



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### COVID-19

### South Tyneside Council

## Establishing a Covid-19 Support Hub

Council staff collaborated with the community and voluntary sectors to offer immediate help to those at greatest risk

### Context

Covid-19 has had a profound effect on all aspects of life in South Tyneside – including employment, income, education, physical and mental health, social isolation and mobility. The Council was acutely aware that, while taking the lead in coordinating support for the most vulnerable and those required to shield for a prolonged period of time, there were others outside the “shielding” category with a range of needs, such as access to food and medicine, financial or welfare support, befriending services, mental health support and other services that third sector partners were well placed to provide. The Council established a support hub with a single point of access that could directly provide support to the most vulnerable. It would also provide a pathway to a range of services provided by partners to support physical, emotional and financial wellbeing. A recruitment drive for volunteers was supported by the Council’s community social media platform (#lovesouthtyneside) in collaboration with its community and voluntary coordinating body, Inspire South Tyneside.

### Development

The Council established a working group consisting of Officers from a range of services and representatives from key statutory and voluntary organisations. The aim of the group was to establish how to support the “shielding” group within South Tyneside, as well as support the voluntary and community sector using shared tools and knowledge. It was key to have a single point of access, promoted across the community, so that people could access the right help from the right organisation in a timely way. The Council worked with a core group of third sector partners to share resources (such as vehicles and kitchens) and identify pockets of need which were below the radar (such as people with specific learning disabilities who could not cook for themselves). This core group consisted of a range of organisations

including: Age Concern South Tyneside; Groundwork; South Tyneside Sight Service; Women's Health in South Tyneside (WHIST); Bliss-ability; Your Voice Counts (representing the views of people with learning disabilities); Alzheimer's Society; Mutual Aid; and First Contact Clinical. The group established a framework that ensured people who got in touch through the single point of contact quickly received the support they required through a carefully scripted algorithm implemented by call handlers.

## Implementation

Hebburn Central, South Tyneside Council's hub for Leisure, Library and Community Activities, was identified as the key location from which to coordinate services. It was largely staffed by the Council's leisure staff, who were redeployed into jobs such as call handling, food distribution and welfare support. A leaflet providing details of how to contact the support hub was distributed to every household, which also included tips on keeping safe and healthy, and contacts for organisations that could provide various forms of support. The group of core voluntary agencies provided feedback and there were regular virtual meetings to assess how the service was being provided and whether any changes were needed. The Hub was run cooperatively, with all agencies contributing. Due to the urgency of the situation, there were few checks on people's circumstances and initially some food deliveries were made to people who did not meet support criteria. As time went on, they became much better at assessing needs and providing the appropriate response.



The Support Hub was operated through Hebburn Central, South Tyneside Council's hub for leisure, library and community activities

## Review

The Hub received over 21,500 requests for support. Initially, most were for food deliveries (over 5,000 requests) but, as time went on, welfare support became the most requested (over 15,200). In addition, there were over 300 direct referrals to voluntary agencies (this did include the signposting of services which would have increased the numbers accessing support from the voluntary sector). The Hub was hailed a success from both the Council and community and voluntary sector perspectives; both found the model effective in ensuring that residents got the appropriate help quickly and simply. A lot of lessons were learned in terms of what organisations could offer and how best to triage large numbers of people to the right support. The Council has continued to meet with the Voluntary Sector Core Group to look at how they work together and implement a Neighbourhood Development Alliance to support residents to improve their wellbeing, resilience and independence post Covid-19. They are establishing a joint set of key priorities between the Council and wider partners to ensure that funders know what is needed in South Tyneside and how groups will work together to meet those needs.

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