

May 2003

Harrow Sports Council Review Survey Report

Report on research commissioned by Harrow Borough Council and conducted by Harrow Business School, University of Westminster in partnership with Westminster Business Consultants.

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1. Executive Summary.

- The research aimed to establish the level of awareness of, and satisfaction with, Harrow Sports Council among stakeholder groups, to identify the needs and priorities of these groups, the strengths and weaknesses of Harrow Sports Council and areas for development and improvement.
- Questionnaires were sent out to representatives of 673 stakeholder organisations, using mailing lists held by the Borough Council. 66 completed questionnaires were received, and the issues raised were followed up in a focus group of ten organisations.
- The survey showed that, whilst 50 of the 66 organisations that responded were "aware" of Harrow Sports Council, only half of these were affiliated to it, and only 16 claimed to receive regular information. The focus group suggested that, whilst most club representatives were aware of HSC's existence, few had any real understanding of its role, or of its relationship to Harrow Borough Council.
- Assessing the performance of the Harrow Sports Council in relation to the aims and objectives set out in the Service Level Agreement, the results of both the questionnaire survey and the focus group suggest that HSC has been relatively successful in its operational roles (administering grants, organising teams for inter-borough competitions), but much less so in relation to its strategic roles (reflecting the opinion of stakeholder bodies on issues of development, funding and facilities, disseminating information and providing a forum for discussion to inform decision making).
- Where the Harrow Sports Council has had successes (most notably in relation to the London Youth Games) it has often lacked the public relations skills to secure awareness of these achievements. Many stakeholders are unaware of these achievements, whilst others criticise HSC for failing to do things (e.g. effectively maintain facilities) which have never, in fact, fallen within its remit.
- Many of the weaknesses of HSC arise from its status as a purely voluntary, umbrella body with limited funds. Many of the things that it has failed to do effectively are things that could not reasonably be expected of such a body and, as such, no criticism should be implied of the individuals concerned.
- Organisations identified information & publicity, access to facilities, funding advice and coach education as key areas in which they require assistance. The Harrow Sports Council is not in a position to provide such assistance, but the Sports Development Unit probably is.
- The survey revealed that many of the organisations lack the public relations skills effectively to promote what they are doing within and beyond the local community (only 20 of the 66 organisations have issued press releases, although many more have had successes which would merit publicity).
- Bowls, badminton, gymnastics, girls' cricket, trampolining and table tennis were identified as priority sports for development, although there is a degree of self-selection here, as many organisations simply nominated their own sport.
- 38 of the 66 organisations that replied to the questionnaire survey expressed a willingness to work with the Sports Development Unit to identify issues and develop priorities.

The conclusions and recommendations of the report are as follows:

- There is a general and striking lack of awareness among local stakeholder organisations of the roles and responsibilities of the Harrow Sports Council and its articulation with the Borough Council and other bodies. This underlines the need for a Sports Development Strategy, which should clearly identify roles and responsibilities and indicate the level of support and assistance that can be expected. Such a strategy would need to emerge from a full process of consultation, and its key points would need to be effectively and widely communicated.
- The Sports Development Strategy should redefine the role of the Harrow Sports Council, which should become more closely focussed on those roles which it is able effectively to deliver. The Sports Council itself should consider whether monthly meetings are necessary or appropriate, and whether less frequent meetings might be better attended, allowing HSC to become more representative.
- The organisation of teams for inter-borough competitions, most notably the London Youth Games, is a role that the Harrow Sports Council performs well. The distribution of grants has also been effective, although this would be enhanced by more effective publicity both before and after the grants have been distributed. This would probably require the assistance of the Sports Development Unit.
- Many of the other roles identified in the Service Level Agreement are not roles that can be effectively discharged by a voluntary umbrella body with a limited budget. These roles, which include the promotion of sports and sport equity, the identification of needs in terms of facilities, the dissemination of information and the provision of advice on funding require professional skills that can only be provided by the Sports Development Unit.
- There is a need for a forum which brings together local sporting organisations to provide a body of opinion reflecting the views of local sports interests on matters concerning the development and future planning of sport and recreation and their facilities within the Borough. This cannot be provided through monthly meetings attended by 6-12 people, whose primary concern is, understandably, with their own sports. It would probably require one well-publicised meeting per year: there is no reason why this could not be held under the aegis of the Harrow Sports Council, but it would require active leadership from Borough officers.

2. Introduction.

The research carried out by Harrow Business School on behalf of Harrow Borough Council aimed to establish:

- The level of awareness of the work of Harrow Sports Council among stakeholder groups.
- The level of interaction between Harrow Sports Council and stakeholder groups.
- The needs and priorities of stakeholder groups.
- Strengths and weaknesses of Harrow Sports Council.
- Areas for development and improvement.

This information was required in order to inform decisions about the future role and remit of the Harrow Sports Council. In addition to the above, certain additional information was requested by the commissioning officer (Carole Stewart), concerning the activities of the stakeholder groups and their interaction with the Sports Development Unit.

3. Methodology.

A questionnaire survey was designed and approved by the commissioning officer. A total of 673 questionnaires were sent out to the following, using mailing lists held by the Borough Council:

- 207 clubs on the main mailing list.
- 79 clubs which use the parks.
- 5 clubs which use Harrow High School (Sports College).
- 4 clubs which use Hatch End Pool.
- 12 team managers for London Youth Games.
- 21 clubs which use Harrow Leisure Centre.
- 345 were sent to all 69 Harrow schools (5 to each school).

66 completed questionnaires were received (10% is at the lower end of the normal expected response rate for postal questionnaires, and some comments received suggest that contact details on the mailing list may have been somewhat out of date). Data inputting and preliminary analysis were carried out by Westminster Business Consultants (the University's unique student-run consulting company) and the final analysis prepared by the lead consultant. These results were presented to the commissioning officer, and further research was then commissioned, in the form of a focus group, conducted by the lead consultant with representatives of ten of the organisations that had returned questionnaires, selected to be representative, as far as possible, of the 66 organisations, in terms of organisation type and size and sports involved. The ten organisations in the focus group included one general sports club and representatives of the following sports: special olympics, badminton, swimming, lawn tennis, gymnastics, martial arts, bowls, golf and cricket.

4. Level of Awareness of the Work of Harrow Sports Council and the Sports Development Unit.

In the questionnaire survey, 50 of the 66 organisations stated that they were aware of the Harrow Sports Council, but only half of these were affiliated to it. 14 of these organisations attend the Council's AGM and 10 are represented on the Executive. Only 16 of the organisations claim to have received regular information on the work of the Harrow Sports Council, and only 7 of them have received funding from HSC. None were aware of grants having been made by HSC to individual members of their organisations, although such grants must, in fact, have been made. Only 8 of the 66 organisations claimed to be aware of the work of the Sports Development Unit.

The focus group made it clear that, although individuals from the various organisations were, in the most general sense, "aware" of the work of HSC (that is to say, aware of its existence), that awareness did not extend, in most cases¹, to any real engagement or understanding of the role of the Sports Council. Some of the opening comments give a flavour of the discussion:

A *"I don't really know what the Harrow Sports Council does"*.

B *"Same here, this is the first time I have ever heard anyone talking about it"*.

C *"Nor me"*.

D *"My club is a hundred years old, and we have never been aware of it"*.

E *"I should come in here and explain that F and I are actually on the Executive of the Harrow Sports Council, but I must confess that I was not aware of it until I was invited to join the Executive"*.

F *"That's the same with me, I found out about it when someone suggested that my son should apply for a grant"*.

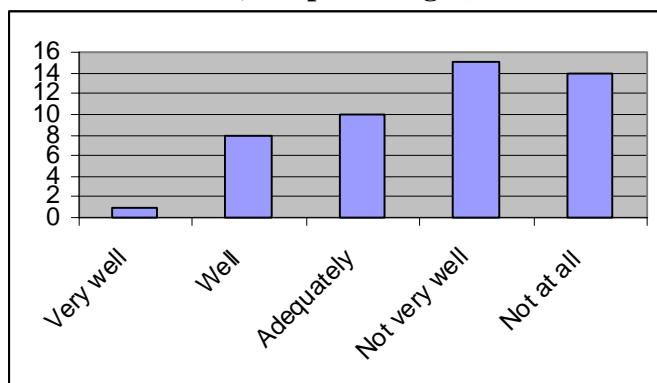
As the conversation continued, it became increasingly clear that most of the individuals present did not understand the role of HSC, its responsibilities or its relationship to the Sports Development Unit or the Borough more generally. This is confirmed by many of the comments on the questionnaires, including criticism of the Sports Council for failure to do things (the maintenance of facilities, for example) which are not, and never have been, responsibilities of HSC.

¹ There were two notable exceptions, both of whom, in addition to their club responsibilities, are members of HSC Executive.

5. Strengths and Weaknesses of Harrow Sports Council.

When asked in the questionnaire survey how well Harrow Sports Council met their needs, organisations responded as shown on Figure 1.

Figure 1. How well does HSC meet your needs? (figures shown are actual numbers - out of a total of 66, not percentages).



When then asked what Harrow Sports Council was good at, they responded (in the questionnaire returns) as follows:

- 6 organisations thought that it was good at providing funding
- 5 thought that it was good at promotion & publicity
- 5 thought that it was good as a forum for discussion & information
- 3 thought that it was good at organising teams for LYG and similar events
- 2 stated that it was good at nothing and one that it was good at sending forms.

When asked “what could HSC do better?”

- 7 organisations thought that it could do better in leveraging funding
- 5 thought that it could do better in promoting sport
- 3 thought that it could do more to promote the upgrading of facilities
- 2 thought that it could do more to influence councillors.

There is, perhaps, a mismatch between perceived strengths and weaknesses on the one hand, and perceived priorities on the other (and, indeed, between the priorities as seen by the stakeholder groups and those set out in the Service Level Agreement between the Harrow Borough Council and the Harrow Sports Council). When asked what should be the role of HSC, the organisations responded (in the questionnaire returns) as follows:

- 24 organisations thought that HSC role should be primarily promotional
- 6 thought that it should be involved in providing and/or checking facilities & equipment
- 6 thought that networking & communications were important functions
- Only 2 emphasised the provision of grants
- 2 emphasised the provision of training
- 1 organisation mentioned national initiatives.

In fact, the Service Level Agreement emphasises the role of Harrow Sports Council in advising the Borough Council on the Borough's sporting needs, the provision of facilities and the development and future planning of sport, the dissemination of information and the promotion of sport and sports equity. Stakeholder organisations are, in fairness, unlikely to be in a position to make informed judgements on the effectiveness of HSC in its advisory role - this is a judgement for councillors and officers to make. The results of both the questionnaire survey and the focus group, however, suggest that HSC has, in general terms, had only limited successes in relation to the dissemination of information and the promotion of sport. The problems associated with the dissemination of information are shown by some comments from the focus group:

F *"I think there is a magazine where people can put their views. Isn't this produced by Harrow Sports Council?"*

A *"I do remember getting one, but that was 5 or 6 years ago, I have heard nothing since".*

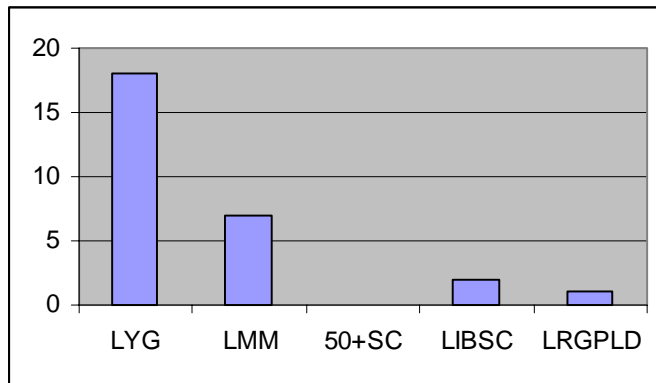
E *"Well, of course, your club secretary does need to remember to renew your affiliation. It only costs £5 after all!"*

As regards the promotion of sport, the Service Level Agreement makes specific reference to the funding of four organisations, the Eagles Sports Club, Harrow & Wealdstone Swimming Club, Harrow Athletics Club and the Harrow Schools' Sports Association, and to the provision of grants to voluntary organisations and individuals. Much of the £27,381 provided to HSC by the Borough Council appears to be taken up with these activities and, to the extent that this is so, appears to have been administered effectively. The Harrow Sports Council is, additionally, charged with assisting with the development, organisation and administration of teams for the following events: London Youth Games, Mini Games & Cross-Country Championships; London Mini Marathon; London/Regional Games for People with Learning Disabilities; London Inter-Borough Swimming Championships and London 50+ Sporting Challenge.

The role of HSC in the organisation of teams for the London Youth Games is praised in a number of the questionnaires, and one individual is even singled out for applause.

Figure 2 shows the extent of club participation in these events, based on the questionnaire returns:

Figure 2. Participation in Inter-Borough Competitions (figures shown are actual numbers - out of a total of 66, not percentages).



In this respect it is clear that HSC has had greater success in relation to the London Youth Games than in relation to the other events listed in the Service Level Agreement, although by their nature one would expect the mini marathon, swimming competition and games for people with learning disabilities to involve fewer organisations than the far more broadly based youth games. The particular disappointment, therefore, is in relation to the London 50+ Sporting Challenge.

Like any voluntary organisation, the Harrow Sports Council operates within a set of constraints, a sense of which can be had from some quotes from the focus group:

E *"To be honest, our main concern is in looking after our own groups - we are passionate, as individuals, about our own sports - that is where most of our time is spent, and we only get involved with the Sports Council as representatives of those sports".*

A *"But surely there needs to be someone in the Sports Council ensuring that there is open communication involving all sports?"*

E *"It is basically a self-interest role".*

MP *"Do you mean self-interest on a personal basis, or representing the interests of your sport?"*

E *"No, no, no - the interests of our sports - we give up our time voluntarily to further the interests of our particular sports, in my case sport for disabled people, but our role in Harrow Sports Council is very much secondary to that".*

D *"How many sports are represented on the Executive?"*

E *"The Council number is fluid, I would say about a dozen. The Sports Council acts as a forum for discussion, it identifies points of interest. It deals with applications for grants from organisations, and from individuals, some of whom live within the Borough, and some of whom seem not to. Special needs schools don't seem to have the time to get involved - I have a real difficulty in communicating with local schools".*

F *"There may be a dozen on the Council but there are rarely more than 6 in any meeting".*

In fairness, the comment about self-interest is not borne out by the facts. Figure 3 shows the composition of the Harrow Sports Council Executive in terms of the sports represented, whilst Figure 5 shows the total amount of grant money distributed to various sports by HSC during the period 1999-2003. It will be seen that only 48% of total grant

allocations went to sports directly represented on the Executive, that seven of the twelve sports represented on the Executive received no funding at all, and that seven un-represented sports did receive funding, amounting to £20,260, more than half of the total allocation. There is no question whatever of Executive members having used their positions improperly to the benefit of their own sports and the detriment of others.

Figure 3. Composition of HSC Executive 2002-3 (figures show number of members).

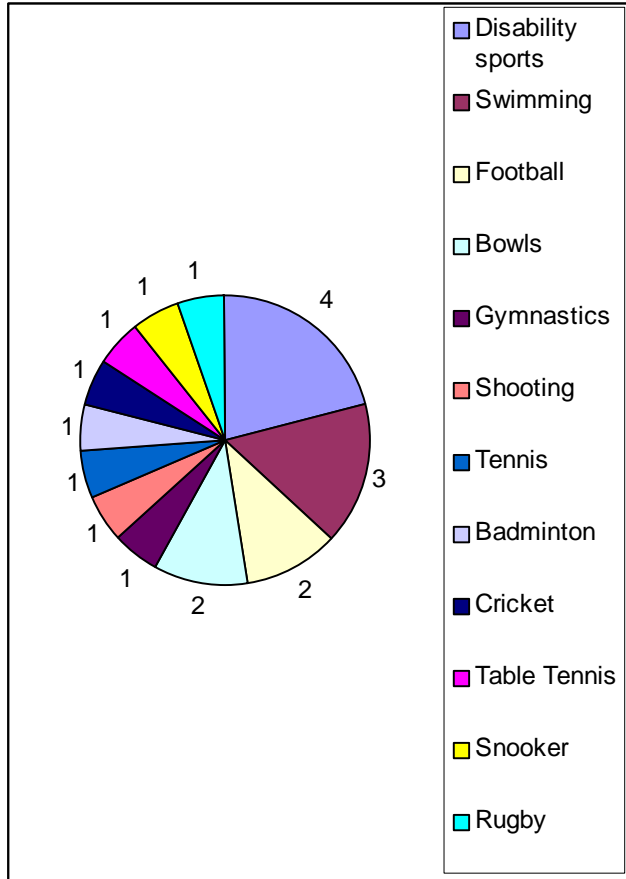
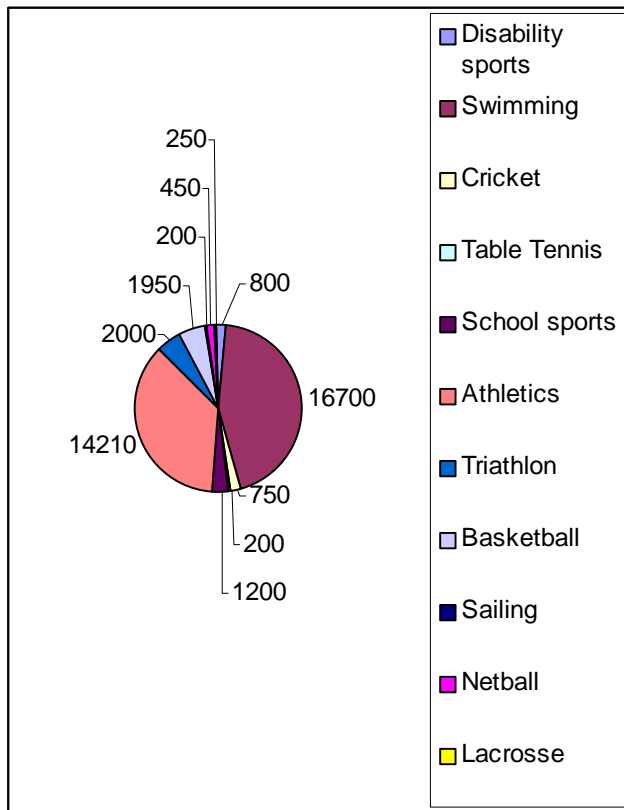


Figure 4. Money (£) Distributed to Various Sports by HSC 1999-2003.



Taking on balance the evidence from the questionnaire survey and from the focus group, the following summative judgements are made about the performance of Harrow Sports Council in relation to its Service Level Agreement.

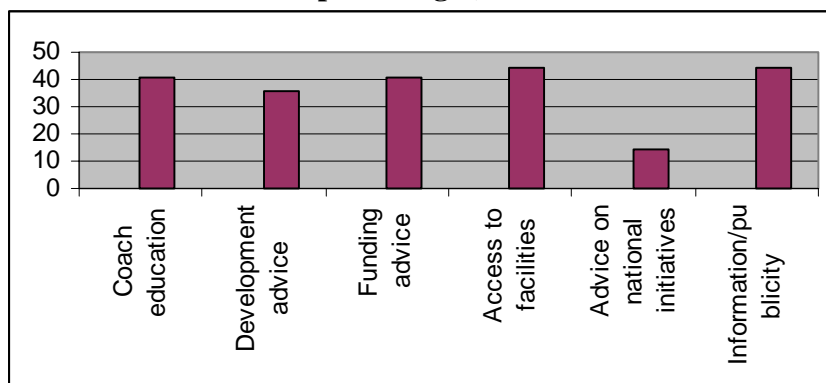
Objective	Performance
2.1	Unable to judge - this is a matter for councillors and officers.
2.2	Achievements, at least as perceived by stakeholder groups, appear to be very limited.
2.3	Unable to judge - this is a matter for councillors and officers.
2.4	Achievements, at least as perceived by stakeholder groups, appear to be very limited.
2.5	Dissemination of information seems to have been very weak.
2.6	Achievements, at least as perceived by stakeholder groups, appear to be very limited.
2.7	Achievements, at least as perceived by stakeholder groups, appear to be very limited.
3.1	Successfully achieved.
3.2	Successfully achieved in most areas, although London 50+ Sporting Challenge is a disappointment.
3.3	Successfully achieved.
3.4	Achievements, at least as perceived by stakeholder groups, appear to be very limited.

It is important to emphasise that many of the identified weaknesses should not be seen as reflecting negatively on the individuals concerned. Perhaps the most significant failure is one of communication and publicity, in respect of which it could be argued that Harrow Sports Council has had at its disposal neither the material resources, nor the skills needed, effectively to prosecute its mission. The £5 affiliation fee for organisations is so low as to generate the lowest of expectations, and to create an environment in which subscription and re-subscription operates on a more or less *ad hoc* basis. The Executive meets on a monthly basis, probably too often given the other commitments of its members, with the result that attendance is low, and possibly unrepresentative, leaving the Council unable to fulfil its strategic roles (2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 3.4), roles which could probably never be delivered by a purely voluntary, umbrella body, on a budget of less than £30,000. In its operational roles (3.1, 3.2, 3.3), by contrast, it has in fact been remarkably successful, although, probably as a result of a skills gap, it has not been able effectively to communicate these successes to stakeholder groups and the broader community.

6. The Needs and Aspirations of Stakeholder Bodies.

When asked which services the Sports Development Unit should provide, organisations responded to the questionnaire survey as shown on Figure 5.

Figure 5. "Which Services Should the SDU Provide?" (figures are actual numbers, out of a total of 66 - not percentages).



In terms of funding and sponsorship, 19 of the 66 organisations that responded to the questionnaire survey have received some form of funding or sponsorship in recent years, ranging from sponsorship by Ladbrooks & Kodak and gifts from local shops, to grants under the "Awards for All" scheme, Harrow Community & Youth Service, Youth Centenary Fund (Cricket), the Lords Taverners, MCB and John Lyons Charity. One commented "*No local assistance given although asked for had to rebuild without*" and another "*No but in the process of so doing - not getting any help from Harrow!!*". Only one organisation (Harrow Athletic Club) mentions financial support from HSC. The rather vague reference to "Harrow" speaks volumes - the organisations surveyed are not distinguishing in any meaningful way between the Harrow Sports Council, Harrow Borough Council and other Borough-wide structures. They see "Harrow" as a blob, blaming each part of it for the failures of all, whilst not recognising individually the successes of any.

There are doubtless opportunities to increase the proportion of organisations receiving funding and sponsorship (by raising awareness of funding opportunities and assisting in the development of bids), but it is doubtful whether these opportunities can be provided by a voluntary umbrella body such as Harrow Sports Council.

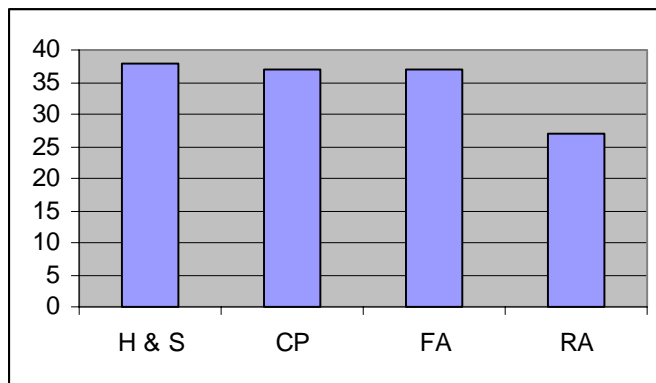
The questionnaire survey shows that 17 of the 66 organisations have participated in national initiatives such as Active Sports, 5 have been involved in the Volunteers' Initiative Programme, 4 in Running Sport and 3 in other initiatives. Only 4 of these organisations have "Club Mark" accreditation, but it was pointed out in the focus group that not all of these initiatives were applicable to all sports. The (understandable) focus of local sports clubs on their own sports is highlighted by the fact that almost all (60 out of 66) are affiliated to particular governing bodies (e.g. the Lawn Tennis Association), as compared to 25 affiliated to Harrow Sports Council. Around half of organisations (30 out of 66) have links with local schools, a reasonably encouraging figure considering that some of the organisations focus specifically on the recreational needs of older people.

Some comments in the focus group, however, suggested that communication between clubs and local schools were limited, perhaps because of schools' inevitable focus on the delivery of the National Curriculum.

As far as coaching is concerned, the number of coaches per organisation, based on the questionnaire responses, ranges from 0 to 25, with a mean of 4.5. 19 organisations have no coaches, but these are in sports (e.g. bowls, horseriding) where the concept of coaching does not apply in the same sense as in some others (e.g. football, tennis). 14 of the 66 organisations have coaches' fora. 27 of the 66 organisations have induction coaches.

Clubs were asked, in the questionnaire survey, whether coaches are regularly updated on health & safety, child protection, first aid and risk assessment. The responses are summarised by Figure 6.

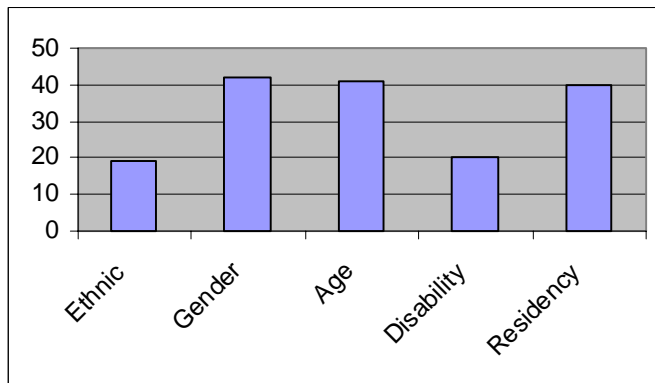
Figure 6. Updating of Coaches on Health & Safety, Child Protection, First Aid and Risk Assessment (figures shown are actual numbers, out of a total of 66 - not percentages).



25 organisations indicated that they use Criminal Records Bureau Procedures in relation to the appointment of coaches.

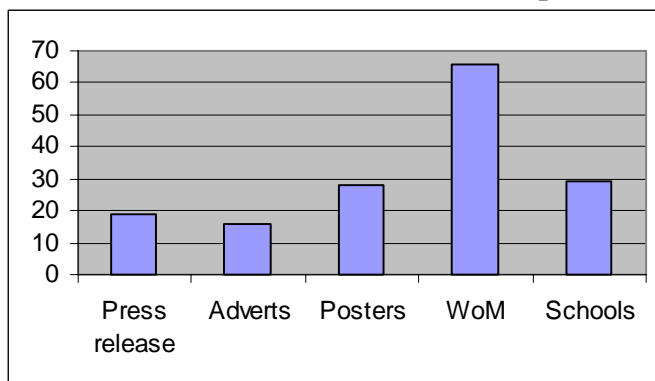
Organisations were asked, in the questionnaire survey, to indicate whether they held records on the profile of their membership in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, disability and residency. The responses are summarised by Figure 7.

Figure 7. Organisations Holding Information on membership Profiles (figures shown are actual numbers, out of a total of 66 - not percentages).



Organisations were also asked which methods of publicity they used, and the responses are summarised by Figure 8.

Figure 8. Methods of Publicity Used by Sporting Organisations (figures shown are actual numbers, out of a total of 66 - not percentages).



This does give rise to some concern, in that many of the organisations that indicate not having issued press releases are also organisations that indicate both competitive success on the part of individual members, and problems in recruiting new members. Effective public relations could, given appropriate training, provide these organisations with a passport to greatly enhanced visibility.

As part of Sports England's Active Sports Initiative, the Sports Development Unit has identified a number of sports as priorities for local development over the next few years: basketball, tennis, girls' football, netball, swimming, athletics, hockey, rugby and cricket. Organisations were asked, as part of the questionnaire survey, for their own nominations.

Predictably, most nominated their own sport, but sports which got more than one vote are:

Bowls 5
Badminton 4
Gymnastics 3
Girls' Cricket 2
Trampolining 2
Table Tennis 2.

Encouragingly, 38 of the 66 organisations that replied to the questionnaire survey expressed a willingness to work with the Sports Development Unit to identify issues and develop priorities. Despite this willingness, however, the focus group revealed a degree of scepticism with regard to the commitment of the Borough Council to sports development, and these perceptions will need to be overcome if effective partnerships are to be built. The following quote gives a flavour of the conversation:

D "The Borough Council needs to take a more proactive role. Does Harrow Council have any interest in sport at all? We pay to the Borough Council £115,000 per year in rent and rates, there are many other clubs paying, so they must take out of local sport at least £230,000. They give £30-odd thousand back to Harrow Sports Council, but it's a pittance compared to what we pay in. We very much want to expand our work with local schools, and we have been doing so, but there is a limit to what we can do on a purely voluntary basis. We need someone working full-time on sport in the community, and working for all sports, not just those that happen to be represented on the Executive of the Sports Council".

7. Conclusions and Recommendations.

- There is a general and striking lack of awareness among local stakeholder organisations of the roles and responsibilities of the Harrow Sports Council and its articulation with the Sports Development Unit, Harrow Borough Council and other local bodies. This underlines the need for a Sports Development Strategy, which should clearly identify roles and responsibilities and indicate the level of support and assistance that can be expected. Such a strategy would need to emerge from a full process of consultation, and its key points would need to be effectively and widely communicated.
- The Sports Development Strategy should redefine the role of the Harrow Sports Council, which should become more closely focussed on those roles which it is able effectively to deliver. The Sports Council itself should consider whether bi-monthly meetings are necessary or appropriate, and whether less frequent meetings might be better attended, allowing HSC to become more representative.
- The organisation of teams for inter-borough competitions, most notably the London Youth Games, is a role that the Harrow Sports Council performs well. The distribution of grants has also been effective, although this would be enhanced by more effective publicity both before and after the grants have been distributed. This would probably require the assistance of the Sports Development Unit.

- Many of the other roles identified in the Service Level Agreement are not roles that can be effectively discharged by a voluntary umbrella body with a limited budget. These roles, which include the promotion of sports and sport equity, the identification of needs in terms of facilities, the dissemination of information and the provision of advice on funding require professional skills that can only be provided by the Sports Development Unit.
- There is a need for a forum which brings together local sporting organisations to provide a body of opinion reflecting the views of local sports interests on matters concerning the development and future planning of sport and recreation and their facilities within the Borough. This cannot be provided through monthly meetings attended by 6-12 people, whose primary concern is, understandably, with their own sports. It would probably require one well-publicised meeting per year: there is no reason why this could not be held under the aegis of the Harrow Sports Council, but it would require active leadership from Borough officers.