

**THE RESET**

**CROYDON COUNCIL’S RELATIONSHIP WITH**

**THE LOCAL VOLUNTARY & COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)**

**1. SUMMARY**

1.1 On behalf of the CEOs Group, CVA presents the Mayor of Croydon with this position statement supporting our shared aim to reset the relationship between Croydon Council and the local VCS. The statement is presented in advance of the next CEOs meeting at which, it is proposed, the Mayor collaborates with the CEOs on a plan of action bringing practical purpose to the reset. The actions agreed will work us towards the central aim – to rebuild a Council-VCS relationship that delivers stronger communities and better wellbeing outcomes for the people of Croydon.

**2. THE VALUE OF VCS PREVENTION**

2.1 This position-statement does not take further issue with the ending of Croydon Council’s VCS Community Fund or the accompanying Equalities Impact Assessment process. Instead it concerns itself with the future sustainability of Croydon’s VCS by exploring how the proposed reset – of the Council’s relationship with the local VCS – can support that sustainability. Our starting point is a clear focus on what needs sustaining, based on the borough-wide consensus formed during the pandemic on the *value of VCS prevention*. This consensus informed Croydon’s *Healthy Communities Together* (HCT) bid and now informs the HCT programme itself and its aim to achieve a greater investment in the VCS’ preventative work. The HCT programme represents Croydon’s commitment to investing in prevention through a local VCS that plugs the gaps in statutory provision; eases the demand on statutory provision; and co-creates with local residents a range of community-led services that reduce dependency on statutory provision.

2.2 A series of crises have highlighted why it is so important that we retain the means to invest in local VCS prevention. The global pandemic taught lessons that should never be forgotten – and in Croydon we learnt that the borough’s emergency relief effort, targeting our most vulnerable residents, depended on the VCS’ mobilisation of local community resources. By bringing prevention into play the local VCS managed to design and deliver practical solutions (mutual-aid; foodbanks; volunteer runs; befriending) that stopped needs from escalating. Prevention operates through an holistic approach by recognising that mental health can impact on employment, that impacts on financial wellbeing, that impacts on housing and so on – and not coincidentally, the Community Hub model gained in currency during the pandemic as we mobilised multi-agency responses to support people with complex needs. VCS prevention enables people to manage a multiplicity of problems that can otherwise bring them to breaking point – and when community-led services are integrated within the multi-disciplinary reach of the Council/NHS teams in our localities, the potential for a seamless, personalised service is greater. Community cohesion is also a product of VCS prevention. The 2011 riots are recent enough in Croydon’s collective memory to caution against the breakdowns in community cohesion that result when too many local people consider themselves on the margins of society and without any stake in their local community.

2.3 The VCS supports a reset that – by planning for the longer-term, beyond the current crisis – acknowledges the VCS’ transformative role and puts prevention at the heart of the Council-VCS strategic relationship.

**3. IMPACT ON LOCAL RESIDENTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

3.1 The impact of VCS prevention at both levels – on local residents and on the wider community – will inevitably be felt from April 2023 as decommissioned VCS services wind down. This point can be illustrated with just a few examples.

* Croydon Drop-In’s (CDI) loss of funding for its outreach service from April 2023 will result in the withdrawal of this service for 1500 young people every year - that’s 1.5% of Croydon’s youth population. CDI services have supported young people experiencing anxiety and presenting with suicidal feelings, self-harming, eating issues and incidents of sexual abuse; young people refusing to attend school; young people who are NEET; young people diagnosed with depression; young people who have experienced a mental health breakdown; young people who are autistic; and young people left isolated by the pandemic experiencing, for example, agoraphobia. The solutions CDI support young people to find include learning how to communicate; reconnecting with friends; attending self-defence classes; voluntary work and enrolment on training courses; preparing for interviews, attaining apprenticeships and finding a job; and starting counselling.
* At the other end of the age spectrum, the borough’s neighbourhood care groups will no longer be supporting hundreds of older people referred to them by GPs and social workers to attend their lunch clubs; keep hospital and dentist appointments; go shopping; go on day trips; and to access their befriending and household-help services. From being lonely and housebound the people who have since enjoyed company, engaged in activities and eaten more healthily will be more likely again to experience depression and/or suffer falls leading to hospitalisation.
* The cuts to Mind in Croydon’s services will leave 2500 local residents without any employment support, welfare benefits advice and mental health support, impacting disproportionately on people with disabilities. There will be 274 people a year across 17 wellbeing different activities - tennis, Tai Chi, yoga classes - that MIND will no longer be in a position to support.
* Age UK Croydon’s Memory Tree Café has supported over 200 people annually - its loss of funding means a step-in reverse for Croydon’s ambition to become a *Dementia Friendly Borough* – and the 1000 people annually supported through Age UK’s now unfunded Information and Advice service will be left without much needed support during the cost-of-living crisis.
* Croydon Mencap’s welfare benefits advice supporting 52 families will no longer be funded, nor will its volunteer programme.
* The 580 people supported on a weekly basis by the Asian Resource Centre and its partner groups are at risk of becoming disengaged and isolated.
* The South West London Law Centre will have no funding for the clinics programme in Croydon that sees just under 1000 people each year working immigration and asylum, community care, employment and discrimination, housing, debt and welfare rights cases.
* Croydon Vision will lose the funding for its Support and Enable Programme, resulting in on average 15 residents per month diagnosed with sight loss no longer being able to access the transport, lunch, social activities and educational workshops.
* Citizens Advice Croydon currently supports 436 local residents through its Direct Referral Service and around 5000 residents annually on work-related issues; welfare benefits; housing problems; debt problems; relationship breakdown and social isolation – all of which now faces an uncertain future.

3.1.2 The resulting pressure on the Council front-door needs planning for. CNCA’s CEO asks the critical question - where will they (the 100s of predominantly over-77s attending the neighbourhood care lunch clubs) go in the future to access support? How will the Council front-door manage the increase in referrals?

3.2 Play Place delivers youth and community activities every year that build aspirations for 1500 young people and prevent anti-social behaviour and gang-affiliations from escalating. Their work – also under threat - provides a clear example of the wider impact prevention can make across local communities. VCS prevention can act like a glue binding communities together. By operating in informal environments in partnership with local residents, Play Place delivers estate-based play and youth provision for 8-24 year olds and their families, with a strong focus on family events, play sessions with younger children and parents and school holiday activities. They use local assets like churches, schools and community centres to deliver their services, supporting smaller community and church groups in the process - working always at times that are appropriate for young people. This gives young people and their families a stake in their communities, a feeling of ownership and a sense of cohesion. In the same way, Citizens Advice Croydon demonstrates through the reach of its service how *population good health and community wellbeing rests on the foundations of individuals having a good standard of housing, employment, sufficient income, a sense of self-worth and engagement and a voice when things go wrong*.

**4. ADDED VALUE**

4.1 Without VCS prevention a significant number of local residents will enter the revolving door that statutory services can become – at significant cost to the Council and NHS. Less prevention leads to reductions in wellbeing outcomes and increases to obesity, mental health and other issues that will create additional strain on public health services and CAMHS. When all the associated costs attached to poor health, unemployment and petty crime are factored in, the business case for prevention becomes compelling. Citizens Advice Croydon can evidence £602,063 in annual savings through the prevention of housing evictions and £325,876 in savings by reducing client take up of GP and other NHS services.

4.2 Local investment in prevention also strengthens the business case VCS organisations build into their bids for external funds. Most funders are looking for innovation and an outcomes-based approach that tackles social problems by their root causes. When VCS fundraisers can evidence a track record in prevention – and show examples of effective collaboration with their strategic partners in local government and the NHS – their bids become closer aligned to the funder’s strategic priorities.

4.2.1 For example, CVA has brought £2,220,000 into Croydon over the last two years - including more than £1 million of funding distributed to local partners through flagship projects like *This Girl Can* and *My Ends*. The VCS groups we supported brought in an additional £11.7 million (2021/22) from more than 40 funders including the National Lottery Community Fund, Sport England, Trust for London and City Bridge Trust.

4.3 Prevention, operating through relationships based on trust and empathy, is practiced uniquely well by volunteers – as evidenced by the impact of services delivered by Croydon’s neighbourhood care groups, its carers network, the CAB, CAYSH and Mencap. Three years after setting up and coordinating Croydon’s emergency relief effort during Covid19, CVA’s Volunteer Centre will have no funding to continue operating beyond March 2023. Over the Community Fund period the Volunteer Centre generated over 32,000 volunteer hours in the Team Croydon shop, equivalent to £480,000 in paid hours – quite apart from the 2,500 structured volunteering opportunities brokered across Croydon’s VCS every year.

**5. MITIGATION AND RECOVERY**

5.1 Resetting the relationship between the Council and Croydon’s VCS will mitigate the negative impact of the financial crisis if we can build sustainable strategies for a greater investment in VCS preventative work. At our last meeting with the Mayor in October 2022 we identified two main strategies for urgent implementation - leveraging and targeting external funds to inwardly invest in the local VCS; and achieving greater social value through the Council’s commissioning and procurement system. The VCS shares an equal responsibility with the Council on both of these. By working closely together on the reset we can bring a greater focus and cohesion to Croydon’s fundraising effort; and we can accelerate the integration of Croydon’s *locality and strategic commissioning* being aspired to through the HCT Funding and Commissioning workstream.

**6. CALL TO ACTION**

6.1 The proposal made through this statement is that we now set about agreeing the actions needed to put these strategies into practice. With the Mayor’s agreement, we will collaborate with the Council in drafting the initial actions that pull together those initiatives already underway (notably through the HCT programme). The challenge then before us is to use the next CEOs Group meeting to map out a set of medium-term actions, with clear timeframes for implementation, that bring us closer to the Council/VCS relationship being sought.

**Steve Phaure**

**Croydon Voluntary Action**

**ON BEHALF OF THE CEO GROUP**

This statement is submitted by CVA on behalf of the following 32 VCS organisations:

* Age UK Croydon
* Asian Resource Centre Croydon
* Carers Support Centre
* CAYSH
* Citizens Advice Croydon
* CRISIS
* Croydon Almshouse Charities
* Croydon BME Forum
* Croydon Drop In
* Croydon Hearing
* Croydon Mencap
* Croydon Neighbourhood Care Association
* Croydon Relief in Need
* Croydon Vision
* Disability Croydon
* Garwood Foundation
* Good Food Matters
* Home-Start Croydon
* Legacy Youth Zone
* METRO Charity
* Mind in Croydon
* Music Relief
* New Addington Good Samaritans
* Off The Record
* Pace Purley
* Play Place Childcare Services
* Reedham Childrens Trust
* Start Up Croydon
* SW London Law Centres
* The Family Centre
* Westbury Community Project
* Willow Learning for Life