

Understanding the impact of Covid-19 in Tower Hamlets

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Wider impact of Covid-19 - summary



Physical health

- Disruption to health services will likely mean some people living in poorer health
- 'Long Covid' is an emerging issue that will impact on residents & health services
- Health behaviours changed with lockdown and presents a mixed picture

Mental health

- Covid has had a mainly negative impact on people's mental wellbeing, though there is now greater awareness on the importance of mental health
- The anticipated increase in demand for mental health support was later than expected but is now underway

Social care

- The impact of the pandemic has been keenly felt in adult social care. The number of people subject to a safeguarding concern has gone up but may not be due to the pandemic.
- The impact of lockdown also been significant in children's social care and demand for support is now significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels

Economy, business & VCS

- The economy was hard hit by lockdown. There are differing predictions on recovery
- Anticipated wave of business failure not fully seen – now depends on ability to get through next stage
- Demand and financial pressures grew for VCS over the pandemic & remain a concern

Deprivation and employment

- The impact on employment to date is largely negative and uneven, but cushioned by furlough. The future depends on economic recovery
- There is a risk that this will result in higher levels of deprivation

Homelessness & rough sleeping

- There are strong indications that rough sleeping levels have improved over 2020-21, and a number of people have been supported into alternative accommodation
- A significant rise in homelessness applications is expected as the eviction ban is phased out.

Domestic abuse

- Difficult to conclusively say domestic abuse increased during the pandemic, but there are indications & evidence of increased need
- Whilst the increase maybe temporary, domestic abuse will have longer-term impacts on women, children and young people

Crime & ASB

- Crime dropped with lockdown, but is rebounding to 'normal' levels in some areas and adapting in others
- ASB concerns surged since the pandemic started. It remains to be seen whether this will be a longer-term trend

Substance misuse

- The number of referrals for substance misuse rose with lockdown, but the drugs market is unlikely to significantly change
- Alcohol use mixed, but those drinking most may be drinking more

Education and learning

- A loss in learning time has impacted academic progress and potentially widened the attainment gap.
- Lockdown likely significantly impacted the language, communication skills and school readiness of some young children.
- Missing school has had significant wider impacts on the lives of children and young people.

Transport, air quality and cities

- Public transport usage is rebounding at a slow pace than car use. Bike use has increased and this may continue.
- Lockdown improvements in air quality were temporary, but home working patterns & active travel may still impact this longer-term
- Working and consumer patterns may change city centres and city migration patterns, but predictions differ on the scale of change.

Community cohesion & involvement

- Feelings of community cohesion improved at first, then dropped down to pre-pandemic levels
- Trust in government institutions & mainstream media improved then dropped. The local picture is more positive than the national picture.
- Volunteering surged with the pandemic & became hyper-local. Volunteering levels remain high

Local authority finances & services

- The pandemic has put extreme pressure on local authority finances, and government funding has not yet been enough to fully mitigate the impact
- Covid-19 impacted on a number of council services, with knock-on impacts for staff and residents



Wider impact on physical health



Disruption to health services will likely mean some people living in poorer health:

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had comparatively high rates of mortality considered preventable as a result of cardiovascular, respiratory disease & cancer.
- Large numbers of people are currently waiting for non-urgent health treatment. It will likely take years to clear the backlog.
- For many conditions, longer waiting times are associated with poorer long-term outcomes.
- A drop in preventative & early interventions may result in poorer health later down the line. Fewer cancer screenings & referrals has likely delayed diagnosis & treatment for some¹. Full impact of this has not yet been felt.
- The number of people attending A&E dropped with lockdown and is still not back up to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Older people** & those with a **disability** or long-term health issue particularly affected.

'Long Covid' is an emerging issue that will impact on residents & health services:

- Some people experience ongoing symptoms following Covid-19 well after their initial infection.
- Scale and severity is still emerging², Current estimates across North East London are that up to 4,000 could be referred to post-Covid clinic by start of 2021-22, based on assumption that around 2% of symptomatic Covid cases will continue to be ill beyond 12 weeks.
- **Women**, those from more **deprived groups** and those with a **disability** particularly affected.

Health behaviours changed with lockdown and presents a mixed picture:

- Pre-Covid, LBTH health challenges included diabetes, childhood obesity, and smoking rates; & significant health inequalities.
- There are indications that many people feel motivated to adopt more healthy behaviours due to the pandemic⁴.
- Some people report being more physically active since lockdown began, others report doing less. Those living in small & overcrowded housing & those shielding likely found it harder to be active over lockdown.
- Impact on healthy eating and weight is emerging, but there appears to be a sizable group who report having increased overall food intake throughout lockdown.
- Impact on smoking is mixed: There was a surge in people quitting smoking in 2020 largely attributed to Covid fears, but others smoked more due to stress & anxiety³.
- Wider determinants of health have been impacted, including employment & social contact. Those from more **deprived groups** particularly affected.

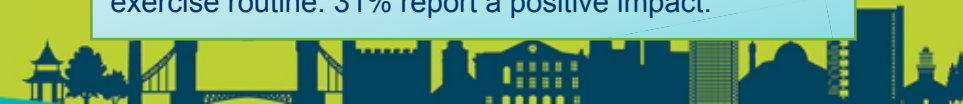
In England, over 5 million people were on a hospital waiting list in April 2021 – the highest number since records began in 2007

Outpatient waiting times in Tower Hamlets rose by 66% in the 6 months to April 2021.

In a May 2021 ONS survey, 1.6% UK residents self-reported long Covid symptoms persisting for more than four weeks after the first suspected coronavirus.

In one national survey, 7 in 10 adults reported feeling more motivated to be healthier in 2021 due to Covid-19

In the LBTH Covid Impact Resident survey in June 2020, 52% said Covid had a negative impact on their exercise routine. 31% report a positive impact.





Wider impact on physical health - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Long Covid
- Backlog of non-urgent health treatment not cleared, with more people living with poorer health as a result
- Health & care system may struggle to restore preventative & early interventions (e.g. immunisations) due to Covid pressures
- A second year of Covid and winter pressures on the system
- As lockdown fully lifts, need to see emerging longer-term trends on healthy weight, physical activity & smoking
- Proportion of health & care workforce is tired and

- Increase in health issues for those who missed preventative/early interventions – particularly given LBTH mortality rates for preventable cardio vascular, respiratory, cancer higher than London average
- Increase in poor health outcomes associated with wider determinants (e.g. deprivation)
- Increase in health inequalities, exacerbated by digital divide & more virtual service provision
- Impact on child health, healthy behaviours & development not seen until later life
- Long-term impacts of the virus to emerge

Opportunities

- BAU increasingly restored
- Virtual offer positive for some
- Continue good joint working with NHS
- Opportunity to capitalise in people's interest in staying healthy

- Opportunity to capitalise on people's growing familiarity with technology for health
- Interest in healthy lifestyles will have long-term positive impacts on health outcomes
- Physical health improved by more active travel & improved air quality



Impact on mental health



Covid has had a mainly negative impact on people's mental wellbeing, though there is now greater awareness on the importance of mental health

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had higher than average reported levels of mental health issues – likely due to the prevalence of 'wider determinants'
- Pandemic has impacted on levels of stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, grief and PTSD.
- Lockdown restrictions likely increased proportion of people experiencing more complicated grief reactions
- Wider determinants of mental health have been negatively impacted by the pandemic – employment, social contact. Likely exacerbated in LBTH due to overcrowding levels and lack of outside space².
- Most people will not need formal support from services and may recover as lockdown lifts. In March 2021 life satisfaction among Londoners was greater than in May 2020, though still below pre-pandemic levels.
- There is likely now greater awareness of the importance of mental health
- Grief & PTSD may be more prevalent in groups most directly impacted by Covid: **older people**, those in **care homes**, people with a **disability**, **BAME** communities, & **staff on the frontline of the pandemic**.

The anticipated increase in demand for mental health support was later than expected but is now underway

- Original predictions for a surge in demand for mental health support did not happen as expected in 2020 but is now being seen.
- The East London Foundation NHS Trust reports an overall increase in referrals & presentations across all MH services over February and March 2021⁴. As of July 2021, there have been increases in use of the LBTH mental health crisis line & hub, in referrals to community mental health teams & in admission rates to the TH Centre for Mental Health compared to pre-pandemic levels⁵. Feedback is that pressure is particularly acute in children and adolescent mental health services.
- Thought to be due to increase in mental health needs from the general population & 'pent up' increased demand for mental health support as lockdown lifts.
- Feedback from staff is that that people are more likely to present in a state of crisis and that cases are more complex compared to pre-Covid.
- Most MH services moved away from face-to-face & hospital-based provision, unless essential. Some MH services have accepted only urgent referrals or ran an adapted offer. May have had a negative impact on those with existing mental health issues⁶
- The National Mental Health Recovery fund may mitigate some of the financial pressures on services as a result of an increase in demand.
- Whilst risk factors for suicide have been impacted, there is currently no evidence of suicide rates increasing¹.
- Indications that mental health issues arising from Covid are more prevalent in **young people, women & lower income groups**.

In the LBTH Covid Impact Resident survey in June 2020, 63% said Covid had a negative impact on their mental health

Use of the Mental Health Crisis Line in LBTH has consistently increased over the pandemic & rose 30% in March 2021 alone. The increase is thought to be influenced by lockdown lifting; the negative impact of lockdown measures on mental well-being; increased public awareness of crisis lines; & reduced opportunities for community mental teams to engage face to face with all service users during the lockdown.





Wider impact on mental health - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Ongoing increase in overall and complex need for mental health support due to wider Covid impacts
- Insecure housing & employment as eviction ban and furlough scheme ends may exacerbate this further
- Any further lockdowns will have subsequent negative impacts on mental health & wellbeing
- Need to focus on the groups described in the last slide.

- Excessive and protracted feelings of stress & powerlessness have long-term MH impacts for the general population
- More complex & advance mental health needs for those who missed early interventions
- Consequences of a severe, longer-term economic downturn would likely result in more people with mental health problems & more deaths by suicide
- Impact on children not seen until later life

Opportunities

- Psychological impacts will be mild & manageable for most
- There is now greater awareness of the importance of mental health – it is arguably now less stigmatised
- Virtual mental health offer positive for some
- Opportunity to develop 'trauma informed communities' to tackle impact

- Mental health improved by more opportunities for walking & cycling, & by related infrastructure changes



Impact on social care & safeguarding



The impact of the pandemic has been keenly felt by adult social care users, carers & staff. The number of people subject to a safeguarding concern has gone up but may not due to the pandemic.

- A massive increase in demand for adult social care - arising from hospital discharge – was predicted at the start of the pandemic but did not materialise. However, pressures have resulted in a waiting list for non-urgent assessments and reviews
- Respite & day service building based services closed over lockdown, resulting in increased strain and social isolation for service users & carers.
- Extremely challenging time for care home residents, families & staff. Future demand for care home provision is also to be determined
- Feedback that people are now presenting to social care with more complex needs, making it more challenging to address the waiting list.
- One report suggests balance, ability to carry out day-to-day activities and cognition has reduced for some older people due to lockdown¹
- Lockdown likely to have made adult abuse & neglect more challenging to identify. Some will have been put into lockdown with their abusers. Evidence suggests social isolation increases the risk of self-harm & self-neglect.
- New safeguarding risks appeared with Covid, particularly related to fraud/scams.
- Predictions that the pandemic might raise the profile of social care, leading to improvements in funding, recruitment & retention has not yet been seen.
- Pre-Covid, LBTH saw an increase in adult safeguarding concerns each year between 2017 & 2020, thought to be at least partially due to increased awareness levels. After an initial dip with lockdown, concerns increased & were higher in 2020-21 than the year before.
- **Older people** & those with a **disability** of long-term health issue particularly affected by trends in social care.

The impact of lockdown has been keenly felt in children's social care, and demand for support is now significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels

- Pre-Covid, in March 2020 LBTH had 973 children in need, 230 on a child protection plan & 307 looked after children.
- Some children will have been put into lockdown with their abusers. Lockdown – especially school & childcare closure - generally thought to have made child abuse & neglect harder to identify. Concern that school closure has reduced opportunities for detection & early intervention: Issues may have become more entrenched
- Concern that the risk of online abuse & exploitation has increased due to lockdown; & that child awareness of consent & keeping safe lessening as not in school or early years provision.
- Following lockdown, feedback is that there was an initial dip in overall referral numbers to children's social care. However, demand then increased and is now significantly above pre-pandemic levels. Feedback is that the complexity of casework has increased.
- Lockdown initially brought a drop in the number of young people going missing in London and a drop in violent crime. We are starting to see increases in serious youth violence.
- Children and families particularly affected by changes in children's social care. Children with additional needs & **disabilities** up to 3 times more likely to be abused or neglected & less likely to disclose due to communication difficulties

In 2020-21, 1,224 adults had safeguarding concerns raised about them in Tower Hamlets. This is 10% higher than the year before, and is the fifth consecutive year this figure has increased.

The number of referrals into children's social care was 690 w/c 25-Jun to 3-Jul 2019. This compares with 832 for the same period in 2021: A 20.5% increase in referrals.



Wider impact on social care & safeguarding - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- A second year of Covid & winter pressures on the care system
- Recovery for those hard hit: care homes, care workers, carers
- Waiting list for non-urgent adult social care assessments may not be cleared
- Potential of a reduction in care home placements due to Covid fears, leading to viability risks for providers
- Increase in fraud & scams disproportionately impacts vulnerable
- Increase in exploitation and grooming online
- Continued resurgence of safeguarding referrals & serious youth violence as lockdown lifts
- Financial hardships increase = pressures on families increase

- Longstanding negative impact on those who have been through traumatic experiences
- Eventual impact on accommodation-based support unclear
- Physical & mental health impacts + exacerbated social inequalities = poorer health outcomes = increased demand on social care
- Long-term move to more remote working makes abuse & neglect harder to detect
- Provision that assisted with detecting concerns may cease following economic & financial pressures
- Mistrust of government & council deters some from engaging with services

Opportunities

- Maintain structures that enable rapid hospital discharge
- Proven ability to flex & adapt workforce in event of future crises
- Increased partnership working to support vulnerable children & adults
- New and/or virtual ways of support positive for some

- Opportunity to capitalise on people's growing familiarity with technology for health & care
- Potential for social care to have a raised profile



Impact on economy, business, voluntary & community sector



The economy was hard hit by lockdown. There are differing predictions on recovery:

- Pre-Covid, the LBTH economy was growing.
- The magnitude of the recession caused by the pandemic is unprecedented in modern times.
- Economic indicators suggest a strong recovery is underway as things reopen. There is uncertainty over how strong and sustained the recovery will be. Much depends on how strong consumer spending is post-lockdown.
- Considerable debate over longer-term economic impact of Covid. Bank of England expects level of economic output to regain its pre-pandemic level by end of 2021. Less optimistic forecasts don't expect this until 2022¹.
- The sectors hardest hit by Covid are arts, entertainment, recreation; accommodation & food services activities. They made up 6.9% of the jobs in LBTH pre-Covid, though it is likely more residents work in this sector.
- Central London ecosystem including arts & cultural sector, night-time economy & retail suffered but is considered well-placed to recover.
- Locally, market traders were also hard hit by lockdown.
- Banking, finance & insurance sectors are less hard hit. Over half of LBTH jobs were in this sector in 2016-19, but third of residents' work in it.

19% LBTH residents worked in the distribution, hotel & retail sector in 2016-19. This fell to 13% in 2020⁷.

GDP declined by 9.8% in 2020, the steepest drop since consistent records began in 1948 and the most in over three hundred years on some estimates.

The anticipated wave of business failure was not fully seen & now depends on ability to get through next stage.

- In line with the economic impact, many businesses felt a sudden demand & supply shock with lockdown. Many also had to adapt to social distancing restrictions, often incurring extra costs.
- Businesses have taken out a total of almost £0.5bn in state-backed loans through Covid-19. No wave of business failures has yet been seen but the future is uncertain. Bounce-back loans can be paid off over 10 years, but some may struggle even on these terms².
- Impact is uneven, with greatest areas of concern being retail, hospitality, arts & entertainment, & administrative and support services² Few areas (e.g. supermarkets) saw unprecedented demand
- Changes in buying habits have accelerated, with a bigger proportion spent online.
- Working from home grew in 2020: LBTH rates were higher than the UK average but still represented a minority of workers. Many companies likely to have a hybrid model in future⁴ with repercussions for business & economy.

17,355 local enterprises were based in LBTH in 2019. 98% were micro/small businesses of 50 employees or less. Over 9000 government-backed loans have been taken out by LBTH SMEs (average £47k).

26% people worked from home in 2020 compared to 12% in 2019. In London this was 46%, in LBTH it was 38%³

Demand and financial pressures grew VCS over the pandemic & remain concern

- Impact of Covid has been 'uneven & unpredictable'⁸
- Many VCS organisations were part of the response to Covid. A National Emergencies Trust reports that 7 million people nationally were expected to have received help from charities in 2020 due to the pandemic. In a Feb 2021 LBTH survey, 58% respondents reported an increase in demand
- At the same time, charity donations & fundraising income largely dropped. One report indicates smaller charities were harder hit. In the LBTH survey, 70% reported accessing funding to continue with provision and support as a key challenge.
- Financial challenges now facing at least parts of the sector. The extent of this impact varies a lot depending on the size, location and type of organisation⁵. One report suggests 1 in 5 charities are considering downsizing as a result of the pandemic⁶.
- There is also concern that the future may hold increased demand (e.g. as a result of disruption to health services) & a reductions in things like Covid funding.

As of May 2020, 74 VCS organisations known to be offering support to residents related to Covid

In one national survey of 650 charities, more than half did not expect pre-pandemic levels of fundraising events to return before the end of 2021⁹



Wider impact on economy, business & CVS - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Greatest risk among arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation & food services sectors
- Ongoing financial challenge for some VCS due to drop in income & increase in demand
- Some businesses & VCS unable to afford furlough contributions from August. Some not viable without support if social distancing re-introduced.
- A reduction in migration will impact on some businesses & VCS
- Possible ongoing additional costs for some businesses as a result of adapting operating procedures as a result of Covid
- Some VCS unable to achieve the outcomes specified in council contracts due to Covid – though easing as lockdown lifts

- Risk of business failure if longer-term 'bounce back' loans cannot be paid back
- Reduced demand for work spaces result if more home working & less business based in the borough.
- Economic downturn would put more pressure on business & VCS
- Pressure on charity sector could result in consolidation, with smaller charities closing
- More demand for council and partner services if less available from VCS

Opportunities

- Some optimistic predictions of economic recovery, with subsequent positive impacts on business & VCS
- Advice and support – e.g. on business reconfiguration – can help mitigate risk of closure
- Opportunity for council to further engage with businesses
- Opportunity for VCS to better utilise volunteers, in line with feedback
- New opportunities for some businesses, e.g. food businesses extending onto the street

- Taking less office space could help businesses and organisations reduce their costs
- Opportunity to rethink procurement procedures to prioritise/direct it to local to stimulate growth
- Speculation that the post—Covid economy could be more entrepreneurial



Impact on employment and deprivation



The impact on employment to date is largely negative and uneven – the future depends on economic recovery:

- Pre-Covid unemployment levels in LBTH had fallen, but significant proportion of the workforce was in low paid, part time or insecure employment.
- Many employees experienced a reduction in hours, have been furloughed or laid off due to the pandemic. Financial impact is being cushioned to an extent through things like the Job Retention Scheme.
- 14% LBTH population was furloughed as of April 2021; less than earlier in the year. Furlough due to end 30 Sep 2021. Return to employment vs. redundancy rates unclear until then, but redundancy rate has potential to increase to levels not seen since the last recession².
- Unemployment and redundancies in London rose in 2020-21², particularly affecting hospitality, retail & admin support².
- London unemployment rates are higher than the national average & has furthest to recover. Payrolled employees were over 3% below pre-pandemic levels as of May 2021⁶.
- Growth in recruitment for certain sectors, including health & social care
- Locally, **older** people aged 50+ and **younger** people aged 18-24s claim out of work benefits at the highest rate². Under 24s have borne much of the brunt of the employment impact, with a large increase in their unemployment rate.
- Those already **facing employment barriers** will be in competition for jobs with others who have lost work & those leaving education. Market will favour those 'job ready'

As of April 2021, LBTH had the 6th highest number of employees on furlough of all London boroughs. As of May 2021, LBTH had the 5th highest largest absolute increase in Universal Credit claimants (152% increase March 2020 – May 2021)⁴

In a survey carried out with 992 LBTH families with children under 5 between Jul-Nov 2020, unemployment rose from 33 to 40% for respondents & was higher for Somali (52%) & Bangladeshi (43%) respondents³

There is a risk that this will result in higher levels of deprivation

- Pre-Covid deprivation levels in LBTH were high but improved. In-work poverty had increased & this group made up a significant proportion of deprived households.
- One report suggests a reduction in relative poverty during the 1st lockdown: Median incomes likely fell, pushing down the relative poverty line; & benefits increased, e.g. £20 Universal Credit uplift, increasing incomes of non-working households¹.
- But pandemic resulted in financial worries for many & there are indications of increased pressure. 3,177 LBTH households were subject to the benefits cap in June 2021 compared to 3,000 in February 2020. 89% households had children⁷.
- Lockdown has also seen a high increase in food bank use & emergency food requests, welfare & debt advice. Holiday hunger schemes likely to have cushioned some but not all of the food poverty impacts for families.
- Official data on poverty during the pandemic is not available until 2022. But predictions that will increase in future. Extent depends on £20pw uplift to Universal Credit & Working Tax Credit due to end Sept 2021. JRF estimates that this plus end of furlough will put 500,000 extra people into poverty in UK¹.
- The economic situation has likely dampened work opportunities that may support people out of poverty.
- **BAME groups, women, young workers, low paid workers and disabled workers** most negatively economically impacted to date¹. Low-income households & those in 'shadow economy' are particularly vulnerable to the economic effects of the pandemic¹.

Pre-Covid, 32.5% children live in poverty – highest proportion in London & England. 44% older people live in income deprived households – highest proportion in England

First Love Foundation food bank saw a 700% increase in support between 16th March and 14th April 2020 compared to previous year.





Wider impact on employment & deprivation - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Unemployment & financial hardship increases when the furlough scheme ends Sept 2021, particularly in sectors hardest hit
- Food poverty for families increases if holiday hunger schemes are discontinued
- Lack of economic recovery means child poverty worsens or does not improve; and those in poverty & just above the threshold pushed further into deprivation
- Harder to tackle deprivation via employment
- Increased demand on council employment & associated services
- Financial pressures arising from increase in demand
- Less job opportunities arising from economic downturn

- Longer-term consequences of unemployment and deprivation include increased risk of mental health issues & poorer health outcomes
- Consequent implications on demand for services & financial pressures on council
- Rise in gig economy while businesses tentatively bounce back – e.g. insecure, low wages, poor conditions.
- Those 'harder to place' into employment find it harder still to find work as competing for jobs with newly unemployed

Opportunities

- More optimistic predictions on economic recovery would much reduce the potential negative impact on employment & deprivation
- Opportunity to recruit to hard-to-fill roles, particularly in areas where we expect an increase in demand (e.g. health care, care workers, food production)

- Strong economic recovery should lead to new job opportunities and a different diverse economy (e.g. rise of digital opportunities)



Impact on homelessness & rough sleeping



There are strong indications that rough sleeping levels have improved over 2020-21, and a number of people have been supported into alternative accommodation.

- Pre-Covid in 2018-19, LBTH had 7th highest estimated number of rough sleepers in London.
- Emergency accommodation was provided through the 'Everyone In' scheme at the start of the pandemic, including those NRPF. Further beds provided through Winter Emergency scheme during 2nd lockdown. A significant number have been supported to secure a home in the medium term. Further provision & support
- Whilst not conclusive, feedback & evidence indicate rough sleeping levels dropped at the start of the pandemic, increased, dipped again in winter, then increased again. Overall, the impact is emerging but considered to be positive: In 2020, snapshot estimates of rough sleeping levels in the England were lower than previous years¹
- Indications that LBTH has a more chaotic rough sleeping cohort compared to other boroughs: Higher levels of substance misuse & mental health problems. 'Everyone In' scheme enabled more support to go in.
- London rough sleepers more likely to be **men** & from **white** ethnic background

A significant rise in homelessness applications is expected as the eviction ban is phased out.

- Contrary to national and regional trends, the rate of statutory homelessness in Tower Hamlets has generally been reducing over the past seven years.
- The eviction ban came in at the start of the pandemic. It ended on 31 May 2021, with a phased return to pre-pandemic eviction notice periods from 1 October 2021.
- Over lockdown in 2020, some council services & VCS staff reported seeing an increase in private renters seeking advice, unable to afford rent & waiting for benefits claims.
- The sector expects a significant rise in family homelessness as the eviction ban ends.
- This is likely to lead to an increase in the use of temporary accommodation for families.
- New Homelessness Transformation Plan may mitigate some of the impacts of this.
- Homelessness acceptances show an overrepresentation of **younger adults**.

Around 260 people were given emergency accommodation through the 'Everyone In' scheme. Around 180 of this group have been supported with a positive move-on from emergency accommodation

As of June 2021, 31 people have been identified as sleeping on the streets in LBTH.

11% of Londoners aged 16+ were not up to date with their rent or mortgage in March 2021, rising to 17% for renters²





Wider impact on homelessness & rough sleeping - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- High financial burden on the council to accommodate rough sleepers is high (exit plans normally take 12-18 months)
- Rough sleeping levels may escalate if further government funding is not forthcoming
- 8 rough sleepers with no recourse to public funds need to be funded by the Council
- Large spike in homelessness when eviction ban lifted. Higher risk for: Private rented, tenants already in arrears pre-Covid; financial hardship from reduced work hours, furlough, lay offs; awaiting Universal Credit; relationship breakdowns inc. DA & those 'sofa surfing'.
- Consequent increase in spend on temporary accommodation.

- Financial pressure on council limits ability to develop new supported housing provision
- Economic downturn = more people in financial hardship = higher risk of homelessness = potential increase in temporary accommodation & rough sleeping.
- Following the government's initial large-scale funding injection, funding to tackle rough sleeping & homelessness may be reduced
- Reduction in government funding for short-term emergency options for rough sleepers

Opportunities

- Support more rough sleepers to have a positive move-on into ongoing accommodation
- Look to attract more government funding to develop more accommodation options for rough sleepers
- Continue good joint working with health and social care
- Opportunities to support tenants to avoid eviction via support & advice, whilst the ban is phased out
- Greater use of private rented sector to resolve homelessness and reduce use of expensive temporary accommodation
- Better web resources for self-help, online facility to self-refer - people receive help upstream and in a timely way.

- Potential to have fewer rough sleepers on the streets
- More & better accommodation options for single people to enable rapid exit from street homelessness
- Transform Housing Options service to prevent & relieve more homelessness; reducing costs on temporary accommodation
- Economic change may impact rent levels, making tenancies more affordable – though income may change in parallel



Impact on domestic abuse



It is difficult to conclusively say domestic abuse increased during the pandemic, but there are indications of this & evidence of increased need:

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had comparatively high levels of recorded domestic abuse: in top 5 highest reporting London boroughs of DA & in top 2 boroughs for domestic homicide.
- Some women will have been put into lockdown with their abuser, often with less opportunity to seek help as a result of the abuser being permanently present. Schools have an important role in detecting DA concerns in families, and school closure likely also impeded the ability of schools to do this.
- At a national level, it is difficult to conclusively say domestic abuse increased as a result of the pandemic, however: Evidence shows an increase in offences flagged as DA-related during the pandemic, possibly also influenced by improved police recording.
- The Met police received an increased number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents following the lockdown, largely driven by third-party calls; likely because people were spending more time at home.
- An increase in demand for DA victim services occurred in the UK during the pandemic, perhaps indicative of an increase in the severity of abuse being experienced & a lack of available coping mechanisms.
- In April 2020, the Home Affairs Committee said there was “evidence that cases are escalating more quickly to become complex and serious, with higher levels of physical violence and coercive control.”

Refuge recorded an average of 13,162 calls and messages to its National Domestic Abuse helpline every month between April 2020 and February 2021. This is up more than 60% on the average number of monthly contacts at the start of 2020,

Whilst the increase maybe temporary, domestic abuse will have longer-term impacts on women, children and young people

- Initially, in Tower Hamlets, levels of domestic abuse reports did not rise locally to the extent feared at the start of the pandemic. However, as the pandemic continued throughout 2020 levels of domestic abuse increased gradually, largely mirroring the national picture.
- In Tower Hamlets, police-recorded DA offences in 2020 was above the 5-year average. Local Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy services and children’s social care domestic abuse referrals all went up in 2020 compared to the year before. Adult social care domestic abuse referrals reduced.
- Whilst the increase may last as long as social distancing restrictions are in place, DA will have longer-term impacts on women, children and young people. It is likely children have had greater exposure to DA given school closures.
- DA is a gendered crime & women are more likely to victims. **Pregnant women, women on low incomes**, with **mental health** issues or **learning disability** are at an increased risk of DA.
- In Tower Hamlets, **Bangladeshi residents** were slightly over-represented in referrals for domestic abuse support.

Local Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service saw a 21% increase in referrals compared to 2019. Children Social Care domestic abuse referrals went up by 21% (281). Adult Social Care domestic abuse referrals went down by 15%.





Wider impact on domestic abuse - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Recovery for those put into lockdown with their abusers
- To be determined whether lockdown lifting removes the risk of increased domestic abuse
- An ongoing economic downturn will potentially impact domestic abuse victims, e.g. through job losses
- Delayed/backlog of trials deters some victims from giving evidence. Prosecution of perpetrators & confidence in system declines.

- Longer-term physical & mental health impacts on women & young children from increased level & severity of DA, inc. depression, immune dysfunction, substance misuse, eating disorders & diabetes. Compounded by shortage of therapies for non-English speaking victims
 - Increased risk of suicide, higher in South Asian women
- Number of long-term negative impacts associated with children who witness DA
- One report estimates Covid will undermine global efforts to end gender-based violence, reducing progress towards ending it by 2030 by a third.

Opportunities

- Domestic Abuse Act enables to domestic abuse victims get priority need status to access housing.
- Opportunity to raise awareness of domestic abuse & support available to people
- Virtual offer of support positive for some

- Social activism to tackle gender inequality has the potential to tackle misogyny as a driver of domestic abuse



Impact on crime and ASB



Crime dropped with lockdown, but is rebounding to 'normal' levels in some areas and adapting in others

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had the 6th highest rate of crime in London based on total notifiable offences.
- Nationally, crime was lower in all categories during lockdown, except for anti-social behaviour and drug offences. Burglary & shoplifting particularly dropped as people stayed at home & shops closed. LBTH largely reflects national trends: Reported burglary, robbery & violence with injury (non-domestic abuse) all reduced with lockdown.
- Lockdown made policing easier in some respects: people moving around less made it much easier to track down dealers, potentially influencing more arrests for drug-related crimes¹
- However, nationally and locally, these reductions are likely to be temporary trends linked to lockdown. For example as previously noted, we are starting to see increases in serious youth violence and gang activity.
- In other areas, crime patterns have adapted and shifted. New financial fraud patterns linked to Covid appeared, with one report indicating that the UK's cybersecurity agency has taken down more scams in the last year than in the previous three years combined, with coronavirus and NHS-themed cybercrime fueling the increase². These adaptations may be more lasting.
- **Older** people and those feeling more socially isolated may be at an increased risk of Covid-related fraud. A disproportionate number of fines and arrests made during lockdown were issued to **BAME** residents in London.

For the 12-month period to year ending December 2020, total police recorded crime decreased by 8%.

ASB concerns have surged since the pandemic started. It remains to be seen whether this will be a longer-term trend.

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had 2nd highest rate of ASB calls in London.
- ASB reports increased with lockdown and have remained high since then. Nationally, in Oct-Dec 2020, incidents of ASB recorded by the police (excluding West Midlands and British Transport Police) were 41% higher than those recorded Oct-Dec 2019.
- LBTH reflects this trend: ASB concerns reported to the council and/or police increased by 80% in 2020-21 compared to the year before. The council received 3,197 ASB concerns in 2020-21 compared to 1,681.
- The scale of increase is thought to be significantly driven by reports of breaches of social distancing restrictions. ASB concerns made to the council were 198% higher in April 2020 vs. April 2019, and 105% higher in January 2021 vs. January 2020.
- Higher levels of ASB concerns is also thought to be influenced by noise complaints and friction between neighbours, partly as a result of increased home working.
- If this is what is driving the rise in ASB complaints, we might expect a reduction as social distancing restrictions ease. However, as some form of increased home working is expected to persist, ASB concerns may remain higher than pre-pandemic levels for some time.

In the 2021 mid-pandemic residents survey, crime and ASB were a top concern: 47 per cent of respondents selected it as one of their top three concerns.





Wider impact on crime & ASB - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Ongoing resurgence of crime types that dropped due to lockdown
- Ongoing resurgence in serious violence, including serious youth violence, with links to drugs markets
- Ongoing changes in 'crowded places' (e.g. supermarkets) results in new terrorism risks
- Likely that increase in cybercrime and fraud will continue
- Increased level of ASB concerns may continue to an extent as increased home working patterns persist

- Any increase in deprivation is likely to have a long-term negative impact on crime & ASB levels
- This, in turn, will negatively impact victims & residents
- Travel restrictions may continue to result in adapting crime patterns

Opportunities

- ASB concerns driven by breaches in social distancing restrictions should reduce as these restrictions lift
- ASB concerns driven by increased home working should reduce to an extent if this reduces
- Opportunity for residents to be more active in reporting crime having experienced a reduction over lockdown

- Longer-term changes in working patterns might continue to impact on crime patterns – e.g. homeworking



Impact on substance misuse



The number of referrals for substance misuse rose with lockdown, but the drugs market is unlikely to significantly change

- Pre Covid, LBTH had the highest estimated rate of crack & opiate use in London
- Lockdown caused initial changes to drugs markets. A UN report concludes that Covid led to opiate & cocaine shortages & price rises, and that trend was seen in LBTH. However, this trend did not persist as supply methods adapted.
- There is evidence that drug supply via the dark web increased over 2020, with one survey indicating using the dark web to purchase drugs increased over the pandemic⁴
- The number of people referred for substance misuse treatment increased in LBTH in 2020, influenced by engaging with rough sleepers with substance misuse problems via the 'Everyone In' scheme. Referral levels peaked in Aug-Sep 2020, and again in Feb-March 2021 during the second lockdown.
- An average of 113 referrals for substance misuse treatment were made each month in 2020-21⁵
- However, this is unlikely to have a significant impact on the cohort of drug users who have 'limited recovery capital'. People in this cohort tend to be older and are likely to develop more complex needs in future.

Between January and March 2020, 193 referrals for substance misuse treatment were made. Between January and March 2021, the figure is 452.

Alcohol use mixed, but those drinking most may be drinking more

- The pandemic has caused increased stress levels for many, which in turn can trigger excessive alcohol consumption.
- Evidence suggests most people did not change their drinking amount but among those who did, a larger proportion of them increased consumption.
- There are some indications that already heavy drinkers were more likely to consume more.
- Provisional data for England and Wales show there was a 19% increase in deaths from alcohol-specific causes in 2020 compared to 2019.
- There is a risk that the pandemic causes an increase in problematic drinking in the medium term, given that excessive alcohol consumption is common after traumatic events as a response to high stress levels.
- The pandemic has had a largely negative impact on mental health. The interplay between substance misuse & mental health means they risk being exacerbated.
- Overall, **men** and people of a **White British** ethnic background are more likely to drink at harmful or dependent levels³
- During lockdowns, **women, parents of young children**, people with **higher income** and those with **anxiety and depressive** symptoms reported the highest increase in alcohol consumption in the UK¹

One national study between May and June 2020 indicated that 36% of individuals increased their consumption of alcohol, 22% decreased their consumption and 42% reported no change in the quantity drunk¹





Wider impact on substance misuse - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- As drugs markets revert to pre-pandemic picture, substance misuse issues will continue
- Potential continued rise in use of the dark web for drug supply
- Those with 'limited recovery capital' are likely to need ongoing support
- Risk that excessive drinking continues by some as a response to traumatic events
- Risk of poorer health outcomes and death if heavy drinkers continue drinking at higher levels after lockdown
- Link between substance misuse and mental health means both risk being exacerbated.

- There is a cohort of long-term opiate/crack users who are ageing and will likely need more support as a result of complex health needs as they get older
- Link between substance misuse and mental health means both risk being exacerbated.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to continue to engage people to access treatment and to prevent relapse
- Stressors that caused increased alcohol consumption for some may lift as lockdown lifts

- Opportunity to use lessons from pandemic to make further improvement in levels of crack and opiate use in LBTH via treatment referrals, prevention & early intervention



Impact on education & learning



A loss in learning time has impacted academic progress and potentially widened the attainment gap.

- Pre-Covid, attainment across LBTH at all stages of school was above national averages. All but 4 schools & all but 3 childcare settings rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding.
- Classroom learning disrupted since pandemic due to school closure and children & staff self-isolating. Further exacerbated by 'digital divide'. Public exams cancelled in 2021 & 2022.
- A 3-year gap in attainment benchmarking is impacting our ability to understand local attainment levels.
- Improvements in remote learning² & tackling digital divide positive but impact on learning not fully mitigated. Analysis estimates pupils lost approx. third of learning time they would have had if pandemic had not happened¹
- No LBTH or national data on learning progress. Local insights suggest pupils made less academic progress than previous year groups⁵. Feedback that government plans to support catch-up fall short of what is required.
- Differing views amongst head teachers on extent & length of the impact on learning. Disadvantaged children usually catch up by around year 2 in LBTH, but attainment gap is likely to extend for longer.
- A number of children with **special educational needs or disabilities** experienced disruption to their learning & wider support, e.g. therapeutic provision.
- The attainment gap for **disadvantaged children** likely grown. Overcrowding, sharing digital devices amongst large families, affordability/access to broadband & devices all potential barriers.

In early years, lockdown likely significantly impacted language, communication skills and school readiness.

- Early years attendance reduced with lockdown. It has since increased but overall take up at the end of May 2021 was still below autumn 2019 levels. Take up of the free entitlement for disadvantaged children is particularly low.
- One report states that 'the partial closure of early years settings is likely to have had significant implications for the wellbeing, learning and development of children'³
- Concerns about the impact of the pandemic on language & communication skills & school readiness amongst young children. In one study, three quarters of primary schools said pupils starting school in Sept 2020 needed more support than previous cohorts.⁴
- Primary exclusions have increased (secondary declined), suggesting growth in complex & challenging behaviours in some younger children.
- Most studies have taken place in primary schools. Results from studies on older pupils' attainment are less consistent.
- Concerns around language skills for young children whose **first language is not English**.

Missing school has had significant wider impacts on the lives of children and young people

- The number of children electively home educated rose from 167 (Sep 2019) to 268 (Jul 2021) in LBTH. The pace of requests has eased over time.
- School closure impacted wellbeing. Significant increase in mental health concerns & access issues due to Covid constraints. Some children had less space & opportunity to play, socialise & be physically active.
- Cancellation of public exams affected some students' confidence and increased anxiety.
- All primary school children received free school meals pre-Covid. The National Voucher Scheme over lockdown went only to those eligible; potentially contributing to food poverty.
- Less face-to-face interaction between staff & children made issues including safeguarding harder to identify.
- Parents & carers impacted by increased caring & learning responsibilities (often combined with work).
- Some schools report that Covid arrangements, e.g. staggered start/end times; one-way systems, have improved behaviour & reduced incidents of bullying.
- Schools have experienced workforce pressures, though no higher turnover in staff has been observed to date.
- Some surveys indicate **young females** & those from **lower-income families** reporting lower wellbeing.

A survey of schools conducted by Tower Hamlets Education Partnership in Jan-Feb 2021, estimated that an additional 10,000 students (1 in 4) remained unable to access online learning at the same level as their peers.

Take up of the free entitlement for 3 & 4-year-olds fell 50% in autumn 2020 vs. autumn 2019. Take-up of free entitlement for disadvantaged two-year-olds fell 33%.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that the total value of lost earnings due to missed schooling in the pandemic is £350 billion, or £40,000 per child over their lifetime.



Wider impact on education & learning - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

Ensuring all pupils have necessary resources to learn effectively at home; tackling the digital divide and lack of devices & connectivity

Priority to support children with lost learning time & academic progress

Tackle low take-up of early years offers

Fewer children 'school ready' in September 2021

Address increase in challenging behaviour in primary aged children

Support needed by some to return to school. Includes those not attending due to mental health reasons, affected by serious youth violence or travel restrictions.

2021 GCSE, AS, A-level grades based on teacher assessments (can appeal)

Schools to continually evaluate curricula so no pupils are left behind post-Covid.

Less take-up of practical subjects (GCSE & A-level) as limited teaching during lockdowns.

Risk to recruitment & retention of school staff over next few years.

Priority to support children with lost learning time & academic progress. Scale & range of national catch-up initiatives not enough

Attainment gap for disadvantaged children takes longer to close at primary

Risk of attainment levels dropping. LBTH hard hit if Covid exacerbates social inequalities

Poorer language acquisition & reduced early socialisation in 0-5 year olds impacts on outcomes in school & beyond – concern that impact on young children will be hard to recover from

Risk of educational underachievement and reduced lifetime earnings.

Financial impact on higher education as a result of a drop in international student applications

Those who miss exams have less experience of them in future

Wider impacts of school closure on health, emotional well-being, confidence, physical development & learning persist into the future

Opportunities

Digital poverty gap is closing

Tackling digital divide in education better equips children and young people for adulthood

Some young people who were previously disengaged from education benefitted from home learning during lockdown - opportunities to build on this

Greater awareness of the importance of mental health

Many children will remain resilient in face of challenges

Schools continuing to engage with innovate ways of working

Increased familiarity with technology for education for school staff, pupils & parents will have long-term educational benefits



Impact on transport, air quality & cities



Public transport usage is rebounding at a slow pace than car use. Bike use has increased and this may continue.

- Car use dropped with the first lockdown, then increased more quickly than public transport or walking¹ from May 2020 onwards.
- TfL & public transport usage levels plummeted then grew. But still below pre-pandemic levels. Potential for longer-term home working could slow full recovery¹
- Bus usage levels have been higher than rail² & tube in London over Covid-19. Many key workers & low-income groups reliant.
- Social distancing restrictions & initiatives to encourage more walking & cycling – e.g. Streetspace, Liveable Streets – contributed to a surge in popularity for bikes in mid-2020. Increased cycling may be a lasting legacy of the pandemic.
- The same initiatives may also encourage more e-scooter use.

Santander bike hires in LBTH in the first quarter of 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively were 709k, 846k and 780k⁷

There were 377k tube taps at LBTH tube stations on 28.1.20, 85k on 22.3.20 and 151k on 23.6.21.

The scale of air quality improvements over lockdown were temporary, but home working patterns & active travel may still impact this longer-term

- Pre-Covid, air quality & road congestion key challenges in LBTH. 37% of LBTH residents own a car (well below national average) but high levels of congestion from through traffic & major roads.
- Levels of nitrogen dioxide from road traffic fall very sharply in London with the first lockdown & overall in 2020, concentrations of NO₂ at the roadside were consistently lower than the average of the previous 3 years⁴
- Since then, there are indications that levels of nitrogen dioxide have increased but remain lower than pre-pandemic levels.

NO₂ levels are captured in borough locations. Mile End Monitoring Station monthly average NO₂ µg/m³ for Aprils 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively was 41, 24.7 and 30. The average for Blackwall was 42,30.8 and 35⁷.

With few visitors around, London's bike-sharing scheme saw a threefold increase in new users between March and July 2020¹

Working and consumer patterns may change city centres and city migration patterns, predictions differ on the scale of change.

- Impact on population size is still emerging, but predictions that London's population may have decreased for the first time this century⁵
- Speculation that Covid may accelerate urban-to-rural migration. Longer-term increased home working could mean more higher earners in knowledge-based industries leaving urban areas⁶
- Feedback is that increased home working has resulted in greater levels of household waste, has contributed to increasing ASB complaints & concerns on things like street cleaning & is changing use of public space (e.g. more use of parks).
- Urban-to-rural migration & an accelerated move to online shopping may impact city centres & sites like Canary Wharf.
- LBTH may be well-positioned for '15-minute city' concept, whereby key services and activities are available within 15- minute journey.
- Concerns raised about longer-term impacts on arts and culture sector in London.
- Others speculate that longer-term changes for cities will be less radical following Covid-19.
- Higher earners leaving London risks worsening place-based inequalities to the detriment of **deprived areas**⁶

In a summer 2020 housing survey carried out by London Assembly Housing Committee, One in seven Londoners (14%) want to leave the city as a result of the pandemic.

A drop in fare income led to the loss of £3.5 billion in revenue for TfL in 2020-2021¹





Wider impact on transport, air quality & cities - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Potential continued rebound in car usage & congestion as lockdown eases if public transport is seen as higher risk for Covid, leading to poor air quality
- Financial pressures facing TfL cause fare increases
- An accelerated migration from London risks negatively impacting the local economy

- Future TfL 'bailouts' deals could result in free or subsidised transport for young, old and disabled to reduce or end
- The postponement of some TfL improvements negatively impacts on public transport
- Climate change could be pushed down the agenda as a result of socio economic impact of Covid
- An accelerated migration from London could exacerbate place-based inequalities in LBTH
- Increased levels of homeworking has interfaces with levels of household waste, ASB complaint levels, and how public space is used (e.g. parks).

Opportunities

- Opportunity accelerate aims of the LBTH Transport Strategy, including encouraging more walking & cycling.
- People more aware of benefits of better air quality
- Improved air quality will have health benefits given air pollution increases the risk of many pre-existing conditions that make Covid more severe (e.g. asthma) & possibly Covid itself

- Opportunity to change how people travel around the borough on a long-term basis, towards more active travel
- Road safety increases if not dominated by cars
- Potential for review of planning policy/regeneration projects to support this shift
- Physical and mental health benefits of increased physical activity & improved air quality
- Contributes to tackling climate change
- Movement of some companies towards more home working reduces pressure on public transport
- LBTH potentially well-placed for '15 minute city' model



Impact on community cohesion & involvement



Feelings of community cohesion generally improved at first across the UK, then dropped down to pre-pandemic levels

- Pre-Covid, LBTH had comparatively high levels of resident-reported community cohesion levels.
- One report suggests a slow decline in people's sense of neighbourhood belonging across 2014-19, a strong sense of division in the UK; and a shift to finding community in virtual spaces¹.
- Evidence is that social cohesion grew at the start of the pandemic, with a sense of people 'coming together'. Feelings of unity then returned to slightly above pre-pandemic levels by Sept 2020¹.
- Indications that people feel a stronger sense of cohesion with their local community than in general. A report found local authorities that invested in social cohesion fared better on this over 2020¹. Lockdown resulted in some forming deeper connections with neighbours¹.
- Social activism & conversations on **BAME inequality** have been a core part of 2020. It is likely that the disparities highlighted by the pandemic contributed to this.
- **Key workers, deprived areas, younger people** & those from **Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black & 'Other'** backgrounds experienced greater declines in feelings of cohesion during the pandemic¹.
- Hate crimes against **Chinese and East Asian** people grew when the pandemic started¹ grew across the UK, but this was not seen in

In the 2021 LBTH Covid Residents Survey, 79% respondents agreed that people from different backgrounds get on well together

In the 2020 LBTH Covid Residents Survey, 43% of respondents said the pandemic had a positive impact on feelings of belonging to a local community. 18% reported a negative impact.

Trust in government institutions & mainstream media improved then dropped. The local picture is more positive than the national picture.

- Pre-Covid, there were low levels of trust in government institutions across the UK. Trust levels initially rose with the first lockdown, then returned to pre-pandemic levels later in 2020¹.
- Trust in local government and the sense of local unity have been higher and more consistent¹.
- There are indications of a reduction in trust in mainstream media. Some misinformation and disinformation spreading quickly across things like social media¹.
- **Key workers'** trust in government has fallen particularly dramatically. 57% of people from a **BAME** background reported trusting government advice at the peak of the pandemic, compared with 75% of white people¹.

In the 2021 LBTH Covid Residents Survey, 64% respondents reported trusting the council. In 2019 this was 69%, though the results cannot be compared due to differences in the sample of respondents

In December 2020, 57-60% of Londoners perceived national division to be growing. 20-23% perceived local division to be growing & 29-30% thought it was increasing¹

Volunteering surged with the pandemic & became hyper-local. Volunteering remain high

- Local communities, hyper-local mutual aid groups and local voluntary organisations have been critical to the pandemic response¹.
- A huge number of mutual aid groups spring up around the UK and in LBTH when the pandemic started.
- The pandemic saw a shift from local to 'hyper-local' forms of intervention and organisation¹
- One report notes that Covid also changed volunteering, accelerating trends towards online and 'micro' volunteering
- The Covid-19 volunteer hub recruited 3,209 volunteers supporting over 100 organisations as of July 2021, ranging from food delivery to vaccine centre marshals. Recruitment rates were highest over the first lockdown.
- Volunteering surge seen as potential positive Covid legacy.
- **Younger adults, men** and those from **higher socio-economic groups** were more likely to volunteer (nationally & locally). This is possibly influenced by Covid-19 risks and barriers facing other groups.

In the 2021 LBTH Covid Residents Survey, 25% said they had volunteered in Tower Hamlets or outside the borough at least once in the last 12 months



Wider impact on community involvement & cohesion - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Mistrust in mainstream media & government risks people making decisions based on incorrect information, to their own & others detriment
- Some studies suggest economic downturn increases the risk of 'scapegoating'
- Reduced opportunity for different communities to come together in public events undermines work to promote community cohesion

- Longer-term shifts in perceptions of national and local government and mainstream media may present further challenge, including on public health messaging
- Some studies suggest economic downturn increases the risk of 'scapegoating'

Opportunities

- Continue to support hyper-local community action
- Utilise social activism to help tackle discrimination and inequality
- Support and further embed volunteering to the benefit of community and VCS
- Keep mechanisms for community engagement that worked well over the pandemic, applying to other issues
- Capitalise on higher rates of trust and unity locally

- Social activism has the potential to tackle long-standing inequalities
- Increased levels of homeworking provides more opportunity for residents to be more involved in their local communities



Impact on local authority finances and services



TOWER HAMLETS

The pandemic has put extreme pressure on local authority finances, and government funding has not yet been enough to fully mitigate the impact.

- The pandemic has caused sudden and severe drops in local authority income, including from Council Tax and Business Rates. For example, the number of people claiming benefits and qualifying for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme increased significantly. More businesses are paying less in business rates.
- Non-repayment of debt to the local authority increased, likely due to the pandemic. For example, the number of people defaulting on Council Tax payments increased.
- Concurrently we had new areas that required expenditure, such as PPE, infection control, testing and emergency food provision.
- There has been an increase in costs in adult social care: A focus put on getting people discharged from hospital as quickly & safely as possible often meant large amounts of homecare put in place to enable this to happen. The increase is being met by the NHS, but this is a temporary arrangement, whereas there could be an increased long-term need – e.g. increased homecare due to long Covid.
- And concurrently, we have seen an increase in demand for support in other areas, such as domestic abuse and mental health support; with subsequent financial implications.
- Some of the projects intended to make savings had to be paused or delayed as we focused on the Covid-19 response
- Combined, this put significant pressure on our finances.

- Early in the pandemic, the Government pledged to provide 'whatever it takes' to local authorities to cover the cost of dealing with the crisis. However, there is feedback in the sector that this commitment has not yet been fulfilled.
- Additional emergency short-term funding was provided by government to councils as a result of Covid-19; and the national review of things like business rates was postponed
- The November 2020 Spending Review announced that the government would provide funding to Local Authorities for 75% of the 2020-21 Business Rates & Council Tax deficits (with the 25% remaining to still be repaid over three years by local authorities).
- Financial planning is challenging in this environment as new funding and grants have often been announced with very short notice and for a limited time period.
- We are using those grants to meet the costs and reduced income arising directly from Covid. This includes specific grants for Test and Trace, Outbreak Management, Infection Control (including supporting social care providers), Rough Sleepers & Reopening High Streets Safely.
- However, the grants do not address the wider, negative financial impacts of the pandemic on local authority finances.
- Our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was reviewed during the pandemic and extended to 2023-24. The MTFS approved at Council in March 2021 agreed the planned use of £1.3m reserves to balance the budget in 2021-22 and identified a potential budget gap of £10.9m for 2022-23 after the use of £8.2m reserves.

Covid-19 impacted on a number of council services, with knock-on impacts for staff and residents

- Council staff sickness levels and self-isolation levels over the pandemic impacted the timeliness of some council services.
- All council services had to adapt to new social distancing restrictions. For some services, this meant moving from a primarily face-to-face service with residents to one that was primarily over the phone or online. Feedback is that this worked well for some residents, and presented challenges for others.
- Some council services have dealt with an increase in demand, e.g. as a result of an increase in ASB complaints, or increased pressure to support businesses to adapt or operate in a Covid-safe way.
- Some council services were also impacted by redeployment, as some staff took on temporary, new roles to help respond to the pandemic (e.g. working to help distribute PPE).
- Work is now underway to retain what worked well during lockdown, and to restore face-to-face services as an option as soon as it is safe to do so.

The latest assessment of the 2020-21 Business Rates outturn position shows a significantly increased deficit (c£40m worse) on our Collection Fund, which is partially, but not fully mitigated by the government





Wider impact on local authority finance & services - predictions



Next 12-18 months

Longer term

Challenges

- Financial planning remains challenging as new funding often announced with short notice & for a limited time period
- NHS funding for increases in adult social care costs arising from hospital discharge is due to end in October, resulting in an additional pressure on finances.
- Increased financial pressure if continue to have reduced income from Council Tax and Business Rates
- Increased financial pressure if there is an increase in unemployment and deprivation – particularly when furlough ends & interventions withdrawn.
- Increased financial pressure arising from increase in demand for children’s social care, mental health support, domestic abuse support

- Ongoing increase in financial pressures in the areas where an increase in demand persist – e.g. social care
- Disruption to preventative actions (e.g. non-Covid immunisation rates) during pandemic results in costs later down the line
 - Reduced demand for work spaces result if more home working & less business based in the borough = less income via business rates = increased financial pressure.
- Economic downturn or lack of ‘bounce back’ results in reduced income and less repayment of debt + potential that council has to meet shortfalls in VCS provision = increased financial pressure.

Opportunities

- Potential of government announcement of sustainable, long-term funding solution to meet the indirect additional costs of Covid-19
- Retain service delivery that worked well during the pandemic, including having more digital and phone options

- Swift economic recovery will relieve some of the financial pressure
- Retain learning from the pandemic on how to flexible and agile in our response to emergency situations



Impact on inequality / particular groups – summary*



Ethnic background

- BAME communities: interfaces with mental health impacts, economic impacts, crime and policing impacts, domestic abuse impacts, a steeper decline in feelings of community cohesion, and lower trust in government institutions.
- White communities: interfaces with rough sleeping and harmful/dependent drinking impacts.

Age

- Children & young people: interfaces with learning & education impacts, social care & safeguarding impacts, mental health & lockdown impacts,, unemployment impacts & a steeper decline in feelings of community cohesion
- Older people: interfaces with disruption to health services, social care & safeguarding, Covid-related fraud impacts, mental health impacts, unemployment (50+) impacts

Sex; pregnancy & maternity

- Women: interfaces with long Covid, mental health impacts, domestic abuse impacts, economic impact, increased alcohol consumption
- Pregnancy: Domestic abuse impacts.
- Interfaces with childcare running through some of these.
- Men: interfaces with rough sleeping and harmful/dependent drinking impacts

Disability

- Interfaces with long Covid, disruption to health services, mental health impacts, social care & safeguarding impacts, economic & employment impacts, domestic abuse impacts.

Socio-economic

- Areas with high levels of deprivation: interface with long Covid, healthy behaviour impacts, a steeper decline in feelings of community cohesion, impacts to places arising from home working
- Lower income groups: interfaces with mental health impacts, employment & deprivation impacts, domestic abuse impacts.

Key workers; carers

- Interfaces with mental health impacts, a steeper decline in feelings of community cohesion, and lower trust in government institutions.

**This information identifies the impacts on the areas identified in this assessment, but it should be noted that there will be wider impacts on other groups and protected characteristics. For example, disruption to NHS services may have had an impact on gender identity clinic waiting times, and social distancing requirements at maternity appointments have impacted pregnant women. Please see the Equality Analysis of the Covid-19 impact carried out in 2020 for more detailed analysis on each protected characteristic.*



Temporary & longer-term impacts

Temporary impacts

- Crime dropped
- Car use dropped
- Air quality improved
- Feelings of cohesion increased

Changing impact

- Demand for mental health support dropped then rose
- Children's social care referrals dropped then rose
- Adult safeguarding referrals dropped then rose
- Demand for domestic abuse support dropped then rose
- Rough sleeping dropped then started to increase

Cushioned impacts

- Impact on employment cushioned via furlough scheme
- Impact on business cushioned via loans
- Impact on homelessness cushioned via eviction ban
- Impact on food poverty cushioned via holiday hunger schemes

Longer-term, persistent impacts

- Physical health impacts
- Mental health impacts
- Impact on deprivation
- Impact on inequality
- Impact on education and learning
- Changing working & travel patterns
- Lasting impact of trauma on individuals

