



COVID-19 & COMMUNITY LIFE

SNAPSHOT 3:

THE PEOPLE'S STRATEGY

**FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES
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Covid-19 & Community Life is a study run by The Young Foundation and generously supported by the Wellcome Trust. The project is exploring how Covid-19 is changing our relationships, interactions and experience of community in real-time. Using both a digital platform, whereby around 140 participants share their stories and experiences online, supplemented with phone interviews with 30 people who do not have access to, or feel comfortable using, digital devices. We are focusing on three key themes:

- how the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting interactions between individual in society;
- how the role of the digital realm plays a role in community response; and
- how individuals and communities relate to science and research.

A more detailed summary of the methodology is at the end of this report.

This snapshot report is based on the findings of 125 online participants. It represents an interim, top-line analysis. A more detailed report will be published later in the project.



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WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE IN CHARGE?

With the majority of our digital diary-keepers citing failures of government as a cause of the recent surge in Covid-19 cases (1), we wanted to delve into the perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of government in times of crisis. Over two-thirds of participants reported feeling as though the government have been handling the coronavirus pandemic badly, but what would they do differently? We asked 125 people across the country to imagine that they were in charge of the UK's Covid-19 response for the coming weeks, and this is what they told us.

Without any expertise or specialist knowledge, envisaging the perfect balancing act between competing priorities proved difficult for most participants. Nonetheless, drawing inspiration from their real-life experiences of the pandemic, The People's Strategy presents three key principles to show how people across the country believe the crisis should be managed.

BE DECISIVE

WORK TOGETHER

PROTECT OUR WELLBEING

BE DECISIVE

People are fed up with confusing systems and rules. They believe transmission of the virus is increasing because people don't understand how they should behave, and this has been exacerbated by often delayed, incoherent, and sometimes contradictory messaging from the government.

People are also frustrated that the government is insufficiently proactive and slow to respond and feel that this way of governing, shaped by hesitation and inconsistency, makes the situation much worse than it needs to be.

The people are calling for the government to be much more decisive.

KEEP IT CLEAR

- Rules not guidance
- Practical advice and help to implement it
- Use both carrot and stick – stricter enforcement, with positive reinforcement when communities get it right

"We need rules not guidance - making something against the law is strong and effective leadership that allows no wriggle room. Providing guidance is wishy washy at best and just passing the buck at worst." **Male, 45-54, North West**

"I would now concentrate on ensuring that people worked hard to stick to basic rules of wearing masks, hand washing ... I would support all businesses to stay open but give clear guidance on safety protocols and managing the amount of bodies in a space at any given time. I would congratulate, support and encourage the public for their efforts and ask that we work together as communities to look after each other." **Female, 45-54, Yorkshire**



"Stable door and horse spring to mind here. But at least the message is out there".

DON'T DELAY

- Proactive measures to prevent the spread
- Short-term pain for longer-term gain

"My strategy would be to act as soon as possible. We didn't take enough action nor did we respond quickly enough to prevent the situation from escalating before the previous lockdown we had. We need to learn from our mistakes, see what other countries with less cases did differently and follow suit." **Female, 18-24, West Midlands**

"I think it is right to tighten the measures early in attempt to prevent hospitals and the NHS becoming overwhelmed again ... If this was for a shorter period of time (not 6 months but more 6 weeks) this may nip the new rises in the bud." **Female, 25-34, South East**

TEST, TEST, TEST

- Make it work, no matter the cost
- Accept it is failing, and find better solutions

"I would do whatever it takes to build an effective, efficient and accessible Covid testing system. Testing would become a Council responsibility. Each Council would have their own test centres and sufficient resources to have dedicated staff and quick processing. ... In summary, much more testing, more accessible, locally operated, greater transparency. Money no object." **Female, 55-64, South East**



"Good to know I don't have to go far for a test, should the need arise"

"The key to recovery in other countries has been testing, so I'd ramp up this facility with testing booths on the street, in shopping centres, in train stations etc. This could also work in combination with mandatory temperature checks when entering any public building ... I think it would also help to mend the divisions, as people wouldn't be as resentful of others going out to bars etc if they were screened on entry to prove that they wouldn't be spreading the virus." **Female, 25-34, Yorkshire**

WORK TOGETHER

With Covid-19 affecting communities across the globe, people are in support of a more collaborative approach to tackling this common issue. People want decision-making to involve coordination between international, national and local leaders, as well as scientific committees and community organisations.

They want decision-makers to learn from international experiences and pool together knowledge on how to best deal with the pandemic. Additionally, at the national scale, there are several calls to decentralise power and have greater trust in local leaders

The people are calling for the government to work together, across local to international scales, to share evidence and resources that will drive more effective decisions and systems.

USE INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE

- Collaborate for the greater good
- Learn from countries who have managed it better
- Listen to the experts

"I would be closely following advice from the WHO and watching how other nations are dealing with the crisis. I would not govern with the arrogance that I knew better."
Female, 35-44, South East

"Consultation with countries who have had more success than us in getting on top of the virus. There should be serious dialogue with experts in New Zealand, Australia and Vietnam."
Male, 65-74, Yorkshire

"Most important, all of our leaders need to get with the programme; properly review what needs to be done and how to do it using competent think tanks and; having developed a strategy, present a consistent and united front. We should be working far more closely with other governments. This is an international problem. It is not confined to the UK."
Male, 65-74, Wales

SUPPORT LOCAL RESPONSES

- Dictate less – collaborate more. Support local authorities and organisations which are best placed to understand the local context, challenges and opportunities.
- Delegate – give local councils control over testing

"Central government should be expending far more effort on coordinating (information, discussion, measures) both with local authorities and with organisations responsible for the management of large numbers of people (such as universities, business organisations etc). The strategic model the Johnson government seems to be following (albeit intuitively rather than consciously) is one of command and control rather than collation of intelligence, collaboration with relevant organisations and coordination of efforts." **Male, 65-74, Greater London**

"I would consult much more widely with the organisations concerned before and after decisions were made, so that they had time to prepare (schools? universities?), and had input into decisions that concerned them, after all they know their business best. I'd have capable people in place to try and have an overview of the complexities and create more joined-up responses." **Female, 65-74, South East**

PROTECT OUR WELLBEING

While saving lives and protecting the NHS are important, people are mindful of the wider impacts the pandemic is having on people's livelihoods and wellbeing. With restrictions in place, they want enhanced economic support and adapted guidelines that consider the struggles people are experiencing in communities across the country. This includes greater consideration of the implications for people's mental health and wellbeing- as many feel this has been forgotten as the physical risks of catching the virus have been prioritised. For some, their motivations for feeling this way are rooted in what would be best for themselves and their immediate network, while others take a more egalitarian approach and consider the needs of those from all sectors of society.

The people are calling for the government to protect our wellbeing with restrictions that balance the need to save lives with adequate support and provisions for people to be able to live well.

SAVE LIVES

- Protect the vulnerable
- Save the NHS

"I do think it's very late to put measures in place but these are people's lives. It's late but it's never too late to save someone's life. Someone's mum, dad, cousin, teacher whatever." **Female, 18-24, North East**

"Local authorities should concentrate their efforts on ensuring that the elderly and vulnerable are looked after and there is enough provision for all." **Female, 45-54, Yorkshire**

MAKE RESTRICTIONS LIVEABLE

- Understand the importance of human connection
- Prioritise the need for education
- Support community groups
- Recognise the need for family support

"I think there needs to be more messaging about how people can not only avoid catching Covid but also look after their mental health. I think the mental health of old people, students and those in isolation is not being considered enough." **Female, 45-54, Greater London**

"I would encourage working parents to bubble with another family in a similar situation to share childcare/ distance learning/ set up remote working spaces in each other's homes. I would put in place a package to enhance distance learning for every school and child whilst this is ongoing. I would ensure everyone had access to the internet and I would subsidise the purchase of tablets or other devices that would help the elderly and isolated keep in touch with their family and friends. I would want to support faith groups and community organisations to offer their support programs virtually." **Female, 25-34, Northern Ireland**

SECURE OUR LIVELIHOODS

- Financial support for those unable to work
- Practical support for businesses and to keep local economies afloat

"More employment support – extend furlough, fund companies that can help them switch to virtual/online/delivery-only, help the self-employed, increase benefits. Support active travel with infrastructure investment. Make broadband a public service for all and offer training, support for poorest to get suitable equipment." **Female, 35-44, Yorkshire**

"I'd evaluate different businesses where the risk of coronavirus is high and come up with different methods so the business can keep operating but also ensure it is safe. For example, I would give restaurants the funding to start takeouts. Later on, I would do the 50% offer for food but instead do it on takeouts only. This will boost the economy well." **Male, 35-44, North West**



"I particularly like the inclusion of communities in this one" **Universal Credit**

AN APPETITE FOR SOMETHING MORE RADICAL?

The people's strategy reflects the viewpoints of the majority. Of course, there are others who are keen proponents of some radical suggestions, spanning the political spectrum from authoritarian to libertarian, individualist to collectivist.



AN APPETITE FOR SOMETHING MORE RADICAL?

I would launch a new health education division which would teach people about true prevention and how to boost their immune systems, abolish the rule of six, mask wearing ... abolish the WHO, CDC and take back health into local, accountable hands. The NHS needs to bring in alternative medicine towards an integrated model like the Chinese do and we give nurses and carers a massive pay rise.

Female, 55-64, South East

TOP PRIORITY: deploy the army. Why have a valuable resource on standby and not use it? The police have lost control of a growing problem. Non-compliance with Covid restrictions is on the up. WE NEED ACTION NOW.

Female, 55-64, North West

The Government is very lucky to have advice from Whitty [infectious disease and epidemiology], Harries [Public Health], Van Tam [specialist in influenza, including ... pandemic preparedness] and Vallance with vaccine and drugs. They really are the dream team.

Male, 65-74, Greater London

I would opt for the herd immunity route again ... Yes, it is controversial. People will die but I don't think any more than will die if other things or seasonal flu. I think I will save lives who would die from lack of cancer treatments, who might commit suicide from stress and job losses which are the Covid alternative.

Female, 45-54, Scotland

As an alternative to furlough and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, introduce a Universal Income Scheme and abolish all legacy benefits. This would encourage spending, kickstart the economy, and ensure the survival of the high street

Female, 55-64, North West

The blanket approach that was adopted towards furlough payments during the first furlough was ill thought out and unnecessarily expensive - that's an understatement! A more selective approach needs to be introduced.

Male, 65-74, Wales

APPENDIX

HOW WE ARE CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH

Using both a digital platform and telephone interviews, this study hears from voices around the UK to better understand how interactions and relationships have influenced the role of communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Around 140 nationally representative participants from around the UK participate in weekly online tasks and discussion boards set by The Young Foundation on an online digital platform called Recollective. The participants are tasked with completing specific activities including polls, photo and video responses, digital diaries and other creative activities, to help us gather insights on different issues as the situation continues to evolve. The tool and method used enables a highly interactive yet un-intrusive approach to working in a participatory way. It also enables a flexible and interactive method in what is a fast-evolving context which can respond to new changes and challenges.

In order to capture the voices of those individuals who are digitally excluded, we are working with 15 trained peer researchers who are part of The Young Foundation's Peer Research Network. These peer researchers are individuals who are deeply connected within their own communities and as part of this project are conducting bi-weekly telephone calls with around 30 individuals from around the UK who either do not have access to, or feel comfortable using, digital devices.

This combined approach ensures that we are hearing from a range of voices and viewpoints, allowing us to create a nationally representative picture of what is happening around the UK as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to unfold.

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