

**Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance (CVSA)**

Name of meeting/event

**Wednesday 22 February 2017, 10am**

Date & time of meeting

**Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA)**

Organised by

**Steve Phaure, CEO, CVA**

Chairman/Facilitator

**Ann Ferris, CVA**

Minute taker

**CVA Resource Centre, 82 London Road. CR0 2TB**

Venue

# Attendance: 43 Full list of attendees available on request.

Steve Phaure welcomed everyone particularly **Steve Reed MP**, MP for Croydon North and since October 2016 Shadow Minister for Civil Society. He has had an interest in the Voluntary Sector since his time as Leader of the Council in Lambeth.

**Steve Reed MP**

Steve was pleased to see such a good turnout. He has been MP here for just over 4 years. A lot has happened in that time not just in Croydon but all over the country, and the world.

We have the opportunity to talk about some of the big issues facing us. The Civil Society plays a big role in so many services that people rely on that are in flux.

Croydon is a good place to try out new ideas as it is so dynamic, a rapidly changing community. There has been a rise of right populism around the world which found expression here in Brexit. This was a cry from people demanding change. The impact of globalisation has damaged people’s hopes. The EU is not responsible for these issues and leaving will not change anything. It is also the end of the liberal order since WW2. It is for all of us to find a progressive response to people’s concerns. We need to rebuild politics so people don’t lose faith in democracy.

It is a fundamental belief that the power of people and power of the community to assert that power against things they don’t want. The business model for public services is bust. The system was set up with much more funding. We now need to look at different ways of doing things. The way we had run democracy in the past had alienated too many people. People used to have job security, now jobs are insecure and low paid.

The model has tried to take over every aspect of people’s lives and this has destroyed, for example, strength of family, connection to place, communities. We need to find a different way of supplying people with what they want.

We need to find the capacity to provide a voice for people. This is often found in Civil Society through communities. Too often the state tries to manage people’s lives rather than anticipating problems and preventing them happening. You can tell a child’s chances from the time they are born e.g. father in prison, there is a good chance the child will end of up prison. We should work with prisoners’ families. Organisations best equipped to do that are in Civil Society – community organisations, faith organisations. Too often we talk about the individual, allocate them to services we think would do them good. We never ask if it’s what they want. There is too little voice for citizens, service users, workers. They get silent, resentful. Councils have lost funding with a dramatic increase in services, like social work. One resource we don’t use enough is the people who live in the community. Decision making is better if people and the communities are involved. We need to equalise power between professionals and people using services. Example: a group of parents led by a faith leader set up a group to combat the gang culture in Brixton. They demanded resources. This led to the setting up of a Community Trust.

It used to be that an MP was elected and the community trusted them to make the right decisions. The role of the MP is not to trust the community.

Q: **Sylvia Wachuchu-King, Wellbeing You**: People are confused by terminology. We hear about the Civil Society and the Third Sector.

A: Language is difficult. We need to find language and stories that communicate in simple ways what are complex issues. Need to avoid jargon.

Q: **Mark Blundell, Onside Youth Zones:** Prevention is better than cure. We struggle with the government to achieve that. How do we validate prevention? Also we need to get rid of the term NEET.

A: The sad thing about how the government has applied cuts is that they have targeted the poorest areas. This has meant that organisations have gone back to core activities. Also the timescales are too short e.g. prisoners’ children, we won’t know the result of the work until they reach adulthood. The troubled families programme is good but has failed to integrate with other services and haven’t given it time to work. Unless we adopt prevention as part of public services on the long term basis it will fail.

Q: **Yvonne Traynor, RASASC:** Because of cuts the Council relies on the third sector to pick up the slack. Are you saying you want us to do more? The NHS relies on us. The government tells us to work in a different way although what we do has worked so far.

A: It isn’t like care in the community. Attitude is that if services are not working, we should take them away. We have to build capacity within communities. Different communities have different levels of resources. The government approach to funding is desperately unfair. Whatever resources are available need to go to the people who most need it.

Q: **Donald Douglas, Croydon Almshouse:** Have charities lost their way because they are competing for resources?

A: The government is trying to shut the voluntary sector up. The way they have cut funding has led to a big decrease in funding for the voluntary sector. They banned charities from lobbying in the run-up to elections. They also set out to undermine the credibility of charities e.g. the publicity about Chief Execs’ pay. As for competing for resources – it is the users who need to have more control, not the charities themselves. The less effective organisations will then lose funding. The Town hall should not be making decisions on commissioning. The decisions should be put out to communities to say what they want.

Q: **Mary McCauley, Open Gate:** Young people are saying they don’t have access to authorities, they need a forum where they can put their views. Girls say they want a programme to mentor them on relationships with the opposite sex so they don’t just have negative fathers’ relationships as a role model.

A: We need a Community Youth Trust. The council has agreed in principle that if one is set up they will use it to collect views.

(Steve Phaure: the next Croydon Congress meeting is focussing on young people; Mary McCauley to discuss this separately with Steve Reed)

Q: **Helen Thompson, Carers Support Centre:** Carers are one of our greatest resources in the area. They play a crucial part in the community. They are supported locally but are not recognised nationally. We are still waiting for the results of the national consultation carried out last year by the Government. The expectation is that family carers take up the slack. Someone in a caring role is so worn down they need support and this falls to the voluntary sector.

A: Being in Opposition I can’t change anything with regards to the national consultation but I can raise this in Parliament and it will have to be addressed. The lack of support is related to the value of carers. Personalised budgets give people more control and there should be more opportunity to pool budgets. Then if no service exists, the pooled budget can create one.

Q: **Bushra Ahmed, ARCC:** How are volunteers seen? There is a whole community of untapped volunteers, mainly women. On official forms there is no box to tick for “volunteer”. The number of unpaid hours needs recognition.

A: I put in an amendment to get recognition of volunteering and it was turned down. If you volunteer abroad you get your NI contributions paid, but not if you volunteer in the UK. You should get something in return e.g. young people contributing to society should get e.g. a reduction in tuition fees.

Q: **Nero Ughwuiabo, BME Forum:** 1) Of 11 deprived wards in Croydon 9 are in your constituency. Growth money is being spent in the town centre.

2) There is not enough transparency on Section 106 in the north of the borough, where a lot of building work is going on.

3) There are lots of new developments in the north of the borough, particularly London Road, where the ground floor should be secured for D1 use (community). But most of these D1 premises become commercial after a few months.

A: 1) I agree on the funding for Croydon North and spend a lot of time on this. Croydon is assessed on need and Government funding allocated accordingly. The Town hall then spend where they want. Boroughs in inner London get more funding per head than outer London ones. Croydon has the problems of inner London but is treated as outer London.

2) Section 106 – I agree, will raise this with the Council.

3) D1 use – I need examples.

Q: **Robert Elston, Status Employment:** Over the past 8 years potential funds have disappeared. Many organisations like Status survive because of ESF funding. If we leave the single market the chance of getting ESF funding will be non-existent. The charity sector relies on these funds.

A: With Brexit we have taken a leap in the dark. Farmers who benefit massively from European money assumed they would get it from the Government. I will raise this in Parliament.

Q: **Gordon Kay, Healthwatch Croydon:** The NHS is having massive challenges. The South London Transformation Plan will shift away from hospitals to community care. How can people get actively involved in decision making?

A: Funding has been pegged to inflation since 2010 although NHS costs 40% more. I have expressed concerns about the STP e.g. Croydon’s A & E threatened with closure while it is still being built. We need a different decision making process. There is consultation but the decision maker can choose to ignore it. Croydon Commissioning Groups may be better as Patient Commissioning Groups.

Q: **Fatima Koroma, Revivify Community Initiative:** A lot of community organisations are based in central Croydon. With the Westfield development, how are we going to compete on rents and do the work we are expected to do?

A: If ground floor frontages are being given to commercial organisations that should stop. The Black Prince Community Hub in Lambeth is owned by the community and cannot be sold. This has given opportunities to people in that deprived area. Could we do something similar with the Samuel Coleridge Taylor centre in South Norwood?

Q: **Yogarani Jeyam, Empowering Tamil Families:** We are supporting 32-45 mothers, 25 people on benefits who want to work but have language barriers. There is no funding to support them to learn English and it is difficult for small organisations like us to get supported to access funding.

Q: **Jonathan Bob-Amara, Parade of Nations:** Equalising power between provider and user. Where do you see the voluntary sector sitting?

Q: **Kate Pierpoint, Age UK Croydon:** We need to formalise process for voluntary sector to take over community spaces.

A: (to all 3 above): We need a different commissioning model. We need user centred Outcomes Based Commissioning. We should be able to show that people who are consulted have agreed to the decision.

Q: **Jeremy Gray, Evolve Housing:** Are running the CR0 2020 campaign. Interested to hear views on rough sleeping in Croydon. Croydon has the 7th largest number of rough sleepers in the country. Where do we go next?

A: This is tragic. A few years ago this was dramatically reduced. Cuts means that support is no longer available. More people lost their jobs, homes, families. Politicians don’t have the answers, communities do. Support mechanisms need to be put in place.

Q: **Pat Reid. PJ’s Community Services:** To follow on the comment being made on Samuel Taylor Coleridge, we need a process for asset transfer. Paxton Academy, a free school, has found a site and the building should have been ready for four year groups in September. It is still at planning with yet another delay. The school now has nowhere to go. This has been going on for five years.

A: I have been involved in the Paxton Academy. The free school system is chaotic. The fault lies with the Department of Education for providing funding for new schools in areas where they are not needed.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge – I am working on it.

**Closing remarks – Steve Phaure**

Thanks to Steve Reed for coming. Some big issues have been raised and Croydon VCS is at the cutting edge. Three particular issues raised:

Outcomes based commissioning

Asset transfer

A voice for young people

**Next meeting:** 28 April 2017. Keynote presentation by Gavin Barwell MP