**Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance**

Thursday 10th November 10:00- 12:00

Online

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| **Welcome and introductions:** Steve Phaure (SP), CVA’s CEO introduced the event. Huge challenges for Croydon with many of our Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCO) in the room today in a perilous state. The VCS in Croydon is proactive and we want to know what relationship we’re going to have and what support can we expect from the council to help people with the recovery, the cost of living crisis and the vulnerable people that we all want to support. |
| **Cabinet Member for Communities**, Councillor Andy Stranack (AS)**:**Thank you all for what you do. Croydon Council is 1.6 billion in debt and spending £50 million on debt interest and that is not sustainable. The council has to become smaller and operate more efficiently. There are 1006 registered charities in Croydon and many additional smaller groups. In 2021/22, the council provided 228 VCS groups with over £20m. The Community Fund formed part of this funding and funded 31 local groups with just over £2m. The Mayor wants more spend from national to local charities. First steps, government funding opportunities to be shared on a new council webpage and to ask the VCS ideas on how we can work together. The full presentation is attached. |
| **Q&A****Age UK Croydon**: We keep talking about new ideas from VCS, I’ve seen the new council website link and there’s little there. We put proposals in, we give ideas and no response comes back. There is no respect for the VCS and no trust, you ask us for proposals/ideas with short deadlines and don’t respond within your own timelines. Where are council staff and what are they doing? Councillors are out of sync with what officers are doing. What is happening is so different from what’s said.**Marilyn:** Was there another page to your presentation?**AS:** The council has reduced in size. The Communities Team used to be 12 and now has 2 members of staff, which doesn’t mean we shouldn’t get back to you. We need to get better at working together, using technology. Our deadlines are tight because we’re responding to funders.My last slide was the VS webpage and where you can place ideas: [VCS support | Get Involved Croydon](https://www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/vcs-support/survey_tools/ideas)**SP**: The perception in the borough is of the council in retreat; that is council officers, services and what council departments are doing- no one has a clue.**Citizens Advice Croydon**: The Community Fund was not a 3 year programme due to end, you have not given a fair representation of the fund. The Legal Information and Advice contact is one of the contracts that has been decommissioned and had existed for 80+ years. The Mayor has said at a previous CVSA meeting that the council would be putting a bid to the Levelling Up Fund, has that bid been put in?**Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association (CNCA)**: I want to challenge the narrative that I keep hearing, that the “Council cannot just keep giving money to the VCS.” I also want to talk about the £519,000 Prevention fund that was ring-fenced specifically for over 65s and the 10 grassroots groups. Between them they have 413 volunteers delivering 626 hours. If we had to pay salaries that would be over half a million pounds. These groups support 2285 over 65 most are over 80s, the most vulnerable who require lots of services, food, hospital appointments, shopping, befriending, outings and most get at least 3 times a week. Our provision does essential service provision that is already efficient, why would this be decommissioned?**AS:** Community Fund started 6 years ago with the intension that we bring all the VCS funding in one pot. We started with £2.6m but it’s been cut over the years and the ambition to bring funds together didn’t happen. The levelling-up bid did go in we’ll let you know as soon as we hear.The value of the work can’t be understated. We are having a number of meetings to understand the impact and inform plans for the future. Thanks for organising our meeting with CNCA’s neighbourhood groups next Friday. We are still the biggest funder of the VS and want to be more efficient and effective and maximise inward investment in the borough.**SP**: You’ve said you want national charities to be replaced by local ones, what are you doing?**Croydon Mutual Aid**: You mentioned a page dedicated to funding on the council website. In my experience over the years, CVA have been fantastic at sharing what funds are available and helping local groups to apply for them? If this is new funding on the council website, how much additional funding will there be in comparison to previous years?**Communities First**: Just not acceptable to come to this meeting without a considered strategy. When will you set up a meeting with CVA, who’ve led on this for years, to give specific solutions and serious strategy- no more warm words.**AS**: Really aware of CVA’s great newsletter, we want to use that as well but we want to share information on government funding that we know about as quickly as possible. The aim is not to compete but work in partnership to give information quickly.Fully accept the strategy isn’t there but in the past the council has come up with strategies and asked VCS to fit in with that. I’m meeting with as many groups as possible, we want to hear from you and build a strategy in partnership with the 1006 groups across the borough.**SP**: If we are talking about an Asset Transfer from the council then again we’ll need a lot more detail than that. A specific example would help VCS colleague see how it can be done. CVA have an Asset Transfer proposal for Waterside in South Norwood, maybe we could use that as a case study of how we can put it into practice.**Asian Resource Centre Croydon (ARCC):** How much is the website you’re creating and maintaining? Presumably that could pay for some of the VCS groups to be funded. Do you think you’re acting fast enough?**Counsellor Rowenna Davis**, Chair of Scrutiny Committee: Has there been an Impact Assessment on what would happen to statutory services if this fund is removed along with the extra funding that is generated as a result of these groups making bids? Do we know what proportion of the £20m that Croydon Council spends on the VCS goes to organisations that are outside the borough?**AS**: Resources for website are internally sourced at the moment, the website isn’t the end product as we want to work with VCS and get as much information out to groups quickly. We’ve been in office since May and are moving as quickly as we can, we’d like to move faster.Two examples of Community Asset Transfer are Harlow Hall and CYTO.The EQIA was started under the last Labour administration when they proposed cuts 2 years ago, it’s a rolling document that we’re updating. Mitigating factors are that we are going out to groups. The latest version will be shared publicly on Friday.36% of Council’s overall VCS funding goes to local organisations.**SP**: Can you share the mapping review of that £20m spend.**AS**: We can’t share that as there’s commercially sensitive information. I can share that there are 228 VCOs funded by the £20m. **SP**: We’re interested in what comes into our local VCS. £2.6m Community Fund cut, thousands cut from Information, Advice and Guidance and mental health contracts. If there’s 36% of £20m locally, I make that about £7m is going to local VCS. We need the detail on where that’s going.**AS**: We want to increase the amount of investment in the local VCS. In 2021-22 about that amount has gone to local VCS but we can’t share that detail.**SP**: Headlines mean nothing without the detail of who’s been funded.AS: We can’t share information on who that funding goes to as it’s in the contract.**Croydon Resident**, Steve Striner: I run a charity in a neighbouring borough. The scale of this isn’t just a problem for Croydon. As a resident I’m horrified at what I’m hearing and as a charity lead in a neighbouring borough I’m worried about the impact these cuts are going to have on our already stretched groups and services. Is this situation being discussed with officers and members from neighbouring boroughs because this is a South London problem?**Westbury Project**. Broad Green over 65s. Expand on what resources you have for effected groups? Can you come up with some of the solutions to help? Need specifics of what you’re doing and a timeframe.**AS**: We are talking to neighbouring boroughs about the overall picture, not about VCS. Bromley and Sutton started reducing funding so we’re learning lessons from them. I also have a mentor at the Local Government Authority. We are using the council’s central resource for project management of how we’re going to work with the VCS in the future. We’re going out with officers and speaking with groups like this and individually. We want to develop a strategy and a way forward that’s a true partnership. If groups want to talk with me, put ideas on the website **SP**: You’re duplicating our website and you suggesting more officers to work on this? We’ve got a cost of living crisis, it is frontline delivery we need resourced not more project managers.**AS**: There is centralised support that’s existing that we are using this for our voluntary sector review.**Supplementary School** It’s very hard to get funding and I never get a response to our applications to the council for funding. There are some groups who get all the local funding to use for their own services- who is overseeing this?**CVA**, Sara Milocco: The Community Fund represents a small amount but it’s a particular fund that supports very small groups, you are killing the very groups you are saying you want to be in partnership with. When you spoke about CVA’s funding information bulletin on the website, you want to continue and replicate. It’s not about a bulletin, it’s about developing relationships with funders to get Croydon bids on the table and bringing funders and partnerships together, bringing appropriate opportunities to groups and making them accessible and supporting them to make a good application, working with small groups and sharing resources. It’s so much more complicated than a simple bulletin that you can replicate if you want but if the funds go our bulletin will go too.**AS**: You should always get a response back from your bids to the council if you’re successful or not. If you’ve got specific examples I’ll look into what happened.We are not trying to replicate the excellent CVA newsletter or what that provides. We want to get out information on funding that we know about. We want to understand the impact on small groups so will be meeting with them individually.**SP**: In the letter announcing the decommissioning of the Community Fund, there were two main mitigations. The second was around external funding, do you recognise the point Sara was making that we’ve been nurturing relationships with funders for years. Do you realise that this decommissioning is putting those relationships with funders in danger?AS: We are working hard to develop those relationships, the Arts Council funding we’ve just got is because of working on those relationships.**Addiscombe Neighbourhood Care (ANCA)**: there is going to be quite a delay between the funding cut and arrival of other outside grants, which will result in many of these groups dying out. Outside funders also tend to look for new, innovative projects and do not cover core funding. The Council needs to talk with colleagues in Health including the One Croydon Alliance.**AS**: I completely hear what you are saying; yes, funders out there are not so keen on core funders. Me and my officers are having daily conversations with Health colleagues to progress the argument of prevention bringing savings in the long term.**Councillor Karen Jewitt**: We should have been spoken to before. Have the Council considered how much it costs to keep a person in a care home rather than at home, with VCS support? How is the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money used? The Art Council funding has nothing to do with the Community Fund and it was agreed by the previous administration anyway. Please continue the cross-party work to give us the overall Government budget we deserve instead of getting half of the amount other boroughs get. **AS**: We unfortunately have a debt of £1.6 billion. I am happy to come around and talk to any group that has been affected. We are speaking to central Government all the time with regards to the Council’s financial position and they are being supportive.**Gavin Handford, Director of Policy, Programmes & Performance:** CIL is a one off pot that pops up from developers as housing is built. £400,000 were contributed from CIL last year to the Community Fund. It needs to be seen as a one off pot, not part of the core revenue budget and it has to meet rules under the planning regulations. We have used it in the past but it is not a sustainable source that can be used for VCS contracts going forward. **SP**: What has it been used for this year instead of funding the VCS? **GH**: I will ask my colleague in Planning but it is a declining pot, we happen to be using less of it as well. It is also used for infrastructure provision and all sorts of things needed in response to development.**Neighbourhood Watch Croydon**: You mentioned Croydon should be doing less. Is the VCS not going to cover the shortfalls in the council’s delivery? What is the Council doing to make sure Croydon is getting more funds from Central Government?**AS**: We have to act because of our financial situation. We are in constant discussions with central government. We are trying to get investment in the borough to continue supporting the VcS.**Councillor Brigitte Graham:** Other boroughs have reduced funding gradually. Why did we not? You are interviewing groups after the decision of cuts was made; what are you going to do with the feedback they provide on impact of cuts? Is it just a tick box exercise?**AS**: Different boroughs have different approaches, some did it quickly and some gradually. We do not have a choice, our position in not sustainable.**Asian Resource Centre Croydon (ARCC):** we host a range of clubs for the elderly including fitness. Where are these residents going to go when they close? Socialising is central to mental health.**AS:** It is so important to keep people out of hospital and connected. We are working to move acute services investment into prevention with our Health colleagues.**Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel**: The report into the state of CIL over the last year will be published in December; we are asking for a commitment from you and the Mayor of Croydon for a more proactive and inclusive allocation of funds of meaningful proportion. The CIL pot should be used for and by the community. We also need to differentiate between funding and commissioning. The Voluntary Sector Strategy had a section on commissioning VS groups to deliver services and there are then the small organisations receiving funding to provide some of the crucial services we are talking about year. Why cannot we have a smaller pot of funding that could go with supporting the VCS? CIL is supposed to be used for and by the community so surely they should be influencing how it is used.**AS**: The CIL funding can be used only as a one off pot; there are legal restrictions on this. I would like to explore how we can extend CIL in the future. Actually, the Community Fund was commissioned. Commissioning is how the Council will fund the VS more and more in the future. **SP**: We are looking forward to receiving the details of the 36% you talked about. Leila’s point on commissioned services is another question we have not yet had a response on with regards to the £20 million. How much of it consists of commissions to deliver statutory services? We are looking for that detail to be shared after this meeting. **Shirley Neighbourhood Care Scheme****:** We should have been consulted before the decision was taken. There needs to be an emergency fund for groups that are closing down. People going to lunch clubs are voters. If you are not going to give money to the VS I hope you give it to Social Services because their phones will not stop ringing. Any future waste of money by the Council will be scrutinised by us. There are funders like Croydon Relief in Need who already told us our area (Shirley) is too affluent to be considered for funding; but deprivation is about loneliness too.**AS**: We cannot promise an emergency fund; we just don’t have the money. There are other ways we can help including through Community Asset transfers. This is why we want to talk to all these 31 VS groups, they will have solutions. I hope we can minimize the number of small groups closing.**SP**: That’s why we need borough wide strategic ideas that go to the details of things like the UK Prosperity Fund (£3.7m). Do we have to wait for you to talk one to one with 31 groups before you come back with a borough wide strategy? The Local Voluntary Partnership Board has a meeting next week and I asked for the agenda to be on this; will you share the details we need to plan? One Croydon want to support groups that are going under but we need the details and a time frame.**AS**: We cannot give the details of our conversations with the NHS. I am happy to come back with the feedback and any mitigations after talking to groups affected.**Citizens Advice Bureau**: You do not have to be small to be at risk of closure. What is your forecasting for the next 3 to 5 years in terms of loss of funding as a result of these cuts? Do you have an overall sight of how these cuts are affecting the loss of other contracts? It feels like there is no joint thinking; when the funding was taken away from the Mind Welfare benefits team, they were told that residents could access CAB. Now that you are cutting us, we are told residents can go to Mind, when their Welfare benefits team was dismantled years ago. **AS**: We have a medium term 3 year financial strategy/budget, which is constantly reviewed relying on discussions with the Government. The EQIA is a document that does not only look at the Community Fund but at the overall impact of the transformation of community services; it has elements of that joined up thinking but the process of coming out to all the groups will further inform the work.**Kurdish Supplementary School:** we have 100 people coming to us every week for ESOL and employment support and work with families too. Can I have your email address? We need help to access funding to run these activities. **SP**: It is important you speak to our Kurdish communities, which are one of the strongest in London Road, and I hope they will be included in the London Borough of Culture.**AS**: My email is andy.stranack@croydon.gov.uk Happy to come and meet you, send to me an email and I will get something in the diary although not immediately.**Croydon Mutual Aid**, There is a 37% increase in homelessness in Croydon and in September this year one in four households with children reported going without food because they could not afford to eat. The CIL money coming into Croydon each year is in the millions. In the years between 2018 and 2021 Fairfield Halls alone was sponsored for £8.3M worth of income from CIL money. There is a choice by the Council every year where the money goes. We appreciate there are political choices but we know that the Mayor of Croydon decided to spend it on Purley’s new swimming pool. What else are you spending it on rather than the VCS?**AS:** We cannot use the CIL pot for on-going support. It was used by the previous administration last and this year. We will check how CIL is used this year and will let you know. **Selsdon Contact:** The real savings made through these small contracts for the Council are substantial. We are attending the Local Community Partnerships (LCPs), giving them lots of our time and ideas. Is that the way forward?**AS**: I am well aware of the extra value brought by the VS. There is more work to be done on how we align LVP, NHS and Council funds. I have also attended when available the LCPs.**SP**: We asked to discuss Community Fund cuts in June but got no response. The LVP Board is meeting next week; let’s continue this conversation there. **Communities First**: How many assets were transferred? How much has it raised?**AS**: I don’t have a figure. Asset transfer is not a way to raise money as such.**SP**: We are still waiting to understand what Council services survived. These are the main points from today that need action/answers:* Of the £20m what percentage is on statutory commission and how much on local VS.
* On Asset transfer, let’s have a case study; the details of the SITO transfer.
* If CIL cannot be used to support VCS, can we see those rules and what it has been used on?
* On commissioning, how fast is the One Croydon ‘shift in investment’ going? CVA has written to the Mayor asking for a Commissioning Summit to see how we can change practices.
* On the UK Share Prosperity Fund, can we have the specifics on what is being done to make it accessible to the VCS?
* Note that you see producing another Council-led strategy as inappropriate - CVA will support the VCS to put their own Business Plan together and take the lead as with the VCS Manifesto

**AS:** No other borough in the country is in the same position financially as us. We want to re-set the relationship with the VCS so that we work in true partnership alongside the NHS, the Police and other partners. We want to work with groups affected. **SP**: We’ll invite you back to the CVSA to report back on the outcome of your 121 meetings**Rowenna, Scrutiny committee**: as members we can request information to the Council, evaluate decisions, make recommendations. The Mayor of Croydon has an obligation to respond to them. The next meeting is on the 6th December 2022 and this topic is on the Agenda. Do contact me to give me the data of the impact of funding cuts. |
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