

Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance

Thursday 21st January 10:00- 12:00

Online

Welcome and introductions: Steve Phaure, CVA's CEO introduced the event

CVA has held a series of three Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance meetings on the Council's financial crisis and how that would impact on Croydon's Voluntary and Community Sector. The deadline for the council's consultation is this Sunday 24th January 2021. CVA has made representation on behalf of the sector and issued a joint statement proposing a council, NHS, VCS collaboration on the Croydon Communities Renewal Plan. A discussion is requested at the Croydon Renewal Improvement Board.

No directive has been made yet by MHCLG. We consider that on behalf of Croydon's VCS we have an important say to bring to the consultation. Additionally, we have an opportunity through The King's Fund to bring funds into the borough with the VCS taking the lead role in preventative services.

VCS Response to Council Proposals: Sarah Burns, CVA Head of Communities

The council held a Community Fund meeting earlier in the week addressing their proposed cuts to Croydon's VCS. Gavin Handford and Rachel Soni presented the cuts to the VCS as a given. The meeting was described as 'an opportunity for join up'. The council seeing itself as facilitating connections to identify VCS savings and efficiencies. The finances to be cut from the VCS include:

£400,000 Community Fund reduction

£100,000 Small Grants to close

£335,000 loss of Transformation funding

Whilst there is no timeline as yet from MHCLG, the council's timeline is that proposals will go to Scrutiny on 8th/9th February, reported to cabinet who'll consider the consultation and recommendations to full cabinet on 1st March.

When groups are written to and a time line given to manage cuts is unclear.

The silver lining was given by Rachel Soni on co-designing community solutions with One Croydon commissioning but no time line given.

Q – Croydon Neighbourhood Watch – What is the exact percentage of cuts being proposed?

SB – My understanding is that, for the Community Fund, it's a 30% cut for each organisation and the Council are looking for us to propose what impact that will have and how things could be done differently.

Discussion:

How will these proposals impact you? How can you do things differently?

Q- Croydon Youth Theatre- Is there any news on rent subsidy? It's the only subsidy we receive and it would be devastating.

SP-The council has put £260,000 against that saving

Cllr Andy Stranack (Shadow Cabinet Member for Safer Croydon and Communities)- The cuts are for next financial year and have already been agreed by the council and are part of the proposal to MHCLG. The cuts in future years might be greater. The budget setting meeting, which was going to be at the beginning of March, is going to be delayed. Also, the Council are expecting a response by MHCLG by the end of February but it has been suggested they want the Council to make asset disposal a priority; we haven't seen, as yet, a list of assets the Council would want to dispose of but we can imagine it will include libraries and a range of buildings the voluntary sector presently uses.

SP- A budget isn't agreed until it's agreed. We are considering this as a genuine consultation.

Maddy – We know we need to make some tough choices but we want to be community led in making those choices. In terms of impact of cuts, there would be a 30% increase in our rent if rent subsidies are removed, which would mean we would to immediately cease our activities at Cornerstone House.

SP – CVA would have to cut the Training programme for voluntary sector groups, leaving the borough without support for good practice in the sector and for management standards.

Hear Us – The main impact would be on our core costs, particularly with regards to Project management and this would impact how much we would be able to actually deliver. It would have an impact on us being able to support some people with serious mental illness through their recovery which is vital to enable people to get back on their feet and play a role in society and their communities. Our support reduces the likelihood of readmission to statutory mental health services and prevents self-harm and suicidal ideation.

UNACC - We are based in the Waterside centre and are part funded by the Community fund. We are currently facing a cut to our funding of 30% as well as a rent increase of 58% - that is on top of the approximately £20,000 loss in income due to covid. This has come at the absolute worst time for organisations when it's already been the hardest year for everyone. We have been in existence for nearly 50 years and are now facing extremely difficult decisions.

Ment4 – It's important to engage the Council on how more efficient our partnership can be. The Croydon Youth Partnership we are part of is looking at areas of duplication in youth services where efficiency can save money. Where are we duplicating and where can the voluntary sector take over some of the Council's services?

Disability Croydon – We are likely to close. Also, on another note, South Norwood library is on the list to be closed and it would be good for the community to take it over.

SP – Appreciated but there are hidden costs in taking over such buildings, in this instance it was suggested to us that they are as much as a million pounds.

CCC – If people are interested in the cuts to libraries, they can contact me CroydonNeighbourhoods@gmail.com www.croydonccc.wordpress.com We must hold the council to account on this and future consultations on compliance with legislation. If we don't then this consultation will be ineffective.

Croydon Association for Mental Health Pastoral Care – Also representing some churches in South Norwood, which are wanting to offer to small groups in the borough accommodation and space for meetings post pandemic.

Croydon Community Mediation - With funding cuts the offices may be given up. The service is unlikely to continue without financial support. We offer help to those with neighbour difficulties. We can offer a safe neutral venue for meeting in our offices in Ramsey Court Church Street. With lockdown we can only offer telephone and Zoom support. This doesn't meet everyone's needs. Problems have escalated with lockdown.

Carers Information Centre – The impact on our partnership with Mind in Croydon and Mencap will be a complete closure of our free carers' respite service (the only one in Croydon), the Health and Wellbeing services (which reduces isolation) and Mencap's Learning Disabilities carers support service. Vital provision for the very people who kept the Health and Social Care services from collapsing. The pandemic has resulted in 4.5 Million new carers across the UK, with Croydon already having a very high number as it was.

Croydon Neighbourhood Care – There will be crisis and older people, who mentally declined already during the pandemic, will end up in hospital. We are bridging the gap that statutory sector cannot fill and taking funding away from us will ultimately put more pressure on statutory services. GPs and statutory services themselves are referring residents to us to keep older people in the community safeguarded and connected as there is nothing else. They want volunteers to deliver this but are taking away small amounts of funding from groups that are entirely run by volunteers

Croydon Drop In – The impact would be on our frontline services (less children, young people and families being supported) and back office (which is crucial in the running of all our services in particular fundraising, the ability to grow and recruit volunteers). For every pound we are funded we provide 8 pounds of investment and value.

We need to keep a log of groups being cut as small services have already been approached by the Council. The letters we've already received are divisive. We should bring MPs into the conversation.

SP - CNCA is inviting organisations who have already being approached for cuts to let them know. The impact of cuts on organisations supporting young people's mental health will be massive, with 100% increase in self harm, CAHMS waiting lists being doubled, 65% more secondary school pupils having suicidal thoughts during the pandemic and in years to come. This can be said of other issues such as Domestic abuse and housing and why it is so important.

Gig Buddies - The loss of the Community Grants could really impact our Gig Buddies project. We will lose a source of major match funding, which will in turn affect our chances of securing funding to continue the project. We are based out of a local community space which we could also lose if they do not find a solution. Gig Buddies provides an alternative way to support adults with learning disabilities in Croydon. Our project is essential in tackling isolation and loneliness many people with learning disabilities face, and in these difficult times is even more essential. Our little community relies on us and each other during these times to stay connected, and if we couldn't offer that support it will put more pressure on other services. We already know how stretched many care services are and, in many respects, not able to offer proper person led support. Our organisations bridge the gap between statutory services and the community. We ease the pressures on statutory services and directly tackle issues within our communities. We have seen the impact of all of our organisations during the pandemic, we may be small organisations but we are the ones that have been propping up the community in our own way.

Good Food Matters – the Community Fund and Green Fund are a significant part of our income. We have been asked to run services to which GPs and other statutory sector will continue to refer into for nothing.

Lioness Tamar - Small volunteer led grassroots organisations that are so close to communities as well as flexible/resourceful in delivering and fill the present gaps in statutory sector services, will disappear entirely when the small community grant programme is taken away. Their voices won't be represented.

SP – We simply cannot ignore the legacy of the last 10 months and the incredible effort that small grassroots organisations have put in.

Croydon Vision – We will have to tell resident who lost their sight and have to wait 9 months for the Council's rehabilitation process to start, that they cannot come to us. It's a very short-term approach with a terrible long-term impact. But we could instead delivery the rehabilitation process for them for more value for money.

Also, even if organisations won't be impacted directly by the funding cuts, their referral process will. Finally, organisations at risk of being cut have to give their staff notice.

Shirley Neighbourhood Care – Even if cuts do not directly affect us, they will impact on our ability to access affordable training (through CVA or the MeLearning platform) or to use other groups like CAT, which benefit from rent subsidies. Considering the hours volunteers give and

extra unpaid time done by staff, the Council's grant only covers 30% of the cost of projects like ours.

Also the suggestion that over 65 groups can merge to mirror the Primary Care Trust map shows no understanding of the sector.

Woodside Bereavement Services: We would not be sustainable. We are a very small organisation delivering on a very small budget bereavement services for children and adults with core costs mainly (rent, insurance, telephone). Our rent at the Waterside Centre would go up to 60% of our costs. We cannot cut back anymore as all our services are run by volunteers (who claim no expenses) with only two part time positions (administrative and children services). Sustainability of services is key as trauma linked to loss of loved ones impacts people's lives over a number of years.

Parents In Partnership: VS services are already running on bare budgets and have been doing so despite cuts in previous years admirably for the benefits of real people to provide them with a good quality of life.

Croydon Neighbourhood Watch: We won't be able to run our services (which cover 15-20,000 households) without the part time manager this fund pays for, who also manages more than 300 volunteer coordinators. And we won't be able to reach isolated older people with our printed flyers if those costs are not covered. Covid increased our workload (as we are linked to the NHS to distribute information on vaccines) but reduced our fundraising.

Parents in Partnership: we will be carrying on going without the Council's funding as they are not there for our parents with children with special needs.

Croydon Mencap: We are facing loss of project delivery (such as the Welfare Benefits service) and proportionate overhead fees (making it unsustainable), rate relief, the free space we use in Children Centres, the loss of Croydon MeLearning. We have also being unable to let our premises during the Covid19 pandemic and have a significant loss of income this year. Croydon Mencap and Parents in Partnership are looking to consolidate their services while saving some money but there is evidence that the Council is taking away services from the VS and taking them in house. It is unclear what the Council is cutting internally.

CAYSH: while case studies demonstrate the soft impact of our services, it is the impact of savings our project make that the Council will listen to.

Parents in Partnership: Local Authority has been talking about the Locality model for a long time, which won't work without local VS organisations. Terribly important at this moment to contextualise covid19 and the role we play for isolated families.

Croydon Churches Floating Shelter: we don't get any grants from the Council but work with them from November to March every year, with the exception of this winter. Churches have lost lots of income during covid19 as they have not been able to rent out their spaces.



Andy Stranack – thank you for all your contributions and work. I see my key role as defending the VS sector; happy to have individual Zoom meetings with groups. The Council has to close a gap of £70M by the end of this year so all these cuts to the Community Fund or the Ward budgets have already been included in this.

Plenary:

Summary of themes as presented in the representation to The Leader, see attached letter.

Councillor David Wood will be attending our next CVSA meeting in March. The council is being explicit through One Croydon about a commitment to fund the VCS so that's no good if groups are forced to close before then.

Localities- One Croydon- Kings Fund are all looking to bring the VCS to the forefront of Croydon's transformation. We recognise we need to be realistic but together we have so much to continue to give and we need to look to a bigger role for our sector.

Close