



# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE



Innovation



Learning

## Telford and Wrekin Council

### Betty the Bus drives Covid vaccine take-up

One of the biggest challenges Telford & Wrekin Council faced during the pandemic was boosting vaccinations in areas where there had been low take up of the vaccine. Data and insight gathered with partners revealed vaccinations were lowest in the borough's most disadvantaged communities, which included some of its most vulnerable residents. The solution? Take the vaccine to local neighbourhoods via Betty the Vaccination Bus. The initiative epitomises the council's co-operative values – working in partnership around a shared sense of responsibility at a time of urgent need and embracing innovation by collaborating with local communities to drive positive change.

Working with a range of partners, including the CCG, GPs, voluntary and community organisations and the Army, Betty delivered the Covid vaccine to local people across the borough, mobilising rapidly in response to the fast-spreading Omicron variant. This highly targeted operation saw locations chosen based on data identifying the lowest Covid vaccine uptake at a hyper-local Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. It has reduced the number of unvaccinated people in the most disadvantaged areas and among ethnic groups where uptake was the lowest.

Stu Pardoe, who is homeless, got his jab via Betty when the bus visited Wellington, a town in the north of the borough. Speaking to the BBC in December 2021 he said: "Without places like this, homeless people are at risk."

Betty the Vaccination Bus was complemented by pop-up community clinics which particularly targeted children who had had missed vaccination opportunities in school during the autumn term. As a result, Telford & Wrekin has one of the highest rates of vaccination coverage for 12-15-year-olds in the country.

Andrew Woodall, the council's Library Service and Digital Inclusion Manager, was one of many officers who took on new responsibilities during the pandemic. As lead coordinator on numerous Betty the Vaccination Bus visits, he saw its impact first hand. "I've spoken to a lot of people who had struggled to get a (first) jab for whatever reason – some was transport or geography-related but the majority cited work shifts as the biggest barrier. I encountered overwhelming positive feedback, people seemed glad the clinics had 'come to them'." Betty has delivered more than 1,500 vaccines since mid-December and statistics show the scheme has narrowed vaccination-related inequalities in Telford & Wrekin, particularly with respect to an increase in first doses.



One of the key success factors was the use of targeted communications via emails, texts and social media – including local influencers such as grassroots Facebook groups and councillors – that informed people of Betty's location in advance.

On top of that, the council's customer contact centre team made calls (from 9am–7pm, seven days a week) to residents encouraging them to get their jab and providing them with advice and support to find their nearest vaccination centre. Calls were targeted using the GP data of unvaccinated patients and residents in the areas of the borough which were known to have the lowest take-up rate. Over one 5-week period alone a total of 28,774 text messages were sent to local residents. Council leader Cllr Shaun Davies described it as "a real team effort". "We know not everyone can travel to one of the usual walk-in clinics. Betty allows our residents to just pop out down the road to go and get their vaccination. Bringing vaccinations to people's doorsteps like this makes it as easy as possible

for people to get protected. The hard work we have put in with partners across the public sector to get Betty up and running in response to the Omicron variant is paying off – this is great to see.”

In the latter stages of the pandemic, the bus was deployed to major employers around the borough to enable people to get vaccinated without having to travel or book an appointment. “Telford & Wrekin has contributed to the ongoing success of the vaccination programme, especially when targeting those areas with low vaccine uptake,” said Angie Wallace, Senior Responsible Officer for the vaccination programme in Shropshire. “Working with council colleagues to identify areas and taking the mobile vaccination buses to these areas in the community that need it most has improved the availability and convenience of getting a vaccination.

“In addition, the great work of community engagement colleagues on the ground has encouraged and provided an opportunity for residents to speak to our local experts about vaccination and discuss any concerns in a more intimate environment, ultimately encouraging vaccine uptake.”

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