



Community Fund Budget Proposals: Impact Assessment (CVSA)

1. Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance (CVSA)

1.1 In the third of a series of meetings, the CVSA – convened by CVA as the representative body supporting VCS involvement in Croydon’s strategic planning and decision-making processes – met on 21 January 2021 to agree a collective response to the Council’s proposed cuts to its VCS budgets. This meeting followed the two meetings before Christmas attended by Council officers and Councillor David Wood, the Cabinet Member for Communities. The fourth meeting in this series will be held in March – on a date to be agreed with Councillor Wood.

2. Headline issues

2.1 The full CVSA Submission will be made through the formal minute of today’s meeting – currently being transcribed. The headline issues in summary are:

- **Duplication:** this is often raised (legitimately) in relation to VCS services, with the VCS responding through the formation of provider collaboratives and via mergers. The duplication of services across the statutory and voluntary sectors is commented on less often, but there is a strong perception within the VCS of its work being duplicated.
- **Public Service Reform:** relating to the issue above, the VCS welcomes the invitation from the Council to consider what it (the VCS) might take over from the Council in delivering. Rather than reverting to bringing community-led services in-house, the Council is invited into a discussion on what it does that the VCS could potentially do better. This discussion needs structuring within a formal process (see section 3 below).
- **VCS Accommodation:** There are concerns around the future of community assets in the borough – that they will either be sold off or made unsustainable by the Council charging commercial rents. Alongside this, there is an ongoing need for more shared use of community facilities – with faith organisations volunteering to lead the way.
- **Volunteering:** this jewel in the VCS crown has been somewhat taken for granted of late, remarkably so given the herculean effort in the year of Covid19. The social value of volunteering can be calculated, and every time it reveals a staggering saving for the

public purse – on what otherwise would be paid roles. Does the Council require a cost-benefit analysis of volunteering in order to inform its proposals?

- The mental health pandemic: the Evening Standard's current investigation has exposed an alarming escalation of self-harm, suicidal thoughts and eating disorders among young people, with the number of referrals to CAMHS doubling since this time last year. VCS support reduces the likelihood of readmission to statutory mental health services and prevents self harm and suicidal ideation. Again the VCS stands in the frontline – requiring investment in its services, not reductions in funding, to cope with more and more referrals (to provision that is often volunteer-led) from NHS services for bereavement and counselling.
- VCS Superpower: Croydon's VCS is the envy of other boroughs, not least for its prowess in levering external funds into the borough. Conservatively, every pound of investment by Croydon Council in the local VCS generates five more in external finance. The current proposals will deprive us of the capacity to collaborate on the sort of partnership bids that Croydon's VCS excels in.
- Covid19 – the legacy: this must never be forgotten – in 2020 Croydon's VCS, supported by Croydon Council, showed why its reach into communities and ways of working require a fundamental shifting of resources in the borough. The current proposals to cut VCS services begs the question – how, with the VCS incapacitated, will Croydon cope with the increasing demand for support from people coping not just with their poor mental health but with addictions, domestic violence, underemployment and concerns around their housing and benefits?
- Carers Support: the pandemic has created 4.5 million new carers across the UK. Croydon had a very high number of people with caring responsibilities even before Covid19 - the cuts could mean the end of respite care and wellbeing support for the very people who kept the system from collapsing during the pandemic.
- The domino-effect: one of the reasons Croydon's VCS is so adept at providing seamless, personalised support for local people is the interconnectivity of its services. This is why when cuts are made across the sector this has a multiplying effect – with the outcome being a lower quality of service for people experiencing multiple disadvantages. VCSOs, whether they are funded by the Council or not, will be severely affected by the impact that rent relief withdrawal will have on the community venues they use, the affordable training they access and the complementary VCS services they refer to.
- Relieving the pressure on statutory services – it's hard to imagine that anyone in the NHS is underestimating how much pressure is taken off its services by the VCS effort. VCSOs are in the business of prevention and the cost to and strain on Council services will be so much more if these organisations collapse. If a full-scale cost-impact is

required to quantify how much the cuts to VCS services will end up costing – through the explosion in demand for statutory services – then this can form part of the proposed way forward (see section 3 below).

- Grassroots community groups: groups in Croydon that are closest to our communities, flexible and resourceful in delivering – and filling many of the gaps in statutory sector services – could disappear entirely when the small community grant programmes is withdrawn. Their voices are already under-represented – the cuts will marginalise them even more.
- Alignment: one of the weaknesses in the Council’s proposals to cut VCS services is its disconnection from the decisions being made on those Council services being withdrawn. The Council has asked the VCS to assess which of its services can least damagingly be cut – without providing the requested information on how its own cuts are impacting on, for example, people in the borough with disabilities.

3. Croydon Communities Renewal Plan

3.1 On behalf of the sector, CVA has issued a joint statement proposing Council, NHS and VCS collaboration on a *Croydon Communities Renewal Plan (CCRP)* to coordinate a realignment of preventative services in the borough. The issues highlighted in this response are suitable for consideration at the proposed *Croydon Renewal Improvement Board* – under the proposed CCRP agenda item.

CVSA

January 2021