

Comments on Accuracy re the Council's letter and Submission Document *ALGO,*

P1 Para 1 ...It is very pertinent that we did not see the contract until we submitted a Freedom of Information request in July 2011 - even now we are not sure that we have been given a copy of the full contract. The contract and budget content remained private to the Council which was of concern and led to many challenges including that of the LINK being able to be an independent body. Independence was part of the 'Direction and Intent' of the DH guidance 2007 so is not opinion and should not have led to differences in direction. The Council says it rejects the notion that it has failed to carry out its duties but further in the document it contradicts itself in saying that it failed in its monitoring responsibilities, as if this constituted only a minor part of its duties and demonstrates yet again its inability to grasp its misconceptions or failures.

..Para 2... 'In 2010 we were made aware of ... it would appear that senior officers would be needed to mediate....' the then Vice Chair went to alert the Director of Community and Housing about the difficulties occurring and requesting advice in August 2010. We took the initiative in requesting mediation twice and which the host/MVSC refused firstly (e9 4 10), and then at a later date when SW offered. Refusing further dialogue was 'catastrophic' when it would have been possible to resolve issues with constructive intervention. We are left asking if there was collusion as to the unilateral decisions made without any discussion with us about any difficulties, and disbanding the group. Actions were dictatorial and non consultative by both the Council and host.

..Para3... 'Since that timedevelop a new governance framework'merely highlights the inadequacy to deal with the situation before, and which we had pointed out. We requested new governance structures on 2 occasions.

P2 Para1... We did nothing but try to promote branding. The host did not see LINK Merton as a distinct brand – seeing only that of MVSC. The Council says they are broadly happy with the standard of MVSC work – what standard is that? We have demonstrated serious inadequacies in MVSC performance. Please see work programmes from neighbouring LINKs and make a comparison as to the standard achieved. In measuring the support we received we only have to see how much hosts support neighbouring LINKs constructively in developing far more substantive work programs.

1. Response to detailed chronology-

P2 Feb. 2008 It was late to hold the first meeting then, as information had been issued in 2007 as evidenced by former PPIF Steering Group members.

April 2008 Confusing statement - this was not a first LINK meeting – it was a meeting hosted by the Council about establishing LINK and therefore not a true LINK meeting

Oct. 2008 - Feb. 2009 The LINK manager went to introduce LINK to other organisations.

February 2009 Why did Marion Radford leave?

May 2009 Why was the first annual report produced by the host? The DH firmly says that it was to be produced by the Steering Group and facilitated by the host - the host were acting as an executive body.

July 2009 We know nothing about any eletters stated to have been sent throughout this submission document. What was their status? Were they a mention in Merton Connected which is produced by MVSC?

August 2009 Why did Saleem Sheikh stand down?

November 2009 RB and LR were **elected** and not appointed

P3 May 2010 Second annual report produced by host, agreed by Steering Group... The Chair and Vice Chair held a meeting with MVSC who had produced a report, to enable the Steering Group content/perspective to be included - a very difficult meeting of 1.45 hrs to negotiate same with host. We reiterate that the DH says that the annual report is the ownership of the Steering Group.

April 2010 If KW became aware of problems within the Steering Group in April why they were not discussed then with members and some liaison with them established?

Oct. 2010 We raised the many problems with the Council and yet the contract was extended. Why? In agreeing arrangements with the host the Council was prepared to get involved with LINK affairs so undermining the autonomy of LINK and supporting MVSC in disregarding the Steering Group.

Nov. 2010 This is not the correct chronology of events - the then Vice Chair of the Steering Group met first with the Director of Community and Housing informally and confidentially 1 9 10 to ask advice re issues emerging as to lack of trust with MVSC/attitudes. As a volunteer giving of her time, one member of staff was behaving in a manner that amounted to harassment through undermining behaviours. The staff member was refusing to meet with the VC. The VC requested a meeting with the Chair and CEO MVSC (10 8 10) - CEO questioned the helpfulness of such a meeting (e23 8 10).

The Director of Community's advice was to seek a meeting with the Chair with CEO MVSC. At the meeting (27 9 10) the then VC raised issues on behalf of others as well as herself. The CEO agreed to speak with the staff member. 3 emails from the VC to CEO (29 9 10; 3.10.10; 11 10 10) with no reply of affirmation that she had spoken to the staff member. The VC informed the Director of Community by email.

24 11 11 KW meeting – NB Nick Pizey was not present. VC had met KW at a DH workshop. It was agreed that he would hold meetings separately with all parties respecting confidentiality to resolve issues (e 9 11 10). KW regrettably told MVSC we did not want to meet with them.... This is a very spartan statement as to the context as to what was discussed.

December 2010 The Terms of Reference were revised at our request. MVSC were rigid in their approach and very reluctant to replace the name MVSC with the term host; they were also reluctant to change the name MVSC on other documents and business cards with Link Merton.

December 2010 It was the Steering Group who invited SW, KW and a DH representative NNerva to a routine Steering Group meeting to be able to move forward into Health watch.

January 2011 The meeting was at our request as we wished to resolve issues informally as to the role of the host in relation to the Steering Group, concern as to the transparency over the contract and budget. To describe the issue between the VC and staff member as a personal issue and place it second on the list in order of priority is not respectful. The situation was as a result of the VC being on the receiving end of disrespectful behaviour by the staff member and witnessed at meetings.

P4 Feb. 2011. For the Council to include a negative statement that the host is saying that the cause of conflict was down to one person, and which is now as an official document in the public domain, is defamatory. What is the evidence and witnesses for same? Please note that the problems with

MVSC commenced before she joined the Steering Group and that a previous Steering Group member also faced issues. Two other steering group members were told to 'put up' or resign. Neither the host nor the Council have discussed any such statement or behaviours with those involved. In supporting the people the Council works with in many projects, and not residents - is this collusion/coercion?

As already stated the MVSC complaints process went through the CEO and therefore could not be an independent process if used. This is also further confirmed by the fact that trustees have never responded to any correspondence from former steering group members when they could have helped resolve the situation at any time. Any complaint process to be used should have been that of LINK itself.

The statement demonstrates that MVSC has been personalising the situation rather than looking to their lack of performance – please note the many references to LR alone and not on behalf of a group of like minded feeling persons when referring to matters and listing correspondence in the report. Please remember that any vice chair is in a position of leadership and coordination and has to speak on behalf of others and thus the issues were not raised by one person alone. The Council and MVSC have not understood the issues and should not be scapegoating anyone.

Issues with a member of MVSC were raised (as per due process) firstly informally by the Vice Chair with the CEO January 2010; then together with the Chair on behalf of herself and others with the CEO. The CEO showed reluctance (email Aug. 2010) at being at such a meeting as it would put her working relationship in jeopardy with him. In 3 subsequent emails (autumn 2010) she refused to confirm discussion of same with the person who was behaving inappropriately as witnessed by others and agreed by the Chair. It was at this point that the affected person sought advice with the Council.

We knew nothing about any meeting between CF and Chair –what were the outcomes which were seemingly reported back to SW?

We have concentrated on the issues and abiding by the law. The Council and host playing the blame game is not professional. The Council have made out that this situation is between us and MVSC so absolving themselves of any responsibility which is plainly not the case. The emphasis that the LA placed on its relationship with the host alone and not the steering group, is against the triangular model from the DH of interrelationships promoted between host/LA/ and steering group together.

Mar.2011 What governance responsibilities do the Trustees have to dismiss the Steering Group? The CEO kept referring to her accountability to the MVSC Trustees whom we asked to meet on several occasions. How can they make balanced decisions when they do not have facts from all parties and perceptions of only one? We have since met 2 trustees who say they know nothing of the LINK situation. SW has stated at a meeting with us that he was involved in the unlawful dismissal decision.

Mar.2011 MVSC had cancelled the Steering Group meeting 2 3 2011 without reference to the then Chair which led to his resignation as Chair but not from the Steering Group. Leslie Robertson did defer the Steering Group meeting (e3 3 11) to gain further information from the Council as stated in her email, and following Dave Hobday's sudden previous cancellation letter. We were then unlawfully dismissed.

Mar. 2011 CEO Merton Council instructs Kate Martyn to undertake investigation but does not inform us. KM was the LBM monitoring Officer for the LINK contract so independence of opinion/outcome was not guaranteed as it should have been, as there was a conflict of interest.

April 2011 KM met us by chance in a corridor at a meeting late into the investigation and told us only then verbally about the investigation.

May 2011 Why did GC take so long to write and confirm the investigation? Letter to KM by LR confirmed discussion at a meeting with her – the content was never responded to and led to confusion about our roles for which we were criticised.

June 2011 The annual report did not include our contribution. Why? We therefore wrote our own with same.

June 2011 Why was the contract extended to October (16mths) when the investigation outcomes were still unknown? Why the bias? This is an implicit sign of confidence by the Council in MVSC when they were under investigation.

June/July 2011 Yes we wrote to the CEO, Leader of the Council and local paper as we were receiving no information from the Council in view of the above actions. We had never had any enquiry from the Councillor or even met her!

August 2011 Letter from us was factually in response to Council investigation re many inaccuracies after the investigation report was issued. We also offered constructively again to engage in a way forwards and for Health watch.

August 2011. Meeting with KM and SW with all of us. The report had many inaccuracies. In the discussions we discussed the fact that an inaccurate quote was included from minutes of Feb. Steering Group meeting. We had never seen these minutes and requested a copy of same. They included inaccuracies and defamatory comments. When we checked with the Chair of the meeting he had never seen them, agreed in writing that they had never been ratified and were not accurate. We requested a copy of the remainder of the minutes - these have never been received.

September 2011 Inaccurate comment. We again expressed a number of serious concerns having requested a reply from our above letter within 14 days. We had no acknowledgement/reply in receipt of our letter as on previous occasions. We expressed in that letter concerns that Officers should have addressed - the investigation report was based on this letter alone. We stated that one next step was to go to the Local Government Ombudsman but we would rather, even at this late stage, have discussed this exhausted and flawed investigation with him and asked constructively for an appointment to meet with him within the next week, with the hope of obtaining a proper outcome.

September 2011 Some revisions were made to the report at that meeting, but not all inaccuracies were removed. It seems the report is the result of unilateral decisions by the Council and their Officers and is not fair or reasonable.

September 2011 What was the need for the Council and host to discuss Governance arrangements – were they acting as the LINK whose responsibility it is to make these?

October 2011 M. Alexander (NALM) stated very clearly that the new proposals (available) were not LINK as intended by guidance documents. The proposed governance arrangements were not appropriate as there was no decision making body. This was not a recognisable LINK model in comparison with those with which he had many dealings.

October 2012 This was not a LINK meeting as purported by MVSC– again one about it. The future appointed Chair chaired the meeting!

November 2011 Chair was to be appointed and not elected as per national guidance and LINK Merton Terms of Reference.

November 2011 We asked for this meeting as we were still not satisfied with the content of the investigation report, still with its many inaccuracies. SW suggested stating at the beginning of the report that actions by everyone involved were of the best intention and that the Council would consider altering the format. We said we would go away and think about it and subsequently met our MP who advised against any changes. We asked to meet with the Leader of the Council in following due protocols. We thus wrote to SW asking that publication of the report be deferred until that meeting had taken place and the outcomes were known.

December 2011 The report was reissued against our request of waiting for the outcome of the meeting with the Leader of the Council held this stated month.

December 2011 Chair was appointed and not elected as per national guidance and LINK Terms of Reference. Council and MVSC on interview panel, so appointment not independent as advertised.

December 2011 LR and colleagues met with Leader of Council. He is more interested in the Council doing well in national audit schemes. He took a month to let us know the outcomes of the meeting following a reminder from us. He backed other Council actions....

March 2012 Inaccuracy - Councillor Maurice Groves asked for the report to be made public. The Chair (despite receiving an email the previous week to the contrary) announced that all parties did not wish the report to be made public. LR replied from the public gallery that such a statement was not true.

P5 2... Inaccuracy - funding comes from the DH to the LA. Their actions do not support their quotations. LINK is a statutory body though this may change in the future.

P6 Para 1...Correct that governance structures were not in contract.

.. Para 3...All reports do not go to OSC - usually only a verbal report is given by the Chair. It became clear that the previous Chair had not informed OSC about the emerging issues re the independence of the Steering Group. If the Council had been monitoring we would not have been unlawfully dismissed.

3... We refute that the host provided all the support services as agreed by the Council itself re branding and publicity. The annual report was produced by the host with Steering Group contributions severely monitored by the host.

4...despite several requests we were not given sight of the contract until a Freedom of Information request in July 2011.

5...Annual reports, outreach and work programmes are always made out to be more significant than they really are by MVSC and bear no comparison to those from other Links. Whilst evidence may be given as to their production please note the poor QUALITY OF SAME. Only 1 AGM or public meeting held in 3 years despite requests; there were only two dedicated newsletters; projects were seen as being carried out by the host - what was the role of steering group in having expertise and contributing to working groups? The work programme was heavily directed by the host and did not fulfil the potential that the Steering Group wished or could have contributed to. The dates of the

outreach meetings were arranged late so that Steering Group members could not participate - they received an apology for same from the then LINK manager. We were limited by the control exerted by the host and thus to their standard of work.

The council say that there was no need for a Steering Group and it therefore could be dismissed but it was a requirement of their Contract and the LINK Terms of Reference. We note that they are now establishing a new one.

Please see above re role of OSC.

We note the appointment of the new Chair but with a Steering Group established some time later in May 2012 who has been doing any of the required work in the interim?

