



Stockton-on-Tees  
BOROUGH COUNCIL



# Covid-19

## The effects on our communities



Stockton-on-Tees

## Executive Summary

On behalf of Public Health Stockton on Tees the Community Wellbeing Champion service have engaged with local people to find out their views and experiences of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, and how this has impacted on their lives and their health and wellbeing.

To gain this information we used a variety of methods including online surveys, face-to-face sessions and ensured that paper copies of the survey were readily available. We worked with our Champions to design the survey to ensure the right questions were asked in the right way. Face-to-face groups included: EID Fusion, Roseworth Big Local Household Health Check, Breastfeeding group (family hub), Marlborough House, Refugee form, ESF Youth, LGTQ+ youth, Trans support, Dementia café, thirteen group

To widen our reach, we utilised and the use of social media, telephone, WhatsApp and email contact with our champions, the public and support services in the local area. One hundred and eighteen people completed the survey.

The overall findings of this engagement, based on what people have told us, show that:

People's health and wellbeing has been affected in many ways including Long covid, weight gain, fatigue, financial worries but the top three concerns were:

- Isolation and loneliness
- Mental health
- Fear and anxiety (fear included fear of who to trust for health care messages, fear to go outside due to covid).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who supported us during this work and for all the individuals who took the time to complete the survey

## Introduction

In November 2020, Public Health Stockton-on-Tees commissioned Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP) to provide the COVID-19 Community Champion project with the aim:

To work together with communities within Stockton-on-Tees to understand COVID-19; the messages and restrictions and to engage those communities in creating solutions to

- minimise the risk of transmission,
- minimise barriers and challenges,
- minimise impact on wellbeing

To ensure the success of the service the importance of reliable and active volunteer Champions could not be underestimated. Without their trusted status and guidance, the service would have run the risk of being yet another one-way message channel to disseminate Covid-19 Public Health messages. By working collectively, and as equal partners, we began to reach the heart of communities to ensure people received factual and up-to-date messages which could help save lives. This important joint working allowed us to seek out the myths and barriers which were stopping our residents from protecting themselves and others from the spread of the virus.

The model was so successful that in April 2022 the project was developed into the Community Wellbeing Champion (CWC) service. Whilst Covid-19 remains at the heart of the service the remit has been broadened to include wider public health messages. The new remit has encouraged many more of our residents and communities to sign up to be Champions.

Public Health Stockton-on-Tees wanted to harness this new enthusiasm by asking the public how they felt the pandemic had affected individuals and communities and ascertain if their approach and services still met the need of the public.

Working with the Champions and Public Health, CWC codesigned the survey.

## Findings

Using a mixed method of on-line surveys, face to face groups and paper surveys 118 people completed the survey. The intelligence gathered will be used to shape the CWC work plan and to help plan local public health services to better meet the needs of the local population.

**Question 1-** “The Covid-19 pandemic has affected us all. What, if any, health and wellbeing issues are people telling you that are still affecting them?”

Long covid- 14

Covid hospitalisation- 1

Memory issue- 2

Mental Health- 29

Isolation/loneliness- 30

Fear/Anxiety- 29

Fatigue- 11

Covid-like symptoms- 10

Covid- 4

Accessing support services- 2

Weight/Fitness- 12

Children’s mental health- 2

Mobility- 3

Bereavement- 1

Financial- 7

Increased alcohol use- 3

Stress- 5

Accessing health service- 17

Quality of care- 3

**Question 2- “What health issues have arisen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in your community?”**

Balance- 1

Blood pressure- 1

Blood circulation- 1

Mobility- 2

Reduced ability- 1

Long covid symptoms- 13

Mental health (anxiety and depression)- 40

Stress- 1

Breathing problems- 8

Fatigue- 4

Deterioration of illness- 1

Weight/fitness- 14

Chest infection- 2

Nutrition- 1

Greater alcohol consumption- 2

Drug use- 1

Pneumonia-1

Delayed development in children- 3

Access to health care- 25

Question 3- “What groups, if any do you feel have been affected more than others as a result of the pandemic? And why do you feel these groups have been affected more?”

0-19: 47

People with long term health conditions: 58

70+: 43

Other: refugees- 1, homeworkers, 2

Question 4- “Are there any particular health and wellbeing topics or issues which affect your community you would like more information or help about?”

0-19: 26

Adult mental health: 46

Adult smoking/alcohol issues: 15

Physical health (e.g., weight): 36

Drug misuse: 8

Menopause: 18

Isolation/loneliness: 35

Other (e.g., sexual health/long covid/ domestic violence etc.)

Question 5- “We want to look at the way we communicate Public Health messages with our communities, you are best placed to tell us how your community would like to hear our messages.

Social media- 62

Email- 39

Paper copies- 29

WhatsApp- 16

Focus groups- 28

Other- 6

Question 6- “We have provided lots of information and safety messages during the pandemic. What do you feel would motivate your community to listen, engage and take action?”

Many people stated that they wanted clear, concise and accessible information. Following on from the covid-19 pandemic many people crave the face-to-face interaction therefore appreciate a prominent social presence; it has been encouraged to attend social events and target areas where there is high foot traffic (shopping areas etc). accessible information is priority to those who cannot attend public events, the Muslim and disabled communities have been highlighted to benefit from paper copies of information to include leaflets. Social media is a theme that continuously arises as we are part of a “social media age” and the information is easy to access. Many people feel incentives such as activities and training will encourage active participation, especially given current circumstances (fuel poverty, cost of living crisis), the ability to take resources. Proof of effective practice has also been highlighted; people are more likely to engage if they are aware of the successes of the project. Stockton times has a free publication service as pointed out through feedback.

## Summary

It is clear from the findings that many people have been affected by the pandemic in many different ways. Not only have people’s health and wellbeing being affected but some have struggled financially. Whilst we will be concentrating on those topics affecting more people, we do not underestimate the impact and importance on each and every person and topic shared with us.

Mental health, loneliness, isolation and anxiety are clearly highlighted as being most important by those who responded.

The group of people most affected was quite mixed with young people, those 70+ and people with long term conditions highlighted.

When asked what topics people would like more help and information on not surprisingly the main topics were isolation, loneliness, mental health and help with physical health and weight loss.

## Recommendations

There is a lot we can do as individuals to stay healthy and well in addition to the Council role. When making our recommendations we have been mindful of the role of Public Health:

- to improve and protect the health of local residents
- preventing ill health and early deaths
- protecting people's health in major emergencies, including prevention and control of local coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and providing expert advice and support on outbreak management

The survey results clearly point to more work being carried out around loneliness, isolation, mental health and physical health.

It is the recommendation of the Community Wellbeing Champion service that we work with our Champions and Public Health to drill further down on what support is needed in communities to help improve Mental health and reduce isolation. We feel we should be mindful of empowering individuals to take an informed active role in improving their own health and wellbeing.

Studies have proven that there is a direct link between mental health and physical health. [Physical health and mental health | Mental Health Foundation](#). Many services and organisations already exist in our area. To assist our communities in accessing those services we would recommend our Champions are upskilled in being able to signpost residents they represent to relevant services and equally important inform CWC of any gaps in services or examples of good practice.

We would also recommend that representatives from services who support people with Mental Health, loneliness, isolation or anxiety are invited to Champion meetings to publicize their service.