



Tony Travers, Director, Greater London group at the London School of Economics, looks at influences on the voluntary sector

Five years is a short time in the 2000-year history of London. But there can be no doubt that this particular five-year period has seen radical changes in the capital. Labour was elected into government; a directly-elected mayor took office; an array of modernising social policies were introduced and, all the while, the capital matured into one of the world's most complex and extraordinary cities.

The arrival of a 'new' Labour government inevitably meant people expected big changes after 18 years of the Conservatives. But, in fact, although there have been many

initiatives. These approaches to policy make it possible to understand much about the government's motives.

Tony Blair and Chancellor Gordon Brown want to "lift people out of poverty" rather than marginally raising the incomes of the poor. Tax credits are preferred to extra social security payments. Narrowly-targeted programmes of public spending are aimed at particular neighbourhoods, rather than whole local authorities. London is awash with zones, special initiatives and one-off funding streams. Simple it isn't, while the long-term effects will take some years to assess.

London the mosaic city

new initiatives affecting public policy, changes within society probably mattered more.

The Blair government at first adopted an approach designed to hold public expenditure at the levels set by the previous administration. Soon it became clear that 'modernisation' of local government, the NHS and virtually everything else was the key priority. In fact, after five years it is clear that the desire to modernise public services derives from a suspicion within new Labour that existing public services are not always efficient and effective.

London's deprived communities, in common with those elsewhere in the country, have found themselves the object of a bewildering array of government-backed

One aspect of new Labour's modernisation – and, indeed, of devolution – was the creation of the Greater London Authority, consisting of a city-wide mayor and assembly. Ken Livingstone, leader of the Greater London Council from 1981 to 1986, became London's first-ever directly-elected mayor. This reform brought an element of American politics into the heart of the capital. As an elected executive for the whole city, the mayor inevitably has to govern in such a way as to take account of the rainbow of races, religions and lifestyles that make up London.

In the five years since 1997, the capital has had to absorb many pressures and unexpected changes. The population of London has continued to rise sharply. International immigration into the capital has occurred at an unprecedented level.

Recent research commissioned by the mayor suggests that the population is now 7.4 million, (not its largest ever population, which was 8 million in 1939) and will rise to over 8 million by 2015. Immigration has included asylum seekers, young citizens from within Europe and the Commonwealth, and rich bankers from the United States.

London is now a diverse, multi-lingual metropolis of epic proportions.

But not everyone believes London should develop in this way. During 1999, a bomber attacked targets in Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho. His targets were the African-Caribbean, Asian and gay communities. His motives – as it turned out at a later court case – were explicitly derived from extremist, National Socialist, objectives. This random and brutal incursion into London's apparently peaceful community relations was a reminder that there is a fragility to the capital's unique culture.

Policing London – the Met were highly effective over the capture of the bomber – has also become a matter of continuous political and community concern. Tragic failings in the handling of the Stephen Lawrence case led to major criticisms of police practices and management. The current senior officers of the Metropolitan Police (which is now subject to greater accountability than in the past) clearly understand the problems of policing a racially-diverse city in a way that has altered radically since the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Voluntary organisations have, as in earlier years, been vital in providing help to many individuals and communities that official organisations cannot reach. London has one of the most wide-reaching and creative non-governmental sectors in the world. City Parochial Foundation, as a consistent supporter of organisations for the dispossessed, has played a key part in underpinning London's social and economic development.

Five years is not long for London. But for those of us who live here, particularly ones who have arrived from strife-torn countries overseas, even a few months can seem a lifetime. Freedoms – to work, to relax and to live peacefully – may be mundane, but they are also precious. London offers the bright lights and big city attractions that bring the ambitious to live here. But the

February 1997

Labour Party publishes report on voluntary sector *Building the Future Together*.

May 1997

Labour government is elected.

August 1997

Home Secretary Jack Straw announces a full independent judicial inquiry into the handling by the police and Crown Prosecution Service of the murder of Stephen Lawrence in April 1993, to be headed by the former High Court judge Sir William Macpherson.

March 1998

Lawrence public inquiry opens at the Elephant & Castle.

Tim Cook retires after 12 years as Clerk. He is succeeded by Bharat Mehta.

More than 300 people – most of them from organisations funded by Trust for London – attend an event at the Guildhall to launch *Trusting in the Community*, a report published to mark the Trust's 10th anniversary.

October 1998

CPF report *Financial Monitoring of Voluntary Organisations* looking at 59 organisations of various sizes is published.

November 1998

Lawrence Inquiry ends after 69 days of hearings.

A compact between the voluntary sector and the government is agreed, setting out a set of shared principles, paving the way for codes of practice on issues such as funding, community groups and volunteering.

city also provides a haven for those fleeing persecution and poverty.

The period from 1997 to 2002 has seen London mature into perhaps the ultimate muddled, creative mosaic city. Whatever it is, its people made it thus.