

Increasing Voluntary and Community Sector Service Delivery Beacon Award

Croydon Council has been awarded Beacon status for its excellent work increasing voluntary and community sector (VCS) service delivery - one of only two councils in the UK to attain the award this year. Beacon status is recognition of the open and trusting relationship Croydon has with its voluntary and community sector and the mature working relationship and active involvement it has with the VCS in all aspects of its work.

THE BENEFITS OF INCREASING VCS SERVICE DELIVERY

- VCS organisations are recognised as an effective way to provide innovative services, particularly those tailored to meet the needs of potentially hard to reach groups within the community.
- Croydon's support for the VCS has risen significantly since 1999, resulting in substantial increases in mental health provision, respite for carers, supplementary schooling and black and minority ethnic (BME) older people's services. VCS organisations provide a wide range of services from improving day services for people with disabilities and / or sensory impairment through DisabilityCroydon, to supporting lone parent families through Croydon Playcare Company.
- The council and other public sector agencies support the VCS in various ways including funding, developing VCS capacity to be able to compete and deliver services and redesigning procurement methods, making it easier for them to win contracts for service delivery.
- The benefits of encouraging the VCS role in service design across all departments and agencies means the sector is able to deliver niche and mainstream services, there is increased community engagement and equality and diversity issues are addressed.

KEY FACTORS TO SUCCESS

Partnerships

- Underpinning this success is the unique partnership Croydon Council has developed with the public, private sector and VCS. All sectors have equal representation on the Croydon Strategic Partnership Board, which sets the strategic priorities for the Borough each year. The board agree the Community Strategy, one of the major priorities of which is the promotion of community involvement and the development of a thriving VCS.
- Croydon Strategic Partnership involves over 100 voluntary and community representatives in theme partnerships and sub-groups which influence the development of services.

Commitment

- Croydon's Sustainable Community Strategy (the vision for improving the quality of life for the people in the Borough) and the partnerships through which it is developed explicitly recognise the VCS role in advocacy and service provision for local communities. The Local Area Agreement also has a commitment to develop community and voluntary organisations to improve their capacity to provide services and represent their service users.

Networks

- Under the Community Network umbrella, a range of networks have been created that enable the voice of many groups within the community to be heard when developing strategies and shaping public services. These networks together involving over 1000 individuals and voluntary and community organisations include Croydon BME Forum, Carers Forum, Disability Forum, Mobility Forum, Mental Health Forum, Older People's Network and the overarching Community Network.

Compact way of working

- A Compact way of working with the VCS has been mainstreamed in the Borough since 2002, when it was agreed and signed at Cabinet and board level by the council and the Primary Care Trust. The core principles outline commitment in various ways to supporting and developing VCS service delivery and recognising the sector's important contribution.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Commitment to supporting VCS infrastructure and capacity building is key to Croydon's success. The council's allocation for infrastructure support and capacity building has increased by 23% from £440k to £540k over the last three years. This level of funding is strengthening the sector and enabling it to develop services and lever in resources through various avenues.
- Croydon benefits from a strong relationship with Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA), which plays a considerable role locally in managing and delivering services such as the Croydon Children's Fund and the Direct Payment Support Scheme. It facilitates the Community Network, and provides support for the wide range of networks and sub-groups.
- With council backing, CVA has grown significantly in recent years and is playing an ever-increasing role in representing and supporting the VCS in Croydon. The council also works in partnership to access more resources for CVA and the communities it works with. CVA's budget is now £1.8 million - double its 2001 level, with 63 staff. It runs over 40 projects, many of which are delivered on behalf of the public sector.

- A Capacity Checker and Capacity Building Toolkit have been developed by CVA and are being used by VCS and council staff to assess organisations' 'fitness for purpose' in relation to service delivery. Associated capacity building support work carried out by CVA and Croydon BME Forum is helping organisations to address areas for improvement to deliver increased and better service and to access more resources. The Capacity Building Toolkit, which helps commissioning agencies identify organisations they might want to commission from has been supported by the LSP.

Procurement

- Support for the VCS through partnership funding and capacity building has enhanced VCS capacity to compete for service delivery. Based on a firm LAA commitment, Croydon has improved its procurement methods. A commissioning model used by commissioning agencies on the Croydon Strategic Partnership enables VCS providers to compete equally for contracts. There is a more streamlined approach and rationalised monitoring system that enables VCS providers to meet performance management requirements with the minimum of bureaucracy.

Funding

- Croydon provides a comprehensive Funding Guide for applicants and has developed a standard funding agreement and application process. The council has a good record of timely payments for its funding provision. Three year funding agreements are the norm for funding core costs. In addition, Croydon External Funding Group's work with the VCS and other partners to access external funding opportunities and enhance resources for the VCS and the services it delivers.
- The purchase of GIFTs grants management software has helped the council to keep better track of the totality of financial relationships with the VCS and will help to map the growth of the sector.

OUTCOMES

There are numerous successful initiatives resulting from increased VCS service delivery. A few examples are below. The complete list can be found in the Beacon Application document, downloadable at the end of page 4.

- **Improving personalised care through direct payments**
Croydon's Direct Payment Support Service enables disabled service users and their carers to arrange their own care. The service, managed by CVA, provides advice, information, practical assistance, support, training and advocacy to individuals using direct payments or considering the direct payment option. CVA's links with VCS providers, support agencies and networks representing service users and carers place them ideally to deliver the service. The service has been particularly useful to users and carers who have specific cultural needs

relating to gender, religious and ethnic identities which were previously unmet by mainstream services.

- **Croydon BME Forum**
Council funded forum ensuring BME communities have an effective voice. The council provides core funding for Croydon BME Forum and a number of generic BME organisations. This is done specifically to enhance the sector's capacity to access resources and develop services sensitive to specific community needs.
- **Training**
CVA has delivered information and training activities for staff of all LSP partner agencies (including police, Croydon College, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council). A wide range of specialist joint training also takes place within the Borough, which is open to VCS as well as council employees and other statutory agencies.
- **'Being a Voice' Programme**
Supporting VCS representatives to express their perspective on partnership groups. CVA also provides training to enhance the confidence and effectiveness of community representatives of Croydon's LSP.
- **Talk2Croydon**
An innovative website helps to coordinate and share the outcomes of community involvement activity across key agencies and provides a good practice guide on widening engagement and consultation. Research conducted by CVA with traditionally hard to reach groups is helping to shape this interface for maximum accessibility.
- **External Funding Group**
Co-ordinates the Borough's approach to increasing the resources available for services delivered by the VCS.

Achieving Beacon status is also about sharing knowledge and experiences with others and inspiring them to improve. Over the coming 15 months the council will be delivering a dissemination programme to share its excellent practices with other authorities.

CONTACT:

Contact name: David Freeman
Job title: Policy Manager, Community Partnerships
Email: david.freeman@croydon.gov.uk