

Croydon Opportunity
& Fairness Commission
Final report
**appendix to agenda
item 6 - Cabinet
220216**

**A BETTER
CROYDON
FOR EVERYONE**





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Chair's Introduction

This is the final report of the Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission, an independent Commission set up by Croydon Council, which I have had the privilege of chairing.

The Commission and the many people we have talked to share a belief that we want a Croydon where everyone, regardless of background, can get on in life and be supported through tough times. When we surveyed residents on their feelings about poverty and inequalities for our Foundation Report, the majority (56 per cent) felt that what matters is ensuring everyone has equal opportunities. Fairness for us and Croydon residents and workers means no one should be excluded; everyone should have the opportunity to fulfil their potential to the full.

The scale of the task is immense. As the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation confirms, the map of the poverty in Croydon looks remarkably similar to that of 30 years ago, with the north of the borough much more deprived than the south and areas like Broad Green and Selhurst containing some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country.

Croydon's house prices, like those in the rest of London, have increased to the point of unaffordability for many workers. At the same time, government welfare changes and the even higher cost of housing in inner London are forcing many of the poorest families to move out of central London and into outer London boroughs like Croydon. Between 2010 and 2015 the borough became relatively more deprived compared to other areas.

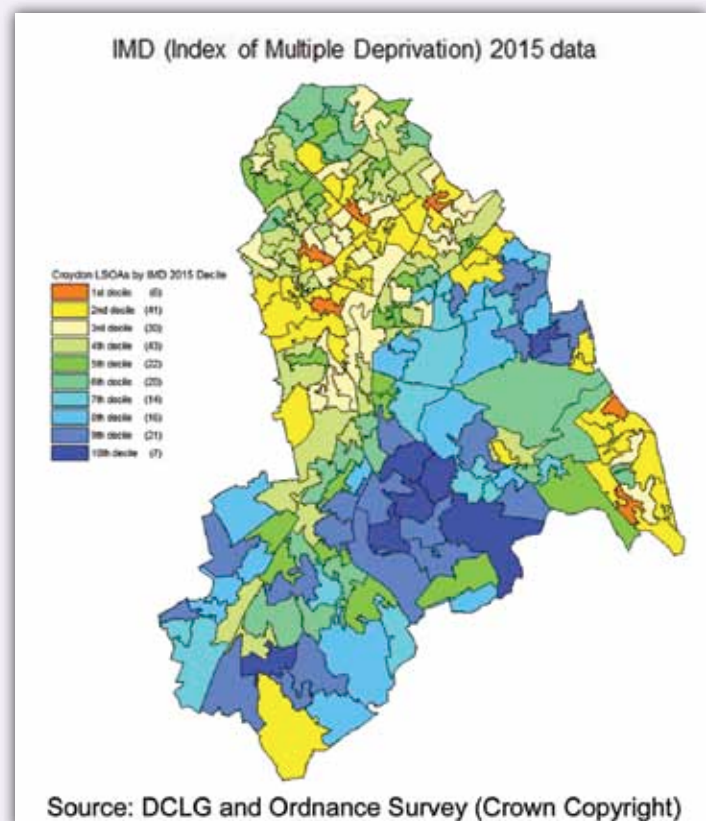
Public services too are under pressure. By 2019-20 the Council's budget will have been cut by 74 per cent. And the borough does not receive its fair share of funds, just £378 per head compared to £637 per head in Southwark or £586 per head in Lambeth.

With this as our reality how can we make change happen?

The arguments we have consistently found most convincing have been those that focus on people led change. By its very nature this kind of change is organic and cannot be prescribed from the centre. Ideas like the Living Wage have come from the ground up. One by one businesses are signing up

because they have become convinced it is the right thing to do. Pressure and persuasion are making the difference. As Mahatma Gandhi once put it, we must be the change we want to see.

We have also always understood the importance of networks and assets. What the least well off lack as much as money is the connections and support networks to get on in life and to bounce back from hard knocks. Croydon and Britain have a social mobility crisis. In the long run, if people living in New Addington and Fieldway are to have better life prospects they need to be able to connect with the opportunities which are already available to others. Mixed tenure housing with enriched social networks and greater local employment opportunities will do far more to change the contours of poverty than higher benefit levels. We believe that power should be shared, not concentrated, so that we are all able to use our gifts in our local neighbourhoods and communities as well as across the whole borough.





We see the arguments set out in this report as indicative of a different approach, which should be applied in future to many other issues. For example, if we can encourage more home owners and potentially tenants to take homeless people into their homes to occupy spare rooms via the concept of a FairBnB, can we do likewise for those with mental health challenges and learning disabilities, as they do in Geel in Belgium? We have come up with some ideas which link together organisations and resources which have not always worked together in the past. We know that there are many other potential connections, many other unused assets of resources and enthusiasm and skill which we have not tapped: our hope is that the people of Croydon will take our report as an encouragement to experiment, to be creative and entrepreneurial in finding more and even more imaginative ways of working together for the common good.

We also know that many of the ideas in this report have the potential to save vast amounts of public money. The annual cost of providing B and B and other temporary and emergency accommodation for homeless people in the borough is £5.7m.



To me, fairness is everybody being treated equally - same opportunities for everybody.

Ann Jameson, Addiscombe

With citizens playing their part we can cut this dramatically.

This report is part of a continuing conversation among those of us who care about our borough. Not everything in this report will happen in the form it is advocated but with the right energy and commitment positive change will happen. Neither I nor other members of the Commission are going to walk away after this report is published. We will continue to be involved in helping Croydon to become a better place; I hope you will too.

It has been immensely rewarding to witness the passion and determination to make Croydon a better place for everyone which is shared by so many residents, public servants and other employees. A particular joy for me has been to see the calibre of the contributions by the young people on our Youth Commission. I want to thank all of the Commissioners – of all ages - for their hard work and dedication, and, of course, all of the many residents and workers who have contributed to this process.

This report comes at a time of great change in Croydon: the question for all of us who care for the borough is, what sort of change will it be? We know that Croydon has been held back by its reputation for many years. The story of Croydon has been of a soulless, culture-free place, somewhere only worth escaping from. The people of Croydon have always known that the real story is very different, but the mud has stuck.

The developments which are and will be taking place in Croydon town centre are the most obvious and visible sign that things are changing, but the real change in Croydon's story will not be in buildings but in people. If we are able to work together for the benefit of the whole borough, we will reap a benefit which is greater than the sum of the parts and be a confident, renewed, ambitious and fair borough. That is the story of Croydon's future, if we make it so.

We can be a place in which people of different faiths, ethnicities, politics and abilities are all able to use our gifts to the full. That will be a place people want to come to, not to leave. A borough of fairness and opportunity: I urge all of you to be the change you want to see.

*Rt Revd Jonathan Clark,
Bishop of Croydon*

Executive Summary

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In the period leading to the publication of our Interim Report we consulted with over 3,000 Croydon residents and employees, more than any other Fairness Commission.

In our final phase we focused our efforts on discussions with those who we hope will play a part in implementing our recommendations. We created new connections, adapted our ideas to reflect our conversations and worked to build commitment to common goals.

The report is structured to consciously build on our interim report published in October and look forward to its further development and implementation. It therefore:

- retains the arguments we set out in our interim report, in their original form
- offers our response based on the dialogue that followed its publication
- in the light of that response sets out our final recommendations

Below we set out our six key themes and the key recommendations for each theme, within the report are further ideas and recommendations. A separate Youth Commission report is also available.



VIBRANT, RESPONSIBLE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Strong neighbourhoods don't start and finish with the formal voluntary sector, important though this is. Neighbourly acts, participation in local community, faith and sports groups, and the kind of peaceful citizen activism which challenges the powerful to spread power and wealth more evenly, are all vital parts of healthy vibrant neighbourhoods.

We want to see everything possible done to foster communities with high levels of participation, connectedness and positive social activism. And we want the Council to lead on this by committing to a proactive approach to volunteering in Croydon communities by its staff and to campaign to encourage other Croydon organisations to do likewise.

Anti-social behaviour and crime were raised regularly with Commissioners on walkabouts around the borough and by our Youth Commission. We know that crime is falling in Croydon but many local residents and businesses see a lack of respect for their area and for their fellow human beings and want to play a part in changing this. They also want to improve the local environment.

We think the best way to achieve this is by using an asset based approach with local businesses and residents working together to tackle shared challenges, supported and enabled by the Council and other public sector organisations.

What we want to see:

- The Council set an example of best practice by encouraging its staff to volunteer on its social priorities within Croydon, with a minimum entitlement of three days a year, ideally more, and volunteering facilitated by an outside organisation to ensure maximum engagement. The Council leadership should join a day of volunteering action to demonstrate their commitment. Other public and private sector organisations should be encouraged to pursue the same model as the Council.

- Risk management and data share protocols agreed by the voluntary sector so that hurdles to volunteering are minimised and an individual who approaches one voluntary organisation can, where appropriate, be easily signposted to another.
- Support for the idea of an online community to directly connect residents and employees to community groups and volunteering opportunities, set up by the community.
- Support for Asset Based Community Development, and other asset based approaches. These should be embedded in the culture of all public and voluntary organisations.
- Where there is demand, negotiated devolution of power to neighbourhood centres, with more power to tackle antisocial behaviour, reclaim some streets, change parking rules and improve the local environment and local businesses and residents working together on a shared agenda supported by Croydon's public sector and voluntary organisations.



A TOWN CENTRE THAT LIFTS THE WHOLE BOROUGH

For many years the reputation of Croydon town centre has held the area back. The changes now underway and planned for the future give the borough a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the town centre and shift that reputation. A nascent cultural and entrepreneurial renaissance is already evident and there is tangible optimism about the future.

But change also means disruption, particularly for local businesses, and without the right policies in place the prosperity and new jobs will bypass local businesses and residents. We want the town centre to become a London Living Wage zone, support young people to get work placements and opportunities, and to become a beacon for the best employment practices for local people, particularly disabled people. We want to see this approach adopted by the rest of the borough too and prosperity spread out from the centre.

What we want to see:

- An inclusive jobs brokerage service provided by the council working closely with developers and local employers. This should typically include, the presentation of 3 local CVs for every job recruited, with at least one interviewed as well as deeper involvement of local colleges in supporting local people to gain the skills necessary to find employment. The jobs brokerage service should also work with employers to support childcare provision, help with caring duties, promote flexible work and make a particular effort to present BME and disabled candidates to employers.
- A new Croydon Employment Charter for Croydon businesses and organisations. This would build on the good work being done by the council as a London Living Wage employer and through its procurement practices as well as the work of Croydon Commitment by asking businesses to sign up to the London Living Wage, to use the Council's job brokerage service, to pursue recruitment best practice which is accessible to disabled candidates and to support flexible work.
- A wider town centre Business Improvement District encompassing London Road and South End, so that all local businesses work together to share the benefits of the new developments.

LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

The pre-school years are the most important for a child's development but in Croydon it is in these years that children are most likely to fall behind their peers in other areas. Related to this are two major challenges: high numbers of children with special education needs and, as highlighted by our Youth Commission, concerns about mental wellbeing among children and young adolescents.

We want to see the earliest possible intervention for children with developmental and emotional challenges. And while we know that the local health service, the Council and many schools are working to improve services that support childhood development and nourish wellbeing, limited resources, an atomised education system and pressure on schools to achieve results make the task daunting.

What we want to see:

- An increase in the number of nurture groups so more children get the emotional support they need to be ready for school.
- More openness to best practice on both therapeutic interventions and support for children with special education needs with the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group providing funding to support evaluation of the best ideas.
- All schools, whatever their status, encouraged to participate in a group led by head teachers to share best practice on wellbeing and special education needs support.
- Work done with schools to encourage them to use their Pupil Premium on wellbeing and behavioural support, with toolkits and top up funding available from the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group for best practice.
- A move to outcome based commissioning for young people with schools, parents and pupils incorporated into the commissioning process.

A CONNECTED BOROUGH WHERE NO ONE IS LEFT ISOLATED

As human beings we have a profound need for companionship. But too many local residents live isolated and empty lives without this basic human need fulfilled. This takes a huge toll on their mental and physical health but it also increases costs on local services, particularly the health service. Increased admissions and patients in beds unable to return home because they have no one to support them are the inevitable consequence of social isolation.

We want this issue to move to the top of the local agenda. Recent research commissioned by Croydon Council found that 48 per cent of Croydon residents would be willing to do more to support a neighbour. Local people want to play their part and, particularly given the stark reality of the funding settlement for adult social care, it must be right to ask them.

What we want to see:

- Place leadership from the local Clinical Commissioning Group and Council with deeper collaboration, ensuring tackling social isolation is a joint commissioning and volunteering priority.
- Work to help communities become dementia friendly.
- Support for outreach services in GP practices and within communities to signpost socially isolated people to services and the promotion of online and offline directories of services.
- Backing for projects that link residents and care groups or community organisations such as the Neighbourhood Care Associations to socially isolated patients to help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and reduce bed blocking.
- Use made of new powers to increase the council tax precept to provide much needed funds for this agenda provided the Clinical Commissioning Group also funds work and that voluntary and community groups take a lead.

FINDING HOMES FOR ALL

The sense of security that comes with owning your own home when the mortgage is manageable or the debt paid off drives most of us to want to own our own home. We support initiatives to help people buy a home. But, even with help, many people will never be able to afford to buy their own home. Lack of affordable and secure housing and rising homelessness – exacerbated by government changes to benefits - pose perhaps the greatest challenge the borough faces.

The end of a private rented tenancy agreement is now the most likely cause of homelessness, closely followed by family breakdown. Early intervention and advice for tenants, short term financial support, and proactive approaches to working with landlords and agents, are some of the ways we can prevent homelessness. But the scale of the task demands that we appeal to communities to do more, by temporarily accommodating homeless people in spare rooms or by investing in a bond or giving time or money to help tackle the challenge.

What we want to see:

- A new fund to temporarily support local residents who cannot manage to secure a deposit in the private rented sector or facing short term difficulties with benefits or pay with temporary loans.
- A Good Agent and Landlord Charter focused on the parts of the private rental sector which can help most to prevent homelessness by taking tenants on benefit, with pursuit of best practice already prevalent in the private social rented sector including early advice on arrears and money wise courses made available, as well as support for disabled tenants. We want to see agents in this part of the market targeted and the idea advertised alongside the Landlord Registration Scheme, potentially with a lower licence rate for eligible landlords who sign up.
- A major push to encourage and financially incentivise residents to offer shelter for homeless people, particularly among home owners. There is already a lot of energy and commitment behind the idea of a FairBnB, which could be a London wide or national platform.
- Investment in New Addington, with a greater mix of tenure options, better amenities, and financial incentives to own or share ownership of new homes, particularly for the families of existing residents.
- A new community fund to tackle homelessness with options to give time and money or to invest in a simple bond.





SUPPORTING RESIDENTS TOWARDS BETTER TIMES

Croydon's vision must be of a high wage high skill economy. We want to see far more employers in Croydon paying the London Living Wage. Currently just eight, including the Council, are accredited Living Wage Employers. If Lidl can pay the Living Wage why not the other supermarkets? If Chelsea can do it why not Crystal Palace? If Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group and Bart's Hospital can do it why not Croydon's Clinical Commissioning Group and Croydon University Hospital?

Many residents told us how they struggle to make ends meet because they have low paid or insecure jobs, debt, or a long term illness or disability. By taking employment, debt, benefits and other advice and support out into every part of the community, in GP practices, church halls, and community centres, and even door to door, far more can be done to help residents through tough times.

What we want to see:

- The roll out of First Step so that every young person at college who wants it is offered local work experience, with priority given to schools in the most deprived parts of the borough.
- New services within GP surgeries and extended into the community wherever possible to support employment and offer benefit advice to people with long term illness and disabled people, joined up with services to tackle social isolation.
- Debt consolidation, benefits and other advice offered more extensively in the community with money wise training provided to those in debt or vulnerable to debt to help make Croydon a money wise borough.
- Support from the council, employers and developers to provide more childcare options, particularly those that free up community space and provide for flexible working patterns.
- A commitment that when business rates are devolved by the government the council will offer reductions for businesses that sign up to the Croydon Employment Charter, which will include the London Living Wage.

1. Vibrant, responsible and connected communities

THE CHALLENGE

Croydon is made up of many diverse communities, with their own identities. The borough is stronger for this and we celebrate our diversity.

While each neighbourhood is distinct they face many common challenges.

Residents tell us that all too often there is a lack of respect for their area and insufficient shared ownership of problems. Dilapidated shops and buildings, litter, fly-tipping and other forms of antisocial behaviour and crime frequently dominate local narratives, particularly in the north of the borough.

Rapid population churn, high levels of insecure rented property, overcrowding and high streets struggling to compete make it more difficult to build strong communities.

Across Croydon over 100 different languages are spoken. Migration brings new energy and new perspectives but also sometimes means communities naturally gravitate towards coexistence rather than coming together to tackle shared challenges.

Many residents tell us that they fear crime and antisocial behaviour and older populations are often more dependent on accessible district high streets with a good local retail offer.

In any neighbourhood there are a core of residents and local businesses willing to do more. We have met many who are doing amazing things to improve their area.


Croydon residents, from north to south, and east to west, also tell us they want more power to shape their local communities.

The challenge is to create an environment that engenders responsibility and nurtures the good things residents and businesses are willing to do to make their area a better place to live.



Croydon would be a better place if we had more volunteers... because there's so much, there's such a breadth of opportunity. [Volunteering] can help people get jobs, get confident, become a family, make friends, learn things themselves... it's about receiving back as well - it's a two-way thing. We don't have to be prime ministers, we don't have to be MPs, we can do our little bit in our little way and it all adds up to the big picture...It's like a jigsaw - we can all be a little bit of the jigsaw puzzle.

Pat, Scouts volunteer, South Norwood



People need to be made aware of the need not to throw rubbish on the streets – it's not a life hazard, it's just annoying – no-one wants to see rubbish on the floor. The Council's scheme, Don't Mess With Croydon, is a good idea and a good start, but by raising awareness we can stop it.

Kenneth, North Croydon



CASE STUDY...

Julia Weller, Family Centre CEO

At the Family Centre we use an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. ABCD is all about drawing on existing 'assets' in the community to help us improve things locally. These 'assets' can be different things – skills, experience, enthusiasm, or knowledge. But the key is that they exist within individuals and communities and, as a result, they can then be capitalised on to tackle problems we face locally.

We've developed a number of ABCD projects. One project, Money Magnet, was led by Wendy Barker, a former resident of New Addington. She wanted to give something back to the community she'd grown up in, and used her skills to help parents who were struggling financially to manage their budget better and do things like shop around for better deals. There have been many other ABCD projects, like one which allowed peer child-minding and another that allowed parents to share their experiences on supporting children with autism.

ABCD has great potential. If there were more ABCD projects, the lives of people in communities could be improved a lot.



RECIPROCITY, VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Across the borough families and communities are nourished and supported by neighbourly acts, participation in sports and community clubs, and in faith organisations.

Increasing participation in sports and activities and engagement in communities connects people and increases volunteering in many different forms. Networks, clubs, groups and associations are vital parts of the borough's social fabric.

More can be done to take up the offers of support made by successful resident associations, such as those in Coulsdon and Spring Park, with those in other places who need help to flourish. More can also be done to encourage the spread of best practice in general.

Croydon is home to over 1,700 voluntary organisations and has a proud tradition of volunteering and philanthropy. The benefits of volunteering are not just for those who need support. For the volunteer they include the sense of satisfaction of helping others but also the acquisition of new skills and connections and with these new employment opportunities and new horizons.

With the right environment reciprocity flourishes and more of us fulfil our potential.

At a time when council budgets are under significant pressure it is particularly important that the council continues to work hand in glove with the voluntary sector and that both the voluntary sector and the council recognise the untapped possibilities within every community.

Councils and other public sector and formal voluntary sector providers cannot make change happen acting alone. Real change happens from the ground up. Organisations like Croydon Citizens and Just Croydon mobilise citizens for the common good. We applaud the social activism that builds broad support for positive change, neighbour by neighbour.

We endorse Asset Based Community Development. This approach brings residents together to identify their goals and the assets that already exist in their community to help them achieve those goals. The methodology has already been successfully applied in parts of Croydon, such as Thornton Heath and New Addington, by Croydon Voluntary Action.



There is a great community spirit. Good examples were when the community rallied at the time of the Tia Sharp murder case and after the riots when the Co-op caught fire.

Sarah, New Addington

The council also has major influence in this sphere, and to maximise this we want to explore ways to increase volunteering. For example, a volunteer day could be a focal point in the current volunteer week: a day when the effort of as many people as possible throughout the borough would be on volunteering and community activities to support the needs of communities throughout Croydon.

The council could lead by example, by requiring, wherever possible, its staff to volunteer in the borough on this day. The day would be promoted with all public, private and voluntary sector employers, residents, and everyone encouraged to join in. This could make a dramatic statement but it would also provide practical support, increase understanding of the issues communities face and facilitate new connections and possibilities.

The public sector can also do more to increase knowledge of its workings among the voluntary sector, with open days where workers and volunteers with voluntary agencies might gain an insight into the work of the statutory bodies with whom they interact. These will help improve the way the sectors work together to achieve common goals.



Another idea the borough could explore is to promote volunteering through a fresher's style week, connecting people to volunteer opportunities. Perhaps this could also be built into the volunteer week.

We also believe more can be done to promote connections through online platforms. Croydon Freecycle has more than 20,000 members. It describes itself as 'a movement of people keeping stuff out of landfills while building a sense of community.' The Freecycle site was founded by people who wanted to make a difference and now has almost 9 million members worldwide.

An online community that helps to connect people who want to do more with people who need support could facilitate a new wave of volunteering and neighbourly acts, without the strictures of formal volunteering.

We also support programmes which actively welcome and introduce newcomers into local neighbourhoods and encourage them to volunteer and participate in the activities of their local area. These should be locally led by communities who want to participate. Wherever possible new migrants should be supported to learn English so they can quickly access the jobs market and play a more active part in the wider community. Despite the good work of Croydon Adult Learning and Training, new migrants can wait months to access an English course.



CASE STUDY...

Dualle, Student, Croydon College

When I came to this country I didn't speak English and I couldn't understand what others were saying. One of my teachers at Croydon College helped me and said "If you want to learn, you have to just go for it".

I started progressing, my speaking and my writing improved. I feel comfortable now talking to everyone. I am helping students who are new to meet other people, and who don't speak English. I know there are many other people who move here who also need help learning English. If they got help, they could progress like I did.



DEVOLVING POWER AND REGENERATING DISTRICT CENTRES

Every neighbourhood has its unique needs and perspectives. But in Britain our system of national and local government is over-centralised and often militates against local initiative and enterprise.

Wherever possible we want to see power and responsibility handed to neighbourhoods. This mustn't mean lots of meetings and bureaucracy or that those with the loudest voices get what they want. Instead local communities should use robust market research to understand what residents and businesses really want and what is most likely to work. In Camden community researchers are recruited locally and training is provided.

The council now gives more discretion to councillors to support local groups and activities with small devolved budgets. We want to see them go further with this approach. We support the transfer of assets to local neighbourhoods where there is demand, such as with Stanley Halls. Ideas like community hubs are also interesting and worth exploring further. We see no need for the council to adopt one approach for the whole borough.



When we started up the carnival originally we had to get in touch with a lot of local groups. And it was only when we did that that we realised just how much goes on up here whether it be voluntary or statutory.

Tracey, Pathfinders

At their best Croydon's high streets are focal points for vibrant neighbourhoods with small businesses' and residents' needs aligned to create a virtuous cycle.

An existing model which hands power to local businesses within locally agreed designated areas is the Business Improvement District. These have already been established in the town centre and New Addington, and most recently in Purley. We welcome this.

Based on assent given through a vote among local businesses, the Business Improvement District gives businesses in a self defined area more responsibility for their fate, including marketing for the area, parking and aspects of street upkeep. In return businesses contribute an additional amount to their business rates.

This approach works, particularly where businesses dominate the local environment, such as in town centres and business park areas, but in district high street locations where businesses can only do well if they play a central role in the life of the local community we think there is scope to enhance this model.

A broader approach would engage and involve both residents and businesses. It would create a genuine local partnership between residents and local businesses, whose owners and employees are often residents too.

With this option for a locally agreed designated area, businesses and residents could be asked to participate and a vote could include both. The democratic process would offer an opportunity to better understand what residents want from their local shops and how the area can evolve to suit their needs, and further to identify residents willing to contribute to the local community. The model would be insight led, not committee led, with decisions taken based on careful market research among residents and businesses.

As part of a package of changes the council, police and other public services would offer additional support, such as a deep clean, funds for Asset Based Community Development, the council's mobile enforcement unit to tackle fly-tipping, and support to tackle other aspects of anti-social behaviour. With more say over parking rules and perhaps over local traffic, those areas that want to can have more power to reclaim some residential streets or areas for children to play in them. This could be done for defined time periods each week,

for example on Sunday. Residents might also work with retailers to improve the local food offer so that it is healthier. The council and other public sector bodies could provide benefits in kind, such as the staff time and skills to support change. No levy would be raised on residents but potentially additional funds could also be crowd sourced and residents could be asked to contribute in kind.

We know that current government legislation does not provide a framework for this model but neither does it preclude it. We want to see what the appetite is for such a model and to work with the Greater London Authority as well as local service providers and local communities to see it happen.



One of the good things about 'Asset Based Community Development' (ABCD) is the reliance on each other rather than funding. At the Me Time project, parents were relaxing and unwinding, and at the same time they received supported with childcare so they wouldn't have to bring in an outside person and pay them to do that work.

Jennine Bailey, ABCD Officer



WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



One of most interesting discussions that followed the interim report's publication was on volunteering.

There was broad agreement that nurturing higher levels of volunteering, and more neighbourly acts and participation in sports and social, faith and community clubs would have widespread benefits for communities and for any individual providing their skills, time and enthusiasm. Skills acquisition, new friendships, and a greater sense of purpose are essential parts of the reciprocity that underpin participation and volunteering.

But in a shared quest to increase volunteering and participation two issues dominated the discourse. The first was about risk and the management of volunteers; the second related one was about the mechanics of making it easier to volunteer and participate.

Many voluntary organisations, like Age UK, work with vulnerable people. Their volunteers need to be vetted, both to ensure they have the right aptitude and attitude and to minimise any potential for harm to someone in their care. They require management and training. Age UK needs more volunteers but they also need real commitment over a period of time to make their investment in an individual viable. At the other end of the spectrum a neighbourly act can take a few minutes and most group activities require no vetting or management. Parkrun is an example of such a group activity that came from one person's idea, and embraces all comers. In between are many organisations that still need to vet their volunteers but manage to keep bureaucracy to a minimum. An example being Goodgym, which combines keeping fit with doing good for those in need, a fantastic volunteering win win.

Croydon is blessed with an abundance of voluntary and community organisations. It has an excellent volunteer brokerage service, and organisations committed to recruiting resident volunteers and volunteers from businesses. However, from our discussions it is clear there are some areas where, by coming together and pooling effort and knowledge better results can be achieved.

We think the voluntary sector needs to:

- **be clear about the different avenues into volunteering and to recognise it as a continuum**
- **be explicit about risk in different scenarios, and to avoid excessive caution**
- **agree information sharing protocols so that the right fit for a potential volunteer can be found**

A volunteer that that is not right for Age UK may be exactly right for Goodgym. Someone who first goes to Goodgym may later want to do something for Age UK. A meeting on Parkrun may lead to volunteering for Goodgym.

In this regard there is ample scope for a peer to peer online platform, perhaps with light touch online moderation. This is distinct from a brokerage service because it lets members of the community make their own connections. Although, again, with the right data protocols a community volunteer might later be approached by the brokerage service. Voluntary organisations might also publicise opportunities to help the most vulnerable on such an online platform.

Of course, an online platform is merely a convenient way to facilitate connections.

Asset Based Community Development and other asset based approaches, combined with devolution, which gives neighbourhoods more responsibility to determine how they do things, are vital underpinnings to civic society. And peaceful citizen activism such as environmental campaigns and those to bring unused assets into community ownership is another important avenue that also has significant potential to contribute to the common good.

The untapped potential of Croydon's assets – its public space, buildings, skills, networks and knowledge - remains vast. Croydon also has an amazingly successful diaspora – musicians, business people, footballers, artists and many more beside.

We were also pleased that in our dialogue with resident associations the desire to collaborate and support each other is already evident. We are particularly keen to see better resourced and more active resident associations in the south of the borough work to support more fragile resident associations in the north of the borough.

In our discussions with the council it became clear that although a staff volunteer policy exists insufficient use is made of it. The council must take a lead on this agenda. Many organisations such as HMRC and Waitrose entitle their employees to three days off for volunteering. We want the council to at least match this and ideally go further. But to really make a difference the council should set out its priorities for volunteering, make clear that leave will automatically be granted for these priorities, and appoint an outside organisation to facilitate volunteering by its staff within Croydon. Staff will benefit by gaining a greater understanding of the challenges faced by the residents they serve and of the local voluntary sector. The council leadership should also participate in a day of volunteering so that there is a focal point for activity and they are seen to lead by example.

Once the council has firmly established its own credentials in this area it will also be in a strong position to encourage other public and private sector organisations to do likewise.

In the debate about devolution we felt that, if anything, our arguments in the interim report were too timid. While we hold the view that any devolution should be negotiated on a case by case basis, so that it is appropriate to each

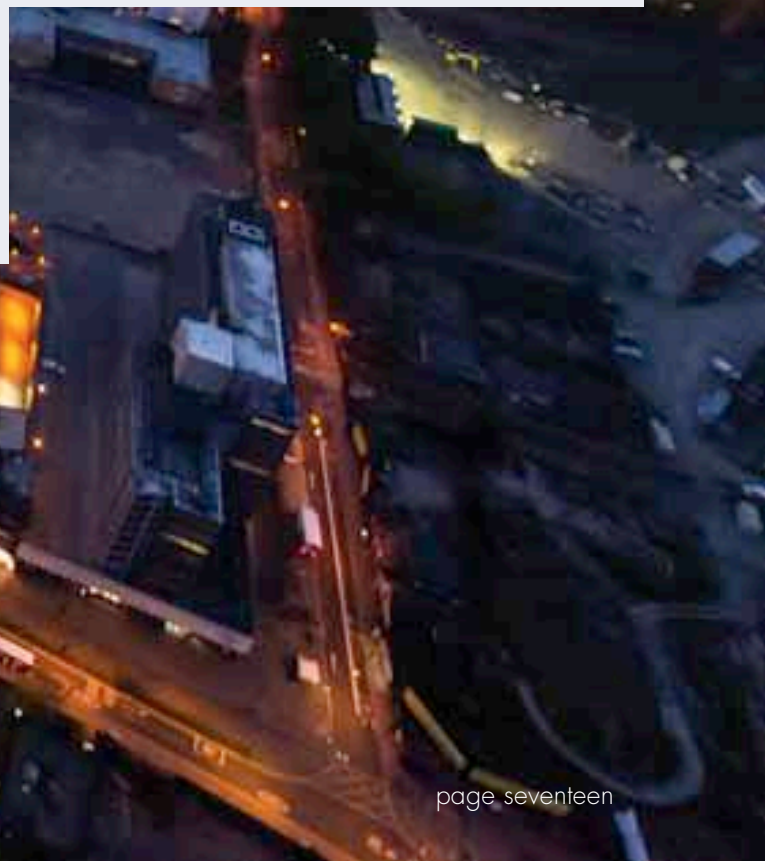
neighbourhood's needs, the tenets are universal.

Devolution around district centres seems logical because not only is there already a mechanism for devolving power to local businesses via the Business Improvement District model but both local businesses and residents have a vested interest in improving their neighbourhood.

More power to reclaim streets, for example with some residential streets closed to cars for one day a week, more control over parking rules and to tackle anti-social behaviour, improve the food and shopping offer and use unused space for social enterprises, are all the kind of things neighbourhoods say they want.

To support a devolution agenda we would like to see the Council create a unit charged with unblocking bureaucratic and other challenges that neighbourhoods face. Council support might include use of its mobile enforcement unit, deep cleans, and help with compulsory purchase orders for dilapidated unused buildings. The police and local health service should also play their part in supporting this agenda.

We want devolution, participation and civic activism to be mutually reinforcing and for the voluntary sector to play a strategic role in supporting this.





WHAT WE WANT TO SEE:

More volunteering and participation in sports and community activities

- The council set an example of best practice by encouraging its staff to volunteer on its social priorities within Croydon, with a minimum entitlement of three days a year, ideally more, and volunteering facilitated by an outside organisation to ensure maximum engagement. The council leadership should join a day of volunteering action to demonstrate their commitment.
- Other public and private sector organisations encouraged to pursue the same model as the Council.
- Risk management and data share protocols agreed by the voluntary sector so that hurdles to volunteering are minimised and an individual who approaches one voluntary organisation can, where appropriate, be easily signposted to another.
- Support for the idea of an online community to directly connect residents and employees to community groups and volunteering opportunities, set up by the community.
- Support for Asset Based Community Development, and other asset based approaches. These should be embedded in the culture all public and voluntary organisations.

- Successful resident associations encouraged to support others and spread best practice.

Increasing common understanding

- Encouragement for community led programmes to welcome migrants into the local area and to support them to volunteer and participate, backed by greater support to learn English.

Devolving power and regenerating high streets

- Where there is demand, negotiated devolution of power to neighbourhood centres, with more power to tackle antisocial behaviour, reclaim some streets, change parking rules and improve the local environment and local businesses and residents working together on a shared agenda supported by Croydon's public sector and voluntary organisation.
- The creation of a unit within the council charged with unblocking bureaucratic and other challenges neighbourhoods face.



2. A town centre that lifts the whole borough

THE CHALLENGE

Most of central Croydon's buildings and its infrastructure were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Its shopping environment is perceived by many residents and businesses to be dated. For the most part its centre is commercial only and it lacks the residents needed to create a vibrant 24 hour living breathing community.

Historically Croydon has attracted businesses in sectors that, when compared to other London boroughs, pay relatively low wages, including office support functions and retail, and in common with other areas of the country its public sector workforce is shrinking.

Today, while there is a nascent cluster of tech businesses and other new economy businesses, Central Croydon's employment remains largely based on retail and office support functions. Croydon town centre also has a reputation for crime which, combined with the view that the town centre is tired, holds it back.

Given its workforce and the potential for shoppers to stay later, its evening economy is minimal, with few workers, shoppers or residents visiting restaurants, bars or cultural events after work finishes.

Although central Croydon has excellent transport connections, the borough as a whole, and the centre in particular, has the lowest cycling rates of any in outer London and not all parts of the centre are pedestrian friendly, with, for example, Wellesley Road dividing the town centre in two.



Croydon really must put young people and families at the centre of their building development plans. This is the historic basis for community and there is a great danger that more young people will be forced to simply window shop or get into trouble because there is nothing for them to do that doesn't cost money. Croydon town centre needs a heart. Please will someone stress this.

Peter Stanley, Director of Ment4



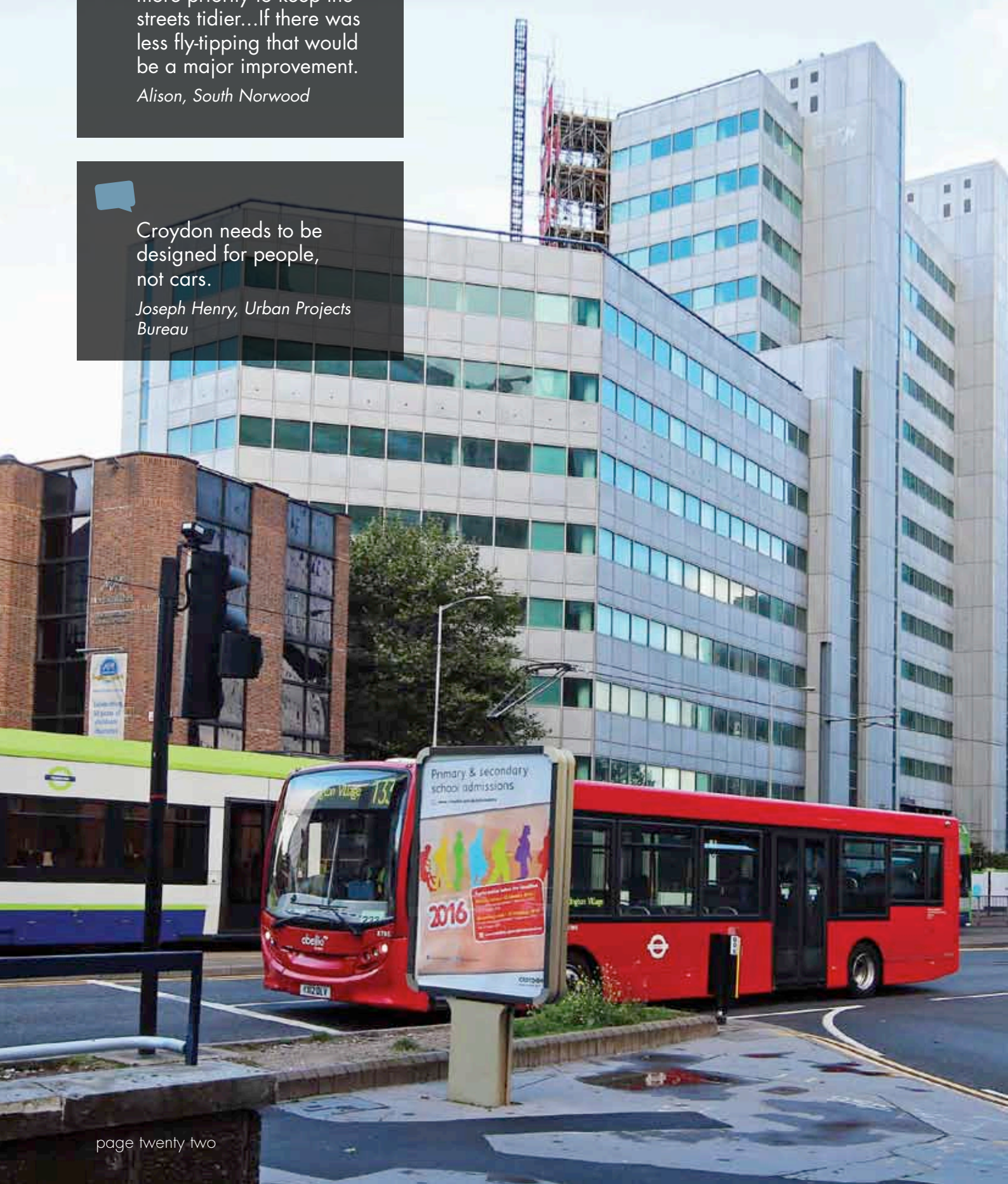


I'm pleased there is now more priority to keep the streets tidier...If there was less fly-tipping that would be a major improvement.

Alison, South Norwood

Croydon needs to be designed for people, not cars.

Joseph Henry, Urban Projects Bureau



WORK

An ambitious borough should continually ask fundamental questions about the nature of the labour market and how it can attract the kind of jobs that can sustain high pay into the future. Croydon is well located with excellent transport links. Retailers attracted by the new development will do better with a well paid workforce on their doorstep. A high pay workforce therefore has the potential to create a virtuous cycle, where retail businesses prosper, new businesses are attracted to the local economy because their workforce feels positive about the environment, and Croydon's reputation grows.

The nature of the economy is evolving with far more small start up companies and self employment than in the past. Already Croydon's town centre is beginning to attract new businesses. Tech City, supported by the council, provides the kernel of a model for an approach that can offer a magnet for a new kind of business. Hub and incubator approaches can facilitate start ups and give the support needed for high growth companies that innovate and have the potential to transform the local economy over time.

We want the council to be more explicit and tougher with the developers on its approach to ensuring local people have an opportunity to get jobs in the new retail developments. This might include a new retail jobs training academy for those who want to acquire new skills as part of the new development, as they have in Stratford, or a new partnership with Croydon College to achieve the same goal.

We support the council's jobs brokerage approach and we want to see businesses in the retail development presented with at least three

CVs from residents and to invite at least one to interview. Employers in the town centre and across the borough should do more to ensure they are attracting a wider pool of applicants when recruiting – including particularly more disabled and BME people.

Many workers also need childcare provision or extra help with caring responsibilities to access the labour market or work the hours that suit them. Adaptive employers, who provide job share opportunities, flexible hours, and work with the council and community to find childcare and other support are vital to spreading the benefits of the new developments to local people who might otherwise miss out.

The council needs to work together with local colleges to ensure the training is there so that local candidates have the skills to for the voluntary sector, and have a positive impact on the local community and economy.

While the benefits of the redevelopment for the Croydon centre are relatively clear cut, for peripheral areas, particularly those adjacent to the redeveloped area, the development will pose challenges as well as opportunities.

We think there should be an impact assessment for peripheral areas such as South End and London Road with clear plans to mitigate any negative consequences of changes, and a consultation on the next phase of development.

We also urge Croydon town centre Business Improvement District to vote to extend its remit to cover a wider geographic area, including South End and London Road, so that the whole centre shares a common endeavour to improve the area.

Many of the solutions to economic and social challenges rely on the voluntary and private sector collaborating and innovating together. Croydon already attracts some great voluntary sector organisations and has succeeded in becoming London's first borough to be awarded social enterprise status. By applying the same approach that it has to Tech City – a hub and incubator model – Croydon Council could do even more to promote social innovation and support community.



I like being in Croydon town centre, as there are a ton of people and it can be an interesting place, but there needs to be a wider range of interesting shops and other things and less vacant spaces. There needs to be more events and youth related services too.

Shaniqua Benjamin, North Croydon

LEARN

London has some of the best universities in the world and Croydon residents are hungry to learn and do well. Locally Croydon's higher education establishments – including particularly Croydon College, which now has University Centre Croydon within it – are moving up a gear. But the area can do more to become a centre for excellence and attract the highest calibre students, including residents who currently go elsewhere.

The existing higher education offer needs to be supplemented by a more ambitious one, which has the potential to make Croydon a desirable destination for degree students from across the country and beyond.

We therefore strongly support the council's endeavours to attract a dedicated higher education campus to Croydon. This will help equip a skilled workforce, potentially provide a reservoir of talent for the voluntary sector, and have a positive impact on the local community and economy.

Staff and researchers at the institution could also be engaged in supporting and collaborating with local businesses and voluntary organisations.

LIVE

Successful urban regeneration means town centres must not only be places of work or to shop and eat but living neighbourhoods, with residents who support and shape local businesses and sustain the vibrancy and balance of the area 24 hours a day.



I believe we need more arts and crafts. A good idea is for artists to open up their home so people can look at their art and meet each other.

Peter Blay, North Croydon



The town centre isn't as good as it could be. My mum was pick pocketed once and you come across rowdy young people but is very easy to access and there are plenty of shops, that is why I come here.

Charlotte McCausland, South East Croydon

A community aligned with local businesses and voluntary organisations can change the dynamic of Croydon's town centre but this requires a new approach; one that invests in shared living space, has a clear strategy for arts and culture, designs out crime with better lighting and safer environments, regulates the evening economy, and one that aims to attract a broad mix of people and give residents a stake in the future of their neighbourhood.

Ultimately, while the right investment and planning decisions can create the conditions in which communities and businesses are more likely to thrive, it is up to local people to organise, campaign, nurture and cajole to make their community the place they want it to be. The broader and deeper the support for change, and the more it is clearly rooted in community, the more likely it is that that change will happen and be sustained.

**CASE STUDY...**

Jonny Rose, Founder, Croydon Tech City

What is Croydon Tech City?

Croydon Tech City is a movement, community and not-for-profit organisation building the tech ecosystem in Croydon, and championing and inspiring tech business, skills and opportunities.

Since our inception in 2012, we have worked to make Croydon 'the Silicon Valley of South London', through free weekly social events and classes, and influencing local government policy, property development and infrastructure changes. As a result, Croydon is now the fastest-growing tech ecosystem in London, and home to over a thousand digital, technical and creative businesses. The Croydon Tech City community comprises of several hundred venture capitalists, software developers, entrepreneurs and company founders.

Croydon Tech City is completely unfunded and relies entirely on the work of the Croydon Tech City management team and engaged volunteers from the community.

Creating a talent pipeline for Croydon's future

Recently, we launched Future Tech City, our scheme to encourage the take-up of computer programming and coding by as many young people as possible to prepare them for the future and for their personal development.

It has four main streams of activity. Firstly, we work with Code Club; aiming to get into every primary school to teach young children basic programming skills and support teachers to deliver an increasingly complicated technology curriculum.

Secondly, we support Apps for Good in their efforts to get into the borough's secondary schools, delivering both tech and entrepreneurial skills.

Third is 'Young Croydon Tech City' which helps young people to have successful careers in technology. Local secondary schools are invited to nominate interested students who meet successful local people of different backgrounds, talking about how they built their careers. The students are fully supported by CTC and business mentors.

The fourth stream is about work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

Community classes by the community for the community

It's not just the young that benefit. As the spectre of redundancy looms for many, the need to learn new skills and keep up with the latest technology is imperative. Croydon Tech City is also working to educate and up skill the borough's adult population.

Opportunities include free monthly web development courses, agile methodology workshops and the Croydon Tech City MBA, which teaches how to run a start-up. We don't just want to create a community that is inward-looking we also want to make sure this is something the whole of Croydon can be a part of and these classes - run by Croydoners for Croydoners - are a great way to up skill the entire town.

To learn more please go to www.croydontechnology.com



Nigel Dias, Jonny Rose, Sarah Luxford - The CTC team

WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



Following the publication of the interim report our conversation on the town centre focused particularly on how to ensure the maximum benefit from any changes accrues to local businesses, employees and residents.


The response to our suggestion that in order to help protect the interests of local businesses adjacent to the new developments Croydon Business Improvement District should embrace the areas of South End and London Road was positive. However, the BID felt that under current legislation this may have to be done with new areas incorporated as satellite BIDs. We continue to feel that an assessment of the likely impact of the new developments on peripheral areas is also essential.

We discussed the council's job brokerage service and allied to this what might sensibly be incorporated into a Croydon Employment Charter. On one hand our suggestion that the Charter include a commitment to receive at least three CVs of local people and interview at least one was felt to be overly prescriptive. While this might be the ideal there would be times where it might not be possible, such as with large recruitment drives. A better commitment therefore being for businesses to make use the jobs brokerage service.

On the other hand there might be a need to be more prescriptive about disability employment best practice and to ensure this is mainstreamed into the work of the jobs brokerage service. We heard more about the kind of approaches that employers should use to give disabled people a better chance of accessing the jobs market, including offering different formats for job interviews, such as over the phone.

We hope the jobs brokerage service can incorporate disability recruitment best practice into its service and link up with the employment and welfare outreach services we cover in Supporting residents towards better times. From our conversations we feel the Croydon Employment Charter should therefore cover four clear commitments:

- **use the council's jobs brokerage service**
- **recruitment best practice which is accessible to disabled people**
- **pay the London Living Wage**
- **support flexible work practices**



There were also further discussions on First Step, giving young people a local work placement and about how to increase take up of the London Living Wage, much of these are covered in the last chapter. However, some developers indicated their willingness to pay the London Living Wage to staff and contractors and to assist with approaches to prospective tenants to encourage them to sign up to a Croydon Employment Charter at the same time they agree terms on a new tenancy.

We also had a protracted dialogue on Croydon's arts and cultural offer. For many years the town centre's arts and cultural offer was seen as limited and uninspiring. Likewise its evening economy. Today's Croydon artists and performers, including Croydon Arts Network, are helping to change this.

There is a clear consensus that Croydon's arts and performance offer should reflect and celebrate its cultural diversity. Croydon singers and bands made up half of last year's Mobo winners, but few have had an opportunity to see these successful artists in Croydon. Venue spaces not made accessible is certainly part of the challenge.

A renewed Fairfield Halls will take time but once opened can act as a beacon for a revitalised cultural offer, unique to Croydon but in competition with the South Bank and other iconic venues.

A more diverse evening economy is also essential if Croydon's town centre is to move on from its reputation for crime. It must broaden its appeal to different demographics within the borough and outside it. Croydon town centre's restaurants in places like South End are already a clear asset but to thrive they need a more broadly based evening economy.

Of course, public funding for arts and performance will inevitably be limited for the foreseeable future. Where funding does exist, small pots of seed funding to promote and nurture activity would seem the best use of resources, but public subsidy can only play a small part in revitalising Croydon's arts and cultural offer. Ultimately the natural talent energy and commitment of its residents and workers will make the difference.



WHAT WE WANT TO SEE:

The benefits of the town centre development spread as broadly as possible.

- A wider town centre Business Improvement District encompassing London Road and South End, so that all local businesses work together to share the benefits of the new developments.
- An impact assessment produced by the developers on the areas adjacent to the main area of development and a joint strategy with the council to mitigate negative impacts. This should also include potential further developments that will enhance the areas outside the area of main development in the future and approaches to marketing the unique selling points of areas such as South End and London Road.
- More local people recruited, and fair pay and employment practices that reach out to those currently disadvantaged in the labour market.
- An inclusive jobs brokerage service provided by the council working closely with developers and local employers. This should typically include the presentation of 3 local CVs for every job recruited, with at least one interviewed as well as deeper involvement of local colleges in supporting local people to gain the skills necessary to find employment. The jobs brokerage service should also work with employers to support childcare provision, help with caring duties, promote flexible work and make a particular effort to present BME and disabled candidates to employers.
- A new Croydon Employment Charter for Croydon businesses and organisations. This would build on the good work being done by the council as a London Living Wage employer and through its procurement practices as well as the work of Croydon Commitment by asking business to sign up to the London Living Wage, to use the council's job brokerage service, to pursue recruitment best practice which

is accessible to disabled candidates and to support flexible work. A shift to an innovative high skill and high pay economy that improves employment prospects and wages over time.

- A high proportion of the proceeds from the Growth Fund, successfully negotiated by the council with the Treasury, targeted at infrastructure and promoting the new economy.
- Financial and other support for businesses and social enterprises from the council, as well as procurement practices, linked to the Croydon Employment Charter.
- A redoubling of efforts to find a major high tech incubator and the extension of this model to the social enterprise sector.

Croydon as a destination for the best students.

- Support for the council's approach and a public campaign to bring a major university campus to Croydon.

A rich and diverse cultural and arts offer.

- With Croydon's local organisations taking a lead a collaborative approach to arts and culture which nurtures the area's diverse talent and aims to attract a mixed audience of people of different ages, ethnicities and backgrounds, with a renewed Fairfield Halls as a central part of this.

An evening economy that encourages a greater mix of customers, is balanced, relaxed and enhances reputation.

- A strategy to broaden the evening economy offer, with more intensive work on designing out crime at development stage, and a review of how licensing laws are applied.

A pedestrian and cycle friendly centre to make the town centre a healthier, more connected place to work, learn and live in.

- A particular effort to calm traffic along and create more pedestrian and cycle friendly connections across the Wellesley Road.

3. Leaving no child behind

THE CHALLENGE

From the moment a child is born their life chances are being influenced, particularly by their parents and family or carer. The quality of these relationships is paramount. One great parent or carer that builds a strong rapport with a child can give them the skills and confidence they need to get on in life.

The children of parents with higher incomes are more likely to be read to, more likely to hear a richer vocabulary and more likely to be praised for doing the right thing than their peers from less well off backgrounds.

Higher incomes can also mean greater access to other support: good quality childcare, extra lessons and activities, and, if necessary, the opportunity to move to the catchment area of a better school or to go to an independent school.

Inadequate housing, poor diet, lack of access to decent open spaces and many other factors can compound disadvantage for children from less well off backgrounds. The Government's Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission recently found that less able, better off children are 35 per cent more likely to become high earners than bright poor children.

The early years are the most important in determining a child's future trajectory. But in Croydon the proportion of children achieving the Government's measure of a Good Level of Development (GLD) by age five is lower than in neighbouring boroughs and the average across England. In the North and West of the borough childhood development is the furthest behind at this stage. Children who are eligible for free school meals are also significantly behind their peers during early development.

This means children starting in Croydon primary schools already need extra support to catch up. From ages seven to eleven, even with many good primary schools in the borough, Croydon children continue to get lower test results than the national average. But by the time they take GCSEs their results are comfortably above the national average.

Despite this, because London's GCSE results are much better than the national average, Croydon performs worse than most other London boroughs at GCSE level. And while there are some excellent schools, too many fail to achieve the standards parents and employers expect.





Overall, therefore, the early years challenge is the most profound for the borough as a whole and particularly for children from less well off backgrounds but there are also individual schools in parts of the borough that don't do well enough.

The early years challenge is compounded by the fact that central government funding for children's centres is no longer protected and council budgets are being cut significantly. Croydon also has the largest number of looked after children of any borough in London, many of whom require intensive support.

In common with much of the country, local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services are struggling to keep up with demand, often resulting in critical time being lost before diagnosis of developmental or mental health disorders.

Difficult behaviours that result from poorly understood and catered for special education needs not only have a deeply negative impact on the child concerned but can disrupt other children in their immediate environment.

The same is true of children struggling emotionally, either because they are facing a challenging time at home or because a mental health condition is undiagnosed or not adequately treated.

Schools' primary focus is on the attainment of high academic standards. This is entirely understandable given the framework they work within and how they are ultimately judged by most parents and employers.

But it often means vulnerable children do not get the all round support they need to feel emotionally nourished and balanced, which is precisely the support many need in order to cope with life's ups and downs and go on to get good results.

Our education system is increasingly atomised, with schools largely accountable to central government for the results they achieve but not always as connected to the community they serve as they could be.

Most parents are aspirant and want their children to do well, but being inspired and supported to do well requires not only committed parents, carers and teachers but wider support networks and services that nurture the children and families who need extra support. In many schools, particularly those in better off areas and with good resources, these support networks are already present, but in others they are threadbare.



My dream is to be a counsellor. Education can help me achieve this because it can give me the information I need to fulfil this job role to the fullest of my potential. Having work experience can help me to achieve this as it would provide me with the physical experience I would need when working with the different clients I may encounter.

Rhianna Benjamin, Thornton Heath

EARLY INTERVENTION THE KEY TO BETTER LIVES

All the available evidence suggests that the earlier in life an appropriate evidence based intervention is made, the more successful the outcome is likely to be and the more money will be saved in the long run. Confident, resilient children are far more likely to go on to be self-sufficient and lead fulfilling lives, without constant need for support from public services and the voluntary sector.

Co-ordinated pre-school strategies to identify developmental needs and support those falling behind are vital. A new Best Start model has recently been agreed by local public sector providers, which includes a single assessment and case management system. These changes help move the borough in the right direction.

From this autumn, councils are also responsible for

commissioning health visitors. We want the council to use this as an opportunity to support health visitors to do more to connect parents and carers with young children to other support services.

Schools and the council are also beginning to invest in nurture groups to support children who are not school ready at 5 years. These provide children in reception year and their families with intensive support in a tailor made environment within primary schools before they are integrated back into their class. There are limited resources to pursue this approach but there is plenty of evidence from Scotland and other parts of the UK that well organised nurture groups achieve very positive outcomes. We think that the more that can be done to roll out this approach the better. It is preferable to support the development and wellbeing of the child until age five, rather than push children who are not ready to learn quickly.



I am proud to live in Croydon. People are wrong to say that Croydon is a bad place. Croydon is a lovely place. Everyone is friendly...I never meet a person who disrespects me.

Gaston, South Norwood



SUPPORTING RESILIENCE, DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING IN SCHOOLS AND BEYOND

Children who have special educational needs and those who experience family bereavement or breakdown are much more likely to get excluded from school than other children. Too often they end up in Pupil Referral Units, where staff work hard to provide supportive environments, but these settings create new challenges. For example, one Pupil Referral Unit explained to us that they sometimes had to move pupils because a member of an opposing gang had moved into the unit and this inevitably meant friction between the two pupils.

The future life of children who are excluded is often desperate and can involve long-term drug and alcohol problems, significant mental health issues and involvement in crime. In recent years, nationally and locally, black Caribbean and mixed race children have typically been more likely to be excluded.

The council has set up a Fair Access Panel. This brings together heads from different schools in the borough to look at individual cases and help prevent exclusion where possible. It involves sharing best practice and sometimes avoiding excluding pupils permanently by moving them from one school to another. By getting school heads together to learn from each other and support pupils, much more can be done to help children achieve the right outcomes. We want all schools to actively participate in this approach, whatever their status.

But by the time a pupil is discussed at the Fair Access Panel the solution is always likely to be imperfect. We want the council, local health service, schools and the community to work together to do more before a problem escalates.



Solutions should be evidence based, schools should be encouraged to innovate locally using the available evidence, and success should be applauded. Bereavement and family breakdown, or intense family stress, has a dramatic impact on young lives, and mental wellbeing services are currently simply inadequate and poorly configured to cope with the challenge. We want the local health service to work with the council and schools to look at new models that do more to bring services into schools and to work with families much earlier when there are problems.

The Youth Commission has expressed to us that mental wellbeing is a priority area for young people. A starting point is better pastoral care within schools so that children can quickly have a private conversation about a problem, such as bullying within the school or a family problem that is impacting on their life inside and outside the school.

Schools must create safe environments where staff and pupils know that they can talk about difficulties they are facing and be supported to get through it. Many schools in the borough and around the country have adopted tried and tested approaches to therapeutic care. In many cases these have been positively evaluated, such as Mount's Bay in Penzance, Cornwall, and schools should be encouraged to adapt their ethos and practices to the approaches that have been shown to work.

For children with special education needs this also means recognising that behavioural problems typically stem from the environment and teaching approaches not being suited to needs. For example, many children with autism are hyper sensitive to noise, light and touch and can easily end up with sensory overload. This means they need tailor made adaptations to their environment and approaches to learning, including potentially regular time outs.

In Halton, the local council and health service are working together to fund Board Certified Behavioural Analysts to help shape better environments for disabled adults and children. This approach has also been adopted by neighbouring councils and is helping to reduce the ongoing costs of support.

We want the council to bring together the heads of primary schools to share best practice in this area and we want the role of the Fair Access Panel to be strengthened to focus on the ethos of schools as nurturing environments. We think more should be done to recognise best practice, potentially with awards for schools that put pupils' emotional wellbeing at the centre of their ethos and consequently reduce behavioural challenges and exclusions. We also want the council and health service to work with schools to regularly evaluate mental wellbeing and pastoral and therapeutic support in schools and their links to support networks outside schools.

We have also heard from Croydon People First how children and adults with learning disabilities or other differences often find travel on public transport

with local school children immensely challenging as verbal and even physical bullying are all too typical. We want the council to work with Transport for London to address abuse against disabled adults and children and other forms of abuse by school children, such as homophobic abuse.

Ultimately by providing clear leadership and declaring loudly that no Croydon child should be left behind or excluded, local public services and the voluntary sector can help fundamentally change the environment in which schools operate and the expectations of teachers and pupils alike. In primary and secondary schools wellbeing and aspiration are bound together, and the more schools put nurturing good behaviour and resilience at the heart of their ethos, the more parents will want to send their children to those schools.

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY TO ACHIEVE MORE

The best communities are assets for schools and the best schools are assets for the community. We want all schools, whatever their status, to do more to connect with their local community. We think much more can be done to tap into the good will of parents and others who live close by a school or nursery. For example, many parents and local people are willing to support reading programmes, which provide additional support to pupils who need it. This is particularly important for children from less well off backgrounds and great charities like Beanstalk support volunteer reading programmes nationally and locally. By giving up a small amount of time on a regular basis they get the satisfaction of seeing a young child develop their skills.

Many families also struggle with challenges that impact on their children's education. In New Addington children taking time out to keep parents company was one issue that teachers and parents raised with us. Nationally and locally there is

evidence that children from white working class backgrounds fail to achieve because of a culture of low expectations. Using local networks to support families in the community, so children can focus on their schooling and both parents and children are clear about the value of education, is vital and requires a huge commitment from the wider community.

Another major area that is fundamental to raising aspiration is to support schools to do more to promote role models. Bringing a successful role model into a school to talk about their life is much more likely to get young people motivated to do well than reading a textbook. It is particularly important that girls and young black and Asian pupils get the chance to see successful role models like them so that they do not fall into the belief that some professions and businesses are not for them. In Lewisham the council also supports a programme to encourage black and Asian people to take on civic leadership roles.

Making older pupils aware of the different potential vocational and academic paths to success and building networks and relationships with local employers who can provide early exposure to different work environments is also critical. The council and local colleges should work to support all schools to do this. In the chapter Supporting Residents Towards Better Times we cover this in more detail.





CASE STUDY...

Liz Hodgman - Centre Manager - Woodlands Children Centre

Children's centres and other services, like pre-school and child-minders, are crucial for child development and making children 'school ready'. If children don't get the right support at a young age, their educational opportunities will be hindered at a later stage.

One big issue we noticed is that children often enter the school system with poor language skills well below their age. We wanted to tackle this problem, so what we did was organise a large training conference of all the providers of early years' services in the locality. We held training sessions on acquiring language skills and also trained people to cascade language learning to others working locally and to parents. The results were very good – we have seen a 10% improvement in language use by our children over the last 18 months.

We are now keen to pass on our learning to projects in the north of the borough.

This programme of support is part of Croydon Best Start. The good thing about Croydon Best Start is that it will lead to joined up services. We need to end working in silos as it only causes confusion for parents who often get asked the same questions by 3 or 4 professionals in health care and children's services. Simplifying this is vital. At the same time we can then pass on more useful information to them.

Looking to the future, the 30 hours of free childcare is an opportunity but it also presents challenges. We are pleased our Centre is above average for engaging with 2 year olds but Croydon as a whole is below average, so those of us working in this field know there is more we can do locally.

WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



In the discussions before the publication of the interim report we were clear about the importance of early years of development, and the evident challenges in a borough with high numbers of special education needs children. Our Youth Commission had underlined concerns about the provision of mental wellbeing support for their cohort and others. But we found it difficult to see how with limited resources, understandable pressures on schools to achieve results, and a fragmented school system the problems could be gripped.

Since the interim report's release we have become more optimistic and clearer about the prospects for tackling these challenges.

We discussed the Clinical Commissioning Group's current work and plans to improve mental wellbeing for children and young adolescents. The Clinical Commissioning Group is investing more and waiting times for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service are coming down. Future plans include an offer of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for schools, to build resilience, along with online innovations which offer group therapy and peer support.

The Council too is working to improve provision for special education needs children and we met with the Autism Partnership Board, which includes very committed practitioners and experts and the parents of autistic children and adults whose experiences are helping to improve services.

We also reached out to school heads and learned more about some of the excellent work being done to support special education needs children and improve mental wellbeing by some schools in the borough, like in West Thornton Primary Academy.

But the task remains immense.

In this domain, as with the social isolation agenda, it is particularly important that all service providers row together. Every school, whatever their status, the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Council, need to play their part in a shared agenda, along with parents, pupils and teachers. Aspiration and better academic results are supported by environments that nourish children's wellbeing and help them overcome developmental challenges.

The Council's Fair Access Panel brings together school heads and others to try to prevent school exclusions. This is a positive development but by the time a pupil's case is discussed by the panel it will prove difficult to help them avoid a negative trajectory.

But the model has many merits and should be adopted to support higher levels of mental wellbeing in schools and children with special education needs. By bringing heads together to share best practice schools can do more to foster positive outcomes for pupils.

Best practice should also be evaluated, with the council and Clinical Commissioning Group providing funding for evaluation. Early diagnosis, behavioural interventions and whole family support are essential approaches to supporting children with special education needs and their families. Appropriate pastoral and therapeutic care within schools can prevent referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and save money in the long run. Schools, teachers and teaching assistants who help achieve better outcomes for their pupils, including higher levels of wellbeing, should be applauded and recognised.

The council and Clinical Commissioning Group should encourage schools to invest a significant proportion of their pupil premium – worth £20 million a year - in these areas and where possible incentivise this with top up funding, other additional support and evaluation. They should work with teachers, parents and pupils using a co-production model and when evidence of success is clear try to ensure as many schools as possible adopt the evidence based best ideas.

It is always challenging for councils and others who face a squeeze on their annual budget to invest in early diagnosis and prevention but by working with schools and supporting families so they have the tools to deal with their child's behavioural and emotional challenges the savings can be substantial and more children can grow up to lead fulfilling lives. We visited a Pupil Referral Unit early in our

deliberations and saw how dedicated staff are and how they can help get children back on track but ultimately it should be the ambition of the council and schools to do everything possible to avoid exclusions.

The council and Clinical Commissioning Group are moving to a model of outcome based commissioning for the over 65s. There is a clear case for pursuing the same model for young people, with schools, teachers, parents, and pupils brought into the commissioning framework.



WHAT WE WANT TO SEE:

Early intervention to give every child the best possible start in life:

- Continued support for the council's Best Start approach and work done to get Health Visitors to connect the parents and carers of young children to a wider range of services.
- An increase in the number of nurture groups so more children get the emotional support they need to be ready for school.

Prioritising development, resilience and wellbeing in schools and beyond:

- A greater priority given to emotional wellbeing in schools, with more focus on pastoral care and therapeutic interventions as early as possible.
- More openness to best practice on both therapeutic interventions and support for children with special education needs, including ideas such as Board Certified Behavioural Analysts, to support children and adults with special needs and those who teach or care for them. With council and Clinical Commissioning Group funding provided to support evaluation of the best ideas.
- All schools, whatever their status, encouraged to participate in a group led by head teachers to share best practice on wellbeing and special education needs support.

- Work done with schools to encourage them to use their Pupil Premium on wellbeing and behavioural support, with toolkits and top up funding available from the council and Clinical Commissioning Group for best practice school awards for the best approaches to supporting childhood development and nurturing resilience.
- Work with Transport for London to address bullying of adults and children with disabilities and homophobic bullying on public transport.
- Continued leadership from the council and other public leaders to make clear that a child excluded is a failure of the system
- A move to outcome based commissioning for young people with schools, parents and pupils incorporated into the commissioning process.

Communities doing more to raise local children's aspirations:

- More work to identify parents and residents willing to help in school, particularly with reading programmes for those children who have fallen behind.
- Greater use of role models, particularly high achieving women and BME residents to that no child believes they cannot go on to be successful.

4. A connected borough where no one is isolated

THE CHALLENGE

No man or woman is an island. No one should be. As human beings we have a fundamental need to build relationships with other human beings who provide the emotional nourishment that sustains us and helps us feel part of our family, our neighbourhood and the wider community.

Our society is ageing and for most of us this means longer more fulfilled lives. Studies show that typically we are at our happiest in our later years. But for some the later years of life are characterised by social isolation and feelings of loneliness. Smaller families, children more likely to move away from where they grew up, pressures of work with more two worker families, and more of us expected to work unsocial hours, combine to mean that support networks and relationships are not always naturally there for all of us, particularly as we grow older. Nationally one in ten of those aged over 65 say they are lonely all or most of the time.

Fear of crime – which is higher in older populations in the south of the borough, despite relatively low levels of crime – can also lead to some residents staying indoors more often.

But while social isolation is more prevalent among older people it can occur at any age. Disability and long term illness are strongly linked with social isolation. For example, restricted mobility or conditions like depression can make it much more difficult to build relationships. Campaign to End Loneliness find that while just over one in five of those aged over 52 who are in excellent health say they feel lonely some of the time or often, this rises to nearly three in five of those who report poor health.

Taking on full time unpaid caring duties can also lead to being more isolated. Caring duties are more likely to be performed by women and some women in their middle age end up caring for both a sick parent and child at the same time.



One in eight Croydon residents currently provide unpaid care.

Those who are new to an area also often lack basic support networks. One of the Church Street food bank users we met was a recent migrant who not only had no access to benefits but had very limited support networks, and his visit to the food bank offered one of the few opportunities for social interaction he had.

Social isolation can be profoundly detrimental to health. It weakens the immune system and results in more strokes and heart attacks, much lower levels of mental wellbeing and a greater chance of depression. For older people social isolation is twice as detrimental to health as obesity. And those who are socially isolated are significantly more likely to die younger. Social isolation therefore has a high personal cost; it makes us feel less human and live more restricted lives. But it also has a direct cost for local public services in the area, as it results in the need for more social and medical support.

Without action the problem is likely to grow as more of us live longer.

Locally we face an elementary challenge of not knowing enough about who is socially isolated. Given the demographics of the borough it is reasonably likely that social isolation is greater in parts of the south of the borough but we need to learn more about social isolation locally.



PUTTING SOCIAL ISOLATION AT THE HEART OF THE AGENDA

We want first and foremost to put social isolation right at the heart of the agenda, nationally and locally. But whereas for many of the challenges we face the natural inclination for most of us is to ask what more the government can do, this is one social challenge where we must ask more of ourselves. Local services can provide the supporting framework and help nurture the best ideas but Croydon residents must play their part.

The starting point is for Croydon to make clear its intention to be a borough where no one is left isolated.

We want the borough to learn from others, particularly places like Manchester, which was the first area in the UK to be declared an 'age friendly' city by the World Health Organisation for its use of arts and culture to help tackle social isolation. It is being supported by the Lottery funded charity Centre for Ageing Better and issuing small grants to community groups for befriending and mentoring services, community networking and a host of fitness, volunteering and wellbeing projects.

We want this area to be a priority for volunteering in the borough and for the council and Clinical Commissioning Group to collaborate with a joint staff team to support this agenda.



When I first came here it was a big challenge. I was feeling isolated and I didn't know who to approach at first...I didn't have no family, no friends, no brother, no sister, nobody. The foodbank has allowed me in my social life so much because by going there I have met new people.

The truth is that social services have [also] let me meet other people. Now I've got friends in college, I've met many people at the foodbank... Things which I've done in the community has made me [feel like] I have a family which I didn't have before...I got friends, I got a foster mother now.

It would be good if there were more places like the foodbank [to meet people], or something alternative to the foodbank, a place where more people can do voluntary work.

Amara, Central Croydon

SHARED BENEFITS

There are many benefits to befriending and supporting those who are currently socially isolated in various parts of Croydon. These services are being supported by the voluntary sector, such as the Purley Baptist Church. Young people in school or college, or who are unemployed or working only part time, can share some of their skills, for example helping socially isolated people to use IT or with other practical tasks like gardening. In the process they will learn more about others' lives and strengthen their CV.

Students from Oasis Academy in Coulsdon are one example among many of those who support Silver Sunday tea dances, and this kind of intergenerational volunteering already being undertaken across the borough we want to see expanded. A further benefit of activities like this is that they begin to break down fear of crime among older residents.

North London Cares also has a great model which encourages young professionals to befriend and support an isolated older person. There is no reason why in Croydon we cannot also ask more of our employers, workers and residents.

The Shared Lives project has risen to national prominence. It matches and trains carers to isolated older people or disabled people and offers them accommodation in the cared for person's home. It currently supports over 12,000 people across the UK, including in Croydon. We think there is scope to push this approach more in the borough and support the process of identifying potential carers.

As part of the devolved model we advocate, we also want to see if more can be done to research and provide for isolated people's needs locally. For example, a mutually beneficial arrangement would be to provide a venue on the local high street, such as a cafe, where isolated people could be invited at a particular time and be offered tea and refreshments while local volunteers supported them to get shopping along the high street. To help realise this model the council should work with local communities and the private sector to support the process of identifying underutilised shared spaces that could be used as the basis for new community enterprises.



We also think more could be done to support good neighbourliness through tenancy agreements. The council and registered social landlords can build clauses into agreements that highlight the needs of isolated neighbours. By providing this nudge at the beginning, understanding can be increased and expectations raised. There is no reason, in principle, why this model cannot be encouraged among private landlords too.

There are many other great ideas out there which offer innovative approaches to tackling social isolation. An example is the Age UK project Men in Sheds, which brings isolated older men together to do woodwork and develop other practical skills.

We would also like to see sheltered housing residents vote in favour of opening up their common rooms to non residents and by doing so, not only better using the space available, but also helping create connections. Faith groups in the borough already do a lot but there are many places of worship that remain under-utilised and by reaching out beyond the current congregation more could be achieved.

In the chapter Vibrant, Responsible and Connected Communities we also set out the case for welcoming and introduction programmes for new migrants, so that they can more easily make connections within Croydon communities.



It was really helpful to be able to find out what other services are available in my local area, while waiting to see my G.P. I found out that an over 50's club was running right on my doorstep.

Alice Bushell, South East Croydon.

SUPPORTING CARERS

Full time unpaid carers who have a relationship with only the person they care for can also feel isolated. For young carers and those caring for people with challenging conditions like dementia, this can be a particularly onerous experience.

There are many great organisations supporting caring throughout Croydon, including the Carers Centre on Katherine Street, and we applaud the excellent help they provide.

Croydon Neighbourhood Care is another great example of the support being provided, with over 30 local care groups reaching out to different parts of the Croydon community.

The Carers Support Centre on George Street is a partnership between the Whitgift Foundation and the council, which works with many voluntary sector organisations and includes information and advice services, various support networks for carers across the borough, and even a telephone befriending service. There is scope to extend this hub and spoke model.

In the future using technology to connect people who provide care with those who need it and provide information about available services will become a vital way to support care. This is one area where collaboration between the private, public and voluntary sector is essential to nurture innovation.



CASE STUDY...

Monica Jefford, Coulsdon

Ten years ago my partner died and, soon after, I was diagnosed with cancer and requiring chemotherapy. A time of physical and emotional challenges, this could have led to me feeling lonely and disconnected from others in my community.

The Contact Group of a local church I had attended invited me for a cup of tea. It wasn't something I would have done normally, but I found the volunteers were friendly and that was encouraging. This led to me becoming a volunteer and now group Co-ordinator.

I really enjoy volunteering with the Contact Group. They are very active; they offer things like a befriending service, health related driving, other lifts, and they organise monthly Pop Ins and other social events. There is always plenty to do. Last year we provided almost one thousand 'episodes of care'. We're always looking for more volunteers to help – there are many opportunities for people to get involved in the community. The key to volunteering is to find what you enjoy doing. I've done that and I am as active now as I was before. Maybe more so!



INTEGRATED WORKING BETWEEN HEALTH SERVICES AND THE COMMUNITY

One of the most obvious costs of social isolation is on our health and social care services. Socially isolated patients are more likely to be more frequent users of health services. Many GPs say they are subject to repeat visits by lonely patients either because they have no one to speak to or because social isolation leads to depression or other illnesses. Simple problems like a lack of fluid intake can result in entirely preventable visits to hospital as a result of urinary tract infections.

At the point where socially isolated patients are due to leave hospital they often have no one to care for them, resulting in delayed discharge from hospital while adult social care try to find them a place in residential accommodation or a carer to support them at home.

There are many organisations and volunteers who work hard to support isolated patients, including the Red Cross who, amongst other things, help vulnerable patients with the transition back home after treatment.

But a concerted effort to identify vulnerable people, tackle isolation at root and build up support networks in the community could transform the lives of many of the loneliest people in the borough, and deliver major cost savings for local services.

We have looked at various models of 'social prescribing' where socially isolated patients are 'prescribed' activities such as swimming or bowls to help them lead healthier, more connected lives. These include the pioneering work of the Bromley-by-Bow Centre and the work of the CVA in New Addington.

There is a widespread agreement that these models have the potential to transform lives. But in order for them to work, busy GPs and their practice staff need to support the idea and the costs of any additional staff time needs to be considered.

We think that one way to achieve this is to give a social prescribing role to trained co-ordinators located in GP practices who also help patients with welfare and employment needs, thus avoiding extra work for GPs but also enabling the costs of the service to be spread across a broader range of services and budgets. We set out more details on this in the chapter, Supporting Residents Towards Better Times.



We also want to engage GP practice and hospital staff and professional carers in the task of identifying socially isolated patients.

Before the point where patients are discharged from hospital we believe much more can be done to engage the community to help support them once they return home. Within the borough there are many well organised community groups, including residents' associations, who could help identify neighbours willing to play a part in making the early days and weeks after leaving hospital easier. Too often no one even asks if a neighbour is willing to perform a simple task like dropping round once a day to see if everything is OK.

For over 65 year olds the council and local health service will soon commission services together based on jointly agreed outcomes. We think this is a very positive development and we would like to see reducing social isolation as one of the central outcomes commissioners focus on.



I had to retire through ill health and I felt very alone. It made me dwell on my problems. My nurse recommended Shine and I joined on line – I have gained confidence and I now support other people with Shine. It has transformed my mental outlook and my physical health.

Ashish Patel, Croydon Adult Social Services User Panel

WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



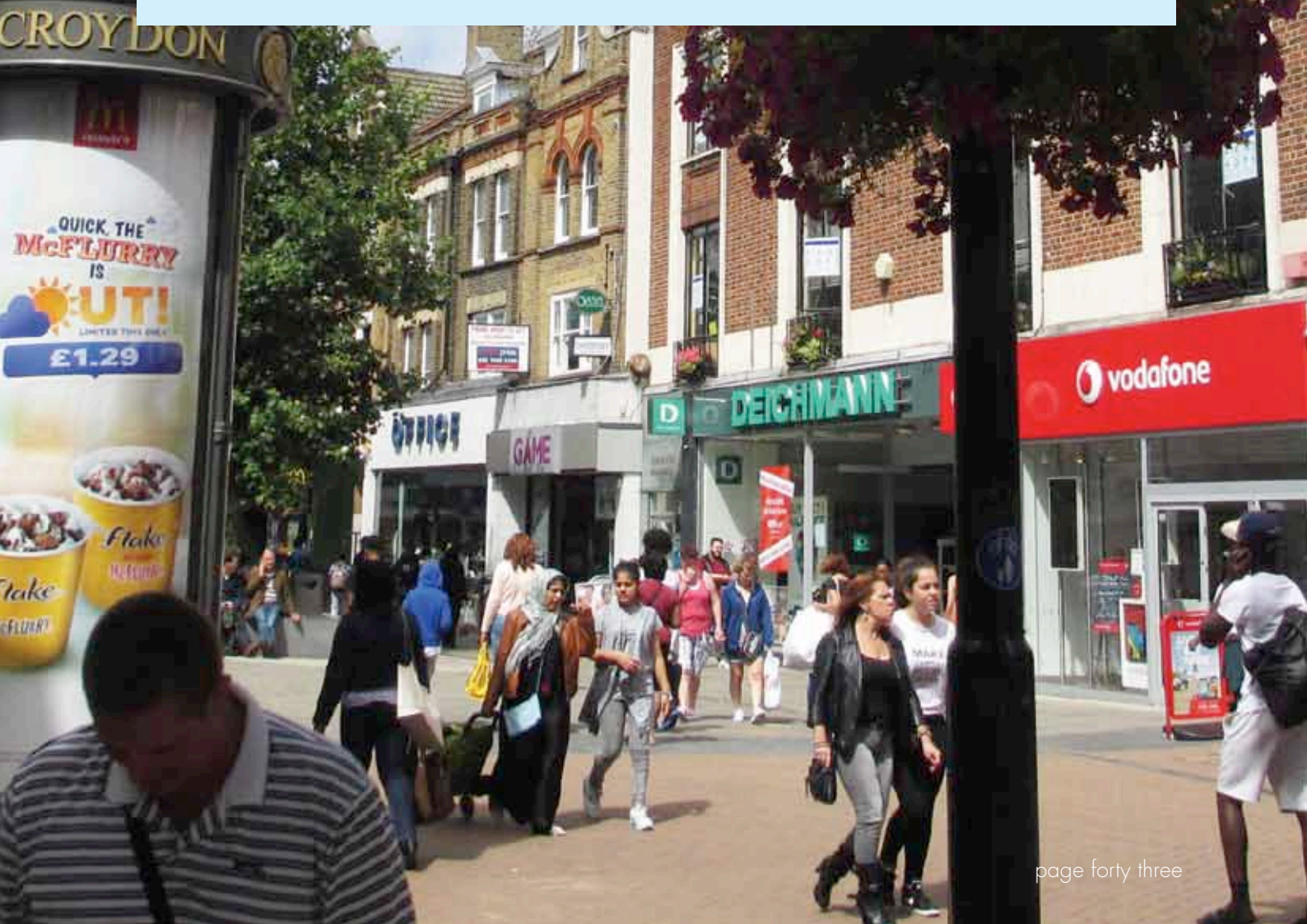
Two of the early results from our conversations were commitments by the council and partners to produce a joint strategic needs assessment on social isolation and to make the issue a topic for discussion at a future congress, which brings together all the main public and voluntary sector partners in Croydon to look at common challenges. We know that social isolation will now rise up local agenda in the near future.

In our dialogue on social isolation following the interim report many respondents wanted us to emphasise that disabled people and those with mental health conditions are significantly more likely to become isolated. Someone with, for example, learning difficulties or autism will find it much harder to make friends than most of us.

We also had further conversations about dementia and its devastating impact. One important thing that local public service providers and the voluntary sector can do is support dementia friendly communities, as advocated by the Alzheimer's Society.

When Beveridge set out his five great evils of want, ignorance, disease, idleness, and squalor, he should surely have added loneliness.

Many of the arguments we set out in Reciprocity, volunteering and social activism, are applicable to this agenda. Indeed among the social priorities the council should encourage its staff and those of other organisations to volunteer on this needs to be at the top of the list. The devolution agenda too can strengthen the support for isolated people, particularly if the council and local health service agree devolved budgets in return for particular aspects of support for socially isolated residents.





One of the unexpectedly controversial debates we had after the interim report was on social prescribing. Why, some asked, should GPs be in the driving seat? Why should they prescribe, rather than let a person determine their own needs? There were also discussions about the practicality of making it work. There was, however, a clear consensus that signposting services based in GP surgeries and other community venues and promoting a comprehensive online and offline directory of services were good things. Most also held the view that there was a case for combining signposting services with employment, debt and welfare services, to ensure there was one point of contact and the economics of connecting isolated people to services were more attractive. We cover this more in Supporting residents towards better times.

At about the time of the publication of our interim report Croydon Voluntary Action secured new funding from the European Union, based on its asset based approach used in the borough and in particular its pilot based in Parkway Health Centre, funded by the Clinical Commissioning Group. The Clinical Commissioning Group, council and Croydon Voluntary Action should explore how a wider roll out of this approach can integrate with other services in the borough, including the Gateway service, and benefit socially isolated residents. Of course, as well as the moral imperative to tackle social isolation the economic case is also compelling. Without it unnecessary

hospital admissions and unnecessarily long stays in hospital will continue to crank up the cost of health provision. The council and Clinical Commissioning Group have a vested interest in working together on this agenda but they operate in very different ways. The council has a local democratic mandate the Clinical Commissioning Group does not. Much of the Clinical Commissioning Group's time and budget is focused on acute conditions and not on seemingly less tangible challenges like isolation. Working cultures are different.

The introduction of joint outcome based commissioning for services for the over 65s should help to bind the two organisations together in their ethos, priorities and outlook. We support this approach. In his Autumn statement the Chancellor announced that councils would be able to increase the council tax precept by 2 per cent to fund social care. Councils have very different needs and very different council tax bases, which makes this tax raising power an imperfect option, and we have highlighted elsewhere in this report the financial challenges faced by many Croydon residents. But in the absence of other options, and with core funding for social care having been cut dramatically in recent years, we think the council should consider using at least some of this new power to support the social isolation agenda. But we want to see the Clinical Commissioning Group match the council's commitment and to see local community and voluntary groups take the lead.



WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

- A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and debate at congress along with work with the community to develop a comprehensive map of social isolation in the borough.
- Support for outreach services in GP practices and within communities to signpost socially isolated people to services and the promotion of online and offline directories of services.

More volunteering to support socially isolated residents

- Social isolation as a priority area for volunteering in the borough, supported through the council's and other organisations' proactive approaches to volunteering among staff.
- Support for responsible tenancy agreements and other approaches to nudging residents towards more support for socially isolated neighbours.
- Work to help communities become dementia friendly.

Better integrated working between health services and the community

- Place leadership from the local Clinical Commissioning Group and council with deeper collaboration, ensuring tackling social isolation is a joint commissioning priority.

- Backing for projects that link residents and care groups or community organisations such as the Neighbourhood Care Associations to socially isolated patients to help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and reduce bed blocking.
- Work to develop a care portal that connects people to services and to each other.
- Use made of new powers to increase the council tax precept to provide much needed funds for this agenda provided the Clinical Commissioning Group also funds work and that voluntary and community groups take a lead.



My neighbours help me out and the group of young mums I know help each other out. Before I knew them I was sitting at home, lonely and depressed.

Anna, South East Croydon



There's definitely the issue of meeting other neighbours and being connected to them. If everyone got involved it would make a massive difference.

A lot of people I know in London don't know anyone, they don't know any neighbours, nothing. London can be a lonely place for a lot of people. We've got a lot of hostel-type accommodation in Thornton Heath – if you're just put there and you don't know anybody, then you are going to be pretty miserable, and you are going to throw rubbish on the streets because you're not going to be happy with where you're are, what you're doing, you're going to have no commitment at all to the area.

Thornton Heath Community Action Team's objective is...to make Thornton Heath cleaner and greener. We have some really committed members. 20 to 30 people turn up even when it's raining.

Amy, Thornton Heath Community Action Team

5. Finding homes for all

THE CHALLENGE

London is undergoing profound change. Its population is growing rapidly and, for many years, house building, particularly affordable housing, has failed to keep up with demand.

In the private sector the consequence of this housing shortage has been steep rises in house prices and, as buying has become unaffordable for many, major growth in the more precarious private rented sector, combined with a parallel growth in private rents. Over the last eight years London's population has increased by 1 million, house prices by one third, and private rents by 50 per cent.

Along with the stresses on housing, government welfare changes, such as the overall benefit and housing benefit caps, mean increasing numbers of families on benefit cannot afford to live in central London.

As many families have been priced out of inner London some have moved to outer London boroughs, including Croydon, where house prices and rents have also grown dramatically, although both remain lower than in most other parts of London.

Social house building, both by the council and social registered landlords, such as housing associations, has been minimal for a generation or more, and councils have limited scope to build homes because government borrowing rules heavily constrain their ability to finance them. New government changes are likely to further exacerbate the situation.

The consequence of this is high levels of overcrowding in parts of the north of the borough, and among certain communities, especially the Asian population.

The number of families in receipt of housing benefit has also increased over time and as an outer London borough the maximum payable in housing benefit is only sufficient to cover rents in the lowest 30 per cent of the private rented sector, and this percentage is likely to shrink further over time. Many private landlords – Citizens Advice Croydon tell us as many as eight out of ten - will not accept tenants on benefits, compounding the problem.

On top of these challenges, and partly due to the presence of the Home Office asylum screening unit in Croydon, the borough also attracts high levels of asylum seekers, including close to 450 unaccompanied minors.

Homelessness has increased for many years in a row. As a result pressures on the council's finances are immense and likely to grow further. At its most harsh homelessness means having no roof over your head and finding a public space to bed down for the night. Croydon Nightwatch estimates that as many as 60 people could be sleeping rough each night. More typically homelessness applies to those who have presented to the council in need of housing, typically at short notice, for whom the council has then had to find accommodation.

The black population is disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Almost half of the homeless in Croydon are black or black British.

Many people become homeless because their short term tenancy comes to an end, sometimes abruptly, and they cannot find other suitable accommodation within their budget, but family breakdown is also a major cause of homelessness. Two thirds of those accepted as homeless in Croydon are families with children and the consequences of becoming homeless include potentially serious impacts on a child's education, including on attainment and behaviour, as well as on mental and physical wellbeing. The scars this leaves last into adulthood.

Alongside this, the number of people in temporary accommodation in the borough has grown every year since 2009 and by 2014 nearly 2,500 families were in this precarious position, a rate six times higher than for England as a whole.

The council have a responsibility to house certain categories of people who present as homeless, including families with children, but faces significant cuts to its budget. More recently, further cuts have been made to council funding for looking after unaccompanied asylum seeker children.



FINDING HOMES FOR ALL: A MISSION FOR OUR GENERATION

Over half of residents in the borough own their own home, either outright or with a mortgage. The sense of security that comes with owning your own home when mortgage payments are manageable or the debt is paid off drives most of us to want to be home owners. We support initiatives to give more people the chance to own their own home but we also know that, particularly in London, the shortage of houses is driving up house prices, making home ownership out of reach of too many families. Building more homes is a vital part of the recipe and Croydon has the capacity to do this. But building affordable homes is much more challenging.

The council has set a new minimum requirement that 30 per cent of homes in any proposed new build of ten homes or more outside the town centre should be affordable. We support this approach but we also know that it is not always possible to achieve this minimum, partly because developers can commission reports which demonstrate that these requirements make a given development unviable and councils do not have the resource to commission independent analysis that might counter this.

The Mayor and Greater London Authority have an important role to play in supporting councils to develop planning expertise and in helping fund reports into the viability of a given proportion of affordable housing in a given development, strengthening the knowledge and capacity of council town planners so that they are on a more level footing with developers.

We also know that there is much more that can be done by government and the Mayor and Greater London Authority working together to increase the amount of affordable housing across London. Given the reality of the housing market and the limited resources available, we think our priority as a borough should be to tackle insecurity in the housing market and, in particular, to do everything possible to prevent and address homelessness. Early intervention is key to this.

The council has a track record of innovation and has tried to use every tool at its disposal to tackle the problem, including working with the voluntary sector to buy local property, setting up private rented property leasing schemes and most recently creating a new development company to help increase the potential opportunities for affordable housing.

Voluntary sector organisations like Evolve London and Croydon Nightwatch have also played a vital part, particularly in tackling street homelessness, and Crisis has plans to open a new Skylight Centre in the town centre, which will also offer education, health and housing advice and employment services. But, despite this the challenge continues to grow.

We know how important it is to stem the rising tide of homelessness in the borough and by working together the council and community can achieve much more. The borough must come together to do everything possible to turn things around.

INCREASING SECURITY FOR THOSE WHO RENT

The most common cause of homelessness is now the inability of some families to be able to find affordable homes in the private rented sector or to stay in them. For those with low and erratic incomes with debts, paying regular monthly rent or managing to scrape together a deposit – now typically equivalent to two months of rent – are challenges that too often prove insurmountable.

We have looked at many ideas to help the situation including a public lettings agency to identify potential rental properties. In this case we have concluded that with finite housing supply the costs of setting it up and running it would make the idea unviable for a single council, but we urge the Mayor to re-look at this idea for London as a whole.

We argue, however, that the council should set up a fund to offer soft loans to certain individuals and families aiming to put together a deposit, or potentially for those who have had interruption to benefits or pay and need short term support. Although some losses would be incurred, these have to be offset against the cost of the homelessness that results when families cannot secure tenancies.

We think this could be linked to the council's successful Croybond scheme, where the council effectively underwrites the risk for a landlord with a bond that acts as a deposit. We also want the council to magnify the possibilities of this approach by looking at every potential source of funding and support, including social peer to peer funding, with agreed levels of underwriting, and to engage with credit unions.

Croydon's Local Housing Allowance is much lower than for neighbouring boroughs like Lambeth, and this means too few properties are available for rent to housing benefit recipients. We hope the government will re-look at this.

The council recently introduced a landlord licensing scheme with the objective of improving standards in the private rented sector. The aim is laudable but the scheme has proved controversial among many landlords who have balked at the charge and argue that the scheme will prove counter-productive. It is too early to tell whether the outcome is that intended by the council and our intention is in not to pursue this debate unless clear evidence of the impact of the proposal is made available to us.



CASE STUDY...

Russell, West Croydon

I became homeless because the landlady put the rent up to £1,000 a month. I couldn't afford that. I was handed my notice to move on, and I lost all my deposit – a £1,500 deposit. It done my head in, and I started to drink. Things were made worse because I have a history of mental health problems.

My friend helped me...she got me where I am today really. She told me to go to the local MP's office, and then took me

round to every single estate agent round the area. She helped me get the place I got today – she's like my guardian angel really.

This is the happiest I've ever been in my life – living somewhere nice. My landlord now is very caring and understanding, and that's all it takes. In my new place I often help people who are homeless out. I get homeless people in and let them have a shower, and give them food sometimes.

We believe it is important that the council work with private landlords and letting agencies to build as broad a coalition as possible, to provide more security in the private rented sector and to prevent homelessness.

We advocate a Good Landlord Charter. The charter would include some simple but important criteria. The number of private landlords unwilling to take benefit recipients is a concern. We understand why this is the case but this further limits housing options to those on the lowest incomes, so we would want to include a stipulation that landlords signing the charter would not place a blanket ban on benefit claimants.

When tenants face financial difficulties, often first the Citizens Advice Croydon or the council get to hear about it is at the point they are being evicted. Managing this crisis is always brutally stressful and disruptive for the family and places a financial strain on the council. Therefore another key component of the charter would be that landlords or their agents would automatically write to tenants within a short time of when they first fall into arrears, advising them to contact Citizens Advice Croydon or the



council Gateway service, which are doing good work to help tenants and others consolidate debt. Combined with the potential to use the fighting fund with earlier warning, the council could prevent many more families from becoming homeless.

Another component of the charter should be best practice to support disabled people to become tenants. For example, a simple change like replacing uneven paving stones can help provide better access for blind or partially sighted tenants.

To make a Good Landlord Charter attractive to landlords, and assuming the landlord licensing scheme remains in place, we want the council to consider a discount for those landlords who have signed up to the charter at the stage when they renew or begin their licence. Other nudges or incentives should also be explored with landlords and letting agents.

In our chapter on support for families we also set out our ideas to support families, particularly children experiencing family bereavement or breakdown, many of whom end up homeless, compounding the emotional trauma they suffer.

Registered social landlords are already doing a lot of good work to tackle arrears among tenants and both the council and housing associations can do more to promote financial literacy and, working with Citizens Advice Croydon and the council Gateway, help tenants consolidate debt. We want a dialogue with the council and local colleges to see how money wise courses and workshops can be rolled out to many more residents who need them. Potentially this could also be linked to the Good Landlord Charter and encouraged among private tenants, particularly when they fall into arrears.





EXPANDING A RADICAL MODEL TO HELP HOMELESS PEOPLE

We have visited the excellent lodging scheme run by Croydon Action for Young and Single Homeless which provides rooms for 16-21 year olds for a short period (normally from one to two years). This operates as a fostering-light model. Housing benefit plus a supplementary fee supports householders who take on tenants with £190 a week. This is a financially beneficial model compared to the alternative costs that would be incurred for the young person to be placed in temporary accommodation.

We want to see this model expanded. In particular, home owners are a major untapped asset, and financial remuneration and altruism provide important motivations for many to take in a lodger. We want a dialogue with the voluntary sector and the wider community to see how much more can be done to support homeless people in this way.

Flexible approaches to tackling homelessness are vital and too often the system militates against this. A homeless man with mental health issues told us that one of the biggest impediments to him finding a home was that landlords would not accept his dog.

A proactive lodging scheme that matches potential lodgers to landlords with a conscience might overcome barriers such as this.

We also want to see homelessness prioritised as part of future volunteer activities and initiatives. There are many great approaches to supporting the homeless, from the work of great campaigning charities to local charities and churches who are helping tackle the problem, and we want to connect more Croydon citizens to the important work that they do.



I always see homeless people in Queen's Park. One of them has been there for ages. I wish I could help them.

Nicole, Central Croydon



MAXIMISING USE OF LAND AND PUTTING THE COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF THE CHALLENGE

We want to see the council and other public sector providers publish information about land use as clearly and transparently as possible and we support citizen led campaigns to identify and find uses for unused land.

We support the idea of community land trusts and other not for profit models of land ownership. We also know that registered social landlords are a vital part of the housing landscape, not least for the expertise they can provide to others.

The council offers financial incentives to encourage those in larger social houses to downsize and we think more could be done to promote this model, freeing up space for families who need it.

We also think that where buildings are dilapidated and unused and present a blot on the landscape the council should be as proactive as possible in using Compulsory Purchase Orders. Their use is currently being reviewed by the government with a view to streamlining the process and we know this is urgently needed to prevent long and costly delays in the process.

NEW ADDINGTON AND FIELDWAY: INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY

New Addington was conceived as a garden village in the 1930s. Today with much of the housing built 60 or more years ago residents tell us that their homes don't meet the standards they expect. Despite recent improvements, including the tram extension, the area lacks amenities and feels isolated. The high proportion of social housing in New Addington and particularly Fieldway, coupled with historic council policies that have concentrated families with common challenges in one area, means that the richness of social networks and consequent opportunities are not naturally available to families who live there. Despite these disadvantages the community has proved resilient and school attainment has improved significantly.

But we think the time is right to work with the community to agree a shared vision of a better future. We think the area would benefit from new high spec, better designed, more ecological housing with increased density, a greater mix of tenure options and new amenities. We know that many residents in the area feel let down because their sons and daughters cannot live as neighbours as local homes are not available for them.

A NEW MODEL OF FINANCE

Social impact bonds are a new approach to raising money from outside core public finance, which also remunerate service providers based on the social outcomes they achieve. They not only have the potential to raise much needed new funds but because they remunerate providers based on outcomes they encourage innovation. The Mayor of London has initiated a £5 million social impact bond for rough sleepers. We think Croydon could produce its own community based Social Impact Bond, which could finance preventative measures around homelessness. Residents, Croydon diaspora, developers, financiers, local businesses, public sector staff and others could contribute to the bond and feel part of the vital mission to find homes for all.

We believe, given the land available and without encroaching on the greenbelt, it is quite possible to build around existing housing, and offer current council house tenants the option to move but without obligation. This should include financial incentives for home ownership and preferential deals to the family of existing council house tenants.

With the redevelopment of Croydon town centre, New Addington and Fieldway are likely to become more desirable as areas to live. A greater social mix will benefit existing residents because it will increase the opportunities for work and make it more economically viable for businesses and public sector providers to provide new amenities for the whole community. Any change should be gradual, carefully planned, and led and supported by the community.



I am from New Addington. Croydon Town Centre is good for shopping but not for living. Where I live I have got fields, it is green and healthier. Croydon is too built-up it is not for families.

Fiona Bashford, New Addington



WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



In response to Finding Homes For All there was widespread agreement about the scale of the task Croydon faces.

Lack of affordable and secure housing is now almost universally acknowledged to be one of the greatest challenges for our generation, particularly in London. As we expressed in our interim report, we welcome initiatives to help people own their own home. With a sustainable mortgage, this is likely to provide the easiest route to housing security. Over half the borough's residents are owner occupiers, either with a mortgage or outright. Financial support for first time buyers and shared ownership schemes are excellent initiatives for those able to access them.

However, the rented sector, social or private, continues to be the only option available to many and the ending of a private rental agreement the most likely path to homelessness, either due to termination and lack of affordable alternatives or family and relationship breakdown.

Perhaps the area that most captured the imagination of respondents was our idea to work with home owners and potentially tenants to match homeless people to those willing to offer them shelter. In our discussions this was articulated as a social AirBnB or even a FairBnB.

The council have expressed their support and tech city companies are interested in finding ways to work with charities to provide a London wide or national online platform. The council has already put a huge amount of hard work into its successful SharedLives programme, which matches vulnerable adults to supportive individuals. This model could broaden the offer to less vulnerable adults and therefore involve less risk for all parties and require a much lighter touch.

Given the high costs and precarious nature of the alternatives, including Bed and Breakfast and other short term lets, there is ample budget to offer for those who provide a home for someone in need, either for the short or medium term. The government has also announced that from April 2016 the rental

income tax free allowance will increase to £7,500 a year. The motivation for taking in a homeless person can therefore include an additional tax free income but also altruism. For some social tenants avoiding the 'bedroom tax' may also be a possibility.

There was also clear support for the idea of a fund to help with deposits or other short term financial pressures in the private rented sector. It was pointed out to us that some tenants are often unable to access their previous deposit until after they have had to pay out for their next one, meaning often all that is needed is a short term loan to bridge the gap until the previous deposit is returned. There was also a request that this help not be confined to families but offered to the single homeless people as well.

The idea of a Good Landlord Charter was debated in depth. There was plenty of support for the concept but questions revolved around the degree to which it could be targeted. There was broad agreement that most landlords and letting agents want to do things the right way and it was a minority who pursue sharp practice. It was argued that a charter should be seen as a way to spread best practice from the social rented sector to the private rented one and that it should be targeted in the following ways.

- First, a recognition that one of the goals is to encourage landlords to rent to those on benefits and that this fundamentally means working in the less well off part of the rental market.
- Second, to work proactively with those agents in this cheaper part of the market, particularly where it is already known that they do not pursue best practice.
- Third, to campaign to promote early warnings when tenants fall into arrears, something in the interest of tenants and landlords alike. Some agents or landlords put off advising tenants who fell into arrears to seek help in the hope that the problem would go away. By making money wise courses widely available an offer to attend such a course could be incorporated into the charter.

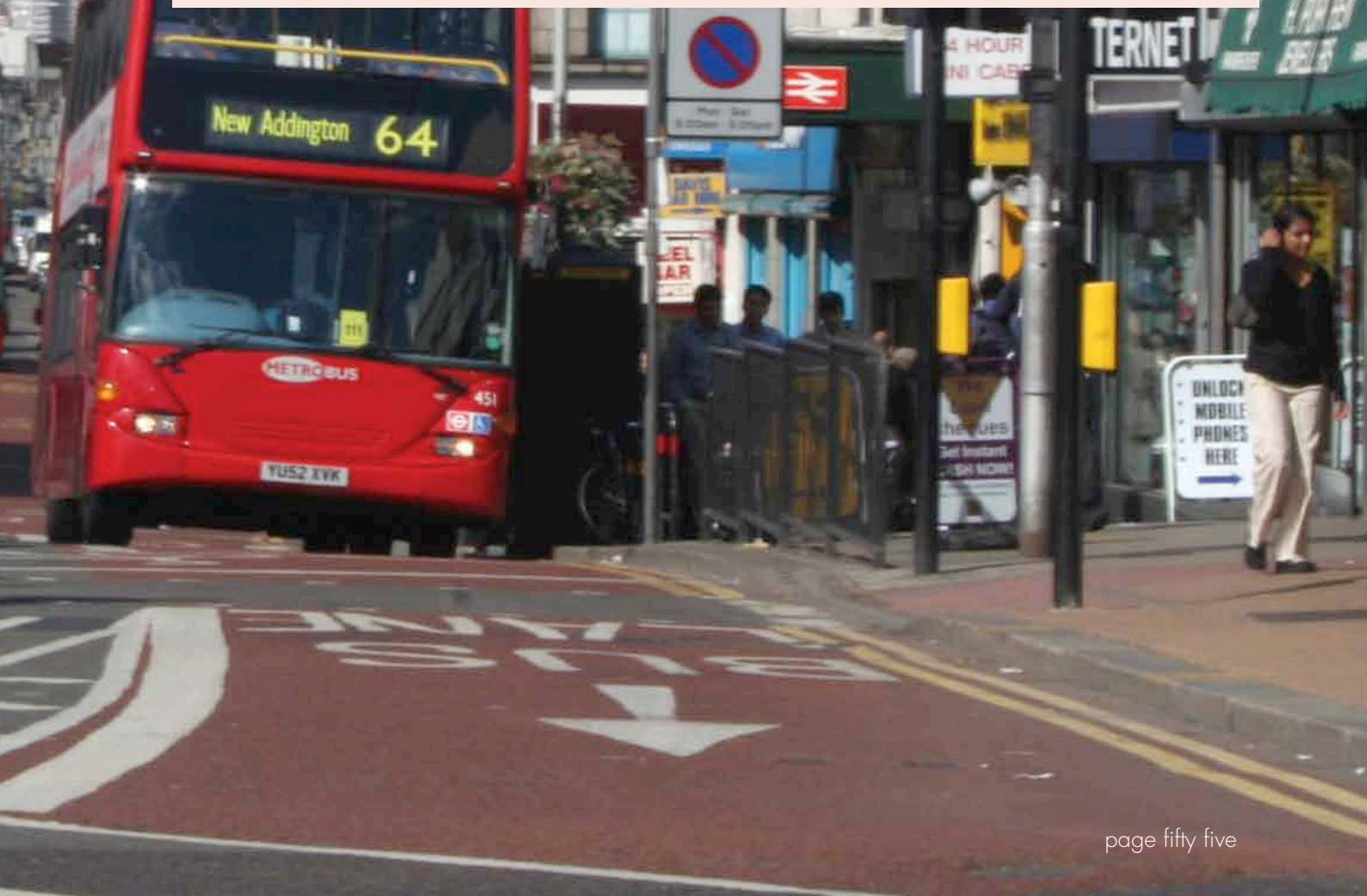
Best practice for disabled tenants was also felt to be an important part of this, and this might include a willingness to make adaptations but also to give additional support in times of crises.

There was also a discussion about ways to encourage tenants who had a bad experience with a particular agent or landlords to broadcast this to others.

Overall we feel that a targeted charter in the way described above, potentially renamed a Good Agent and Landlord Charter to explicitly acknowledge the importance of agents in the equation, is the most likely way to spread best practice and encourage agents and landlords to help prevent homelessness. We think there is ample opportunity to offer a reduction in the landlord registration fee as a nudge and that financial incentives could also be targeted via letting agents.

We want local residents to continue to explore ways to bring people together to use underutilised land and to explore forms of common ownership such as land trusts and we urge local campaigners to work with the council to ensure land that can be used for the benefit of the community is used.

There were discussions about outside funding and other forms of support, including community based social impact bonds. The feedback we received suggested that there was a widespread willingness among local businesses, and residents to offer support in kind and potentially to invest directly in tackling homelessness. Concerns were expressed about the complexity of social impact bonds and our view is very much that the financial returns for those who invest in tackling homelessness should be kept to a very simple formula and decoupled from any financial arrangements with providers. There should also be a clear option simply to give. Of course, raising money normally requires a lot of initial effort and finding the right vehicle for this remains an issue. We think crowdfunding is probably the right approach and on reflection the language of social impact bonds is unhelpful for what we have in mind. If any funds raised are focused on one part of the homelessness challenge, such as a FairBnB, local businesses and residents will see more clearly what they are supporting. It was also argued that resident associations, particularly in the south of the borough might be willing to assist in spreading the word about this.







WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

Increased security for those who rent

- A new fund to temporarily support local residents who cannot manage to secure a deposit in the private rented sector or who are facing short term difficulties with benefits or pay with temporary loans. This idea has widespread support and has potential to save the council money over time.
- A Good Agent and Landlord Charter focused on the parts of the private rental sector which can help most to prevent homelessness by taking tenants on benefit, with pursuit of best practice already prevalent in the private social rented sector including early advice on arrears and money wise courses made available, as well as support for disabled tenants. We want to see agents in this part of the market targeted and the idea advertised alongside the Landlord Registration Scheme, potentially with a lower licence rate for eligible landlords who sign up.

Using Croydon's best assets to support the homeless

- A major push to encourage and financially incentivise residents to offer shelter for homeless people, particularly among home owners. There is already a lot of energy and commitment behind the idea of a FairBnB, which could be a London wide or national platform.

Maximising the use of available land and putting the community at the heart of the challenge

- Support for citizen led campaigns to identify land and for community owned land trusts and other approaches to common ownership.

Investing in New Addington and Fieldway

- Investment in New Addington, with a greater mix of tenure options, better amenities, and financial incentives to own or share ownership of new homes, particularly for the families of existing residents.

New funding to turn the tide of rising homelessness

- A new community fund to tackle homelessness with options to give time and money or to invest in a simple bond.

6. Supporting residents towards better times

THE CHALLENGE

Croydon is an aspirant borough with good reasons to be optimistic about the future, but the life chances, life experiences and incomes and wealth of residents vary markedly across the borough.

One quarter of children in the borough grow up in poverty and this has remained entrenched in certain geographic areas, such as Fieldway and New Addington and many parts of the north and west of the borough, like Selhurst and Broad Green, for decades.

The growth of food banks – with at least eight now running across the borough – is symptomatic of the poverty some residents face, with new migrants, young people without work, training or financial support from their family, those with mental health conditions and sanctioned benefit claimants among the poorest and most marginalised in the community.

Unemployment has fallen over the last few years and the number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance is now back down to pre-recession levels with Croydon's unemployment rate close to the national average.

We do not yet know the impact of Universal Credit, which is beginning to be rolled out in the borough. Young people, those aged over 50 and BME residents are still more likely to experience unemployment than other cohorts.

For the borough a particular concern is that while unemployment is back to pre-recession levels the number of people on Earning Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit has continued to rise each year to nearly 14,000 now. Ill health and disability now account for over half of benefit claimants in the borough and a further one in five claimants are carers of adults or young children.

Lack of affordable childcare also poses a challenge for many parents, particularly women and single parents, wanting to work or work more hours.



I can do business and if others do business then the borough will do well.

Tony Fairweather, South Croydon





Nationally and locally the labour market is undergoing significant change, with public sector employment shrinking and far more self employment. Although self employment represents a choice for most, for many it can also mean low and irregular incomes. Nationally over half of the population now work for businesses that employ fewer than 10 people and small business owners also often struggle to pay themselves a regular wage. The use of zero hours contracts for employees can lead to precarious incomes too, particularly in some sectors, such as among care workers. The knock on effects of these forms of employment can include finding it harder to rent and particularly to secure a mortgage for a home.

Even with regular wages many local residents have told us how they struggle to make ends meet. Just eight Croydon organisations are currently accredited London Living Wage employers and over a quarter

of local employees earn below the current London Living Wage rate of £9.15 an hour. Although the July Budget unveiled year on year real increases in the minimum wage, it will remain well short of the London Living Wage. Next April it will rise to £7.20 and by 2020 to £9, still below the current London Living Wage, which will be updated each year.

The new rates will not apply to those aged under 25 and, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, 13 million families will lose an average of £5 a week as a result of the budget changes, which included extending the freeze in working age benefits, tax credits and the local housing allowance, until 2020.

Given these realities it is not surprising that many Croydon residents also struggle with debts; Citizen Advice Croydon tell us that after benefit and tax credit and housing issues, debt represents their third biggest case load. The prevalence of high interest finance, such as Payday loans, or hire purchase options, compounds this challenge.

Life chances, and life experiences, continue to be influenced by who you know rather than what you know. Many less well off Croydon residents lack the networks to help them open doors and get on in life that better off residents have. Ethnicity, gender and disability still play a major role in shaping outcomes and the workforces of too many Croydon employers don't reflect the diversity of the local population. The nearer you get to the top of most organisations the more this is the case.



I think the town centre will improve – more shops will bring more jobs and there will be more opportunities. It will also bring more people, more people will want to move to Croydon. People do not want to move to Croydon for lack of opportunities.

Danielle Allen, Central Croydon

NURTURING THE NEW ECONOMY AND PUTTING LOCAL BUSINESSES FIRST

We know that the borough can't change the fundamentals of the tax and benefits system and that difficult employment and pay decisions have to be made by the employers. Particularly for small employers these have to reflect the realities of making the sums add up and keeping on top of cashflow.

The centralised Work Programme and benefit sanctions regime also throw up many injustices and our preference would be for local areas, like Croydon, to be handed more power to shape employment support locally. Nevertheless by working in partnership with businesses and tapping into the energy of citizens we can do much more to improve opportunities, tackle debt, and improve the pay and employment security of Croydon residents and workers, especially those in the most precarious situations.

In the long run, as we set out in the chapter A Town Centre That Lifts the Whole Borough, by nurturing employment in the new economy, such as the high tech sector already mushrooming in the town centre and the vibrant engineering sector in Purley, we can create the conditions for a high wage high pay economy that have the potential to benefit many more local people. The proceeds from the Growth

Training for youth and unemployed people is vital to their prospect of getting job. The more members of the community that are engaged in work the more the economy will grow, better living standard and healthy society. Third sector should be given necessary support and encouragement in form of grants and provision of space in form of community building/centres so that they can contribute more to the life of the people especially the disadvantaged which are majority of their client.

Action for Community Development (AfCD)



We need wages that we can live on not ones we struggle with.

Jeremy Shanks, Central Croydon

Fund negotiated by the council with the Treasury provide a fantastic opportunity to support growth in these sectors.

Across the borough it is small businesses that make up the lifeblood of the local economy. Supporting entrepreneurship and encouraging residents to spend money in the local economy are obvious ways Croydon can nurture local enterprises and become a more prosperous borough. According to the Federation for Small Businesses, for every £1 spent with a small or medium-sized business (SME), 63p was re-spent in the local area compared to 40p in every £1 spent with a larger business. Buy-local campaigns, potentially linked to the Employment Charter we advocate, so that local firms work to recruit local residents and pay a Living Wage, are a fantastic way to foster success. The devolution agenda we advocate in the chapter Vibrant, Responsible and Connected Communities should provide a framework for local neighbourhoods to work with businesses to own this agenda, supported by the council and other public services.

With cuts in council funding the council is even more dependent on vibrant local businesses to support the community and its revenue base.

MAKING CROYDON A FIRST STEP BOROUGH, EXPANDING APPRENTICESHIPS, AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Alongside this schools and colleges need to work with employers to understand their needs and link young people to the labour market as early as possible. The best colleges already work closely with employers and support their students' work placements.

Croydon Citizens youth organisation has identified the importance of in-borough work placements for local students as a major priority and is already working with the council to establish a First Step work experience brokerage service. We applaud this focus and want the council and local colleges to be more ambitious and aim to find an in-borough work placement for every student that wants one.

First Step is one way for businesses to test if recruits might be suitable, and the borough also has a better track record of providing apprenticeships when compared to other London boroughs, with over 2,000 provided in the borough last year.

However, in our consultation with businesses many have told us that they find it hard to get employees with the right skills.

We want local businesses, the council and colleges to engage with the government's consultation on the Apprenticeships Levy announced in the last budget and to strengthen relationships between local colleges and businesses.



We can see opportunities all around us. While that is exciting, many young people fear that we won't benefit from these opportunities.

Brandon Schloss, Coulsdon College

TAKING EMPLOYMENT, BENEFITS DEBT AND OTHER SUPPORT INTO THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

Croydon's long term sick and disabled residents are being badly let down by an inflexible system which neither meets the needs of those who can or those who cannot work.

The desire to earn and the social benefits of working provide strong motivations to secure work, but few employers are aware of best practice or ever get to see potential disabled or long term sick recruits. Employment support is too often lacking and the benefit system makes it difficult for some to dip their toe into employment for fear they will lose out if it does not work.



We argue that disability equality best practice should be part of a new Croydon Employment Charter, but we also think employment support services should reach out into the community.

In Islington they are developing a model of employment support for disabled and long term sick residents based in GP surgeries. The council is already offering some outreach advice but we want to go further in three ways. First, by broadening potential support offered to cover benefits advice, housing, debt and social prescribing. Second, to make this service open to a broader range of people, including socially isolated residents. And third, by exploring ways to offer this service as widely as possible within the borough, such as in community and faith venues and potentially even door to door. The service would work with Citizens Advice Croydon, the council's Gateway and welfare advice services, Job Centre Plus and many voluntary organisations to form the linchpin of an integrated approach to employment, benefits advice, debt and wellbeing services.

A MONEY WISE BOROUGH

Locally we have a limited ability to influence the credit market. Credit Unions play an important role but at their best they are small, community orientated organisations focused on engendering a savings habit and they still need to lend cautiously. There are other ways to support social lending, including micro finance and peer to peer lending, with organisations like Kiva demonstrating what can be done. In principle social lending within the borough could partly be underwritten by the council collaborating with a financial organisation but we know this poses many challenges. We have also suggested the use of council backed loans to support tenants to put down deposits or to help with short term challenges such as ad hoc interruption to benefit payments. Linked to these, loans for essential goods, such as cookers, might also be an option.

However, we think that as well as making debt consolidation services available to as many people

as possible, prevention is always better than cure. We want schools, colleges, churches, housing associations, the council and community and voluntary organisations to come together to agree a plan to make Croydon a money wise borough. We think the primary focus of this should be to offer money wise training to those most likely to be vulnerable to debt. Citizen led campaigns to highlight extortionate high interest lending, and tackle loan sharking, should also be part of this.



We decided to start up the First Step Croydon Campaign in collaboration with the Council, and we won over 200 work experience placements for young people in Croydon.

Ismael Musoke, Croydon Citizens

INCREASING TAKE-UP OF THE LONDON LIVING WAGE

The council is paying at least the London Living Wage to all its staff and, as new contracts are signed, its suppliers have to do likewise. It is in the accreditation process to become a Living Wage employer. We welcome this approach, and we want to encourage as many local businesses as possible to pay all their staff at least the London Living Wage.

The council has other levers it can use to promote the London Living Wage, including for example making the London Living Wage conditional for those who receive loans through the Croydon Enterprise Loan Fund or for businesses that are incubated.

We want the new Croydon Employment Charter to include a commitment to the London Living Wage and to engage developers, particularly Westfield Hammerson, as advocates for the London Living Wage, for example at the point where new tenants sign leases. We hope the town centre particularly can become a London Living Wage zone.

As outlined above, more can also be done to link London Living Wage and buy-local campaigns, providing a double benefit for local economies. The council could also work with local communities to agree advertising opportunities that could be used to promote campaigns like this. At present only 8 employers are accredited London Living Wage employers. We have looked at the use of financial incentives to increase take up of the Living Wage. Brent currently offers business rate discounts to local employers who pay the London Living Wage. The scheme began in April of this year and we feel it is too early to assess its impact. We will continue to monitor progress before our final report and welcome all ideas to make the London Living Wage a reality for more Croydon workers. With businesses such as Lidl now committed to being Living Wage employers, we believe many more businesses in Croydon can and should pay the London Living Wage.



I have worked for years on the minimum wage. When you're struggling to make ends meet, how can you do your job properly? The living wage pays enough to live and not just to survive. This is not just about having more money - it's about dignity in work.

Stacy-Ann Shirley, Care worker in central Croydon and Croydon Citizens Leader



SUPPORTING CHILDCARE OPTIONS IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Surestart funding is no longer provided to councils and budget pressures mean it is harder to offer free or subsidised childcare to residents who need it. Despite this there are many approaches the council and local businesses can adopt to support childcare in the borough.

With the approval of the Westfield Hammerson development we want to see a negotiation with the developers to make childcare provision a centrepiece of the new employment landscape, with developers providing the childcare infrastructure and the council, local employers and the developers working together to agree a package of support for parents who need childcare to work in the town centre.

The council can do more to support childcare networks with hubs, such as community cafes, as meeting places for young mothers. Beanies is a successful local example of this approach. There is much more that can be done to attract childcare providers with a social remit into the borough. For example, the award winning social enterprise London Early Years Foundation already has 34 nurseries across London, and almost half the children who attend are given free provision. We want the council to reach out to organisations like the London Early Years Foundation to encourage them to set up nurseries in Croydon.



Having friends and knowing lots of people can definitely help you get a job. When you have contacts they can refer jobs to you, or you can swap jobs with them. My friend is helping me find a job in animation. It would be good if people in general had more friends – community centres for example could help people meet others and get more jobs.

Steve Gear, Student, Croydon College



*CASE STUDY... Geoff Ranson, Selsdon,
Croydon Business Venture employee*

There's a huge amount going on in Croydon at the moment. There's lots of entrepreneurial work, lots of cluster working amongst businesses, and all of this activity has the potential to improve people's lives and transform the reputation of the borough.

For example, there is a growing social enterprise movement – recently, only in May, we were the first London borough to be officially awarded Social Enterprise Place status in recognition of the number of social enterprises in the borough and the commitment to support them. We've also got lots of networking activities going on; there's a number of networking events, held for example by Croydon Chamber of Commerce, and another on Purley Way – Big Breakfast at Ikea. Great things emerge from these networking events – businesses learn to work together more, by sharing their products or services, experiences, office spaces and training courses. These opportunities need to continue to be

expanded; we need to continue growing our support for this kind of activity.

With the new developments going on – like Westfield and Hammerson, and Boxpark – there is the feeling that Croydon is on the up, that it is one of the places to be. We need to use these opportunities to make sure we provide work experience and apprenticeships to local young people; so they can try different roles in businesses, and see what different possibilities there are for them.

In 10 years time Croydon could be a more vibrant place, a place where when you mention the word 'Croydon', it's not seen as a negative thing, but a place which is good to work, good to live in, and good to set up and grow a business. With these changes, people locally could benefit – there could be a big focus on getting opportunities for young people, tackling unemployment, and creating better paid jobs.



Croydon is definitely going places - there are buildings for example on London Road, there are better places to look at. And there are more jobs being created. There is more housing developments, more jobs, more everything really. The Croydon riots knocked us back, but we're doing better now. In my area we have a theatre, comedy going on. The culture is definitely going to improve, and I also think there will be more opportunities for young people.

Gary Adams, Broad Green

WHAT WE HEARD BACK FROM YOU IN RESPONSE TO OUR INTERIM REPORT



The latest Index of Multiple Deprivation data reminded us how stark and entrenched Croydon's poverty and inequality are. Places like Broad Green, Selhurst and New Addington continue to dominate the poverty map of Croydon and just over one quarter of workers in the borough earn below the London Living Wage.

The London Living Wage was one area where we continued to ask if more could be done. Most of our proposals are based on persuasion. But, what happens if large firms that can easily afford to pay the London Living Wage don't? Croydon Citizens takes the view that naming and shaming is an important part of the pressure that can be applied and given the inaction and obfuscation by some large employers in the borough we feel it must be right to use naming and shaming. Certainly employers like Crystal Palace and for that matter Croydon hospital or any of the major supermarkets based in the area can afford to do more.

As set out in our in A town centre that lifts the whole borough a London Living Wage should be one of three key commitments in the Croydon Employment Charter, but realistically we know that it will not be easy to get employers to sign up to it. What if, however, the Council made clear that with the devolution of business rates only firms who sign up to the Croydon Employment Charter will pay lower business rates?

Of course, any reduction in business rates would mean some sacrifice of precious revenue for the borough but if it is competing with other areas which cut business rates for businesses regardless of whether they pay the living wage, is it not better to ensure that the borough attracts and supports high pay employers rather than low pay ones? A vision of a high pay economy must surely be right. Much of the revenue from higher local wages will also flow back into the local economy. As a further nudge could the Council also target buy local campaigns to small local firms who sign up to the Employment Charter?



There was a discussion about proposals to roll out First Step so that as many young people in college as possible are offered local work placements. The proposals were widely supported and this was certainly an area the Youth Commission wanted to see prioritised but there are some schools and colleges where support and networks are abundant enough to ensure young people get work placements, so most felt given limited resources some targeting towards schools and colleges with more deprived pupils would be appropriate, while simultaneously avoiding rigid formulas.

In our initial survey of residents many told us that the cost of childcare provision was restricting the hours they worked. However, previous attempts to offer workplace nurseries have not always resulted in high take-up. One successful model we visited is provided by My Outspace, a social enterprise which offers workspaces alongside flexible childcare.

Given the feedback we received from women wanting to work more hours, and the changes in the childcare tax relief regime the government is planning we want to see the Council, employers and developers back the approach taken by My Outspace and find ways to magnify it.

We discussed proposals to provide employment support and offer benefit advice to disabled people in GP surgeries and other parts of the community. Some disability groups in the area were anxious about the idea but much of this was based on their concerns about the government's legislative framework. Most were positive about the idea. Many of the organisations we spoke to also wanted us to emphasise the importance of supporting mental wellbeing in the adult population, and there was broad agreement that interventions to support mental health would help with employment prospects. More outreach services integrated into the Council's Gateway and aligned with support to tackle social isolation are an important next step for the council, Job Centre Plus and Clinical Commissioning Group.

WHAT WE WANT TO SEE:

Helping small local businesses to grow

- Active support for buy-local campaigns, linked particularly to small firms who sign up to the Croydon Employment Charter.

Improving work experience and job opportunities for local people

- Support for the roll out of First Step so that every young person at college who wants it is offered local work experience, with priority given to schools in the most deprived parts of the borough.
- More work to connect colleges and businesses to support training needs.

Supporting the long term sick and disabled people back into work

- New services within GP surgeries and extended into the community wherever possible to support employment and offer benefit advice to people with a long term illness and disabled people, joined up with services to tackle social isolation.

Reducing and avoiding debt and increasing security

- Debt consolidation, housing, benefits and other advice offered more extensively in the community with money wise training provided to those in debt or vulnerable to debt to help make Croydon a money wise borough.
- Support for social lending, including peer to peer approaches.

More employers signing up to the London Living Wage

- Support for the naming and shaming of large employers who do not sign up to the London Living Wage.
- Developers enlisted to support the Croydon Employment Charter and to encourage potential tenants to sign up to it at the point where they agree tenancy terms.
- More work to link payment of the London Living Wage to council backed small business loans and other services and offers it provides. A commitment that when business rates are devolved by the government the council will offer reductions for businesses that sign up to the Croydon Employment Charter, which will include the London Living Wage.

Encouraging more childcare provision

- Encouragement for social enterprise hubs such as cafes to build up childcare networks and for the council to entice providers with a social remit to set up nurseries within the borough.
- Support from the council, employers and developers to provide more childcare options, particularly those that free up community space and provide for flexible working patterns.





Terms of Reference

Croydon is an aspirant, young and diverse borough. It combines areas of endemic poverty with those of relative prosperity. It has unfulfilled potential and can and must do better. But it can only do this if residents, local business, and the voluntary and public sector develop a common understanding of the challenges it faces, share a vision for the future, and agree a route map to unlock the potential of all its residents, particularly the most disadvantaged.

- Analyse and understand the extent and causes of disadvantage and lack of opportunity in the borough, recognising the differences across areas and populations with as much attention as possible to the particularities of each locality
- Highlight and map the assets and potential assets the borough has: the skills, ingenuity and the contribution of residents, the community and voluntary sector to creating better lives, and the physical and technological assets that are underutilised
- Reach out to all parts of the community to understand their concerns and priorities. Ensure that residents and the voluntary, community and statutory sectors are engaged throughout the process and that their perspectives are embedded in any analysis. As part of this the commission will seek for solutions that meet the needs and aspirations of both poorer and more prosperous communities, and propose policies that aim to benefit all residents and workers in Croydon
- Analyse the changing nature of the labour market and technology and its impact in Croydon. Engage the business community – the people who create job opportunities for Croydon residents – as partners in the work of the Commission and in any new partnership
- Recognise that the council and other public service providers are under severe financial pressure, and many residents struggle to make ends meet, to make recommendations which enable partners in the borough to achieve more with less, using the resources available – better utilise existing assets and harness untapped ones
- Reappraise the long-term vision for Croydon from an Opportunity and Fairness perspective
- Propose achievable policies and solutions. Engage with those who will have to implement them (service providers, businesses, the voluntary sector and residents) so they are motivated to deliver them and are publicly committed to doing so
- To provide interim reports and a final report by early 2016



Fairness for me is whatever you're born into – whether you're rich or poor – that shouldn't affect your life chances. For example, Prince William will send his kid to a public school. If they are going to have equality then why can't we all?

Brett Evans, Broad Green



Statement of principles

Building on its terms of reference, the Commission has adopted the following principles which underpin its approach. The Commission will:

- Prioritise those policy areas where the challenge is significant and Croydon communities and organisations can, acting together, make a difference.
- Acknowledge the financial and legal constraints that residents, local organisations and businesses are under and adopt solutions that are realisable within those constraints.
- Reach out to those parts of the community that do not always come forward or naturally get their views heard to ensure our deliberations are based on evidence that is representative of all of Croydon's communities.
- Adopt an asset based approach that looks at the skills, attributes, spaces, networks, motivations, finances and other things available in the area that can be used to support better solutions.
- Emphasise that responsibility for improving Croydon does not rest solely with public sector organisations: residents have a significant part to play in the process, whether as individuals, or through their involvement in voluntary organisations and businesses, whatever their size.
- Identify best practice both within Croydon and elsewhere.
- Make sure that approaches and solutions we recommend are based on up to date sound evidence.
- Underline the importance of collaboration in solving problems and make sure that those who have a stake in the outcome help create the solution so that they also own the solution and recognise that they are accountable for the outcomes.
- Ensure that decisions are devolved so they are made as close as possible to the communities that are impacted by them.
- Put in place approaches which both identify developing issues



Concluding remarks

In conclusion, we would like to formally note the Commissioners and the process they followed. We end by pointing to an approach that we would like to see adopted after this report.

THE COMMISSION

An independent body set up by the council and chaired by the Bishop of Croydon and 12 other volunteer Commissioners.

- Rt Rev Jonathan Clark (Chair)
- Cllr Hamida Ali (Vice Chair)
- Brian Stapleton
- Christopher Adams
- Hannah Miller
- James Gillgrass
- Jeremy Frost
- Mashhood Ahmed
- Pat Reid
- Richard Serunjogi
- Sian Thomas
- Stella Fasusi-Olomu
- Steve Yewman

OUR APPROACH

To develop the findings and recommendations set out in this document we have:

- Engaged over 3,000 local people at meetings, local walkabouts, street stalls, events and visits to local services including food banks and pupil referral units.
- Gathered the views of young people through a Young Fairness Commission, led by young people. This has included workshops with schools and youth groups, regular meetings, a photo competition and a survey of more than 300 young people.
- Invited guest speakers and policy experts to contribute such as Lord Glasman and Professor John Hills.
- Followed a seven step process to prioritise issues, identified where we could add value to the work already being done, explored best practice and assets that are currently underutilised, and explored new approaches.
- Engaged local leaders and voluntary organisations as well as public service staff to understand the challenges they face and their ideas to make Croydon better.
- Published an interim report as part of a conversation around our interim recommendations and develop the findings and recommendations.
- Actively sought responses to the interim report from organisations, businesses and individuals throughout the Borough.

NEXT STEPS

Commissioners have committed to reconvene in October 2016 and January 2017 to assess and comment on how the recommendations proposed here have progressed.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

For the people and organisations of Croydon to be able to own this report and follow its impact we would like to see:

- The Local Strategic Partnership taking overall responsibility for implementation of the reports findings.
- A cabinet member of the London Borough of Croydon to oversee implementation.
- The Scrutiny and Overview Committee to monitor how the changes have been implemented and their impact.
- A website to be maintained so that the report and follow up monitoring and implementation can be easily viewed by the organisations and residents of Croydon.



This report contains a range of quotes from local people. In a few cases their names have been changed at their request.




**Opportunity
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Croydon Opportunity & Fairness Commission

