

Local Conversation



The **Local Conversation** is an initiative funded by the People's Health Trust. By investing money in local communities and giving local people control over how the money is spent, the aim is to support local people to make their communities better places to live and to reduce the inequalities between the richest and poorest communities.

For example, did you know that someone living in Chelsea can expect to live for between 10 and 20 years longer than someone living in Glasgow and that these differences can be attributed to differences in factors such as levels of income, quality of housing, quality of education and access to jobs?

There has been a Local Conversation initiative in Higher Croft since 2014. It is co-ordinated by **Blackburn Healthy Living** and a number of local people have been employed or have volunteered to help support it.

Kathleen McMonagle
*Community Development
Assistant / Youth Worker*



Kath has worked in the Higher Croft ward for over 20 years and has supported adults and young people throughout those years.

She worked for the Local Authority as a community worker at the community centre and then continued to work for the Community Development and Neighbourhood Engagement department within the Council.

She has been working on Local Conversations Higher Croft project for the last 4 years.

Shelley Hill
*Community Development
Assistant / Youth Worker*



Shelley is born and bred in Blackburn and has lived in the Higher Croft ward with her family all her life.

She has previously worked for the local authority in the Community Development Dept for 6 years and then moved over to Children's Services for nearly 10 years.

Shelley has just been recently employed onto the project and both Kath and Shelley are employed as Community/Youth workers.



money raised by
healthHeal
through



Local Projects



You may already have come across some of the great projects that have been organised and supported by local people, such as the growing projects at GroZone where we have worked in partnership with the Pop-up Church from St James Church.

We have supported local people coming out of National and Local Lockdowns with learning skills whilst tackling isolation. The Local Conversations Higher Croft have also developed youth initiatives working with different age groups.

Youth Forum Social Action Project
(Supporting elderly residents who have been targeted by Anti-Social Behaviour)



Youth Group
(recently re-established post COVID)

Community Clean Up





GroZone
Growing Project



Women's Group
renamed Chit Chat
post COVID
Men's Group



They have begun developing a local youth forum and organising Social Action projects. We developed a Men's and Women Group for local residents providing a safe environment to address specific issues around mental health and social isolation.

Young people meeting
at the church group
for the first time



There have been difficulties reaching out for men to access community groups and we worked with a local trusted resident to bring together local men and run the sessions.



The Covid Effect

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic struck the country in March 2020 and Blackburn, like the rest of country went into lockdown. This presented a number of challenges for the Local Conversation as we struggled to meet face to face and to carry out some of the activities that we had planned. Our challenges included:

- The inability to meet face to face
- The closure of community facilities and venues
- Individual health concerns for vulnerable members of staff as well as the community
- Digital exclusion and the challenges of being able to connect with limited equipment, pay as you go access and poor wi-fi
- Concerns about loss of income and food and fuel poverty
- The lack of local facilities, including shops, making it difficult for people to stay local
- Home schooling, the loss of education and the loss of friendship networks for children and young people
- Concerns about mental health and isolation

While many of these concerns were common to communities up and down the country, Blackburn was also hit by the fact that it remained one of a number of areas of concern and high numbers of COVID infection across the North West and remained in lockdown for most of 2020 even when restrictions in other areas eased.

In response to these restrictions, much of our activity shifted to the provision of crisis support and the maintenance of some sort of presence in the area.

- The local library was closed to the public but we used it as a base and a distribution point for food and other essentials
- The distribution of emergency food and responding to concerns about fuel poverty (e.g. paying for heating or card for meters) became a priority.
- Considerable effort went in to befriending schemes, reaching out to isolated and vulnerable people.
- We developed partnerships to help with other needs (e.g. if people required shopping or prescriptions, they were referred to Age UK).
- Attempts were made to use social media (mainly Facebook) to contact people, with neighbours helping to point out .

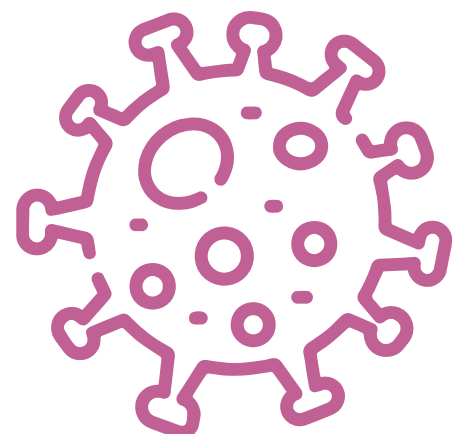
As the weeks and months rolled on:

- More than 150 families were supported with food parcels
- Concerns were expressed about dealing with mounting debt and the need to help people get back to work when jobs have gone, maximising benefit support.
- Concerns was expressed about the approaching of Eid and Christmas and how the community would respond to this.
- Questions were raised about how local lockdowns would be imposed and about the need to prepare for the longer term and support the building of resilience.

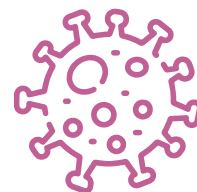
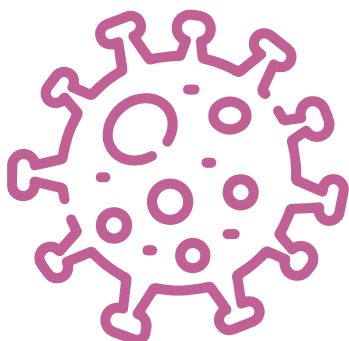
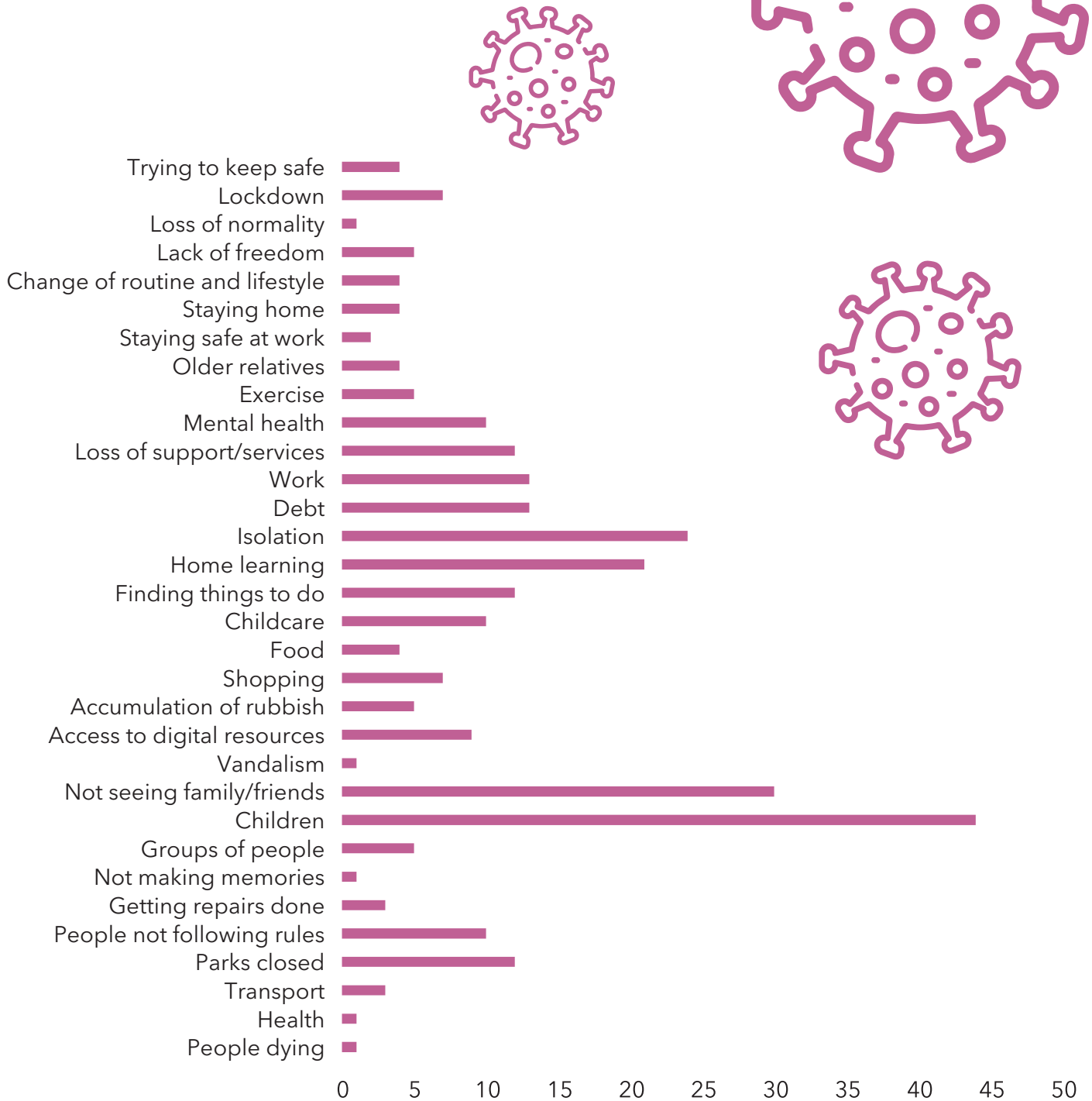
As we emerged from lockdown over the summer of this last year we thought that it would be timely to re-visit our plans and priorities for Local Conversation in Higher Croft. To this end we distributed a survey across local residents which some of you may have seen and responded to. The survey was designed to test our priorities for the Local Conversation in the light of COVID and to see whether the plans that we had pre-COVID were relevant or whether something else was now needed.

198 people responded to the community survey. The survey shed light on the main concerns that you and other people living in Higher Croft have had about COVID. As one might expect, these were varied, with people reporting that they had been affected in lots of different ways. Some of the concerns overlapped but were expressed in different ways - for example, some people talked about their mental health whereas others talked about isolation; some people talked about being in debt, others talked about not having enough food. These nuances are interesting to look at and reflect on in terms of understanding how we all experienced the pressures that we have been under.

Looking at the 198 responses that we had, your major concerns seem to have been around children, education, not seeing people, being isolated and loss of income/employment. Concerns about children encompassed many issues, including education, lack of socialising, difficulty keeping them occupied, but sometimes these are articulated separately.

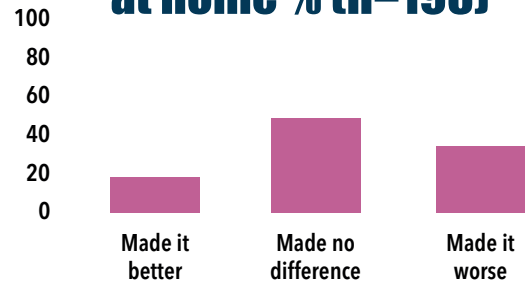


Biggest concerns during covid

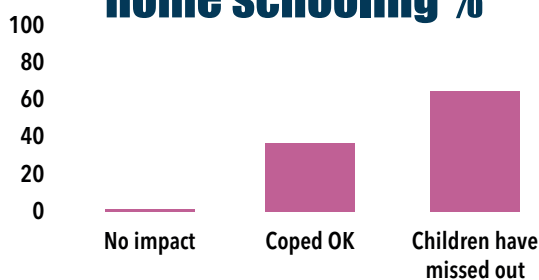


You have told us about the impact that COVID has had on life at home with one third of you saying that it had made life at home worse.

Impact of COVID on life at home % (n=198)



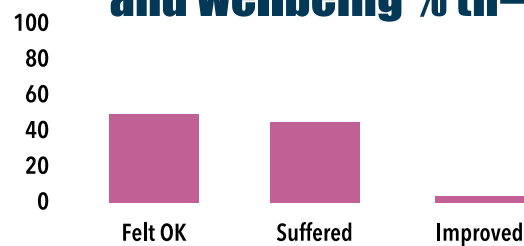
Impact of home schooling %



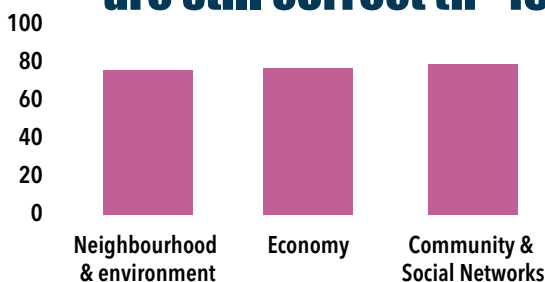
Two thirds of you said that you felt that your children have missed out on education as a result of home schooling.

Nearly half of you have said that your health and wellbeing has suffered as a result of COVID.

Impact of COVID on health and wellbeing % (n=198)

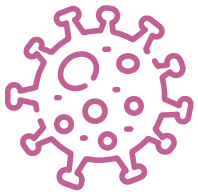
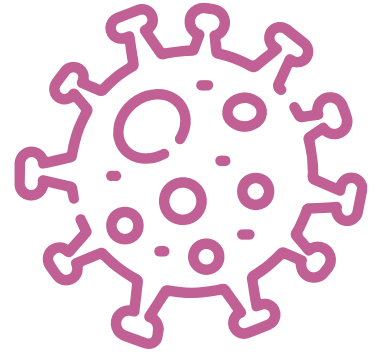


% agreeing that priorities are still correct (n=198)



Despite these concerns, most of you (i.e. more than 75% of you) felt that the priorities for the Local Conversation (neighbourhood and environment; the economy; and community and social networks) remained relevant.

Activities suggested to support the neighbourhood & environmental priority



You also came up with a list of the type of activities that you said they would like to see developed or supported under each of these priority areas.

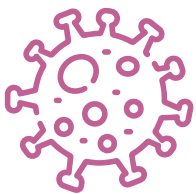
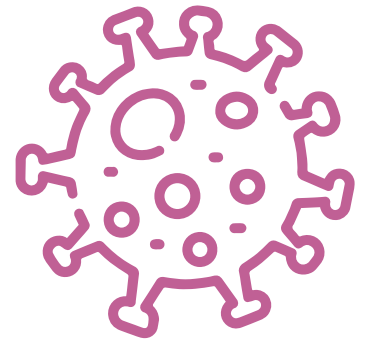
The way the area looks seems to be the main thing you want to see actioned under the neighbourhood and environment priority (cleaning the area up, litter, housing maintenance). As part of this you have also said that you want to see more community and outdoor spaces that you can use. You have also said that you want to see activity and spaces to bring people together.

Activities suggested to support the economy priority



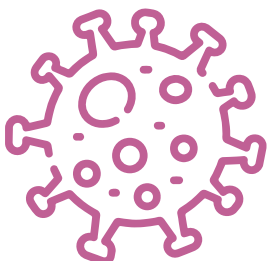
Under the economy priority, a lot of you expressed concerns about poverty, debt and (un)employment. You said that you wanted immediate help and relief of these things (e.g. food vouchers, hampers, school meals, growing projects) as well as longer term solutions such as advice and training to deal with this. You also felt that greater investment in local facilities (jobs, shops, businesses) would support this.

Activities suggested to build and sustain community and social networks

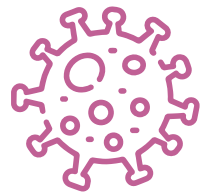
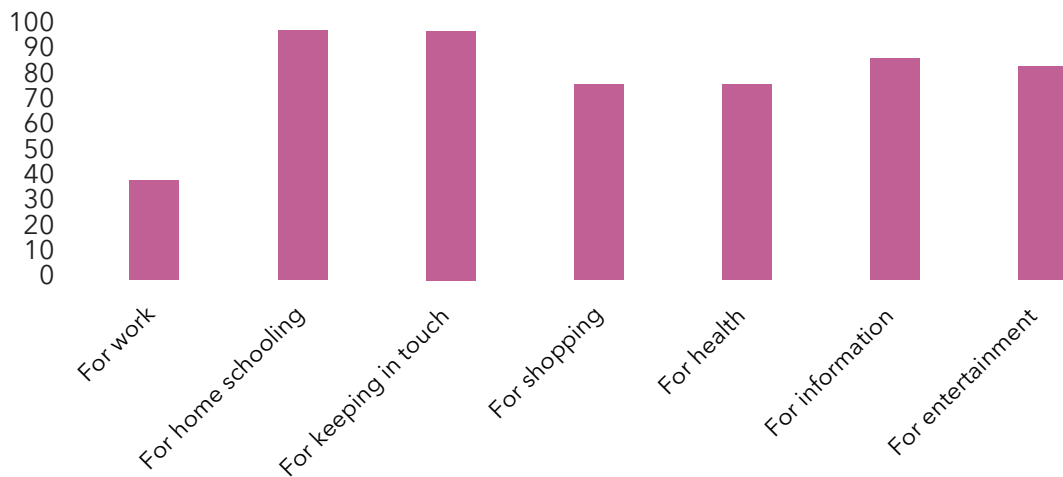


Under the community networks and community activities priorities, three main suggestions emerged including:

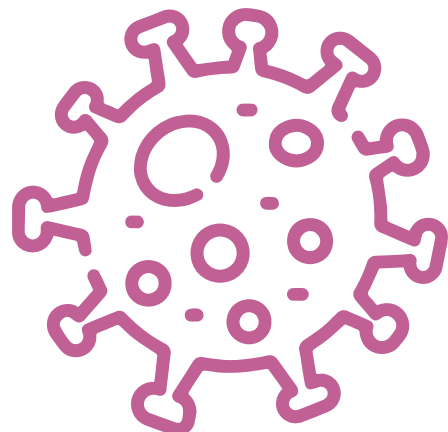
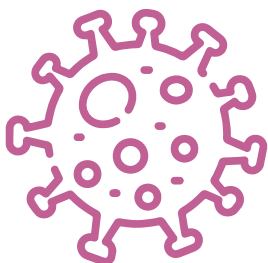
- The provision of activities for children and young people*
- The need for a community venue/setting and for whole community activities*
- The continued provision of food parcels*



Use of digital resources % (n=198)



A further finding of interest was the extent to which you appear to have been able to use digital resources during lockdown. Although the reasons for using digital resources varied (and it is notable that only 38% of you said that you were able to use digital resources for work), a significant number of you reported that you had used digital resources for something, with 95% of you saying that you used digital resources to keep in touch with people, for example.



Our next steps



The community plan has been developed highlighting three key priorities. Which are Improving Surroundings, Financial Aid and Stronger Communities. There are sub groups supporting the priorities such as;

Improving Surroundings

- Environmental
- Tenants & Residents

Financial Aid

- FareShare Scheme
- Supporting Financial Hardships

Stronger Communities

- Community Hub
- Youth Forum

Subgroups have been setup to support the delivery of each priority except for the Community Hub. A local building has been identified by residents to develop the Hub and we have moved forward with proposals to the local authority and are waiting on financial reports.

The Sub groups are being supported by the partnership members and have recruited residents to identify ways forward in addressing priorities with support from staff.

If you would like more information about the Local Conversation and how you can get involved here is how you can find out more:

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