

THE BEACON SCHEME 2006

Assessment Form

Theme	Increasing voluntary and community sector service delivery
Authority	London Borough of Croydon
Number	1468

Overall Score		
Outstanding (6)/Excellent (5)/ Very good (4)/ Good (3)/Fair (2)/Weak (1)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Outstanding - 6	Score: Outstanding - 6

Summary Comments		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
<p>A very good application with lots of praiseworthy examples but one needing particular testing about what is actually in place and for how long and what is just planned. Need also to establish the quality of the feeling behind the very good arrangements and that these are Compact compliant.</p>	<p>A very informative and well-structured visit which had a good balance between formal explanations of the Council's/Third Sector work and time for the assessors to explore particular issues in detail. The unity of purpose shared by the local authority and the VCS left us in no doubt that considerable trust had been built up between the two. Most of the areas for investigation from the First Sift have been answered particularly around proof of what is actually happening on the ground. Other Councils could learn a lot from Croydon.</p>	<p>The London Borough of Croydon has proven that it is an excellent authority in all aspects of its VCS work. The Panel was impressed with the authority on all levels and is strongly recommending that Croydon be awarded Beacon status.</p>

Score Summary Table			
	First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Leadership, Vision and Strategy	Good - 3	Excellent - 5	Outstanding - 6
Community and Customer Engagement and Empowerment	Very good - 4	Outstanding - 6	Outstanding - 6
Actions	Very good - 4	Outstanding - 6	Outstanding - 6
Partnerships	Very good - 4	Outstanding - 6	Outstanding - 6
Equalities and Diversity	Very good - 4	Outstanding - 6	Outstanding - 6
Outcomes	Very good - 4	Excellent - 5	Outstanding - 6
Sharing Best Practise	Good - 3	Excellent - 5	Outstanding - 6

Leadership, Vision and Strategy (Section 2.2 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Good - 3	Score: Excellent - 5	Score: Outstanding - 6

Comments	Comments	Comments
<p>The Council has good links with the VCS/Third Sector and there seems to be a strong sense of commitment to working together and to funding. Some of the arrangements appear not yet fully developed e.g. commissioning and procurement. The structural arrangements seem comprehensive if complex but it is not clear how accessible they are to new entrants. It isn't clear how effectively the VCS is resourced to enable this involvement to take place.</p> <p>Are the arrangements for increasing service delivery sufficiently developed in line with the Beacon criteria for lessons to be learned and excellence passed on?</p>	<p>Very strong leadership from both the Council and the Sector. There is no doubt that Croydon are Compact compliant and in many ways they have moved beyond Compact principles to the real implementation of its ultimate purposes. Despite the change in political leadership it is clear that these relationships are positively embedded within the LA.</p> <p>The Strategy has grown out of existing arrangements and the Best Value Review 2003. That organic and pragmatic growth has made it less easy to follow than a structure designed and built from above. To the untutored eye, the large number and variety of projects/initiatives can make the progress seem confused but the growth has been taken forward with the Third Sector and is well-founded on good processes and trust which makes it sustainable. Some of the final finishing touches, such as the overarching VCS commissioning model, are being put in place and reinforce the mutually supportive arrangements between the Council and community. The vision for the future appears to be more of the same but it is not clear whether the Council or Sector see any limits on that growth and the areas of involvement.</p>	<p>The authority demonstrated how, despite a change in administration it was able to look for continuity in its work with the VCS which did not result in dismantling any existing practice.</p> <p>VCS work has never been a party political issue in Croydon and both political parties are engaged in the process.</p> <p>The VCS at a political level is prepared to act as a critical friend and there is a strong culture of communication between all stakeholders.</p>

Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
<p>Although there does not appear to be a full Compact document - as there is for many other local authorities- the arrangements in place to involve the VCS do seem comprehensive and in line with Compact principles. It will be necessary to check that the arrangements are no less favourable than would have arisen under a full Compact agreement. Evidence on the structures and their effectiveness.</p> <p>Does the Sustainable Community Strategy fully represent a Strategy for engagement with the VCS?</p>	<p>How ambitious does the LA want to be in light of Central Government's plans and their experience to date?</p>	

Community and Customer Engagement and Empowerment
(Section 2.3 of the application form)

First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Outstanding - 6	Score: Outstanding - 6
Comments	Comments	Comments
<p>Lots of good evidence of structures for community/customer engagement and a Beacon award for Getting Closer to Communities and for Improving Housing Services by Involving Tenants.</p>	<p>The visit reinforced the sense of enthusiasm and commitment which came from the application. A truly impressive demonstration of unity and an openness of discussion which left one feeling that disagreements could always be resolved and that change only meant progress.</p>	<p>Community and customer engagement is integral to all that is done in Croydon.</p>
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
<p>Good community engagement is a sign of better opportunities for VCS service delivery but has that been translated into activity on the ground? How do the VCS feel about this programme? What are contract arrangements like?</p>	None	

Actions
(Section 2.4 of the application form)

First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Outstanding - 6	Score: Outstanding - 6

Comments	Comments	Comments
Lots of good actions with training and support. There appears to be much work in progress to develop their commissioning processes though it isn't entirely clear how long these structures and processes have been in place. More examples of how these have brought about change would have helped.	The wide variety and diversity of projects and initiatives under way were most impressive. It was also clear that different and innovative funding methods had been widely used to fit the particular needs.	The presentation lived up to the standard of the visit. No further comment.
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
We need to know more about the local authority's thinking behind its rationale for enhancing VCS capacity. Evidence of more service delivery as a result of the changes?	How can the LA convey the sense of excitement from the visit in a 20 minute presentation?	

Partnerships (Section 2.5 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Outstanding - 6	Score: Outstanding - 6
Comments	Comments	Comments
Good partnerships in line with Compact principles with mechanism in place for complaints and joint training.	See the references above. One of the strongest feelings coming from the visit was the complete absence of any need for either the Sector or the Council to dress their shop window. Views from both sides were open and frank with a justifiable pride in what had been achieved so far through effective partnership.	The authority has demonstrated mature working relationships and the VCS is actively involved in all aspects of work. There is evidence of an equal partnership between the VCS and private and public sectors and good partnership working has paved the way for structures to be developed. The panel was also particularly impressed with the way in which Croydon uses its partnership forum to discuss and resolve issues.
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
What does the VCS community think about how concerns and complaints are handled? The value to the local authority and the VCS of the scrutiny arrangements.	None.	

Equalities and Diversity (Section 2.6 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Outstanding - 6	Score: Outstanding - 6
Comments	Comments	Comments
Good to see that existing partnerships are being used to gain greater understanding of the needs of disadvantaged communities.	Again, another very strong area in a community where even small shortcomings on equality and diversity could impact badly on partnership. The sense of common purpose from all groups backs up the score.	No further comment.
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
How does the community feel? Is the use of such networks leading to real change in service delivery? What additional routes are the local authority using to test this out?		

Outcomes (Section 2.7 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score: Very good - 4	Score: Excellent - 5	Score: Outstanding - 6
Comments	Comments	Comments
Some very good examples of excellent outcomes across a range of services and an aspiration to deliver more.	Croydon are clearly delivering a lot in very close co-operation with the Third Sector. There are many excellent and tangible outcomes. They do not pretend that the community issues have been solved but there does now seem to be an accepted method of moving improved public service forward in which the community has a say. The apparent level of public consensus on the way forward is most encouraging both for the Sector and for the Councillors who have given consistent backing to the work.	Structures and progression shown. No further comment

Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
How far can the community influence the outcomes?	For the presentation it would be helpful to get an overview of the structures which have led to and maintained the close working, together with figures showing the progress made and the volume of spend.	

Factors that underpin your success (Section 4.1 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Score:	Score:	Score:
Comments	Comments	Comments
Good on structures and processes but a bit more practical detail would be helpful about how the aspirations are met.	The presentation phase offers a chance for Croydon to build on their key underpinning messages about what works and why in their borough.	The panel was impressed by how Croydon has managed to transform social services particularly around prevention. This mirrors Croydon's ethos of working with service providers to transform services. Croydon's capacity building work with other agencies and joint commissioning has resulted in an increase in providers. The areas of investigation have been answered and detailed comment is in the following sections.

Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
How does the VCS feel? Do they feel actively engaged and supported? Are the processes open and transparent?	In this regard it would be interesting to hear from Croydon what they would summarise as the key messages from their borough and how they would approach dissemination of these in a standalone capacity as well as in collaboration with other beacons within this theme. It would be helpful to the panel if time was taken to further outline the strategic approach they would take to disseminating messages and the types of activity they would envisage using. There would also be an opportunity to give more detail on who might be a part of doing this and what their role might be in sharing their messages.	

Successful initiatives (Section 4.2 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Comments	Comments	Comments
Some good details	The visit to the Waterside Centre showcased 9 disparate examples of successful initiatives each of which underlined and reiterated a clearly common approach.	The panel highlighted Croydon's commissioning arrangements and the focus on developing capacity within the voluntary sector. Also particularly impressive was the way in which Croydon has integrated local area agreement blocks into the structures of the LSP, of which the voluntary sector is a key part.
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
How did these come about and what was the council's role in them?		

Who are the key target audiences that would benefit from hearing your key messages? (Section 4.3 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Comments	Comments	Comments
A good range of audiences and stakeholders identified	These were identified in the application and firmly reiterated over the course of the visit.	<p>Croydon has identified local authorities and voluntary sectors as its main audience irrespective of size or tier.</p> <p>Croydon has identified the following key messages that would form the basis of the authority's dissemination programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Strength in formulating partnerships · Embedded compact way of working · Commitment to capacity building · Mainstreaming of good practice · A culture where politicians trust real people to deliver services · Being at the top of the game – i.e. recognition that there is a constant need to challenge and keep improving processes such as commissioning practice
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
For discussion in greater detail during visit.	How would the LA transfer what is being done well to counties and districts?	

Beyond the national Learning Exchange conference and Open Day, how might you work with other Beacons within your theme to maximise the impact of your learning activities?
(Section 4.4 of the application form)

First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Comments	Comments	Comments
<p>Previous Beacon experience will be particularly helpful so prospects look good for dissemination.</p>	<p>Croydon has previous experience as a Beacon in earlier rounds and has analysed what has worked best. In the main this has been based on one to one mentoring/shadowing arrangements, which they have found to be most successful. During the visit the authority made it explicit that this is an approach they would seek to replicate whilst exploring the possibility of using the approach of sharing through case studies.</p>	<p>Croydon has identified the following methods of sharing its key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Targeted marketing with a range of activities · Working with government departments to champion policy in this area · A pathfinder authority – linking beacons to this work · Development of Croydon's website · Successful coverage in local and national press · Conference on embedding the 3rd Sector in public services
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
	<p>Can Croydon identify the critical success factors that over time have led to their current position?</p>	

What experience does your authority have with sharing lessons with others? Give examples of where your authority has supported others to improve (Section 4.5 of the application form)		
First Sift	After visit	After presentation
Comments	Comments	Comments
Beacon on 4 previous occasions.	Croydon has taken a systematic and analytical approach to identifying what works for them in terms of improved delivery, mature partnership arrangements and the role the different sectors play in making this happen.	It is clear that a beacon award would act as an improvement driver to Croydon. The authority has clear messages about what works in the Borough and why. As a previous beacon, Croydon has a great deal of experience in sharing best practice and has a keen understanding of the methods that work best for effective dissemination of best practice. Croydon's messages could prove to be more powerful because of heavy commitment to this work by politicians and the prominent role the voluntary sector will play in sharing key messages.
Areas for investigation	Areas for investigation	Outstanding issues
	The presentation gives a further opportunity for the authority to demonstrate how they would condense the lessons learned (both previously and on an ongoing basis) into transferable messages and practice (i.e. how could other areas replicate the approach and development of the right kind of culture and behaviours for sustained impact?)	