services such as Live Journal and My Space enable users to post text and pictures on their own personal site using a simple, text-based form.

In addition to ease of use, one usually considers a program's effectiveness when selecting a method of communication. If a user's goal is to make data available to a large number of people, he or she likely would not consider instant messaging as sending the information to each recipient would be rather time-consuming. However, web forums provide the user with a way to post his or her information once and have it read by everyone without any further work. The advantages to using web forums in this situation are obvious, and will certainly affect the user's decision.

There are many other factors to consider when selecting an appropriate communication tool, such as the availability of data, the method of organization, and the size of the program itself. Table 1 gives a brief comparison of the tools currently available.

Table 2: A Comparison of Various Social Software Applications

<b>TOOL</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>AUDIENCE</b>	<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>EASE OF USE</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
<b>Instant Messages</b>	One-to-One	Very Small	Text	Very Easy	AIM, Jabber, MSN
<b>E-mail</b>	One-to-One	Small	Text, Attached Documents	Very Easy	gMail, Hotmail, Yahoo! Mail
<b>Web Logs</b>	One-to-Many	Very Large	Text, Pictures	Moderately Difficult	Live Journal
<b>Forums</b>	Many-to-Many	Large	Text, Pictures, Attached Documents	Moderate	phpBB
<b>Wikis</b>	Many-to-Many	Very Large	Anything	Difficult	Wikipedia
<b>Chat Rooms</b>	Many-to-Many	Medium	Text	Easy	AIM Chat, IRC

Users can send Instant Messages (IM) using a simple client that allows users to add their friends to a contact list and see when they are online. If both parties are available, messages can be transmitted between the two nearly instantly. Chat rooms are similar to IMs in that the messages are typically text-based and sent instantly. Unlike IMs, however, a number of users receive messages.

E-mail is short for “electronic mail.” A user may send a message to any other user who possesses an e-mail address. The recipient need not be online at the time of transmission, as the messages remain available until read. Typically, the time between messages is longer than with an IM client, as are the individual messages. In addition to text, users may attach documents to e-mails.

Web logs, or “blogs,” allow a user to post text and sometimes images to a website that others can read. A typical use of this technology is an online journal. Recently, many journalists and corporate executives have started their own web logs to post their opinions on current issues.

Forums, often called message boards, allow users to post topics for discussion. Other users may then post replies to these topics, or start topics of their own. This information is usually available to all registered members and can be stored indefinitely. Such a system eliminates the need to coordinate meeting times as users can check forums at their convenience.

Wikis are collections of articles written by many users. What makes them unique is that a user may edit or read any article at any time. Most articles contain text and images, though it is possible to add multimedia documents as well. The most popular example of a wiki is Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia.

We kept these social software tools in mind when developing the Merton Partnership’s website. While many of these tools are not well suited for an internal government application, the concepts of social software are. We used these concepts throughout the development process of the Partnership’s website.

### 3 Methods

The goal of this project was to help improve communication among the members of the Merton Partnership, the organizations they represent, and the community, by developing web-based tools to allow them to communicate online. With these tools, the members of the Partnership will have an easier time presenting thoughts, ideas, and data to each other and keeping everyone informed. By researching what underlying issues existed among the partners, we were able to determine which tools would best help them. Interviews with the members of the organization aided us in discovering exactly how they intend to use the website and which features they felt were necessary.

To achieve our goal, we met the following objectives:

- We characterized the nature of the communications problems encountered by other local government partnerships in general and by the Merton Partnership in particular.
- We determined what each member of the Merton Partnership would like to see on the website and how he or she intends to use the site.
- We identified the characteristics of effective web-based communication systems that have been developed and tested in other complex organizations, especially other local government contexts.
- We collected the technical information necessary to build the site.

The project involved four principal tasks:

- We interviewed members of the Partnership to determine what they would like to see on the website and how they would use this site. We compared and contrasted these results and determined what features best satisfy the majority of partners.
- We consulted with IT professionals and project managers representing the Merton Council and other LSPs with successful websites to obtain the required technical information.
- We constructed the website iteratively, asking members of the Partnership for feedback along the way.

### **3.1 Research**

Although we had conducted a great deal of research on the Merton Partnership before arriving in London, gaps remained. Aspects such as a detailed look at how the Partnership functions, the prominent organizations within it, the main or most relevant issues that it deals with, and how everyone involved was communicating were vital to the development of an effective Merton Partnership web site. We took some time to collect this information during the early phases of the project.

The group first needed to investigate the workings and proceedings of the Merton Partnership. We needed to understand the formalities, structure, and content of the quarterly meetings as well as the bimonthly executive board meetings. Thus, we attended the executive board meeting on 18 January 2007. By attending this meeting, we gained a better understanding of the workings of the Partnership.

Once we learned more about the workings of the Partnership, we focused on the individual organizations within the Partnership. We felt that it was important to identify the major organizations involved and the main issues with which they must deal. Our liaison was able to answer many of these questions, as she is familiar with the dealings of the Partnership and the member organizations.

One of the most important things we had to consider while developing the Partnership's website was how the Partnership and its member organizations were communicating before we arrived. We needed to find out if they only communicate during their quarterly meetings or on a more regular basis. To obtain this information, we conducted interviews with the majority of the partners. This information was important because we needed to know with what our client was used to working.

### **3.2 Interviews**

To develop a web-based communication tool, which provides an easily accessible way for the members of the Partnership to communicate, we conducted a number of interviews with a variety of different groups. We interviewed our liaison, the members of the Merton Partnership, and IT professionals and project managers from the Merton Council and LSPs with successful websites. See Appendix A2 for outlines of these interviews and Appendices A3-A5 for brief summaries of them.

By interviewing the liaison, Samantha Ghulam, the Policy and Partnerships Officer of the Merton Council, we obtained a better understanding of the wants and needs of the Partnership. This information helped us to determine how to proceed. She was able to fill in the gaps and clear up any confusion we had regarding the project. The interview also provided further information that included identifying relevant Partnership documents and how to access them, information about the Partnership such as current issues or leading organizations, and who to contact to further the research.

Interviewing the members of the Partnership provided vital information for the project. We contacted members shortly after we arrived in London, in order to plan appropriate meeting times. The information we sought to obtain from these interviews included opinions on how the Partnership currently communicates and how they would ultimately like to communicate. The members also presented ideas regarding the major organizations involved with the Partnership and what issues with which they were dealing. Most importantly, we learned what information they would like to share about their organization and what information they would like to obtain from the other organizations. We also obtained their opinions on how this website would affect their individual organizations, the community, and the Partnership as a whole. We used this information to better our understanding of the Partnership's views on the project and to formulate ideas about how to improve communication for the Partnership.

In addition to meeting with members of the Merton Partnership, we met with project managers from other local strategic partnerships. These interviews were very important as they gave us a better idea of which communication tools have worked well in the past and which have failed. Further, they provided us with some insight as to why some systems failed and gave us ideas about how to improve them. All of this information was very important when designing the website for the Merton Partnership.

Finally, we interviewed IT professionals and project managers from the Merton Council. These interviews supplied the technical information needed to ensure that the new website would be compatible with Council's existing sites. The IT staff provided a good deal of information about the web design process and instructions on how to use the Council's content management system, LiveLink 9.5. This knowledge was extremely helpful when designing the final website.

Once we had collected the data, we began to analyze it. We sorted through all of the information to find common themes. These common themes, along with our research into web

design and communication, provided us a way to design the site so that it satisfied the majority of people.

### **3.3 Web Design**

Before we began to design the Merton Partnership's website, we looked at the sites of other local strategic partnerships in the area. We decided what we liked and did not like and used these ideas to develop basic templates. These templates started out as notebook sketches and later became working website prototypes, which we passed on to a number of IT professionals working for the Merton Council as well as a few members of the Partnership. We received feedback on our design and used it to make changes. Once we felt that our designs were sound, we moved on to the next portion of the website. Using this iterative process, we were able to ensure that our interpretation of the Partnership's desires was as accurate as possible. By presenting only part of the website at any time, we received more focused comments.

Once the templates were complete, we passed them to the IT staff for partial implementation. This ensured that the proper accessibility features and branding would be present on each page. Then, we wrote the content that each page would contain. This content, when combined with our templates, formed the Merton Partnership's website. To ease the process, the Council provided us with training for and access to their content management system, LiveLink 9.5. This system allowed us to add and remove content easily, as well as update existing pages.

## **4 Results and Analysis**

Before we could design the Merton Partnership's website, we needed to know what the members of the Partnership wanted their site to do for them. To obtain this information, we conducted a number of interviews. Our liaisons, various consultants, and the members of the Partnership themselves provided us with the data that we needed. Additionally, IT professionals, project managers responsible for developing other LSP websites, and our research into social software aided us with the technical aspects of design. All of this information allowed us to develop and implement a website that meets the needs of the majority its intended audience.

### **4.1 Goals and Purpose**

Tracy Francis and Samantha Ghulam, the liaisons for this project, gave us a much better understanding of the project than we had before arriving in London. Ms. Francis provided the team with a brief that described the general guidelines for the design of the website as well as the main goals and purpose of the project. The Partnership wanted the website to raise awareness of the Merton Partnership and of what it represents, and to offer the members of the Partnership a forum to communicate informally between meetings. She and Miss Ghulam both insisted that the site is primarily for the Partnership and that the public's involvement should be minimal for the moment. In the future, the Council will further develop the site to involve the community. Ghulam mentioned that the website should be "useable at the moment, easy to update later."

### **4.2 The Merton Partnership**

Our liaisons also informed us of the Merton Partnership's most influential organizations. The Merton Council, the Primary Care Trust, and the Merton Police seem to play a larger role in the Partnership than the other members. These organizations may be the major players because of their larger budgets or simply their positions in the community. Despite this imbalance, the Partnership allows each member to express his or her opinion. In this way, every part of the community is equally represented. According to Ghulam, the other partners almost expect the Council to take a leadership role since it started and chairs the Partnership.

The interview with the chair of the Merton Unity Network, Lola Barret, revealed that not all of the partners agree with Miss Ghulam. Ms. Barret feels that the volunteer sector of the community is underrepresented because its budget does not allow them to undertake large tasks. Roy Benjamin, a representative of the voluntary sector and a trustee at Merton Vision, shares this

view. He adds that the volunteer sector consists of hundreds of organizations but only has four representatives in the Partnership, which he feels is an inadequate representation.

To gain a better understanding of the way the Partnership functions, we attended an executive board meeting. This meeting allowed us to see a part of the Partnership working in a formal setting. We saw that the representatives for the Merton Council were very active, as was the representative from the Merton Chamber of Commerce, while most others only contributed occasionally. Additionally, saw how power was delegated from the Partnership to the board and finally to the thematic subgroups. During the meeting, the board referred to the website. These comments gave us a clearer idea of its intended use. Frequently, the executives spoke of using the site as a means for storing large documents and reports, as this would ease the burden of printing 148 pages of paperwork for each attendant of the bimonthly meetings.

### **4.3 Information Sharing**

Dr. Norman Urquia, the Diversity and Communications Manager for the Merton Council, has been developing a collection of fact sheets about the organizations represented in the Merton Partnership as well as information concerning the five thematic subgroups. We used this information as content on the Partnership's website.

The website contains a lot of private information that cannot be shared with the public. In the United Kingdom, there are a number of laws and regulations to consider when publishing such information on the Internet. Simon Guild, the Information Governance Manager for the Merton Council, met with the team to discuss these things. The Freedom of Information Act requires that any information shared online be accessible, upon request, to anyone that the information concerns. The U.K. has many laws protecting data. Because of these laws, there are limits on what the website can contain.

### **4.4 The Partners**

Susan Tanton currently coordinates the Local Area Agreement, one of the Partnership's principal documents, and works closely with the volunteer sector. While not a member of the Partnership herself, she has worked closely with its members since the beginning. According to Ms. Tanton, the website was necessary. She felt that non-members do all of the communication behind the scenes and that the partners themselves only update each other at their quarterly meetings. Ms. Tanton wanted to see funding opportunities offered by or available to the organizations represented in the Partnership as well as links to all of the organizations involved in the voluntary sector on the

website. While she felt that a message board was a good idea, she was worried that people will not check it unless asked to.

The chair of the Merton Unity Network, Lola Barret, agreed that the website is a very good idea. She expressed her desires for a simple, clean, and easy-to-use website. Her assistant suggested a software package called Share Point that allows users to upload and download documents and gives convenient information about them. Ms. Barret mentioned that she would like others to submit summations of long documents to the website, allowing others to be informed without taking the time to read every report. She also expressed interest in a document library to help ease the paperwork required for meetings. Finally, Ms. Barret wanted us to feature the Black Minority Ethnic Network's work somewhere on the website.

Roy Benjamin, a trustee at Merton Vision and voluntary sector representative on the Merton Partnership, thought the website to be a great idea. He said that a message board would be very helpful, as would a document library. Mr. Benjamin expressed interest in a chat room where various representatives from the voluntary sector could communicate. He felt that this feature would alleviate some of the communication troubles that plague the sector due to its very large size. As a representative for Merton Vision, Mr. Benjamin wanted the site to be accessible for those who use screen-reading packages to browse the Internet because of sight loss. As a representative of the voluntary sector, he wanted the website to contain information such as budgets, policy restraints, business plans, and opportunities for collaboration.

As a Community Engagement Network representative, Mr. Andy Norrell believed that the website would be beneficial to both the Merton Partnership and the voluntary sector as a whole. He felt that the website would be a great place to inform others of upcoming events and deadlines. In addition, Mr. Norrell expressed interest in document summaries. He cannot spare the time to read lengthy documents. While Mr. Norrell felt that the website was a good idea, he expressed concerns that it might be too time-consuming to use. He worried that there will be expectations from the Merton Council that his organization cannot always meet.

Like Mr. Norrell, MP Steven Hammond cannot always commit much time to reading documents for the Partnership. To this end, he wanted to see document summaries available on the website. Further, he would prefer to receive information about the large issues, rather than the small details. This information would allow him to participate in the Partnership more than he is able to now. Because he has obvious ties with the government, MP Hammond felt that the other organizations in the Partnership could bring large issues before him and have them resolved.

Additionally, he felt that it would be helpful if there were a way for the other partners and the community to leave him letters on the website.

Abdool Kara, the Assistant Chief Executive of Merton, informed the team that the Inter Faith Forum lacks a website of its own. He also mentioned that the Forum does not produce documents as the other partners do and is relatively unknown. To help raise awareness, Mr. Kara has requested a simple page for the Inter Faith Forum that contains a list of their members, meeting minutes, and a bit about Peace Week, an event that the Forum organizes. He did not feel that the members of the Forum would use message boards or any sort of document library.

Councilor David Williams, a member of the Conservative Party and Leader of the Merton Council, acts as Chair of the Merton Partnership. Mr. Williams felt that the website would establish the Partnership as more than just a “name” and believed that it would help the members communicate better than they had in the past. In order for this to happen, he felt that the website needed to be very simple and informative. He mentioned that posting documents on the website would be very helpful to the partners but that it is not feasible to use electronic reports at the quarterly meetings. Finally, Mr. Williams expressed that it would likely take a fair bit of time before the partners began to use the new website and see its benefits.

Borough Manager Andrew Roberts, of the London Fire Brigade (LFB) in Merton, felt that the website was a “crackin’ idea.” He believed that the website could be very useful for organizations that need assistance in meeting their targets for the Local Area Agreement. To this end, he requested that the website prominently display target status. Displaying these targets would allow the members of the Merton Partnership and the community of Merton could see how well the partners are doing. Despite his enthusiasm, Mr. Roberts expressed concerns about the amount of time that he would need to spend uploading and updating his organization’s information for the website. Like many other partners, his and the LFB’s resources are rather limited.

Mr. Ged Curran, the Chief Executive of Merton, is responsible for chairing the executive board. He told the team that the website is very important to the Merton Partnership and that it would allow the community to learn of the Partnership’s purpose and goals. He wanted to see performance data, business plans, consultation campaign information, and drives of specific projects from other organizations on the website. While Mr. Curran felt that the forums were a good idea, he expressed concerns over whether anyone would use them regularly. He believed that people would only use them during emergencies that affect all of Merton. Additionally, Curran made it clear that he did not feel that electronic communication is a substitute for face-to-face interaction,

though it is very useful for getting things done quickly. Finally, Mr. Curran wanted to see a “who’s who” feature that displays a picture with contact information of each partner along with a brief statement of his or her responsibilities.

Councilor Samantha George is the Deputy Leader of the Merton Council and Deputy Chair of the Merton Partnership. She felt that the website was a very good idea and that it would be very useful to both the partners and the community. She wished to see a history of the Partnership as well as its goals stated clearly on the site. In addition, she wanted to promote the Local Area Agreement. Councilor George mentioned that forums were a good idea, though she expressed concerns about partners sharing personal information. Like Mr. Curran, Councilor George wanted to see a “who’s who” feature. Lastly, Councilor George recommended an opinions link where users could submit feedback on which parts of the site they found useful.

The representative for London South Learning and Skills, Don King, said that a lot of bilateral communication occurs amongst the partners but not much else. He felt that this website could make it easy to obtain information from other organizations, as doing so in the past could be quite difficult. Mr. King wanted to see information concerning which organizations are involved in each of the five themes, what everyone is currently working on, and what chances exist for influencing future decisions made by these organizations. In addition, he wanted to see employment opportunities somewhere on the site. Mr. King stressed that the site must be very easy to use and that it should be very pleasing to the eye. He felt that these features would make the site very successful.

Like many others, Mr. Steve Farrow, a representative from Jobcentreplus, wanted a forum on the new website. He felt that this feature, in addition to the ability to upload and download documents, would be beneficial to both the Partnership and the community. Mr. Farrow also wished for borough statistics, job vacancies, and members’ agendas to be present on the site. This site, he said, would encourage the partners to communicate more.

Ms. Marylin Davis and Ms. Morag Plank represented the Merton Voluntary Services Council in place of Chris Frost, a member of the Merton Partnership. They informed us that they had spent a lot of time developing their own website and that it would be preferable to simply link to it rather than duplicating its information on the Partnership’s site. Additionally, they claimed that they already had information on the other organizations in their database and do not require much from them except for any changes that may occur to representatives, contacts, or projects. For their part, the MVSC wants to let others know what services they offer and how to contact them for help.

Funding and strategic documents would also be very useful to have on the website. In order for the site to succeed, Davis and Plank felt that it must be very dynamic and that it should contain something new every time someone visits.

Borough Commander Michael Wood was not certain that anyone in the community that does not deal with the Partnership directly was aware of its existence. As a result, he was not sure that many people would use the site. Nevertheless, he felt that the project was a very good move, as it would help in solving this problem. Aside from links to the borough police site and the Metropolitan Police corporate site, Mr. Wood did not feel that anything from his organization needed to be present on the new website. Likewise, he did not feel that he needed information from the other organizations.

Ms. Foshua Poku works for the Merton Community Advice Bureau and is part of the Community Engagement Network. She represents the latter organization on the Merton Partnership. Ms. Poku mentioned that a forum would be a good tool, as it would allow partners to give feedback on current affairs and projects. She felt that the site must have a clean, easy-to-navigate layout and that it must be accessible to those with disabilities. Like others, she mentioned that a good contact page would be very helpful and stressed that phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and postal addresses should all be present to make contacting others as easy as possible. Finally, Ms. Poku made it clear that web communication was not the only form of communication. While the website would be a very good tool, it cannot replace face-to-face contact.

Reverend Andrew Wakefield, chair of the Sustainable Communities subgroup and a member of the Executive Board, began asking for a website nearly seven years ago when the first Merton Partnership was still forming. He feels that the members are not able to meet often enough due to other responsibilities and that the website will help them overcome this problem by providing a virtual meeting place. Reverend Wakefield thought the idea of a message board was perfect and had no other requests of his own.

Finally, Ms. Bhuhi, a representing Ms. Fiona Wright of the Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust, felt that organizations should share their annual reports on the website. Likewise, she offered to share a number of annual reports from the PCT. She cautions that personal information should not be present on the website and that members of the Partnership must be careful about what they post. Ms. Bhuhi felt that the website was a great idea because it would allow the Partnership to show the community what they have accomplished.

## **4.5 Common Ideas**

The majority of the partners interviewed requested that a message board be present on the website. Their reasons for this request varied. Some wished to advertise upcoming events, others wished to collaborate on projects, and still others wanted to see funding opportunities posted. In all cases, a message board seems to be a very popular idea that will benefit nearly everyone involved.

A number of partners also requested a document library. Such a library would allow the members of the Partnership to upload and download documents at their leisure. This lessens the amount of paperwork required for quarterly Partnership meetings and bimonthly executive board meetings. Additionally the more time-starved partners have a better chance to contribute to the Partnership without actually coming to the meetings. All of the partners expressed their need for a simple, easy-to-use site. Many of them cannot take the time to learn how to use a complicated system. A simple site makes communicating much more efficient and would likely draw more users.

The most common wishes concerning content were that organizations update the site with information about their status on various projects and that they post any funding opportunities that are available to the other organizations. Additionally, many members would like a well-organized contact directory on the website. These features allow the partners to collaborate with ease and keep everyone informed of progress.

## **4.6 Other LSP Websites**

In order to design and develop the best website possible for the Merton Partnership, we looked at other local strategic partnerships' (LSPs) websites and interviewed the project managers who were involved in the design process. The interviews provided us with information regarding which systems have worked well in the past and which systems have not.

We interviewed representatives of the Thanet LSP, the Milton Keynes LSP, and the Sutton LSP. All of their sites varied in age, but for the most part had very similar characteristics. All of the sites were mainly for community access. Some of the sites were more complex than the others, but overall they had very similar content provided to the public.

Each of the three websites allowed its members to communicate in different ways. The Thanet LSP did not use their site for communication at all. The representative said that though they have every member's contact information listed, they would most likely never consider using interactive online communication tools.

The Milton Keynes LSP's had a slightly more advanced communication system in the sense that they used the site to post and share papers and projects. Otherwise, the partners did not use this site to communicate. When developing this site they considered providing communication tools, but decided that nobody would use them. They were confident that they would never look into using this site as a communication tool.

The Sutton LSP had the most advanced website out of the three. Its members used this site to post and share documents, similarly to the members of the Milton Keynes LSP. Additionally, Sutton's website offered free web pages to the smaller organizations involved and provided electronic forms for the public to fill out. Overall, the project manager said that the members of the LSP mainly use an e-mail network to communicate with each other. He indicated that the site was not being used to its full potential and that no one involved could spare the time to develop it further.

Overall, none of the websites was exactly what the Merton Partnership was looking for. We took the information that we obtained from the interviews and by looking at the sites to successfully develop our site. We were surprised to discover that most LSPs do not use online communication tools, but it is our hope that this new website will start a new trend. The information provided by the above LSP websites helped our group predict the effects that the Merton Partnership website will have on the Partnership and on the community.

#### **4.7 Website Development**

Our team found that both the development and the implementation of the website were very complex. Besides trying to please the majority of the members of the Merton Partnership and the Council, we had to follow many project specifications.

One of the most important issues that we faced was balancing members' wants with the site's accessibility requirements. For example, our liaisons wanted us to follow a color scheme based on those in the Community Plan. In the Community Plan, each themed group is designated a color. One of these colors, yellow, did not work well on the site. It was unpleasant to the eye and it was hard to read. We determined that this color would not be a good choice to use on the website so we used a shade of orange instead, which would be more pleasing to the eye.

Another issue our team encountered was finding appropriate images to use on the site. Once we decided what images we wanted, we had to ensure that we had the legal right to use them. For example, we wanted a picture of a diverse group of people to use for the template. We found a

picture we wanted in one of the Partnership's printouts of the Community Plan but the Council did not have the proper license for us to use it. Because of this, the Council paid £400 in order for our team to use it on the site. Our liaisons believed it was important to keep the website's images consistent with the Partnership's previous documents and pictures, such as those in the Community Plan. For the most part, however, we were able to utilize the Council's image database.

When choosing content for the website, there were many things we needed to take into consideration. In order to satisfy the majority of the partners, we interviewed them and made decisions based on our analysis of their feedback. For example, some members suggested a document library, a forum, a contact list, and links to their organizations' websites. We determined which content would be feasible to implement in the time we had and which seemed most important to the partners. We decided it was a good idea to proceed with most of their suggestions. However, more content was required to make the site worthwhile to the community. We researched the documents provided by the Council and used this information to supplement the content provided by the partners.

#### **4.8 *The Merton Partnership's Website***

The Merton Partnership's website consists of two parts. The first and larger part is accessible by anyone while the second area is private and only accessible by the members of the Merton Partnership. This members' area requires the user to type in a name and password before they can continue.

Good news stories and recent accomplishments of the Merton Partnership comprise the home page of the public area. This information will help establish the Partnership as a beneficial organization to the community. Additionally, it will help visitors understand what the Partnership is doing for them. A "Quick Links" box occupies the top-right corner of the page and contains links to important documents. These links make it easy for visitors to find the most important information. Figure 8 contains a snapshot of the most recent home page.



Figure 8: Merton Partnership Home Page

From the home page, visitors can follow the links on the left side menu to obtain more information about the Merton Partnership and its publications. The “About Us” link leads to information about the history, structure, and membership of the Merton Partnership. In addition, we have provided details on the Community Plan, the Annual Report, and minutes from previous meetings. Like the home page, this page contains a “Quick Links” box.

By visiting the “Community Plan” link, visitors can learn about the Community Plan, the Community Cohesion Charter (a document that promotes equality, social inclusion, and positive relationships between and within local communities), and the Local Area Agreement (a three-year strategy for meeting the goals outlined in the Community Plan). From here, we invite visitors to learn more about the Community Plan by following the links to the five thematic subgroups and to downloadable versions of the document.

Each of the Partnership’s five thematic subgroups has its own page. The Merton Partnership chose to use a different color to represent each thematic subgroup in the Community Plan and we chose to continue using them on these five pages. By doing so, we make it easier for visitors to differentiate between the themes and their pages. Each thematic page contains

information about the organization, purpose, and leadership of the theme, which organizations are involved in it, and links to any important documents that it has published. Figure 9 contains a snapshot of the Children & Young People thematic page.

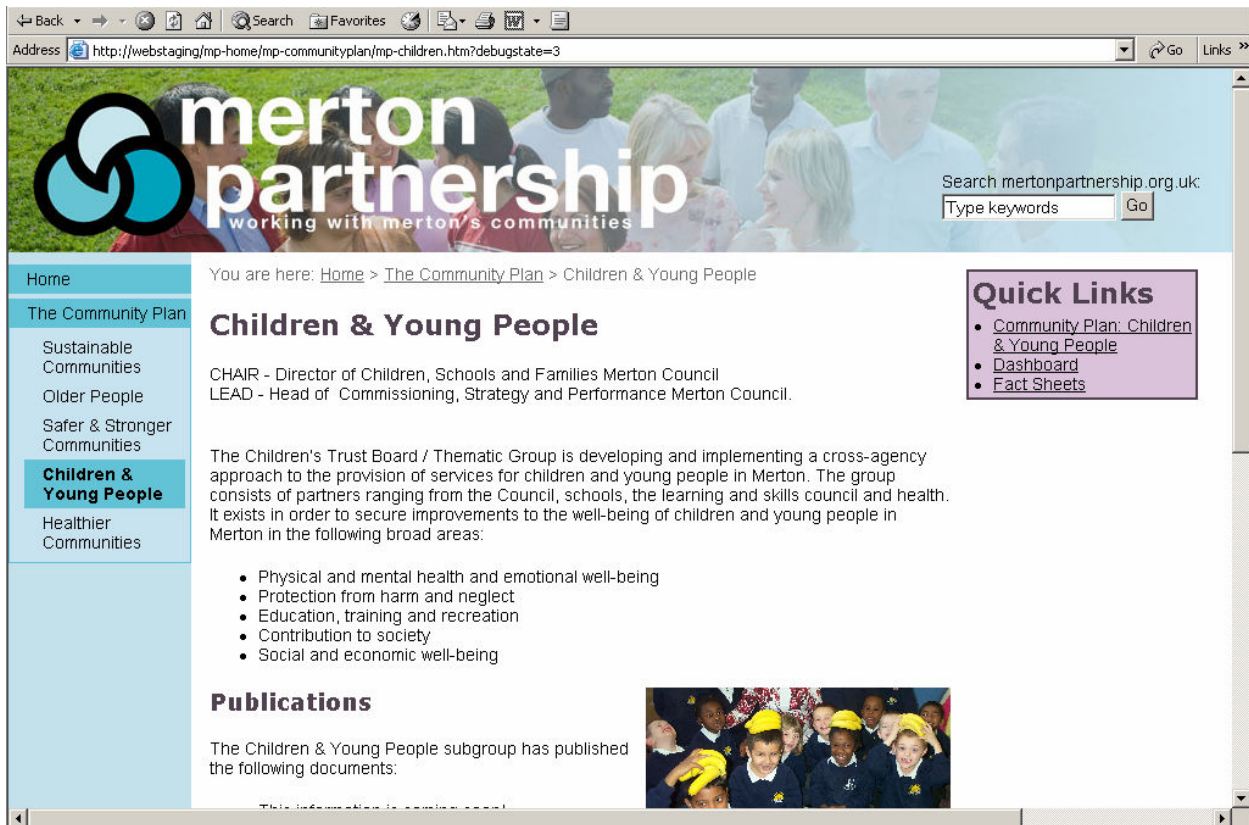


Figure 9: Children & Young People Page

The “Member Organisations” link leads to a page that contains the name and logo of each organization involved in the Merton Partnership. From here, visitors can follow links to pages that contain information about each of the organizations including its purpose, links to publications, and a link to its website. If partners were willing to provide more information, it is present on this page. For example, the Interfaith Forum page features meeting minutes and a member list. Figure 10 contains a screenshot of the Merton Unity Network’s page.

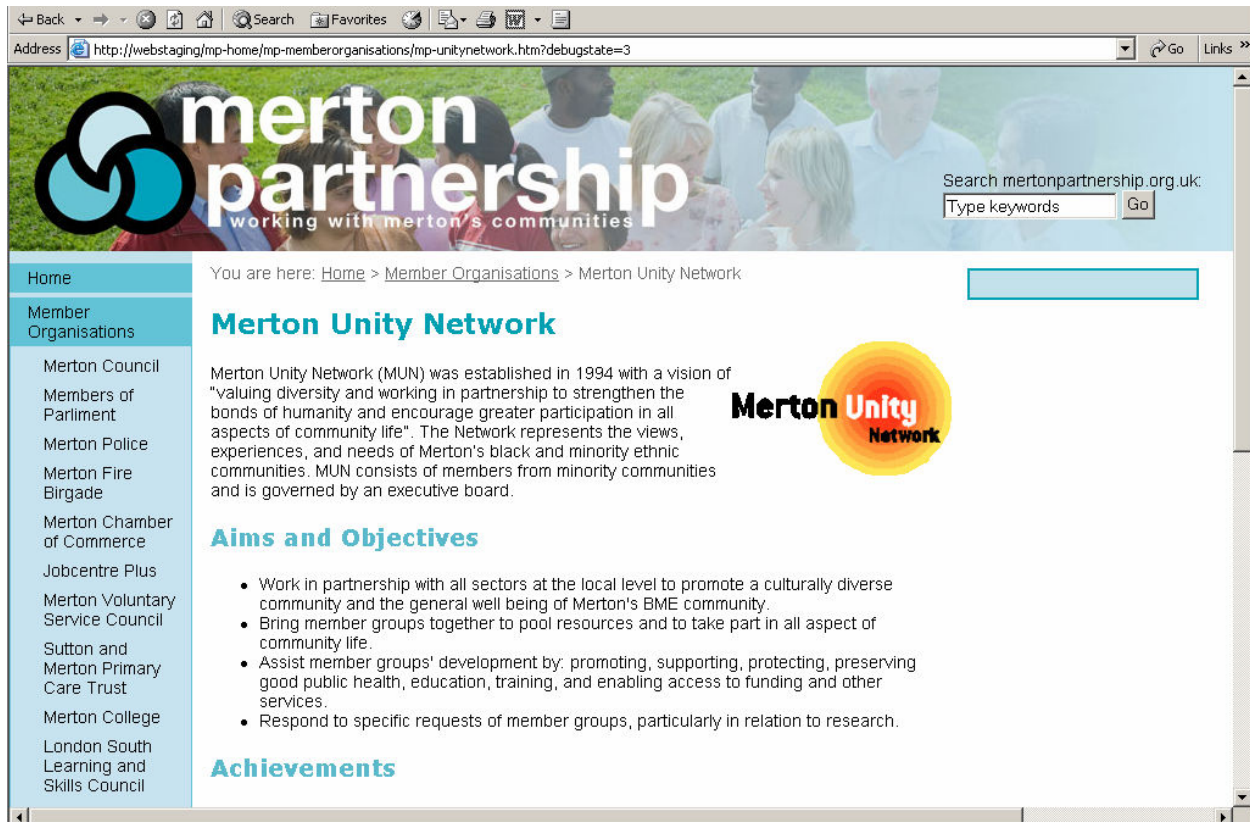


Figure 10: The Merton Unity Network Page

Finally, the public area of the website contains a contact page. This page provides the user with a variety of ways to contact the Merton Partnership, including e-mail, phone, and post. Since there is currently no other way for visitors to provide feedback about the website, we felt that this page was necessary.

The private website contains a members' forum, a calendar, agendas and minutes from the bimonthly executive board meetings, and a contact directory that provides partners with contact information for everyone involved in the Partnership and the five thematic subgroups. These tools enable the Merton Partnership to communicate virtually when it is more convenient to do so. Additionally, the calendar displays upcoming meetings and events. Unfortunately, we are not able to provide a screenshot of the private website.

#### 4.9 Analysis and Predictions

In the time provided, the team designed, developed, and launched a website that the Merton Partnership and the community of Merton will be able to access. However, the team could only predict how the partners will use the website in the future and the effects it will have on the

members of the Partnership and the community. After we interviewed the members of the Partnership, members of the Merton Council, and others involved in the Partnership, our team made predictions concerning the expansion, usage, and effects of the website. Although our team could not actually study these things, we are confident in the accuracy of our predictions since over the past few months we gathered a clear sense of the proceedings of the Partnership.

After interviewing the members of the Partnership and of the Council, our team believes that the expansion of the site will take time. Although the website's main audience is the members of the Partnership itself, the team is aware that it will take them a fair bit of time to learn how to use the site properly. It is not realistic to expect that the partners will utilize this tool to its fullest potential at first. The team, as well as members of the Partnership, agree that significant usage of the web communication tool will come eventually. Furthermore, expansion of the site will take time, but once the members adjust to communicating via the web site they will find it very time efficient and beneficial.

As stated above, our team made educated predictions on the effects that the website will have on the Partnership and on the community, provided it is maintained and updated properly. On a broad scale, we predict that the website will be beneficial to both the members and to the community. We believe that the site will be a common meeting ground for the partners to share documents, such as annual reports, strategic plans, and agendas. Our team predicts that this meeting ground will allow and encourage members to be aware of the bigger picture surrounding the Merton Partnership and the Community Plan. With this awareness and involvement, we believe the Partnership will become much more cohesive and unified. With this unification, the Partnership will be much more efficient accomplishing their target goals.

Concerning the community, the effects of the website will be different. Currently, it is safe to say that the community is unaware of the Merton Partnership all together. We believe the website will raise the awareness of the Partnership to the public. Once the public is aware of the Merton Partnership and the Community Plan, our team predicts that there will be a rise in community involvement in the borough of Merton. We believe this new site could spark a common interest in the Partnership's efforts to carry out the Community Plan. Our team believes the site will allow the community to become directly involved in the Partnership, giving them a voice concerning how their borough is improving. This opportunity, in effect, will accomplish the goal of the Community Plan: creating a more unified Merton.

## 5 Conclusions

Upon completing the Merton Partnership's web site, we reached many conclusions. After working directly with a government agency, a strategic partnership, and a diverse range of people, we have learned about and experienced the many problems, issues, and obstacles that arise when working with them. This project was much more than just designing, developing, and implementing a web site. We learned first hand about the everyday communication barriers, policy restrictions, political stresses, and contradicting ideas associated with such large government organizations. With this, we have concluded that the problem of inefficiency does not lie with technology but rather with societal issues such as communication and teamwork. Proper communication and teamwork is vital for the success of government agencies and partnerships for society as a whole.

The London Borough of Merton faces problems that our website can help them solve. Merton is currently divided into two parts: the east, consisting of Mitcham and Morden, and the west, which consists of Wimbledon. In the east, there are many minorities, the education is below average, and many consider the two wards deprived and in need of attention. However, in the west, a homogeneous community flourishes with wealth and business. As a result, the national government often neglects the two deprived wards when funding is available. The Merton Council recognized this problem and has drafted the Community Plan to address the economic and social inequalities in the borough. The local authority funds the Community Plan. This is not typical as the national government funds most Community Plans. Because of this situation, funding is a problem and the borough must bid for money. In order for the borough to gain financial aid, they need to prove that they have greater need than the other bidders do. To this end, Merton needs to provide sufficient evidence that the Council and the various community sectors are working together efficiently to achieve their targets. The new website will help by creating a virtual meeting place for the members of the Merton Partnership to work together.

Merton must address many other factors in addition to funding if it is to improve. Technology is going to help by unifying the public, private, and community sectors of the borough, but it cannot solve every problem. All three sectors need to work together effectively to bridge the gap between the eastern and western parts of Merton. Education, transportation, business, safety, and wealth all contribute to the status and the future status of Merton.

Merton's problems stem from the development and wealth in the west and the lack thereof in the east. Technology will help the latter by creating a transportation system, improving education,

creating a safer environment, and establishing business. As of today, public transportation to the eastern wards is almost nonexistent, which makes it difficult for people to travel in and out of the city to work. Worse, cars, gasoline, and congestion fees require a fair bit of money that many families in the eastern wards may not have. Furthermore, if education is poor and transportation is lacking, people will have difficulties finding jobs. Business owners do not want to hire uneducated people who are going to have difficulties getting to work. In addition, since the east has a higher crime rate than the west, businesses owners do not want to establish their businesses in the east, nor do people want to work where they are fearful of their environment. While these issues pose a great problem in Merton, the Partnership has designed the Community Plan to fix them over the next eight years.

The Merton Partnership website is a technological tool that will allow the Merton Council, the Partnership's members, and the members of the community to share information, communicate with each other, and work together as a team to create a safer and stronger Merton. It is essential that everyone involved work together as a cohesive and efficient team in order to gain the much needed funding to fulfill the Community Plan. In addition, the site will help the public, private and community sectors work together to improve the transportation, education, safety, and business of the east to narrow the gap between the eastern and western parts of Merton.

Technology was not a major problem for our team in the development of the Merton Partnership website. Like the Partnership, our group faced communication, political, and personal issues that made the project seem harder than necessary. The implementation of the website did not pose a problem because the technology was available to us through the Council. Rather, it was the layout and content of the website that troubled us. In order to develop the website's templates and content we interviewed over twenty different people involved in the Partnership. Partners had their own opinions, desires, and visions concerning the content of the website. Our team had to analyze these interviews and ultimately decide what best suits the Partnership. In addition, we encountered mixed feelings toward colors, fonts, layout, etc. Our team realized how hard it is to get certain things accomplished when it takes two meetings and a few emails to decide on something that would seem trivial to most people. With this, the team can relate to the Partnership's communication issues, and realizes what a problem they pose to productivity. We are confident our website will help overcome these communication barriers and allow the Partnership to work efficiently towards a higher quality of life in the Borough of Merton.

## **6 Recommendations**

Although we were able to provide the Merton Partnership with a functioning website, time did not permit us to implement all of the features that we feel are necessary. The website currently shows its potential use as a tool for the Partnership. To guide the Merton Council in further developing the website, we would like to make a few recommendations. Our suggestions are a guide to increase further the usefulness of the Merton Partnership website and we encourage the members to continue providing their support, comments, and suggestions in order to make the website the best that it can be.

### **Recommendation 1: Continue support**

We recommend that all of the members of the Merton Partnership continue their pro-active approach and support for the development of the website. We created the website based on the partners' ideas, and without their continued feedback and contribution, the website will diminish.

### **Recommendation 2: Continue funding**

We recommend that the Council continue to fund and host the website so the IT professionals can administrate and make any technical modifications necessary for the website to develop along with the Partnership. Without the Council's support, the Merton Partnership's website will not have a home.

### **Recommendation 3: Update documents**

We recommend the content manager, James Scott, reviews posted documents every three months and make any necessary updates. During the partners' quarterly meetings we recommend there be an addition to the agenda where partners can produce any updated documents or information that needs to be posted on the website. The partners do not want many outdated or irrelevant documents on the site.

### **Recommendation 4: Update forums**

We recommend the forum administrator, Samantha Ghulam, monitors, reviews, and archives forum content weekly. Since there is a large array of discussion topics with many potential forum users, discussion topics need to be archived so not to fill the forum up with outdated topics.

**Recommendation 5: Set an example**

We recommend that the Council set an example by posting agendas, minutes, and other documents on the new website exclusively, which will force the partners to utilize the website. As a result, the members will get used to the layout and functionality of the website, encouraging them to use it on a more regular basis.

**Recommendation 6: Create public awareness**

We recommend that the Council publicize the website utilizing MyMerton, radio stations, and bus and tube stops. With this, the public will become aware of the Merton Partnership.

**Recommendation 7: Create a public forum**

We recommend that a public forum is implemented so that the community can be directly involved. Since the Merton Partnership wants public contribution, they need to implement a means to do so. The Partnership drafted the Community Plan to meet the needs and wants of the community. Therefore, they need community involvement to meet their goals.

In conclusion, the team recommends that the Council and the Partnership will use the site as intended. We recommend that the forums see constant use, that documents are regularly made available on the website, and that efforts are made to increase the public's awareness of the Partnership by advertising the new site. In modern times, everyone's diaries fill up quickly and there is not enough time to address all of the important issues. With the above recommendations, and a good amount of time, we hope that the new website will help solve this trouble. By making communication easier, involving the community, and alleviating the stress of many meetings, we feel that the website can play a vital role in the success of the Merton Partnership and, most importantly, the community of Merton.

## Appendix A1: Sponsor Description (Merton Council)

The Greater London Authority (GLA) comprises thirty-two boroughs. The London Borough of Merton is located in southwest London (highlighted in Figure 11) and was formed in 1965 by the merger of the Municipal Boroughs of Mitcham, Wimbledon, and Morden Urban District that were formerly in the county of Surrey. The Borough has a total population of 194,700 (Merton Council, 2006a).



Figure 11: The London Boroughs (Wikipedia, 2006)

The Merton Council, which comprises sixty councilors, governs the Borough of Merton. Residents elect the Councilors every four years from the twenty constituent wards. In May 2006, the Labour Party lost control of the council to the Conservative Party. The council now consists of 30 Conservative members, 27 Labour Party members, and 3 Merton Park Residents. The current leader of the Merton Borough is Conservative Councilor David Williams (Merton Council 2006b).

The council was reconstructed in 2005 and now is comprised of five departments (Figure 10) which include the Chief Executive's department and four departments that provide frontline services (Children/Schools and Families, Community and Housing, Corporate and Services, and Environment and Regeneration). The five departments are divided into smaller committees and partnerships also shown in Figure 10 (Merton Council, 2006c). The cabinet, which is comprised of ten councilors from the majority party, oversees and coordinates the functions of the departments and determines the overall strategies and policy directions of the Council.

The main responsibility of the Chief Executive's department is to guide and direct the rest of the council. The Children/Schools and Families department is responsible for the operation of all public schools and social care services in the Borough. The Community and Housing supplies community services, accommodations, and housing to those in need. The Corporate Services department provides services such as financial advising, legal advice, and customer service to the people of Merton. The Environment and Regeneration department is responsible for organizing,

planning, and protecting public property and street systems in Merton. These departments are vital to the success of the Borough because they provide structure and optimize performance and service within the district (Merton Council, 2006b). Figure 12 outlines the structure of the Merton Council.

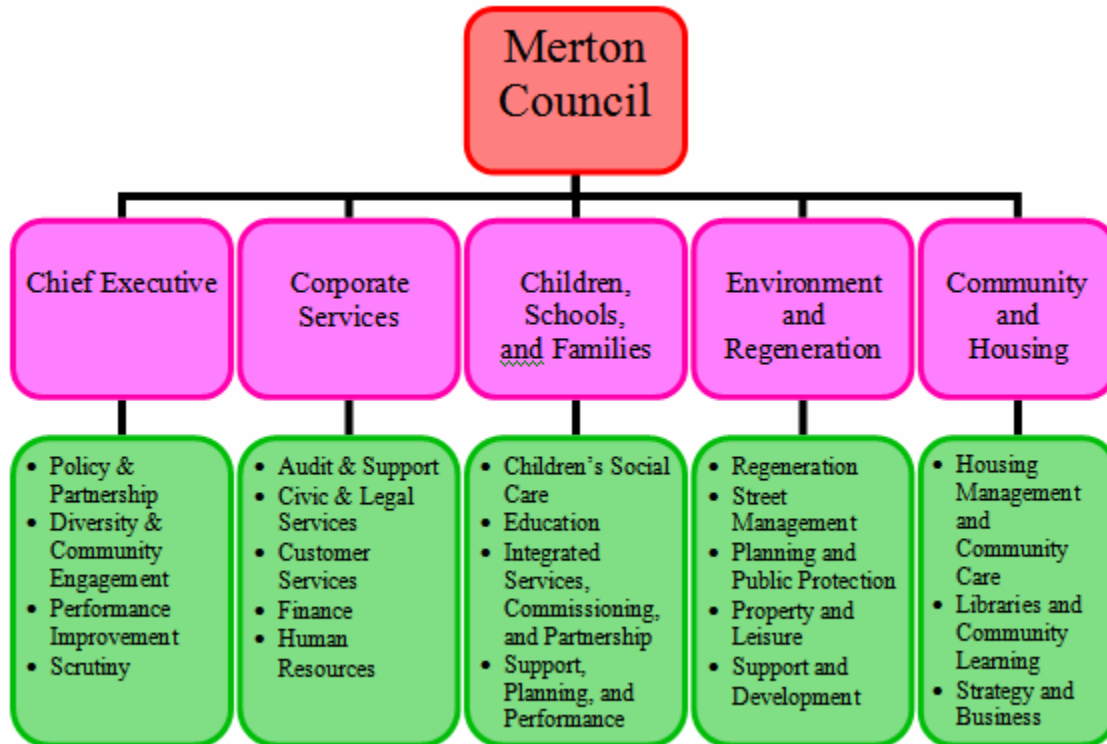


Figure 12: Structure of the Merton Council

The Borough of Merton has three primary sources of income: revenue support grants (36% of the budgeted funding), council tax (34%), and business rates (30%). Additional income is raised through charity events, district fees and charges, and other grants. Surprisingly, the largest amount of revenue comes from grants even though Merton receives the fourth lowest amount of external funding in London. Residents pay the council tax for services provided by the Council and the Greater London Authority. The Council receives 80% of the taxes acquired and the Greater London Authority receives the remaining 20%. The Council then distributes its share to the five departments. The Environment and Regeneration and the Community & Housing department receive the largest portions (37% and 29%, respectively). The Council has taken many steps in order to keep these taxes to a minimum. Currently, the council tax has moved from the third highest tax to the tenth lowest tax out of the thirty-two Boroughs (Merton Council, 2006d).

The London Borough of Merton has sponsored more global interactive qualifying projects with WPI than any other organization. The fifty-six projects have covered such topics as

transportation, carbon reduction, and housing standards. In 2006, the Borough sponsored four projects (Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 2007).

## **Appendix A2: Interview Outlines**

The following subsections outline the general flow of our interviews with various subjects. While each question was covered, they were not necessarily asked in order. The IT Professionals outline was used for anyone not a member of the Partnership, not a project manager from another LSP, and not our liaison. The exception is Susan Tanton, with whom we used the Members of the Merton Partnership outline. Additionally, other topics may have been covered. For summaries of each interview, see Appendices A3-A5.

## **A2.1 Interview with our Liaison**

- 1.) Introduction
  - a. Introduce ourselves.
  - b. Briefly introduce our project proposal.
- 2.) Consent
  - a. Ask permission to use information provided.
  - b. Can we use her name in our project?
- 3.) Background
  - a. How long has she been working with the Merton Council?
  - b. What positions has she held in the past?
  - c. What position does she currently hold?
  - d. What are her responsibilities?
- 4.) The Project
  - a. What is her opinion of the website project?
  - b. We will provide a detailed description of our proposal.
    - i. Obtain feedback
    - ii. Improvements?
    - iii. Anything missing?
- 5.) Research
  - a. Ask her how we will obtain further information regarding the Merton Partnership.
    - i. Partnership's documents
    - ii. Current Issues
    - iii. Leading organizations
  - b. Ask for suggestions regarding our research
    - i. Whom we should contact?
    - ii. Best way to contact organizations and other LSPs
- 6.) Closing Remarks
  - a. Thank her.
  - b. Ask her if she has any questions or concerns.

## ***A2.2 Interviews with the Members of the Merton Partnership***

- 1.) Introduction
  - a. Introduce ourselves.
  - b. Briefly introduce our project proposal.
- 2.) Consent
  - a. Ask permission to use the information provided.
  - b. Does he or she want to remain anonymous?
  - c. Can we use his or her name in our project?
- 3.) Background
  - a. How long has he or she been a part of the Merton Partnership?
  - b. Has he or she held positions in the past?
  - c. What positions does he or she currently hold?
  - d. What organization does he or she represent?
  - e. What are his or her responsibilities?
  - f. What issues does his or her organization mainly deal with?
- 4.) The Project
  - a. How does he or she feel about the project?
  - b. How do the members of Merton Partnership communicate with each other and with their community?
  - c. How would he or she like to the members of the Merton Partnership to communicate with each other and with their community?
  - d. How does he or she feel that this website will affect the Partnership?
- 5.) Research
  - a. What would he or she like others to know about his or her organization?
  - b. What would he or she like to know about other organizations?
- 6.) Closing Remarks
  - a. Thank him or her.
  - b. Ask if he or she has any questions or concerns.

## **A2.3 Interviews with LSP Representatives**

- 1.) Introduction
  - a. Introduce ourselves.
  - b. Briefly introduce our project proposal.
- 2.) Consent
  - a. Ask permission to use information provided.
  - b. Does he or she want to remain anonymous?
  - c. Can we use his or her name in our project?
- 3.) Background
  - a. How long has he or she been a part of the LSP?
  - b. Has he or she held any positions in the past?
  - c. What position does he or she currently hold?
  - d. What are his or her responsibilities?
  - e. What issues is he or she currently dealing with?
- 4.) The Project
  - a. How does he or she feel about the project?
  - b. How do members of the LSP currently communicate with each other and their community?
  - c. How would he or she like the LSP members to communicate with each other and their community?
  - d. What type of system (if any) does his or her LSP currently use?
    - i. How effective is it?
    - ii. How easy is it to access and manage?
    - iii. How could it be improved?
    - iv. What aspects (if any) are missing?
  - e. How difficult was it and how long did it take to implement this system into his or her government?
- 5.) Research
  - a. Any suggestions regarding other LSPs to contact.
  - b. Any particular systems we should look into.
- 6.) Closing Remarks
  - a. Thank him or her.
  - b. Ask if he or she has any questions or concerns.

## **A2.4 Interviews with IT Professionals**

- 1.) Introduction
- 2.) Consent
- 3.) Background
  - a. How long has he or she been working with the Council or Partnership?
  - b. Has he or she held any positions in the past?
  - c. What positions does he or she currently hold?
  - d. What are his or her responsibilities?
- 4.) The Project
  - a. How does he or she feel about the project?
  - b. What technologies do the Council use?
  - c. What are the most common problems that the Council faces?
- 5.) Research
  - a. What does he or she consider when working on Council pages?
  - b. Does he or she have any suggestions for us in regards to implementing the website?
- 6.) Closing Remarks
  - a. Thank him or her.
  - b. Ask if he or she has any questions or concerns.

## **Appendix A3: Interviews with Members of the Merton Partnership**

This section contains summaries of interviews with the members of the Merton Partnership. They are presented in the order that they were conducted. Unfortunately, only sixteen of the twenty partners could be contacted for an interview. For interviews with other LSPs, see Appendix A4. For interviews with our liaison, consultants, and IT professionals, see Appendix A5.

### ***A3.1 Interview with Lola Barret on 17 January 2007***

The interview began with introducing ourselves and providing a brief overview of our project. Ms. Barret is the chair of the Merton Unity Network and has been a part of the Merton Partnership since its beginning two years ago. As a chair, Ms. Barret delivers to the public by considering taxpayers and by influencing the actions of the Partnership.

Ms. Barret began the discussion by expressing her views on the site. She said that the site should be clean, clear, and simple. She said it should not be flashy or commercialized. Ms. Barret also believes the home page should contain enough information to allow anyone who happens to stumble upon it to know what the purpose of the site is.

Ms. Barret recommended we research SharePoint software. She explained SharePoint as software that allows users to see who posts or accesses documents on the network. She spoke very positively about this program and its ease of use and practicality.

Ms. Barret is currently working on the Black Minority Ethnic Network (BME). BME represents the collective voice of the minority community. BME provides representation, housing, education, and other provisions needed in deprived communities. Ms. Barret feels BME is extremely important and wants it to be represented on the site. She wants the goals and progress of the program to be clear and concise on the site.

Ms. Barret wants complete documents posted on the site with a summary of each. She said documents can be quite long and bullet points of important aspects should be provided to prevent users from having to download large documents that turn out to be irrelevant.

Ms Barret thinks that this site will be effective if used by the partners. In order for partners to use this site it must be user-friendly, easy to access, easy to use, and exciting. She suggested a message board or something similar to BlackBoard would prove to be a great tool.

### ***A3.2 Interview with Roy Benjamin on 19 January 2007***

Roy Benjamin has been a part of the voluntary sector for over four years. He is currently one of the voluntary sector's representatives in the Merton Partnership as well as a trustee for Merton Vision. Mr. Benjamin's responsibilities consist of representing the voluntary sector, liaising with and understand what is happening within the themed groups, supporting people with sight loss and other disabilities, and dealing with welfare advice. Mr. Benjamin believes this is a much-needed tool for the Partnership.

Mr. Benjamin would like to see a chat room facility for voluntary sector representatives to share information with the voluntary sector as a whole. There is a lack of communication concerning the voluntary sector because it is so large. For example, miscommunication could occur between the chair of a themed subgroup and the executive board. If the chair of a themed group is not a member of the executive board, they have to relay their messages to someone who is. This website will provide the needed overlap between chairs of themed subgroups and the executive board. It will also enable the community to see what is happening.

Mr. Benjamin also explained how the website will allow all of the members to have equal access to the same information. Members such as the Merton Council and the Primary Care Trust (PCT) seem to have the resources to distribute large documents while the voluntary sector does not. Roy mentioned that even the larger organizations sometimes have trouble. It takes many resources to make sure everyone in the Partnership receives 300-page documents. With this website, instead of sending or printing out large documents to each of the organizations, a simple post on the website will allow all documents to be available to all members easily.

Mr. Benjamin feels that members should be able to post problems and resource pressures such as policy restraints, budgets, business plans, and potential collaboration opportunities. He believes this information is important for the Council and Executive board to take into account while making policies and plans for the Partnership.

Suggestions from Mr. Benjamin included message boards with discussion around themed groups, and a design that will work well with screen reading packages for people with poor vision.

### ***A3.3 Interview with Andy Norrell on 22 January 2007***

Andy Norrell is a Community Engagement Network representative, chair of the Merton Volunteer Center, and one of five voluntary sector representatives on the Merton Partnership. He has been a member of the Partnership for two years but contributed to the development of the Community Plan before that. Mr. Norrell recruits volunteers for community service work in Merton. His work differs from that of the Merton Voluntary Services Council, directed by Chris Frost, because Mr. Norrell's organization supports individuals rather than organizations. While Norrell's work directly relates to the Safer and Stronger Communities thematic subgroup, it overlaps the other themed groups as well.

The voluntary sector in Merton wants to be more involved and influential with the Merton Partnership. Mr. Norrell believes this website will help the voluntary sector, as well as other smaller organizations, get more involved in the Partnership. Mr. Norrell would like to use the website to inform other organizations about the services available to them through his own. He also wants their "Good Practice" work to be available on the site. Norrell expressed his interest in the site providing a general awareness of current events held by other members.

Mr. Norrell raised a couple of concerns about the website. He commented on the time necessary for each member to contribute to the site. He mentioned how uploading documents takes time and is another task to perform. Mr. Norrell also wants the Partnership to avoid dictating what is posted or how often documents are to be posted. He does not want the organization to be obligated to more than their resources allow.

Despite these concerns, Mr. Norrell is very positive about the project and believes information sharing between the partners can be beneficial. He, like other partners, notes that documents can be very lengthy and posting them on the site will reduce paperwork. Furthermore, he feels that there should be summaries and bullets of important information. Mr. Norrell also believes communication has been a big problem, especially with the smaller organizations and this site can be a good tool to keep everyone aware of everything that is going on within the Partnership and within the community.

### ***A3.4 Interview with Abdool Kara on 22 January 2007***

Abdool Kara is the Assistant Chief Executive at the Merton Council. Norman Urquia and his colleague advised us to interview Kara regarding the Inter Faith Forum. Salim Sheikh is the actual member of the Merton Partnership, but Urquia and colleague believed that Sheikh would not represent the entire Inter Faith Forum.

During the interview with Kara, he explained what the Inter Faith Forum is. He clarified that it is not an agency, but a committee of several organizations. He explained how the Inter Faith Forum does not deal with a lot of data or documents. Their main concern is “Peace Week,” which is comprised of events and activities for the community that promote unity.

Regarding the entire website, Kara said he would like information regarding the cohesion and policy action plan to be on the site. He also said it would be a good idea to have links to each of the organization’s websites on this site.

Currently, the Inter Faith Forum does not have a website. Kara stated that the Inter Faith Forum has the least presence in the Merton Partnership. He agreed that it would be nice to promote the Inter Faith Forum by providing a web page. He would like their page to be very basic. On their pages he wants agendas, minutes, basic information about the people involved, and information regarding Peace Week. He said he was going to bring this up at their next meeting in March and decide what else needs to be added to the site. For the time being, he is not looking for anything too elaborate, just a little recognition. Since the Inter Faith Forum does not have a website, Kara gave us a few contacts in order to obtain information about them to use on the site.

### ***A3.5 Interview with James Sherman on 23 January 2007***

MP Steven Hammond of Wimbledon could not meet with us due to an emergency. Instead, we met with one of his assistants, James Sherman, who spoke on behalf of MP Hammond.

Mr. Sherman expressed MP Hammond's interest in the project because it will allow him to participate more in the Partnership. MP Hammond spends most of his time in his office located in the House of Commons. With a Partnership website, he can contribute to the Partnership from his office at his convenience.

In addition, MP Hammond feels that the website can be a tool for the organizations to contact him with any problems or issues they want addressed to Parliament. Since MP Hammond is a representative in Parliament, he has government connections that may be useful to the Partnership. In order for this to work properly, the site must provide a way for organizations to post summaries of their problems. Mr. Sherman made it clear that MP Hammond does not have the time or the resources to read hundreds of e-mails a day asking for help. However, he can get a lot out of summaries and bullet points of the major issues.

Mr. Sherman suggested that there be a MP section of the site where organizations and the community can post problems, concerns, or issues involving the two MPs. They can also see what the MPs are doing to address these issues as well as things they are doing to help carry out the Community Plan. He also believes it is a good idea to match up common interests or problems different organizations have. Instead of addressing individual problems for each organization, it is much more time effective for MP Hammond to address things more generally.

### ***A3.6 Interview with David Williams 24 January 2007***

David Williams, a member of the Conservative Party, is the Leader of the Merton Council and therefore the Chair of the Merton Partnership. Mr. Williams had no prior affiliation with the Partnership until he was elected as Leader of the Council in May 2006. As Leader of the Council, he is responsible for setting the political direction of the Council with consultation from his nine cabinet members. In relation to the Merton Partnership, a partnership that Mr. Williams considers a “Partnership of Equals,” he acts as an administrator. He ensures that the organizations deliver their parts of the Community Plan. He is also invited to attend the Executive Board meetings of the Partnership, though he does not chair them.

Mr. Williams says it is evident that the Partnership has settled down and is becoming much more cohesive. He claims executive board and Partnership agendas have been very similar, indicating good practice amongst the members. However, the members only communicate if they feel they need to or if they are together in the quarterly meetings. Mr. Williams believes that the website will not only create a virtual meeting place, but that it will establish the Partnership as much more than just a “name.” The Partnership has value but the members cannot extract this value unless they have good communication. He feels that the members should be communicating because it is beneficial rather than because it is obligatory. In order for the members to use this site, he believes it must be simple yet informative.

With regard to cutting down on paperwork and reducing large paper documents, he believes it is unreasonable for members to bring laptops with electronic copies of documents to meetings. He also believes it will take the members time before they utilize the website and see its benefits.

### ***A3.7 Interview with Andrew Roberts on 25 January 2007***

Andrew Roberts represents the London Fire Brigade (LFB) and is new to the Merton Partnership. Mr. Roberts has recently replaced Bernie Higgins and is adjusting to his new position. He has previously worked with other LSPs in the past; however, Merton's Local Area Agreement and Community Plan are much more advanced than his last endeavors. Mr. Roberts says this website is a "crackin' idea" which will only enhance the Merton Partnership's ability to complete their strategic plans.

Mr. Roberts thinks that the homepage should include a headline updating the Partnership on the status of the LAA completion. He feels that individual organizations need to post their progress on the approximately one-dozen "stretch targets" addressed by the LAA. By doing so, the members of the Partnership and the community can see how Merton is performing as a borough, as well as where they stand globally. In addition, this site can be a "help tool" for organizations if they need assistance in completing their targets.

Mr. Roberts raised some concerns. He is concerned with the work and time that will be involved in posting data and documents on this site. He questioned how often his organization will need to upload documents and how up-to-date the information on the site will be. Like many other organizations, the fire brigade's resources are limited and he does not want to be required to spend a lot of time uploading and updating documents on the site. Mr. Roberts thinks this site needs to be created because it will create a common ground for the Partnership.

### **A3.8 Interview with Samantha George on 29 January 2007**

Councilor Samantha George is the Deputy Leader of the Council and Deputy Chair of the Merton Partnership. She is a part of the new Council administration, which took control in May of 2006. As Deputy Chair of the Partnership, she is on the Executive Board and is substitute Chair of the Partnership meetings if needed. Clr. George is very positive about this project and believes that the website will be very useful to the Partnership and to the community.

Councilor (Clr.) George sees the website as not only an information tool to the community but also as a communication link between partners. She would like to see the site inform the public on issues such as the Local Area Agreement (LAA), the Community Plan, Community Cohesion, and about the people and organizations involved. Clr. George said that the site should contain a history of Partnership and that its goals clearly. She also wants to see the site explain the LAA's motto, "Bridging the Gap," which refers to the unification of the east and west sides of the borough. She also recommended a "who's who" link that will provide pictures and a brief statement for each of the members involved in the Partnership. She also suggested a "Dashboard" feature, which the Merton Council uses to measure their success of objectives. This includes a "stop light" feature that color-codes each objective according to its progress, severity, etc.

Clr. George is the first to recommend an "opinions" link, for users to write comments or answer simple feedback questions like "Did you find this page useful?" or "What are we missing?"

As for the Partnership's current communication, Clr. George believes it is very good. She recommended a message board, but mentioned access control for she is concerned with private information that members might share. She also mentioned that the information and documents posted need to be updated because local government is constantly changing.

### ***A3.9 Interview with Ged Curran on 29 January 2007***

Mr. Curran is the Chief Executive of the Merton Council and has held this position since he came to the council in March of 2004. He is responsible for chairing the executive board. As Chair, he diplomatically deals with disputes, promotes cohesion among the Partnership, and is ultimately responsible for the Partnership. He is also the Joint-Chair of Safer Merton, a partnership dedicated to making Merton a safer place.

Curran stated that the Partnership communicates through a series of bilateral interactions, which are driven by the members' personal interests toward their individual work. He also stated that the five thematic groups bring people together to work on the Community Plan. He added that the Partnership is more of a "theatrical group." Its members gather to agree on work that has been completed by other groups.

Mr. Curran said that this site is very important and will be "a part of something." He stated that the Partnership's purpose and workings are unclear to the public and that this website will help resolve this problem.

Curran expressed some concerns about online communication, stating, "Nothing beats face-to-face interaction." While he believes e-mails can be very useful to keep track of things, he admits that they are often misinterpreted. As a result, he has had to deal with many disputes arising from e-mails.

Mr. Curran hopes this site will improve the Merton Partnership. He anticipates that it will provide a forum where data from the Partnership can be located. He would like it to include performance data, business plans, consultation campaign information, and drives of specific projects from other organizations and from the Council. He also mentioned that it would be useful to provide some basic personal information regarding contact information, a "who's who," and a guide to the decision making process.

He expressed some concerns concerning the private area of the site. In his experience, he believes people do not use message boards. He stated that they might be used a lot during events or tragedies that affect all of Merton, but other than that, he believes that they will rarely be used. He stressed that they need to be "topic specific" in order to work well. Because the message board will probably not be used continually, its usefulness will be hard to determine.

### **A3.10 Interview with Don King on 30 January 2007**

Mr. King works for the London South Learning and Skills Council. He has held this position with the Partnership for about a year since he started in July 2006. The Learning and Skills Council is a national organization made up of nine regional offices and five local offices in London. Mr. King represents one of the five local offices, the London South. London South looks after six boroughs in London, including Merton. Mr. King is mainly responsible for all the work in Merton.

King stated that this organization just went through some major changes. Before, the Learning and Skills Council was not divided up into sections, but did have their own website. He said they followed more of a regional structure. Currently, they do not have their own website, but there is a regional website. He said this regional website contains a link to the London Learning and Skills Council.

Mr. King explained that there is a lot of bilateral communication amongst the members of the Partnership. He said it is driven by the partners' individual work because of what they do and whom they work with. Overall, King does not have much significant communication with any of the partners and does not receive any other information until their meetings. He does not believe there is any broad communication among the partners, but is also unsure if it is needed.

Mr. King expressed concerns about obtaining information from other organizations. He stated that some organization's information is extremely easy to access, such as the Merton College and Merton Council, but is unaware of the workings of the Primary Care Trust and the Voluntary Sector. King believes information about the other organizations would be extremely useful and beneficial not only to his organization, but to all of the other organizations, and the community. This information includes how each organization fits into the regional structure rather than just Merton, how much they spend and what they spend it on, and what influence people can have on upcoming decisions and expenses made by these organizations.

According to Mr. King, this website should provide links to other organizations' websites, a depository of documents, access to other's current and past research, information regarding what work is currently being done, information on who is involved in the five themes, and any employment concerns or opportunities in Merton. King also stressed that this site should be easy to navigate. He has used the Merton Council's website in the past and has found it difficult at times to find information. He also said in order for this site to be successful, it needs to be used by the members and should be visual and pleasing to the eye. He would also like the final documents to be

posted somewhere on the site. This will provide a way for the partners to know how far they are in completing all their key targets. Lastly, King would like this site to include information concerning how partners can influence other's work and make comments.

### **A3.11 Interview with Steve Farrow on 1 February 2007**

Steve Farrow is a Partnership Manager for Jobcentreplus and represents Jobcentreplus in the Merton Partnership. Jobcentreplus is a part of the Department for Work and Pensions and helps unemployed people receive proper job training and work. Furthermore, Jobcentreplus ensures appropriate and accurate benefits to their clients.

Mr. Farrow feels that communication is currently a problem because of the recent changes in the Partnership such as the new Council and newly elected members. However, Mr. Farrow believes that the Partnership's communication is developing rapidly, and that the five themes are helping significantly. He would like to see the members communicating more and thinks that the website will encourage and allow them to do so.

As for the content of the site, Mr. Farrow would like to see statistical data relevant to the Partnership and to the community, such as demographics. He suggested that we link to the National Statistics website. He also would like to see links to job vacancies and members' agendas. Farrow wants the website to be a tool for members to share outreach facilities and information. For example, the police and Jobcentreplus often work together because Jobcentreplus helps people released from jail and people with drug problems find jobs.

Mr. Farrow likes the idea of having a forum or message board on the site. He said that he would like the chance to work with it as well as the ability to upload and download documents. He feels that the opportunity to share information will be beneficial to both the Partnership and the community of Merton.

### **A3.12 Interview with Marilyn Davis and Morag Plank on 1 February 2007**

Marlylin Davis, the office manager of the Merton Voluntary Services Council (MVSC), and Morag Plank, the deputy director of that same organization, spoke with the team on Chris Frost's behalf. Chris Frost is the director of the MVSC. Ms. Frost has been a part of the Partnership since it began. Her main responsibilities are ensuring that the voluntary sector's views are heard and represented, helping voluntary organizations, acting as a representative between the voluntary sector and the statutory sector, and coordinating the Community Engagement Network.

Davis and Plank informed us that the partners deal with large amounts of paperwork. They both agreed that this is very difficult when everyone is as busy as they are. No one has the time to read the documents. Ideally, the members of the Partnership would communicate by continuing to e-mail each other and obtain any other information needed from this website. They hope this website will provide a way to keep all of the necessary information in one place. They both believe that the partners need to have trust in this site and get into a habit of using it. They stated that if this can be achieved, the site would be very successful.

Davis and Plank would like this website to contain a link to their site. They have spent a lot of time building their site; they do not want to spend more time creating another page. They also believe their site contains all the necessary information and do not want a lot of duplication of information. Davis and Plank also stated that the site should be easy to access and that it should be dynamic. It should have something new every time someone visits it.

Ms. Davis and Ms. Plank would like other organizations to know what they do, what support they can provide, and how to come to them for advice. They would like to make sure their section of this site is equivalent to all the other organizations' sections. Regarding other organizations' information, they informed us that they already have everyone in the Partnership in their database. The only information they need about other organizations is any changes that occur, such as new members, new contacts, new projects, etc. They stated that available funding and strategic documents would also be very helpful to have on the website.

### **A3.13 Interview with Michael Wood on 1 February 2007**

Michael Wood is the Borough Commander of Merton. He has been a part of the Partnership for about three years. Since he is the Borough Commander, he automatically receives a seat on the Merton Partnership. Mr. Wood also works with the LA Network, sits on the Executive Board, and co-chairs the Safer and Stronger Communities subgroup along with Ged Curran, the Chief Executive of the Merton Council.

Mr. Wood stated that communication among the members of the Partnership is very poor if there is any communication at all. He said that they mainly communicate informally through meetings and that there is absolutely no networking. He also added that there are opportunities to talk but members choose not to do so.

Ideally, Mr. Wood would like the members of the Partnership to communicate through a combination of e-mails and meetings. Overall, Mr. Wood feels that the partners do not really need to speak to one another. He personally does not do much work outside of the meetings with the Partnership.

Mr. Wood finds this proposed website to be a very positive move. He expressed concerns regarding which members of the public are actually knowledgeable of the Partnership and whether anyone would actually access the site. He stated that there is a gap in their communication and it needs to be filled. He believes that this website may help them move in the right direction.

Mr. Wood would like this website to contain a link to the borough police site as well as one to the Metropolitan Police corporate site. Lastly, he stated that there is not anything particular he would like to add to the site or would like to know from other organizations.

### **A3.14 Interview with Fosuah Poku on 6 February 2007**

Fosuah Poku works for the Merton Citizens Advice Bureau (MCAB), which is a part of the MVSC. She is currently an interim representative for the MVSC on the Partnership until the formal elections. MCAB is a part of a larger national organization that was set up during the war years to give citizens advice about rations, evacuations, etc. Today, MCAB is still a voluntary organization, which gives advice about employment, welfare, housing, etc. Ms. Poku reflects and represents the views of the community and voluntary sector and the people who use the services provided by these agencies. She expresses the wider views of the Community Engagement Network in meetings with the Partnership.

Ms. Poku believes this project is a good idea in principle and that the website will help the Partnership. She thinks that the site needs to be accessible to people with disabilities, should encourage people to be involved, have a good layout, be easy to navigate, and have a good contact page. She wants the contact page to have e-mail addresses and phone numbers so that it is easy for people to get in contact with someone. Furthermore, she wants to know how to obtain hard copies of documents. In addition, she thinks a message board or forum is a good idea. This feature will allow people to comment on issues, give feedback, and give surveys.

Ms. Poku raised some concerns about the site. She is concerned with people who cannot access the web and how they can still be involved. Another issue raised is that web communication is not the only form of communicating. She believes this site will allow and encourage the partners to practice better communication, but nothing beats face-to-face contact. She also thinks that file sharing and links to other information will be very useful and beneficial to the Partnership as well as to the community.

### **A3.15      *Interview with Reverend Andrew Wakefield on 9 February 2007***

Reverend Andrew Wakefield has many different responsibilities within the Partnership and within the borough of Merton. Reverend Wakefield has been working in Wimbledon for the past twenty years as a clergyman for the Church of England and is Chairman of the Merton Chamber of Commerce. As Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, he deals with business issues and represents businesses in Merton. He is also an Industrial Chaplain belonging to a team that deals economical issues on behalf of churches of all denominations. In relation to the Partnership, Reverend Wakefield is Chair of the Merton Racial Equality Partnership, is Chair of the Sustainable Communities themed group, and is a member of the Executive Board. In addition, he chaired the development of the Community Plan. In doing so, he became the only person in London to chair a community plan while not serving on a borough council.

The Merton Partnership website is exactly what Reverend Wakefield had been looking for. He told the Council seven years ago that the Partnership should stay in touch online via a website to work together on projects. He said that the partners mainly communicate face-to-face. However, he claimed the Partnership as a whole only communicates during the quarterly meetings. Reverend Wakefield feels that having more frequent meetings would be beneficial but unrealistic. Some members have a number of different jobs to keep them busy and would not be able to attend every meeting. He believes the website will allow the members to work together despite their busy schedules.

Reverend Wakefield explained to the team how the London Borough of Merton's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (NRS) is different from other boroughs'. The Federal Government provides money for "new programs," such as a NRS, according to a borough's need. Merton is usually excluded from this funding because the west side of the borough is wealthy. However, since parts of eastern Merton are deprived, the Council is funding their own NRS, the Community Plan. Because of this, the borough needs to work together efficiently to ensure that they win bids for funding. Reverend Wakefield believes that this website will allow the members of the Partnership to work more efficiently, thus enabling them to receive more funding and helping them meeting the Community Plan targets.

## **Interview with Jatinder Bhuhi on 18 February 2007**

Ms. Bhuhi works for both the Merton Council and the Sutton and Merton Primary Care Trust. We met with Ms. Bhuhi in lieu of Ms. Fiona Wright, the PCT representative for the Merton Partnership. Ms. Wright has been a member of the Partnership for a bit over two years now. As the director of the PCT, she provides public health support to the Partnership. In addition, she is a consultant in public health and the health and equalities lead at the PCT.

Bhuhi said that the project is a good idea because it allows the Partnership to show everyone what it has done. As long as the Partnership is sharing information, she feels that the creation of a website is a positive move. However, she cautions that the members need to be careful about what they share. Personal information, which is very abundant in healthcare documents, should not be present on the website, she said.

While the PCT has a website with a wealth of information, Jatinder offered to share some documents for the new website. These documents include the annual public health reports and the health equalities report. Likewise, Ms. Bhuhi mentioned that annual reports from other organizations would be helpful to the PCT and the Partnership.

Because Ms. Bhuhi is not a member of the Partnership, she was not sure how its members normally communicate. However, she made some suggestions that might help improve the community's involvement. She suggested that executive board meetings be co-chaired, or that the board elect chairs, and that two of the four quarterly Partnership meetings could be workshops where the public could come and bring forth their concerns.

## **Appendix A4: Interviews with Other LSP Project Managers**

The following subsections contain summaries of interviews with the project managers from three different local strategic partnerships. These managers were responsible for the creation of their LSP's websites. The summaries are presented in no particular order. For interviews with the members of the Merton Partnership, see Appendix A3. For interviews with our liaison, consultants, and IT professionals, see Appendix A5.

#### ***A4.1 Interview with Thanet Partnership on 26 January 2007***

One of our team members interviewed Suzanne Dowse over the phone. She is the Corporate Project Manager for the Thanet District Council and was involved in the development of the Thanet Local Strategic Partnership. She provided us with information regarding their site, which helped us with our development process. She said the site is about four years old and that her team is meeting with IT professionals in a few weeks regarding refreshing their site and making updates. Afterwards, they will run articles in the district magazine to promote this site. Thanet Partnership is hoping that this will raise the profile of the site and will increase the amount it is used by the public.

At the time of this interview, the site was strictly for the community. Dowse stated that the Partnership meets every second month. She believes this provides them with sufficient time to communicate and that they do not need another means of communication. In the case of an emergency they have each other's contact information, but this is rarely needed.

Dowse said that she is involved in committees that have access to tools that upload and share information, but stated that this is never used by the committee. When she needs something, she goes straight to the person rather than wait for a response.

She said that Thanet Partnership will most likely never consider an interactive online communication tool for the members, but said that one might work well for the Merton Partnership. In order for this tool to be successful, the Merton Partnership members need to be proactive and get into the habit of using it.

#### ***A4.2 Interview with Milton Keynes Partnership on 26 January 2007***

We interviewed Sara Le-Surf over the phone to ask her about the Milton Keynes Partnership website. Ms. Le-Surf is the Committee Secretary for the Milton Keynes Partnership and was involved in the development of their website. She said the site was new and was launched in December of 2006. She also said this site is mainly for the community but that the committee does posts papers and currents projects. However, committee members do not use this as a communication tool. She explained that she did consider this idea when developing the website, but believed that online communication tools would not be used. Ms. Le-Surf believed that the website is a work in progress and will continue to be updated. However, she does not believe it needs to be improved upon but rather expanded.

Le-Surf stated that the committee meets quarterly, similar to the Merton Partnership. She believes that the committee members know each other well, but do not communicate much outside these meetings unless needed. From her perspective, she does not believe the committee has any trouble communicating and believes all the work that needs to be completed is done so a timely manner.

She told us not to underestimate the amount of work it takes to build a website. This process was especially difficult for her because she did not have all the knowledge needed to develop a site. Le-Surf recommended that we find IT professionals that would be willing to help. She reminded us that growth creates work. She suggested that we consider this, especially since many of the partners do not need more work than they already have.

### ***A4.3 Interview with Sutton Partnership on 19 January 2007***

We conducted a phone interview with Graham Dean, the project manager for the Sutton Council. He said that the Sutton Partnership's site was launched in 2005 and has been up and running for about eighteen months. With this website, partners are able to post and share documents. Dean stated that this feature is a very important aspect of the website that has proved to be a very useful tool for the members.

This website also provides discussion forums, but they are not currently being used by the members. Dean said that the members mainly use an e-mail network to communicate with each other. The Sutton Partnership has not had the time to develop this site in order to ensure that all members know how to use it and are aware of all of the tools it provides. Dean believes this site is very useful and easy to access and manage, but the interactive aspect of the site needs to be developed further.

This website offers free web pages to the organizations involved that do not have the funding to build their own website. Dean feels this is a great idea. However, these pages are not being utilized because the organizations that need these pages do not have the technology or the budget to create and design a website.

The community can also use this site to communicate with the Partnership. Members of the public can fill out forms online, which are then sent to the Partnership and responded to by e-mails. This currently works well for them, but may not be the most time efficient. It may take a week or even longer to reply to the needs of the public.

Overall, this interview provided us with very important information. Mr. Dean helped us realize that no matter how many tools we create and provide, it will all depend on whether or not there is sufficient time to work out the details and make sure that everyone has the correct information regarding these tools and how to properly use them. Dean advised us to contact Matt Maguire about any IT questions we had regarding this site. Maguire works for Blue Nova and helped develop this site.

## **Appendix A5: Interviews with Other Consultants**

The following subsections provide summaries of our interviews with our liaison, various consultants, and IT professionals working for the Merton Council. They are presented in that order, with no preference given to any two within a group. For interviews with the members of the Merton Partnership, see Appendix A3. For interviews with other local strategic partnerships, see Appendix A4.

### ***A5.1 Interview with Samantha Ghulam on 15 January 2007***

Samantha Ghulam has been working with the Merton Council since September 2005 and has worked with other councils in the past. Her duties are focused primarily on policy work with the Merton Partnership, including the Governance Handbook, and reviewing the Partnership's effectiveness. For this project, she is the liaison in the Council's building.

Miss Ghulam seems enthusiastic about the project and feels that it will be a great tool for the Partnership. She feels that commitment from the partners will be very important for a successful site. They need to be willing to share information. In addition, she is concerned about updating the site. She thinks an approach that yields a site that is useable now and easy to update later would be best.

Ghulam mentioned that the Merton Council, the Primary Care Trust, and the police department are the major leaders in the Partnership, largely due to their roles and their larger budgets. The partners expect this sort of leadership and these leaders are always open to others' suggestions. Currently, partners are very positive about how things are going. Due to a lack of government funding, they must work together to get things done.

To further our research, Miss Ghulam suggests that we meet with Gavin Compton, the web master for the Merton Council, the partners, and Harvey Upton, an IT professional for the Council. She also suggested that we meet with Dr. Norman Urquia about community involvement in the project.

## ***A5.2 Interview with Simon Guild on 15 January 2007***

Mr. Guild is the Information Governance Manager for the Merton Council. He has held this position for approximately four and one half years and has previous experience in this area from his work with charity. His main responsibilities include record management and working with the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Guild feels that the project is a good idea but needs more focus. He feels that we should be more concerned with the sharing of information amongst the partners and less with community involvement. He mentions that working with many people, especially those in the Partnership, may be very difficult.

To make the website successful, Guild feels that the information it contains needs to be attended to regularly to ensure that it is up-to-date and accurate. This is important for legal reasons and because out-dated information is not likely to be very useful to the site's visitors. Security is also something to consider. The type of information that can be used on a website is very dependent on what security measures are in place.

Mr. Guild believes that consultation is very important. He told us that we should let this project be driven by our customers. He feels that their input and opinions will be very valuable when determining the content of the website. He suggested message boards and a document library as means of communication amongst the partners.

### ***A5.3 Interview with Dr. Norman Urquia on 16 January 2007***

Dr. Norman Urquia has his Ph.D. in sociology and has been working at the Merton Council for the past two years. He currently holds the position of Diversity and Communications Manager at the Merton Council. His main responsibilities include promoting good practice consultation, information sharing, and the Community Cohesion strategy.

Dr. Urquia is very optimistic about this project and is a proactive member in the development of the Merton Partnership website. He believes that there are gaps in partners' knowledge and in their participation in the project. Dr. Urquia envisions the website to be a "one-stop shop" for partners to post important information quickly and easily.

During the interview, Dr. Urquia told us about the Resident Panel, a database consisting of over 300 names and profiles of Merton residents. The profiles are compiled from an annual survey conducted in Merton from those residents who volunteer to be consulted by the Merton Council. Dr. Urquia suggests that we should call or email our contacts rather than drafting a survey, which can be timely and costly. He also suggests we vary the age, gender, and postcode of the participants for analysis purposes. Dr. Urquia believes the community will have little to no knowledge that the Merton Partnership exists.

#### ***A5.4 Interview with Susan Tanton on 15 January 2007***

Ms. Tanton has been involved with the Merton Partnership since the beginning. Currently, she coordinates the Local Area Agreement and works closely with the voluntary sector. Specifically, her interests and responsibilities lie in the regeneration of Merton. She and her team deal largely with the Primary Care Trust and many organizations in the voluntary sector. In addition to this, she handles a lot of the “behind the scenes” communication between some members of the Partnership.

Ms. Tanton feels that this project needs to happen. However, she is worried about a number of things. Her primary concern seems to be that many residents of Merton do not have computers or access to the Internet, especially older residents. She, as well as many others, does not often visit a web site unless she receives an e-mail or some other alert that asks her to do so. This could make keeping information updated and communicating with other partners with the site very difficult. Voluntary organizations may have trouble printing documents from the site as the cost of ink and paper can be high. Finally, she mentioned concerns about compatibility with other websites. Most of the organizations involved have their own websites and the Partnership website must be compatible with those.

The members of the Partnership do not communicate at all, Susan said. She mentioned that the majority of interaction takes place amongst other members of their organizations. She does not feel that an ideal communication system is possible as humans will always be involved.

Ms. Tanton would like to see funding opportunities on the website, specifically those available for or from other members. She would like to see links to organizations in the voluntary and community sectors and graphical data. She mentioned that many projects and documents are shared by more than one organization and may fit into more than one of the five sub groups. So, cross-data would be very helpful. Susan would like to see minutes posted from meetings of the sub groups, though she is not sure how often she will be able to read them.

For her organization, Ms. Tanton would like others to know about the support they provide for businesses and is willing to provide basic economic information. From others, she would like to know what they are doing so that her teams can get involved.

### ***A5.5 Interview with Harvey Upton and Gavin Compton on 17 January 2007***

The group had a joint interview with Harvey Upton, the IT Project Manager for the Merton Council, and Gavin Compton, the Web Information Manager, to discuss our starting point on the design and construction of the Partnership's website. Mr. Upton has been with the Council for four years and has worked on the e-government project. Mr. Compton has worked for the Council for three years as a web coordinator and web manager. He sets the standards for the Council's intranet and its usability and accessibility.

Mr. Upton and Mr. Compton suggested that we start drafting preliminary design templates of the website to demonstrate its basic layout. These templates should be simple, black and white Word documents. With these templates, we can do two important things: give the partners a visual in which to comment about, and give the Merton Council's web team something to implement. Mr. Compton explained the three aspects of web design. These are content (information), structure (hierarchy), and template (look).

Mr. Upton and Mr. Compton suggested that we break the difficult communication barrier associated with large organizations and establish a consensus on what the Partnership needs from this website. They suggested consulting Abdool Kara, Assistant Chief Executive to help. Mr. Upton mentioned that we might consult Gary Farmer and Sinh Tao of the Council's graphic design team for logos and other graphic materials to help in our template design.

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