

State of the Area Report 2020

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Contents

	Page
1. North Tyneside and Covid-19	1
A recovery Framework for North Tyneside.....	1
2020 State of the Area Event	2
2. North Tyneside: contextual data	3
3. Climate Change	5
2019 State of the Area Event	5
Progress since the 2019 State of the Area Event	6
How we achieved this reduction.....	6
Covid-19 and climate change	7
What we plan to do next	8
4. Town Centre Renewal	9
Spotlight on North Shields	9
Covid-19 and our town centres	10
What we plan to do next	11
5. Inclusive Economy	12
Inclusive economy and inclusive growth	12
Barriers to economic inclusion.....	12
How we will seek to create an inclusive economy	13
6. Community Resilience	17
Responding to Covid-19	17
Building back better	18
The Spirit of North Tyneside	19

1. North Tyneside and Covid-19

We are continuing to learn about the impact the pandemic has had and continues to have across North Tyneside. But we know that, just like all other areas across Great Britain, it already looks and feels very different as a place. This will continue to be the case as we adapt to live with the virus and respond to the profound economic and social shock it has caused. We know this will not be straightforward, but that together with local people and our partners, we have a key role to play in ensuring North Tyneside's recovery.

Economically the crisis is shifting patterns of investment, activity and consumption and it is important not to assume that things will either be able to, or be desired to, revert back to the pre-pandemic situation.

The social impact is also great with differential impacts on different groups of people in the Borough from a health and social inequalities point of view. In common with the rest of the country the pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities across North Tyneside. In addition the health impact goes beyond those directly impacted by having the virus to include those whose mental health and well-being have been affected.

A Recovery Framework for North Tyneside

In response to this and in line with the Our North Tyneside Plan, North Tyneside Council's Cabinet agreed a recovery framework for the Borough on 29 June 2020. The framework was designed to meet the following strategic objectives

Our People

- to provide calm and resilient leadership mitigating the deep impacts of the pandemic on the Authority, communities and the local economy
- to protect the vulnerable as a priority
- to restore hope and confidence in future amongst communities and creating a platform for social recovery
- to contain the spread of infection
- to protect the safety of staff, residents and visitors
- to address the impacts of the pandemic from an equalities point of view in relation to protected characteristics, health, well-being, education and income.

Our Places

- to ensure Covid Secure open spaces and town centres to support confidence and to keep North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit.

Our Economy

- to support local businesses to enable economic recovery and growth.

A phased approach: Our approach to recovery for North Tyneside is a long term one, with three distinct phases linked to the Government's Covid-19 Recovery Strategy and the regional economic recovery framework. The three phases are:

- **Restart** (June- September 2020) focusing on: early plans and actions in place in line with national Government guidance and new public health driven Covid-secure standards; supporting eased lockdown through Local Outbreak control; re-starting Council services in line with Government guidance; supporting businesses, town centres and schools to re-open in a safe way; launching new Poverty Intervention Fund; ongoing financial support to businesses.
- **Transition** (October to March 2021) focusing on: planning for further transition from lockdown and replacing social restrictions with smarter controls; actions to address social and economic recovery; plans to live with Covid-19 in the community; working with the NHS to plan for winter.
- **Build and regrow** (April -July 2021) focusing on: building a strong economy; Ambition for North Tyneside (our regeneration strategy for the Borough); our care home sector and the future of public transport.

While the timetable may have had to be flexible as we respond to a second wave of Covid-19; and although we can now look forward to the roll out of the new vaccine(s); our strategic objectives for recovery and ambition to 'build back better' continue to be central to plans for the Borough.

2020 State of the Area Event

During the 2020 State of the Area Event we want to:

- focus on local people's priorities for the Borough's recovery as identified in this summer's Big Community Conversation
- share our ideas and ambitions
- give local stakeholders the opportunity help shape the recovery plan by taking part in the following on-line workshops:

Climate change. We continue to work towards our commitment to deliver a carbon neutral Borough by 2050, but want to identify ways to sustain the beneficial environmental impacts witnessed during lockdown, which included the switch to more sustainable forms of transport; and learn lessons from the response to the global health emergency and apply them to our response to the global climate emergency.

Town Centre Renewal. We want to ensure a co-ordinated recovery for town centres through: investment in infrastructure to enable Covid-secure operation; future programmes of events and activities; communication and marketing campaigns to support Covid-secure and promote local consumption; new housing opportunities to bring new residents into town centres to support local shops and services; investment in our places and spaces to improve the quality of place and to ensure

that local retail businesses and their supply chains benefit from business support to help them recover and grow.

Inclusive Economy. We want to continue to support and grow existing and emerging new businesses; to sustain a robust digital infrastructure for the Borough; enable people to access opportunities and develop skills through Connexions, adult learning and employability programmes; ensure that no-one is left behind and everyone can share the benefits of the recovery. From those recently made redundant, young people thinking about a career, those with poor digital or transport connectivity, residents with health issues, budding entrepreneurs to established companies looking to expand in an attractive, accessible location.

Community resilience. We are seeking to build on what can be learned from the Community and Voluntary Sector's response to Covid-19 and how the sector can build back better, for example by: developing new opportunities especially those presented by the growth in volunteers; supporting the better use of technology; and strengthening partnerships responding to local needs.

The rest of this document provides additional background information on each of the workshop themes.

Please note that the data used within this document was the latest available at the time of writing.

2. North Tyneside: contextual data

North Tyneside is home to 207,900 people. 100,600 are male and 107,300 female. Currently, 61.7% are of working age (16-64 years), 20.3% are aged 65 and over, while 18.1% are children aged 15 years or younger.

North Tyneside's population is projected to grow by 10.4% between 2018-2043. However the make-up of the population is aging. By 2043 the number of residents aged:

- over 65 years is projected to increase by 42.2%
- those aged 75 or over is predicted to grow by 79.6%
- those aged 85 or over by 81.5%.

We estimate that 15,000 people living in North Tyneside aged 65 or older live alone, this is projected to rise by 17% by 2025.

We have learned that Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequalities and had differential impacts on people which can be associated socio-economic factors and personal characteristics such as age, sex, disability and race.

Although North Tyneside has continued to see a relative reduction in deprivation, around 1 in 10 residents live in an area that is ranked as being in the 20% most deprived in England, and around 42% of children in our most deprived wards are living in poverty.

The number of working age residents claiming universal credit increased by 43% between February and October 2020, just over a third were searching for work, a similar proportion were working, while the remainder were unable to work due to ill health or caring responsibilities - more people are now able to claim Universal Credit due to changes in eligibility made during the pandemic

By the end of September 2020 3.5% of working age residents were on the Job Retention Scheme.

3.6% of North Tyneside's population identify as Black, Asian or from other minority ethnic communities.

1 in 5 people living in North Tyneside are living with a disability or long term condition.

Over 500 people with a learning disability receive care from North Tyneside Council.

Prior to the pandemic, 200 residents were receiving direct support for mental health reasons, 84% of these were of working age.

An estimated 2,8,68 residents aged 65 years or over are living with dementia.

More than 10% of our population identify as carers. Approximately 1 in 4 of these provide more than 50 hours unpaid care each week.

3. Climate Change

In July 2019 North Tyneside Council declared a Climate Emergency, setting a target to reduce the carbon footprint of the Authority and the Borough by 50% by 2023 and to become carbon neutral by 2050.

The Authority's carbon foot-print: is made up of:

- the power, heat and water used to run its buildings, including sheltered accommodation but not schools
- the electricity used to power over 31,000 street-lights
- the fuel and power used to operate almost 400 fleet vehicles
- the business miles staff travel in their own vehicles (not including commuting to and from work).

This definition of the Authority's carbon footprint is in line with Central Government's Greenhouse Gas Protocol.

The Borough's carbon footprint is made up of:

- the power and heat used in the commercial, industrial and domestic buildings across the whole of North Tyneside
- emissions from road and rail transport
- land use
- tree planting or removal activities, which can result in either a release into or removal of emissions from the atmosphere.

2019 State of the Area Event

Following the Council's Climate Emergency Declaration, it was agreed that this would be the theme for the 2019 State of the Area event. Participants took part in workshops on: 'Reducing our Carbon Footprint', 'Transport and Air Quality', 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle', 'Communities – doing it for themselves' and 'Let's talk about food'.

The key findings to emerge from the event focused on:

- recycling, including better recycling of yoghurt pots and old clothes
- raising awareness of the environment
- reducing food waste
- working locally' (e.g. 'being aware of the local environment' and 'buying more local produce').

Participants concluded that:

- action should be taken to support local communities to make changes
- the Youth Council's Environment Sub-committee should identify how they can use their voice and enthusiasm to effect change.

Progress since the 2019 State of the Area Event

The Youth Council's Environment Sub-committee: has compiled and promoted a list of small changes that all residents can commit to that will make a difference to the environment. These include: walking to school or using public transport instead of the car; asking parents to switch off the car engine when waiting at the school gates; shopping locally, and remembering to take own bags to the supermarket; having at least one day a week meat free.

Members of the Youth Council have also met with Head Teachers to encourage them to increase recycling in schools and attended the North East Protect Our Futures E-Convention, which looked at transport, food waste, fast fashion and single-use plastics. This has resulted in:

- a virtual fashion show to promote the donation, purchase and reuse of clothes from charity shops
- young people's organisations undertaking more work on a regional basis on environmental issues.

The Authority's carbon foot-print: At the end of 2019/20, the Authority's carbon footprint had decreased by 46% since we first started measuring it in 2010/11. Given this current performance, it is likely that the Authority will achieve the 50% reduction target by the 2023 target date.

The Borough's carbon foot-print: The most recent data shows that between 2005 when we started measuring this and 2018, overall carbon emissions have decreased by 40% and carbon emissions per head of population have decreased by 44%.

How we achieved a reduction

In line with our commitment to tackling climate change, North Tyneside Council and its partners across the Borough have, and continue to plan to, complete a range of actions, some examples of which are listed below. We have:

- established a Climate Emergency Board which met for the first time in March 2020 (see below for further details)
- continued to redevelop and decarbonise our Killingworth depot site with the introduction of Air Source Heat Pumps, rooftop Solar photovoltaics (PV) and solar canopies in on-site car parks. This solar PV electricity generation will help to reduce demand from the national grid by between 80-90% at the depot
- expanded the range of materials that can be included in kerbside recycling, to include pots, tubs and trays
- secured funding to retrofit 69 buses to accelerate carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxide reduction within the North Tyneside bus fleet

- introduced new age and emissions standards for taxis and private hire vehicles and secured grant funding to upgrade North Tyneside Taxi's, so they are compliant with the Tyneside Clean Air Zone due to come into operation in 2021
- launched a 12-month e-Cargo bike trial for small and medium size enterprises in North Shields, Whitley Bay and Tynemouth for zero emission last-mile deliveries
- worked to ensure all council employees understand what they must do to contribute to carbon reduction in the workplace
- installed solar PV generation systems on over 1,400 council houses in partnership with E.O – this produced over 3,000 megawatt hours of renewable electricity in 2019, which is enough to power around 800 homes per year.

Covid-19 and climate change

Our Climate Emergency Board oversees the Borough's carbon reduction action plan. The plan was developed in partnership with The Carbon Trust and in consultation with an extensive range of stakeholders, both in person pre-lockdown and electronically post-lockdown. It sets out our collective approach to environmental protection and plans for: improving energy efficiency of our building stock; cleaning up (de-carbonising) our electricity supply, our heat supply, our travel; and managing waste.

The action plan was prepared in the midst of the Covid -19 outbreak. At the time of development, the true economic and societal costs of the pandemic were not fully known. The lockdown measures and economic damage caused by the pandemic will undoubtedly result in a short-term reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, however it is possible that emissions could rebound if climate positive solutions are not included as central elements in local and national recovery plans.

The Climate Emergency Board continues to review appropriate funding packages from Government that aim to decarbonise the economy and stimulate economic growth.

We also seek to learn lessons from the pandemic that can be applied to the climate emergency, perhaps the biggest being the population's capacity and willingness to accept lifestyle changes for the wider benefit of society. Learning from the response to a global health emergency and applying them to the global climate emergency could also pave the way for the accelerated and sustained change that is critical in solving the problem of climate change.

By embracing these lessons locally we may be able to enjoy long term sustainable carbon emission reductions from changes in behaviours, such as the increase in active travel, reduction in travel by private car, increased working from home and willingness to invest in domestic property improvements. We supported this through the creation of a temporary four kilometre coastal cycle lane and the introduction of several pedestrianised areas across the Borough to enable social distancing and encourage active travel.

During the pandemic it has been evident how much residents have used and enjoyed the parks, beaches and open spaces North Tyneside has to offer. Our ambitious carbon reduction programme seeks to protect this natural capital by alleviating climate change and the threat of a subsequent climate breakdown.

What we plan to do next

The Climate Emergency Board has developed a number of policy proposals that will enable North Tyneside to achieve its Climate Emergency targets. By implementing these proposals we will:

- convert all council street-lights to LED by 2023 (with the possible exception of specialist heritage columns) - we've already committed to investing £500,000 to install LED streetlights from January 2021
- ensure all newly built council operational buildings do not use gas or oil as the primary fuel for heating
- identify renewable energy investment opportunities across the Borough, including on its own buildings and land – despite the pandemic, exploration has already begun
- replace all council light goods vehicles due to be replaced by 2030 with electric vehicles and continue to explore the possibility of replacing all of the council's heavy goods vehicle (HGV) fleet with electric vehicles
- continue to encourage employees to tackle the climate emergency through a range of initiatives
- reduce car-based school trips by 5% annually
- require all new developments to provide electric vehicle charging points
- remove all 'non-essential' single use plastics from council premises and activities, where possible, by 2025
- include conditions to end the use of single use plastics within our street trading licensing scheme
- from 2022, where practical and other alternatives can be sourced, single use plastics will not be permitted at council managed events
- implement an Events Charter to reduce the council's environmental impact.

4. Town Centre Renewal

In November 2018 the Council unveiled its *Ambition for North Tyneside* vision. This focusses on the needs of every part of the Borough and sets out how we hope to help shape North Tyneside and ensure it is fit for the future.

Since then we have:

- developed and consulted on a master plan to transform North Shields town centre and Fish Quay
- refined plans for Wallend's World Heritage Site Segedunum Roman Fort
- worked with partners to bring the Swan Hunter site back into beneficial economic use and refurbished the upper floors of the Centre for Innovation in Wallsend to create more office space
- replaced eyesore sites at the coast with family housing
- improved flood defenses and leisure opportunities at Killingworth Lake
- enhanced Forest Hall high street
- invested in housing, highways and schools across the Borough.

Spotlight on North Shields

Through the North Shields Master Plan we aim to transform North Shields town centre and riverside into an environment where people choose to live, work and spend their leisure time.

In recent years we've completed a number of major projects in the town, including:

- North Shields Customer First Centre: completed in 2013, over £3m was invested in transforming the old central library into a local hub offering a library and a range of public services and information.
- Northumberland Park: the popular beauty spot has undergone a £4m restoration, joint funded with the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Fiddler's Green sculpture: the council supported the North Shields Fishermen's Heritage Project to create a lasting memorial to lost fishermen.
- Nater's Bank Seascape restoration: the fish-themed artwork overlooking the Fish Quay has been restored thanks to help from a local artist and the community.
- Installed new flagstones around Northumberland Square.
- Art stop: working with local artist Helen Smith, the bus shelter at Fiddler's Green has been transformed into an art gallery.
- Fish Quay regeneration: using more than £20 million of public and private sector investment, vacant premises have been restored and developed for business use to create an attractive cultural and leisure offer.

Building on these, further schemes are already underway, or have been completed, to improve the town centre and surrounding area. These include:

- Northumberland Square Housing development: a £5.6m scheme to restore a row of Grade II Listed Georgian terraced properties and provide new build homes will be complete in December 2020.
- Wooden Dolly restoration: the much loved unique wooden statue, engrained in the maritime traditions of North Shields has been fully restored and returned to Northumberland Square.
- Improvements to toilet facilities in North Shields Customer First Centre which will be accessible outside of library opening times.
- Securing Heritage Action Zone funding from Historic England to breathe new life into Howard Street.
- Encouraging private housing developments including: Smith's Dock; 14 apartments and retail units on Bell Street and the redevelopment of the former North Eastern Rubber Factory on Clive Street.

Covid-19 and our town centres

The Covid-19 outbreak has had a major impact on the Borough's town centres and the business operating there. Through the course of the pandemic, North Tyneside Council has supported businesses to recover and grow through access to practical and financial support, advice and information. This has included:

- developing Town Centre Recovery Plans for the reopening of North Shields, Whitley Bay, Wallsend and Killingworth town centres in June. This involved redesigning our high streets to support social distancing and personal protection through both physical measures and communications. Following implementation, the team listened to residents' feedback and worked with local businesses to make changes to the design to strike the right balance between pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, while still maintaining social distancing measures
- establishing of an Enforcement Hub, to inform businesses about their responsibilities and help to keep their customers, staff and suppliers safe and health – this will continue to operate until all businesses are operating as usual
- working with North Shields, Whitley Bay and Wallsend business chambers to encourage footfall to our town centres through the creation of the 'Buy Local North Tyneside' website. This 'digital high street' details which businesses are open and what goods and services they provide
- proactively informing and signposting businesses to relevant advice, support schemes and, to local and national grant opportunities
- rolling out our Discretionary Grant Fund, which gave £1.656 million to 189 local businesses
- delivering three business grant schemes on behalf of central government, providing over £34 million of funding to over 3,000 businesses
- launching our 'Back to Work' service to support local businesses with recruitment, retention of staff or skills and training advice

- creating a Business Helpline which has been jointly promoted by the council, North Tyneside Business Forum and local Chambers of Commerce.

What we plan to do next

Continue to work with North Tyneside Business Forum, local chambers and local businesses to ensure Covid secure town centres to support confidence.

Deliver new government funding to support local businesses.

Continue to work with local residents to deliver the North Shields master plan. This includes projects to:

- improve North Shields is a residential location of choice and an attractive, family friendly destination
- create a smaller but more vibrant, high quality town centre
- create more flexible retail opportunities and expanding the evening and weekend economy
- improve public transport; and the quality of walking and cycling connections across the town, including better links to Fish Quay
- improve the quality of both the built environment and public space in North Shields and ensure it is suitable for hosting events and festivals.

To achieve these ambitions and ensure growth and prosperity in North Shields, the masterplan aims to provide opportunities and projects that:

- are both attractive to investors and aligned to our priorities
- will secure the necessary funding and investment to ensure they are deliverable
- create a town that more people wish to live, work and visit.

5. Inclusive Economy

Inclusive economy and inclusive growth

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes inclusive growth as “economic growth that creates opportunity for all segments of the population and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity, both in monetary and non-monetary terms, fairly across society.”

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic North Tyneside’s economy was performing well: it was home to 5,190 businesses; around one in nine working age residents were self-employed; business start-ups were strong and sustained; and inward investment was successful – SAGE and Verisure being two recent examples.

There were also good levels of economic activity among residents and average earnings were rising to close the gap with the national average. However, between February and October 2020 the number of working age residents claiming universal credit increased by 43%, just over a third were searching for work, a similar proportion were working, while the remainder were unable to work due to ill health or caring responsibilities (more people are now able to claim Universal Credit due to changes in eligibility made during the pandemic). Also by the end of September 2020 3.5% of the Borough’s working population were on the Job Retention Scheme.

Overall Covid-19 has created increased in financial pressures for businesses, particularly for sectors such as leisure, hospitality, personal services and non-essential retail. This has led to financial pressures for residents who have lost their jobs or had reductions in income due to being furloughed or working fewer hours, with young people most affected. While those looking for jobs are likely to find fewer job vacancies and changes to the type of jobs that are available.

In addition to the immediate economic impact, persistent inequalities have been highlighted.

Barriers to economic inclusion

In North Tyneside the main barrier to economic inclusion is deprivation. Around 1 in 10 residents live in an area that is ranked as being in the 20% most deprived in England, and around 42% of children in our most deprived wards are living in poverty. It is also known that the proportion of residents experiencing financial hardship is greatest in the southern area of the Borough; 14% have not been able to afford food (compared to 8% overall) and 20% cannot pay fuel and energy bills. The impact of Covid-19 has hit low income families hard, increasing the incidence of in-work poverty, job insecurity and debt.

The risk of economic exclusion can be heightened by an individual’s personal characteristics, including sex, age, race and disability. The impact of Covid-19 outbreak has exacerbated these risks and people’s ability to respond to them. For example, national data shows that:

- Household incomes have fallen by 8% during the pandemic, with the greatest loss being among those with the lowest 20% of household incomes, single parents being most likely to be affected.
- The greatest economic impact of Covid-19 has been experienced by:
 - those who were already in work poverty - who are more likely to have been furloughed, had reduced hours or wages, or lost their job
 - minority groups already over-represented in poverty e.g. disabled people and those of Black and Asian ethnicities
 - both younger (18-24 year olds) and older (those aged 55 or older) workers, with for example half of all eligible under 25 year olds being furloughed in the first 3 months of the first lockdown, compared to one in four 45 year olds.
- It is estimated that 300,000 more children are living in poverty as a result of unemployment caused by the first lockdown.

This highlights the need for North Tyneside to strive to be an inclusive economy as it works to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

How we will seek to create an inclusive economy

North Tyneside's proposed approach builds on the social foundation created by a good education, a decent income and work, peace and justice, social equity, decent housing and effective social and digital networks.

A good education

North Tyneside is proud to have a strong education system that provides significant opportunities to our children, young people and adult learners. However children and young people who come from neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation are less likely to be ready for school, to do well in school, to progress into further or higher education and to move into good jobs.

We are therefore working with our partners to review our education strategy to ensure it focuses on tackling barriers and building on opportunities in the following key areas:

- ensuring every young person is ready for school
- improving outcomes for children and young people who experience deprivation
- reviewing post-16 education for North Tyneside
- planning school places and balancing the books.

A decent income and work

As previously highlighted prior to the pandemic working age people living in North Tyneside were experiencing good levels of economic activity, relatively low unemployment rates and increasing wages.

To deliver equal opportunity to recover from the pandemic and to benefit from a decent income and a good job, we aim to ensure:

- continued support to businesses across the Borough.
- careers guidance for all of our children and young people in line with national good practice and statutory guidelines.
- specific support targeted at children and young people at risk of not accessing good learning and employment opportunities, especially those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), who have a disability or a long-term condition or experiencing deprivation
- support for adults to access the labour market and quality employment in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions, with additional support for those who need it
- we work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority to build on opportunities in the offshore energy, green technologies, culture and tourism and digital sectors.
- career opportunities in the health and social care sectors are strengthened.
- budding entrepreneurs can benefit from our 'Business Ideas Finder' tool to search for business ideas based on their skills, interests and lifestyle choices.

The Work Academy devised with Premier Inn Whitley Bay is a practical example of how we have sought to provide new routes to employment for residents with very limited work experience. It enabled participants to complete a 10-week work readiness course, after which they were guaranteed an interview.

Peace and Justice

North Tyneside is a safe place to live, work and visit, but we know that people in the southern area of the Borough are less likely to feel safe during the day and after dark.

Fear of crime and experience of anti-social behaviour are key contributors. Working with our partners in Northumbria Police we have created Volunteer Networks to provide extra support for the most vulnerable victims. This, together with the introduction by the police of an Anti-social behaviour task force has resulted in more than half of the people suffering long term anti-social in their neighbourhood having no further incidents after reporting it, but there is still more to do. Together we will:

- tackle graffiti and related anti-social behaviour to ensure these crimes are stopped and where possible diverted
- engage with the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour to stop the problem
- support campaigns and activities to promote feelings of safety amongst our communities.

Social Equity

The council is seeking to increase social and economic inclusion:

- through our £1 million Poverty Intervention Fund which aims to address the financial, social and health impacts of poverty experienced by children, their families and older people.

- by ensuring that when we design and deliver services to meet our ambitions for the Borough, those ambitions are tested to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit and the needs of our diverse communities are shown due regard
- by designing and delivering projects through our Ambition for North Tyneside Regeneration Strategy that are inclusive and can be enjoyed by everyone
- by continuing to use our spending power to benefit local business; to achieve social, economic and environmental benefits ('social value') for the Borough; and fulfil our corporate social responsibility by engaging in and supporting volunteering and ethical practices.
- by working more closely with the business community drawing on their business expertise and identifying opportunities for collaboration and innovation for the benefit of the Borough
- by supporting the introduction of the North of Tyne Combined Authority's Good Work Pledge. Enabling local employers to demonstrate their commitment to: valuing and rewarding their workforce; promoting health and well-being; effective communication and representation; developing a balanced workforce; and social responsibility.

Decent housing

Housing has a fundamental impact on inclusion. The majority of housing stock in North Tyneside is in good condition and in 2018 67% of residents were satisfied with both the quality and choice of housing in their local area. However two key issues need to be addressed:

- the poor-quality rented housing concentrated in areas experiencing deprivation
- fuel poverty, which affects approximately 10,000 of North Tyneside's least affluent and most vulnerable residents.

We aim to address this through a range of initiatives, including:

- The ongoing delivery of additional affordable homes. Since 2013 1380 affordable homes have been delivered in North Tyneside, exceeding the total number delivered in the previous 10 years by 75%.
- Market interventions such as the purchase and conversion of eleven houses in Charlotte Street, Wallsend. This is a pilot initiative that could be extended across the Borough.
- The creation of our Safe and Healthy Homes service, which provides information and guidance to people living in private rented and owner-occupied accommodation who have a housing issue which may be affecting their health.
- The Local Energy Assistance Programme provides a free energy and money saving service targeting households who are already in, or at risk of falling into fuel poverty.

Effective networks

The absence of the networks people need to thrive is a barrier to inclusion. Networks, including those created by family, friends and local organisations, provide

support, encouragement and direct people to the help and opportunities that make a real practical difference to their wellbeing. As further emphasised by our experience of the pandemic, digital networks also have a vital role to play.

Community networks: North Tyneside Council is working closely with the voluntary and community sector to establish and sustain a range of networks. For example:

- North Tyneside VODA's Sector Connector is working with North Tyneside Business Forum to link businesses to the voluntary and community sector. This is opening up new ways for business to contribute to local communities and organisations.
- Work to develop a SEND Inclusion Strategy to help ensure that children and young people with special, education needs and disabilities have an equal opportunity to benefit from learning, employment and community networks.
- Recent experience of COVID19 has resulted in even stronger links between the council and VODA, as evidenced by the co-location of the two organisations and the partnership that has delivered the Local Support Hub and ongoing support to people who need to isolate.

Digital networks: We also aim to enhance our digital networks for the benefit of local people and businesses. Our work to create a digital North Tyneside includes both infrastructure development and action to address digital exclusion, by supporting residents to increase their digital capabilities.

Infrastructure: plans are being developed to ensure physical regeneration works includes digital infrastructure, work with the North of Tyne Combined Authority to build on the provision of Local Full Fibre Networks and the growth of 5G technology. This will support our healthy digital sector; as exemplified by the Stellium Data Centre at Cobalt Business Park.

Tackling digital exclusion: The four key challenges to going online are: access (people may not be able to afford a device, be able to access broadband or encounter language barriers); a lack of skills or confidence; a lack of motivation or mistrust of the internet. People in social housing, those on low wages or who are unemployed, those with disabilities, older people and ex-offenders are more likely than others to experience digital exclusion.

We are working with our partners to support digital inclusion through, for example:

- the provision of laptops to pupils
- delivery of the North of Tyne Combined Authority's Digital Inclusion Scheme, to loan equipment to residents who are disconnected from education, employment opportunities or are vulnerable to the impact of Covid-19
- free access to computers, printers, scanners, WIFI and digital training in all our libraries
- a range of free digital skills classes run by our Adult Education Service throughout the Borough.

6. Community Resilience

Over the past seven months, residents, businesses and the community and voluntary sector have all stepped up in times of need, helping to ease the burden of the Covid-19 pandemic on everyone affected.

Existing initiatives

VODA (our local Voluntary Organisations Development Agency) has continued to support its existing initiatives to grow and support community resilience. These include:

- The Good Neighbours project which recruits, trains and supports volunteers to carry out a variety of practical tasks commonly associated with those carried out by a 'good neighbour'. From small household tasks to helping run errands or assistance with shopping.
- The SAINT (Social Action in North Tyneside) project which supports people facing barriers to volunteering, such as mental health problems or other long-term conditions, to come together and create social action projects for the benefit of the wider community.

Responding to Covid-19

VODA and colleagues across the voluntary and community sector have worked with North Tyneside Council to harness the power of North Tyneside residents during the Covid-19 outbreak as illustrated by the following projects:

- Community Health Champions: who play a vital role in sharing up to date, trusted health messages with people they know and care about during the COVID-19 pandemic. They reach out to their local community to pass on important messages to their friends, neighbours, colleagues, customers and service users.
- The community and voluntary sector's invaluable contribution to North Tyneside's Local Support Hub, which has supported over 1,800 residents with day-to-day tasks including picking up prescriptions, household supplies, grocery shopping and purchasing pet supplies. While, through North Tyneside Business Forum, local businesses helped to provide essential groceries and prepared meals, staff and volunteers from Family Gateway and Cedarwood Trust delivered meals to residents,
- Volunteers from the charities Age UK North Tyneside and Dreamshine offered a befriending telephone service to chat with people at risk of being lonely during isolation.
- The upscaled Good Neighbours project has deployed 320 new volunteers to respond to over 1900 requests for help from local residents. The project has now branched out to provide The Good Neighbours Buddy Scheme to help the

support to some of our most vulnerable local people take their first steps back out into the world by being a:

- Garden gate buddy - offering a much needed chat with a local resident who is feeling socially isolated, by visiting them outside of their home (at the garden gate, or metaphorical gate) at a safe 2 metre distance.
- Shopping buddy - to help residents build confidence and independence to do their shopping
- Walking buddy- to enable residents to get outside again, explore the local area and regain their confidence with walking.

Building back better

VODA and the council have also been working together to help the voluntary and community sector 'build back better' by supporting new initiatives to grow volunteering numbers, enable the better use of technology and strengthen local partnerships. Indeed when VODA's base on the Queen Alexandra Campus was closed the team found a home at the council's Quadrant Headquarters.

Throughout the pandemic an overwhelming number of new volunteers have offered their help. In response to this a new partnership with members from VODA, Sector Connector (the project that supports businesses to develop their corporate responsibility), Health Watch (the independent organisation for people who use health and social care services) and North Tyneside Council has been established to assess how the voluntary and community sector will respond, recover, reflect and become more resilient as a result of the pandemic.

Using the findings from a survey conducted by VONNE (Voluntary Organisations' Network North East), which gathered the views of North Tyneside's voluntary and community sector organisations, together with feedback from local community conversations and national evidence, the partnership has developed an action plan. The plan seeks to focus on beneficiaries and community needs, build back better and strengthen partnerships and collaboration.

Under the plan work has been undertaken to:

- assess community need post Covid-19
- identify the support voluntary and community sector organisations need to resume services
- understand what support organisations might need to help manage their workforce
- provide guidance (via Zoom and VODA's website) on ensuring buildings are Covid secure and the use of PPE (personal protective equipment)
- share Human Resource and Health and Safety procedures and best practice developed by the council, with local voluntary and community organisations
- assess what can be done to support organisations rebuild their finances
- find ways to support volunteers to continue their involvement
- encourage partnership working across voluntary and community sector groups and organisations

- assess gaps and the need for technology for beneficiaries
- promote the work in the sector through marketing and communication.

The Spirit of North Tyneside

Recognising the unprecedented times that we are living in, North Tyneside Council and VODA have also come together to create the 'Spirit of North Tyneside' - our shared commitment to recognising the outstanding achievements of our Borough.

'Spirit of North Tyneside' aims to acknowledge and celebrate all of the people who have helped to make a difference, by, for example: going the 'extra mile' to support vulnerable residents or a community effort; a random act of kindness; signing up to volunteer; or developing a new scheme to support people who were shielding. There are four categories for nominations to the 'Spirit of North Tyneside':

- **Unsung hero:** recognises those who have unknowingly made an impact on the community or an individual through a selfless act of kindness.
- **Young Mayor:** recognises a young person or young people who live, work or study in North Tyneside and have made a positive impact on their community.
- **Our people:** recognises volunteers, trustees or staff who have made a difference in their communities or for their neighbours through their actions or support.
- **Our place:** recognises voluntary and community organisations who have continued to - or found new ways to - deliver their services in their neighbourhoods to their beneficiaries; or businesses who have gone above and beyond to support their local communities.

A plethora of nominations have already been received, clear evidence of local people's strong community spirit and desire to make a difference.