

TITLE OF REPORT: 'Behind the masks, Gateshead's Covid stories' (2020/21).

REPORT OF: Director of Public Health

Purpose of the Report

To provide an overview of the Director of Public Health's annual report for 2020/21.

Background

The Director of Public Health annual report is a statutory function. It is required to be independent, in that it doesn't represent an organisational or political view, but instead sets out the local Director of Public Health's professional perspective of the health and wellbeing of the community.

Last year's DPH report, '*It's raining, its pouring*' touched briefly on the Covid-19 pandemic and some of the inequalities that have been highlighted and exacerbated by both the virus and the measures required to mitigate morbidity and mortality for our residents.

This year, my report focuses solely on the pandemic. Everyone who lives, works, or goes to school in Gateshead has been affected by the enormity of Covid-19. I therefore wanted to tell the first year, or so, of Gateshead's Covid story through the voices of our communities and partners to:

- Record local people's and professionals' experiences of the pandemic in their own words, recognising the devastating impact that it has had, and the tremendous efforts made by people who have come together to tackle it.
- Acknowledge that we are battling a syndemic - concurrent pandemics of Covid-19, discrimination and disadvantage, which interact, cluster and exacerbate the burden of disease.
- Call for revitalised and re-focused action to tackle inequalities. This has never been more important than it is now.

Overview

The report highlights the direct impact of Covid-19 on Gateshead people and how organisations, individuals and communities have gone above and beyond to respond to the challenges they have faced. The report then focuses on the impact of the pandemic on the six policy objectives set out in the 'Marmot Review: Fair Society, Healthy Lives' (2010) and adopted by the 'Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy: 'Good jobs, homes, health and friends':

- Give every child the best start in life.
- Enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives.
- Create fair employment and good work for all.
- Ensure a health standard of living for all.
- Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.
- Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention.

Our Gateshead stories show that the pandemic has had a massive impact on us all but also demonstrates that the relentless interaction between Covid-19 and established and emerging inequalities is leading to a growing gulf between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

Lessons from our teacher called Covid

Rather than traditional recommendations, the report concludes with a number of lessons from our Gateshead Covid stories.

Lesson 1: We must continue to prioritise the policy objectives set out in our Health and Wellbeing Strategy (published February 2020). Our Covid stories have shown us that, while they may be more challenging than ever, they remain the key areas to tackle so we can reduce levels of inequality and alter the circumstances that lead to inequality.

Lesson 2: We must continue to take action on poverty at every opportunity. We must make sure that the services that provide advice and support to those in the communities of place and interest, who have been most affected by the pandemic, receive the resources that they need to mitigate the damage that poverty brings. This means we will have to do different things in different places striving for equity and not equality.

Lesson 3: Children and young people have experienced significant disruption to their lives at key stages in their development. Supporting children, young people and families to make up ground lost in the pandemic as soon as possible, is critical to preventing problems being stored up for generations to come. We need a focus on how we support our children and young people to recover. Our response will need to be differentiated by the stage of life.

Lesson 4: There must be an increased focus on preventative action across all our services. In particular, we need to consider how we support mental health and well-being in all our services and at all levels. The long-term consequences of the pandemic

for the health of the local population will take time to be fully understood but it is already evident that there has been a negative impact on many people's mental health. Health behaviours including physical activity, alcohol consumption and smoking are also early areas to address.

Lesson 5: We must engage communities in developing the solutions – enabling people to maximise their capabilities and have control of their lives is, as we know, is part of the solution. We must work with communities to hear and understand the things that matter to them and what works for them. During Covid-19, we've seen how successful this approach has been in making information and support accessible and relevant to different communities.

Lesson 6: We need to continue to harness the power of social action in communities. During the pandemic local community groups stepped up to support their vulnerable neighbours. We saw how powerful this could be when there is a collective goal everyone can get behind. We need to find a way to support this type of community action.

Lesson 7: We need to ensure that those innovations and service developments that have improved access to services are identified and mainstreamed whilst recognising that they may not be appropriate for everyone and all circumstances. There needs to be a range of options, particularly for those who are digitally excluded whilst recognising that others have benefitted from being able to access services remotely.

Lesson 8: The initial waves of the pandemic have demonstrated how much successful partnerships can achieve when local government, health and other public sector partners, charities, the voluntary sector and community groups come together behind a shared goal. We need to continue to build on this renewed focus and purpose as we look to the future.

Recommendations

1. The Health and Wellbeing Board are asked to consider, comment on and agree action to tackle the lessons from our Covid experience in Gateshead.

Contact: Alice Wiseman 01914332777