

**THIS IS
CROYDON**

LONDON BOROUGH
OF CULTURE 2023

IMPACT REPORT



31% Wool, 3rd Party Entertainment, A Collective, A Little History of the Sikhs, Abeer Kayani, Glaze, Akademi, Akin Theatre, Alamy, All Saints Church, Sanderstead, Amanda Smethurst, Amber Lewis, Apsara Arts, Association of Jamaicans, Atelier Arzu, ATMA, Atrium Galleries, Beats & Bev Jones, BH Live, BirdGang Ltd, Black Gifted Network, Bob Stanley, Bold Mellon Collective, Sensible, Carolyn ML Forsyth, Cat and Hutch, Caterina Loriggio, Centrale and Whitgift, Charles Addington, City Bridge Foundation, City Commons, CK, Claire Chandler, Claire Cunningham, Cllr. Croydon Academy of Eastern Arts (CAEA), Croydon Active Voices, Croydon Adult Learning and Forum, Croydon Brass, Croydon Carnival, Croydon Council, Croydon Creative Enterprise Zone, Croydon Music and Arts, Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society (CNHSS), Croydon Town Hall Concierge Team, Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA), Croydon with Talent, Croydon Youth Culture Croydon, Dance Umbrella, Dani Dawks, Daniel Winder, Dean Myles, Deborah Goatley-Sport, Department for Education, Designblock Studio, Desrene Dacres, Dhol Academy, Didymus, Drop Da Biscuit, Drum The Bass, Drunken Chorus, East Croydon Community Organisation, East Croydon Cool, Edward Richards, Emergency Exit Arts, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Event Master International, Faiths Together In Croydon, Fashion Meets Music, Fenton Arts Trust, Finesse Foreva, FM Conway, Four Communications, Frank Chicken, Friends Meeting House Croydon, Friends of Addiscombe Railway Park, Friends of Norbury Park, Friends of Park Hill Park and Recreation Ground, Friends of Selsdon Wood, Friends of Shirley Windmill, Friends of South Norwood Country Park, Friends of Trumble Gardens, Garfield Weston Foundation, Gijs Van Bon and Parker Hertz, Glenn Foster Photography, Good Food Matters, Good Wolf People, Gordon Flynn, Gospel Rising, Graeme Miall, Graeme Smith, Griff Griffiths, Hahna Ahmed, Herbe Walmsley, Historic Croydon Airport Trust, Holly Greenland, Holy Innocents Church South Norwood, Homes for Ukraine, HurlyBurly Theatre, IMG Artists, Jaime Taylor, Jemima Yong, Jen Kavanagh, Jenny Pengilly, Jess Woolf, Joan Redding, Joanna Shirley, John Grindrod, John Thaw Foundation, Open City, Over Da Counter, Paul and Jenny Camlett, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Paul Hudson Pete Edwards, Pete Wiggs, Philip Moreira-Yeoell, Pif-Paf Theatre, PINS, Play for Progress, Plunge Queer Croydon, Rachel Adams, Rachel Flowers, Rachel Savage, Rachel Victor-Sampson, Ralph Raffs, Rosie Vizer, Rotary Club of Croydon Jubilee, RRB Photobooks, Sagar Shah, Samia Tossio, Shaniqua Benjamin, Shri, Siri Guru Singh Sabha Croydon Gurdwara, Skye Baker, SLiDE Dance, Croydon Business Association, South Norwood Community Festival, South Norwood Community Church South Norwood, Stanley Arts, Stephanie Wilson, Still Shadey, Strange Cargo, Studio Productions, Talawa Theatre Company, The Andy Copps Company, The Audience Agency, The The Enterprise Trust, The Foyle Foundation, The Front Room, The Graphic Design House, The Holy The National Gallery, The National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, The Oval Tavern, The Place, & Tight, Think Events London, Thomas Briggs, Thornton Heath Community Action Team, Tiny Bridge, Upper Norwood Library Hub, Vauxhall City Farm, Vicky Olusanya, Vipul Sangoi, Virginia Writerz and Scribez, Xabier Mendez, Young Urban Arts Foundation, Zip Design, Zoo Co Theatre

And a special thank you to the Mayor of London, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and all National Lottery players.

Achates Philanthropy, Adrian Winchester, Age UK Croydon, Agudo Dance Company, Aiyana Ash, Ameena Rojee, An Act Above, Angela Farrance, Anita Cottle, Anneka Gonzales, Antonio Eats, Beeja Dance, Bernadette Russell, Bethlem Gallery, Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Better, Boundless Theatre, Boxpark, Broomdasher, Brutalist Library SE25, Bureau of Silly Ideas, Captain Baker, Charlotte Young, Cherrystars, Chineke! Orchestra, Church of St. Mary the Blessed Virgin Andy Stranack, Clocktower Café, Club Soda, Coral Flood, Coulsdon College, Creative Croydon, Training (CALAT), Croydon Archives, Croydon Astronomical Society, Croydon BID, Croydon BME Croydon Cycle Theatre, Croydon Libraries, Croydon Mela, Croydon Mencap, Croydon Minster, Operatic and Dramatic Association (CODA), Croydon Pride, Croydon Reprographics, Croydon Assembly, Croydon Youth Theatre Organisation (CYTO), Croydonites, Crystal Palace Festival, Birch, Demelza Watts, Denisa Glennon and family, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Digital Drama, DJ Hatcha, Double Take Projections, Downlands Partnership, Downlands Trust,

Johnny Moped, Jono Erodotou, Josie Lebilé-Holo, Kate Laird, Katia Del Rio-Smith, Katie Hurley, Katie Rose, Kerala Cultural and Welfare Association, Kevin Quilty, Kinetika, Kirsty Lothian, Kristian Aspinall, Layla El-Deeb, Learn To Dream, Light Up Trails, Lighthouse Educational Society, Lindsay Ould, Little Mouse, Liz Hollowood, Llama Digital, London & Partners, London Mozart Players, London Road Business Ltd, London Southbank University, London Trams, Los Kaos, Louise Birchall, Love Norbury, Lucie Vezey, Lucie Wenigerova, Lucy Lawrence, Lucy Williams, Lynnebec, Mama G, Mandy Smith, Marcus Harris-Noble, Marie Tulley-Rose, Mark Oryang, Matthew's Yard, Miniscule of Sound, Mirfat Abraham, Monike Campbell, Mr Fox, Mud Summons Records, Museum of Croydon, Music Managers Forum, Music Relief Foundation, Nadia Rose, Natalie Mitchell, National Portrait Gallery, New Addington Boxing Club, New Addington Carnival, New Addington Community Writing Group, New Addington Pathfinders, Nikita Shah, Norbury Green Residents' Association, Norbury High School for Girls, Norwood JunkAction, Oceanallover,

Associates, Paula Murray, Paulette Johnson, Peabody, Pengenista Drummers, Pepper Pictures, Bloom, Pollock's Toy Museum, Postcode Society Trust, Premm Design, Purley BID, Queen Mojo, McTell, Rap Therapy, Rapclub Oasis Academy Shirley Park, Raze Collective, Reaching Higher, Riff SamProjects, Sanderstead Shantymen, SAVVY Theatre, Scanner's Inc., SDNA, SE19 Dance Project, Sony Entertainment TV, Sophie Linehan-Biggs, Soul Symphony, Sound Intervention Limited, South Kitchen, St Francis' Church Monks Hill, St John the Evangelist Upper Norwood, St Mark's Scamps, Subrang Arts, Sunrise Radio, Surrey Hills Arts, Susie Rundle, Svitlana Goncharuk, Sysco BRIT School, The Cinema Museum, The Circus, The David Lean Cinema, The Enriched Kids CIC, Family Catholic Church, Sanderstead, The John Whitgift Foundation, The Kenley Revival Project, The Poetry Takeaway, The Shift Collective, The Twentieth Century Society, Theatre-Rites, Thick Productions, Tony Fairweather, Transport for London, Tribal Entertainment, Turf Projects, UK DRC Smith, We Love SE25, White Label, Wild in Art, Wild in the City, William Antoniani, Worldbeaters,

THANK YOU TO ALL OF THE ORGANISATIONS, DELIVERY TEAM AND PARTNERS LISTED ON THESE PAGES, AND TO ALL OF THE 5,000+ PEOPLE WHO MADE THIS IS CROYDON HAPPEN

100 FACES OF CROYDON

A community-led project by London Mozart Players

Scan the QR code to see all 100 Faces

THIS IS CROYDON
LONDON BOROUGH OF CULTURE

London Borough of Culture is a Mayor of London initiative.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Presented by:



100 Faces of Croydon billboard in East Croydon Station. Photo by Vipul Sangoi.

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Subrang Arts' Mela Queen. Photo by Glenn Foster.

FOREWORD

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London



London Borough of Culture is about bringing our diverse communities together, supporting grassroots talent to shine and unleashing the potential of young Londoners. I created it with the aim of opening up access to culture and putting it at the heart of local communities. I'm delighted that Croydon has done exactly that with its fantastic programme, *This is Croydon*.

Collaborating closely with the creative sector and local people, Croydon Council has demonstrated the power of culture to act as a vehicle for positive change and unity. By bringing events and activities to the doorsteps of local residents, the council has also helped to ensure that no one misses out on cultural experiences because of who they are or where they live.

One highly successful part of the programme has been the engagement with young people, with 92% of schools getting involved and 16,275 opportunities taken up by young people to develop their creative skills and cultural leadership. A brilliant example of this is the **NXTGEN** music conference, which saw 900 young people visit Fairfield Halls to learn about all aspects of the music business. Crucially, Croydon Music and Arts, the Music Managers Forum, and local music management company Finesse Foreva, who led the event, will now continue working together to develop pathways from education into good jobs in the music industry for young Londoners.

Throughout the year, Croydon has also shown its commitment to inclusive arts, with local companies developing new and innovative work. This includes theatre shows **Night Shift** by Zoo Co, which looked at the lives of night workers, and **Pinocchio** by SAVVY Theatre, produced in partnership with homelessness and mental health charities.

I'm proud that we will continue to work with the team in Croydon to develop their Access Manifesto, an inspirational new resource and toolkit to equip creative organisations to deliver more inclusive and accessible events. This will form part of our ongoing close work with Croydon to help shape a strong and enduring cultural legacy that benefits local residents as we work to build a better London for everyone.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

FOREWORD

Jason Perry
Executive Mayor of Croydon



It was a cause for celebration when London Borough of Culture was awarded to Croydon in 2020. However, the unforeseen impact of COVID-19 and the financial challenges faced by the Council posed significant difficulties.

When I was elected as the first Executive Mayor of Croydon in May 2022, the Council was on the brink of its third S114 notice, effectively bankrupt. Within a year, we achieved a significant turnaround, and I'm pleased that we chose to proceed with London Borough of Culture under my leadership. Despite being a Council in financial distress, it has proven to be a tremendous success story, providing a significant boost to the economy and the creative sector in Croydon.

We had to shift our focus as we turned the *This is Croydon* brand into an opportunity for inward investment, emphasising the creation of a lasting legacy and celebrating Croydon's creativity from the grassroots level upwards.

Given the challenges we faced, our achievements for the people of Croydon are truly remarkable. London Borough of Culture was a grassroots showcase supporting local talent, working closely with Croydon's established cultural sector.

There were festivals attended by tens of thousands of people across the borough and many events celebrating our fantastic diversity.

Our key plan, as one of the youngest boroughs in London, was to provide opportunities for our young people to develop their skills, and we exceeded all our expectations.

There were a number of standout moments: from attending the amazing **Oratorio of Hope**, to proudly watching our young people take to the stage in Wandle Park, to standing in Thornton Heath Library admiring Constable's *'The Cornfield'*, visiting from The National Gallery, or seeing Croydon town centre taken over by a herd of giraffes as part of **Croydon Stands Tall**.

Croydon is an amazing place which should be recognised for its music genius, from Captain Sensible to Desmond Dekker, and more recently, as home to internationally award-winning artists Stormzy, RAYE, and Nadia Rose.

Thanks to our prudent management Croydon is no longer operating under Section 114 and London Borough of Culture has successfully put Croydon back on the map for the right reasons. We managed to stay within budget whilst delivering a wide range of cultural experiences and building a truly lasting legacy.

As a Croydonian born and bred, I am extremely proud of what we managed to achieve, and my heartfelt thanks goes to all those who made this happen. London Borough of Culture has provided the opportunity to shine a light on the wonderful uniqueness of our home town.

Mayor Jason Perry
Executive Mayor of Croydon

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Shaped *This is Croydon*,
83% Croydon-based

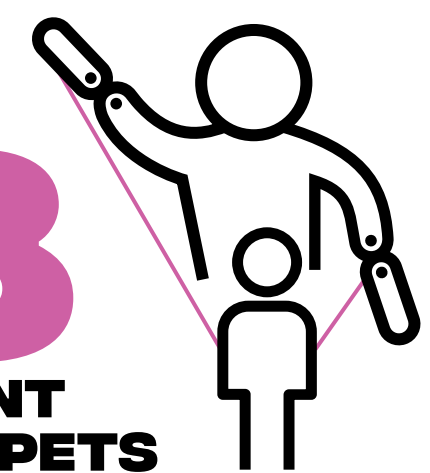
2,750+



ARTISTS AND CREATIVES

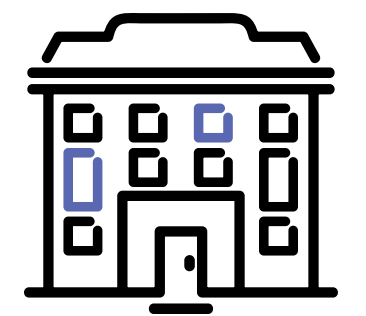
Involved in the programme

8



GIANT PUPPETS

Representing Croydon's music icons

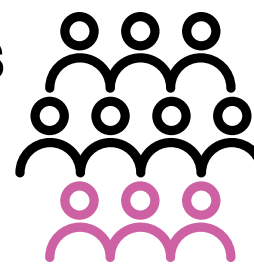


92%

CROYDON SCHOOLS

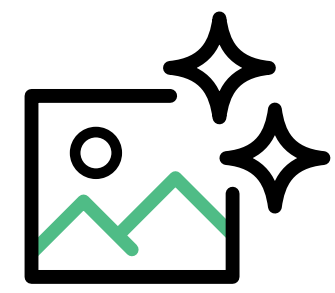
Engaged with the programme

655,000



AUDIENCES

360,000 in-person
and 295,000 digital



5.1M

PUBLIC ART VIEWS

Out and about around the borough

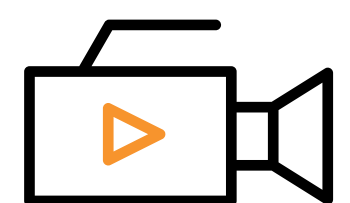
1,071



VOLUNTEERS

With almost 13,000 hours of time donated

11.6M



VIEWS OF MEDIA COVERAGE

From 201 pieces of coverage, 95.4% positive



60

GIRAFFES

Decorated by local artists and communities

16,275



OPPORTUNITIES TAKEN UP BY YOUNG PEOPLE

To develop skills

5



THINGS TO DO PER DAY

As an average across the year

18

SHEEP & 2 SHEPHERDESSES



As part of Rural Croydon



Ameena Rojee



Glenn Foster

National Gallery Constable Visits and Rural Croydon: Constable's *The Cornfield* visits Thornton Heath Library, and Croydon artist Ameena Rojee responds with a photography project celebrating Croydon's pastures.



Ameena Rojee



Birdgang perform at the Launch at Boxpark. Photo by Lia Toby/PA Wire/PA Images.

HOW WE GOT HERE

DELIVERY CONTEXT

In February 2020, the Mayor of London awarded Croydon the title of London Borough of Culture 2023. At this stage, *This is Croydon* was to be delivered by a 12-strong council team with a £4.4 million budget. Things do not always go to plan. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. Then in November 2020, Croydon Council issued a section 114 notice (often described in the media as declaring bankruptcy). The council could now only spend its resources on statutory services, which do not include culture.

"We are resilient. We are inclusive," wrote the bid, but how would we find our way through these unexpected challenges? The period between winning the bid and starting the programme inevitably held several crucial decision-making moments.

The council had to step back and pull its core funding from the budget. What would

have been a key first year for planning and fundraising was lost to a series of lockdowns and more pressing priorities for both the local authority and funders. The 12-strong council team was reduced to three, but in March 2022 these three officers moved on to new organisations, leaving a wide hole in terms of central council delivery.

Croydon's cultural sector stepped forward. Croydon's Culture Network had been key to shaping the bid, and 34 of its members established a formal steering group to take the programme forward in lieu of the council. Dan Winder, Artistic Director and CEO of Stanley Arts, and Carolyn Forsyth, Executive Director and Joint CEO of Talawa were elected as chair and vice-chair respectively, driving forward plans and reshaping the programme to fit the new reality. Additionally, focused advisory groups were set up to champion key aspects of delivery: Youth, Access, Marketing, Queer Arts and Evaluation.

The May 2022 elections brought a new administration, with the election of executive Mayor Jason Perry and an emphasis on inward investment and restoring pride in Croydon. Within the council a new Director of Culture and Community Safety, Kristian Aspinall, came on board. So, when the council issued a Section 114 for a second time in November 2022, and the government-appointed improvement and assurance panel scrutinised plans for the year, they were able to approve the continuation of the programme.

More good news came that November - five Croydon organisations who were key to *This is Croydon* delivery were awarded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status from Arts Council England (ACE), three for the first time. This represented a £1.5 million per year new investment in culture in the borough and a much-needed boost in confidence for the sector.

The original bid to the Mayor of London was not forgotten. The 12 flagship events outlined within the application remained key to programme development and delivery. This strand included summer festivals and carnivals; opening events and commissions; a Croydon BID public art trail; a multiple activation visual arts strand exploring the design of Croydon town centre and underused spaces; a sustainable fashion strand; and a large-scale music heritage programme. The steering group then managed two funding schemes (Ignite) at large and medium scales, with awards starting from £2,950 and capping at £50,000. These led to 27 artist and community-led events and commissions ranging from open days at Croydon's historic airport to hosting the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, from CODA's **Alice in Wonderland** to **Popin' Pete's Pop Shop**. Many smaller grant recipients were able to use their award as leverage on larger applications to Arts Council England and other funders, attracting an additional £750,000+ of investment to the borough. There were also embedded development strands to support inclusive heritage, accessible arts delivery and the borough's LGBTQ+ artists.

In January 2023, Stephanie Wilson joined the council as Head of Culture, Leisure and Libraries and Caterina Loriggio took the lead role for the year, both supported by Project



DAN WINDER

Steering Group Chair

My role as chair of the This Is Croydon steering group began in early 2022 as the sector came together to work with the council to pivot the delivery model in the face of extraordinary financial pressures. Working together, the sector and the council sought practical solutions, shared resources, and were each other's critical friends. In the crucible of those challenging months, we forged a new, more collaborative way of working together, which I hope will continue to influence the way we deliver culture for Croydon in future.

It is only at the end that you can look back and see how far you have come. With the recent launch of Culture Croydon, the new independent network for culture in Croydon, the sector is working more collaboratively than ever and developing a stronger collective voice. Within Croydon Council, although resources will always be tight, there is a new recognition of the vital importance of culture. Far from being a 'nice-to-have', a strong and vibrant cultural sector is now recognised as essential to all aspects of strategic development.

As we close our year as London Borough of Culture, and I end my time as the chair of the steering group, I am hopeful that this year was just the start of a much deeper and broader level of cultural engagement across the borough. I am excited to see what this new partnership model can bring as we continue to expand the range of people and organisations that contribute to our growing cultural community.



CAROLYN FORSYTH

Steering Group Deputy Chair

2020 was a challenging year, marked by heartache, trauma, and reflection. Amidst this turmoil, the fate of London Borough of Culture 2023 hung in the balance. I began working full-time for Talawa in November 2020. Both the company and I were excited about This is Croydon. However, as the reality of the deliverables and the council's position became clear, it was evident that, without serious advocacy, the programme could be doomed.

London Borough of Culture 2023 acknowledged Croydon's rich cultural heritage and its dedication to nurturing creativity and community engagement. Croydon embarked on a journey to spotlight its vibrant arts scene, celebrate its diverse communities, and promote cultural initiatives enriching residents' lives.

Throughout the year, Croydon organised a plethora of cultural events, performances, exhibitions, and workshops, showcasing local talent, fostering inclusivity, and engaging residents of all ages and backgrounds. These endeavours not only celebrated Croydon's cultural identity but also fostered unity and pride within the community.

London Borough of Culture provided Croydon with a unique opportunity to showcase its culture, engage with residents, attract visitors, and stimulate economic growth. The year has been a success, creating opportunities for people living and working in Croydon. While there is plenty of learning, we've progressed from a place where few believed it could be done to a genuine source of hope for the borough. Let's celebrate the win!



On International Women's Day we gathered some of the female leads involved in making *This is Croydon* happen. Photo by Jemima Yong.

Officer Aiyana Glaze. Support was on hand from Mayor of London colleagues and, together with our marcomms agencies, a successful launch was delivered in March 2023. Kevin Quilty was appointed as Senior Communications and Marketing Manager, joining the team in late April and, in December, Kirsty Lothian joined as Grants and Evaluation Manager. Weekly meetings between the council team and steering group chairs, as well as monthly steering group meetings, tied everything together.

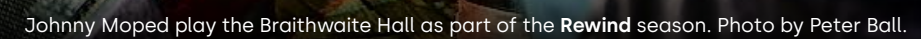
As the year progressed, the council was able to supplement the rich home-grown artistic programme with central delivery of projects and programming strands. New grant schemes were initiated to better support broader community involvement

and to extend geographic reach: a school strategy was implemented; the music heritage strand was extended; and a strand of high-quality family programming in libraries was developed. This ensured more people and places in the borough could participate and that our story could be more fully told. Between the council, community and culture sector, and despite all odds, the cumulative effect of genuine joint endeavour meant that we pulled it off and, at times, rather spectacularly too.

As this report will highlight, *This is Croydon* was a success. This does not mean that everything was perfect, far from it. The year presented many challenges to all involved. There were frustrations, complicated delivery models and niggles which were never fully

resolved. A lot of planning time was lost. With a central team in place earlier, the year would have had a different shape: more support would have been available for the sector, marcomms planning and delivery would have been more strategic and effective, and the year likely would have had an even greater impact. However, through passion, commitment and hard work, and despite reduced resources, together we were able to deliver more projects and reach significantly more people than were envisaged in the original bid. This is cause for celebration.

This is Croydon and this is how we deliver a year of culture.





LAUNCHING THE PROGRAMME

**Step into my kind of beautiful.
We glimpse the world each day.
For this is Croydon, the one I see,
We need, for you and me, for us and we.**

Lyrics by Jeff Moore, after
Shaniqua Benjamin's poem,
For Us and We

ORATORIO OF HOPE [APRIL 2023]

"Oratorio: a large-scale, usually narrative musical work for orchestra and voices."

London Mozart Players (LMP), the borough's resident orchestra, brought together almost 400 local professional and amateur performers to celebrate the breadth and depth of Croydon's musical talent. Opening with a specially commissioned film - *For Us and We* - set to a new poem from Croydon Poet Laureate Shaniqua Benjamin, the evening continued with the full LMP chamber ensemble, dancers, spoken word, choirs, visual art, Afrobeat rhythms, classical Indian instruments and dance. The event attracted the largest audience the refurbished Fairfield Halls had seen since it reopened in 2020. Throughout the opening weekend, the venue's foyers and terraces were taken over by 19 community choirs and musicians for a joyous, inclusive showcase of all Croydon has to offer. The Times praised the "sheer quality of the participants," "upbeat vibes" and "roof-raising finale".

The programme was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the Series and Events category, up against two major festivals.

“Oratorio of Hope felt like an Olympic opening ceremony. There was not a single person that I spoke to in the audience who was not thoroughly enthused, energised, and mesmerised by the performance or by the sheer positivity of the afternoon.”
Neil Ridulfa, S.I.N.G. a cappella choir

“It was really exciting to perform. The song we sang was very good because it did represent what Croydon is and what it stands for.”
Children's Chorus member



Launch: Lia Toby/PA Wire/PA Images

TIMELINE

MARCH 2023

LAUNCH [MARCH 2023]

200 people gather in Croydon Boxpark, with BBC London's breakfast show broadcasting live to launch *This is Croydon*.

APRIL

EMBEDDING HOPE

“Being a part of *This is Croydon* has permanently changed the way we work in Croydon. It has enabled us to connect more deeply with our community and strengthened our commitment to being Croydon's resident orchestra. We are proud of what we have achieved and are excited to continue developing our new relationships.”

Flynn Le Brocq, LMP Chief Executive

Oratorio of Hope allowed the orchestra to build relationships with a huge range of creative partners. It acted as proof-of-concept for bringing together the breadth of Croydon's professional and amateur musicians in artistically innovative work of a very high standard. In partnership with council colleagues, the model was re-used for **A Very Croydon Christmas**. This time the programme incorporated family and multi-faith events across the Croydon Clocktower complex as well as the Fairfield Halls foyers, bringing together 4,000 people across venues. At the centre of the programme, a carol concert with community choirs, the LMP ensemble, TikTok sensation organist Reductio, sing-along moments, and some sensational snow effects perfectly captured the spirit of the season.



A Very Croydon Christmas: Glenn Foster



A Very Croydon Christmas: Glenn Foster

Mozart The Mixtape/100 Faces of Croydon in February celebrated LMP's 75th birthday, later broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Portraits of 100 Croydonians were projected before and as part of the concert. These were gathered through a community project engaging 30 amateur and professional photographers. All 100 sitters took part in the performance which broke the audience record set by **Oratorio of Hope**, taking LMP back to their pre-COVID audience levels. The 100 faces went on to be displayed on trams and billboards across the borough.

The model is powerful and inclusive: 100% of the **A Very Croydon Christmas** audience felt welcomed and included.

“Things like this really show Croydon is still a great place”
Audience comment, **A Very Croydon Christmas**

WITH AN AVERAGE OF FIVE THINGS TO DO PER DAY ACROSS THE YEAR, LED BY 114 PARTNERS AND 2,750+ CREATIVES, THIS IS CROYDON WAS WIDE AND FAR-REACHING. ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO DO JUSTICE TO ALL THAT HAPPENED, THIS IS A SNAPSHOT OF OUR YEAR AS LONDON BOROUGH OF CULTURE.

RECOGNITION

[JUN 2023]

A new Talawa Theatre production, based on the life of Croydon-based composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, shines a light on a little-known legacy of Black classical music.



Recognition © EllieKurttz

ACCESS WEEKENDER

[JUN 2023]

The culture sector skills up their disability access know-how.

LAUNCH OF MUSIC HERITAGE TRAIL

[JUN 2023]

A new street art commission by ATMA, and an app trail traces the path of Croydon's rich music history.



Croydon Music Heritage Trail Launch: Rachel Adams

WINDRUSH 75

[JUN 2023]

BME Forum, Croydon Council and 300 friends celebrate the rich contribution of the Windrush generation with a joyful event at Croydon Minster.



Windrush 75 Croydon Minster: Fluid4Sight

JULY



Summer of Festivals: Glenn Foster

SUMMER OF FESTIVALS

[JUL 2023]

Audiences of 55,000+ gather across Croydon PrideFest, Croydon Mela, CR Talent, Croydon Food and Music Festival and carnivals and community festivals in London Road, Thornton Heath, New Addington, South Norwood and Purley, to celebrate local communities and big talents.

CLIMATE MUSICAL - WHY ON EARTH?

[JUL 2023]

BRIT School students raise their voices for youth climate activism.

NATIONAL GALLERY CONSTABLE VISITS

[JUL 2023]

Constable's *The Cornfield* visits Thornton Heath Library.

QUEER JOY

[JUL 2023]

Curated by Bold Mellon, an exhibition and event programme celebrates exciting up-and-coming LGBTQIA+ artists at Stanley Arts and Purley Library.



Queer Joy

AUGUST

DESIRE PATHS

[AUG 2023-MAR 2024]

From gardening interventions to creative wayfinding, Turf Projects commissions nine local artists to work with Croydon communities exploring how creativity can better shape the borough's underused spaces.



Desire Paths: Thea and Nathan Eaton-Baudains

CROYDON STANDS TALL

[AUG-OCT 2023]

Croydon BID unleashes a herd of artist-designed giraffes across the town centre, launching a 10-week art trail.



Croydon Stands Tall: Glenn Foster

SEPTEMBER

CROYDON OPEN HOUSE

[SEP 2023]

29 venues, from churches and private houses to Shirley Windmill, open their doors and welcome people in.

DANCE FESTIVAL CROYDON

[SEP-OCT 2023]

Contemporary dance bursts from Croydon's theatres to the high street, showcasing local, national and international dancers curated by Beeja.

LIBERTY

[SEP 2023]

Drunken Chorus curate the Mayor of London's flagship festival of Deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse artists.



Liberty Festival: Paul Fuller

OCTOBER

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF UKRAINE

[OCT 2023]

The orchestra visits Fairfield Halls accompanied by an art exhibition led by young Ukrainian refugees. Our Ukrainian community celebrates with a flag raising ceremony.

BLACK HISTORY 365

[OCT 2023]

Croydon's BME Forum curates grassroots events to share Croydon's Black creativity and heritage.

[OCT 2023]

Caribbean Influencers transfers to the National Portrait Gallery.

POPIN' PETE'S POP SHOP AND FRIENDS

[OCT 2023]

Scanner's Inc and hip-hop legend Popin' Pete stage a creative takeover in a vacant shop.

FAMILY (DYS)FUNCTION

[OCT 2023]

Young people and elders come together with Birdgang in a new intergenerational show.

NOVEMBER



A Very Croydon Christmas: Glenn Foster

A VERY CROYDON CHRISTMAS

[DEC 2023]

Croydon's diverse communities and faiths come together for an inclusive winter celebration.

SAVVY PRESENTS PINOCCHIO

[DEC 2023]

An epic retelling of the classic story by drama groups of adults and young people with learning disabilities, experience of mental ill health, and homelessness.

OUR CROYDON

[NOV-DEC 2023]

Talawa's Community Archiving projects records and celebrates Caribbean elders' experiences.

CROYDONITES

[NOV 2023]

10 days of new theatre from cutting edge artists unrolls across Croydon.



Croydonites Festival Abandoman: Lukasz Izdebski

NIGHT SHIFT

[NOV 2023]

Zoo Co's inclusive new play explores London's night workers in English, subtitles and BSL.

DECEMBER

JANUARY 2024

SUPER NORMAL EXTRA NATURAL

[JAN 2024]

An immersive dance performance takes over Whitgift Shopping Centre, in a partnership with The Place and Requardt & Rosenberg.



Super Normal Extra Natural: Camilla Greenwell

JOURNEY OF A REFUGEE

[FEB 2024]

Theatre Rites and Agudo Dance explore refugee journeys through theatre and dance.

FEBRUARY



Croydon Remix: Doug Southall/Pepper Pictures

CROYDON REMIX

[MAR 2024]

Audiences of 6,000 enjoy the closing weekend of Croydon's year as London Borough of Culture, shining a light on our proud musical past, present and future.

MARCH

LAUNCH OF CROYDON LOVES YOU

[FEB 2024]

Microgrants for grassroots creativity to support residents' wellbeing.

MUSIC NXTGEN: CROYDON

[FEB 2024]

MMF and Finesse Foreva bring together 900 young people to highlight music industry career pathways and build the next generation of Croydon talent.



NXTGEN: DaisyLdn

LAUNCH OF REWIND: THIS IS CROYDON'S MUSIC

[FEB 2024]

The Museum of Croydon's main gallery reopens with a celebration of Croydon's music history.



Croydon Remix: Vipul Sangoi

DEVELOPING PRIDE IN CROYDON

Croydon often gets a bad press, but *This is Croydon* was an opportunity to:

Change the narrative: 95.4% of press coverage for *This is Croydon* has been positive. *"The legacy of 'This is Croydon' will continue to motivate future generations to cherish and contribute to their cultural heritage."* South West Londoner

Show off its heritage: 80% of audience members agreed that Croydon is a good destination for heritage events and activities. *"I never knew Croydon could be so interesting."* Croydon visitor taking part in **East Croydon History Walk**

Support local talent: 83% of partner organisations were based in Croydon. *"I so am proud Croydon has so much talent it can share"* Audience Member, **Dance Festival Croydon**

Shine: 15 award nominations across the programme. *"It makes you proud to be from Croydon"* Audience Member, **Croydon Food and Music Festival**

REWIND AND CELEBRATING CROYDON'S MUSIC

Croydon has an extraordinary music history: Dubstep, Reggae, Punk, Folk, Church Music and more have deep roots in the borough. **Rewind: This is Croydon's Music** re-opened the Museum of Croydon's main gallery for the first time since COVID-19, with exhibits donated by Captain Sensible, DJ N-Type, Nadia Rose, Ralph McTell, Desmond Dekker's family, Shri Sriram and many more.

Alongside the exhibition, family programming, library workshops and performances and a touring music production bus reminded Croydonians (and beyond) of how many groundbreaking musicians Croydon has homed and raised, and the incredible music being created today. A weekly concert and gig programme ran



Rewind Exhibition: Glenn Foster

from the opening week in February to the final weekend, spanning genres through local music legends such as Mad Professor, Johnny Moped, Saint Etienne, and rising stars such as Roger Samuels and Meron T.



"I didn't realize most of these people came from Croydon. It's amazing. For the kids as well, so they can see what they can be too"

Audience Member, **Croydon Remix**

The closing weekend, **Croydon Remix**, brought the exhibition out onto the streets, taking over Croydon Clocktower and Katharine Street with interactive installations, outdoor arts, a new music commission and projection, and eight of Croydon's music greats dancing in the street in the form of giant carnival puppets created by Strange Cargo. At the heart of the weekend were the musicians of the future: the finale of Drum the Bass's year-long **Croydon Young Composers** project at Fairfield Halls showcased over 100 young musicians.



"What you've done tonight has brought Croydon together. This is amazing. There should be more of this every night."

Audience Member, **Croydon Remix**



Little Manhattan at Open House: Glenn Foster

CELEBRATING CROYDON

When Thornton Heath Library hosted the National Gallery's **Constable Visits**, *This is Croydon* commissioned artist Ameena Rojee to respond to it with **Rural Croydon** - a photography project celebrating Croydon's working pastures and grazing cattle. Animals from Vauxhall City Farm greeted school children at the launch. Throughout the week we celebrated with outreach events, culminating in a family day. The project opened people's eyes to what can be possible in an urban library, with an eminent painting at the heart of the community, and a local artist showing that great art is in Croydon already.



"It was amazing having great art in Thornton Heath, and to learn how it related to rural Croydon"

Audience Member, **Rural Croydon**

Several projects worked with the Museum of Croydon to reinvigorate Croydonian pride in the town centre through exhibitions with talks, reminiscence events and walking tours. **Croydon from the Palette of Evacustes Phipson** from volunteer-run Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society exhibited a collection of late 19th and early 20th century watercolours; and Digital Drama's **Little Manhattan** created new artworks and a film through oral history and creative workshops exploring redevelopment post-1950.



"I've lived here for decades, this has made me see Croydon differently"

Participant, **Little Manhattan Architecture Walk**

"Absolutely amazing exhibition - great to see our past."

Visitor, **Croydon from the Palette of Evacustes Phipson**



SURFACING HIDDEN HISTORIES AND CELEBRATING SELDOM SEEN COMMUNITIES

This is Croydon uncovered hidden histories by:

Shining a light:

OVER £250,000 invested in heritage projects uncovering seldom seen communities (Global Majority, Deaf and disabled, LGBTQ+ and working class)

Making a space:

ONE THIRD of the overall programme was specifically focused on seldom seen communities

Collecting Stories:

107 Oral histories collected from seldom heard voices

The National Lottery Heritage Fund-supported **Faces and Places** programme, along with core budget investment, allowed *This is Croydon* to develop a deep-rooted strand of work bringing hidden histories to light. This included celebrations and a digital experience for **Windrush 75**; a film screening with Q&A for Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Heritage Month; collecting working class stories from shop and factory workers at iconic Croydon employers Alders and Barton's Toy Factory; the **Black History 365** programme; and creative approaches to heritage led by and with Caribbean and South Asian communities. Additionally, David Lean Cinema hosted a week-long sell-out **Punk Film Festival** with panel events linked to seven films including special guests Johnny Moped, Fred Burns, Marty Love, Griff Griffiths, Captain Zip, Martin Gooch, Joanna Scanlan and Captain Sensible.

FACES AND PLACES

In partnership with the Museum of Croydon, Talawa produced **Our Croydon**, a transdisciplinary community archiving programme that celebrated local communities of Caribbean heritage. Three commissioned artists partnered with the local Association of Jamaicans UK to capture their stories using film, music, and visual art. By bringing together elders and artists to record and preserve histories, the project shifted mindsets about whose experience and records are of value.



"I have discovered my legacy through this project, I was sitting on it. Whatever I can bring out, and open up to others, that will be my legacy."

Our Croydon participant

A South Asian Heritage strand included Apsara Arts' **Bollywood Weddings**, culminating in a celebration of wedding culture in the Braithwaite Hall complete with a live and life-size papier mâché bride. Subrang Arts developed batik flags and a giant carnival queen with local schools, both appearing at Croydon Mela and London Road Carnival celebrations. Vipul Sangoi's **Cultural Connection** photography programme captured young South Asians in traditional and contemporary dress, with a pop-up exhibition touring to community events and libraries.



Caribbean Influencers: Museum of Croydon.

CARIBBEAN INFLUENCERS

The Museum of Croydon partnered with the National Portrait Gallery's Citizen UK project, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and Art Fund. Artist Kyam, Croydon Poet Laureate Shaniqua Benjamin and designer Abi Wright created portraits and stories of the Croydon Caribbean community and unsung influencers who have made an impact on the borough. Working in collaboration with local volunteer citizen researchers, they collected and told these inspiring stories creatively. The exhibition opened in Croydon in April 2023 and transferred to the National Portrait Gallery in October. It was a challenging project to deliver, but one with huge impact.



"[Influencers] appreciated being seen and celebrated. That can't be measured... I think that will be with them forever. And that will be big when people in the future look through things online and know more about our history" Shaniqua Benjamin, Poet and Co-lead, **Caribbean Influencers**

SIKH HISTORY ON THE STREETS OF CROYDON

Croydon Gurdwara and historian Rav Singh led a project uncovering the borough's rich Sikh history. *"We took a small risk in trying to conduct research in a borough where the Sikh population is very low, but ended up with a rich, informative project. We found so much,"* wrote one of the organisers. *"Our advice to other boroughs would be that taking a small risk with small communities in your borough pays off!"* The research phase led to creative sessions with adults and children at

the Gurdwara; two showcase events for the wider borough; a Sikh history walk; and a self-guided map printed and distributed across all Croydon libraries.



"Interesting, welcoming, proud" "It was a fantastic, eye-opening event" "Great fun!" Audiences and participants from the Sikh history showcase events and walk

MAKING SURE EVERYONE IS WELCOME

This is Croydon welcomed:

Everyone: 98% of project participants agreed they felt welcomed and included

Disabled creatives: 10% of delivery organisations were disabled-led

Disabled audience members: 13% of audience members and participants identified as Deaf or disabled

Global Majority creatives: 65% of practitioners identified with a Global Majority ethnicity

LGBTQ+ people: 29% of attendees identified as LGBTQ+

This is Croydon, and you are welcome.

As well as hidden heritage programmes, investment was made in disability arts and queer arts development strands, and in platforming Global Majority voices. This was bolstered by developing and showcasing a range of inclusive work taking place locally on an ongoing basis.

EMBEDDING ACCESSIBILITY

Across the year, a real investment was made in making Croydon's cultural sector more accessible to both Deaf and disabled artists and audiences.

Zoo Co supported *This is Croydon* delivery partners, upskilling the sector for the future. This included free, bespoke access consultancy; development of an online **Access Manifesto and Toolkit**; a lending library of equipment from captioning software to ear defenders; and an **Access Weekender** of free training for 50 members of Croydon's cultural sector.

Volunteer-run David Lean Cinema presented **Relaxed** and **Dementia Friendly Screenings**, as well as subtitled screenings with signed introductions. Learning through the process what audiences needed, they built up a regular following over the year.

GLOBAL MAJORITY VOICES

Talawa's award-winning new play **Recognition** told the story of late-19th century Black, Croydon-based composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor; Theatre Rites and Agudo Dance Company's **Journey of a Refugee** traced two East African refugee artists' path to safety in a play for children and young people; **Dance**

Festival Croydon platformed South Asian artists. Subrang Arts' **Kalasetu** connected Indian Classical and Flamenco dancers and musicians in a spectacular new commission; while **Croydon Mela** brought together 300 community dancers and audiences of 8,000+ to celebrate in Wandle Park.

QUEER ARTS

A Stanley Arts supported delivery of the queer arts strand included an exhibition, new theatre commissions and community workshops. The programme has led to the creation of **Queer Croydon** - a new network and online home for queer arts locally.

Led by the Queer Arts Advisory Group, **Queer Croydon** - www.queercroydon.com - launched in October 2023 as an open platform for queer stories and events from Croydon and South London, with an ambition to develop future productions and artworks.



"London Borough of Culture has given us a sense of 'you matter, you deserve to take up space'."

Claudia Coelho, Chair of Queer Arts Advisory Group

The **Collide** project supported 10 LGBTQ+ artists with money, space, time and resources to actualise their next big idea. A collaboration

between Stanley Arts and Raze Collective led to a showcase evening of performances, live art, installation, and a party.

Bold Mellon collective ran a programme of **Queer Joy**. This included powerful multidisciplinary work from emerging LGBTQ+ artists with stories from underrepresented queer voices inspired by their personal journeys. There were five seed commission grants for contributing artists, with free use of studio space at Turf Projects. **Queer Joy in Words** showcased queer poetry and storytelling at Purley Library, while a panel event, **Queer Joy in Conversation**, discussed a new multimedia documentary.



"I have lived in Purley for 10 years, I grew up here. This is the first time in a decade that I have seen queerness in the place I grew up - that's something I didn't even know I needed."

Purley Library workshop participant



"The Access Training Weekend was brilliant, instructive and inspirational, giving ideas even when budget is short."

Access Weekender participant

Each London Borough of Culture hosts **Liberty**, the Mayor of London's flagship festival of high-quality work by Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse artists. Led by Drunken Chorus, **Liberty** in Croydon took place on the first weekend in September, showcasing the work of 83 UK artists over three sites.

Zoo Co developed **Night Shift**, a new play written and performed in integrated English, subtitles and BSL by a cast of Deaf and hearing performers at Stanley Arts; Club

Soda, SLiDE and MOSS Collective partnered to deliver **SoDaDa**, four learning-disabled accessible club nights; and SAVVY Theatre delivered **Stepping Stones**, bringing together inclusive drama groups to stage a production of **Pinocchio**.



Hijinx at Liberty: Paul Fuller

BRINGING A POSITIVE IMPACT FOR CROYDONIANS' HEALTH AND WELLBEING

There is no shortage of evidence that taking part in cultural activities is good for your health. Using the 5 Ways to Wellbeing model to track this impact, *This is Croydon* helped Croydonians:

Connect: 95% of audience members agreed that events had helped them feel connected to people in the community
"It's been nice to use these events to get out and meet people"
Participant comment from **A Very Croydon Christmas**

Get Active: 22,935 opportunities for hands-on participation were taken up
"I danced on stage for the first time at the age of 53!"
Participant comment from **Croydon Pridefest**

Take Notice: 88% of participants agreed that participating in their project positively impacted their mental wellbeing.
"People kept saying 'I'd never noticed that before'."
Walk leader comment **Croydon from the Palette of Evacustes Phipson**

Learn: 75% of participants agreed their project gave them the opportunity to learn a new skill
"It opened my mind to different ways of learning."
Participant comment from **Our Croydon**

Give: 1,071 volunteers supported the programme with almost 13,000 hours of their time
"It took me out of myself (...) It helped me realise I have a lot to share."
Participant comment from **Our Croydon**



Wishing tree: Glenn Foster

Croydon Loves You was a microgrant programme in the winter months for projects connected to creative wellbeing. The 12 grants, between £300 and £1,200, allowed grassroots organisations and individuals to try new ideas, from a silent retreat for women to gardening for elders. It also allowed new groups to manage a grant for the first time, building skills. On the back of its success, the model is being developed as part of the year's legacy.



"My voice has got louder. When I first started, I didn't speak much. It's a real confidence booster. Previously, I could be with you for the whole day and you'd never hear me say a word. But now...It does make a difference." Participant in the **New Addington Writing Group**, an informal group which is continuing to meet weekly alongside the foodbank.

FAMILY (DYS)FUNCTION

Family (Dys)function was an intergenerational project produced by Dance Umbrella. Croydon-based hip-hop choreographers Birdgang worked with eight teenagers and 10 elders to create the show. It was a new experience for the company, and one they intend to continue. "If we didn't do this in the future we'd be missing out - there should be more of these projects," writes one of the directors. The biggest impact was on the participants:



"After the project, I had a group of people that I will stay connected with. It's given me a sense of family" Young Participant

"It was scary but once you did it... I thought maybe this is something I can do. You learnt new skills" Older Participant



Family (Dys)function: Birdgang



Wild in the City hike: Wild in the City

HAPPY VALLEY AND BEYOND

Croydon is rich in green spaces. Access to green space provides vital health benefits as well as environmental amenities – they are perfect places for reducing stress and anxiety. We ran several programmes to connect residents to local parks and to the many meadows, woodlands and nature trails across the borough.

Wild in the City led hikes, a woodland skills course and ecotherapy in support of their ongoing work to make the countryside more accessible to people of colour. By overcoming barriers to access, their work builds confidence and knowledge about nature and outdoor activity. As part of their *This is Croydon*-funded programme they trained six new Nature Guides, building capacity in the borough for ongoing programmes.



"This funding provided a unique opportunity to highlight the green spaces within the borough, encouraging residents to explore and enjoy the natural world on their doorstep." Project Lead

A microgrants programme supported 27 'green' projects between £200 and £2,000. These free-to-attend projects included litter picks; railway line, bird, and bat walks; community festivals and picnics; mindfulness events; an apple day; a nature-based fun palace; and even the opening of a new community garden.



INVESTING IN THE CREATIVITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE

This is Croydon created opportunities for young Croydonians to:

Take part: **16,275** participation opportunities were taken up by young people.

Lead: a Young Creative Lead, a youth advisory group and 16 young producers supported projects, with eight being recruited for the legacy year.

Learn: almost **35,000** free or low-cost opportunities taken up by Croydon's school children to engage with culture, with 92% of Croydon's schools taking part (and an extra nine from outside the borough).

Share: young people's artwork was projected onto Croydon Clocktower, performed on stages across Croydon, and is currently appearing in public spaces across the borough.

Engage: **128** schools took part in *This is Croydon*, with 42 becoming Croydon Arts and Culture Schools, undertaking to develop their cultural and creative provision over the year and in future.

Development opportunities for young people were woven through the programme. Croydon Music and Arts (CMA) ran an open access **Young Producers** programme, funding young people up to the age of 25 to take up paid placements with the organisations delivering the *This is Croydon* programme. In all, 16 young people (50% Global Majority) were placed, with several going on to be employed by their hosts.

“It taught me that I can do anything as long as I give it a go and believe in myself. It has inspired me to create more and perform where I can. I did work in theatre as a job when I was a Young Producer and I loved it! I had no regrets and it shows that I can do theatre as a career.”

Elgin Edison, Young Producer placed with **Croydonites**

CMA also delivered **CR Talent**, a one-day outdoor music festival for and by young people, with over 1,000 young people performing on the day.



Music NXTGEN: Croydon: Bigsttp_h

MUSIC NXTGEN: CROYDON

Finesse Foreva and Music Managers Forum were commissioned to collaborate on the delivery of a one-day conference presenting panels, seminars, showcases and networking opportunities to demystify the music business and highlight current opportunities available to self-starters, graduates and creatives, focusing on Black music. The event attracted 900+ young adults, largely from backgrounds underrepresented in the cultural sector.



“Networking with other people, it's been really helpful. I've got Instagrams and social medias who I can work with in the future. The different stalls were really good. I spoke to people about royalties for my songs”

MUSIC NXTGEN: Croydon Participant



Music NXTGEN: Croydon: Bigsttp_h

FAMILY PROGRAMMING

We developed a strong strand of family programming across the borough's libraries. This included six family days, 20+ performances, and 40+ workshops linked to the **Constable Visits; Rewind; Summer Reading Challenge**, plus a bespoke large-scale event: **A Very Croydon Christmas**. This strand, which reached an audience of circa 10,000, also enabled us to commission and programme a wider range of voluntary arts groups, local and national artists.



HurlyBurly Theatre: Glenn Foster



KATIA DEL RIO SMITH, This is Croydon Young Creative Lead

With the support of legacy funding, I am collaborating with partner organisations to build a structure that will enable Young People (aged 18-25) to hold paid positions within the Youth Advisory Group, broaden access to the group and enable different voices to feed back directly to the sector about how to develop their youth-arts. The role has helped me develop as a leader, and I will be embedding This is Croydon's legacy as one of the recently elected Co-Chairs of Culture Croydon, This is Croydon's legacy body.



Folk Dance Remixed at the Whitgift Centre: Vipul Sangoi

SUPPORTING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE BOROUGH

The cultural sector is growing at twice the rate of the rest of the UK economy, and culture is a powerful force for economic renewal. **This is Croydon** developed Croydon's economy and skills through:

Investment: **£3.6M** of inward investment leveraged by the council, unlocking over £750,000 of further grant funding brought into the borough by partner organisations.

Employment: Over **10,000** days of paid work in the borough for creatives delivering the programme, with 83% of delivery partner organisations based in Croydon.

Volunteering: over **1,000** volunteers with almost 13,000 of hours of their time.

Skills and opportunities: **69%** of partner organisations developed new skills in their teams, 81% tried new ways of working, and 87% developed new partnerships.



"As an artist and member of a local artist organisation, I love that London Borough of Culture has connected me with a bank of other freelancers I can work with across projects. For example, we worked with Julia (31% Wool) to build our website and graphic design. If I need a photographer, I've got three locals I can reach out to at a moment's notice."
Katie Hurley, Associate Director of **Croydonites**

CROYDON STANDS TALL

Croydon Business Improvement District (BID) harnessed the economic power of local businesses to deliver a feel-good invasion of 60 giraffes across the town centre. They raised £146,000 of commercial sponsorship from 30 sponsors, employed 30 artists and engaged 5,500 school children. 59% of their sponsors would consider sponsoring further art projects, with 94% feeling it represented good value for money. At the end of the project, the giraffes were auctioned for charity, raising £58,729 for Crisis Skylight Croydon.



"The positivity it generated and the smiles I saw as people spotted giraffes around the town was wonderful. I'd love our town to have more reasons to smile like this."
Sponsor, **Croydon Stands Tall**



Croydon Stands Tall: Glenn Foster

REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE

Fashion Meets Music (FMM), an innovative creative business based in Centrale shopping centre, ran a series of sustainable fashion swap shops and workshops for the public, encouraging textile re-use and creative customisation. They also ran 10 training sessions for emerging designers and for young people not in education, employment or training, developing skills in sustainable fashion, culminating in an all-day fashion event in the concourse of Centrale. Six months later, 62% of participants reported that the sessions had helped them to sell more of their work.



"This is Croydon has been amazing. There's been a proud feeling. It's changed perspectives, opened people's eyes because it's made people actively put on things, do things, seek out what's happening, what the talent is in Croydon. It's drawn me out of my creative corner to be a part of something central to my borough. I know it's done that for a lot of other people as well."
Zawdie Campbell, young creative based in Croydon, who took part in **Reduce Reuse Recycle**, **Croydon NXTGEN** and other projects.



Desire Paths: Turf Projects

MAKING USE OF VACANT SPACE

This is Croydon was an opportunity to showcase Croydon's town centre in new and different ways, making use of vacant spaces and attracting new audiences. **Pollock's Toy Museum** re-opened for the first time since losing its central London home, and Scanner's Inc's **Popin' Pete's Pop Shop and Friends** hosted a programme of dance workshops in Centrale. Both attracted local and international audiences. An innovative dance commission from The Place and Requardt & Rosenberg, **Super Normal Extra Natural**, unfolded in the central square of the Whitgift Centre, bringing a committed dance audience as well as an unsuspecting audience of passersby, demonstrating that great art and heritage attracts economically diverse visitors to the town centre.

Turf Projects commissioned nine locally-connected artists for **Desire Paths** to focus on disused and underused spaces across Croydon. Each commission has involved co-creation between artists and the public around the borough, exploring how communities and creatives can shape the places around them and forge their own paths to determine how Croydon's spaces are used. It engaged landowners, retailers and residents, and built a partnership with the council's placemaking team, developing skills for both the artists and the local authority, demonstrating how art can reimagine public space, and facilitate dialogue between stakeholders. The project reached 850 participants and an audience of over 4,000.

REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

CATERINA LORIGGIO
Lead, London Borough of Culture 2023

Culture is obviously not the only sector still trying to make up for time lost in 2020. Perhaps though with so many of our outputs linked to anniversaries, key calendar, civic or sporting moments, or to special 'years of'; and with so many of our audiences still missing and so many of our colleagues in financial peril, the impact remains more markedly felt? But in fact, anyone working in the sector will tell you that there has never been 'enough time or enough money' and it is often our sheer bloody-mindedness and commitment to the cause that ultimately gets us through. In that regard, This is Croydon was not really very different from other programmes, the volume was just pumped up considerably higher! Overcoming these challenges however did make the reward seem even sweeter and the bonds and friendships formed even stronger, and I hope longer lasting.

There is much to be learned from Croydon's year in the limelight. I believe that we are the first borough to plan such a large-scale programme under a Section 114, but the strain on local authorities has never been greater, sponsors seem to be getting scarcer, and we are all living a new economic reality, so it is clear new ways of working are needed and expectations need to shift accordingly.

Delays in starting programme planning and the late appointment of a central leadership team could have been catastrophic, but thanks to the goodwill and expertise of an awful lot of people, it was not. There is no doubt that these issues had significant and ongoing impact but through exploring new ways of working, we more than got through. In that there is hope for all of us, so long as, while we go forward with more collaborative mixed models of delivery, we do so in a way that is not only open and inclusive for everyone, but also enables a healthy balance between personal wellbeing and great programming.

Croydon makes things happen. We are proud of what we achieved and what has become increasingly clear in the production of this report is that we have plenty of evidence to show that we ought to be. Our success is a true testament to the tenacity, generosity, entrepreneurialism, dynamism and inclusive spirit of this amazing borough.



Caterina Loriggio: Rachel Adams

A Very Croydon Christmas: Glenn Foster

LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarity and shared understanding are needed. Set realistic expectations from the get-go.

There is a pressure (real or felt) within the culture sector when applying for funding or for special 'years of' to demonstrate the biggest, most exciting, engaging, ambitious and innovative projects. Aspirations set out in a bid often cannot be matched when it comes to actual delivery. Funders and the sector should come together to agree more realistic outputs/outcomes. This is particularly pertinent in the economic and social context within which we all currently operate.

Ensure there is shared understanding of what is achievable. Partners can perceive bid aspirations as 'promises' and therefore feel let down as delivery evolves.

Designed models and devolved models each present wins and losses: look for ways to get the best of both.

The devolved model engendered a diverse and rich programme. It emboldened the sector and forged stronger networks. However, the scale of the programme meant events could be competing for resources and for participants and/or audiences. Moreover, programme outputs tended to reflect areas of pre-existing strength for the borough, both in terms of art form delivery and in terms of geographic location.

Volunteering for a steering group requires confidence and the available time and resources to take part. This meant that our steering group was not as inclusive as it might have been, and not always economically accessible to freelancers or the voluntary arts sector – these are areas that we are addressing moving forward.

The large size of the programme vs the small central team meant that council colleagues

could not sufficiently support partners' issues that (inevitably) emerged around project delivery.

Some delivery areas fell down a gap between models. For example, marketing and communications were less impactful than desired because centrally funds had been set aside for overall programme promotion, not for individual projects. This had not been communicated to delivery partners in the planning stages and they had therefore not allocated adequate time and resource to promoting their work.

Set realistic overhead budgets. Do not make assumptions around available resources/ experience.

When you have not delivered at scale before or are trying new things it can be difficult to fully understand what might be needed. For Croydon this was evident at both the macro and micro level. In part, the point of these 'years of' is to embed new skills and aspirations into the borough's psyche, however more guidance upfront would be helpful. Support could be on offer from funders at the bid writing and programme development stage to ensure that adequate resources are allocated from the get-go.

The tendency at the application stage to keep overheads low compared to 'creative' spend ultimately results in artists and practitioners subsidising delivery with their own time. Across these big 'years of' programmes that adds up to a lot of time; for the central team there is little let up. This was compounded in Croydon where there was no one in place at the planning stage with experience of delivering year-long programmes. Consequently central resources were further minimised, placing even more pressure on the small team.

There was not a full understanding within the council at the start of the year of how much hands-on support delivery partners/projects might need, not just from the central London Borough of Culture team but also from other departments such as Highways, Events, Parks, Cleansing etc. .

Be flexible. Be prepared to reshape, to drop or maybe to add to the programme as required.

There was a lot of felt pressure (often self-imposed) on all partners throughout the year to try to make up for time lost. It is important to remember in those moments when things do not go to plan that 'you can only do what you can do' - perfection is hard to achieve in any set of circumstances. Moreover, the end of the year does not necessarily mean the end for your ambitions. We are now using our legacy plans to try to reframe some areas where we feel we could have gone further or done better.

Institutional procedures are not well suited to cultural delivery. Good governance is key to all local authorities and funders, but rigid contracting and payment structures can cause complications and delays. Many of our smaller organisations struggled with the demands of IR35, cash flow and branding. Getting this right for all delivery partners pulled considerably on central resources and very often caused significant delays.

Keep some funds aside so that when good ideas emerge or evolve later in the year there is scope to support them.

The world might change between writing your bid and delivering your programme. Five years ago that statement would have looked like a gross exaggeration, but that happened to Brent, Lewisham and Croydon's London Borough of Culture years. Be prepared to change your programme but more importantly, your expectations accordingly.

Find the most appropriate partners and advocates.

Many of Croydon's successes were garnered because we had the right delivery partners talking to the right audience. Build on pre-existing social and cultural capital to ensure wide and meaningful engagement.

However, in doing so, make sure that minoritised communities do not have to do the heavy lifting. If you need the support of underrepresented community organisations, make sure there are resources available to pay for their time and input.

NEXT STEPS

The legacy of *This is Croydon* is already starting to take shape. The year has created the conditions for a more deeply networked local cultural sector that can learn together and address challenges as a group. The steering group is currently evolving into a sector support organisation, Culture Croydon, supported with a £250,000 grant (managed by Stanley Arts) from Paul Hamlyn Foundation for sector development. Culture is also now firmly on the agenda as part of Croydon town centre’s regeneration plans and as part of wider council transformation.

Below is a snapshot of some of the legacies around the year’s core objectives.

Developing Pride in Croydon

- *This Is Croydon* has developed pride in Croydon as a place to live and work. £850,000 funding has been secured to support an ongoing town centre programme. The core team has grown to be able to deliver and promote activity and embed programme learning and legacy.
- Croydon Urban Room has launched as a new space for creative engagement with town planning through workshops, exhibitions and artist residencies.
- A cross-council group has been established to embed culture across the organisation and work with the culture sector to address challenges



Turf Projects Desire Paths: Lina Ivanova

Surfacing hidden histories and celebrating seldom seen communities

- The Museum of Croydon will continue to partner with local communities to bring their stories to life, supported this year with a £30,000 grant from the UK Shared Prosperity fund.
- Croydon Archives has received a £249,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund to collect records of *This Is Croydon*, invest in digital collecting and deliver a radical Young Archivists programme for Global Majority communities aged 14–18, to diversify the collection.
- Croydon BME Forum has attracted sponsorship to continue their Black History 365 programme of creative activation and commissioning for two more years.

Making sure everyone is welcome

- The **Access Arts Croydon** toolkit and resource library continues to equip cultural partners to deliver inclusive programmes.
- **Queer Croydon** will continue to provide an online home and resource for queer arts in Croydon.
- Advisory groups for access, queer arts and Global Majority arts will continue to support sector development and artistic excellence through Culture Croydon.



“There’s been a buzz in Croydon for the last year. A percentage of that was around London Borough of Culture and everybody feeling they were part of something bigger. It’s done a brilliant job of galvanising people, bringing everybody together to have conversations around what individual organisations are doing and how we can all work together. It’s triggered more partnership working, which has led to resources going further with lots of different offshoots”.

Talita Moffatt, producer Black History 365

Bringing a positive impact on health and wellbeing:

- A partnership between the council’s culture and public health teams has led to a £900,000, three-year, creative health development programme to address health inequalities in the borough and create the case for arts investment for a healthier, happier Croydon.
- On the back of its success, the **Croydon Loves You** microgrant programme is continuing in 2024 with £85,000 available for creative projects focused on boosting wellbeing and supporting those experiencing health inequalities.

Investing in the creativity of young people:

- *This Is Croydon*’s Young Producers programme will continue, offering an additional eight paid traineeships April 2024-March 2025.
- The youth advisory group and role of Young Creative Lead is continuing to advocate and create pathways for local emerging talent, alongside other Culture Croydon advisory groups.
- The Arts and Culture Schools programme is continuing to connect educators with local creative opportunities, supporting schools to embed cultural provision for the borough’s children and young people.



SLIDE at Liberty: Paul Fuller

Supporting economic and skills development

- UK Shared Prosperity funding of £470,000 is resourcing a programme to support creative careers, night time economy and business development led by the council with the Croydon Creative Enterprise Zone and Start Up Croydon who lead the Creative Digital Lab.
- Croydon Council will invest £60,000 in small professional development grants for artists and heritage practitioners who took part in the year, to progress their work or build their skill set.
- A £60,000 investment will also be available for a gigs programme to support the night time economy and the borough’s live music scene.



TALK LOUDER

When they tell me to lower my voice
I'll talk louder

When they shoot my ideas down
I'll pick them back up

When they question my decisions
I'll leave them unanswered

When they say 'What will others think?'
I'll say 'At least they'll think I'm different'

If the purpose for a voice is
to be heard, don't let it be silenced

Don't let anyone keep you quiet
Leave them speechless

Maya, Year 9 Pupil, Oasis Academy Coulsdon
Poem created as part of **Out Of Silence**, a project to
support young people and marginalised communities
in Croydon to express themselves through poetry.

London Borough of Culture is
a Mayor of London initiative.

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Supported using public funding by
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