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Stronger than anyone thought:

Communities responding
to COVID-19

Report from the first research phase, September 2020

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Local Trust

About this report

This paper reports the findings from the first phase of a study by Local Trust of community responses to COVID-19. It identifies the varied responses of communities to the immediate crisis, the ways in which their responses have changed since, and their planning for the next phase. The paper highlights the importance of community-led infrastructure in supporting an effective response to COVID-19.

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Cover photo: A community member at St Johns Community Centre on the Elthorne Estate in N19, London, June 2020. Photo credit: Zute Lightfoot



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Executive summary

In the context of COVID-19 and public health-related lockdown measures, Local Trust commissioned a study examining how communities react to, cope with and recover from major crises. The study started in April 2020 and the first two phases are due to conclude in June 2021. It presents a unique opportunity to gain grounded insight into community responses to crises as they unfold.

This report from the first research phase draws from findings gathered from 26 different communities in England between April and September 2020. It is based on learning conversations with over 300 community members, activists and workers linked to community-led infrastructure and networks.

There are **three main findings** to emerge from the first stage of the research:

1

Community responses to the immediate crisis have varied significantly, despite ostensibly facing the same crisis at the same time. This is evident in both the level and range of activities and services in support of residents, and also in the extent to which community groups have worked beyond boundaries with other agencies.

2

As lockdown restrictions ease, most communities have moved on from an initial crisis response and, to some extent, are looking ahead. However, it is an uneven picture; the ways in which they are able to move on varies. Some are planning ahead systematically for emerging and future community needs, but others struggle and feel a lack of control over events. The sense of crisis and the response have changed how some groups see themselves, their communities and their relationships with others.

3

The role and significance of rich and established community-led infrastructure seems to underpin an effective community response. Where community-led infrastructure – consisting of connected networks of residents, community leadership, trust, relationships with agencies, and access to money – has been built, it appears to make a difference. Where it is limited, the crisis response has primarily been food-focused, often through the actions of individuals; where it is richer and more established, the response has been wider ranging.

The research suggests that some communities have been readier to respond and able to make more effective use of their resources than others. The second phase of research will focus on the ways different areas move on from the immediate crisis.

Introduction

The UK has experienced significant consequences as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside high levels of infection and death, within a few short weeks whole lives and livelihoods were upended across the country, as government implemented a lockdown to suppress the virus. While government has sought to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis through the furlough and other intervention schemes, concerns about the wider and yet uneven economic and social impact of the crisis have come to the fore, as the sheer breadth and scale of the disruption becomes more apparent.

Within this, renewed attention and appreciation has been given to the vital contribution of communities in responding to the immediate crisis, and in their potential role in whatever comes next. From the first street-based efforts of neighbours reaching out to support each other, and people stepping forward to volunteer time or donate money, food and clothing, to the work of more organised mutual-aid groups, local community organisations and established voluntary agencies, community-based action appears to have flourished, come into its own, and been recognised in the media and by statutory bodies.

It is in this context that Local Trust commissioned a study of community responses to COVID-19. The study aims to examine how communities react to, cope with and recover from major crises, how this compares with community reactions to other crises, and what support communities need both to make an effective response to COVID-19 and to recover effectively from its impact.

The study started early in the lockdown in April 2020 and the first two phases are due to conclude in June 2021. It presents a unique opportunity to gain grounded insight into community responses to crises or emergencies as they unfold. It seeks to provide both in-depth analysis of community action over time, and a breadth of perspectives from a range of different places.

This report draws from the research in [26 areas in England](#) between April and September 2020. The research involved a total of 317 individual and small-group online learning conversations with residents, community activists and community workers in the study areas. These include 21 areas involved in the Big Local programme, five involved in the Creative Civic Change programme (some are involved in both), and two that are not involved in either. The 26 areas include several that have been classed as 'left behind' areas in recent research from Local Trust (2019). Additional insight has been gained about experiences



Volunteers from Elthorne Pride distribute 'complimentary store cupboard basics' to members of the community at St Johns Community Centre on the Elthorne Estate in N19, London, June 2020.

in a further 57 areas in the Big Local programme from interviews with 20 Big Local reps (individuals appointed by Local Trust to offer tailored support to a Big Local area and share successes, challenges and news with the organisation).

This report outlines the main findings and conclusions from the research with communities in the first months of the crisis. The next section explores the main themes evident in the fast-growing literature that has been accompanying the crisis. This is followed by a discussion of three main findings from the research: community reactions and strategies (section 3); emerging from lockdown and thinking about community recovery and forward plans (section 4); and conditions for an

effective community response, noting variations across different areas (section 5). The report concludes with reflections on the situation some six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, considering the idea of ready and resourceful communities, and looking ahead to the next stage as the research continues and the crisis unfolds.

Understanding community responses to crisis: reflections from an emerging literature

Documenting the crisis and response

Since mid-March, when the potential scale of the crisis for the United Kingdom started to become apparent, there has been a steady stream of observation, commentary and emerging research on the impact of COVID-19 across society.

For many voluntary and community organisations the early and continuing concerns have been about **three dimensions** of the crisis – resourcing, operation and demand – although their combined impacts affect organisations in different ways and to different degrees (Macmillan, 2020). Significant resource streams, from fundraising, trading and grants, have faded away or become vulnerable. Operationally, many organisations have effectively had to curtail activities to comply with early lockdown social distancing restrictions, or fundamentally reshape them to develop

online services. And some organisations have faced significantly increased demand, particularly those at the forefront of acute social welfare provision. Early snapshot surveys and focus groups sought to gain insight into what was happening on the ground, and these highlight the scale, suddenness and intensity of the challenges faced by many organisations (see, for example, Firth et al, 2020; Institute of Fundraising et al, 2020a and 2020b). Part of this was intended initially to bolster the case for a dedicated government rescue package, and then to assess whether it was likely to be sufficient.

Natasha and mother Sheri and daughter Teya working on the worlds foods section at St Johns Community Centre, June 2020.



Photographer: Zulte Lightfoot

Commentators began to appreciate and reflect upon the remarkable upsurge of neighbourhood and community-based mutual aid activity, seen for the most part as a spontaneous response to the immediate need of those thought to be most vulnerable in the midst of lockdown (for example, Alakeson and Brett, 2020; Robinson, 2020; Tiratelli and Kaye, 2020). There was almost universal celebration of such efforts, usually placed in contrast to the slower responses from more formal or established institutions, such as central government support, local government initiatives and larger voluntary organisations. At the same time, several reports sought to showcase the work of particular kinds of organisations in the immediate response to crisis. For example, Locality argued that its member organisations acted as ‘cogs of connection’ between neighbourhood-based mutual aid responses and formal institutions; Community Organisers reported on their ‘locally rooted’ work; and funders highlighted the work of Taylor and Wilson, 2020 organisations they funded (see, for example Locality, 2020; Lloyds Bank Foundation for England and Wales, 2020). The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on marginalised groups and communities, particularly Black and Minority Ethnic communities, began to feature in conversation, as an early ‘all in this together’ sentiment gave way to a more nuanced understanding of the pandemic’s uneven consequences in an unequal society (Murray, 2020; Uddin, 2020).

An emerging consensus

Reviewing the whole period since the first weeks of lockdown in late March and early April, what has been noticeable is an upsurge of reflective thinking about what the combined public health, economic and social crisis means for communities and society overall. After noting the scale and character of the crisis, the greater presence and visibility of community responses of different kinds – mutual aid, volunteering – and some sense of greater cross-sector collaboration, commentators then invariably refer to the crisis as an opportunity, or an invitation to join a conversation about rethinking the way society works. There is a common concern across much published writing to make sense of the crisis, to frame it in certain ways, but somehow to keep hold of new possibilities and ways of working (Alakeson and Brett, 2020; Robinson, 2020; Wallace et al, 2020). Although continuing uncertainty about a ‘second wave’ means that it is still perhaps too early to talk with confidence about ‘recovery’, much of this commentary seeks to contribute to a larger conversation about ‘building back better’. There is a great deal of consensus and cross-referencing in such writing, suggesting the consolidation of a pre-COVID-19 movement promoting community power, local action, and community mobilisation (Alakeson and Brett, 2020; Tiratelli, 2020). Broadly the same message is promoted across these writings, albeit expressed in slightly different ways, be this the importance of relationships (Robinson, 2020), an enabling state (Wallace et al, 2020) or the cultivation of a ‘garden mind’ (Goss, 2020).



Photographer: Zule Lightfoot

Young Voices: Black Lives Matter Workshop at W12 Together Big Local, St Michaels Church, White City Estate, August 2020.

Although there are variations, much of the new literature on community responses to COVID-19 has a common target: an attempt to move away from traditional, centralised, top-down or command-and-control approaches, both to planning and delivering services to meet local needs, and to organising emergency support in the crisis. The vibrancy, agility, innovation and responsiveness found at citizen and community level are promoted in contrast to a system dominated by a stultifying, controlling state and other powerful institutions. Within this common target there are then a range of perspectives on the role of the state in facilitating and supporting community power and mobilisation.

A grounded perspective

COVID-19 has led to a wealth of commentary and discussion. Organisations and commentators have been quick off the mark in their efforts to frame the crisis and shape future opportunities, striving creatively to find the right persuasive language to make

the case for new ways of working. There is a vibrant discussion underway about the role of community action which has been reinforced by early COVID-19 experiences. But so far, in general, it has been based on a relatively limited range of conversations, reflections and observations, rather than systematic, detailed or comprehensive research into what has been going on at community or organisational level. Such research has inevitably been slower to get off the ground, and the findings will emerge in due course. In addition, emerging reports tend to a degree to gloss over some of the problems and difficulties of community-centred approaches: for example, where power lies, navigating internal conflicts and dynamics, and how 'community' relates to and reflects deep-seated inequalities of power and resources.

The research underway and discussed in this report seeks to add to this conversation by sharing insights from extensive grounded research with different communities in England, conducted in real time alongside their COVID-19 responses.

Community reactions and strategies: responses to the immediate crisis

Key finding

Although communities have faced ostensibly the same crisis at the same time, community responses have varied significantly.

This is evident in both the level and range of activities and services in support of residents, and the extent to which community groups have worked beyond boundaries with other agencies.

One crisis, many responses

In a majority of case-study areas, initial responses to COVID-19 moving into lockdown were informal and neighbour-to-neighbour, either in terms of offering practical support or through street-level social media platforms. A community member commented:

 **Neighbours have been helping each other... Where people have got family then that is okay, family are helping each other, but there are a lot of cases of neighbours helping each other and getting to know each other perhaps better and perhaps for the first time in the many years that they have lived as neighbours."**

Indeed, in some areas, bring-and-share food tables sprang up on streets, in gardens and outside houses, and these, along with the self-organising of socially distanced events (such as VE day celebrations), have remained a feature throughout and post lockdown.

In most areas, community groups stepped in at a very early stage of the pandemic to, according to one community member, "fill the gap where statutory agencies were slower to respond", or to provide additional services and activities that were focused on community spirit, wellbeing and engagement.

The range of provision by community-led infrastructure is significant (see summary in Table 1).

Table 1 – Summary of responses to COVID-19

Information	• Sharing / signposting information • Newsletters • Webpages and social media posts/WhatsApp groups
Food	• Drop-and-shop type activities • Street food (bring and share) tables • Free school meals for those not currently eligible / children's lunches • Cooking and distribution of hot meals • Community fridges and freezers • Food banks • Recipe boxes
Creative/arts	• Community choirs • Drama • Street art • Giving out seeds/plants • Activity packs • PPE mask making/distribution • Street art
Technology	• Getting people online • Giving out tablets and paying for wifi access • Online activities, e.g. knit and natter, coffee mornings, yoga, training courses, youth projects
Space	• Making community hubs available for food distribution
Funding	• Funding for local response activities – food, creativity, mental health support, and so on • Funding for individuals, for example for making PPE
Staffing	• Redeployment/secondment of staff • Covering staff childcare costs
Outreach	• Street activities • Doorstep conversations • Identifying changing needs
Wellbeing and reducing social isolation	• Wellbeing calls • Family support sessions online • Befriending services • Mental health support services
Targeted interventions	• Refugees/those without recourse to public funds • Homeless people • Young people in school transition/young people's mental health
Supporting local economies	• Social enterprise support to meet health and wellbeing needs • Support for local business to survive and come out of lockdown • Supporting small scale enterprise
Volunteers	• Recruiting and supporting volunteers • Co-ordinating volunteer activity

At the beginning of lockdown, March-April 2020, most of the efforts focused on food distribution, with a range of different approaches across areas. There were those community-led infrastructure groups that:

- converted closed community hubs to storage spaces and centres for food preparation and distribution, which helped accelerate the transition from food collection to distribution
- established their own mutual aid type groups and food banks – adapting previous services (such as the community fridge or breakfast club) to meet emergency needs
- provided small grants, where funding was available, for the distribution of hot food, baby clothes and toiletries, and to establish telephone helplines
- tapped into and supported existing food projects – either through individual group members volunteering with, or seconding workers to, food banks (interestingly, in one area, the centralised command-and-control model of distribution was challenged by community groups who felt it was more appropriate for food to be distributed by known local activists “rather than a stranger”, as one community member commented.

Some took local-authority-level information and guidance and tailored them to the needs of hyperlocal communities (small geographical communities) and services, rather than providing or delivering food directly.

Others were slower – or more measured – in their initial responses. As one community worker described it:



We delayed... we watched and listened first to see what was going on, because we particularly wanted to make sure that we were linking in with the county/district/town councils, because we thought, ‘There’s no point in doing something if they’re going to come in in three weeks’ time and, you know, overrun it’.”

This more cautious approach had certain advantages in terms of the range of services developed locally. Community-led infrastructure groups supported vulnerable groups not covered by statutory schemes, such as families with young children, refugees and those with no recourse to public funds. They provided a valuable co-ordination point that avoided duplication of effort. The extent to which food responses were knee-jerk, or more strategic, was partly dependent upon the knowledge of hyper-local infrastructure, both in terms of reaching vulnerable groups and facilitating access to local services. Furthermore, a majority of case-study areas noted the extent to which food distribution schemes (based on local knowledge) operated on trust, which reduced bureaucratic transaction costs.

A second common response was the use of arts and creative activities both to support families with children and combat social isolation amongst older people. In a majority of case-study areas this involved the provision of arts and crafts packs and/or growing kits. In others, street art was used to share positive messages, and the development of lockdown journals and photo recordings was actively encouraged.

Centre-based activities and clubs were moved online. This met with varying degrees of success in terms of attracting participants. Research interviewees reported that online was most effective where there had been a pre-existing and well-established group. It tended to be less successful in attracting new members where the activity was new and had not been previously offered (such as online coffee mornings).

A number of case-study areas combined moving activities online to provide social support with maintaining some physical events – following social distancing guidance – particularly as lockdown restrictions eased. These included family-based activity trails (such as ‘find the teddy bears’ in the local wood), litter picks, sports and fitness activities, guided walk-and-talks and even a ‘lockdown carnival’.

While the substantive interventions have focused on broad community needs – in particular, food, and sustaining social connections – there have been a range of other COVID-19 response activities. In a number of case-study areas, tablets and Zoom licences have been secured by community-led infrastructure for vulnerable adults, or additional tablets purchased and donated to local schools for young people. Others have developed enterprise support schemes to prepare local businesses for a return to trading, or to encourage them to adapt their business models during lockdown as a means of survival.

While a majority of communities in the study have taken a broad-brush approach in terms of meeting community needs, some have taken a highly targeted approach in terms of food delivery and broader social support to meet perceived gaps in the responses provided by mainstream services. This has involved working with homeless people, refugees and those without recourse to public funds or organising activities over the summer to facilitate the integration of young people transitioning between schools.

The ways in which activities have been delivered across the 26 case-study areas have varied. As noted, there were those where community-led infrastructure did not respond to the immediate crisis around food, feeling that sufficient emergency provision was already in place. There are those communities where there was a heavy reliance on a single anchor organisation, or where “community groups ploughed their own furrow”, as one community member put it. Resident-led groups also played a co-ordination role: for example, in connecting emerging but disparate mutual-aid activity, or ensuring that vulnerable families receiving food parcels also had assistance with toiletries and children’s clothing and access to activity packs. In areas where programme funding was available, for example, in Big Local and Creative Civic Change areas, this co-ordinated approach was facilitated by community commissioning of complementary services.

Not all these initiatives were successful. There were areas where telephone helplines never rang, where new volunteers went unused or where there was competition between groups for the kudos of representing the community or being the most active. While some food distribution initiatives were flexible and resourceful in the ways they operated, others became bogged down in red tape (as investigated in Community Responses to COVID-19 – Rapid Research Briefing 4). One community member said that in some case-study areas, community group activities were limited to “those already known” rather than reaching hidden, vulnerable groups or minority communities. Indeed, there were those who perceived that Black and Minority Ethnic communities, often via faith groups, were “looking after their own,” as one community member mentioned.

Working across boundaries

The extent to which community-led infrastructure worked collaboratively with others, crossing organisational boundaries, is a mixed picture.

Collaboration at the hyperlocal level tended to be seen in those places with a rich history and networks of community action. In one area, small social enterprises working on health and wellbeing issues came together to form a consortium, first to meet what they felt were the unmet needs of Black and Minority Ethnic communities and, in the longer term, to prepare bids for larger grants and contracts to support that work and become more sustainable.

There is also evidence of positive and effective working relationships with larger voluntary-sector infrastructure bodies and local authorities. In a number of areas, the community-led infrastructure body became the relief hub for its area and was part of broader decision making. In one, an existing alliance of organisations that had been working behind the scenes became more visible to residents through its COVID-19 response, playing a connecting and coordinating role with residents and the voluntary and statutory sectors. Its existing relationships with local people underpinned this and ensured a high level of mutual trust. Indeed, there is evidence that relationships across sectors, including the community sector, have improved in some places through joint working, with increasing recognition from the council of the value of engaging with community-based organisations. Unpublished internal Local Trust data on the Big Local programme from July 2020 suggests, for example, that 67 per cent of Big Local areas appear to have worked collaboratively with their local authority. In the majority of cases this was built upon existing relationships with councils.

There is also, however, evidence of missed opportunities. The centralised command-and-control models of delivery implemented by many statutory agencies have not always accommodated the more informal and fluid approaches of community groups. In one area community groups successfully challenged the centralised food distribution system arguing that working through local networks was more effective in reaching vulnerable groups. Some groups have felt that the relationship with the local authority was very mechanistic. When hyperlocal community-led infrastructure groups were asked whether the council was proactive in contacting and working with them, most said not. One community worker said:

 **The local authority talks about partnership – but it is all one way. They ask us to do things but do not respond when we ask for some support.”**

The relationship is not all the responsibility of the local authority. There is evidence that places with a disconnect between statutory and community-led interventions seemed to have an element of self-fulfilling prophecy (regardless of the planning and delivery that was actually happening). Some case-study areas had developed a strong narrative of neglect over time by local authorities, had little trust that anything would be different in the face of COVID-19, and expressed this in their accounts of local developments.

Changing responses

The focus of community responses to the pandemic has changed over time. Food dominated the early activities, with a rapid move from (food bank) collections to deliveries. The early learning from this demonstrated that, as one community member put it, “people appreciated the food but valued the social contact”.

As lockdown continued, more emphasis was placed on social connections and combating social isolation – through doorstep conversations, telephone support or online activities.

Thinking about food poverty has also shifted over time. The early response in many case-study areas was informal, and provision was made for “anyone in need”, according to a community worker. But in some areas there was a subsequent tightening of eligibility criteria to address perceived abuses. Discussion of dependency on food parcels has emerged as a theme, with different responses. COVID-19 has made food poverty more visible, and in some places it has been argued that there is, therefore, a need to continue – and expand – food banks. Others (where financial resources have been available) deliberately provided short-term funding for food delivery services to “avoid dependency”, in the words of one community member. Then there are those that have adapted their approach, for example, away from providing food parcels to delivering recipe packs with fresh ingredients.

Not all community groups anticipated how prolonged lockdown would prove to be; for some “it was going to be a short break to catch up on the paperwork,” a community worker commented. Given that the pandemic is a “destabilising macro-event” (see [Community Responses to COVID-19: Rapid Research Briefing 1](#)), there was a greater realisation over time of the wider impact on the following areas: employment, and the need for retraining for different work (ONS, 2020a); indebtedness, and the importance of access to quality benefits and money advice (StepChange, 2020); mental health and well-being, and the need to respond to an increase in mental distress (ONS, 2020b); and the growth of domestic abuse (Women’s Aid, 2020). It was noted by one community member that one effect of the pandemic has been to “shine a light on pre-existing inequalities”.

The data gathered in the first phase of the current research highlights the diversity of community responses to the immediate crisis. This ranges from taking no overt actions through to instigating unprecedented levels of activity. The variation is partly accounted for by the age and vulnerability of community leaders. In some places, nearly every key activist was shielding and felt out of touch. However, it also relates to how resident-led bodies perceive their role. For some, emergency relief was the only thing to do, while others, especially where the response from larger agencies seemed adequate, have concentrated their efforts on working towards existing agendas and longer-term goals.

Emerging from lockdown

Key finding

As lockdown restrictions ease, most communities have moved on from an initial crisis response and, to some extent, are looking ahead.

However, it is an uneven picture; the ways in which they are able to move on varies. Some are planning ahead systematically for emerging and future community needs, but others struggle and feel a lack of control of events.

Nonetheless, the sense of crisis and the response have changed how some groups see themselves, their communities and their relationships with others.

Stopping and starting: making sense of where we are

This study is ostensibly conceptualised in two parts: response, followed by recovery. Yet, as noted in [Community Responses to COVID-19: Rapid Research Briefing 1](#), "the idea of broad stages in response and recovery remains relevant, although they are likely to overlap and be messier than any stage model might suggest". Emerging from lockdown is far from straightforward, and the picture and our understanding of response and recovery have become more complicated. The future is uncertain, and while one community member described the period following lockdown as one of "repair and care", another commented: "it's like reading tarot cards".

The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)'s 'Future Change Framework' (Burbidge, 2020a; 2020b) aims to help "make sense of how the crisis is changing the world as we are living through it" (Burbidge, 2020a) and to focus on new ways of doing things. It includes four categories of activity: **temporary measures** (immediate and specific to the crisis), **paused activity** (activities which were stopped because of the crisis but need to be restarted), **stopped activity** (things that, on reflection, are now not fit for purpose and should be let go), and **innovations** (those things that were tried out during the crisis and could be continued). This framework is a useful starting point to explore what appears to be happening at community level as lockdown restrictions are eased. To this framework we have added two categories: **temporary plus** activities, and **adapted and continuing** activities.

'Temporary measures' describes those emergency responses outlined in section 3, such as delivery of food parcels and creativity packs. By late July/early August, these were already starting to be wound down in many areas. However, some of these temporary measures may not be as short-term as first thought. There also appears to be a 'temporary plus' category. In one area, funding has been secured to keep phone lines open for a further six months, and COVID-19 highlighted food poverty as an issue requiring a continuing response. There is evidence that in some places demand for food has not dissipated. Several areas anticipate running or supporting food bank provision at high capacity for a further six months or more; and there are those that, as noted, are looking creatively at ways to respond that are less emergency-focused and more sustainable over the long term.

All areas have paused some activities, particularly face-to-face activities – for example, health and wellbeing groups, youth services, events such as summer galas, and regular governance meetings. Groups intend to restart these as soon as people feel it is safe to do so, and many children and young people's summer schemes have been put on, albeit with smaller numbers, to comply with government guidance. How long the pause will be for other activities is not clear and will vary from place to place. Communities wishing to reopen community centres, for example, are navigating a whole series of guidelines pertinent to social distancing, safeguarding, volunteering and cleaning. One community worker commented: "The lockdown was simple, but re-opening is a more complex message."

While some people are eager to return to previous face-to-face activities, others are more cautious. The most popular centre-based activities may be the hardest to restart as they attract the most people, and social distancing will therefore be more difficult. Fewer people attending sessions may also have an impact on income and may make some activities not financially viable. It was reported that a number of community hubs themselves may be at risk in the medium term.

'Stopped activities' are described by RSA as those that will be 'let go' after the crisis because people now realise they were, or at least are now, not fit for purpose. It is too early to say whether groups in this research study will let go of previous activities. This will be an area of study over the second phase of the research.

'Adapted and continuing' activities are those that were running prior to the crisis and have carried on, though perhaps in a slightly different way. There are examples of online knit-and-natter groups and youth projects being welcomed and popular. One community-based arts worker has described how COVID-19 has shaken the entire foundations of his community work, which was all about face-to-face relationships – a common theme amongst workers. Recognising that for many people the community centre was their only opportunity for social interaction, some groups are slowly rebuilding group gatherings by meeting up in someone's garden or in the local park rather than inside a building.

In addition, several groups have managed to continue project-management functions despite the crisis. Governance and decision-making, funding and organisational development have continued in many organisations, as has consultation around community needs and the creation of community plans.



Friendly Bench launch, North West Ipswich, August 2020.

There are stories of innovation. Some of the new approaches and activities put in place during the crisis will continue. Ideas for activities generated during the lockdown include: increased partnership working, building on new relationships formed during the pandemic; projects that will maintain engagement with new volunteers who have come forward; and the development of community pantries. Several groups have decided to invest more in IT training as they see the importance of helping people to get online and addressing the levels of digital exclusion highlighted by the pandemic. A community worker commented:



People have enjoyed the zoom calls and will keep some element of this – even the sewing group worked – a lovely social thing to do. Zoom has become part of people’s lives.”

Several respondents have suggested that it would be an error to return to business as normal. Communities are reflecting on how they can put in place more appropriate and sustainable activities. For example, the existing approach to food bank provision, which was essential in most places and expanded during lockdown, is being questioned now. Concerns focus on the stigma attached to food banks, the potential loss of dignity for users and its sustainability as a model in the context of potentially increasing and enduring financial hardship. A Big Local rep said:



The food thing has highlighted probably what we’ve known for quite a long time anecdotally, which is food poverty’s always there in the background for people who don’t have a lot of money.”

Alternative models of people's supermarkets, pay-as-you feel cafes and community kitchens are being mooted. These innovations provide an opportunity for groups to move on from response mode and think creatively about the future. As one community member put it:

 **We need to move from food as charity to food as a means of community building."**

Moving on: an uneven picture (so far)

The impact of COVID-19 has been uneven across communities; for example, hitting those already struggling with financial and food insecurity the hardest. Similarly, the extent of response at community level has varied. This extends now into different approaches for moving on. While some groups are still in a 'rescue and react' mode, others are thinking strategically about the longer term.

Groups have been feeling their way to recovery through vague and what has often been perceived as contradictory guidance. A community worker commented: "We have to wear masks in the community centre but not if we meet in the café down the road."

Emerging and future needs identified so far at community level generally include mental health, employment and debt support services, as described by one community member:

 **We've now got a new world and I would say that anything that would be going out as a kind of specification would include that kind of wider wellbeing work with people that are under-employed or unemployed."**

The prime and immediate concern for some groups is halting the negative impact of the pandemic on community infrastructure. Paid community staff that were put on furlough are coming back to work. For those groups with a community hub the priority is getting their centres open again. Rent free space is being offered in some community centres to encourage groups to start reusing spaces and meeting rooms.

There is both a social and financial imperative to this. Demands from the community to reopen community spaces combines with an awareness that users of centres are often those most socially isolated. But financially, some groups are reporting a six month loss valued at over £10,000, even after receiving government funded compensation grants. As noted above, they would like clearer national government guidance and more understanding from local authorities as well as proactive support around risk assessments. Some areas did re-open centres in late July/early August – albeit with substantially reduced opening hours and visitor numbers. Others have been carrying out risk assessments over the summer with the hope of re-opening in September, depending on COVID-19 infection trends and the possibility of a second spike. There are some groups who are being even more cautious and have no plans to re-open until early 2021.

Most groups studied are conscious that they will have a crucial role to play in their communities in the coming months, although many are challenged by waning energy levels. By July, key activists and workers were reporting feeling, as one community member put it, “exhausted... tired... burnt out.” How to keep the energy going is emerging as a key concern.

Those that are taking a strategic approach are systematically identifying where they should put their focus, and if they have it, their money. Some are focusing on the needs of specific groups of residents, others on supporting small community groups to re-emerge, or are considering the needs of local shops and small businesses.

Outreach work and community audits have been planned to listen to residents’ concerns and ambitions. There are those groups that are engaged in scenario planning – anticipating likely outcomes of the pandemic in their communities and beginning to think through how they can respond to unemployment and financial hardship in the months ahead. In some areas, small community groups are being asked about their likely future needs. In part, this comes alongside an awareness that the usual round of summer fundraising opportunities – festivals and galas – has not happened. There is widespread recognition that they will need to be fluid and flexible to reflect changes in the community, and, in areas where there is access to resources (such as in Big Local areas), funds are being set aside as ‘COVID pots’ so they can act swiftly once they know what is needed.

There is some evidence that the experience of working with other agencies during the lockdown period has resulted in greater partnership-working with local voluntary and statutory sector agencies; and, in a few areas, community-led infrastructure bodies are feeding into ‘recovery’ conversations with the local authority. For example, in one area, they are jointly creating a resilience-and-emergency fund and a process to support organisations and businesses should a similar crisis re-occur. In another area, an economic recovery sub-group has been formed at community level, involving the Chamber of Commerce and the local MP.

Disruption changes things

It is still too early to assess the extent to which community-led infrastructure will help people to move on from the crisis, and how it will do this. What we do know, however, is that the sense of crisis and the response has changed how some groups see themselves, their communities and their relationships with others. This is well expressed by a community member in one area: “When you deal with a crisis you kind of then start to see what’s really important and I think it’s allowed us to do that.”

There are several factors underpinning and reinforcing this rethinking. The practical focus of providing an emergency response has been a unifying force for some groups, and the success of their response has given them greater confidence that they can make a difference in their community. This is matched by enhanced awareness and trust from the broader community that comes from having been there when needed.

Several groups in one case-study area stressed that some of the issues faced by their communities now are the same as the ones they faced previously, but have been amplified by the crisis. There is a growing sense that these need to be prioritised as long-term goals which they will address over time with a 'we can do it' philosophy (also noted as a theme in Robinson, 2020: 23).

A significant element of learning from the period of lockdown is a greater recognition of inequalities. This knowledge, that not everyone is in the same boat, has partly come through media headlines about the varying health impact of the virus. But it has also arisen through reflecting on who has and has not accessed the emergency provision put in place, and realising that the group's reach into the community was perhaps not as great as previously thought. Some groups are targeting outreach to minority communities to build stronger relationships in recognition of these inequalities. In one area, paid workers are preparing to hold 'difficult conversations' in response to the racism that has been encountered by volunteers over the last few months.

Projects put in place as a response to lockdown have evidenced need, especially where people were previously falling through gaps in provision. For example, a hot-meals service for people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has raised awareness about the ongoing needs of homeless people; and outreach services to deliver food and creativity packs have encountered people in different ways and highlighted the difficult circumstances in how some people live. A community member commented:

"With lifting of lockdown... [we are] concerned about different people in our community – it's putting some families in a lot more vulnerability than others. I feel like the Big Local has actually never been more necessary because the demographic of our town is obviously going to change, already has changed in the last two months, and in the coming six months we'll only see more and more of the effects of this."

Although some groups have recognised the limits of their reach into communities, others have linked up with a much broader population through the activities and services they have provided and the way in which they have been delivered. For example, groups have been able to connect with people who were around during the day because they were furloughed from work, and activities have been taken out into the community rather than being centre-based. One community worker said: "They reached different people through their on-line activities, a wider geographical reach, and people who weren't already engaged through the community centre."

Conditions for an effective community response

Key finding

The research has highlighted the role and significance of rich and established community-led infrastructure, consisting of connected networks of residents, community leadership, trust, relationships with agencies, and access to money.

The difference across the case studies, in terms of an effective response to the crisis, appears to rest on the extent to which community-led infrastructure has been built through investment and support. Where it is limited, the response has primarily been food-focused, often through the actions of individuals; where it is richer and more established, the response has been wider ranging.

In an essay for Local Trust during the first weeks of lockdown, Steve Wyler commented:



If we really want to harness the 'renewable energy of communities' we need to understand better what the necessary conditions are for a shared sense of community to emerge, for self-organisation to flourish and for all residents to benefit."

(Wyler, 2020: 71)

The rich mix of 26 case-study areas, combined with insights from other areas, provides ample evidence of this renewable energy in practice, as well as significant learning about the different roles assumed at community level, the nature of responses to COVID-19 and, crucially, the conditions for an effective response.

Fluid, flexible, fast

The most common community-based response to the pandemic has been the speedy mobilisation of people. As noted in [Community Responses to COVID-19: Rapid Research Briefing 5](#), relationships of people and place are significant and many more people have taken direct action within their own communities than have been deployed through formal volunteer mobilisation schemes. There is evidence of people stepping up and stepping in to provide a range of responses across all 26 communities. While it is not possible to gauge the numbers of people acting on an individual basis (such as shopping for neighbours), the research does illustrate the consequences of collective efforts.

The extent of a groundswell response is, however, uneven. Some of the case study communities have reported a surge in new volunteers, particularly people furloughed from employment. Others have experienced insufficient numbers, and even diminished participation from active residents shielding for reasons of age and health conditions, fear of the virus and a sense of being stopped in their tracks. What appears to have made a difference is local leadership, either through the support of paid community-based workers and/or through strong neighbourhood networks and connections. In both cases, the power to act, the support to act and the co-ordination required to be effective have been in place.

Unlike with many larger organisations, community-led infrastructure has the capacity to be fleet of foot because it does not have to seek permission through a long chain of command. For example, in one area, a community-led infrastructure group saw itself as the only one responding early on in the crisis, since the school, children's centre and local faith-based organisation were all closed. In other areas it was observed

by a community member that the larger organisations furloughed their workers "just when they were needed most", and that it was left to community-based organisations to step in and deliver a response. This was well described by one of the Big Local reps interviewed for the study:

 **They are very down to earth, practical... and they don't worry too much about the complicated stuff. They don't want to know about it, they don't want to think about it, and they want to deal with what's in front of them. They're really resourceful."**

The importance of support for resident-led action cannot be overestimated. There are many examples of where it has bolstered the capacity of the community response. In one area, a community worker coordinated residents and business owners to ensure that vulnerable people received a daily hot meal. In others, existing food bank services were expanded primarily through the efforts of paid staff. Furthermore, it was usually paid workers who supported residents to get online so that they could benefit from digitally based activities. Such responses relied on people shifting from their prescribed roles into whatever was needed at the time – they became delivery drivers, packers, cooks and local call-centre operatives. This shift in patterns of working, including secondments, redeployment, flexible working hours and supporting childcare costs, was mostly quick and nimble.

The evidence from this research illustrates that the existence of established community-led networks and infrastructure can contribute a co-ordinated approach to mobilising people. This is well illustrated here in a reflection from a community member in an area in the Big Local programme:

 **We've got literally hundreds of volunteers in all sorts of working groups who, while we speak, are networking and giving help to other people that they wouldn't perhaps have been able to do before... because they've got the tools and the wherewithal and we've given them the confidence to actually do it. And I think that's been the strength of Big Local all the way through this."**

Many groups in the study have built their response on existing connections, relationships and trust. Residents and paid workers have used their local community knowledge about where support might be required. A Big Local rep said: "Because... they will say, 'I know that family. They're too proud to come and ask but their kids are hungry.' And it's that stuff that the big organisations just never get to know."

Groups pulled on connections on the ground and local knowledge to make things happen, as illustrated by a Big Local rep here:

 **[They] very immediately got into gear, started delivering food parcels before the county council had got themselves sorted ... made sure that they weren't overlapping in any way, and the county council endorsed what they were doing... They also, they have an industrial standard kitchen, and they have a guy, a local chef who volunteers with them on a Saturday... And he was furloughed, so he came day-in, day-out, cooking meals and they did a hot meal, meals on wheels thing."**

Availability of, and access to financial resources have been significant. In 21 out of the 26 case-study areas, resident-led bodies direct the use of Big Local funds allocated to their community. This enabled a rapid response to meet community needs, from paying for emergency food to funding mental health support for young people. As one community member said: "It's great while we've still got Big Local money, we've got that freedom to be able to do stuff."

This access to funds brings confidence and the power to act. In some areas where there has been less of a people-based response, access to money has compensated. Residents have been able to commission others to deliver online activities and door-to-door services or to pay for food.

The knowledge that money is available and is not going to disappear in the immediate future has also enabled communities to plan for the next phase of the COVID-19 crisis without the worry that they might not financially survive the next few months. Indeed, some Big Locals have made, or are planning to make, grants to other local community groups to ensure that they survive the crisis and have a future. A community worker said:

 **We've got to accept our privilege with this money... it's not going to be pulled out from beneath us because of this or anything else, you know, and that's just so unique."**

As mentioned in section 4, some groups have earmarked funds as 'COVID pots', so that they can support groups and local businesses and commission appropriate services to meet community needs as they arise.

Community-led infrastructure

The evidence from this research demonstrates that existing community-led infrastructure, consisting of connected networks of residents, community leadership, trust, relationships with agencies, and access to money have made a difference during the pandemic.

Figure 1 shows a working example from one of the case-study areas to demonstrate what this can look like, and the interconnectedness of different elements.

Figure 1 – Example of community-led infrastructure in operation





Noel Park Big Local volunteer Paul delivering plants to community member Rebecca to grow at home as part of the Let's Get Growing initiative, July 2020.

Yet, this is not a consistent picture across all 26 areas, even accounting for the disparity between those that are part of the Big Local programme, those that are part of the Creative Civic Change programme, and whether or not areas are classed as 'left behind' areas.

There is, however, evidence from across all the 21 Big Local areas that they would not have been in a position to do as much of their COVID-19 response activity before the advent of Big Local investment and support. They have all responded, albeit in various ways and at different scales. Based on collective decision-making, their response has been to mobilise and deploy residents, staff and/or money.

However, in two of the five areas without the Big Local programme and support there is also evidence of a community role in the crisis response and, arguably, a more active role than in some of the Big Local areas. In both cases – one a Creative Civic Change area, and one without a community-led funding programme – there was some pre-existing infrastructure that involved local people. In one area,

partnerships and networks have been forged over many years, and an alliance of agencies and residents trusted each other enough to share responsibility and make an effective response. In the other area, a small unfunded community group joined up with a network of community groups forged many years ago that had developed into an organisation with staff, a diverse range of projects, and relationships with funders. They merged their response efforts, made effective use of social media and embraced volunteers.

This contrasts with the other three of the five areas without a Big Local programme and support where work was less connected and coordinated. Here, where two areas are part of the Creative Civic Change programme and one is without a community-led funding programme, responses hinged instead on a patchwork of individuals and groups, doing their own thing, with "stuff popping up everywhere," as one community centre manager put it.

One aspect of difference across the 26 areas is the broader support provided at scale

by Local Trust through its Big Local and Creative Civic Change programmes at a national level. This was instigated swiftly once the lockdown became apparent, with an offer of free access to Zoom accounts, training in how to use it and frequent national networking opportunities. Indeed, in the areas that are part of both Big Local and Creative Civic Change programmes there has been an extra layer and an additional offer which has enriched the community response. For example, in Creative Civic Change, relationships built between residents and artists at the local level and the arts-based focus have offered new and additional ways into civic engagement.

There were no discernible differences between 'left behind' areas and other study areas in the overall strength of the immediate responses to COVID-19. Rather, across all areas it was the extent to which community-led infrastructure has been built – through investment and support – that seems to have made the difference. Where it is limited, the response has primarily been food-focused, often through the actions of individuals; where it is richer and more established, the response has been wider ranging. These comparisons of how different kinds of area are faring will be further examined in the next stage of the research.

The challenge now is to support communities as they emerge from the immediate crisis. This may well both amplify pre-COVID-19 conditions (such as food insecurity) as well as the extent to which groups are resourceful and ready for what comes next. Some are already in planning mode, but some are more fearful, as seen in this reflection from a project worker in one area:



This is not a community that has resources.... the poverty levels are just... at every level, it's poverty of aspiration, it's poverty of education, people's access to knowledge and resources, people's access to food. I mean, the housing is awful. So all of that stuff hasn't gone away because of a horrible virus. It's still there."

Conclusion: changing communities

In some ways, COVID-19 has changed everything. Across the UK and around the world people have stepped up to help their neighbours and communities. This report tells just a part of this story through its focus on community-led responses in England from March to September 2020. The responses have varied, depending upon local needs, the role of larger agencies and statutory bodies, and the confidence of the communities' power to act.

Many hyperlocal community-led infrastructure organisations responded by adapting what they did before to address identified needs. They may not always have been ready or prepared, but many responded rapidly, flexibly and, sometimes, as one community member put it, "making it up as we go along". In the majority of cases, they were also able to change their activities and role as the pandemic evolved – moving from emergency action to offering wellbeing support and more creative responses.

However, in other ways COVID-19 has changed very little. At a macro, societal level, a community member said it "shone a light" on pre-existing inequalities, poverty, poor housing and levels of social isolation; and it exposed new vulnerabilities, particularly for those in low-paid, insecure employment. They continued: "What we learned was... we are not all in this together."

At a hyperlocal level, the pandemic has highlighted pre-existing relationships rather than fundamentally changed them. Where links and connections within and between

organisations have been strong, bonds have been strengthened. Where there have been underlying tensions, these have been exacerbated. In particular, systems of community governance have been severely tested. While some groups have supported all resident members to be informed and involved in decision-making, in others, power has come to lie more visibly with a very small number of residents or with workers.

Hyperlocal knowledge and more informal ways of working assisted and extended reach, but there was also a lack of capacity in most case-study areas to respond at scale. In addition, the reach of interventions has often relied on pre-existing networks, rather than engaging more marginalised groups in the community. Equally, groups covering very small areas have not often been on the radar of strategic planning bodies and have lacked the capacity to engage. An outcome of the pandemic thus far has been some acknowledgment at both community and public agency levels of the inter-dependency of strategic and localised responses. More effective

partnership arrangements, based on trust, will be critical in the coming months as communities emerging from lockdown face issues that they may be ill-equipped to address on their own, such as domestic violence and mental ill health.

Ready and resourceful communities

Press headlines tell us that we have witnessed a resurgence in community spirit, billboards tell us that 'Community is Kindness'. A comment from a community member that "This community is stronger than anyone thought it was," highlighted the realisation that, in the face of adversity or emergency, when push comes to shove, communities want to step up and look out for one another.

This research has found, however, that some communities were readier to respond and able to make more effective use of their resources than others. For example, some resident-led groups were already operating food projects such as a community fridge; some had community hubs that could be transformed into food centres; some had the local knowledge to be able to target help where it was most needed; some had experience of supporting and coordinating volunteers; and some had established connections with organisations that could step in when needed. A community worker said:



I'm so pleased we had already built the relationship with [young people's counselling service] before all the COVID stuff."

In addition, most of the 26 areas had community structures in place to be able to re-prioritise use of their resources. In the Big Local areas, the resident-led partnerships were able to make decisions quickly: for example, to direct human and financial resources as needs became apparent. As Alakeson and Brett (2020: 8) argue: "Mutual aid at scale needs community organisations."

Community-led infrastructure has addressed the pandemic with a resourcefulness that has enabled rapid adaption, and the adoption of new ways of working and more creative responses to addressing need ([Community Responses to COVID-19: Rapid Research Briefing 2](#)). It has been challenging, not least because, during lockdown, groups whose *raison d'être* is face-to-face group interaction have had to adapt to a rather alien world of virtual and socially distanced interactions. However, applying four elements of resourcefulness (from MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013), they have:

- brought human and, where available, financial resources to bear
- used skills and technical knowledge to facilitate the adoption and implementation of alternative ways of working
- applied local/cultural knowledge to meet immediate needs
- promoted recognition of communities' right to mobilise, attract and manage new resources.

In other words, the building of hyperlocal community-led infrastructure has provided opportunities for people to respond to the crisis.

Old, adapted and new normal

The next phase of this research study will explore how communities move on from lockdown and cope with the ongoing effects of COVID-19. Currently, it is possible to identify three different broad perspectives. There are those people that:

- want to return to an 'old normal' by getting the community centre and activities up and running again with maximum usage, as soon as possible
- recognise an 'adapted normal' where activities will be restricted for the foreseeable future by social distancing
- desire a 'new normal' (Parker 2020), which, as one community member said, replaces the "old normal of poverty and isolation. I don't want to go back to the old normal."

Communities will move on in various ways just as they have responded differently so far, but in all areas there will be changed dynamics, new opportunities and new challenges. For example, newly acquired digital knowledge will transform the way some groups operate. The connections and trust that have been built in some communities have the potential to boost grassroots action and involvement in local decision making. It is also a time for reflection – about how to ensure that people do not fall through the gaps, or how to reach more marginalised people in communities, or how to target resources to where they will have most impact. The pandemic has illustrated the value of grassroots action. Over the coming months relationships between communities and statutory and voluntary sector agencies will be pivotal.

The second phase of research will include a regular review of emerging literature from relevant research; learning conversations will continue across the same 26 areas; findings will be gathered through others involved in the Big Local programme; and interviews will be conducted with a sample of local authorities. This next phase will focus on the ways different areas move on from the immediate crisis.

This involves exploring:

- the extent to which secure funding provides a safety net, and what this can enable to happen
- whether and how community-led decision making helps to generate locally determined priorities
- the different degrees and ways in which community-led infrastructure and other agencies lead the 'recovery' together, and whether they are 'ready' to make a difference in their communities.

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Appendix

Summary COVID-19 timeline, December 2019 – August 2020

1/12/19	First case of COVID-19 – person in China showing symptoms
9/1/20	First reported death occurs
12/1/20	WHO reports cluster of cases in Wuhan; first came to attention 31-12-19
22/1/20	UK risk level rises from very low to low
30/1/20	UK risk level rises from low to moderate
31/1/20	First cases in UK (two Chinese nationals at a hotel in York)
28/2/20	First within-UK transmission of Covid-19
3/3/20	Coronavirus Action Plan launched
5/3/20	First UK death
11/3/20	Designation as a pandemic by WHO
12/3/20	UK risk level rises from moderate to high
15/3/20	Matt Hancock advises that over-70s will be told to self-isolate for four months
16/3/20	Government announces stronger measures on social distancing, following Imperial College research
17/3/20	Additional budget measures – business-loan guarantee scheme
20/3/20	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme announced – cover 80 per cent pay for furloughed workers
20/3/20	Government announces closure of all restaurants, pubs, clubs and indoor sport and leisure facilities
23/3/20	Boris Johnson address to the nation – lockdown of three weeks
25/3/20	Coronavirus Act receives Royal Assent
25/3/20	UK Parliament closes
26/3/20	National applause for healthcare workers
27/3/20	Boris Johnson and Matt Hancock test positive for COVID-19
28/3/20	Fatalities reach 1,000

31/3/20	Number of people in hospital with COVID-19 passes 10,000
3/4/20	First Nightingale hospital opens in London
5/4/20	Boris Johnson admitted to hospital
6/4/20	UK death toll exceeds 5,000
6/4/20	Boris Johnson in intensive care
12/4/20	PM discharged from hospital
12/4/20	Number of UK deaths exceeds 10,000
16/4/20	Lockdown extended for further 3 weeks
25/4/20	Recorded deaths in UK exceed 20,000
28/4/20	ONS report indicates a third of coronavirus deaths in England and Wales are occurring in care homes
30/4/20	Prime Minister Boris Johnson says the UK is "past the peak" of the COVID-19 outbreak, but that the country must not "risk a second spike"
6/5/20	Deaths in UK exceed 30,000, highest in Europe
10/5/20	Government updates its message from 'Stay at Home...' to 'Stay alert...'; five-level alert system introduced
11/5/20	Government publishes 50-page document setting out details for lifting restrictions, and PM makes first public statement on COVID-19 since discharge from hospital
12/5/20	ONS figures show overall death toll exceeds 40,000, but weekly number falls for the first time since the start of the pandemic
12/5/20	Chancellor extends furlough scheme; a quarter of UK workforce covered by the scheme
20/5/20	PM announces track and trace system to be in place from June 1
23/5/20	Dominic Cummings visit to family in Durham dominates the media
25/5/20	Cummings gives press conference at number 10
29/5/20	Rishi Sunak announces Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to end at end of October
5/6/20	Number of recorded deaths passes 40,000
6/6/20	Anti-racism demonstrations held across the UK
8/6/20	Rules requiring travellers arriving in the UK to quarantine for 14 days come into force
12/6/20	ONS figures show UK economy shrank by 20.4 per cent in April.
13/6/20	Households with one adult can become linked with one other household of any size

15/6/20	Retail shops and public facing businesses to reopen
19/6/20	Alert level lowered to Level 3
23/6/20	PM leads final Downing Street daily briefing
25/6/20	Major incident declared after half a million people travel to Bournemouth beach area
29/6/20	Stricter lockdown measures imposed in Leicester for minimum of two weeks after spike of COVID-19 cases
10/7/20	Quarantine rules relaxed for people arriving in UK from 75 countries and overseas territories
17/7/20	PM announces people allowed to use public transport for non-essential journeys
24/7/20	Face coverings compulsory in shops and other enclosed public places
30/7/20	Restrictions placed on Greater Manchester and parts of East Lancashire and Yorkshire – separate households cannot meet indoors
30/7/20	ONS figures show England had highest number of excess deaths in Europe between end of February and mid-June
31/7/20	PM postpones some lockdown easing measures for two weeks
1/8/20	Employers required to contribute to cost of furlough scheme
2/8/20	Major incident declared in Greater Manchester
3/8/20	'Eat out to help out' scheme begins

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places where they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of local communities, to enable them to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding through our work supporting local communities make their areas better places to live, and to draw on the learning from our work to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

About TSRC

The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) at the University of Birmingham coordinates a research team of 15 members examining community responses to COVID-19 for Local Trust. TSRC was established in 2008 in order to enhance knowledge on the third sector and civil society, with a focus on understanding the scale, extent and dynamics of the sector, its work in service delivery, the work of 'below the radar' organisations and the changing policy context.
birmingham.ac.uk/research/tsrc

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