



Metropolitan
Society
for the Blind

Chairman's review of 2006

Looking back on another busy and productive year, I am pleased to report that the services provided by the Society continue to be well organised and widely appreciated. The Chief Executive's report, which follows, provides a more detailed summary of our operational achievements. Here, I should like to comment briefly on several developments which have a broader significance for our future work.

Many of you will already know that Frank Luck, who was Secretary of the Society since 1993, retired at the end of the year. Frank was a towering personality in more ways than one. His commitment to improving the welfare of visually impaired people, combined with clear vision, an engaging personality and a firm grasp of operational detail not only marked his leadership style but were key ingredients of the Society's stability and effectiveness during his tenure. I am sure that everyone associated with the Society will join me in wishing Frank a long and happy retirement.

Before appointing Frank's successor, the Council made two important decisions. The first was to formally acknowledge the way in which the Society and the environment in which it operates has evolved during Frank Luck's term of office. There is now considerable interest from the Government and the public at large in the role of voluntary sector organisations. Evidence based practice, value for money, working in partnership with other organisations and user participation are just some of the topics now on the public agenda. These changes make it difficult for the Council, meeting at irregular intervals throughout the year, to do justice to the complexity and importance of these matters. Accordingly, we have decided to appoint our first Chief Executive. While, in many respects, this is a modest change in terminology, it also more accurately reflects the remit of the Society's most senior employee. The Chief Executive will report regularly to the Council which retains responsibility for financial oversight, governance and strategic direction.

Our second decision was to invite the Chief Executive to carry out a strategic review. The review will be wide ranging and will seek input from all those who benefit from, or have an interest in, our services and activities. It will provide the foundation for a strategic plan which will be prepared during the course of the year.

In my last report, I referred briefly to progress on the Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO). I am pleased to report that this valuable exercise, initiated by Frank Luck, was completed shortly before his retirement. The Council is now satisfied that systems and procedures necessary for effective management are all in place. However, we are not complacent and further opportunities for improvement will no doubt be identified as a result of the strategic review.

Like many Chairmen, I believe that a vigorous and effective organisation needs solid financial foundations. Our capacity to deliver high quality services year-on-year, across the twelve inner London boroughs and the City, is dependent upon a secure and reliable source of income. We are fortunate in being able to fund independently a significant part of our operations. However, we are also reliant upon the fund-raising efforts of the Greater London Fund for the Blind (GLFB). I should like to pay tribute to the staff team led so ably by Cass Edwards and to the GLFB Board for producing some highly satisfactory results. Our investments also generated a steadily rising level of income which was augmented by some extremely generous legacies, producing a substantial surplus for the year. Much of this will be invested to support the development of our core activities together with any new opportunities for increasing our effectiveness which may emerge from the strategic review.

Our new Chief Executive, John Harris, joined the Society in October 2006. Previously, John was Chief Executive of the British Institute of Learning Disabilities and, more recently, Deputy Director of Policy and Research at Barnardo's. I look forward to working with John and I am confident that he will lead the Society with skill, energy and enthusiasm.

The continuing success of the Society is, in no small part, due to the quality and dedication of its Trustees and Honorary Officers. I should like to express my appreciation for their continuing hard work as members of Council and for the advice and support they provide to our staff and volunteers. Mr John Parfitt, who has been associated with the Society for 60 years, initially in his capacity as a professional architect and surveyor and, since 1993, as a Trustee, stood down at the year end.

It is with sadness that I report the death of Sir Peter Gadsden on 4th December 2006. Sir Peter, a former Lord Mayor of London and Master of the Clothworkers' Company, was involved with the Society's affairs for some 30 years, firstly as a Council member and then as President from 1979 until his retirement in 2004.

To both these distinguished Members of the Society, we record our gratitude for their long and valued service.

Mr J R Orme
CHAIRMAN

Chief Executive's report

It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be joining the Society as Chief Executive. I will do everything in my power to maintain the high standards for which the MSB is so widely respected while, at the same time, seeking new ways to assist people with visual impairment. I should like to express my gratitude to the Council for making it possible for me to work alongside Frank Luck before he formally handed over responsibility for the Society's day-to-day management on 20th November 2006. Frank has been a wise, amiable and very supportive mentor who has taken great pains to ensure that my time was used productively and that I learned not only about what the Society does, but also about its traditions, beliefs and values.

Visiting Service

One of my first tasks, after joining the Society, was to spend a working day with each of our Visitors. This turned out to be a very valuable exercise, offering a unique insight into the lives of blind and partially sighted people and the benefit they derive from our visiting service. Complete trust in the probity of the visitor, mutual respect, and the enjoyment of each other's company are the hallmarks of effective visiting. Like any task, when it is done well, visiting looks easy and natural - and yet it belies a range of complex interpersonal skills needed to adapt and respond to the personalities of people from a variety of backgrounds living in very varied circumstances.

There is insufficient space here to refer to our visitors individually. However, I am pleased to be able to report that David Porter has made a successful transition from his part-time position in Westminster North to a full-time role covering Southwark, and I should like to welcome Roger Moore who joined the Society in September 2006 as the Visitor for Westminster North.

The number of referrals for visits, radios and grants were all slightly lower during 2006 compared to 2005. A comparison of referrals from each borough indicates that Lambeth, (down 18) Southwark West (down 12) and Hackney and Tower Hamlets (both down 10) had the largest reductions in the number of referrals while Camden, Islington and City and Wandsworth showed little change.

Radio Service

As an Agent for the British Wireless for the Blind Fund, we are responsible for over 1300 radios out on loan to visually impaired people. I am pleased to report that, when I met Margaret Grainger, Chief Executive of the British Wireless for the Blind Fund in February, she referred to MSB as an exemplary agency. We discussed the difficulty in keeping pace with technological change in the digital age, the increasing use of home computers among blind as well as sighted people and the importance of planning for future generations of blind people who will have grown up using information technology.

Welfare Rights

By focussing on isolated and/or disabled people who cannot easily travel to an agency's office or receive assistance by phone, our welfare rights service complements that provided by other larger organisations such as RNIB. Following a successful application for funding to the Greater London Fund for the Blind, we will be extending the part time welfare rights post into a full time position early in 2007.

Hospital information Support

Liz Tilbury continues to develop the provision of non-medical support, information and advice at four hospital eye clinics:

Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital: one day per week; will relocate to St Thomas's Hospital in January 2007

University College London Hospital (previously the Middlesex Hospital): one day per fortnight

Kings College Hospital: one day per week

Royal London Hospital: one half day per week

Financial assistance

During the year ending December 2006, a total of £27,424 was spent on grants. We are grateful to the Clothworkers' Foundation for their support during the year and I look forward to exploring how our long and productive relationship can be further developed to benefit visually impaired people.

Escort driver service

During 2006, the escort driver service made possible a total of 26 journeys by blind and partially sighted people. In the coming year, we will carry out a review of the costs and benefits of the escort driver service with a view to making proposals for improvements in efficiency and effectiveness.

Church Service

The Service was held on Sunday 1st October in St George's Cathedral. Our guest preacher was the Reverend Erial Kirby, Lead Chair of the London Methodist District, Methodist Church of Great Britain. His sermon was relevant to both blind and sighted worshippers. Ann Grindrod read the first lesson as she has done for many years and music was provided by the powerful combination of the Gravesend Salvation Army Brass Band, the Cathedral organist Nick O'Neill and the Richard Fentiman Singers. In spite of the wind and rain, nearly 100 blind and partially sighted people came with their relatives, friends and escorts and were joined by Mayors or their Deputies from a number of the inner London boroughs. I believe that everyone present found the Service to be enjoyable and very worthwhile.

Cooperation and liaison

I have met several representatives from the other major VI charities operating in London and plan to arrange further meetings as the strategic review takes shape. Of particular importance to MSB is its relationship with the Greater London Fund for the Blind. Under a new agreement our protected allocation from the Fund will decrease year on year until it stabilises at 10% in 2010. However, GLFB remains a critical source of income and we need to do

everything possible to support its fund-raising activities. We have a great deal to gain from working in partnership and, as a newly appointed trustee to the Board of GLFB, I will be seeking a better understanding of the opportunities which lie before us in the weeks and months ahead.

I have visited several other local societies which are members of the National Association of Local Societies for Visual Impairment (NASLSVI) and regularly attend meetings of the London Visual Impairment Forum. In view of our commitment to providing services in inner London, I will ensure that members of LVIF are kept fully informed of the progress of our strategic review.

Office and staff

It has been enormously reassuring to be welcomed into an office which works smoothly and efficiently, where everyone pulls together as a team, and where each individual's effort is properly valued. I should like to express my appreciation to colleagues who have enabled me to settle in with relative ease. It was with sadness that we said goodbye to Brenda Johnson and June Boydell. As Finance & Administration Assistant, Brenda had been a reliable, cheerful and efficient member of the small office team. June's energy and commitment to the welfare of vulnerable visually impaired people was largely responsible for the success of our fledgling Welfare Rights service. We wish them every success in the future

Financial Review

Income/expenditure

As a result of several unexpected legacies, the Society showed an end of year surplus of £400,883. Bearing in mind that such a windfall is unlikely to be repeated, the Council will give careful consideration to how this year's surplus can be used most effectively. Financial stability and independence have underpinned our past success and will, no doubt, be important objectives for the future. However, we must also be prepared to embrace opportunities for new activities to improve the welfare and life experiences of visually impaired people.

A significant proportion of the Society's voluntary income comes from the Greater London Fund for the Blind, which had another very successful year. However, GLFB operates in an increasingly competitive environment and, while we remain optimistic and enthusiastic partners, there can be no guarantees regarding the level of future income.

Reserves policy

Our overriding concern is to deliver effective and reliable services to the people who most need them. For this reason, it is the policy of the Council to manage the Society's reserves so that, in conjunction with other funding, they will provide a stable annual income over the long term.

Donations and grants to the Society

The Society was, once again, the grateful recipient of substantial grants from other organisations:

- The Clothworkers Foundation awarded £25,000 as a grant-for-grants.

- British Wireless for the Blind Fund awarded £6,800 in appreciation of our work as their agent.
- Richard Cloudesley's Charity awarded a total of £250 for the visiting service in the parish of Islington.

A total of £5,456 was received from other donations. A good proportion was from collections in memory of deceased people whom we had visited, a moving reminder of how much our visiting service has been appreciated.

Strategic Review

While it is too early to report on any findings from the strategic review, I am delighted with the enthusiasm with which staff, members of Council and colleagues in other organisations have engaged in the review process. This is an exciting time for MSB as we look back with pride on many years of solid achievement and pause, perhaps with some trepidation, to consider our prospects for the future. I look forward to working in a remarkable organisation and I am delighted to have the opportunity to begin my term of office by carrying out the strategic review.

John Harris
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUMMARY OF INCOME & EXPENDITURE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2006

	2006	2005
	£	£
Incoming resources		
Allocations by the Greater London Fund for the Blind	197,555	252,239
Donations & other income	40,092	44,140
Legacies	475,795	61,022
Investment & interest income	<u>180,138</u>	<u>160,092</u>
Total incoming resources	<u>893,580</u>	<u>517,493</u>
Resources expended		

	<u>11,289</u>	<u>9,354</u>
Costs of generating funds		
Charitable activities		
Visiting service	262,71	238,90
	0	1
Radio service	60,225	52,754
Social welfare	33,836	25,263
Welfare rights service	25,206	22,652
Hospital support services	9,363	8,827
Welfare grants	27,424	21,940
Other services	<u>34,981</u>	<u>26,965</u>
	453,74	397,30
Total cost of charitable activities	5	2
<i>Governance costs</i>	<u>27,663</u>	<u>22,458</u>
Total resources used	<u>492,69</u>	<u>429,11</u>
	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources	<u>400,88</u>	<u>88,379</u>
	<u>3</u>	

Statement of the Council

The Summary of Income & Expenditure has been extracted from the audited accounts of the Society and was approved by the Council on 18th April 2007. The Summary of Income & Expenditure may not contain sufficient information to allow a full understanding of the financial affairs of the Society. For further details, the full annual accounts and the auditor's unqualified report on those accounts should be consulted.

Copies of the full annual accounts have been filed with the Registrar of Companies and the Charity Commission. Copies may be obtained on application to the Society.

Signed on behalf of the Council

12 June 2007 Keith Felton, Honorary Treasurer

Auditors' Statement to the Council

We have examined the summarised financial statements of Metropolitan Society for the Blind.

This statement is made solely to the trustees, as a body in accordance with the terms of our engagement. Our work has been undertaken so that we might state to the trustees those matters we have agreed to state to them in this statement and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the trustees as a body, for our work, for this statement, or for the opinions we have formed.

The trustees are responsible for preparing the summarised financial statements in accordance with the recommendations of the Charities SORP and Companies Act 1985.

Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summarised financial statements with the full financial statements and trustees' report. We also read the other information contained in the summarised annual report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summarised financial statements.

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 1999/6 'The auditors' statement on the summary financial statement' issued by the Auditing Practices Board for use in the United Kingdom.

In our opinion, the summarised financial statements are consistent with the full financial statements and the trustees' report of Metropolitan Society for the Blind for the year ended 31 December 2006.

London, UK
Date 1 May 2007

PKF (UK) LLP
Registered auditors