



Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance

Thursday 23rd March 10:00- 12:00

Online

Welcome and introductions: Steve Phaure, CVA's CEO introduced the event. We have three items on the agenda; the main one is to revisit the re-set of the relationship between the Council and the Voluntary Sector. We will also provide information on the South West London ICS (Integrated Care System), which is presenting us with some opportunities, and the London Borough of Culture.

Croydon is the London Borough of Culture 2023: Cllr Andy Stranack, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

The reason why not everyone knows about the London Borough of Culture initiatives yet is that they were only recently launched; we had a big launch last Tuesday at Box Park, which went really well.

The London Borough of Culture was awarded to Croydon in 2021 and there are now 40 projects received funding bringing London wide and national attention on the borough. The aims of the London Borough of Culture are: 1) to bring inward investments into Croydon (it has, so far, brought £5 million pounds from the London Assembly, the Arts Council, the National Lottery and other trusts), 2) Culture for all. There are at the moment 15 events in the south of the borough, 13 events in the north of the borough and 24 events in central Croydon, which is where the national portfolio organisations are. 3) a new partnership way of working; we have created a steering group of art organisations that have led on events and the scoring of bids, with the Council only supporting them.

The first event is on the 1st and 2nd April at Fairfield Halls. The whole programme is not dependent on ticket sales and events are free or low cost, with tickets starting at £5. In April we will have a programme from the Portrait Gallery encompassing artists with Afro-Caribbean routes. In May we have a dance festival over two weeks at Stanley Halls. In June we will have the music heritage trail across the borough, linking to key music venues. In July there are going to be street parties across the borough including the London Road Carnival and Croydon Mela. There is also going to be a production by the Brits School about the environment, which will be performed across the borough. In August we will be celebrating 50 years of Hip Hop, in collaboration with the American Embassy; it will include dance legend Popin' Pete. Other initiatives will include debates and installations, including in public spaces. There is going to be a trail of statues that different local artists and schools will be able to paint and that will be linked to an app, indicating their location. In September there is going to be a Liberty Festival, a performance festival by disabled artists with workshops and new commissions from artists with disabilities and a junk action festival that will upcycle and recycle old in new fashion in South Norwood. In October we will celebrate

Black History in collaboration with the BME Forum. We also have the Ukrainian National Symphony Orchestra performing at Fairfield Halls. Also in October the Multiverse event will bring together three generations through dance, music and digital. In November a Nightshift, a new production produced by deaf, disabled and abled actors, will have a premier in Croydon and then go on a tour. House of Commons, a new show about democracy and teenage voting rights, will play at Stanley Halls. In December there is going to be a slight break but we will have Stepping Stones, a production using the story of Pinocchio at Fairfield Halls. In January 2024 Stanley Halls will present the Welcoming Party, an immersive theatre production for young people and their families. In February we will have a development programme highlighting the role of LGBTQ artists across the borough. In March we will have the final event that will bring together all the communities in Croydon in one large celebration.

How can you get involved? If you have cultural events that you would like to include into the programme, go to www.culturecroydon.com; there is still some funding available for cultural community activities as well as the possibility to link you in with our website and social media package, so that you can highlight your events to new audiences, London wide and nationally too. We recognise that there is still work to be done on faith and music and want to put together a Harvest Festival in the Autumn; if you are interested get in touch. We will be joining with Open House London so do get in touch with us if you know of any local buildings that should be open to the public.

You can also be Ambassadors for the year; go to www.culturecroydon.com and see what events will take place.

This is a year to show off the rich cultural identity of Croydon not only to London but nationwide.

Q – Leo Cardow, Purley Cross Community Information Centre – I appreciate there is information online and there will be banners across the borough, but how do we get hold of flyers to distribute in community settings?

AS – A Social Media package of marketing materials is being developed at the moment. We will be sending out information to the 200 organisations part of the Cultural Network and information and advice services too, using the Council's links.

Q – Croydon Voluntary Action, James Moore – Can we have contact details for organisations wanting to add their existing community events to your calendar? Also, it is no surprise that there are lots of events to celebrate culture across the borough; some have not been included in the programme and have expressed their sadness about that. New Addington Carnival, Thornton Heath festival, Croydon Night of Dance etc

AS – Go to www.culturecroydon.com and contact us from there. The presentation will be circulated with the minutes. All the funding streams have been heavily oversubscribed; one of the key criteria was about bringing a regional or national focus in the media. If you have an event that you think would fit into the programme, pass on your details so that we can add them.

Q – Mary McCaulley, Open Gate project – We are a faith group working with young people with music, praise and pray to reduce violence in the borough. I belong to that group that is coming to the event at Fairfield Halls (which is already sold out) and we are coming to pray. I wonder if you would be interested in this type of event.

AS – Absolutely, that is an event we would like to include. Croydon Council is on the steering group and we are reaching out to Pastor Damien Luke and Pastor Bola. But if there are events you know of please get in touch and we can include you in the branding etc.

Q – MM –Would you be able to fund a concert?

AS – Send to us more details and we can discuss. There is funding but it is limited and we need to make sure activities fit into the Arts Council's plan.

Q – John Gilhooly, Neighbourhood Watch – It looks like every initiative needs to create their own Social Media, website, flyers. I wonder if CVA could create a sort of Croydon channel that brings in one place all the messages that are launched separately. It might be very effective for small groups that are short of funding for marketing.

AS – I think CVA already do quite a lot, including Simply Connect Croydon. They also do a regular newsletter. I think there are good solid foundations in place that, I agree, we need to work on.

Q – Marion, Pathfinders and New Addington Carnival – We put in a huge bid with Good Food Matters that was turned down. I would like to know how an award-winning garden donated by the Royal Chelsea Flower Show, cooking from around the world done and supplied by refugees and other faiths, alongside a Carnival with a multicultural church service and a mobile winner performing on a stage, did not get any funding. It is gutting that the long serving carnivals have got nothing. We never asked for funding for the carnival before. You put us in the bid to get the London Borough of Culture and you do not include us in any of the planning, invite us to the launch or give us any funding.

AS – We spoke to Good Food Matters and I believe helped them find additional funding for their project. I am stressing to officers they need to work with Pathfinders on the Carnival, and I believe we have conversations going on with a meeting in the diary. I have not written the bid for the London Borough of Culture and equally did not score the bids received. However, we know we need to make sure we provide funding to New Addington to be borough wide and the community producers are reaching out to do that.

SP – Are any of the officers on the call? Who is the leading officer? There is a need for this Borough of Culture to be truly borough wide and there are other organisations who also put in very good bids but were not successful. It would be good to hear more from your lead officer, who has not been particularly visible in community meetings about the process. You mentioned the pot of funding, is this the UK Shared Prosperity Fund or is it something else?

AS – Kristian Aspinall is the lead and he is on annual leave this week. We are reaching out to Pathfinders to make sure the funding is geographically spread across the borough. There are a number of different funding streams, and depending on what people are interested in doing we would look into and allocate them to the appropriate stream. I will add a slide into the presentation when we circulate it, to explain the criteria for the funding that is remaining; the slide will be ready by the end of next week.

SP – Croydon Voluntary Action – We hope that partners in the room will be heard and supported; it is a year-long programme and Carnival time is coming up soon. Let's make supporting VCS partners to be involved our priority for the first quarter of this year.

Marion, Pathfinders– the Family festival does not get any money and, when I asked, I was told we were not considered the town centre. We will cover the costs ourselves, but we need help with the barriers and to shut the street off to make the place safe. This should be paid for by the Council any time, let alone this year; if we could have it in kind rather than cash, that would be extremely useful.

AS – I heard that at other community meetings. If I can put together that slide, that would be the fairest way forward for everyone.

Reset of the relationship between the Council and the Voluntary Sector

SP-We are here to focus on the domino effect the Council's financial situation has had in the voluntary sector. A lot of organisations have had serious setbacks in terms of their income and we are a week away from the end of this financial year, when funding for some will come to an end.

The concern is for all those people who have been relying for services from those organisations; not all of them have a clear route for other support. How are we going to address the crisis the borough is in with the voluntary sector playing an important part?

I am going to recap on what the Mayor of Croydon and yourself said at the last CVSA meeting in February, on the back of the survey you carried out. There was talk about some detailed things like Croydon Observatory, training for bid writing and webpages but the big theme was around investments. The Council mentioned that, although they were withdrawing the Community Fund, they had other funds going into the voluntary and community sector through different sources. Last night a procurement plan went to Cabinet; we are looking for transparency and a fair share for groups like the ones in this room.

CVA has also a responsibility to bring in external fundraising opportunities by presenting the work of Croydon's voluntary sector as powerfully as we can; lots of these opportunities come through the Council so it needs to be a partnership approach. We need to make as many organisations as possible involved in things like the Shared Prosperity Fund. Where is the reset going to go next?

AS – We have spoken about this before but it will be useful to recap the Council’s financial situation. The Council gets about £320 million a year from the Government. At the moment, because of legacy issues, it is in debt to £1.6 billion pounds. That means it has to spend £48 million a year just on debt interest before it provides any services. We are negotiating with Government to try to bring our debt levels down; part of that package is an agreement to raise Council Tax fees. We are also negotiating the write off of some debt and we are looking into further capitalization loans but we recognise that won’t help us in the long term. You will know that, on the back of that, when the Community Fund finishes in March 2023, that will be its natural end. We have spoken to all groups that asked for a meeting and are affected by that decision. We have heard very clearly there still need to be an Information and Advice service, on which we are working now; part of the reset was not to develop services on our own but to co-commission services for the future. We have a plan now to work with key partners in the Information and Advice sector to develop a new contract for that service. We are also at the very beginning to do a similar process for Volunteering.

We equally recognise we need to be more transparent on how we are spending our money and where it goes to. We have a breakdown of all the money the Council currently spends in the Voluntary Sector; this is over £20 million; a lot of that is on Individual Care programmes. We have shared it with the Local Voluntary Partnership Board and the CEO group, chaired by Steve. We spend 70% with national voluntary sector organisations and 30% with local voluntary sector organisations; the Mayor’s ambition is to increase the funding that goes to local groups and we are working with the LVP and the CEO group to see how we can do that as well as look at how we can use Section 106 development money and the business sector Corporate Social Responsibility budget imaginatively to fund the sector in the future.

We want to better identify contractual opportunities for the sector. Last night we published at Cabinet a list of all the contracts that will be procured this year, in 2023/24. I agree with Steve, it is a line per contract at the moment and it needs more analysis to understand what part of those contracts might be suitable for the voluntary sector to work on. We need the LVP and CEO group to analyse that a bit more. We then want to empower and train the sector to access those opportunities.

We are working on 8 community asset transfers of buildings from the Council to various voluntary sector groups across the borough; that figure is changing all the time. Harlow Hall just finished but we are engaging with other community groups to discuss with them the possibility to transfer assets.

The final aspect is trying to communicate better so that the Voluntary Sector advice section on the website have pages on how to initiate an Asset Transfer, Funding opportunities, how to get letters of recommendations from the Council if writing a bid, and soon how we can support you to write those bids.

We recognise that there is a long way to go but we are working fast to change the culture of the Council so that it is no longer the Council giving out small pots of money to various groups but co-designing the funding with community groups.

SP– The LVP is part of the Healthy Communities Together programme we have in the borough and that is the one that sits between the voluntary sector, the NHS and the Council, funded by the Kings Fund.

Q – Maddy Orobator, Communities First – I came to the Mayor with a comprehensive Community Asset Transfer strategy about four weeks ago now, providing a plan for funding and ideas for the benefit of voluntary sector groups. Can you share how those propositions are being addressed?

AS – The plan involved different teams and departments across the Council so we are collecting feedback on it from officers but it is taking some time to co-ordinate it as the plan is very comprehensive.

SP – I am suggesting making proper time for an item on this at the next meeting.

MO – Absolutely as this is a crisis that did not need to come to this point. If the comprehensive suggestions were acted on none of these groups would be losing their funding now.

Q – Sanjay Gulati, Age UK Croydon – We have been shouting about how Information and Advice is a critical service for some time. The recognition of it came so slowly and painfully, why? Are key Council staff on board?

AS – There is a culture shift going on at the Council, especially amongst the Mayor, Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team about the importance of the Voluntary Sector, co-designing and partnership working. In the past the Council has designed services and then offered the contract out but we now want to co-design at an earlier stage. We are modelling this now with Information and Advice services; I am sure there are going to be bumps along the way.

Q – Julia Weller, Family Centre Fieldway – Is it possible to have a figure for the Section 106 development money?

AS – It is difficult to give a precise figure because it changes all the time. Also, only a maximum of 20% of the overall total could potentially go to the voluntary sector but we are looking into how we can use it more effectively in the future so that the figure can change.

SP – Is there a register for Section 106 that we could use to make the process a bit more transparent?

AS – Certainly. I will look at how we can publish that.

Q – Susanette Mansour, Croydon Vision – We prepared for our one-to-one Community Fund meeting meticulously by looking at how we could support each other and prepared a specific action plan. We have not heard anything since. I emailed and followed up with no response. I heard the same from other colleagues. I don't see how the reset can work if it is more of a mute button.

AS – Did you not receive a letter from us in January? You should have received one.

SM – There are conversations we are not having in this borough, one of them being what do we do with residents who were supported by these organisations and won't be from the beginning of April. We had the Gateway services withdrawn, a Council team that was held as a flagship team, but nothing was said about what was going to happen as a result. We need honest discussions, more than letters being sent.

Q – Norman Till, CNCA – If there is nowhere to refer residents to, Information and Advice systems, however well meaning, won't be able to recommend/propose services to residents. Also, other organisations like us cannot go looking for outside funding as bodies won't want to support effectively what the Council should have been carrying on supporting or should have redirected to the Health and Care budget. The Council should have worked during the last 2 years on creating a bigger pot of money from Health that could have helped support organisations like Neighbourhood Care, which, once lost, cannot not be re-lightened.

AS – If you are looking for external funding, we are very happy to provide supporting letters explaining why you are seeking funding. I do hear what you are saying about keeping the groups going; I know that the vast majority of organisations affected by the Community Fund cuts will be able to survive. The final aim of the reset is to get more funding for the voluntary sector but I recognise it is going to be a very difficult couple of years until then. We are working through the CEO body and the LVP to make sure that, as the Council changes, our colleagues in Health do similar work.

Q – Marion Burchell, New Addington Pathfinders – We have recently stepped in to help a group that lost all their funding from the Community Fund, funding they have been receiving for the last 61 years. It is called the Samaritans New Addington Pop In and services between 80 and 100 old age pensioners per week by providing care, social, dietary etc. They could not ask for help until the end of February; we have written seven funding applications for them. We have a letter from the Council. We have been turned down and they are struggling. Everything stopped in March. Will there be some fall-back money for groups like this that are still waiting to hear on bids? Bear in mind where we are, we need it.

AS – I wish I could say yes but there is no funding pot. I will do all I can to support Diana and individual groups that are struggling to find funding. We will use our officers and any resources we have to help them to find funding.

Q – SP – Can you review what Council posts are being advertised at the Council at the moment and analyse what is more important for the Community? The type of support Marion has just described or whatever it is that those posts are brought in to do?

AS – There is a bigger conversation to be had on how we use resources but the number of Council staff is shrinking in general.

Q – Claire Keetch, Citizens Advice Bureau – Want to thank the Council for recognising the importance of Information and Advice. The CAB is still alive and kicking and available to take

referrals; as we have done for over 80 years, we are available to everyone 18+ living, working or studying in Croydon.

Is the Section 114 still active? Also, I want to raise our concern about the 15% Council Tax rise as it is our highest debt inequality area; I hope that some modelling has been done on the fact that some people won't be able to pay. The last point is about the review of the Council's estate; where are we with the central estate, that I believe covers the library and the Town Hall? Can we feed into someone about that review?

AS – Yes, we are still technically under a Section 114 which means that the Council can only spend money on essential services. It relates to the 2023/24 budget; the Government have written to say that they are minded giving us a capitalization direction for that year to cover those costs but has not given any money yet.

The modelling has included less revenue collected but also a new £2 Million pounds Hardship Fund, on top of the Household support scheme that the Government provides.

The review of the central estate is ongoing; the team is carrying out desk research on what the Council requirements are to then go out to a much wider audience about potential buildings and how they could be used in the future.

Q – Ellaine Harrison, CPCT – We are physically in Bromley but 60% of our users are from Croydon, and it is increasing because of what is happening in the borough. The value for money in the voluntary sector is far higher than in the statutory sector. We have officers in the Council that do not need to be there, to protect political concepts. We have external funding streams being used to fund Council officers that could be pointed towards the voluntary sector. The Council is so lucky to have Steve at CVA and groups in these room wanting to work with you. I have extensive consultancy experience working with Councils and want to offer my services for free to review your staffing structure. No heads have rolled adequately.

AS – I do understand the value of the voluntary sector, please send me an email.

Q – Ima Miah, ARCC – My question is on the CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money. What is it spent on? What are the criteria on where the expenditure goes? What is the balance? Some of us were so reliant on the Community Fund because it provided for core costs while most funders provide project funds. How can we use CIL money to support groups while they are looking for new project funding?

AS: CIL money is allocated to the area where the development is situated; 106 money is available for a wider area. The challenge we currently have since May is that you are not allowed to use these pots of money for ongoing funding; you can use it for transformation or infrastructure investment. The last administration had used it for a few years for the Community Fund but we cannot continue to do so. However, different Councils do use it in different ways and we are currently looking at how we can use it more flexibly in the future. It will feed into the re-set work with the VCS. The work is ongoing.

Q – Sue McVicker, CNCA – I want a reassurance that the overview of how many people have been supported every year, provided in the Voluntary Sector quarterly Monitoring reports, have been looked at. And that there is a forward plan on how this is going to be managed. Is there a concern in the Local Authority about an influx of referrals when groups close? It has come to our attention that a number of organisations that thought they could continue to operate realised very recently that this is not the case. Even if some of these groups get funding, they won't be able to take in referrals from the Council in the same way as the funder will have different priorities.

AS – Yes, there is a serious concern. The Mayor recognises that the Council needs to be on a stable financial footing and be modelled so that it becomes a sustainable collaborative entity in the longer term.

Q – John Gilhooly, Neighbourhood Watch – Is CVA or the Council trying to find other sources of funding not from Central Government or Trusts but the Croydon business community and banks? They could fund a short term 6 months arrangement.

AS – All the funding for the London Borough of Culture comes from the National Lottery, GLA etc so we are working to bring in funding from other sources. We are also looking at large businesses in the area and their corporate social responsibility budgets; we are beginning conversations with them on how they can use them more imaginatively. Those discussions are ongoing.

Q – Leo Cardow, Purley Cross Community Information Centre: Council Housing is increasing and, with it, the number of people in social housing needing support. Is that an ongoing situation? Because we do not have the services to provide for more residents.

AS – Not strictly my portfolio but, yes, there has been a lot of development in Croydon over the last two years and we think we have hit our targets for the next few years. If we want to do something specifically on this, we can bring someone back to the next meeting.

SP: Gavin Handford, who has regularly met and briefed CVSA, is leaving the borough and we wish him well.

We need to turn around Corporate Social Responsibility over next few months. Croydon Vision is hosting an event with businesses and we can provide information on that. We need a shopping basket with organisations in the community that our private sector could or should be required to support through Section 106.

We also need to come back to Maddy's plan on Asset Transfers.

We need to find opportunities for small organisations through the Procurement plan.



Sarah Burns, Director of Communities, Croydon Voluntary Action

We have lots of opportunities, including funding, attached to working at system level with Health and Social Care. Come on the **27th April 2023, 9.30 to 11.30** am to South West London Voluntary, Community and Enterprise Sector (VCSE) Alliance to find out more and be introduced to the new Director of the SWL VCSE Alliance.

Close