

# **Croydon Churches' Floating Shelter (CCFS)**

## **Annual Review 2023**

Much of CCFS's activity in 2023 was focused on discerning the way forward in our support for the homeless and, in particular, deciding whether it was possible to re-open the shelter as an overnight operation following its Covid closure. Two major issues needed to be resolved before contingent matters could be addressed: first, whether there were enough churches able to participate to operate a Floating Shelter effectively in Croydon; second, whether Croydon Council would support the shelter.

Several of the Croydon churches with small congregations withdrew from participation in CCFS following Covid either because their premises had been put to other uses or because their ageing volunteer force had not been able to recruit new members. New churches were sought but none had been forthcoming. The idea of running a shelter for a shorter period (January to Easter) was explored. We, in Coulsdon, could have participated in such a plan but still the outlook was not promising for finding churches able to accommodate guests at weekends. This matter remained unresolved.

The issue of council support for a potential shelter proved an even greater challenge. Such support has always been necessary for the safe, successful running of the shelter, with the council introducing to us those guests who could benefit from our welcome and helping to move them on into employment and secure accommodation. Initially it had seemed promising that such collaboration might continue but the decision was finally taken at senior level that Croydon Council could no longer support the shelter. Their approach to supporting the homeless was now guided by central government strategy which is to put rough sleepers into single-room accommodation until they could be permanently housed. This was a disappointing decision for CCFS after over 10 years of making a difference in the lives of many people. There are still rough sleepers on the streets of Croydon.

## **The Future of CCFS**

The normal autumn AGM of CCFS was postponed because of lack of clarity over possible future pathways. It is now expected that the AGM will be held in February when it should be decided whether to wind up the organisation and whether/how to dispose of funds and equipment. We, in Coulsdon, have retained our equipment in storage at St Aidan's in case of future need.

## **Support for Nightwatch**

This year CCFS continued its collaboration with Nightwatch by supplying sandwiches to be distributed in Queens Gardens, Croydon each night of the week. We, in Coulsdon, took on our normal Thursdays in November and December. Eight of our churches provided reliable volunteers in plentiful numbers such that we were able to send off over 100 sandwiches each night along with fresh fruit and extra treats. In addition we provided large stocks of groceries collected by St Mary's, Old Coulsdon. This year 59 volunteers were involved, either making sandwiches, delivering them with the grocery donations to Croydon or administering the system.

A number of them were new volunteers. We have come to expect an enthusiastic and generous response to this initiative and it is never difficult to fill slots on the rota or to find last-minute cover in case of illness. This is a small contribution towards the work of dealing with the problems of homelessness in our borough but it has, nevertheless, been a valued one and Nightwatch is grateful for the support.

*Leonie Wilding, CCFS Co-Ordinator*