



## The Croydon Assembly

# Taking control in Croydon

A People's Plan  
for real change

## What is the Croydon Assembly?

The Croydon Assembly, which has met five times since November 2015, provides our community with a democratic voice and a means to uniting in the fight for a fairer, more equal society.

We encourage open, friendly debate on the issues and challenges that working people face and promote respect for all sections of our diverse community. All of our Assemblies are organised in a way that creates the widest possible discussion by everyone present in small working groups, in addition to guest speakers. The work of the groups is followed up where possible with publications and further discussion.

The Assembly is an initiative of Croydon Trades Union Council and has attracted widespread support in the local community and beyond. Speakers at our Assemblies have included John McDonnell MP, the shadow chancellor, Matt Wrack, leader of the firefighters' union, Christine Blower, general secretary of the teachers' union NUT, Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS union and Philipa Harvey, NUT president, plus local activists and campaigners. We published our own Manifesto at the fourth Assembly in March 2016. A People's Plan for Croydon was developed out of the work of the fifth Assembly in November 2016 and published in spring 2017. The Assembly also organised a well-attended public debate on the European Union referendum and a meeting on the education crisis.



Above: Mark Serwotka, Ted Knight, Matt Wrack & Philipa Harvey  
Below: some participants at the Croydon Assembly



## Introduction

“Taking control in Croydon – a People’s Plan for real change” gets to the heart of what’s wrong in our borough and, for that matter, the rest of the country. Working people simply have no control or meaningful say in what happens in their communities, to their jobs, essential services like the NHS and education, or public transport or whether property developers should decide what happens to our town centre.

That’s why the Croydon Assembly devoted a day to deliberating on the absence of democracy in the borough and throughout the UK. But we didn’t do that just to have a moan about the situation because the Assembly is also about putting forward proposals for action in the wider community.

The People’s Plan came directly out of the work of our fifth Croydon Assembly last November and is in itself an example of how democracy should work. After identifying how corporate power has strangled democracy at national and local level, the People’s Plan puts forward Citizens Assemblies as a possible way forward.

As the Plan says: “The positive experiences of trade union, other democratic organisations and campaigning bodies could be taken into the formation of Citizens Assemblies. Structured physical forms of meetings

like Croydon Assembly are empowering and we need to give more people that experience of decision making so they can begin to understand the challenges of exercising power and being able to be involved in bodies that make decisions that affect their lives and circumstances.”

There are proposals to introduce democracy into housing, education, health, the environment, the local economy and welfare which can all be developed and extended into other areas. Please circulate them as widely as possible so that the work of the Croydon Assembly has a significant impact in all our communities.

We have to put an end to top-down decisions that favour the powerful. We should celebrate being a diverse community and oppose the demonization of migrants and refugees. The strength of communities lies in supporting each other. As inflation cuts into living standards and services continue to deteriorate under austerity, the People’s Plan can mobilise working people in the fight for democratic control as part of the struggle for a fairer, more equal society.

Ted Knight  
Chair, Croydon Assembly



# Taking control in Croydon

## A People's Plan for real change

Who is in control of our borough? Not working people, that is for sure. Decisions about local jobs, housing, education, nursery provision, care for older people, surgeries, hospitals, transport, local amenities, parks and open spaces are out of our hands. Our voices and interests are ignored in favour of developers and what the government tells the council to do. Democracy is noticeable by its absence in Croydon just as it is throughout the UK.

The Croydon Assembly that met in November 2016 came together to debate the absence of any meaningful democracy in the area and to propose an alternative People's Plan for the borough and beyond. This draft is drawn from the discussions that took place on November 26, when a diverse group of people, representing different points of view, campaigns and political movements, devoted a day to debating power and democracy.

## People's Plan - Democracy

The belief that our interests and concerns are ignored coincides with the Assembly's view that the corporate agenda dominates at every level. While there is consultation, much of it is meaningless. Meanwhile, key decisions are taken behind closed doors in secret. This is especially true in relation to the National Health Service where so-called Sustainability and Transformation Plans are drawn up by bureaucrats. A true democracy requires the following:

- Local people to be informed
- No self-selection of representatives
- Larger group involvement/ mass involvement
- The power of recall over officials
- A place for grievances to be addressed
- An inspiring vision for housing, transport, health and education that challenges what exists
- A return to local authority control
- All communities to have assemblies which can be turned into a larger movement with decision-making powers.
- Appropriate attention to restricting CO2 emissions and contributing to the efforts to halt global warming.

## Citizens' Assemblies

These could address the democratic deficit and ensure that decisions are not foisted on people and railroaded through. The positive experiences of trade union, other democratic organisations and campaigning bodies could be taken into the formation of Citizens Assemblies. Structured physical forms of meetings like Croydon Assembly are empowering and we need to give more people that experience of decision-making so they can begin to understand the challenges of exercising power and being able to be involved in bodies that make decisions that affect their lives and circumstances. Citizens' Assemblies could:

- Take the form of mass localised meeting where different organisations get together to debate



Attila the Stockbroker at Croydon Assembly

different issues like the cuts to mental health services, Southern Railways, and education tied to campaigning initiatives

- Provide information that underscores the cuts still going on and presents alternatives
- Embrace imaginative and different methods and approaches used by campaigners to consistently build engagement
- Be used as an arena that can hold existing structures and representatives to account and connect with them
- Provide a place for people to participate where existing structures are not inclusive and people are often fragmented
- Bringing together activists, campaigners, labour movement organisations, into something that has a purpose, grow it step by step into a powerful local force.

If local communities had real power, they could balance out the different needs and interests across Croydon's diverse communities through:

- Innovative technologies to manage decision-making
- Partnerships with different groups

- Provide resources for people in need, special needs
- Connect people of different ages and for learning
- Create communities of interest rather than geographical separation so that people can have equal treatment across the borough
- Campaign to bring services and utility companies back into public ownership.

We demand a strategy that is not based on the market-developers-corporate-consumer-shopping centre imperative, but on local people's democratically agreed needs and wishes. These should include a green, healthy environment rather than roads, motorways and car parks. In terms of services, the People's Plan for Croydon should consider the following:

## Housing

- We reject the fact that housing is treated as wealth, not as a roof over one's head and that power is in the hands of property owners
- A massive social house building programme is required
- We want legislation that improves security of tenure, standards and imposes rent controls
- Co-operative forms of housing and tenures to address the problems of particular groups in society have to be a priority
- There is a case for the public ownership of land and ending the right-to-buy that has reduced the availability of social housing
- It is undemocratic that older people have to struggle for decent, affordable social care. The People's Plan demands proper care for all in older

age, fully funded by the state, with facilities and accommodation returned to local authority control

- There is a case for demanding free or subsidised insulation and solar panels on homes, business and public premises.

## Health

The National Health Service (NHS) must be publicly-accountable and publicly-funded through general taxation with publicly-provided universal comprehensive health care, free at the point of need. To achieve this, we have to:

- Remove all private healthcare from the NHS
- Ensure that the National Health Service is free from all "marketisation", both internally and externally
- Provide a publicly-owned pharmaceutical manufacturing corporation which would supply a range of generic medicines for the NHS and work with universities to research new drug treatments
- End hospital closures and increase bed provision to meet national need
- Compulsorily renationalise without compensation all NHS premises, for NHS use. Then and only then, cancel any Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or Public

Private Partnership (PPP) related debt

- Expand primary care services for example general practitioners, dentists, district nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists
- Scrap all fees and prescription charges
- Maintain and promote world class training of new doctors and nurses, ensuring adequate funding with proper agreed terms and conditions.

## Welfare

Welfare reform has made life a nightmare for disabled people, those with chronic illnesses and where caring



Ellen Clifford of Disabled People Against Cuts



Patsy Cummings & Philipa Harvey at Croydon Assembly

responsibilities restrict ability to earn. Not just because of cuts to essential daily income, but also because of the endless and stressful assessments we have to go through without support or information. A United Nation's report found evidence of grave and systematic violations of people's rights due to welfare reform by the UK government. What we could do locally in Croydon:

- Share our stories so that more people who are not on benefits understand what we are going through
- Share information from Disabled People Against Cuts so that disabled people in Croydon know what their rights are
- Find out what Croydon Council is doing regarding the government's work and health programme and raise awareness about what the dangers of it are.

## Education

Education is under sustained attack from the government. Funding cuts will bite deeply in Croydon while teachers are under enormous pressure at work and have little opportunity to be creative and inspire students. In terms of education, the People's Plan should:

- Reject all plans to go back to grammar schools which leave many children at 11 regarding themselves as failures
- Campaign for a curriculum that will inspire and help children to reach their full potential
- Advocate that the curriculum be created jointly, by teachers, parents, guardians and representatives from the wider community
- Consult on whether children should learn through play and start formal education later

There should be compulsory classes on ethics, politics and society and more involvement with parents and an increase in after-school activities. Schools should seek feedback from children, to find out what worked and what did not.

We are opposed to the government's so-called Prevent strategy. It encourages scaremongering, is alienating and seen as a tick box exercise for Ofsted. We should discuss Universal Values (rather than 'British Values') and create discussion, rather than being lectured to.

We should celebrate being a diverse community and oppose the demonization of migrants and refugees. The strength of communities lies in supporting each other.

## Local Democracy and the Economy

A coherent vision is needed as a priority. It should include working to create a range of diverse and green jobs for local people on good pay and working reasonable hours, a town centre that is more than just an area for retail consumerism, a good quality of life in the districts/neighbourhoods, and in which people are able to be involved in decision-making.



Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP at Croydon Assembly

## Local Jobs

Employers should be expected to prioritise offering local people jobs in Croydon. They should work with education organisations where local people are not ready for particular jobs. Employers should be expected to hire and train young people.

The number of employers in Croydon committed to paying the London Living Wage is small. Therefore more campaigning is needed. More co-operative structures are needed in which workers control the businesses. They help with job creation and enable profits to go back to the worker owners or into growing the business.

## Local Democracy Openness and Transparency

A form of local democratic structure is needed in helping to revive local governance and involving people in the decisions that affect where they live and work.

The Cabinet system of Croydon Council governance is anti-democratic, giving too much power to whoever is Leader and marginalising most councillors from involvement in decision-making. At present it appears

that all decisions are being taken by a small group of councillors. It also appears that they spend too much time supporting developers whose projects do not meet local needs. The pre-Cabinet model of running the council should be re-introduced.

The council should stop being involved in meetings like Develop Forum Conferences which are not open to community representatives because of the prohibitive cost. It should hold conferences open to everyone to take part, including small businesses.

On planning applications there should be less delegated decision-making to the officers, and more applications considered publicly by the Planning Committee. This is particularly important in relation to applications that involve job creation or the loss of employment sites being turned residential.

In all actions the need to restrict CO<sup>2</sup> emissions should permeate

every local government policy and should be reflected in our response to developments beyond the local government boundaries (e.g. plans for new runways at airports).

Croydon Assembly backs small enterprises such as Bobski's, here with customer Jeff



## Westfield Shopping Centre

Unless the developers pull out, the new Westfield Shopping Centre will happen. Pressure should continue for a better proposal that is not just devoted to consumerism.

- small retailers to be allowed to be tenants balancing the more up-market chain retailers that dominate the other two London Westfield Centres
- provision of more public green spaces
- places for teenagers to meet
- facilities for community projects
- a requirement that all employers in the Centre pay at least London Living Wage
- a requirement that workers in all the businesses have a reasonable number of working hours, without signing up to opting-out of the working time agreement, and no split shift working hour systems.

Busking in Croydon town centre



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£1

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