

# CHAMPIONING CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY THE CVA STRATEGIC PLAN – 2024/29



***STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY  
EXPANDING THE ROLE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY  
MAXIMISING THE INVESTMENT IN CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY***

## PREFACE

CVA is the infrastructure body supporting the whole of Croydon's voluntary and community sector (VCS) - and its wider Civil Society. Our mission is to enrich family and community life in Croydon by supporting the full breadth of VCS activity – from volunteering and active citizenship to grassroots community action and specialist service-delivery. Our infrastructure role involves:

- Having a strong voice and acting as a powerful representative of Croydon's VCS - advocating on its behalf, campaigning to promote its services and the people it serves and, where necessary, acting as an independent critic of government to secure VCS interests
- Promoting the VCS' unique strengths in prevention, early intervention, the asset-based approach and tackling inequalities – and managing VCS delivery-partnerships that achieve transformational outcomes for local people
- Being the main promoter of volunteering in Croydon - brokering supported volunteer placements, capacity building the volunteer-involving delivery groups and targeting new opportunities at people who face barriers to volunteering
- Attracting financial investment into Croydon's VCS, fundraising on behalf of our VCS partners and representing the social value provided by Croydon's VCS to local commissioners

Our new Strategic Plan sets out how we aim to honour the Covid19 legacy of community-led action by playing to this borough's greatest strengths and assets – our local people and the communities they represent. Croydon's sustained recovery is our shared goal – and our shared challenge is to build on the solid foundations that Croydon's Civil Society put down in 2020 and has worked tirelessly since then to maintain.

We are planning to commit our resources for the rest of this decade to achieving three transformational goals that Croydon united around during the pandemic. These are:

- A genuine devolution of power and responsibility to local people
- An expanded role for Croydon's VCS – from running neighbourhood activities that nurture community resilience, to delivering borough-wide services that support proactive care
- A shift in local investment towards this community-led model of provision that creates such an abundance of health, wealth and wellbeing in Croydon

Everything that CVA has achieved since 2020 in mobilising this town's indomitable community spirit has owed its success to partnership working. As 2024 approaches we now invite our partners in local government, the NHS and the business sector to join with us and our community partners in shaping the actions CVA is committing to in the Implementation Plan presented below.

**Karim Hemani**  
**CVA Chair**  
**On behalf of CVA's Board of Trustees**

**Steve Phaure**  
**CVA Chief Executive**  
**On behalf of CVA's staff team**

# CHAMPIONING CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CVA has been kept extremely busy this decade – firstly in coordinating Croydon's emergency relief effort in response to the global pandemic, and then in rebuilding the VCS relationship with Croydon Council in the wake of an unprecedented financial crisis. For the rest of the decade at least CVA expects its focus to be on Croydon's recovery – and the part Croydon's Civil Society plays in this.

1.2 When Civil Society stepped up so magnificently during the pandemic, the community spirit it released was so strong that CVA found itself at the centre of a borough-wide volunteer movement with foodbanks, mutual-aid groups, faith communities and the local VCS combining to prevent social breakdown and protect our most vulnerable citizens. CVA's main imperative now is to channel that priceless community spirit in ways that put local people at the heart of Croydon's recovery. This plan commits CVA to working in partnership with Croydon Council, Croydon NHS and our local VCS to:

- Strengthen the voice of Croydon's Civil Society
- Expand the role of Croydon's Civil Society
- Maximise the investment in Croydon's Civil Society

1.3 For the rest of 2023, CVA will consult on the plan and explore with our partners how, by working differently and more collaboratively, we can achieve flagship status for Croydon across the UK - as the Champion of a Civil Society\* that innovates new models of governance and service-provision, with local people in the lead.

\* In January 2024 CVA will begin a research project scoping the size of Croydon's Civil Society and the social value it delivers – both through its paid workforce and through the carers, volunteers, connectors, befrienders and community champions who are active in social-support systems throughout Croydon that stretch from families into neighbourhoods and across whole communities.

## 2. TRANSFORMATION

2.1 In taking a lead during Covid19 CVA worked its community connections like never before. In the process Civil Society showed how transformational a part it can play in overcoming the huge challenges this borough faces - in health inequality, food poverty, social isolation, violence reduction, homelessness and mental ill-health. The consensus formed on the back of this transformational effort, was that we need a massive rethink about how we seek to improve the life outcomes of local people. This took on added significance when the Council's internal crisis led to a borough-wide withdrawal of frontline statutory services, making the case for a new community-led model of provision even more compelling.

2.2 The Kings Fund and National Lottery thought so too when they funded the *Healthy Communities Together* (HCT) programme in Croydon, creating a transformational agenda for systems-change that supports a greater role for local people in decision-making and a shift in investment towards the

VCS. When in 2022 Croydon's VCS presented the new Mayor with its 2022-25 Manifesto, it provided another reminder of how unique a role the VCS can play in mobilising this borough's community assets behind a genuinely local operating model.

### **3. STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY**

3.1 Under our first strategic aim:

- CVA is proposing that Civil Society plays a formal, constitutional role in the governance of our town. Croydon's new model of governance will be inclusive, integrated and empowering – of both individual residents and the collectives representing our diverse range of communities. To achieve this, we need to build on the evolving system of decision-making in Croydon that has given Civil Society a key role in local planning and commissioning. If successful, this will create a unique brand of devolution in Croydon that identifies the agency in local communities, invests in community self-help and enables local people to get things done more easily.

### **4. EXPANDING THE ROLE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY**

4.1 Under our second strategic aim:

- CVA is proposing that Croydon's local VCS be afforded the status befitting its role as the foremost provider of community-led services in Croydon - covering a spectrum of activity that begins in preventing people from becoming dependent on statutory services and extends to enabling people to access VCS services that promote independence and self-care. We want to scale up Croydon's asset based community development (ABCD) resources to generate grassroots social activities across every neighbourhood in every locality, at the same time as we capacity build our VCS partners to expand their borough-wide delivery roles in support of independent living and social solidarity. By 2030 Croydon's community-led service-model will be breaking new ground by evidencing how Civil Society can be preventative in how it creates health, wealth and wellbeing - while relieving the unmanageable demand on Croydon's essential statutory services.

### **5. MAXIMISING THE INVESTMENT IN CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY**

5.1 Under our third strategic aim:

- CVA is proposing to establish a *Croydon Civil Society Fund* that pools resources and ensures that investment in our local Civil Society is strategic, coordinated and sustainable. If successful, Croydon will discover a strategy for making its scarce resources go as far as possible, creating a fairness, transparency and inclusivity around funding that redefines the relationship between funders and VCS providers.

5.2 As preliminary steps towards the consolidation of Civil Society funds, CVA has formed strategic partnerships with the Reedham Childrens Trust and Age UK Croydon to manage significant new investments in what Croydon's VCS does best – innovation and prevention. The *Youth Innovation Fund* and the *Localities Commissioning Fund* both represent a new, relational way of working with

VCS providers by finding out what works best for them in achieving life-changing outcomes and maximising their impact. They offer a new way of targeting scarce funds at community-led solutions – and they invite matched funding to create a unified pot supporting Croydon’s Civil Society in a coordinated and sustainable way.

## **6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AND ANNUAL REVIEW**

6.1 The Draft Implementation Plan below sets out the high-level objectives that, if met, will achieve our three strategic goals. The actions that we have begun to map out combine pragmatism with aspiration. They are not all within CVA’s gift to deliver – which is why we are inviting our strategic partners in the VCS, Council and NHS to not only endorse our aims and objectives, but to collaborate with us in actioning them.

6.2 Having consulted our partners and taken their views on board, we will provide a timeline against the actions in the Implementation Plan over the short, medium and longer terms.

6.3 The final Implementation Plan will be launched in the new year, instigating a five-year programme that CVA will lead and collaborate on. We will review these actions annually, in consultation with our partners, to review the progress made and to re-prioritise if necessary. The CVA Board will build key performance indicators around the actions, measuring their impact at our quarterly Board meetings and reporting back to our strategic partners on progress made.

## **7. OUTCOMES**

7.1 CVA’s mission for the rest of this decade is to build on the heroics during Covid19 to give our local communities a pivotal role in reversing this town’s fortunes and building a national reputation for Croydon as the Champion of Civil Society. The challenges we will face cannot be underestimated - from the cost-of-living crisis and the position Croydon’s local authority finds itself in, to the violence and homelessness on our streets and the persistence of health inequalities across Croydon. But in five years’ time, through the implementation of this plan, our aim is to have delivered on a set of outcomes that will transform the role Civil Society plays in the life of this borough.

7.2 By 2029/30 we will have:

- Involved thousands of residents and hundreds of voluntary organisations in Croydon’s decision-making process, revitalising local democracy and putting responsibility for Croydon’s future firmly into the hands of our local communities
- Supported a community and volunteer-led model of local provision that is achieving quality-of-life outcomes for even the most vulnerable people in Croydon – demonstrably so, through reference to the VCS evidence-base
- Secured the best possible value from every pound of investment in Croydon’s Civil Society – from both inside and outside the borough



## **CHAMPIONING CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY THE DRAFT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **1. STRENGTHENING THE VOICE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY**

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To empower and engage Croydon's local communities in a devolved model of governance, positioning Croydon's Local Community Partnerships (LCPs) at the centre of local planning and commissioning
- To extend the influence of Croydon's Civil Society across the South West London (SWL) NHS Integrated Care System (ICS)

#### **ACTIONS**

- To embed the LCP role in the Council and NHS commissioning cycles
- To establish the LCP Community Plans in Croydon's Corporate Planning process
- To link the LCPs together through an Executive Group made up of the LCP Co-Chairs
- To link the LCPs into the appropriate Council, NHS and One Croydon Alliance decision-making bodies
- To create and support LCP staff teams in every locality
- To relaunch the CVSA as the Croydon Civil Society Alliance (CCSA) making it representative of our LCPs – together with the foodbanks, mutual-aiders, local resident groups, faith communities and grassroots groups that make up Croydon's Civil Society
- To host the Charity CEOs Group, providing a strategic link between Croydon's VCS providers and the leadership teams of our statutory partners
- To host the SWL VCS Alliance, providing a strategic link between the VCS and our strategic partners at the SWL level

#### **LEAD COMMUNITY PARTNERS**

- Local Community Partnership members
- Foodbank Network members
- Croydon Voluntary Sector Alliance members
- Chief Executive Group members

## 2. EXPANDING THE ROLE OF CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY

### OBJECTIVES

- To support the sustainable development of quality grassroots organisations in Croydon
- To support our VCS partners delivering key services in Croydon to be sustainable in their development and resilient to the changing income streams
- To expand the Community Hub model as the bridge between Croydon's social activities-base that diverts people away from service dependency – and the local VCS providers that specialise in supporting independence and building strong communities
- To facilitate understanding, shared learning and intelligence between the sectors in Croydon

### ACTIONS

- To extend our ABCD work across every locality, supporting teams of ABCD Community Builders (including those not employed by CVA but mentored by our staff) to nurture the growth of social activities in target neighbourhoods
- To launch the *ABCD Fund* enabling our Community Builders to support neighbourhood initiatives - i.e. for families with learning disabilities – and grassroots groups to pay for supplies and meet the costs of renting short-term spaces for their sessions
- To expand the network of VCS Community Hubs in Croydon to create an integrated network of place-based hubs in every locality
- To develop the Hub and Spokes model, linking up with Youth Hubs, Food Hubs and Family Hubs to bring cohesion and coordination to every locality
- To create a Central Croydon Community Hub in the Centrale shopping centre signposting people to their local hubs and VCS services
- To support the growth and development of a VCS service-model in Croydon that specialises in prevention and in taking a public-health approach to tackling the root causes of inequality
- To maximise the role and impact of VCS delivery-partnerships that take a lead role in Croydon on tackling food poverty, social isolation, serious youth violence and mental health
- To support VCS collaboration and joint VCS bidding through networks like the Croydon Youth Consortium, Croydon Mental Health Alliance and Croydon Food Partnership
- To maximise the role and impact of volunteering by conducting an ongoing volunteer-recruitment campaign; delivering a volunteer matchmaking service creating volunteer placements for local residents; and providing volunteer-management training across the VCS
- To facilitate learning and workforce development by running a leadership and skills development programme for VCS staff
- To provide training and networking opportunities for VCS trustees, giving them access to good governance resources via the CVA website
- To strengthen the VCS evidence base capturing the impact of community-led services by inducting partner organisations on impact measurement software and tutoring them in evidencing the value of their work
- To enhance knowledge of local VCS services by embedding the Simply Connect Directory in every partner website
- To increase awareness and knowledge of the VCS sector in the ICS Partnership and create opportunities for collaboration and partnership-delivery with the ICS

## LEAD COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Croydon Youth Consortium
- Croydon Mental Health Alliance
- Croydon Food Partnership

## 3. MAXIMISING THE INVESTMENT IN CROYDON'S CIVIL SOCIETY

### OBJECTIVES

- To create the *Croydon Civil Society Fund (CCSF)* - a strategic framework for the consolidation and management of every Council and NHS income stream addressing *preventative, community-led* and *neighbourhood-based* provision
- To take on a devolved commissioning role – under the CCSF framework - through Croydon Council and Croydon NHS
- To coordinate Croydon VCS fundraising from external bodies

### ACTIONS

- To support Croydon Council in resetting its relationship with the local VCS by achieving tangible benefits linked to (i) commissioning; (ii) social value; and (iii) fundraising
- To work collaboratively with Council and NHS Commissioners, resetting the way commissioning and procurement is managed in Croydon to better able the local VCS to win contracts and innovate in service-delivery
- To broker social value benefits through the Council's commercial contracts
- To convene a cross-sector *Civil Society Funding Group*, taking lead and/or joint-lead responsibility for managing the CCSF funds
- To identify every local funding programme inviting community-led responses, bringing it under the CCSF remit, sharing information on each programme widely, and opening up the bidding process to our local VCS
- To take responsibility for managing community-led funding programmes devolved through the CCSF – i.e. the HCT *Localities Commissioning Fund*, in partnership with Age UK Croydon
- To partner the Reedham Children's Trust in co-managing their *Youth Innovation Fund*
- To act as lead and accountable body for VCS delivery-partnerships accessing external funds

## LEAD COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Reedham Children's Trust
- Age UK Croydon

## CROYDON VOLUNTARY ACTION NOVEMBER 2023