REVIEW OF THE OPERATION OF THE
QUEEN’S AWARD FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE
IN GREATER LONDON

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Executive Summary

Taking account of its population, Greater London is relatively unsuccessful in securing successful nominations for the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service.

Reasons for this include a difficulty in finding suitable organisations for nomination as well as the considerable engagement of time needed by Deputy Lieutenants to carry out assessment visits to a proper standard. There is also a perceived lack of marketing and publicity for the Award from the Cabinet Office, and relatively little media attention can be secured even for successful organisations. Most voluntary bodies and their supporters are unaware of the existence of the QAVS.

Given that the QAVS is a part of the Honours system where those under consideration are aware of the fact, the handling of unsuccessful nominations is a delicate process. Unfortunately stock rejection letters sent out by the Cabinet Office have caused significant problems through their inadvertent tactlessness. This can only disincentivise DLs from tackling a task which presents enough challenges in terms of finding candidates and carrying out proper assessments. Generally, there needs to be closer contact – both formally and informally – between the Lieutenancy, the Cabinet Office and the voluntary sector to ensure that all systems and documentation meet everyone’s needs as well as possible.

Nevertheless, other Metropolitan Lieutenancies manage to achieve a success rate that considerably exceeds what would be expected for their population. They, and some shire Lieutenancies visited, attributed their success to a centralised process for handling and assessing all nominations.

The most immediate task for the Greater London Lieutenancy is to increase the resource available for handling the QAVS. This can most easily be done by engaging in the process non-Rep Deputy Lieutenants – otherwise largely a dormant resource. This raises wider questions about using them across the functions of the Lieutenancy, for Borough level support to Rep DLs, and/or for Lieutenancy-wide functions reflecting their experience and interests. This would be dependent on the outcome of the current consultation on the future working of the Greater London Lieutenancy.

Drawing on the experience of other Lieutenancies, however, the best model for the future would seem to be a centralised system with a core body of DLs, supplemented by external expertise where necessary, taking responsibility for assessments, quality control, and process management. An alternative of Borough level groups under the relevant DL would provide a significant increase in nominations and Awards, although it would be unlikely to achieve as significant a change.
List of Recommendations

**Recommendation 1**

DLs should use as intensively as possible the opportunities provided by formal relations with Councillors and their officers, and informal contacts with different parts of the local community, to encourage identification of high quality voluntary organisations.

**Recommendation 2**

The Cabinet Office should consider whether the scope of the Award should be extended to cover British Overseas Territories.

**Recommendation 3**

The Cabinet Office should issue guidance on the eligibility for the Award of organisations in the UK responsible for voluntary work undertaken overseas by persons normally resident in Britain.

**Recommendation 4**

Additional effort should be made to secure publicity for the Award, both in terms of nominations and successes; on balance there seem good arguments for arranging larger level Award ceremonies, rather than simply a presentation at the Organisation’s premises.

**Recommendation 5**

To increase the available resource, non-Rep DLs with the interest and aptitude should be used routinely in the QAVS process, at Borough and/or a central level.

**Recommendation 6**

The Lieutenancy should consider the potential contribution that could be made by non-Rep DLs across the whole spectrum of Lieutenancy functions.

**Recommendation 7**

A pilot project should be launched by interested Rep DLs allowing them to delegate functions at their discretion to a specified group of non-Rep DLs who support them in the Borough.

**Recommendation 8**

The Cabinet Office should re-draft the rejection letter and institute a Certificate of Commendation (to be signed by the Lord Lieutenant) for unsuccessful nominees.

**Recommendation 9**

Management supervision of the QAVS process in the Cabinet Office should be increased to secure adequate quality control.
**Recommendation 10**

Cabinet Office officials should arrange to meet at least one Lieutenancy Clerk as part of their induction process to work on the QAVS.

**Recommendation 11**

Clerks to Lieutenancies should consolidate practical concerns about the operation of the QAVS into an agenda for an annual discussion with Cabinet Office officials to be convened by Clerks.

**Recommendation 12**

A working level meeting should be convened by the Cabinet Office to consider whether the forms currently in use for nomination and assessment could be improved to the benefit of all.

**Recommendation 13**

A working level meeting of users, suppliers and the Cabinet Office should be convened to identify problems with current IT arrangements and options for addressing them, subject to resources.

**Recommendation 14**

DLs should familiarise themselves with the current Cabinet Office guidance and note the questions likely to be posed by the Assessment Committee.

**Recommendation 15**

Subject to consistency with the outcome of the Strategic Review, it is recommended that the Lieutenancy establishes a central Committee to manage the Queen’s Award, supported by Borough Committees under the Chairmanship of the Rep DL.
1. Introduction

1.1 This Review was commissioned by the former Lord Lieutenant for Greater London, Sir David Brewer CMG CVO JP. Its terms of reference are at Annex A.

1.2 Its origin lies in a growing sense that Greater London was under-represented in The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, and that as a result the voluntary sector in Greater London was not receiving the public recognition which was its due. Given Greater London’s large population and diverse ethnic make-up, this also probably means that the ethnic minority voluntary sector is under-represented nationally in the Awards.

1.3 Statistically, these concerns appear more than justified: with a population of 8.6m, Greater London represents 13.4% of the UK population. In 2015 there were 7 Queen’s Awards given for voluntary service in the capital out of a total of 187 nationally, that is a 3.7% of the total, well under what would be expected for the population. By contrast a comparator major city, has a population of 2.7m or 4.7% of the UK figure, yet secured 22 Awards or 11.8% of the total – well above what would be expected for its population size.

1.4 Anecdotal explanations for the Greater London’s lack of success have ranged from the complexities of the process, the lack of effective marketing, to the vagaries of the assessment process. But all these general factors apply equally to the comparator, whose successes were considerably more than the combined total of successful and unsuccessful nominations submitted by Greater London. So some other explanation must apply.

1.5 To understand what is taking place, the Review has been carried out through a study of documents; structured interviews with a range of Representative Deputy Lieutenants representing different types of Borough in Greater London (a number of which also involved Council staff); interviews with successful, pooled and unsuccessful voluntary organisations in Greater London; meetings with the Lieutenancies of two shire and one metropolitan county; and consideration of a few written submissions.

2. Finding High Calibre Organisations

2.1 Nationally, there are around 164,000 registered charities – 91% of which have no paid staff – and there are estimated to be the same number of non-registered charities. Over the 13 years of the Award’s existence, some 1,600 Awards are believed to have been made: a tiny fraction of the potential field.

2.2 The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service is described by the Cabinet Office web-site for the Award as ‘the MBE for volunteer groups’ and there is no doubt that it is highly valued by those who receive it. Leaders of voluntary organisations see the Award as bringing multiple benefits: it recognises and rewards the effort put in by all their volunteers and boosts their morale; as one volunteer put it after hearing about the Award: ‘I am so proud to be part of this, we did this’. Additionally, the Award provides increased credibility for fund-raising and any resulting local publicity enables the organisation to both reach a wider clientele and to attract more volunteers.
2.3 Given its potential, it is perhaps surprising that there seems so little knowledge of the Award among the voluntary sector. One DL reported that he had had to suggest to an excellent voluntary body that they might consider seeking a nomination for the Award – they had never heard of it or seen any publicity. Another winner of the Award was unaware of its existence until prompted by the local MP, fresh from a meeting with a Minister who had been encouraging its take-up.

2.4 Many DLs raised the problem of finding suitable organisations for whom nominations could be encouraged. To some extent this is inevitable: while the meek may inherit the earth, they would never expect it and would certainly never dream of asking for it. The type of organisation that the Award looks to recognise is precisely the one that does excellent work without pushing itself forward for recognition. Among the means currently used by DLs to find suitable nominees were the following:

- Consulting Council officers responsible for the voluntary sector (although a number of these posts have been cut recently);
- Using a business sector Social Responsibility group (although it proved difficult to find anyone in the community willing to put in the work to nominate and write-up recommendations);
- Local religious organisations were recognised as being likely to know what is really going on at the micro-level, and contacts with individual religious leaders and networks were seen as a good way of spreading the word (but a DL in an area with a large Muslim population was surprised to find no nominations coming forward from Mosques and wondered whether a central Muslim organisation would be a better way of getting the message into Mosques);
- Talks to local Councillors encouraging them to nominate candidates;
- Word of mouth through local contacts in education, health, elderly services;
- Scanning the local press;
- Consultation with the Mayor’s office, given the range of voluntary bodies a Mayor is likely to have contact with in their year of office;

2.5 DLs were alert to the risk of perceived favouratism if they were personally recommending nominations, as well as the risk that their necessarily partial knowledge of the field could well overlook worthy candidates who had not found the limelight as much as others. They were also conscious of the problem of assessing such a nomination since they would effectively become judge and jury in the same cause.

2.6 There is clearly no single route to finding suitable organisations but the key elements seem to be the depth of the relationship between the DL and the formal structures of the Borough, as well as the extent to which the DL has contacts with local, ethnic and faith communities in the Borough. One of the five duties specified for the Lieutenancy is: support to charities and other voluntary organisations. In theory, therefore, the contacts should be made in the normal course of a DL’s duties. However, the amount of time any one DL can devote to this will be limited – particularly if they do not live within easy access of the Borough. (The work-load implications generally are covered below in Section 4.)

2.7 There is a curious anomaly in the scope of the Award. Cabinet Office guidance makes clear that groups based overseas are not eligible for the Award. However, inhabitants of the 14 British Overseas Territories such as Gibraltar, the Falklands and Bermuda are full British Citizens and the Queen is their Sovereign too. Together the British Overseas Territories have a population of around 250,000 and are ineligible for the Award; this should be compared with the Isle of Wight - population 140,000, three Awards (2015); the Channel Islands - population 166,000, three Awards; Rutland –
population 38,000, no Awards. If British citizens resident in the Channel Islands are eligible for the Award, it is difficult to see why those in the British Overseas Territories are not eligible. Processes exist for other parts of the Honours System to apply overseas, not excluding honorary awards for non-British citizens, so there seems no reason in principle why equivalent arrangements should not be made for the QAVS.

2.8 A further uncertain area concerns organisations and volunteers based in the UK but who carry out their service overseas. These include organisations which enable Medical staff to use their annual leave to work overseas in response to a major health epidemic such as Ebola, or specialist search and rescue organisations who deploy volunteers to disaster zones. If the aim of the Awards is to recognise the voluntary service per se, then it would seem that such bodies should also be eligible.

**Recommendation 1**

DILs should use as intensively as possible the opportunities provided by formal relations with Councillors and their officers, and informal contacts with different parts of the local community, to encourage identification of high quality voluntary organisations.

**Recommendation 2**

The Cabinet Office should consider whether the scope of the Award should be extended to cover British Overseas Territories.

**Recommendation 3**

The Cabinet Office should issue guidance on the eligibility for the Award of organisations in the UK responsible for voluntary work undertaken overseas by persons normally resident in Britain.

3. **Marketing**

3.1 There was widespread concern that little seemed to be done centrally to market the Award or publicise successes.

3.2 Previously the Cabinet Office had put this work out to the private sector, contracting with ‘Consortium’, but the experience had not been successful and the work had been taken back in-house. Consortium were felt to have done little more than produce sample advertisements and leave it to Lieutenancies to place them in the media.

3.3 One winner of the Award arranged for professional quality PR photos from their Award ceremony to be sent to the Cabinet Office on the assumption that they would be useful for central marketing purposes, but had heard nothing about their use in any form, and was surprised that the Cabinet Office had not found a ready taker for them in the Evening Standard or the Metro (the Review is unaware of whether or not the Cabinet Office made any relevant approaches).

3.4 Overall, there was some surprise that there was little or no General publicity for the Award generated through the Cabinet Office as its administrator. It was felt that if

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1 If normal arrangement for scrutiny of organisations were to apply, it is unlikely there would be any difficulty in finding DILs willing to take on site visits.
society is increasingly looking to the Voluntary Sector to take on roles which had previously been the province either of the state or of informal neighbourly support, then it must be in the Government’s interest to invest minor amounts of money to secure major cost-free gains and an increase in social cohesion?

3.5 For the first time this year, the Daily Telegraph provided extensive coverage of the Awards, highlighting a number of Organisations for their particular contributions to society, and giving a profile to the Award compatible with its status as an organisational MBE. They are to be congratulated on the initiative and it is hoped that other parts of the media will similarly give the Award national coverage. One DL argued for listing of Award winners alongside the half-yearly Honours List, to make the clear their value and place in the national system.

3.6 Local publicity proves harder to generate, particularly with the relative decline of local newspapers. However, while in a number of cases there was a preference for Awards to be made at the organisation’s premises, with all friends and supporters present, in other cases Awards are made at much larger ceremonies creating a higher profile, a sense of occasion, and a more attractive proposition for local or regional media.

3.7 For example, in one county the Lord Lieutenant hosts a reception for all nominees, whether successful or not. Elsewhere there is a civic ceremony in a prestigious venue which includes QAVS as part of a spectrum of Awards in the area. Another county brings all the Award recipients together at a smart venue, provides refreshments for 20 guests for each winner (all costs covered by a sponsor), citations are read out in full by the Vice Lord Lieutenant with the Awards presented by the Lord Lieutenant in the presence of all the relevant Mayors. The event generates sufficient momentum to guarantee coverage in regional and local presss and Twitter photos generate a lot of publicity on social media.

**Recommendation 4**

Additional effort should be made to secure publicity for the Award, both in terms of nominations and successes; on balance there seem good arguments for arranging larger level Award ceremonies, rather than simply a presentation at the Organisation itself.
4. **Work-load on DLs**

4.1 An effective process of identifying suitable organisations runs the risk of creating a level of demand that some DLs felt would be unsustainable. One DL suggested that 10 or 15 nominations a year would be appropriate for his Boroughs without devaluing the status of the Award, but noted that 15 nominations would equate to about 3 weeks’ work.

4.2 In Greater London the assessment process is largely carried out by DLs working on their own in their Boroughs. While there are other models in use elsewhere in the country, it is worth teasing out what the current approach entails.

4.3 The core of the process is the visit to the voluntary body. For some this is a matter of an hour or so, but everyone noted the time that had to be spent in preparatory study of annual reports and accounts to ensure that the right questions and issues were probed with due diligence, and then the time needed to write up the results. Coupled with travelling time this pushed estimates up to ten hours for a single assessment. Visits to organisations based in more closed communities took longer, and might involve two visits to the organisation and one to a supporter to check their perceptions. A need to check with third parties – particularly the police and the local Council - was also noted: to protect the dignity of the Crown it was important that statements on nomination forms were corroborated by evidence and that dubious bodies or those which might be under investigation were not put forward. Additionally, communities which traditionally operated through networks of kinship and favours might operate a voluntary body in a way which inappropriately excluded some groups.

4.4 To process 15 nominations a year to a standard compatible with an Award from the Sovereign could thus take at least three weeks of a DLs time, to say nothing of effort expended in contact with the voluntary sector generally and in encouraging suitable nominations. A sea change of this magnitude does not look viable taking account of other duties of DLs (to say nothing of the fact that they too carry out this work on a voluntary basis, often among many other commitments).

4.5 However, other Lieutenancies visited use a very different model. Rather than nominations being passed from the Clerk to the Rep DL or equivalent, they are handled by a Committee of DLs. In these cases, DLs with particular interest or experience in the subject see their work on the QAVS as a functional service representing a significant part of their contribution to the Lieutenancy, rather than perhaps having a role which encompasses everything in a geographical area.

4.6 A metropolitan Lieutenancy described its handling of the assessment of the organisation as involving prior research on the internet and with the Charity Commission, followed by as much time as possible talking not just to the hosts of the visit, but to volunteers, service users, and beneficiaries not directly connected with the organisation, to produce hard evidence of the community benefit. It was seen as a time-consuming role needing enthusiasts selected on the basis of their interest in the sector and the subjects covered; a new member of the assessment committee in the Lieutenancy concerned described the process as ‘a wonderful experience’ which they had really valued and from which they were inspired to look out for potential nominees. All this was seen as essential to give a human feel and some enthusiasm to the recommendation.

4.7 There are a number of advantages to the Committee approach. It recognises that different DLs have different strengths, experience and interests and enables their
contribution to be focused where it will offer most benefit. It enables less experienced DLs to be teamed up with more experienced colleagues; it provides an opportunity to involve advisers from outside the Lieutenancy where that would be helpful; it provides quality assurance and comparability of standards applied.

4.8 Models of organising QAVS work are discussed below in Section 8, but they would be of limited value if they amounted to no more than a different way of structuring the work of DLs. What is needed is extra resource.

4.9 This raises an issue which, while not on the face of the Terms of Reference for this Review, is an inescapable result of any study of the issue. The Greater London Lieutenancy has a large and – at present - significantly under-utilised resource in the sixty or so non-Rep DLs. On being offered appointment, most are flattered and look forward to contributing in some way to the work of the Lieutenancy. In practice, some may occasionally be asked to substitute for a Rep DL at a function, but there is no systematic attempt to identify their skills, experience, and interests, and to use them systematically from the beginning of their appointment. The result is that initial enthusiasm risks turning to disengagement, and the potential for active work may ultimately to waste.

4.10 There are obvious opportunities being missed here. In terms of this Review, non-Rep DLs could play a significant part in getting to know the voluntary sector in a particular Borough, in searching out potential candidates for the Award, or in supporting any structures established to manage the Award.

4.11 If the same approach were applied across the Lieutenancy roles, the capacity of the Lieutenancy at Borough level to visit, get to know, and support military units (including cadets and Reserves), the voluntary sector, the emergency services and other key parts of the local community would be greatly increased. A metropolitan county visited even found it practical for the Lieutenancy to be represented at all citizenship ceremonies by simply having a rota on which all DLs took their turn. Perhaps most importantly, such an approach would enable a newly appointed DL to learn his trade under the mentoring of an experienced Rep DL and ultimately be able to take on a Rep DL role with knowledge and effectiveness.

4.12 The essential question here is whether appointment as a DL is primarily a position of dignity to reward past service, or a commitment to service to the Crown in a new sphere, for which past achievements fit the appointee? As one interviewee put it: ‘DLs should earn the uniform they wear’ – it was seen as a matter of commitment to the functions of the Lieutenancy at their fullest, not a question of occasional participation in a dignified ceremony.

**Recommendation 5**

To increase the available resource, non-Rep DLs with the interest and aptitude should be used routinely in the QAVS process, at Borough and/or a central level.
Recommendation 6

The Lieutenancy should consider the potential contribution that could be made by non-Rep DLs across the whole spectrum of Lieutenancy functions.

Recommendation 7

A pilot project should be launched by interested Rep DLs allowing them to delegate functions at their discretion to a specified group of non-Rep DLs who support them in the Borough.

5. Handling unsuccessful nominations

5.1 The QAVS is reported to be a perennial subject of discussion at annual meetings of Rep DLs. Leaving aside the practical issues for DLs of processing nominations, there is a far more serious difficulty arising from the nature of the Award itself. It is a part of the Honours System, but it is the only part of the Honours System where the potential recipient is aware that they are being considered. Managing expectations is obviously important from the start, but dealing with those whose nominations are rejected can create real problems for DLs.

5.2 Leaders of voluntary bodies will characteristically talk of the Award as something they sought in order to provide some reward and recognition for their volunteers. For the management, there is a significant amount of work to be done in supporting a nomination and in dealing with the DL’s assessment visit. Some leaders will sensibly keep the knowledge of the nomination to themselves, but in other cases it may become public knowledge in the organisation by a variety of routes, including the nominating body and the organisations that provide references.

5.3 Failure to secure an Award can be deeply hurtful to a hard-working group of volunteers and it presents serious problems for management in maintaining the morale and goodwill on which the voluntary sector relies for its outputs. The critical factor here will be the way in which the news is conveyed.

5.4 Regrettably, this proved the least successful aspect of the QAVS process evident in this Review.

5.5 Organisations which are not selected for the Award are informed of this by what appears to be a stock-letter from the Cabinet Office. Almost all Rep DLs and other Lieutenancies shown an example were simply appalled – both by the strikingly negative tone and by the lack of the ordinary courtesies to be expected in a letter sent on behalf of a Royal Award. It merits quoting in full, with emphases as in the original, although anonymised:
The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service 2014

Dear Mr [Forename Surname]

You will be aware that the XYZ Trust was nominated for The Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service 2014.

The Award, created by The Queen in 2002 to mark the occasion of her Golden Jubilee, recognises excellence in voluntary activities carried out by groups in the community.

We regret to inform you that your group has not been successful this year. Hundreds of groups were considered from across the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and the standard was extremely high.

Following the visit you received from the Lord Lieutenant in your county, all nominations were assessed by the independent Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service Committee, chaired by the former broadcaster Martyn Lewis CBE. Their final recommendations were made to the Minister for the Cabinet Office in April.

The winners were confirmed by Buckingham Palace and will be announced on [date]; their details will appear on the Queen’s Award website at www.direct.gov/qavs

I am afraid that due to the large volume of nominations we received for this round, we will be unable to provide any feedback.

Although you were not successful for the current round of the Awards, we would like to congratulate you on being nominated and hope you continue the excellent work you do in your community.

Yours sincerely,

The Queen’s Award Administrator

5.6 The letter is unsigned, there is no address or contact details of the sender, it is dated only with a month, the salutation is incorrect and typed, and the content has obvious errors: most organisations will not have been visited by the Lord Lieutenant personally. But it is the tone that is simply unacceptable. The primary message of the letter is strongly negative and is unnecessarily stressed, what recognition of voluntary service there is comes too little and too late, almost as an afterthought.

5.7 The recipient of this letter was shocked and angry, later telling the Lord Lieutenant ‘I will continue to volunteer, but I did not feel like it at the time’. The letter could not be shown to the volunteers and management effectively had to cover-up for what they felt was a slap in the face from the Cabinet Office. The Rep DL concerned felt obliged to throw a party for the organisation to counter the damage done.

5.8 This Review does not criticise the officer who drafted this letter: probably relatively junior and educated at a time when formal letter writing was not regarded as a priority. But the issue does raise questions about the level of management supervision which can allow such letters to be sent out routinely, damaging not only the valuable
organisations that receive them, but also prejudicing the reputation of the Cabinet Office and of the Queen’s Award.

5.9 In fairness to the Cabinet Office, it must be said that the officer interviewed for this Review, who had arrived in post relatively recently, was similarly appalled by the letter and was keen to collaborate on drafting an alternative. Unfortunately, this officer has now moved to another Department.

5.10 The fact of being nominated for a Queen’s Award is a distinction in its own right and should be recognised as such. Even if unsuccessful, an organisation should be as proud of having been nominated as an actor is of being nominated for an Oscar even if, on the night, it goes to another. The letter should aim to affirm the values of the organisation and should be constructed to boost the morale of the volunteers. The test should be: can you frame it and display it with pride in your entrance? An approach on these lines might produce a letter reading as follows:

QAVS Letterhead
Room 123
Government Innovation Group
Cabinet Office

Dear Mr Smith [handwritten]

The nomination of the XYZ Trust for the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service 2015 represents a tremendous achievement for your organisation. Everyone involved, and particularly your volunteers, should feel immensely proud of the recognition that a nomination for this Award represents.

The work your group does for the community was very much admired by the independent Assessment Committee, chaired by Martyn Lewis CBE. Unfortunately, given the large number of nominations and the very high standards throughout, I am sorry to say that in the end the XYZ Trust was not among those selected to receive the Award.

However, will you please convey to your volunteers and other staff our warm appreciation of the excellent work they do and of the enormous benefit it represents to the local community. As an indication of this, I am pleased to enclose a Certificate of Commendation, signed by your Lord Lieutenant, recognising the value of your work and the significance of your nomination for this Award.

Yours sincerely,

Forename Surname [handwritten]

Forename Surname
For and on behalf of the Queen’s Award Administrator
e-mail address

5.11 The beneficial effect could be amplified if the letter were accompanied by a Certificate specifically designed to be framed and displayed. Production of a Certificate of Commendation, printed on heavy-weight paper, can be done on any desk-top computer, at virtually no cost, and the design could be handled by the Cabinet Office’s communications staff if no one in the relevant part of the office has an eye for
computer-based design. If the letters with Certificates were routed through the Clerk to the Lieutenancy, the Certificates could be signed by the Lord Lieutenant and in all probability DLs concerned would mount them in a stock frame for presentation. An approach on these lines was widely supported by DLs interviewed. Another Metropolitan Lieutenancy interviewed had reached a similar view independently, and envisaged the Assessing DL returning to the organisation to present the Certificate.

**Recommendation 8**

The Cabinet Office should re-draft the rejection letter and institute a Certificate of Commendation (to be signed by the Lord Lieutenant) for unsuccessful nominees.

**Recommendation 9**

Management supervision of the QAVS process in the Cabinet Office should be increased to secure adequate quality control.

6. **Relations with the Cabinet Office**

6.1 The relationship between the Cabinet Office and Lieutenancies is not an easy one. The Cabinet Office has, at best, a staff of two who cover the Queen’s Award among other functions. Lieutenancies typically have a single Clerk, who may also have other duties for the Local Authority. Greater London does better than most with a Clerk and a Deputy Clerk, both full-time. With very light staffing on both sides it is inevitable that there will be unintended problems from time to time.

6.2 The most serious criticism made about the Cabinet Office arose from an error in the 2015 QAVS Round. A letter was sent by the Cabinet Office to a number of voluntary bodies in March, which should not have gone out until June, identifying groups which had apparently not been successful and referring to meetings of the Assessment Panel which had not yet taken place. Unsurprisingly, there was considerable work for both the Cabinet Office and the Lieutenancies to deal with the situation created, and there was a marked drop in confidence expressed by Clerks in the administration of the Award by the Cabinet Office.

6.3 This was, however, a one-off problem caused by a simple human error of pressing the wrong button on a computer. Such things happen. What is more worrying though, is that it is reported that when one aggrieved Clerk asked for the name of an official’s line manager, the official responded by denying they had a line manager and refusing to provide the name of anyone higher up the chain of command. On another occasion, when a Clerk asked for statistics of the number of nominations and the proportion of those that were successful for use in a press release the next day, they were told by an official that they didn’t know, ‘I have got a lot of work to do at the moment; and I have got to go home soon’. It was 3.45 p.m. For a Clerk trying to deliver the QAVS as professionally as possible, it was an unacceptably unprofessional response.

6.4 It is not the task of this Review to verify or otherwise these anecdotal criticisms, and the staff concerned are no longer working in this area. But these reports are indicative of a worrying lack of confidence among some Clerks in the levels of staffing, professionalism and supervisory management that is currently available in the central administration of the Award.
6.5 The usual answer to dealing with such problems is for the two parties to find a way of discussing them informally. And indeed until a few years ago this seemed to be the case with informal meetings between Cabinet Office staff and Clerks, discussions in Lieutenancy offices and attendance at social events. But in recent years there has come to be very little direct contact between staff in the Cabinet Office and Clerks – despite this being the key functional relationship. Most contact is now by telephone or e-mail, although a few Lords Lieutenant are invited to sit in one of the Assessment Panel’s sub-committee discussions. It is essential in any sphere of Government business that Civil Servants understand the sector they are dealing with, and it is equally important that the sector concerned understands the constraints on officials. Yet there appears to be no regular process for informal contact between the Cabinet Office and Clerks, not even as part of the induction process for new post-holders in the Cabinet Office. One Cabinet Office interviewee said they had met someone, but were unclear whether it was a Lord Lieutenant or a Clerk.

6.6 With both parties operating under serious staffing constraints and struggling to make the system meet all their needs, there is a clear need both for informal meetings to build personal relationships, and for more structured opportunities for Clerks and officials to investigate the rubbing points. The nearest Clerk to the Cabinet Office is to be found in Gwydyr House, barely two hundred yards away across Whitehall, so some informal contact should not be difficult and would do much to improve relations and the efficiency of the system as a whole. Happily, both parties welcomed the idea and were very open to meeting in this way. But it should not have needed a Review to generate what was – and what should be - normal working practice between any branch of the Civil Service and the sector it deals with.

6.7 The IT system is a further source of frustration. Clerks reported it as particularly cumbersome, not allowing them to use it in the most efficient way, and resulting in tedious and time-consuming cutting and pasting. Cabinet Office officials were very ready to sit down and discuss the problems, but noted that the cost implications of asking their IT supplier to make the changes might rule it out. However, they were very happy to explore the problems and work collaboratively on possible solutions.

6.8 For Cabinet Office officials there were frustrations too in the material they received from Lieutenancies. While some award citations added real value with information on the outstanding qualities of the organisation and the extent of volunteer involvement, many did little more than repeat the factual information available elsewhere in the papers. Too many nominations came forward as Highly Recommended rather than Recommended, with the result that the currency has become so devalued that there is now consideration of dropping the distinction altogether (see Section 7 below).

6.9 There was some criticism of how far the Form currently in use is suitable for the needs of voluntary organisations, as opposed to the needs of the Cabinet Office. Following this Review, the Cabinet Office could sit down with voluntary organisations and Lieutenancies to discuss whether and how the form could be improved in a way that met the needs of all parties.

Recommendation 10

Cabinet Office officials should arrange to meet at least one Lieutenancy Clerk as part of their induction process to work on the QAVS.
**Recommendation 11**

Clerks to Lieutenancies should consolidate practical concerns about the operation of the QAVS into an agenda for an annual discussion with Cabinet Office officials to be convened by Clerks.

**Recommendation 12**

A working level meeting should be convened by the Cabinet Office to consider whether the forms currently in use for nomination and assessment could be improved to the benefit of all.

**Recommendation 13**

A working level meeting of users, suppliers and the Cabinet Office should be convened to identify problems with current IT arrangements and options for addressing them, subject to resources.
7. The Assessment Committee

7.1 The central Assessment Committee process seemed to several Lieutenancies an impenetrable mystery. One Clerk commented that having put five nominations forward one year, none of which were successful, there seemed little point in bothering to put in so much work for so little outcome. The criteria by which the Selection Panel made decisions were unclear to many, and several interviewees questioned whether there were numerical, geographical or sectoral quotas which might have explained why some highly recommended nominations had been unsuccessful. One interviewee wondered what purpose there was in having a local Lieutenancy assessment process, with all that entails in terms of local knowledge and judgement, if it is then to be overruled on the papers alone by a national Selection Panel, without any checking back with the Lieutenancy about possible concerns.

7.2 In the thirteen years the Award has existed, some 1,600 Awards have been made, but there are 164,000 registered charities (91% of which have no paid staff) and about the same number of non-registered charities. Out of 400 nominations in the 2015 round, 187 were successful. There was no overall numerical limit on successes, although in previous years it is understood that limits had been set by the Cabinet Office to reflect the budget allocated for the crystal trophies – a curiously parsimonious approach given the value of encouraging publicly beneficial voluntary service. There were four sub-committees of the Assessment Panel this year, looking at different sectors and composed of judges who were highly experienced in those sectors. There was likely to be an increase in the number of sub-committees in the future to reflect the growing number of nominations.

7.3 The Assessment Committee felt that far too many nominations were marked ‘Highly Recommended’ to the point where the distinction was losing value and might be dropped in future. The questions likely to be posed by the Panel were:

- What do the volunteers do?
- Who do they help?
- How do they help?
- What did they do to start the activity off?

Supporting material provided by Lieutenancies should endeavour to deal with those questions. Letters submitted in support were useful where they came from people who had personally benefitted from the voluntary activity, but bland formal statements of support from public bodies were of little value. The critical factors in success are the role of the volunteers and the value placed on it locally. These issues are covered in the Guidance on making a nomination provided on the Cabinet Office web-site. It is not clear how familiar all DLs are with the details of the guidance, and this is one area where the Committee approach (see Section 8) could offer an increased depth of understanding of the requirements.

Recommendation 14

DLs should familiarise themselves with the current Cabinet Office guidance and note the questions likely to be posed by the Assessment Committee.
8. Models for the Future

8.1 Considering the difficulties experienced in Greater London against the background of experience in other Lieutenancies, a number of options for improvement in the process suggest themselves.

A. The Full Committee system

8.2 In this model, the administration of the Award in Greater London would be wholly vested in a central Committee under the Chairmanship of the Vice Lord Lieutenant assisted by experienced DLs and some newer DLs (all with the relevant interest, experience or aptitude), with the option for the Committee to co-opt additional advisory members from outside the Lieutenancy where they have specific expertise needed by the Committee.

8.3 The Committee would encourage identification of candidates through organisations working across London, such as religious bodies, charitable structures (NCVO, Do It Trust, Team London etc.), and organisations concerned with social cohesion. It could also work with major London structures such as the GLA who might want to assist with building the QAVS profile, for example, through Award ceremonies.

8.4 At Borough level there would be Borough Committees, chaired by the Rep DL and comprising other DLs engaged in the Borough, a representative of the Local Authority, and (optionally) voluntary sector specialists. Borough Committees would be tasked by the central Committee with each securing a minimum of 3 nominees annually, on a set time-scale.

8.5 At both central and Borough level, Committees could usefully be assisted by co-opted members with access to different ethnic and other sub-cultures in Greater London.

8.6 Assessments, including visits to the organisations, would be carried out by members of the central Committee operating in pairs, they would include a checklist of standard questions/areas to probe. The results would then be reviewed collectively, written up on a consistent basis in the light of experience of what is being looked for, and passed to the Cabinet Office. Where helpful, feedback should be provided to the Borough Committee.

8.7 Advantages:

This approach mirrors that used in other Lieutenancies which have seen a great increase in their successes as a result of it. It provides for structure, drive, and resources dedicated to dealing with the Award. For newer DLs it would provide a significant personal focus for their Lieutenancy work. It separates out the risk of Rep DLs encouraging nominations which they are then required to assess personally, with a risk of conflict of interest and/or embarrassment if the nomination is unsuccessful. It removes the considerable work-load of assessment from the Rep DL. It would facilitate the identification of suitable groups from minority communities.

8.8 Disadvantages:

Some Rep DLs might see it as a structural change which devalues their role in relation to the Borough and the contacts they have nurtured. Arguably,
assessment by a central Committee would lose the benefit of local knowledge and background. The system is dependent on their being sufficient DLs with the time, interest and willingness to take up a much more significant commitment than they presently exercise. There is a risk that if not focused on clear Terms of Reference and effective chairmanship, committees at central and Borough level become an unproductive bureaucratic layer.

B The Borough Committee

8.9 This model would omit any central Committee, but recognising the pressure on Rep DLs, focus instead on building up the capacity at Borough level. Each Rep DL would have a number of other DLs working directly to him in finding suitable nominees for the Award and in assisting him in assessing and writing up the judgements. Individual supporting DLs could be tasked either on a geographical basis within part of the Borough or with a sectoral interest matching their expertise.

8.10 Advantages:

This would keep the focus on the Rep DL, while managing to separate out the encouragement of nominations from the person who then assesses them. It would provide the resource to enable routine visits to be made around the voluntary sector as a natural part of the Lieutenancy’s duties. It would enable newer DLs to become directly involved in Lieutenancy business and provide a means through which they would ‘learn their trade’ from the guidance of an experienced Rep DL. As they would be known locally, they would be better placed to cover for events where the Rep DL was unable to be present, than bringing a DL in from elsewhere in London with little experience of the Borough. It would increase the reach of the Lieutenancy within the Borough and provide an obvious model for other functions of the Lieutenancy, including support for the military (especially Cadet units), and representative roles (for example where more than one Remembrance Day parade takes place within a Borough).

8.11 Disadvantages:

This approach is dependent on the enthusiasm of individual Rep DLs to drive it, and on their willingness to utilise DLs in a subordinate role under their direction. It could be seen as diluting the influence of the Rep DL as much as it increase the engagement of the Lieutenancy generally. Some may feel that the creation and management of Borough Committees themselves would create work and bureaucracy which an experienced Rep DL can avoid at present.

C Informal support structure

8.12 This model would leave business largely where it is in the hands of Rep DLs, but would make available to them a pool of DLs who have expressed an interest in assisting in the QAVS. At the request of an individual Rep DL, one or more of the pool would be available to help with any stage of the process.

8.13 Advantages:

Structures and systems would not change noticeably and the Rep DL would retain the central role in the process. Relationship with Local Authorities and key figures in the community would not be affected. Pool DLs would build up a range of experience in different Boroughs and may be able to spread best
practice. Pool DLs could also be used to support the Clerk in managing the process.

8.14 Disadvantages:

This approach would lead to a risk of Boroughs falling into distinct groups with different experiences of the Award depending on whether or not the Rep DL took advantage of the Pool DLs. Where best practice was spread, it would be limited to those Boroughs where Pool DLs were operating. If Pool DLs are not sufficiently used, their enthusiasm and willingness to make their time available are likely to wither.

Assessment

8.15 The overarching objective of the Terms of Reference of this Review is ‘to consider how the Greater London Lieutenancy can most effectively support the operation of the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service’. Any of the models above would provide some improvement. However, on the evidence of practice in Lieutenancies that are more successful in terms of the QAVS, it is clear that the central Committee supported by Borough Committees is the most likely to produce a major shift in performance. It does, however, involve some significant changes in the way the Lieutenancy as a whole operates, and it would open the door to very different ways of using the resource of non-Rep Deputy Lieutenants as a whole. The model chosen will need to be consistent with the outcome of the Strategic Review of the operation of the Greater London Lieutenancy which the Lord Lieutenant has put out for consultation to DLs and any implications that has for how DLs are utilised.

Recommendation 15

Subject to consistency with the outcome of the Strategic Review, it is recommended that the Lieutenancy establishes a central Committee to manage the Queen’s Award, supported by Borough Committees under the Chairmanship of the Rep DL.

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R. Kornicki
8th September 2015
Annex A

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1. To consider how the Greater London Lieutenancy can most effectively support the operation of the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service in London;
   In particular:

2. To consider how best to identify high calibre organisations, suitable for nomination;

3. To consider the impact on Voluntary Organisations of the processes for nomination, assessment and announcement of results;

4. To consider the present balance of effort and reward for Voluntary Organisations involved;

5. To consider how best to ensure that all sections of London’s diverse community have the opportunity to be considered;

6. To make recommendations for the Greater London Lieutenancy;

7. To make observations for consideration by other bodies.