

Resources for **small groups**

Premises

Deciding on premises is a complex area and groups intending to take on property are likely need legal advice.

What do you need?

- Some more established groups may need their own office space, perhaps with access to a meeting, training or interview room.
- Groups may share office space to reduce expenditure.
- Small groups with no staff may operate from the home of a committee member, perhaps booking a room at a local community centre or church hall when they need it.

What responsibilities can you take on?

The responsibilities and drawbacks of taking on premises can sometimes be overlooked. For example:

- A great deal of your time may be taken up with managing the building rather than running your activities
- Some parts of the building, such as meeting rooms, may only be used occasionally which would not be cost effective.

Sharing office space with other organisations means you can share responsibility for managing the building and it may be possible to find fully-serviced accommodation where management of the building is included in your rent leaving your organisation responsible just for the office space you use.

Some groups' needs might be much more basic, e.g use of a room for meetings, events, classes, etc. A list of community venues in Merton is available at the MVSC web site.

Different types of tenure

There are broadly three main types of tenure:

- *Buying a freehold or a long leasehold.* This can provide long-term security for a group, but is likely to be an expensive option. It may therefore be out of the reach of many small voluntary groups.
- *Renting on a lease.* A lease gives a group an exclusive right to occupy a property in return for payment of rent. Leases run for a set period of time and should include a break clause which would allow the group to surrender the lease early if required. Without a break clause the group (or individual trustees in the case of unincorporated associations) would be held liable for the costs for the whole duration of the lease, even if the group moves out.

- *Renting on a licence.* Licenses tend to be more temporary arrangements than leases and the licence will be a much simpler document. They tend to give less security to tenants, but can be more flexible in terms of allowing a tenant to surrender it.

What resources do you have?

A key factor in your choice is likely to be the funds you have available or are able to raise. Most local groups will find it easier to approach funders for a sum to cover rent, rather than for the considerably larger sum needed for purchase or renovation costs.

What is available?

It is worth asking around amongst other voluntary and community groups to see if they have some space available they could share. MVSC may also be able to put you in touch with people who have space available. Merton Council rents out some office space for voluntary groups in *Vestry Hall*, Mitcham and elsewhere. MVSC also provides office space in Vestry Hall for small new groups to rent for one or two sessions a week

If you do decide to take premises on a lease, legal advice is very important.

