

CROYDON VOLUNTARY ACTION

LOCAL, LOCAL, LOCAL

The 2011 – 2014
CVA Strategic Plan



croydon**voluntary**action
celebrating 100 years

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strategies to involve local people more in shaping their own communities and in running local services have now been adopted at government level. The focus is on new rights and powers being given to local people, new schemes to encourage volunteering and new incentives to involve charities, voluntary groups and social enterprises in public service delivery.

Coinciding with severe public spending cuts, the current strategies to devolve more power and responsibility to local people are proving contentious. The structural deficit may be the government's main preoccupation, but the role of volunteers and the part charities play in delivering local services are now the subjects of national debate.

In reappraising its own role as the champion of volunteering, community empowerment and local charity services, CVA has found it timely to revisit the voluntary sector's own business case for building stronger and more enterprising communities. In its leadership role CVA is expected by its members to be plotting the right course for volunteers, community activists and local charities. In particular, at this critical time for Croydon's voluntary sector, CVA's obligation is to be offering directions towards the right destinations. This plan provides clear statements of CVA's positions on volunteering, community involvement and voluntary sector services and of where we are going in our support of them.

1.1 Voluntary sector services – the case for:

Voluntary and community sector (VCS) services are set up by the people who use them. They respond more directly to a person's needs and engage the service-user in an affirming way that seeks to overcome social and cultural barriers. VCS services offer alternative ways of meeting a person's multiple needs in an environment that encourages innovative and pioneering work. By going to the root causes of a social problem the VCS offers people pathways to keep them supported in the community, achieving medium-term savings by relieving the pressure on the NHS and social services. Early intervention, added value, preventative and holistic are the bywords of VCS provision and the key ingredients of a more personalised approach to service delivery. CVA would like to see:

Local commissioners play to the strengths of VCS providers by increasing their role in service delivery without stifling their unique qualities. If VCS providers collaborate more innovatively, acquire new business skills and adopt quality controls to take on a more mainstream role in delivering public services, they must also be allowed to bring with them the working practices and principles that have delivered value for money and accessibility within an ethos and environment that is quite different to the one offered by public sector providers. VCS providers can help shape public service transformation by bringing a greater number of service users into more enterprising settings that help to improve each individual's well-being and stimulate their personal development.

1.2 Volunteering – the case for:

Volunteering gives equally to the individual and to the community being served. For the individual, volunteering offers a sense of purpose, of community and of personal well-being. Volunteers perform their tasks willingly, free of charge and often with a passion for helping others. In so doing, volunteers can develop skills that enhance their job prospects and gain new experiences that may shape their future careers. Volunteers bring skills and motivations to a community service that are unique in their value. As well as making services cheaper to run, volunteers can enhance their quality by providing the service-user with an informal role model who offers support and advice based on personal experience. A service supported by volunteers that is more personalised, more user-friendly and more valued by its users, is more likely to be high performing. CVA would like to see:

Volunteering retain all its main characteristics – i.e. no element of compulsion, the availability of specialist infrastructure support and an ethos that enables volunteers to perform appropriate roles benefitting both them and the communities they serve. Volunteers cannot replace paid workers in order to keep services open. But where there is a will among local people to maintain valued services, volunteers will have a key role to play that, if properly supported, can achieve sustainability and local ownership. Specialist infrastructure provides volunteering with the underpinning management and support it needs. Volunteers need help in getting started in the roles that suit them and organisations hosting volunteers need support in learning the tricks of the trade – i.e. in offering more placements of a higher quality and in dealing with the difficult HR issues like safeguarding. Volunteer Centres provide this support and guidance to their members.

1.3 Community involvement – the case for:

Community involvement creates a sense of community in which local people feel they can contribute to and feel a part of the places in which they live and work. By influencing and shaping what happens and goes on around them, people achieve a feeling of belonging. This in turn breeds caring and responsibility, nurturing a personal and social well-being that can manifest as neighbourliness or, more formally, as a community activism that both challenges and complements representative democracy. Community involvement can deliver responsive and accessible services that are shaped by local people who may be experiencing hardships and, as self-advocates, have identified the most effective ways of meeting their own needs. CVA would like to see:

An environment in which local people are enabled to be involved on an independent basis, taking responsibility themselves for delivering solutions that they are uniquely well placed to find and develop. Being independent itself, one step removed from direct service delivery roles and with a remit stretching across all client groups, CVA can provide local people with a range of platforms to choose from in getting involved. Different methods of involvement appeal to different groups and a community development expertise is needed to engage people, to make them accountable and to link them up around cross-cutting issues. Civil society and the local infrastructure supporting it relies on strong government that doesn't stifle or control but, without always giving power away, helps to create an environment in which people are prepared to pick it up. In return, a well organised and supported civil society will provide local decision-makers with clear lines of communication to people living in the communities they serve.

The following sections describe how CVA will deliver its plans to support VCS providers, volunteers and community voices over the next three years

2. CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT SERVICE

In the next three years CVA aims to:

- Be the leading infrastructure organisation providing practical one-to-one and on-line support to VCOs in Croydon, large and small, with specialist support around all the hallmark areas of running a charitable organisation or social enterprise
- Be the first port of call for any individual entrepreneur or activist who wants to start up a voluntary organisation or social enterprise for Croydon beneficiaries
- Work with local commissioners to ensure that there is a healthy and fair environment in which the VCS can access opportunities to provide services to local people
- Help finance the Big Society in Croydon by managing funds that support local grassroots organisations in finding solutions to social problems caused by deprivation and inequality
- Co-ordinate and encourage collaboration between VCOs in Croydon by providing back-office support – i.e. co-location within CVA-run properties and support with quality systems enabling VCOs to evidence the impact of preventative services
- Be the leading VCS learning provider in South London, collaborating with local partners such as Croydon College and CALAT and reputable awarding bodies such as the Institute of Leadership and Management
- Be at the forefront of providing timely information on all aspects of Croydon's civil society via effective communications
- Provide the leading property management service for VCOs in Croydon
- Provide VCOs with a high quality and low cost solution for the production of all types of marketing and promotional materials
- Continue to be regarded as the 'voice of the voluntary sector' and support any initiatives that raise the profile of the civil society and lead to better services for the people of Croydon

2.1 CVA's capacity building support service will deliver:

One-to-one support

- CVA will provide intensive one-to-one capacity building support to VCOs on the full range of organisational development areas including good governance, financial management, volunteering, quality assurance, marketing, monitoring and evaluation, and fundraising

- CVA will provide start-up support to individual entrepreneurs and ‘community champions’ that may wish to set up a community organisation, charity or social enterprise. CVA’s emphasis will be on supporting groups to meet identified needs, to collaborate with existing organisations where they exist, and not to duplicate services, resources and efforts
- CVA will develop expertise around consortium working, partnerships and mergers and will proactively encourage and facilitate VCOs to talk to each other more, to share strategies and collaborate to achieve economies of scale, efficiencies and more effective delivery of services to the targeted clients
- CVA will provide practical support to VCOs to gain from commissioning opportunities both locally, regionally and nationally where appropriate. CVA will develop expertise around supporting VCOs to be commissioned in certain sectors, (e.g. health and young people) and particularly for personalisation and co-production type services
- CVA will provide practical support to its members to benefit from the emerging commissioning regimes led by GPs and schools
- CVA will provide an accessible enquiry and support service that makes efficient use of the available resources, is innovative in the methods used, is inclusive for all VCOs and recognises the additional support needs of excluded communities within Croydon
- CVA will provide specific high quality services in identified growth areas such as print and design, premises management, financial management, HR support, fundraising, and training consultancy. These will be charged services and contribute to CVA’s financial sustainability strategy, so that essential underfunded support services can be sustained
- CVA will re-establish its reputation as the centre of excellence for social enterprise support in the Croydon area

Learning and development

- CVA will deliver and strive to extend its range of VCS training programmes on organisational development subjects such as fundraising, business planning, governance, volunteering, quality assurance, financial management, charity registration, company formation, mergers and partnership working
- CVA will provide a broad portfolio of training for individuals within civic society who may wish to develop their personal and professional skills for working in the VCS, such as project management, teaching, counselling, advocacy, management, advice and guidance
- CVA will be an accredited learning centre with key awarding bodies and offer a broad package of accredited and non-accredited learning opportunities that are customised to suit specific client groups from across the sectors
- CVA will have strong links with other learning providers such as CALAT, Croydon College

and the London Learning Consortium and will deliver contracts for a range of funders including the Skills Funding Agency

- CVA will encourage its member organisations to develop their own specialist training programmes and be satellite centres of CVA's Learning Centre where appropriate. Various programmes will run across many sites by various partner organisations under the CVA learning umbrella

Information

- CVA's website will be the first port of call for organisations wanting to be signposted to resources, factsheets and advice on the full range of policies, procedures and good practice on running a charity or social enterprise
- CVA will be the first port of call for any agency wanting to find out about the profile, make-up and characteristics of Croydon's civic society via the CVA database of VCOs and social enterprises, acting as a powerful tool for data gathering, information dissemination and targeted communications
- CVA will produce timely and targeted e-bulletins for members, using the appropriate media technology (e.g. social media, text etc) to communicate with VCOs and the wider public
- CVA will target its communications strategy so that information filters through to all intended communities including those that may be excluded or marginalised for whatever reason. This will include using traditional face-to face communications, outreach, telephone and specialist press where appropriate
- CVA will be the first point of call for VCOs needing help or advice on booking rooms for meetings, help with organisational policy and procedures, advice on recruitment and information on local community meetings and events

A thriving sector

- CVA will represent Croydon's VCS at all the appropriate levels to ensure that it remains supported by intelligent local commissioning
- CVA will support organisations and bids that bring extra investment into Croydon's local communities
- CVA will manage grants to the voluntary sector so that valuable projects and high performing organisations can be supported and their services developed for the benefit of local people. Where CVA does not have grants to distribute directly, CVA will support other agencies in their grant making function so that informed decisions are made and quality needs-led projects are funded and local VCOs supported

- CVA will encourage its members to look creatively at ways in which they can be more efficient and more resourceful with their limited resources, so that key services are not lost in Croydon, by offering back-office functions such as HR or finance that help reduce running costs
- CVA has a property portfolio of community buildings and public spaces that it owns or manages and will explore opportunities for local people to manage local assets or take ownership of public places for the benefit of their communities
- CVA will take on a lead and accountable body role in new projects that bring benefits, resources and funding into local communities

3. VOLUNTEERING

In the next three years CVA aims to:

- Ensure that there is a strategic approach to the development of volunteering in Croydon
- Carry out innovative work to support volunteering throughout Croydon
- Increase the number of people involved in the community through formal and informal volunteering
- Increase the effectiveness of volunteer and community participation by supporting volunteer involving organisations to manage more effectively
- Increase our capacity to support people without any experience of volunteering

3.1 The Volunteer Centre Croydon (VCC) will deliver:

More people involved in the community through formal and informal volunteering

- VCC will help people to think more creatively about how they want to volunteer their time to help others, and how they can become active in their local communities
- VCC will bring down the different barriers that prevent a large proportion of the people expressing an interest in volunteering from doing so, thereby increasing the conversion rate of people registering who then go on to volunteer
- VCC will be more hands on in our approach, increasing contact and follow up with people who register with us
- VCC will make our services more accessible, diversifying how and when we run advice sessions and workshops by running themed volunteer fairs and information sessions
- VCC will support people from the business community to use their skills as volunteers by developing diverse, high quality opportunities that are short term and easy to access
- VCC will create a network of volunteer champions drawn from a cross section of the community to promote volunteering in Croydon
- VCC will create a 'volunteer bank' of highly skilled volunteers who can be called on to respond to specific needs and a 'pool of volunteers' that can respond to short practical volunteering opportunities

A higher quality experience of volunteering

- VCC will improve the quality of people's volunteering by offering volunteer-involving-organisations (VIOs) a complete package of volunteer support including support with volunteer strategies, targeted recruitment campaigns, volunteer selection (interviews and reference checking), CRB checks, on-going volunteer management, dealing with disputes, continuing health checks and volunteer training
- VCC will strengthen the Volunteer Organisers Forum; increase marketing to improve our brand identity and develop longer term links between businesses
- VCC will support the establishment of a diverse volunteer workforce and increase the retention of volunteers within VIOs

More support for hard-to-reach groups

- VCC will seek to continue and broaden its supported volunteering projects and to develop specific projects to target those that need additional support to start volunteering
- VCC will offer bespoke training and consultancy enabling groups to 'outsource' parts of their volunteer management; collaborate and work in partnership with other local agencies; and get involved in cross borough and sub-regional work

4. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In the next three years CVA aims to:

- Deepen community democracy and empowerment by developing an independent Community Democracy Hub for Croydon to connect communities from all ages and backgrounds and deliver products and services that strengthen community democracy in the borough
- Be a central resource for coordinating, sustaining and growing community empowerment in Croydon with links to informal and formal political engagement
- Establish a stronger and more connected independent civil society with clear pathways to civic participation
- Enhance community networking and provide a range of platforms for connecting and strengthening local community groups, voluntary organisations and local resident activists

4.1 The Community Involvement Team will deliver:

Organised and connected communities of interest

- CVA will provide universal, targeted and consultancy services to deepen community democracy. The Hub will be a resource for good practice in community democracy, organise all representation, provide a supportive environment for activists and campaigning, and a practical source of advice and guidance. The Hub will connect with local public scrutiny functions by participation in reviews and participatory research, as witnesses and by coordinating local views through wider networks
- CVA will deliver face-to-face and innovative online networks that reach both communities of interest and civil society organisations. These networks will be responsive to a range of voluntary groups, older people, people with an interest in mental health, children and young people, refugees, BME people, women, environmental groups, people interested in health and care and faith groups
- CVA will support E-democracy in Croydon via open source online involvement at www.talk2croydon.co.uk. and other social media tools. Talk2Croydon will become the Hub's independent centre of e-democracy with open source tools encouraging local people and groups to exercise their rights to be involved in local and national democracy
- CVA will be the main community organising body in Croydon providing an expert community development service using recognised techniques such as: Asset Mapping, Participatory Budgeting and Community Organising. We will nurture local activism and social organising through neighbourhood networks and action teams starting with community buildings as a focus. We will work with the 24 Safer Neighbourhood Panels

and the Police Community Engagement Groups. We will establish Participatory Research Hubs and encourage enthusiastic local activists to take a lead on plans for their area

A stronger voice for local people, community leaders and civil society organisations

- CVA will launch and grow the Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance (CVSA) facilitating the regular selection of community voices to the most strategic partnerships in the borough. CVSA will be at the core of the Community Democracy Hub and will speak for voluntary groups, faith groups, local networks and activists. It will shadow the Local Strategic Partnership's newly formed Congress
- CVA's networks will be a source of expertise on current issues and provide a safe-space for learning and for lobbying. We will provide independent and impartial facilitation of networks using community development principles
- CVA will establish a People Power List. This will be a development of our existing A Voice for My Community programme which began to connect with and support those speaking for a community, group or network. We will identify new and existing community leaders, representatives and activists and provide them with training, action learning sets, bursaries, guidance, peer-mentoring and shadowing opportunities. The People Power List will have a dedicated young people's section. CVA will enhance their skills and enable filter-down community organising
- CVA's Xpress project (C&YP Participation Service) will be the independent young people-led arm of the Hub. It will continue to be led by a team of dedicated young sessional workers and be directed by a network of 1000 young people. Using a range of tried and tested techniques - including the recently developed HYPE tool (How Young People Evaluate); young researchers; e-democracy for young people; drama and creative participation, space and place facilitators; participatory multi-media; young people-led events and campaigns - Croydon Xpress will remain at the cutting edge of young people's participation. Croydon Xpress will specialise in the 8-19 age range and establish close links with the Children's Trust by providing regular input from CYP. Croydon Xpress will develop a consultancy and training service led by young people
- CVA will provide our tailored and accredited programmes for budding community leaders including Health Champions, Community Researchers and Community Champions
- CVA will host the local Health Watch Croydon (formerly Croydon LINK) locating this new service as the health and wellbeing arm of the Democracy Hub. With its statutory powers the LINK/Health Watch will have powers to enable interest groups to influence local developments and plans from commissioning to delivery. We expect to establish strong links with the local GP Consortia, Public Health and Social Care Managers
- CVA will organise an annual 'Big Question Week' to measure the impact of voluntary sector services on the lives of those they serve. This would be organised to record the answers to one question, asked in one week by all VCOs to their service users culminating in a borough-wide report.

Increasing understanding of democratic structures

- CVA will provide a democracy advice service for local people and groups. This will include advice on accessing local Councillors, MPs, on campaigning, using powers of petitioning, the community right to challenge and navigating decision-making (including planning services) using online and interactive tools. Croydon Xpress will provide a specialist CYP version of this service. The service will be volunteer-led. We will also use our expertise to provide a Community Democracy Consultancy Service for public sector partners offering a package of tools, training and advice

Growing opportunities for new communities and seldom heard voices

- CVA will work with and support self-advocacy groups to represent their communities of interest. We will offer opportunities for these groups to grow and develop and take on responsibilities locally through the services within our Community Democracy Hub. We will provide platforms and opportunities for co-production and advocate for these groups through strategic partnerships
- CVA will reach out to and create relationships with those least heard in the borough and develop new projects that enable them to be heard. We will continue to facilitate networking opportunities to help excluded groups to have a voice
- CVA will specialise in connecting communities of interest and providing a bridge for these groups to connect with others and influence local decisions. Community cohesion through the Democracy Hub will create a better environment for empowerment. Projects such as the Environment Network, Faiths Together, Older People's Network, Refugee work and Croydon Xpress are of particular relevance to this theme. We will develop community-led cohesion projects with community experts leading the way

5. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The success of major government programmes on localism, the big society and public health will depend significantly on how well we can nurture an active and enterprising civil society and CVA's main priority is to support VCS providers, volunteers and community interests to take on more lead roles and responsibilities in Croydon.

However, in bringing service-users, practitioners and decision-makers together in joint efforts to improve services, CVA is also able to support its LSP partners to achieve their own complementary aims. Indeed, CVA's strategic plan can only be delivered in partnership and we look forward to finding new and innovative ways of working together with our local partners to meet the challenges ahead.

6. POSTSCRIPT – ABOUT CVA

CVA is the Council for Voluntary Service in Croydon. Our core roles are: to provide VCOs in Croydon with strategic and practical support; to promote and strengthen volunteering in the borough, and to develop civil society by enabling local people and communities of interest to connect with and influence the body politic. CVA provides training, information, fundraising, property, marketing and grant-giving services; we host Croydon's Volunteer Centre; we run a range of community leadership programmes and we service community networks that are representative of key client groups in the borough. As a result of cutbacks CVA's income has fallen in the past year by 37% putting our annual turnover at around £1.5 million. CVA's Board has successfully driven down its costs via staff redundancies, a salary freeze and the outsourcing of key functions (finance; HR). This process will continue while, at the same time, we step up our fundraising efforts to bolster the support for social enterprise, volunteering within disadvantaged communities and for the smaller VCOs meeting new needs and representing emerging communities of interest. In common with our partner agencies we are striving to enhance the quality of our services in order to achieve more impact with less funding.

For more information on CVA please visit our new website - www.cvalive.org.uk

CVA
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