

COVID Community Impact Assessment

Recognising the impact of COVID-19 on Bracknell
Forest residents

July 2021

Introduction

Purpose

The coronavirus pandemic and subsequent measures to control transmission has impacted every part of life. There is a significant amount of data being collected at a national and local level to track the changes in perceptions, behaviours and environment. The community impact assessment brings together information from a range of sources to provide a local narrative on how residents in Bracknell Forest have been affected by the virus.

Understanding these impacts and the emerging opportunities and challenges will inform the council's decision making and future planning to make sure priorities best address the current environment. This work also supports wider actions to recognise the disproportionate impacts of the virus for some groups.

This report is not intended to provide the answers or solutions to the impacts of coronavirus, however the evidence gathered is an important step in identifying the key issues that must be addressed.

An extensive assessment has been conducted and examined to guide strategic work and this report is a summary of the most significant issues for ongoing action. This document aims to highlight the areas where evidence indicates significant impact on the community. It also describes how the COVID pandemic is likely to affect the delivery of the Council Plan. Finally this document raises current areas of priority for recovery and renewal work.

We hope this will inform residents about the direction of the council's work with partners in addressing the emerging impacts from the pandemic.

Methodology

This report is based on data broadly up to the 1st May 2021. This builds on the previous community impact assessments to compare the changing trends over time. It aims to capture a snapshot of the impacts emerging from the new environment. Whilst further changes have since occurred and some newer data is available, the 1st May has been used to provide a consistent time point.

It is recognised that the impact of coronavirus will continue to change over the coming months and years therefore, there is broader work monitoring live data. There are also a very broad range of impacts and there continues to be new data available, therefore this report has focused on highlighting the most salient issues.

The narrative provided has been based on a range of local and national evidence sources.

- Local statistical sources and dashboards
- National transparency data
- Analytical primary research from local partners
- Stakeholder and partner insight

When reference is made to the 'first lockdown' period this refers to the restrictive measures put in place from the 23rd of March to the 1st June 2020. The 'second lockdown' period refers to the 5th November to 2nd December 2020 and the 'third lockdown' period refers to 5th January to 12th April 2021.

Community Profile

Within Bracknell Forest there is a diverse community. It has been widely reported that coronavirus affects some groups more than others with an increased risk of catching the virus and a higher chance of mortality. Therefore, the prevalence of these groups must be recognised to understand the potential health inequalities and impact for the borough.

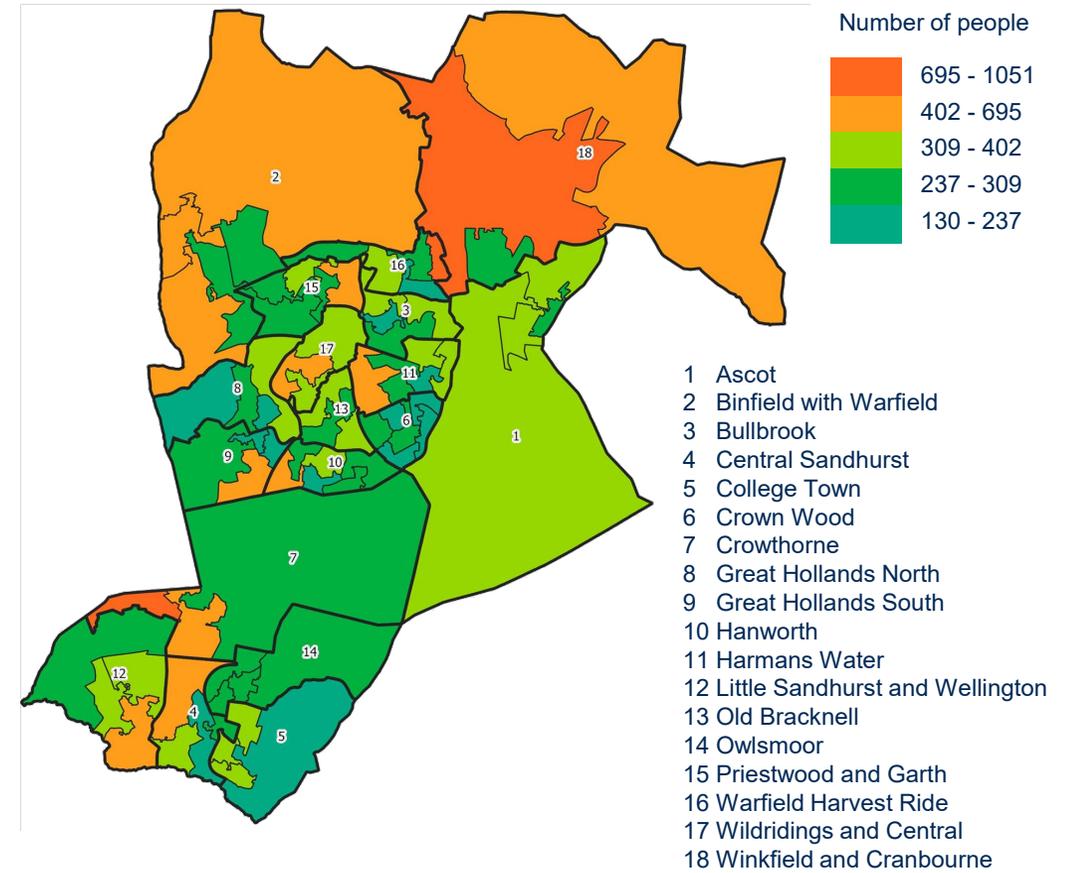
Age and Gender

Bracknell Forest has a population of approximately 123,000 people. Of these, just under half (49.7%) are male. Of confirmed cases, men have been more at risk of needing intensive care and have a higher mortality rate.

Bracknell Forest has a smaller proportion of over 60s compared to the average for the South East and England. This is estimated at just under 25,000 people. There is a significantly higher risk of mortality for older adults, particularly those over 80 years. There are approximately 4,700 residents over 80 in the borough, this is 3.8% of the population and a smaller proportion than the SE (5.5%) and England (5.1%)

Ward level information is available on the over 60 population. Some parts of the borough have higher proportions of adults over 60 living there, this is particularly noticeable in the north of the borough. There may be a greater impact on these communities if the virus becomes more widespread in the borough, as those over 60 have more negative outcomes.

Population aged 60 and over 2019



Source: [Public Health England Disparities Report](#) and [Berkshire Observatory](#)

Community Profile

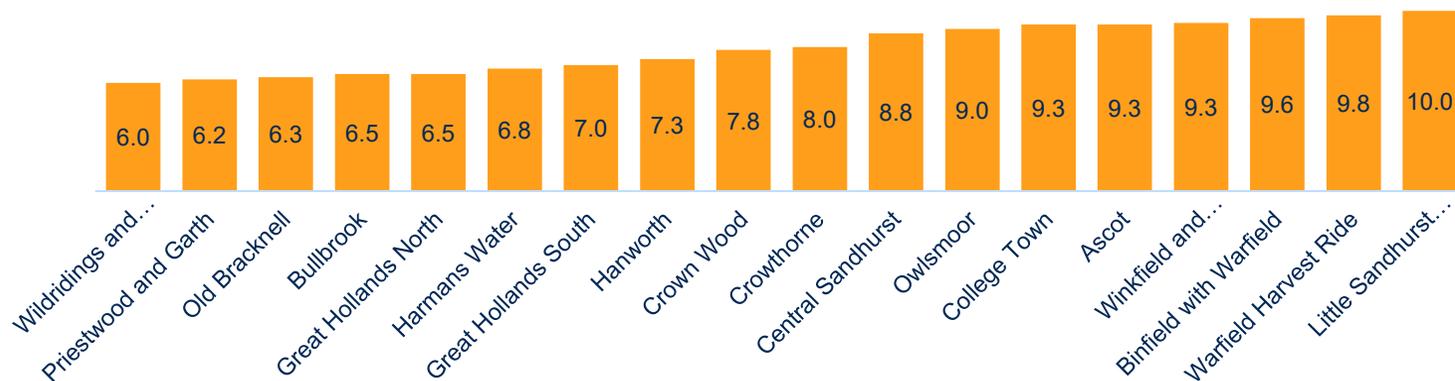
Deprivation

The level of deprivation is relatively low across the borough, with just under half of neighbourhoods in the least deprived 20% of the country. However, there are a further 16% of neighbourhoods considered more deprived than the national average. The evidence to date shows that more deprived areas have a higher rate of deaths related to coronavirus.

Parts of Crowthorne and Wildridings and Central are the most deprived in the borough, therefore the impact of coronavirus may be greater for these communities.

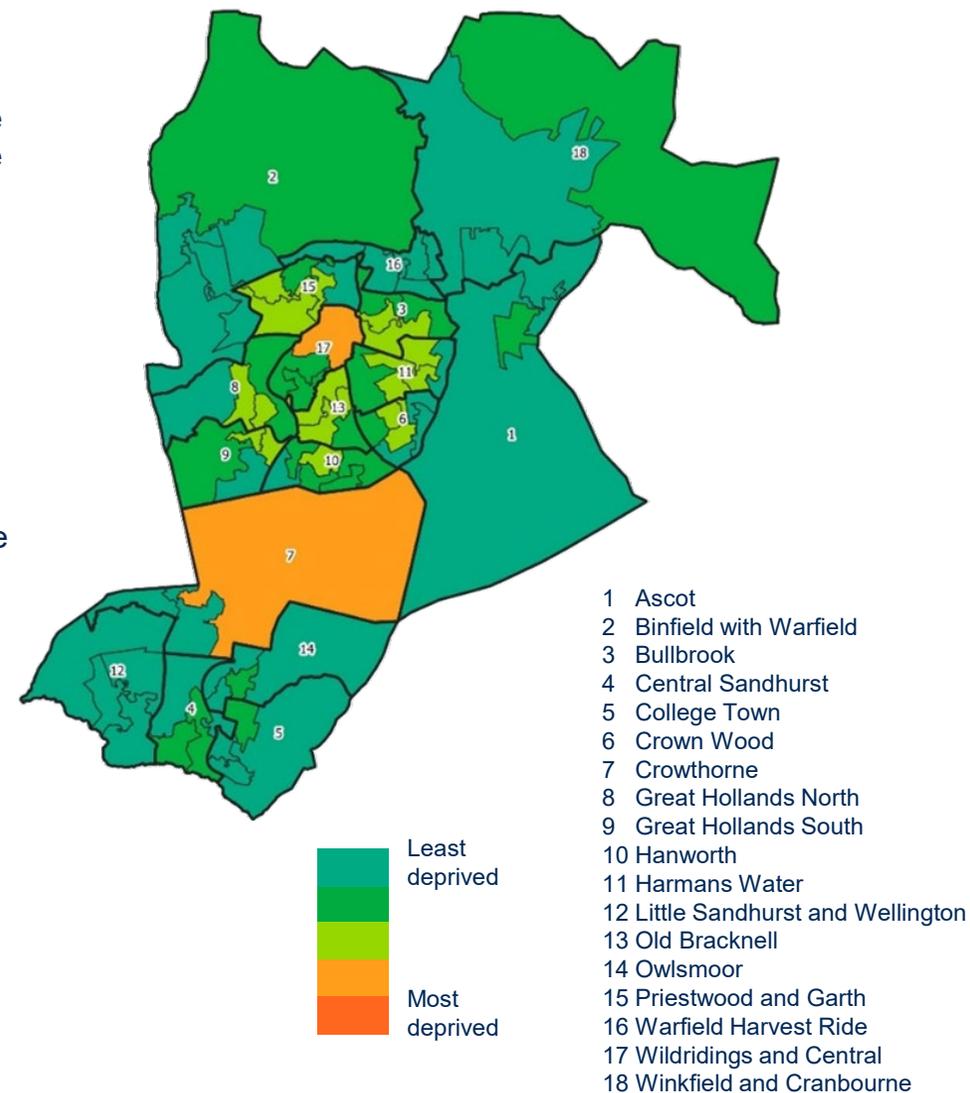
The map implies that a large proportion of Crowthorne is more deprived, however it should be noted that this is a single neighbourhood (Lower Layer Super Output Area). All neighbourhoods represent approximately 1500 people, regardless of geographic size. When evaluating the deprivation of whole wards, it shows that Crowthorne has an average level of deprivation for the borough, as highlighted in the graph below. Wards nearer to Bracknell town centre are, on average, more deprived.

Average Deprivation (decile)



Source: [Public Health England Disparities Report](#) and [Berkshire Observatory](#)

Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019



Community Profile

Ethnicity

There is a similar profile of ethnicities in Bracknell Forest compared to the South East, with 91% of the population from a white ethnicity. It's estimated there are just over 10,000 ethnic minority residents in the borough. There are a notably higher proportion of 'other Asian' residents than other areas of the South East and England, this is in part due to a large community of Nepali residents linked to the Gurkha Company Sittang regiment based at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

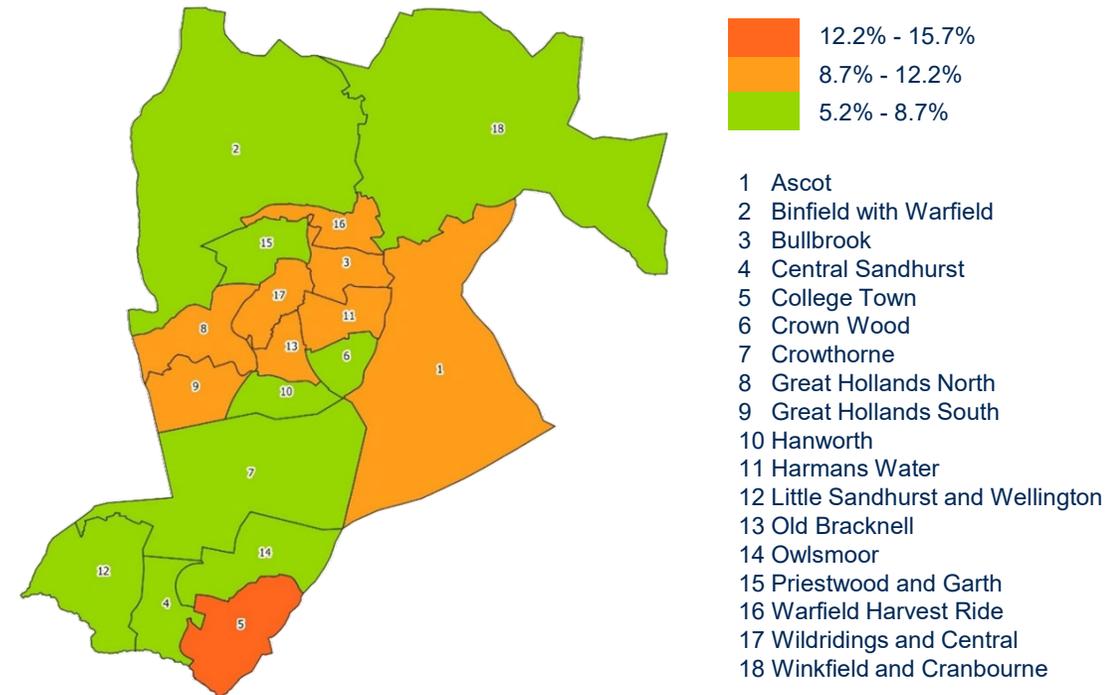
A number of more negative impacts of the pandemic have been reported for non-white ethnicities. Including that Black ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by coronavirus as more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than white ethnicities. Some ethnic minority groups are also more likely to need more intensive treatment.

Bracknell town centre wards generally have a higher proportion of residents from ethnic minority communities. However, there is also a significantly higher proportion living in College Town where there is a large Nepali population. Therefore, the impact of the virus may be greater in these areas.

Household environment

In the 2011 census, approximately 7% of households in the borough were single parents with dependent children and a further 28% are one person households. If these proportions have remained similar, this equates to around 17,500 houses with one adult. The impact of the multiple periods of lockdown may be greater for these individuals due to isolation and the knock on effects for health and wellbeing.

Percentage of ethnic minority population



An estimated 6% of households are considered overcrowded, where there are increased risk of transmission and where it may be more difficult to work or study at home.

Similarly, the risk of isolation may be higher for those who are not as able to connect through technology and with their community. It was estimated in 2019 that 2.4% of the Bracknell Forest adult population have never used the internet and 0.7% do not speak English well or at all. Within the over 65 population around 12% report not to speak English well.

Source: [Public Health England Disparities Report](#) and [Berkshire Observatory](#)

Community Profile

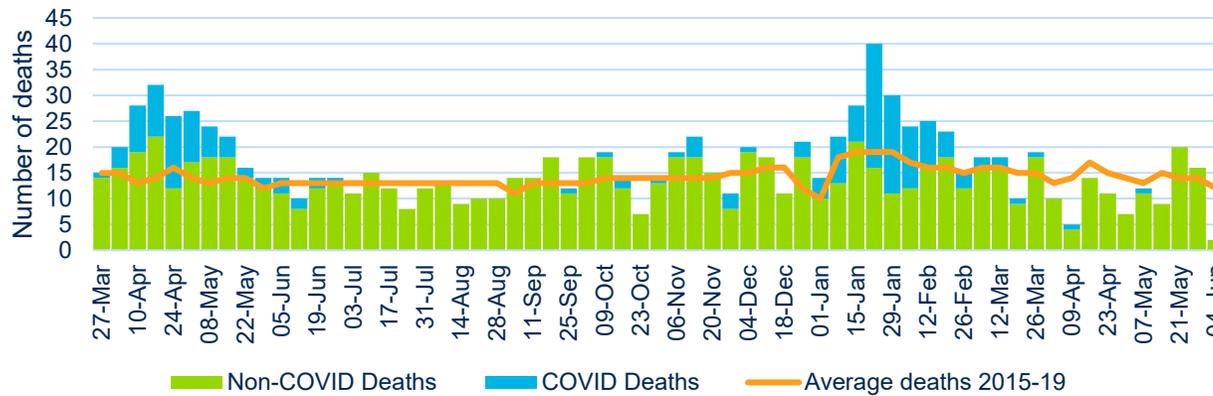
Surveillance Data

On the 30th April 2021 in Bracknell Forest, there was an average case rate of 25 new cases per week, around 8% of cases were in the over 60s age group. There is a slow but continued reduction in cases.

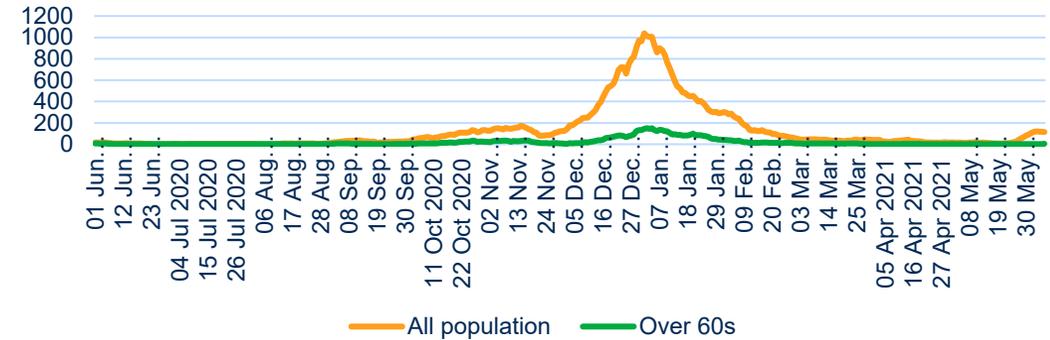
Mortality

Up to the week ending 30th April, there had been 186 deaths of Bracknell Forest residents registered as related to COVID-19. This is an increase of 115 people, since the last report (end of September) and reflects the 'second wave' that occurred over the winter. The pressures on healthcare and different environmental circumstances have also been reported to have contributed to more deaths. There has been approximately an 18% increase overall in the number of deaths of Bracknell Forest residents in the last 13 months, compared to the expected average. This is substantially higher than the previous report and reflect the high impact of the second Winter wave.

Weekly mortality in Bracknell Forest



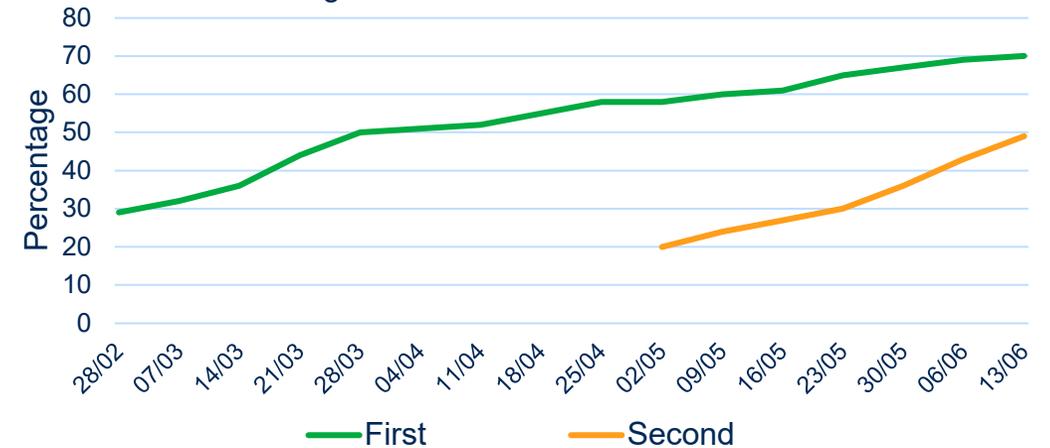
Weekly number of confirmed cases:
7-day moving average



Vaccinations

Up to the week ending 13 June, 70% of residents had received at least one dose of a COVID vaccination and almost 50% had received both doses. Broadly this is in line with the rates for England and across CIPFA neighbours.

Percentage of residents with a COVID vaccine



Since this report, the rate of new cases has increased. There is a surveillance tool from the Berkshire Public Health team with real time reporting. This can be accessed at: www.berkshirepublichealth.co.uk/covid-19-dashboard

Source: LG Inform and Fingertips PHE

Community Profile

Shielding residents

The shielding programme was introduced during the first lockdown to provide additional protection to those defined as clinical extremely vulnerable. The NHS initially advised 2,218 residents in Bracknell Forest to follow the shielding guidance. By the 1st June 2020 this had doubled to 4,139 residents. Of those advised to shield, 2,502 registered themselves for support online or over the phone.

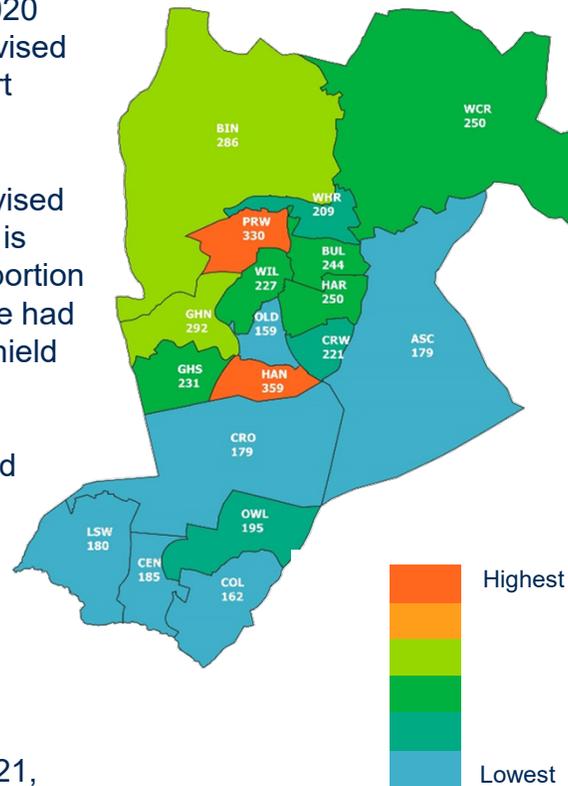
The ward with the greatest number of people advised to shield was in Hanworth, with 359 people. This is approximately 4.4% of that community. As a proportion of the ward population, Winkfield and Cranbourne had the highest percentage of residents advised to shield at 5.1%.

The lowest numbers advised to shield were in Old Bracknell with 159 people (2.6%).

This shows which areas may have the greatest health needs and potential wellbeing needs linked to the longer and stricter isolation recommendations.

The second shielding phase ended on 1 April 2021, were a total of 5,906 had been advised to shield.

Advised to shield



Health

Other health conditions have also been linked to different outcomes for coronavirus. Most notably diabetes has been reported in one in five COVID-19 deaths. The health profile of the borough is relatively similar to the rest of England as around 62% of the local population classed as overweight and there is a diabetes prevalence of 7%.

Community Profile Summary

The community profile of Bracknell Forest residents suggests that the impact of coronavirus may not significantly differ for the rest of the South East. Of note are the lower number of the over 60s population and lower levels of deprivation which may slightly reduce the risks and consequent negative impact on the community. However, there are over 10,000 residents in the BAME community who are more at risk of the COVID-19.

Within the borough, the ward level information also shows that there may be greater impact for some specific communities. This may be particularly apparent where there are compounding risks for example in some of the central Bracknell Town wards where there is greater deprivation and higher numbers of the BAME community.

This may be relevant to consider in the context of the council plan and associated recovery planning as it identifies where more targeted resources may be needed to support specific communities.

Emerging trends – Challenges

The impact of the pandemic and associated restrictions will have been significant for many and this report aimed to understand some of these key areas. The data and insights from services, partners and residents identified several areas where the patterns suggest negative impacts. These have also been explored in further detail beyond this summary to further understand the impact on Bracknell Forest.

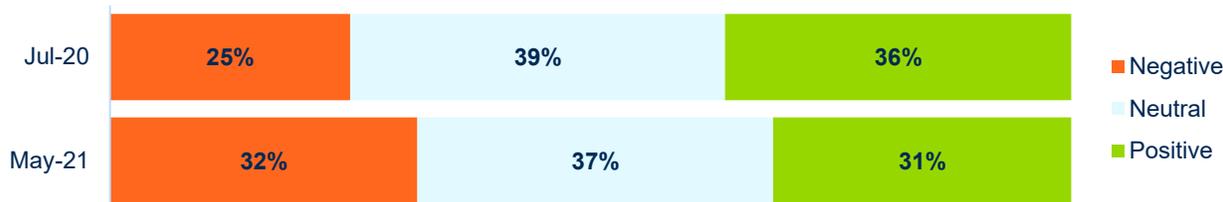
Unemployment remains high

National data shows that unemployment in the borough has significantly increased since the pandemic. Whilst this was initially more apparent for younger people, it now appears to be over 55s where the unemployment is more sustained. This will have significant knock on effects, including stable but increased use of foodbanks, Citizens Advice and financial support claims. Looking to the coming months there are also concerns that the end of the furlough scheme will further increase unemployment.

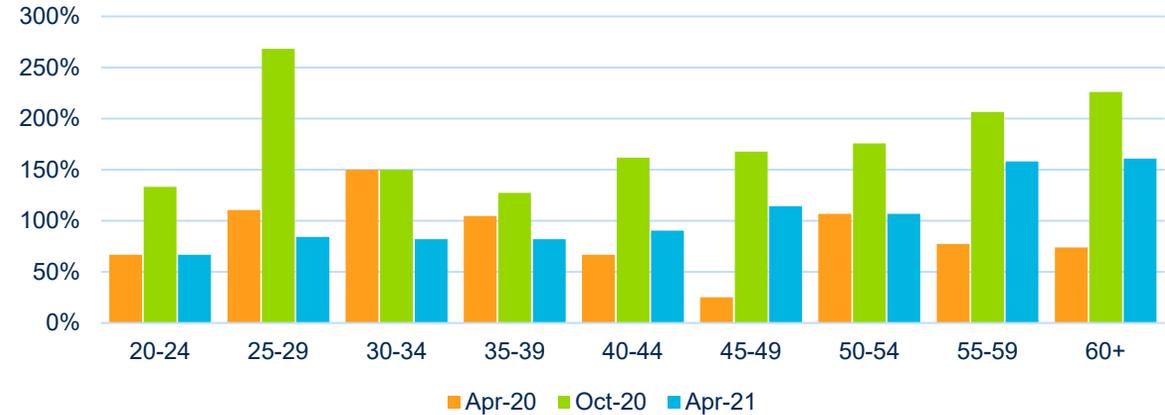
Worsening mental health

In the council's May 2021 independent survey, one third of residents reported that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health. This was a higher number than in the July 2020 survey. Partners have also shared their concern about the increasing prevalence and complexity of mental health needs. However it is also important to note that around one third also reported a positive impact for their mental health, and for many, household and caring relationships have improved.

Residents Survey: Mental Health Impact



Change in number of JSA claims compared to 2018/19 average



Slow recovery for community social and learning groups

The booking and use of community spaces has remained substantially lower than last year. The significant reduction in the use of these spaces demonstrates how many community groups have had to operate in alternative ways. Some groups may be able to operate online however many will also have stopped. This reduces the opportunities for support, personal development and active lifestyles for the community.

Disruption to children's education and support

Schools have significantly changed how they provide support and education to their pupils. Despite this, it has been widely reported that the pandemic has increased the inequalities in attainment and learning. 58% of parents reported that the pandemic has negatively affected their child's education. There is still significant uncertainty for the longer term effects of this.

Residents Survey: Impact on Child's Education

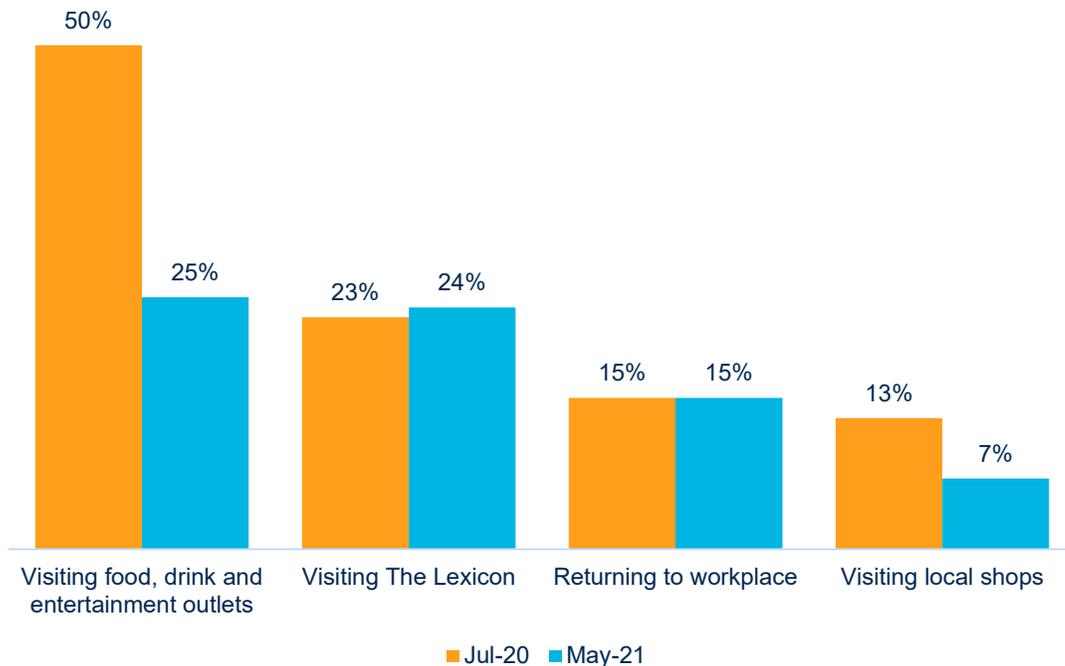


Emerging trends – Improving

Town centre recovery

Several indicators, including car park visits, suggest that town centre activity is increasing as restrictions continue to ease and as more people get vaccinated. This was also supported by the residents survey, which particularly indicates recovery of local shops and retail. There has also been a significant increase in confidence for visiting food and leisure outlets.

Residents survey: Activities not likely to return to soon

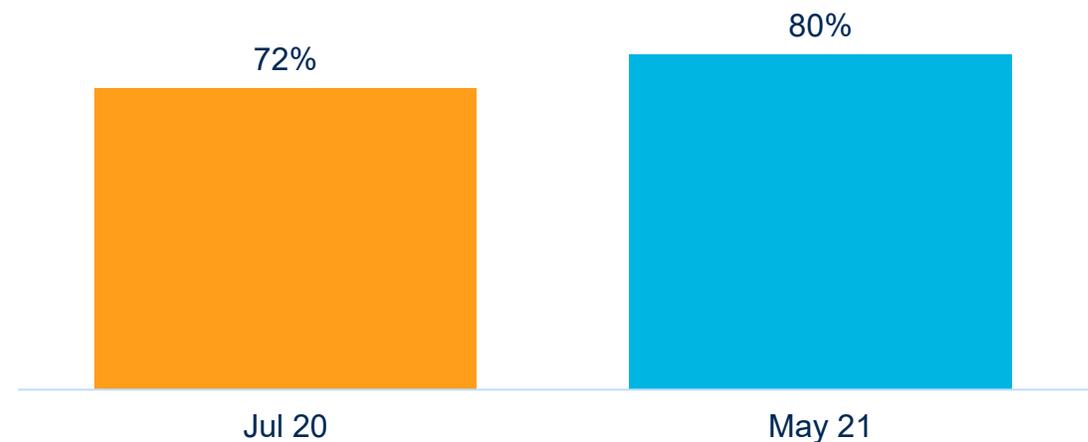


Climate friendly action

Throughout the pandemic there has been positive changes for the environment, particularly linked to reduced driving. In the recent residents survey, three quarters of residents agreed that the pandemic was a good opportunity for people to be more environmentally friendly. More people reported taking actions to reduce their carbon footprint than in July 2020, suggesting a greater desire to be environmentally conscious.

In comparing the two resident's surveys, it shows that residents are now more likely to be walking and cycling and to be traveling less in general. This implies that positive habits may be forming. The introduction of the food recycling service is also increasing the opportunities to be environmentally friendly.

Percentage of residents who have made changes to reduce the carbon footprint



Emerging trends – Opportunities

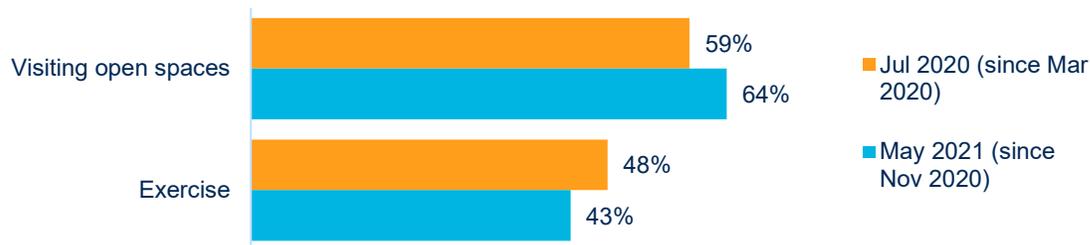
Increased volunteering and community engagement

During the pandemic lockdowns, the community excelled in supporting the local community response. Over 7,500 tasks were completed by the community response volunteers. Around one in five residents undertook some form of volunteering, including informal activities. Those aged 35-54 were the most likely to volunteer and reported a greater intention to continue in the future. This increase in active engagement within the community demonstrates a positive impact of the pandemic and shows how vital strong community networks are.

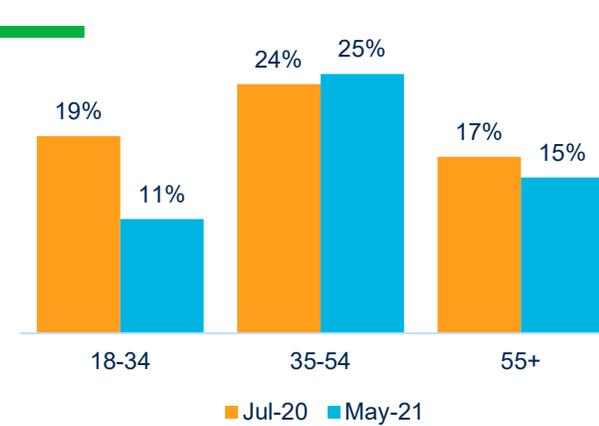
Increased exercise and use of open spaces

Whilst there has been a mixed impact for overall physical health, reports in local surveys suggest that many residents have been able to do more exercise during the lockdown than previously. In many cases this was reported as linked to having more time. Many residents also report accessing local parks and open spaces more often. Promoting healthy lifestyles is an important commitment within the council plan and so the current changes in behaviour suggest positive progress towards this and an opportunity to be sustained.

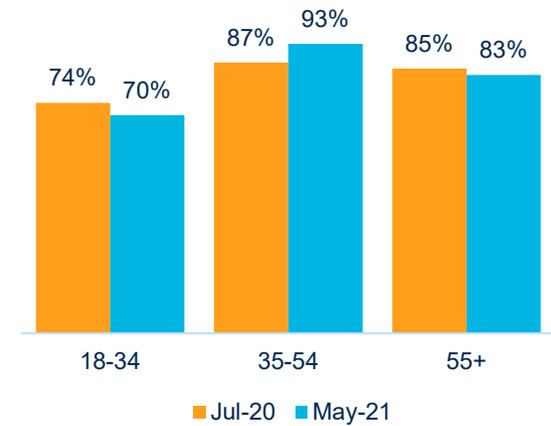
Residents survey: More frequent activities



Volunteering during the pandemic*



Intention to keep volunteering



Greater digital engagement and confidence

Many activities had to move to digital operating methods during the pandemic restrictions. Health partners have reported greater preference from many patients for using these online services. There were also many more visitors to the council website and increased engagement on social media platforms, all indicating changing communication habits. Most residents reported using the internet, particularly for communication, more often than before the pandemic.

Using online services



Accumulated impacts

Through this report, evidence had been gathered identifying some of the key impacts for residents. These have been grouped into themes related broadly to the council plan, however there are also cross cutting and accumulated impacts that do not fit into a single theme. The impacts of COVID have widened health inequalities, disproportionately affecting certain groups of our local population, therefore this page briefly summarises some of the most significant overarching issues where there are multiple compounding impacts. This broadly remains the same as the previous CIA.

Young people

There has been a slight reduction in the rate of young people seeking employment support, since the previous CIA. This is a positive indication of recovery in employment rates. Of those school aged, there are emerging indications of increasing gaps in education attainment, compounded by deprivation and lack of technology for home-schooling. There is also likely to be an increasing cohort of young people leaving school into a limited jobs and training market. However broadly, there is confidence in young people in accessing the economy and support as restrictions ease.



Older adults

Older adults are more at risk of mortality if they are infected by coronavirus, although the progress of the vaccination programme significantly limits this. They are also more likely to have wider health conditions where treatments and check-ups may have been postponed during parts of the lockdown restrictions, having negative impacts on health. This group are more likely to have shielded, increasing their risk of isolation and negative mental health impacts. This isolation can also cause further deterioration for conditions such as dementia. Older adults are also more likely to be affected by digital deprivation in skills, confidence and access to online and virtual communication methods.



Low income families

There are an increasing number of people affected by multiple deprivations. For example, those already on lower incomes are also more often working in jobs in sectors most affected by redundancies, therefore they are at more risk of unemployment. These groups may also be more reliant on the VCS for support, for example through foodbanks. There has been a lot of financial support schemes in place for low income families, which may be masking and delaying some of the impacts.



Ethnic minority communities

It is already widely reported that COVID-19 is exacerbating the pre-existing inequalities in health. Ethnic minority communities are particularly affected with negative outcomes related to COVID-19 however this will be minimised with the vaccination programme. They also are more likely to live in areas of deprivation, to use public transport for work and to avoid seeking healthcare.



Council plan impacts



Value for money

The evidence indicates increasing financial hardship for residents, so the need for council tax support is likely to be greater. The evidence also suggest greater confidence and use of technology which supports the council plan objective to increase digital technology/self-service. Although some groups are still relatively excluded from digital methods such as older adults and some of those with learning disabilities. Business stability and economic evidence indicates a risk for the objective to generate income through commercial property investment.



Economic resilience

One fifth of the local population reported in the resident's survey that the council should prioritise supporting the local economy and businesses for the borough's recovery. However the economic environment means several objectives may be affected. This includes the development of The Deck, retaining and attracting businesses in the area and maintaining the viability of shopping and employment areas. Although indicators for these sectors suggest they may also 'bounce back' relatively quickly. There has also been positive impacts for council plan delivery such as strengthening the relationships with businesses and delivering infrastructure improvements with minimised disruption to residents.



Education and skills

The evidence indicates it will be now more difficult to create opportunities for care leavers and to increase the number of apprenticeships and training programmes. The impact of limited education and support groups may mean more resources are needed to increase the percentage of children achieving good levels of development in communication and language. The objective for new youth services may also need to be considered in the context of new needs and operating models post-pandemic.

Council plan impacts



Caring for you and your family

One sixth of the local population reported in the resident's survey that the council should prioritise supporting vulnerable people. The impacts highlight the importance of council plan objectives such as using social prescribers in reducing isolation, the need for new mental health services and the value of working closely with the CCG and primary care network. However achieving some objectives, such as promoting a range of sport and leisure activities have been more difficult under the social distancing restrictions and could contribute to more negative health impacts emerging later.



Protecting and enhancing your environment

The residents survey feedback would indicate support on council objectives to become carbon neutral, protect green spaces and promote more use of cycle ways. However the impact assessment findings suggest the objective to encourage greater use of public transport will be more difficult to achieve and in the context of the pandemic, may not be appropriate to promote. The impact of more people using local parks has also added pressure to the maintenance of popular outdoor spaces such as Horseshoe Lake and the Look Out.



Communities

Objectives such as supporting community centres and libraries will be extended through working with partners, to ensure services are integrated and accessible to residents. There has been a positive impact for the council plan delivery where the pandemic has encouraged a greater focus on recognising and supporting the diversity in the community and relationships with partners have strengthened such as with the police and the VCS, supporting the delivery of community objectives.

Recovery and renewal priorities

Since the last report it is clear that the recovery and renewal principles agreed in 2020 are still highly relevant. However the latest data provides more detailed insights into understanding the effects.



Mental health

There continues to be a sustained impact for mental health. Slightly more people are reporting negative impacts than earlier in the pandemic, perhaps demonstrating fatigue and reflecting growing financial pressures. There is growing pressure on mental health services, with more complex presentations. This is also affecting a range of services beyond the increased demand for health and social care services.



Physical health

Early in the pandemic there were many positive indications that physical health for many had improved. However this appears to have reduced slightly, suggesting habits of walking and exercising more may not be sustained as restrictions ease. Some residents, particularly older people, have reduced confidence accessing health services which could also lead to later physical health difficulties. Long COVID effects are still relatively unknown but may cause further pressures related to health.



Business and employment

Whilst the national economy is still relatively unstable, businesses appear to be recovering well each time restrictions are eased. Employment continues to be a challenge, this appears particularly to be the case for older people, with many now seeking more financial employment support. Earlier in the pandemic, young people were also significantly affected however the evidence suggests that this has reduced slightly, perhaps supported by schemes such as Kickstart.



Voluntary and community sector (VCS)

There continues to be significant uncertainty for the state of many VCS groups. It is positive that many residents report continuing their volunteering roles and particularly 35-54s have a strong intention to continue volunteering longer term. There is likely to need to be a shift in roles for volunteering to reflect the changes in the community and the reduced profile of older volunteers.



Carbon reducing activity

Many positive changes to the environment occurred during the restrictions, notably the reduced use of vehicles and increased cycling and walking. These changes are now returning to pre-pandemic behaviours and so work will focus on sustaining positive changes for the environment.



Financial principles

The emerging trends indicate there is likely to be increasing need for support from the council and pressure on services. A number of one-off measures to support recovery have been introduced addressing many of the areas of impact recognised through this CIA. It will be a priority to continue maximising the resources available to make sure the council can support the community recover.