

communities versus **COVID**

HOW LABOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT TOOK ON CORONAVIRUS



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Foreword

Cllr Nick Forbes

Leader of Newcastle City Council and Leader of the LGA Labour Group

No-one could have predicted that 2020 was the year when our world was turned upside down. Still sore from our Party's recent General Election defeat, 12 months ago my biggest worry in Newcastle was how we would continue to deliver on priorities such as climate change and building more council houses with yet another Tory Government in Westminster. But within months we were gripped with the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic, the country locked down and dealing with the loss of many friends and loved ones. People were frightened, not just for themselves and their families but because it was apparent early on that the Government completely failed to understand the devastating impact that Covid-19 would have on the country.

At the start of the pandemic Labour councils were quick to respond to these new challenges. Priorities changed overnight – with councils working hard to mitigate the situation that was emerging in care homes at the time, sourcing PPE for front line workers where the government had failed to do so, and working with local voluntary organisations to support residents who had been asked to shield themselves.

As the months went by, we dealt with further challenges, such as how to protect our high streets and local hospitality sectors, how to work round the Government's centralised and privatised test and trace system and how to work with residents to suppress a second wave. And over the last few months we've had to deal with ever changing restrictions, from the rule of six, to the Tier system, to a second lockdown, back to a different Tier system and to a third lockdown. Mass community testing and the rollout of the vaccine present fresh challenges, and our local economies will need our significant and sustained support if they are to recover.

There's lots that both local government and central government can and should learn from the pandemic. The response to the pandemic has been most successful when it has been locally led. The Government's test and trace system has not been sensitive to local needs and dynamics – many Labour councils have consequently set up their own test and trace systems that are more personal, with council staff knocking on doors, telling residents that they need to isolate and finding out what support they need. As a result, contact tracing systems run by local authorities have a 97% success rate – compared to a dismal 70% for the national contact tracing system. This is just one example of how we have adapted and improvised throughout, coming together as a Labour local government family to share ideas and encourage each other in the absence of any assistance nationally.

Looking ahead, the pandemic has also highlighted the structural and financial weaknesses of local government in the UK. Covid came after 10 years of crippling austerity, and the Tories reneged on their promises to support councils properly through the crisis. But local leadership, bringing partners together, reassuring communities and supporting those most vulnerable, has never been more important. If there is one big lesson from 2020, it is that we need to see a significant shift in power and resources from national to local government to make our country more resilient for the future.

This publication showcases the best of Labour local government over the last 12 months – from profiles of Covid heroes, to innovations by Labour councils, and articles looking at the different aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through adversity, it shows Labour in local government at its finest - leading and delivering for our communities.

COVID

timeline 2020/21

January

First two confirmed UK cases of coronavirus.

February

SAGE advises the government that restricting activities outside the household would delay the peak of the coronavirus outbreak by up to five weeks and reduce overall cases by

50-60%

The number of confirmed cases rises to 23 by the end of the month.



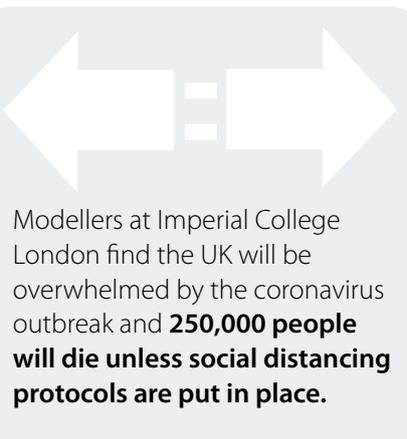
March

SAGE suggests the government issue advice that people should NOT shake hands. The same day Boris Johnson tells a press conference:

"I was at a hospital the other night where I think there were a few coronavirus patients and I shook hands with everybody, you will be pleased to know, and I continue to shake hands".



The government announces it will end the mass community testing programme despite advice from the World Health Organization that it was vital. **The next day they reverse the decision.**



Modellers at Imperial College London find the UK will be overwhelmed by the coronavirus outbreak and **250,000 people will die unless social distancing protocols are put in place.**

A UK lockdown is announced:

"From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - you must stay at home." says Boris Johnson.

Ministers provide assurances that the government would provide "whatever funding is needed for councils to get through this and come out the other side", a promise later repeated by Robert Jenrick.

In response to widespread concern about lack of PPE supply the Government announces that they will set up a new 'Amazon-style' PPE distribution service with health minister Jo Churchill MP later stating the system would come online in the next few days'. **By July, this service still does not exist.**

By the end of March, 1,408 people have died of coronavirus and there are over
22,000
confirmed cases.

Boris Johnson contracts coronavirus and is later hospitalised.

COVID

timeline 2020/21

April

The government admits that none of the **17.5 million** coronavirus antibody tests it has bought work.

Frustrated by the government's failure to provide adequate PPE for care workers, many councils are forced to procure their own supplies. Labour councils in Yorkshire, led by Bradford, charter their own flight to bring PPE in from China.

Councils call on government ministers to involve local government in plans to track and trace coronavirus, stressing that any national system must be complemented by existing local knowledge and skills on the ground, including Directors of Public Health. **The Government instead makes the catastrophic decision to outsource Test and Trace to the private sector at a cost of £12bn.**

 Matt Hancock announces that the Department of Health is developing its own contact tracing app, rejecting an offer from Apple and Google to use their technology. **Two months later, he admits the app will be abandoned as it does not work.**

By the end of April, the UK has surpassed Italy to become the country with the highest declared death toll in Europe, with **more than 26,000 fatalities.**

May

 Communities secretary Robert Jenrick backtracks on his earlier promise to support councils to do 'whatever it takes' to fight coronavirus, telling MPs that councils should not "labour under a false impression" that all costs would be reimbursed, provoking widespread anger amongst local government leaders and MPs.

Councils again plead to be involved in the Test and Trace system, pointing out that 'there are some areas in different communities where an app simply cannot reach'. The government ignores the calls.

The government is plunged into crisis over the behaviour of senior adviser Dominic Cummings, who breached lockdown measures during a trip to Durham.

Boris Johnson urges people who are unable to work from home to go back to their jobs, while maintaining social distancing.

The Local Government Association says that the failure of national government to share vital and up-to-date data with councils and other agencies is hampering efforts to contain local outbreaks.

 Boris Johnson waves away Labour pleas to exempt NHS staff from the immigration surcharge, saying it would raise money. **The next day he backs down.**

By the end of May over
38,000
people have died from coronavirus in the UK.

COVID

timeline 2020/21

June

Latest figures reveal that the
£12 bn
outsourced Test and Trace system is failing to reach one third of people who have tested positive for COVID-19.

£ The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development predicts that Britain will suffer more economic damage than any other country in the developed world.

U Despite a popular campaign led by the Manchester United footballer Marcus Rashford, the Government refuses to fund free school meals during the summer holidays.
The next day, they back down.

Following a spike in cases in Leicester, Health Secretary Matt Hancock announces the reintroduction of stricter lockdown measures for the city.

July

Councils estimate their coronavirus costs to have hit £ 6.1 bn by 31st July.

Emergency funding from government to date is just **£3.7bn**, leaving an unfunded gap of at least **£2.4bn** – a gap that rises to over **£7bn** by the end of the year.

August

U On A-level results day teachers have almost 40% of their A-level assessments downgraded by an algorithm defended by education secretary Gavin Williamson, who says there would be “no U-turn, no change”.
Two days later the government does a U-turn, and changes back to teacher assessed grades.

Frustrated at the failure of the government’s Test and Trace system many councils launch their own locally-supported contact tracing arrangements. Figures immediately show they have much more success at reaching complex close contacts of positive cases, despite the national system’s failure to supply prompt information on who they should be trying to contact.

September

R The R value, which measures the virus’s ability to spread, rises above 1 across the UK for the first time since early March prompting fears of a second wave of the virus.

Three months later than promised, the government releases its new contact tracing app. The developers later admitted the app had not been able to link more than 60,000 coronavirus tests carried out in England - a third of the total - to its systems.

October

R The R number rises to between **1.3** and **1.6**. Labour Party leader Keir Starmer urges the government to impose a two or three week period of lockdown in England so that the country does not “sleepwalk into... a bleak winter”. Boris Johnson refuses, poking fun at the suggestion.

Two weeks later the government finally announces a second four-week lockdown.

COVID timeline 2020/21

November



Boris Johnson again refuses to feed children from poorer backgrounds during school holidays. **After dozens of Labour councils step up with plans to feed hungry children, and under further pressure from Marcus Rashford, he is again forced into a U-turn.**

New figures show that local council health protection teams reach 99.1% of contacts who were asked to self-isolate, compared to just 59 per cent of contacts managed by the national system.

Local councils ask government to be given the chance to 'act shoulder-to-shoulder with the NHS in the distribution of a vaccine', warning that this will be too big a logistical task for the NHS to do on its own. Their calls are not answered.

A report from the House of Lords Public Services Committee notes that councils developed 'remarkable innovations to meet the COVID-19 challenge', but attacks the government for 'over-centralised delivery of public services' and 'poor communication from the centre'.

December

The first effective vaccine is approved for use in the UK, and a mass vaccination programme begins. By the end of December 786,000 people have received a vaccine dose.



Boris Johnson mocks Keir Starmer for wanting to "cancel Christmas" when he raises concerns about the spread of coronavirus over the holiday period, and Education secretary Gavin Williamson issues legal proceedings against Labour councils that advise schools close early to reduce the spread of the virus. **Just three days later, the Prime Minister is forced to cancel Christmas due to rising infections, giving families little notice to make alternative plans.**

2020 ends – a year in which over 82,000 people died from coronavirus in the UK.

January '21



Despite safety concerns, the government insists that most schools must reopen on Monday 4th January. **Later that day the Prime Minister announces that schools must close on Tuesday 5th January for at least six weeks, as part of a third national lockdown.**

Celebrating our councils and communities

CLlr Anntoinette Bramble

Deputy Leader of the LGA Labour Group and Deputy Mayor of Hackney Council

We have seen the very best from our communities and councils despite the challenging circumstances of the last twelve months. In March, councils, community leaders, groups and individuals across the country quickly stepped up to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and lockdown, not knowing how long this would last. Almost a year later, we are all still constantly readjusting the work that we do to respond to an ever evolving situation, whether it be the introduction of the Tier system, the November lockdown, the new Tier 4, or the lack of leadership shown by the government over school closures.

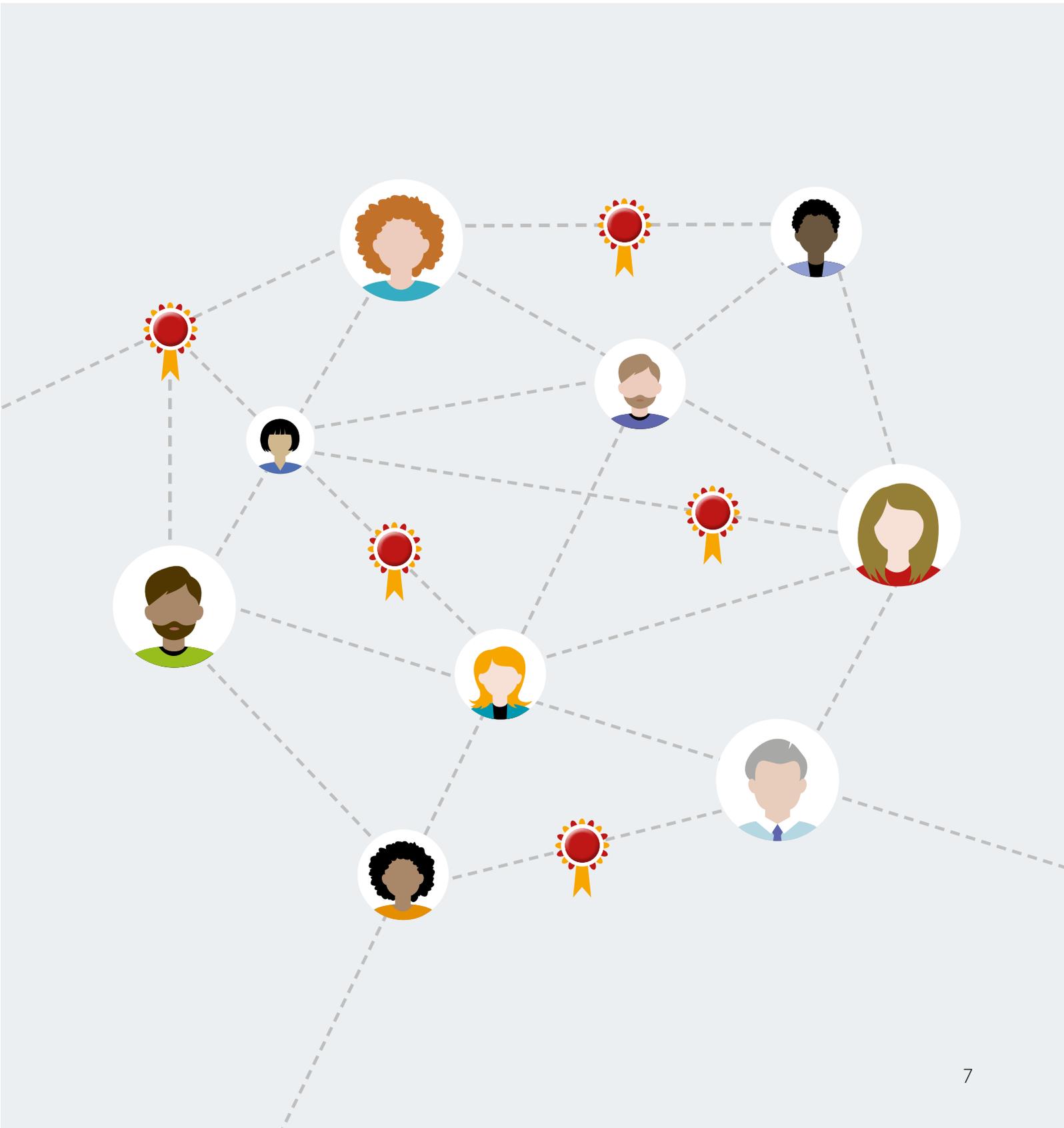


Looking at the last twelve months, it is only right that we honour some of our “Covid Heroes” who have gone above and beyond to support their communities. Some are Labour councillors who are also key workers, others are council officers who have shown extra dedication during the height of the pandemic. Healthcare workers are included, and we also recognise the work of mutual aid groups, as well as a new community group that sprung up in response to the pandemic.



Labour councils have also risen to the challenge, innovating and adjusting to ensure that residents are still well served despite all the changes we have seen to our day to day lives. We’ve included a range of innovations by Labour councils that have happened in direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic which have improved the day-to-day lives of residents, supported local businesses and helped communities around the country. Our Labour councils have done this despite almost eleven years of Tory austerity, where councils have lost 60p in every £1 of funding, and who were told to do “whatever it takes” to tackle the crisis by the government – but we are still waiting for the funding for this to materialise. I want to thank all those who demonstrate the true heart and spirit of our country, thank you all!

COVID heroes



NOMINATED:
Anjum Munir
Bradford Council



NOMINATED BY:
Bradford Labour Group

Anjum Munir, a Bradford Council officer, supported Council for Mosques (CfM) with funeral services and burials within the Muslim section of Scholemoor Cemetery during the first lockdown. Anjum not only supported the CfM but co-ordinated volunteers, security personal, staff, Funeral Directors and grave diggers. He coordinated access to the cemetery with the security company, ensured social distancing was in place by using the volunteers, and worked with funeral and cemetery staff to secure access to PPE. This was an extremely sensitive role and Anjum went way above what was expected from him and was available constantly without complaint over a three-month period.

NOMINATED:
Raj Modi and team
Whalley Bridge Chemist



NOMINATED BY:
Cllr Kath Thompson,
High Peak Labour Group

Raj Modi and his team from Whalley Bridge Chemist in High Peak have gone above and beyond over the last 16 months.

*In the summer of 2019,
Raj and his team played a key role
in keeping residents safe whilst
the dam above Whalley Bridge was
threatening to collapse, making sure
that medication was still dispensed
to residents who needed it.*

During the pandemic they have continued to go above and beyond, delivering medicines and other essentials to shielding and self-isolating residents. Raj always helps people with queries and problems, working beyond the usual opening hours to do this.

NOMINATED:
Dr Ronx
Homerton Hospital



NOMINATED BY:
Cllr Anntoinette Bramble,
Hackney Labour Group

Dr Ronx is well known across Hackney and there are so many positive things that they have done during the pandemic. During long shifts at Homerton Hospital Dr Ronx read stories to children on the children's ward, made a video modelling how to wash hands thoroughly and to remind people of the social distancing guidelines. Dr Ronx recently did a programme on Channel 4 called "Is COVID racist?" which looked at the disproportionate effect COVID has had on black people and people from other ethnic minorities, and why so many NHS colleagues who died were black.

NOMINATED:
Public Health Team
Oldham Council

NOMINATED BY:
Cllr Eddie Moores, Oldham Labour Group

Oldham Council's Public Health team have gone above and beyond during the pandemic, providing support to the council and the wider community. Katrina Stephens, the Director of Public Health, provides clear and up-to-date information to councillors to inform decision making locally whilst also working with our partners in Greater Manchester and nationally. Rebecca Fletcher, a Public Health Consultant, is a well-recognised name in the community, making herself readily available to schools, businesses and community groups, offering advice that enables them to make informed decisions about how to operate in a Covid secure way. Without their support and advice many of our schools would struggle to remain open and some community services would not be operating.

NOMINATED:

Alva Bailey

*Interim Assistant Director
for Community Safety*



and Sheila Roberts

*Assistant Director
of Licensing and Regulation,
Newham Council*



NOMINATED BY:

**CLlr James Beckles,
Newham Labour Group**

Since the first lockdown Alva and Sheila have been instrumental in leading and coordinating Newham's response to Covid 19, whether tasking community safety officers to patrol public spaces, encouraging people to remain indoors to save lives or monitoring high street shops to ensure they comply with Covid 19 rules. Both lead small teams which have a large impact because of their frontline roles. Sheila's Trading Standards Team won an award after making over 1,400 visits to local businesses between March and August, issuing closure and fixed penalty notices where necessary. Their leadership has ensured that both businesses and residents have confidence in how Covid is being handled in the local area.

NOMINATED:

Witney Baby Bank



NOMINATED BY:

**CLlr Duncan Enright,
West Oxfordshire Labour Group**

Created during the first lockdown, Witney Baby Bank is run by volunteers, who have been raising funds and delivering nappies, baby food and menstrual products to young families across the district. It was set up to ensure that no family or child was left without at a time when many lost their incomes and jobs. Witney Baby Bank has been so popular that they've had to look for a bigger space.



*Witney Baby Bank volunteers
carried out a Christmas Toy Appeal
to ensure that no child in Witney
went without at Christmas.*

NOMINATED:
Cllr Samantha Bellamy
Salford Labour Group



NOMINATED BY:
Cllr Heather Fletcher, Salford Labour Group

In March when the first lockdown started, Cllr Samantha Bellamy, a qualified chef, started cooking extra meals for her close friends and staff in nearby care homes, soon widening her net to provide meals for all veterans in Salford. In May, she took this initiative even further and set up a project called *"For the Love of Food"*. This provides meals for struggling families, pensioners and veterans across Salford. She heads this organisation and together with her team she prepared 1,500 meals a week across Salford in the summer. This has been continued through the autumn and winter with support offered over Christmas for those who need it.

1,500
MEALS A WEEK

NOMINATED:
Zoe Scott
Founder, South Tyneside Mutual Aid



NOMINATED BY:
South Tyneside Labour Group

In response to the coronavirus outbreak and inspired by other Mutual Aid groups, local resident Zoe Scott set up 'South Tyneside Mutual Aid' to safely bring together residents to play their part in the national effort tackling the pandemic. Within weeks, under Zoe's leadership, *South Tyneside Mutual Aid* had successfully mobilised hundreds of local volunteers. Volunteers collect and deliver essential items to the homes of residents in need, and a buddy system matches volunteers to local people struggling with social isolation and mental wellbeing. Zoe prioritised volunteer and resident safety, ensuring all volunteers working with vulnerable residents have the necessary DBS checks. Hundreds of residents have been supported during the lockdown and beyond thanks to Zoe and the team.



NOMINATED:
Cllr Adorabelle Shaikh
and **Cllr Imtiyaz Shaikh**
Swindon Labour Group

NOMINATED BY:
Cllr Jim Robbins, Swindon Labour Group



Councillors Adorabelle and Imtiyaz Shaikh represent two wards in Swindon with large BME populations. When Swindon saw a spike in cases in August, the BME community was disproportionately affected. They both worked closely with the Public Health team to understand the challenge, and then created a series of videos targeting the BME community to ensure that the right messages went directly to the affected communities. The videos were very successful in allowing the council to communicate with those who don't usually engage with traditional council communications. Through their work, they played a key role in Swindon getting on top of the spike in cases.

Labour councillors working as

COVID heroes

Throughout the pandemic Labour councillors have been working hard in their roles as councillors, whilst often juggling full time jobs and other commitments. Some Labour councillors have been working as key workers alongside representing their communities in some of the most challenging times.

Cllr Joanna West

Cllr Joanna West is a Derby City councillor and is an active member of the Central England Cooperative Membership Committee. At the start of lockdown, committee members were asked to help in the shops where needed due to the pressures created by increased demand for food and staff having to isolate.



Joanne worked in a village store and stocked shelves, cleaned fridges and freezers, scanned labels for new products and cleaned baskets for customers as they came into the store. She has spoken of her pride at doing this work at such an important time and praised her retail colleagues for adapting to new and difficult situations quickly.

Cllr Pauline George



Cllr Pauline George is a Lambeth councillor who works as an Intensive Care Nurse at Lewisham Hospital. During the first wave of the pandemic she worked long shifts in intensive care, doing work such as adjusting ventilators, monitoring oxygen levels and checking kidney function, as well as carrying out personal care for the patients, making it physically demanding and mentally intense work. Despite the nature of the work, Pauline signed up for shifts in other hospitals in London to support their teams and play a crucial role in the fight against Covid.

Cllr Julie Gibson

Cllr Julie Gibson is a Lancashire County Councillor and she works as a postwoman. There has been an increased pressure on the postal service throughout the pandemic, not only due to staff isolating, but due to the increased demand amount of post being sent as people stay at home and order online. Julie took the time to talk to people she was delivering post to, recognising that a lot of them were isolated and living alone so needed someone to talk to. She was also able to direct people to council services if they needed them, combining her job as a postal worker and a role as a councillor.

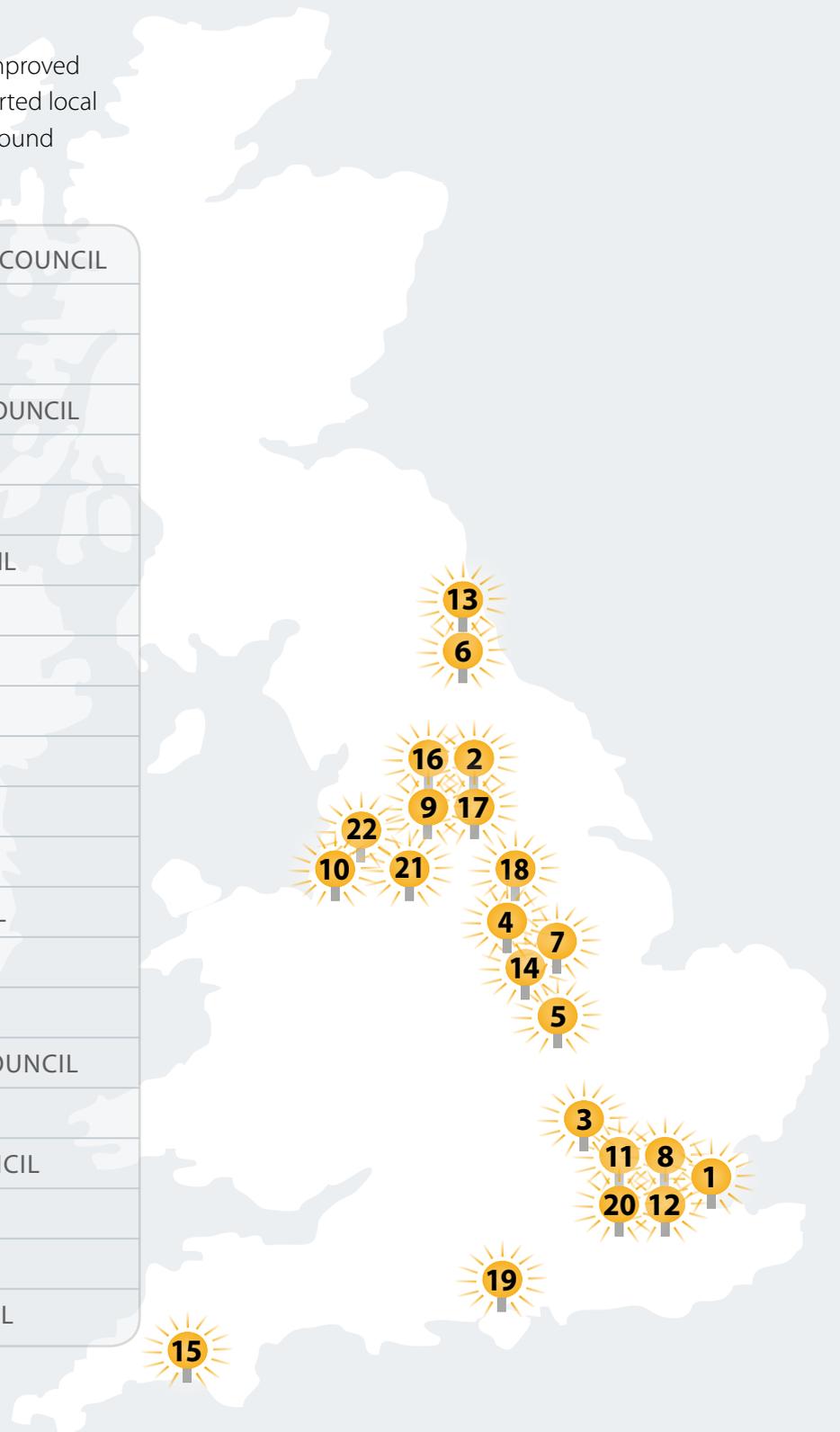


COVID

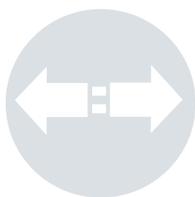
innovations

Innovations by Labour councils have improved the day-to-day lives of residents, supported local businesses and helped communities around the country. These councils include:

1	BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL
2	BRADFORD COUNCIL
3	BRENT COUNCIL
4	CHESTERFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
5	CORBY BOROUGH COUNCIL
6	DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL
7	GEDLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
8	HACKNEY COUNCIL
9	KIRKLEES COUNCIL
10	KNOWSLEY COUNCIL
11	LAMBETH COUNCIL
12	LEWISHAM COUNCIL
13	NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL
14	NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
15	PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL
16	ROCHDALE COUNCIL
17	ROSSENDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL
18	ROTHERHAM COUNCIL
19	SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
20	SOUTHWARK COUNCIL
21	STOCKPORT COUNCIL
22	WEST LANCASHIRE COUNCIL



BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL Covid Communications



Barking and Dagenham Council has taken a number of steps to communicate information about Covid in a clear and concise manner to residents. These have included using the fleet of electric vehicles to drive round neighbourhoods with tannoy machines attached so that key messages about Covid could be communicated over the tannoys, writing to residents in wards where cases were rising reminding them of social distancing measures, daily video updates from the Leader during the first lockdown, and monthly "Leader Live" sessions where residents could ask questions of the Leader via social media.

BRADFORD COUNCIL Covid Ambassadors



Bradford is the UK's youngest city and the council recruited a team of Young Covid Ambassadors (YCA's). They prevent the spread of Covid-19; educate their peers on how to be safe and help respond to the impact of Covid-19 is having.

Their slogan is 'YOUth lead the way' - reflective of their ability as role models to change young people's behaviour.

The YCA's are creating, shaping and delivering campaigns, strategies and direct outreach work with young people. They know the barriers faced by young people and what resonates with them. In addition to a comprehensive induction programme, YCA's have received social media; culture change training and a behavioural science workshop.

BRENT COUNCIL Hyperlocal Testing

Despite the increased risk of infection, staying at home was not an option for residents in frontline roles or those struggling from paycheque to paycheque. Brent Council worked closely with the Department for Health and Social Care to establish the UK's first hyperlocal testing centre in Harlesden to screen those in high-contact professions, such as taxi drivers, cleaners and retail and hospitality workers. Harlesden is an area which has been hit hard by COVID-19, but with 3,217 tests booked through the council's own system we're doing all we can to protect these frontline workers in our borough.

3,217
TESTS WERE BOOKED
through Brent Council's own system

CHESTERFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL Santa Claus is Zooming to Town



Chesterfield Borough Council wanted to spread some Christmas cheer, so they created the magical amazing Santa house and elf trail. The 'Santa Zoomer' provides a direct link from the North Pole to Chesterfield. Families have an augmented reality experience in which Santa magically appears with them. This is all captured on video, a copy of which is sent to their e-mail to share with family and friends. The Chesterfield elves aren't letting Santa have all the fun. They appear across the town leaving clues for families to follow their trail.

CORBY BOROUGH COUNCIL Tackling Holiday Hunger

Following the Government announcement that free school meals would not be provided over the school holidays, putting vulnerable children in danger of going hungry, Corby Borough Council announced that they would fund free school meals for local children to ensure that no child went hungry. They partnered with a local community centre to provide hot and cold meal options that could be eaten in or taken away, and a delivery service was organised for those who couldn't leave their houses.

In October half term, nearly 700 meals were handed out to local children, funded by the cancellation of the annual fireworks display.

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL Support for Voluntary and Community Groups

Following the start of the pandemic, Durham County Council took the decision to provide additional grant funding to voluntary and community groups who would be more important than ever across the county. Many had lost key sources of income overnight.

£100,000
was allocated to each of the 14 Area Action Partnerships to award grants of between £1,000 and £15,000.

Grants have been used to fund a wide range of support including supplying food parcels and hot meals, provision of activity packs for children and support for foodbanks. In total approximately 300 grants comprising **£1.2 million** of support have been awarded across County Durham.

GEDLING BOROUGH COUNCIL Humanitarian Centre

In response to the pandemic, Gedling Borough Council created a humanitarian centre at a local leisure centre and began a complex operation to support the most vulnerable residents. Within days, the council created a fundraising appeal, raising over **£20,000** in 24 hours to support local foodbanks, recruited over 500 volunteers and issued thousands of food parcels. In October, in response to the second wave of infections and in support of Marcus Rashford's **Free School Meals** campaign, the council raised a further **£10,000** and in December, provided over 600 Christmas food and wellbeing parcels to families who needed support over the winter period.



HACKNEY COUNCIL Greener Hackney



The first lockdown allowed people to experience streets dominated by people, not cars. As the country reopened, and people avoided public transport, there was a risk of an increase in polluting car use.

Hackney introduced three Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, creating through-traffic free areas, where walking, cycling and public transport are promoted while maintaining access.

70% of households in Hackney do not own a car, and only 21% of traffic in Hackney is 'internal' - meaning it starts and ends in the Borough - so LTNs stopped this through-traffic from using Hackney's streets as shortcuts.

KIRKLEES COUNCIL Heart Your Town



The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult time for creative professionals, especially as many of them didn't qualify for financial support from the government. As part of our town centre recovery, Kirklees Council invested in 14 local artists to bring colour and creativity to our town centres. #HEARTyourtown was a creative response to brighten up Huddersfield and Dewsbury and enhance public spaces to be enjoyed in a socially distant way, making visits less stressful and more pleasurable.

KNOWSLEY COUNCIL Growth Hub



Working in partnership with Knowsley Chamber of Commerce, Knowsley Council launched a dedicated helpline for businesses in March 2020.

Open seven days a week, the "Growth Hub" team has responded to local businesses and provided specialist advice and support throughout the pandemic.

Providing a seamless service for businesses to access advice and support has been vital in protecting jobs and ensuring the strongest basis for local economic recovery. In partnership with Knowsley Chamber, the Council has capitalised on strong links with the business community to identify and ensure successful applications for businesses support grant schemes.

LAMBETH COUNCIL Digital Inclusion Fund

Covid-19 has highlighted how technology is now essential for access to and the delivery of the services provided to residents. Digital inclusion is essential for helping the council, residents and businesses to stay connected, learn, keep well, access help and advise and be engaged in society. Lambeth Council launched a **£200,000 Digital Inclusion Fund** to help voluntary and community sector organisations and schools to address digital poverty and get those who need it most connected online. The **Digital Inclusion Fund** is part of Lambeth's forthcoming Digital Strategy – going beyond 'getting online' and aiming to improve the infrastructure that underpins it.

LEWISHAM COUNCIL 100 in a 100 Campaign

To support Lewisham's economic recovery the **Mayor's Apprenticeship Programme** decided to advertise 100 apprenticeships in 100 days. Over 150 vacancies were advertised, with the council working with almost 50 local employers. Importantly, the council also started paying the London Living Wage for apprenticeships in April and transferred some of its Apprenticeship Levy to support 25 positions at local organisations. Opportunities have been made available in health care, education, publishing, housing, digital, publishing, marketing, administration, accountancy, horticulture, plumbing, property maintenance and more.

NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL CityLife Line

Newcastle City Council set up **CityLife Line** to coordinate asks and offers of help in our local community in response to poor Government support for those shielding. A Freephone number and email address were staffed by redeployed council staff. Volunteers were recruited and coordinated with bespoke software co-designed with local digital entrepreneurs. This matched volunteers to their nearest neighbour needing help - building lasting contacts and friendships. The **CityLife Line** has helped people with food, dog walking and medication collections. The service recently expanded to coordinate offers of free school meals during the half term holidays.

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL Strengthening Food Partnerships



This pandemic has exposed and exacerbated food poverty in the city. Nottingham already had many passionate and committed food groups supporting vulnerable people and families across the city but the surge in demand for food banks meant that small groups were at risk of being overwhelmed. The council developed seven partnership areas bringing together local groups and connecting them to each other, to the council and to a national network, *FareShare*. Over 200 projects and volunteers were brought together and delivery services reviewed and improved. The city has a strengthened approach to tackle food inequality over the pandemic and as we plan for a fairer recovery.

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL Young Carers



Community Connections Youth Work Team work with over 90 young carers across Plymouth. The Young Carer's sessions aim to provide them with a safe space and support with their emotional well-being alongside combating isolation. The team did not want this to stop due to Covid-19, so brought the sessions into homes instead. From March to September the team created and delivered packages to each young carer to promote wellbeing as well as providing a distraction in these challenging times.

Each week the package contained a different activity including creative, baking and mindfulness activities. It was important for the young carers to feel supported and valued.

ROCHDALE COUNCIL Pay boost for frontline workers



Carers have put their lives on the line looking after the most vulnerable during the pandemic. So, rather than just clap them once a week, Rochdale Council negotiated with all the borough's care providers to increase their pay. Thousands of low-paid workers will now receive a pay boost to £9.50 an hour – calculated independently by the Living Wage Foundation. The pay boost is the least they deserved for their life-saving work on the frontline in response to the pandemic.

ROSSENDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL Covid Business Advisor

Rossendale Borough Council have been in national and local lockdown restrictions for virtually the whole of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Rossendale was the first district council in the region to employ a Covid Business Advisor to support local businesses.

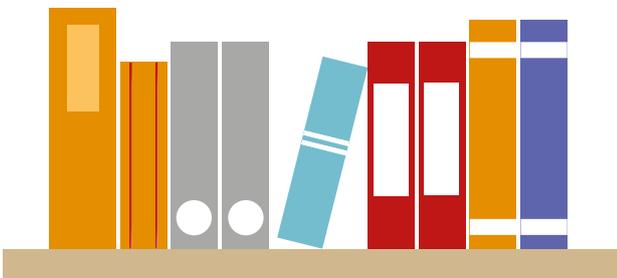
They have had direct contact with over 200 businesses, offering practical business recovery support, signposting to grant funding and running recovery webinars. So far they have enabled one large business to relocate to safeguard jobs and supported a significant number of others to make the move to online, comply with Covid restrictions and explore business restructuring.



ROTHERHAM COUNCIL

Well Read

During lockdown, an extensive **£1.4 million** investment programme of capital improvement was begun in Rotherham's libraries with upgrades on digital provision, refreshment and toilet facilities, signage and furnishings. A *Call and Collect Service* was also introduced and a telephone welfare check system for known vulnerable users. *Pop-up Libraries* in parks allowed a different access route and working with the Book Trust they delivered book packs to vulnerable families across Rotherham. Library staff are now looking to support clinically vulnerable residents via Skype and Zoom to reduce isolation. A new Library Strategy for 2021-26 builds on the 99.1% satisfaction ratings received from customers.



SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

Inside Out Initiative

Southampton City Council, the Business Improvement District and other stakeholders set up a new initiative called '*Southampton Inside Out*' which aimed to make it easier for businesses in the hospitality sector to create more outside seating. A pedestrianisation scheme was implemented in Bedford Place, a city centre shopping and hospitality area. Parts of the road were temporarily closed and traffic redirected to create more outdoor seating. The new pedestrianised spaces were allocated using planters and concrete bollards decorated by local artists and 52 outdoor dining licences have been issued.

The measures provided a safer, more spacious environment and enable people to follow social distancing guidelines with greater ease.

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

The Nest

*Southwark launched a **FREE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE FOR 11-25 YEAR OLDS** during the pandemic as part of our ambition to ensure 100 per cent of children in the borough receive the mental health support they need.*

The service is accessible to all, without needing a professional referral, and was initially launched online but now offers in-person appointments. The Nest has quickly established itself as a safe and supportive space for young people, which is particularly needed at a time when the pandemic has taken its toll on people's mental health.



STOCKPORT COUNCIL

Jobs Match

Stockport Council created a *Jobs Match* website during the first lockdown to support those out of work or facing the prospect of unemployment due to Covid-19. The website attempts to bridge the barriers between unemployed residents and employers with an offer of jobs, employment and work opportunities and careers advice. The website currently has over 1,000 jobs advertised from 180 employers or recruiters.

WEST LANCASHIRE COUNCIL

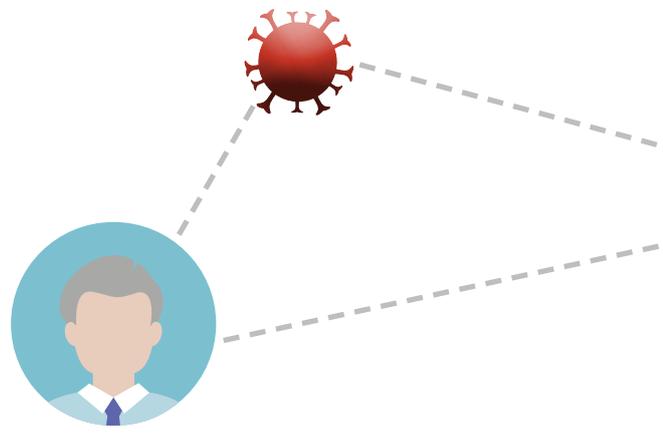
Waste Management

During the first lockdown, residents raised concerns with West Lancashire Borough Council that the decision by Lancashire County Council's decision to close *Household Waste Recycling Centres* (HWRCs) would lead to large amounts of waste building up at their homes. The council responded by providing skips in all 25 wards in the borough, in which 927.2 tonnes of waste were collected during the lockdown. Feedback from residents was overwhelmingly positive, with many grateful that this was available whilst the HWRCs were closed.

Adult Social care

Cllr Paulette Hamilton

*Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care,
Birmingham City Council*



It was Boris Johnson's first speech as Prime Minister, in June 2019: 'I am announcing now – on the steps of Downing Street – that we will fix the crisis in social care once and for all, and with a clear plan we have prepared to give every older person the dignity and security they deserve'. Eighteen months later it is clear that it was nothing less than a lie: no such plan ever even existed, and tens of thousands of vulnerable people have died, victims of a virus that has cruelly exposed the appalling state into which social care has been allowed to wither.

This global pandemic has of course tested the resilience of even the best social care systems – but over the last year it has clearly demonstrated the key problems with our own care systems: misunderstood, overly centralised, and criminally underfunded.

Coronavirus seemed to suddenly hit our country like a sledgehammer. Everything seemed to change overnight, with millions of people suddenly working from home, and every pub, restaurant, and non-essential retail outlet closed. But the social care system can't work from home. Hundreds of thousands of care staff – many on minimum wage – continued to offer care and support to the vulnerable despite the obvious personal risks. Many others also rose to the challenge, especially the community, voluntary and faith sectors – from carrying out 'safe and well' checks and wellbeing calls, to delivering food to those shielding and needing extra support.

An immediate problem was the national failure to provide Personal Protective Equipment.



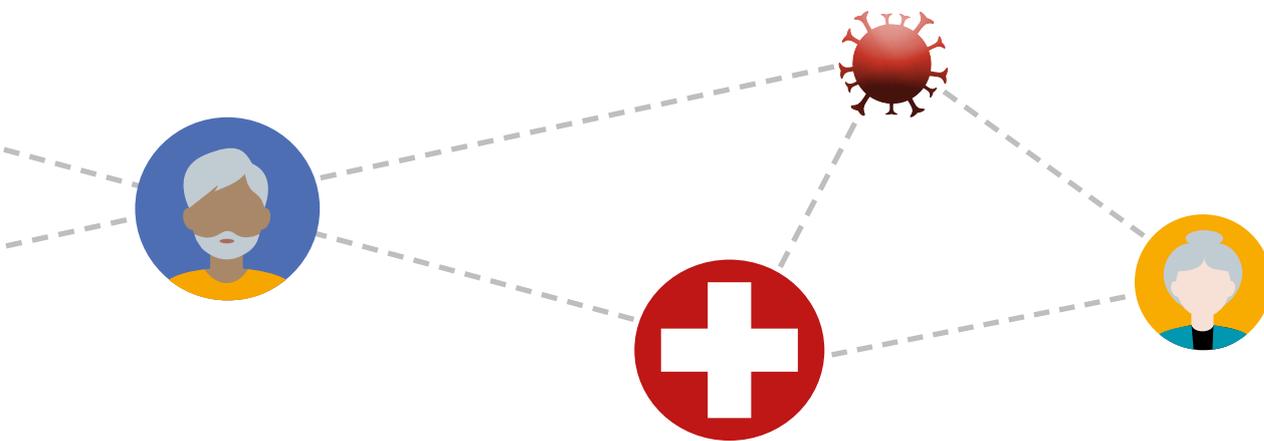
For many months, local councils and our care providers struggled to get the supplies of the PPE needed.

The national pandemic stockpile turned out to be too small, and in poor condition.

Some of the emergency PPE supplies procured by Whitehall turned out to be useless as they didn't meet safety standards.

The 'Amazon-style PPE supply system' repeatedly promised by ministers simply never appeared.

Councils were forced to step in - working with local partners to ensure they received PPE.



Evidence emerged that national decision makers simply did not understand the role of social care, but instead just treated it as an extension of the NHS. The forced decanting of sick elderly people from NHS hospital beds and into care homes, without testing them for coronavirus, led to thousands of preventable care home deaths. This rightly garnered huge media coverage, but there was little understanding that most recipients of social care don't live in care homes, but their own homes – and that domiciliary care workers needed support too.

The long-term problem with social care is a lack of funding. The pandemic amplified these deficits, but they existed before the pandemic hit.

Local councils' tightening of eligibility criteria since 2010, in response to huge Whitehall cuts to their budgets, means about

1.4 MILLION

people who currently need help don't get it. Providing the care these people need would cost at least £8bn a year in England, and to go further, for instance to introduce free personal care for everyone, would likely cost a further £7bn.

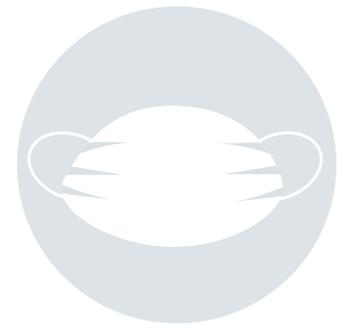
The failure of Test and Trace

Perhaps the most disastrous example of the governments failure to work with local government was the failure of the Test and Trace system. An effective system should have been central to efforts to control the virus until a vaccine could be rolled out. Councils are already responsible for public health, and had the local knowledge and expertise needed to make contact tracing a success. Councils' pleas to lead test and trace were ignored by health ministers, who instead spent **£22 billion** on a centralised private sector-run system that simply never worked – and lost control of the virus as a result.

Councils that set up their own systems immediately showed why this decision was so catastrophic, using their local knowledge to successfully trace cases that the national system couldn't. The difference was stark: in October the national test and trace system managed to trace just 54% of reported contacts – but in the same month councils were able to trace 97% of these missing contacts.

Coronavirus may have highlighted the fault lines in our social care system, but they existed before the virus did, and Boris Johnson did nothing to address them. The Conservatives' repeated mishandling of this crisis shows they can't be trusted to correct their mistakes. It will be up to us to learn the lessons of the past year and produce a genuine plan to fix our broken system. Local government again stands ready to lead the way.

How Bradford managed their Covid-19 response



Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe

Leader of Bradford City Council

A woman regularly emails me as Leader of the Council, telling me exactly what she thinks. I've never met her, she doesn't want to meet me and insists she wants no help, but in the meantime she's become one of my barometers of how people are really feeling in the Bradford district. She's expressed varying degrees of fear, anger, confusion and frustration over that time and serves as a reminder, if one were needed, that people's mental health is being badly affected after many months now of living in local restrictions in West Yorkshire. One of her recent emails to me said: "People are at end of their tether now and it's getting to the point where people can't take anymore. There's nothing to look forward to, it's not a life".

As local leaders we hear people's concerns even down to street level. We are connected to our communities. With the best will in the world, that's something a national system parachuted in from Westminster will never have. We recognised early on in Bradford that this local knowledge would be a vital tool.



Bradford is a big and diverse place, a key worker city where most people can't work from home. We have significant ethnic minority populations, who we know have been disproportionately affected. Our response therefore had to be locally-led and fleet-footed to reflect the needs of the communities we serve.



Covid is like a heat-seeking missile, it can quickly pass from person to person, until infection levels are rising at an alarming rate.



When the first cases emerged, we quickly mobilised the first response: regular briefings were set up with our public health experts, teams were equipped to work from home and we got those first messages out to the public to wash hands, clean surfaces and "catch it, bin it, kill it".

CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT!

We are fortunate in Bradford to have strong expertise, including the world-leading *Born in Bradford* project led by epidemiologist, Professor John Wright with a background in setting up public health systems in the UK and overseas. We immediately knew the importance of an intelligence-led, localised approach.

In those early days we set up our own testing site with local health agencies primarily to test care workers. In the following weeks Government set up three testing sites, including a walk-in centre in the heart of the city at Centenary Square and another at Victoria Hall in Keighley. We also had mobile testing units and gained permission from PHE to go out with door-to-door home testing kits to pick up asymptomatic cases in areas with high rates of transmission, sending trusted figures into those communities in advance to build a rapport and reaching as many as 600 tests a day.

In August we were one of the first 10 local authorities in the country to start local contact tracing, investing

£1.6m

in our local test and trace

It became clear that the national system was only reaching 72% of cases, with gaps in the method. Our local test and trace seeks to contact all those positive cases not traced through the national system and this has led to more success, the two combined reaching a current rate of 84% exceeding the Public Health England target. We have employed 60 contact tracers making as many as 180 calls a day.

The local test and trace approach doesn't stop there. We also offer support to individuals to self-isolate and give detailed knowledge of the practical support available locally. We have lobbied government to increase the financial support for people self-isolating. We have increased our door-knocking to reach

many of those who have not responded by phone. The feedback we get on the doorstep also gives insight into the attitudes and beliefs in different neighbourhoods, feeding in to the intelligence-led weekly reports to the Outbreak Control Board. We have invested in neighbourhood wardens and youth services, worked with our VCS partners and ramped up enforcement to support the four-pronged strategy: Engagement; Education; Support to Isolate; and Support to Access Testing.

The highest infection rate to date in the Bradford district was recorded on the 7-day period ending 7th November at 596.4 cases per 100,000, an average of 460 cases per day, which at the time of writing in early December has come down to 199.3 cases per 100,000, an average of 154 cases per day. We cannot be complacent. And our work is underway to support the rollout of vaccines.

Government must learn the lessons from their hesitancy in supporting local test and trace; this time they must involve local government in the vaccination roll-out from the outset.

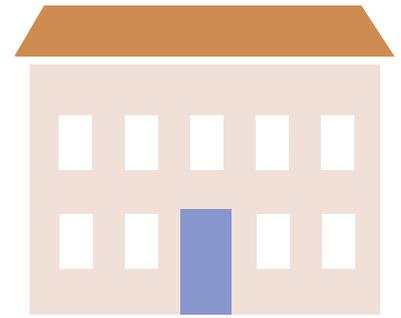
I think back to the woman who emails me and tells me her worries, and other residents who do the same. As councillors we know our communities. That knowledge underpins the relentless work of a locally-led public health partnership dovetailing with a national approach which will, ultimately, save lives. That has always been our number one priority. Every single death from Covid-19 is a tragedy. This virus has exposed the inequalities in our nation – and our recovery must focus on fundamentally tackling them.



Everyone In – building a better Bristol

Mayor Marvin Rees

Mayor of Bristol



Since the *Everyone In* initiative started, Bristol has placed some 1,200 people into accommodation, giving them the stability they need and deserve. Two-thirds remain either in accommodation or have moved into sustainable social, supported, or private housing – including modular homes. Bristol has continued to be pro-active in this spirit. We have secured some funding but it does not go nearly far enough to enable us to end homelessness in the city, with all the enduring uncertainty that entails for people affected and their mental health.

We continue to provide accommodation regardless of vulnerability or recourse to public funds and, during the first lockdown, helped 700 families keep a roof over their head through emergency housing payments.

Tens of thousands have relied on our full council tax reduction scheme, comprising a tenth of our revenue budget, with a

400%

spike in applications earlier in the pandemic.

With Bristol families increasingly not knowing how to make ends meet, we have doubled our local crisis prevention fund budget for essentials like food, fuel, and school uniform.

Like ever more families' finances, councils are at or approaching breaking point – knowing that the books must be balanced, but not how. After ten years of austerity, councils need more funding for such crucial interventions or else limited resources will need to be refocused once again.

Just as the challenge of homelessness runs deeper than rough sleeping, as we know, the challenge of housing is complex.

Bristol has 13,000 families on our council housing waiting list, with 30,000 affordable homes needed by 2036 to keep up with population growth.

Over 900 households in Bristol are living in temporary accommodation – 50% higher than before the first national lockdown.



Our administration's priority has been to get Bristol building, and so some

9,000

NEW HOMES

have been built in Bristol since 2016.

We are still on course to deliver 500 new affordable homes this year, despite the national uncertainty for the construction sector due to not one but two delayed exits from the European Union in 2019. Against the odds, that's five times more than some years under the previous administration and the first time that so many have been built in a decade. It will be all the more remarkable an achievement given frequent opposition delay tactics, which at times seem to suggest more interest in creating headlines than building homes.

We need the right homes in the right places: good quality for exactly the reasons we set out to build them. Land can only be used once, so must be utilised for maximum benefit – which can mean master-planning rather than a rush to development which often resembles a race to the bottom. Small, expensive, or badly designed homes will lock in the social problems, and resulting impacts appear in council services as well as the NHS and criminal justice system and other public services. The uneven distribution of Covid in lower-income and BAME communities shows how poor housing conditions influence everything else in life.

Bad homes can cause people's lives to spiral but building good quality homes in the right way, in the right place, can be the closest thing we have to a policy panacea.

Progress has been possible, despite a tough few years – with Brexit uncertainty, the pandemic, and more Brexit uncertainty hitting the sector hard. We face similar further challenges. The need for good, affordable homes is rising as sharply as pressure on our budgets, local services, and infrastructure. All with the climate and ecological emergencies facing us, and our ambition of a carbon neutral Bristol by 2030, and the latest red herring of planning reform.

Bristol continues with an all-of-the-above approach, innovating and learning from best practice by councils here and internationally. Our Housing Festival exemplifies this approach and provoked a city-wide conversation about fixing the broken housing market.

Last summer, a crane lowered into place eleven self-contained homes on stilts over a car park in East Bristol – all built off-site to the highest energy efficiency standards.

Our hope is that there will be a clear and sustainable funding settlement for homelessness, so that we never return to the endless bidding-and-waiting bingo structure; otherwise uncertainty will continue to compound crises, with all that means for councils and those depending on us to help end this injustice.

Local Government Finance and the Covid-19 pandemic

Cllr Richard Watts

Leader of Islington Council

It has been, rightly, repeated many times by those in local government over the past few months that at the start of the pandemic, the Government called for councils to do “whatever it takes” and the Government would foot the bill. I would imagine the Secretary of State regrets those words nearly as much as he regrets sitting beside Richard Desmond at the infamous dinner last year. However, the story that hasn’t been told enough is the consequences that are already being felt by councils across the country who moved heaven and earth to keep people safe from the virus and have been left with budget gaps as a result.

Labour councils up and down the country acted swiftly to put a number of measures in place to protect local people. In my own borough of Islington, we immediately set up our *We Are Islington* helpline, which initially contacted those who were shielding to make sure they had all the help they needed.

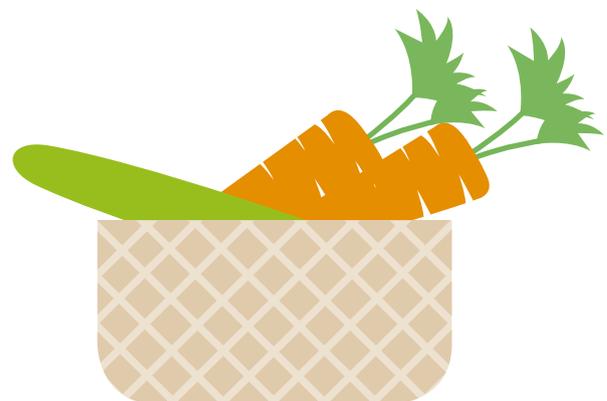
The We Are Islington helpline evolved into a one-stop-shop where local people could call up and access food, medicine, advice or financial support for themselves or their loved ones.

This was all whilst maintaining the essential services local people need. Labour councils across the country have brought public services in-house in recent years. This has meant we have had greater control over local services and allowed us to keep more of them running, rather than relying on private companies.

This includes recycling and rubbish collections continuing as normal, libraries moved to online services and schools teams distributing laptops to children who were remote learning, despite broken promises of more laptops from the DfE.



Labour in local government also used grants to give the least well-off residents money off their Council Tax bill and offered rent holidays to our smallest businesses.





As my borough is the most densely-populated borough in the country, we know that many residents do not have easy access to green space so we were determined to keep our borough's parks and fields open for use. This was vital for local people's wellbeing throughout the pandemic.

All councils have also seen income dramatically fall, as there was much less parking, no leisure services and the aforementioned commercial rent holiday. But Labour councils everywhere have stepped up because local people needed us.



We were delighted when the Government told us we would be fully reimbursed and we took them at their word. Unfortunately, since then, it has been a series of backtracks, empty promises and partial funding. We have seen a drip-drip of government announcements which have barely touched the surface of the cash needed, gaslighting from the government about how

councils couldn't expect funding for everything they'd spent and a series of Government contracts that have wasted public money on their private sector mates.

Now, councils across the country are left facing an upcoming budget process which is going to mean more savings having to be made. I can say that we have seen in Islington, after ten years of Tory austerity which has decimated local government finance, trying to find savings which don't harm local services is harder than ever.

Since 2010, local government has been forced to work under constant austerity, making savings, finding efficiencies and taking tough decisions. Since then, we have worked extremely hard to deliver balanced budgets, working against cuts in funding to make our borough a fairer place. I am proud to say we continue to do that but it is becoming harder each year as austerity continues for local government.

We will see difficult decisions made in the coming months across the country as dedicated councils try their best to keep providing the services local people need. I can only hope that the Government finally sees sense and stops trying to make us do this with one hand tied behind our backs. However, I'm not banking on it.

The zoom where it happens

Cllr Alice Perry

Islington Council, Labour's NEC



The LGA Labour Group often talks about how to increase diversity in local government and make politics more accessible to those we represent. Labour councillors often talk about the barriers that prevent more women, BAME, disabled and working class candidates from getting more involved in politics. One barrier can be political and council meetings themselves, which can take place at inconvenient times, in inaccessible or inconvenient locations, and use archaic and confusing formats.

The speed of the lockdown meant millions of us have been forced to embrace video conferencing to see our family and friends and pushed face to face meetings online – and local government was no exception.

It has improved connections between local politicians from across the UK too. Attendance at our LGA Labour group meetings has rocketed – with people no longer needing to travel hours by train to take part, and has helped us hear from an even broader and more diverse range of voices.

Whilst this was challenging and disorientating at first, most councils and Labour groups adapted quickly – and an unexpected bonus has been that attendance and participation in many meetings has dramatically increased. I was surprised and delighted when my own borough's first online planning committee meeting was attended by over 70 members of the public. It is refreshing and important that meetings have suddenly become more accessible, giving more opportunities for people to input into discussions that will shape their communities.





LGA Labour leader Nick Forbes has been able to convene weekly meetings of Labour councillors and leaders to discuss and coordinate our collective COVID-19 response, helping us to share intelligence and best practice. This kind of meeting would have been very challenging to arrange face-to-face even in normal times. Being able to quickly discuss important issues and take soundings from a range of opinions strengthens us collectively, from dealing with national government, oppositions parties, and internally within the Labour Party.

In recent years, Labour groups across the country have been championing parental leave policies.

When I had a baby a few years ago, I was so grateful for the support of our group and our maternity leave policy. It was a shame, though, that during that period, I was not able to fully participate in Council or Labour Party meetings and discussions while I spent months at home – feeling a bit isolated – feeding a baby for hours on end.

Labour Party meetings have also been taking place online. I recently chaired a National Policy Forum policy commission meeting that had **4 OR 5 TIMES** as many people attending as compared to our London based meetings.

No one should lose their political voice when they have a child and if I'd been able to attend meetings remotely it would have transformed the experience.

Branch and GC meetings have been more of a mixed bag, although I understand ward chairs are enjoying having a mute button and feedback from *Labour Women's Network* and *Disability Labour* suggest that these online meetings do make meetings more accessible.

Labour's democracy review included a recommendation for group meetings to offer provisions for councillors to attend remotely to ensure that everyone is able to participate. This would support people taking parental leave, as well as those with caring responsibilities or shift workers.

For hundreds of years, the 'room where it happens' has been inaccessible to ordinary people, because of their working or family life, or simply because the distances are too great. It is vital that now that we have seen the benefits of making decisions in 'the Zoom where it happens' instead, we'll keep provisions for online meeting attendance and make local democracy more accessible to everyone.

Putting public health at the heart of Transport and Air Quality

Cllr Arlene Ainsley

Cabinet Member for Transport and Air Quality, Newcastle City Council

In Newcastle, this is the fourth year of the Transport and Air Quality portfolio. Within that time emphasis has shifted towards decarbonisation and the importance of air quality's impact on public health. Transport is responsible for around a third of our city's carbon emissions. The link between transport and our city's environmental, economic, and social health is clear, the design of places plays an important role in helping people make healthier transport choices for them and their families.

It's transport's role to help meet a city's needs, not compete with it. I feel that the right way of framing the city-and-transport question, particularly as we emerge from this pandemic, is to ask:

'What kind of city do we want?'

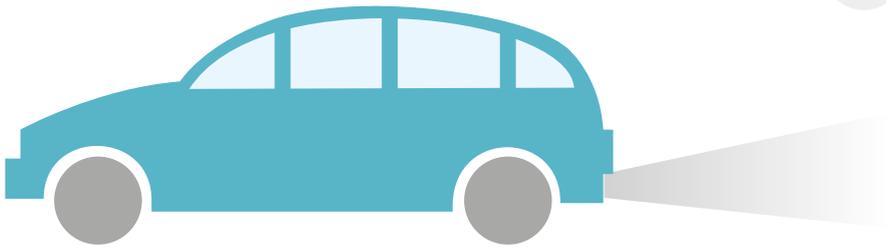
And then to ask:

'What can transport do to help us have that kind of city?'

That is a question we asked ourselves early in the lockdown. We want to see Newcastle reassert the supremacy of our city over its traffic and despite the challenges, we've treated this as a chance to change. The public debate around such an approach can be difficult when set within the context of a recovery from a pandemic that has threatened public health and economic activity.

Communicating what we're doing, and why, is critically important. But so too is recognising that not everyone will agree with the actions we take. From the outset, we have made it clear we may not get everything right immediately, and would make changes if we needed to. We have consistently done so, and this approach, as opposed to completely removing measures, has helped people recognise we are listening to their feedback, but also that we will not avert from a course that seeks to rebalance our road space as we redefine our future.

The focus in all the actions we've taken has been on providing safety and security in the short term, but recognising that we should only take measures forward if they aligned with our longer term ambition. We have focused on specific themes of work. These were our city centre; district shopping centres and radial corridors; and low traffic neighbourhoods. Before the pandemic we had endorsed the principle that we'd seek to join all these locations with a safe walking and cycling network – we've sought to accelerate that work.



Recognising that most journeys start or end at home, people's choice of getting around the area they live is important in defining their other travel decisions.

We believe low traffic areas are the basis of delivering sustainable and thriving



MINUTE NEIGHBOURHOODS

Having defined all the likely areas we engaged with local councillors. This enables local ownership of the outcomes. Our early interventions have been targeted in areas where single closures to motor vehicle traffic can create lower traffic areas.

Given that people also feel the potential loss of what they have more intensely than what they stand to gain, initial opinions are generally driven by those who don't wish to see the change. Giving time, and not reacting to remove measures too quickly, is important.

In one area where we'd made similar interventions previously:



2/3 of residents were against the change before we made it.



Within a year, that had switched...



to 2/3 of residents wanting the new restrictions to be retained.

The sense of what people stood to lose had changed as they realised the benefits of living in a low traffic neighbourhood.

In our city centre we've also made major changes that we intend to make permanent. These focus on reallocating road space away from car parking, to people, and businesses for outdoor hospitality space wherever possible. These include one of our country's most beautiful locations, Grey Street.

Our work throughout has been complicated by shifting guidance from government, generally with no advance warning. Along with this, the lack of a level playing field (such as certain powers only being available to London authorities) and an archaic number of different legal orders governing changes (parking being different to the traffic regulations on the same street for example) are things we must work together to address and overcome.

Despite the challenges, it has been incredible to lead a division of people who were so keen to play their role in managing the impacts of this pandemic, and to help plot a course to recovery. Should any of you wish to visit Newcastle to see and discuss our changes, please get in touch.

Supporting Telford businesses throughout the pandemic

Cllr Shaun Davies

Leader of Telford and Wrekin Council

The pandemic had an immediate and wide-ranging impact on our community, which meant that we as a council had to act quickly. We knew that effective communication was key - not just in getting information and application forms on our website but using a range of methods and channels to ensure that all parts of our community could be made aware of what support was available and how to access.

We were one of the first councils in the country to offer 'payment holidays' to both residents and businesses, giving an instant relief with regard to any short-term financial difficulties.

Instead of paying their monthly instalments during April, May and June 2020, they had the option of spreading payments over the remainder of the year. Over 15% of payers quickly took up this option which demonstrates its need and value, and our approach was highlighted by the Money Saving Expert website.



The Government's Business Support Grant Schemes meant that we were able to award grant payments to our businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industries.

In addition, we created a discretionary scheme which supported those which had missed out on other funding schemes. We created simple web forms to capture necessary information, and our award-winning team, worked 7 days a week to process and make payments to businesses within days of applications being submitted. Many businesses told us that we made a positive difference in helping them to survive.

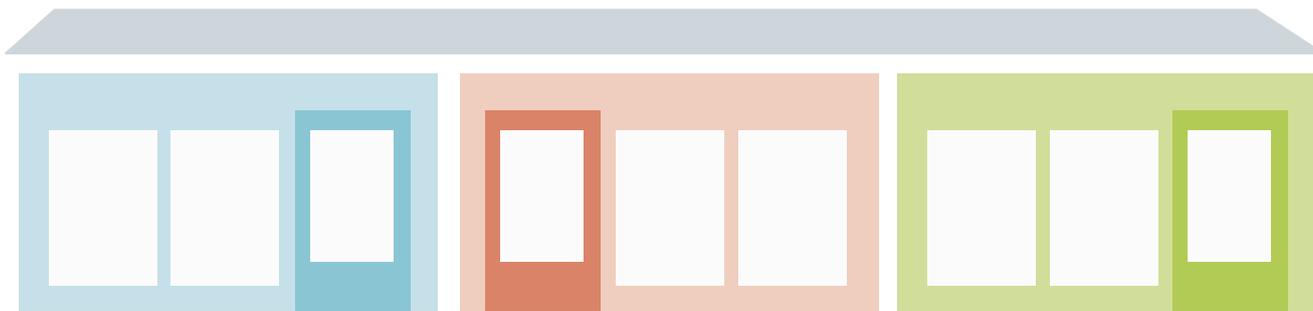
At the core of our response to Covid we continued with our outstanding track record of securing investment to protect and create jobs, built on our reputation as a business supporting, business winning council. From the outset of the pandemic we established a dedicated business hotline working 6 days each week with out of hours cover as well. The hotline has led to several thousand businesses getting support. We have worked with our property tenants to provide flexible payment terms, setting a standard for other landlords.

Our Enterprise Telford e-newsletter has a reach of over

3,000

BUSINESSES

directly providing daily updates alongside all our proactive media work.



Working with our Business Growth Hub we transferred our face to face business support programme to on-line, offering a full virtual business support

programme. To support our High Street businesses we launched a new programme of **Revive & Thrive** grants offering support to businesses to diversify product and delivery. We have published a series of 'how to' guides and launched a Virtual Market Place as a platform for businesses to launch a digital presence.

*Recognising the predicted growth in unemployment due to Covid, we pushed forward our **Job Box** offer – an all age employment support programme – committing over £500k to provide a dedicated hotline, digital platform and community based outreach programme with advisors skilled to support young people, as well as those returning to the job market.*

To date we have worked with well over 1,000 residents with a significant number of positive outcomes for the people we serve.

During lockdown we used social media, Facebook live and radio to maintain our programme with **Job Box Live** events, reaching residents and businesses alike. Our innovative **Job Match Service** provides a platform for businesses that are making redundancies to

be linked with companies recruiting. We have secured a significant amount of job matches, which is fantastic during this difficult time. We have also committed to make available 100 'kickstart' placements which we are really excited about.

Maintaining business confidence is critical to recovery and growth. Throughout, we have continued to deliver our infrastructure investment programmes, including direct delivery of major new employment sites and new private rented homes through our wholly owned Housing Company - Nuplace. We have successfully attracted over **£10m** of Growth Funding via our Local Enterprise Partnership to unlock and make shovel ready, development sites. In Telford we are looking to the future – working with our businesses and creating the conditions for growth. We see digital transformation as key to this which is shown in our ambitious Town Investment Fund.

*In December we submitted a **£25 MILLION** Town Investment Fund prospectus which sets out ambitious plans to transform our Town Centre, presenting Telford at its best as a modern, dynamic town.*

Central to our plans is a new Digital & Enterprise Hub to be delivered in partnership with Telford College, Wolverhampton University and local businesses. Alongside this, we are progressing work which will secure well over **£35m** of private sector investment to enable the town to become one of the first to move to high capacity and resilient full fibre network.

