

Lambeth united: Our response to Covid-19



A time of crisis, Lambeth has come together

In mid-March I was at City Hall for the King's Civic Challenge – giving awards out and taking photos with some amazing community groups from Lambeth as part of a great partnership between the Council, King's College University and Lambeth communities. It was a wonderful afternoon of celebration, partnership and investment in our neighbourhoods.

A handful of weeks on and the world is completely changed and for everyone has been scary, unsettling and traumatic.

The pandemic has spread across the globe, quickly and relentlessly. It led to the tragedy of over 26,000 deaths across the UK, including 289 here in Lambeth (30 April). There has been nothing like it since the Second World War.

In Lambeth I've witnessed pain and tragedy, uncertainty and fear but also a coming together from every corner of the borough and every background, in solidarity, to support one another and overcome this crisis together

This report is a snapshot so far of what we've done, the steps we've taken, the lessons we've learnt and the thinking that has sat behind our actions. The emergency has meant that things have happened very quickly, with unexpected challenges faced and an

unprecedented requirement for agility and working in very different ways and circumstances.

I am deeply proud of the way Lambeth council has responded, keeping critical services going despite huge challenges and creating new ones in a matter of days. In particular, distributing over 8,000 food and care packages to vulnerable people who need them is something we are immensely proud of. I want to thank and pay tribute to our officers, councillors and Cabinet colleagues for their commitment and dedication.

But this report also references and demonstrates that the Council has not achieved anything on its own, and without strong relationships and partnerships with the community, our businesses, our public sector partners like the Police and Health Services, our academic institutions, our voluntary, community faith communities. It shows

that Lambeth's resilience is ultimately a sum of all its parts and their relative strength.

Within hours of the crisis emerging, people around Lambeth mobilised at pace and established new 'Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs) that have shown the value we place in our immediate neighbourhoods.

Our voluntary and community sector (VCS) has stepped up yet again, when the need was most acute. Those VCS organisations who have helped with deliveries of essential items such as food, medicines and other urgent supplies are a model of what the third sector can do. We were one of the first boroughs in the country up and running with our support for vulnerable people, using our supply chains and partners and developed in partnership with existing community organisations. Now, we must develop a longer-term solution that ensures those services'

sustainability, while providing the sector with the co-ordination and resources needed to do the job.

With clear and swift action to help the private sector (including small businesses) weather this storm and help preserve jobs in our diverse local economy, our Business and Enterprise team developed an ambitious package of initial support, in partnership with our fantastic Business Improvement Districts. More is being developed as the situation evolves and the scale of the economic challenges become clear as lockdown lifts and businesses open again.

What each of these shows is that 'place' really does matter. The individual projects in local geographies, or the borough-wide packages of support demonstrate the value of local communities and local solutions. Those ideas features heavily in our Borough Plan, which sets out our ambitions for Lambeth, alongside the clear requirement for shared endeavour.

It also shows that together we can achieve great things, and if we want to reinvent the world in which we live then now is the right time to begin to examine what the future should look like. And we must not lose our innovations and new ways of connecting and contributing for a world fit for everyone.

And that is because the crisis has exposed and exacerbated problems



that existed long before we had heard of COVID-19. The effects of the lockdown on those who were already living in crowded flats with no green space, those already struggling to get by on poverty wages or in other precarious situations has been to make them worse, and as we know all these trends disproportionately affect Black and Minority Ethnic members of our community. These challenges have worsened and the numbers of people who have fallen into hardship has grown.

We have to be clear- we do not want to go back to the world we had before, because it did not work for too many

people. But to solve these problems we must work together.

This report sets out what has been done and shows what has worked but also identifies where we need to do more. The Lambeth Recovery strategy has not been written yet because it will require every bit of the Borough to come together to write it. But I'm confident that our borough's response to the crisis shows we have the capacity and the commitment to build that recovery together.

Many thanks and best wishes

Cllr. Jack Hopkins

Adapting to the crisis

Our greatest asset is our people. Councillors and officers have mobilised in many different ways, to deliver key services where they are needed. Unlike other boroughs, Lambeth did not face the difficulties of reductions in services so severe that we could not keep running them well. In some cases, the significant changes and measures needed for managing Covid-19 – such as massively increased working from home, necessary self-isolation and an almost total reduction in face-to-face services, except in areas like health and social care – did require some small reductions in those teams able to deliver on services. However, to the great credit of our officer teams and senior management and partners, no service was ever in jeopardy.



Borough Emergency Control Centre

To manage and co-ordinate those key decisions, in a situation that was changing daily and needed responses at pace, the Borough Emergency Control Centre (Becc) was set up within days of the pandemic taking hold in the UK. The Becc has been staffed throughout by a dedicated team of staff volunteers, who were redeployed from other services. Their work has been long and absolutely essential. Without its early presence, that strong service delivery would never have happened, across almost every council and NHS system.

Digital and online services: working from home

This change has also driven genuine innovation – which matters so much as councils like Lambeth look to provide increasingly digital solutions, including planned improvements in resident/customer experience, a process which has been accelerated by the pandemic.

Here we saw one of those changes that is so positive. Coronavirus has driven wide culture change right across the authority. The overwhelming majority of our workforce are now working from home, a transformation which seemed impossible at the start of the year and which took only days to happen. One key strand of work which has been valuable has been the

regular online meetings with our staff trade unions. Their commitment and feedback have been vital in raising concerns about service delivery.

Changes to Council Decision Making

A large majority of this critical work has been carried out digitally, through web applications such as Microsoft Teams and others. This was a challenge, because for a significant period of time, right at the start of the pandemic, the government hadn't provided clear guidance on how the council could take certain decisions and hold meetings remotely. That lack of clarity was resolved thanks to the Coronavirus Act, which set out what decisions could be taken, how and by whom.

Innovation in Digital Systems

To make sure this and all other key decisions could go ahead, the council's Information Technology team worked extremely hard to get all of our critical systems in the right place. Our Chief Executive and Director of Public Health made sure that as many people as possible working for the council were able to hear from them both, as often as possible, with the setting up of weekly 'Teams Live' events, streamed for everyone who could access the platform. This covered what is happening around the council and across the borough, with hundreds of questions submitted.

Physical and face-to-face services

But not all of our services and changes could be delivered online. Our Integrated Health and Care Team took rapid action, coordinating our collective response with our Lambeth Together partners, working with NHS and social care providers and with other boroughs in the south east London system and across the capital in order to ensure that key services were available to those most in need.

Our early experience of supporting care homes in Lambeth was challenging. In many cases, we had to work hard, negotiate in difficult times and secure access to emergency Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supplies. Our teams had to have close engagement with our home care sector to ensure that the most vulnerable continued to get the services they needed in their own home.

Other Council services could not be provided online and our Facilities Management team took caring for our staff seriously and started a thorough programme of office cleaning, right across numerous council buildings.



How the council responded

The council's initial response focused on three areas:

- Local economy and jobs
- Residents' support and resilience
- Voluntary and Community Sector response

A fourth key area emerged quickly as we worked to provide food and care packages as part of an unprecedented offer for vulnerable people not covered by the Government's 'Shield' project. The Hub's key role was to set up, supply and deliver essential food to those who were deemed to be vulnerable by the council and NHS.

By the end of April, over 8,000 food parcels had been delivered, an amazing achievement in such short a time. Key to that work, was the rapid establishment of a Helpline for vulnerable people, their families and carers to request that support, so that we strove to make sure no one was left without support of some kind. The setting up of the Hub, initially at Brixton Rec and then later at other sites across the borough, was only possible due to the amazing work of our voluntary sector partners and council staff.



I have received two food deliveries and have been so grateful as really struggling to get food.”



Local economy and jobs



Residents' support and resilience



Voluntary sector and community response



Helpline for vulnerable people



The Somali community in Lambeth and across London has shown great resilience throughout this crisis whether that's supporting each other with homework, showing our mums how to use house party or reaching out on zoom to support each other. The council has been hugely supportive of our communities at this tough time and we are proud to be part of the Lambeth family.”

Issa Issa, Chief Executive Bright Education and community activist

Voluntary sector and Mutual Aid Groups (MAGs)

The VCS sector also rose to the challenge, delivering non-food and food services and supporting and complementing the work of the Hub. To help them in this task, the council made our Crowdfunder pot available to VCS groups.

Also crucial, was the work of the many Mutual Aid Groups across the borough. Here, residents helped each other and their neighbours, making a difference to many lives. We thank

them for their efforts and look forward to working with them in the future.

Equalities

Lambeth is a borough rich in diversity, which we celebrate. But is clear that the pandemic is impacting BAME communities in negative ways at rates of impact far higher than those of other residents.

This requires urgent analysis, so we can track the issue, look at the causes and address them through policies that work.

Our approach on this was hampered by national systems that failed to track ethnicity data, such as on the recording of deaths. To resolve this, the council decided to introduce our own equalities data questions, in line with our recent policy. We have also commissioned different organisations to reach out to our diverse communities and produced our guidance in different languages.



Local economy and jobs

Supporting our local businesses – whether micro, small and medium or large – was a top priority right at the start of the pandemic. We had to act fast, with our proactive partners in our seven Business Improvement Districts and business leaders – so that as many businesses could continue their operations, keep the local economy moving and protect the maximum number of jobs.

The workstream has:

- Quickly paid over 70% of all eligible grants, totalling over £40m as at 3 May, the team is on track to pay the majority of the remainder following essential checks to make sure the money goes to the right place.

- Frozen commercial waste collections for 96 businesses, at a cost of £18,000 per month.
- Introduced three months' commercial rent relief for 318 Lambeth businesses and VCS organisations, operating from council property, including our sub-tenancies.
- Developed and delivered a business survey – this is now underway and is informing the council's response and helping drive new business support measures. The survey report is due in May.
- Set up a 'business helpline' to provide advice and follow-up on grant applications forms where required. As at the 16th April, helpline had supported 735 businesses – 75% of enquiries related to government grants.

- Established a Lambeth Business Taskforce, in partnership with our BIDs; providing real time information on impacts to local business, helping coordinate communications, lobbying of Government (for example on the size of the Government's package, which we considered insufficient and lobbying on the health of Lambeth's particularly well-developed and UK-leading cultural offer).
- Established a new service to provide employment support to newly unemployed residents and funded extra capacity in local community advice agencies.
- Developed key data dashboards to monitor local economy response activities and make changes where the data show a need to do so, quickly.

£40m
grants paid

£18k
per month
commercial
waste frozen



We are hugely grateful to Lambeth for providing a rent holiday to tenants at International House.

Harry Owen-Jones, 3Space



Residents' support and resilience

Covid-19 is not just a public health crisis – it is a real and pressing financial crisis for many Lambeth residents. We focused on the practical and urgent help we could provide for our residents, many of whom were struggling to pay for essential costs such as rent, Council Tax or had to make applications for Universal Credit in record numbers, due to unemployment caused by businesses winding down or at risk of closure because of the impacts of C19. Our goal was simple: to help as many people in need, as we possibly could, as quickly as possible – so they could retain their tenancies, minimise debt and get help with employment.

The workstream has:

- Made sure that we stopped pursuing any council housing evictions and asked our housing association partners to make the same commitment.
- Expanded our Emergency Support Scheme for residents at immediate risk of financial hardship; securing an extra £500,000 worth of funding for residents.
- Stopped all enforcement action for Council Tax arrears, apart from an initial reminder.



- Agreed an extra £1million for Discretionary Housing Payments budget to help those struggling the most.
- Increased the scope and funding for our Council Tax Support Scheme.
- Developed a new employment programme for the care sector in Lambeth – this was launched to tackle unemployment and provide jobs where high demand exists.
- Developed dashboards to enable improved monitoring for the next phase of support as the lockdown restrictions ease.

- Improved monitoring for the next phase of support as the lockdown restrictions ease.

Care
employment
programme

£1m
extra housing
payments budget

£500k
extra funding
for residents at
immediate risk



Voluntary sector and community response

Supporting our voluntary and community sector to keep their operations going and to support vulnerable people was a key part of the council's response. An early video call with a wide range of VCS and community groups scoped out the VCS response and then led to financial support and improved sector partnership working. There are challenges in this work – not least funding to pay for such work to happen, but the sector has worked incredibly hard, alongside the council.

We have:

- Supported Mutual Aid groups and offered guidance, support with printing and mapping.
- Ensured the financial health of VCS groups as far as we are able – expanding and re-purposing the Crowdfund Lambeth criteria for applications to ensure that our most vulnerable communities have the help they need and invested money in our Crowdfunding platform to enable grants for local community organisations that are responding to the pandemic.

- Projects we have pledged on so far include: Streatham Youth and Community Trust – £4,585 pledged, Oasis Waterloo – £5,000 pledged, South London Cares – £5,000 pledged. We are working as fast as we can to make those payments encouraging further applications for help to keep VCS services running.
- Supported smaller VCS groups with capacity grants (for example, the vital work of domestic violence charities, such as Refuge/Gaia Centre to sustain their service provision). Following the onset of lockdown, the police have reported a significant increase in arrests on charges of domestic abuse and Refuge/Gaia Centre have had a large rise in calls to their helpline, seeking urgent support.
- Enrolled 1,000 public volunteers – mobilisation of these has now commenced to support food distribution and assist with hospital discharges. The work of our community volunteers has been deeply inspiring and equally important. We thank all of our volunteers for stepping forward – and for their patience – as safeguarding applications were checked and projects scaled.



1,000
volunteers enrolled

VCR
groups engagement
and support



Helpline for vulnerable people

We are proud of the establishment of our Community Hub and Helpline, both of which were set up at speed to respond to the need to support those identified as clinically extremely vulnerable and anyone else who was vulnerable because of COVID-19. This has included:

- Establishing a secure supply chain of food to vulnerable people – the first food deliveries to vulnerable people began on the 27th March, prior to the receipt of any emergency supplies from government for the shielded population and a week prior to receipt of the first significant batch of data relating to those required to shield in the borough.
- Setting up two food packaging and distribution hubs with distribution undertaken via Pedal-me Cargo bikes.
- Launching a Vulnerable Hub helpline, webform and triage service staffed by staff volunteers seven days a week, 8am-8pm – their work has made a huge difference to the lives of many of Lambeth's most vulnerable people.
- The Hub has opened over 16,000 cases inclusive of the shielded list, those identified by professionals as 'Lambeth vulnerable' and those who have called the helpline to self-identify as vulnerable, delivering over 7000 food packages (by 28 April).



Helpline
staffed by staff
volunteers

5,000
residents being
supported

- Mapping local VCS food delivery to identify opportunities to collaborate; we are now undertaking ongoing co-ordination with VCS groups to deliver support this process jointly with the council on a longer-term footing.
- Trialling a volunteer-powered paid-for shopping service on the 15th April and subsequently procured a borough-wide shopping service that will meet the needs of all those who are vulnerable but just need some support with their shopping and supplies.
- Providing bulk deliveries to hostels and hotels supporting homeless people and to local VCS groups who have identified vulnerable parts of the

community not accessing the offer through the helpline.

- Capturing equalities and diversity data across the Hub processes to monitor the impact of disproportionality among BAME communities. Our data is showing higher rates of BAME need than the known population demographics and ethnic breakdowns. This is of concern, but mapping and analysing the data, in conjunction with groups such as Black Thrive, will help suggest solutions and policies to address this.

Keeping services running

Making sure our services – right across the council – can deliver to those whom we serve, including those most in need has been a top priority for Lambeth.

Co-ordinated and managed by the Becc, with operational leadership by Management Board and our Directors, business continuity assessments have been greatly helped by a simple ‘dashboard’ which gives key services a Red, Amber, Green rating. This is updated daily and placed on our website, so that residents and others can check the position and be sure that services are delivered. We are proud to say that throughout the crisis, no service has been ‘Red’. This is testament to the incredible hard work of our officers across Lambeth Council, as well as to those councillors leading portfolio responsibilities

or championing groups within the borough. Our thanks go to them.

Our recycling and waste teams have shown remarkable resilience over the last few months, altering services and redeploying staff from household recycling centres and ancillary services, to ensure that at all times essential household collections are maintained. Reported fly tipping and littering has reduced across the borough. We have also seen the volume of recycling, food and garden waste increase by around 10%. Despite this our teams have been able to maintain the service because

residents have been doing the right thing with their waste.

Waste contamination has gone down from an average of 15% in Jan/Feb to 11.5% in March, as people have been paying more attention to how they dispose of their waste and are recycling more. This makes the crews’ jobs a lot easier and helps reduce our disposal costs.

During this time the Lambeth community have been incredibly supportive, recognising the frontline workforce as vital keyworkers, which has been very inspiring for staff.

“Over the past few months people have been leaving pictures and messages of thanks on their bins, and have been clapping us as we clean the streets and make collections. It has been really nice to see communities coming together and appreciating what we do, it makes me proud to work in Lambeth. Long may that continue!”

Rohan Munda Veolia Operative



First authority in the UK to publish an emergency transport response to Covid-19

We were the first local authority in the country to publish an emergency response that looks to protect residents from the hugely increased road danger risk due to speeding and traffic, as well as to facilitate social distancing and reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission. Coronavirus dramatically changed the way people are using streets in Lambeth and beyond, with many people walking and cycling to make essential journeys or exercise. However with that comes an increased road danger risk. People having to walk or exercise in the roads to socially distance, more residents cycling and fewer cars on the road but travelling at greater speeds necessitate emergency intervention.

We also know that our most vulnerable residents and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to own and use a car, yet are often the most at risk. Therefore we need to make sure that our most vulnerable communities are protected as we move into an uncertain future.

Our emergency plan focuses on four phases: short term (immediate lockdown), near term (easing of restrictions), medium term (lifting of restrictions) and recovery (moving to the ‘new normal’). The council moved to extend pavements at some of the

busiest pinch points in the borough within days of the decision being formally agreed, such as under the railway bridge in Herne Hill and moved to bring forward plans to close Cornwall Road in Waterloo to through traffic.

The emergency changes will be followed by longer term work to make safe routes to and from the borough’s town centres, such as along Railton Road and Fentiman Road, so that residents are able to travel safely between our town centres. The planning behind this was to create safe routes for residents to travel safely to spend money and support our local businesses at such a tremendously difficult time. To achieve this, we are bringing forward our plans for reducing through traffic in two neighbourhoods (the Oval triangle and Railton Road areas); measures which can sometimes take months or years to put in place we are mobilising within weeks.

The plans will ensure that as restrictions are lifted, we are able to mitigate against rat running and the expected increase in motor vehicle use.

Working with the NHS

Many of our health services have had to rapidly change to new ways of working to comply with social distancing and to keep patients and staff safe, whilst at the same remaining accessible to those people needing care and support.

A new digital offer has been put in place across a wide range of different health care services for both adults and children.

There have been new responses in the way we deliver primary care

services for people, for example with the establishment of Covid Clinics for those individuals requiring GP support and who are directly affected by Coronavirus.

Working with our local hospitals to help them cope with the increased demands of Covid-19 has been an urgent and important element of our system response. We have worked with Guy's & St Thomas' and King's to establish Integrated Internal Flow Hubs to act as a single point in order to support discharges out of hospital for all referrals. A new integrated 'Home First' team has been established with Guy's and



St Thomas', who provide our community health services. Home First takes referrals from the hospital teams to support people home and will respond within 2 hours.

Our Integrated Health and Care Team have worked tirelessly to ensure that Lambeth care providers and primary care in the borough are supported, through maintaining good supplies of PPE equipment, providing advice and guidance on clinical care and infection control, enabling access to Covid-19 testing for key workers and through commissioning additional care capacity to meet demands.

Lambeth Together partners have demonstrated the flexibility to work differently to meet changing needs of the population. For example, Council and CCG staff worked together to put a medicines delivery service in place by repurposing the SEND home to school transport providers, using local accredited drivers and their cars to support over 20 local pharmacies with the delivery of medicines to shielded and other vulnerable groups.

Mental health and wellbeing

The crisis has had a profound impact on everyone's lives, and there were particular concerns from the outset about the impact on people's mental health and wellbeing.

Recognising the challenges generated by the coronavirus and the impact of the necessary social distancing measures, the Council has been working with partners to continue to support the mental health and well-being of our residents and of our staff. Specifically:

- Making sure we protect and support our most vulnerable individuals who may be living with mental health conditions.
- Enabling anyone living and working in Lambeth to access clear and reliable information and advice about how to maintain their physical, emotional and psychological well-being.

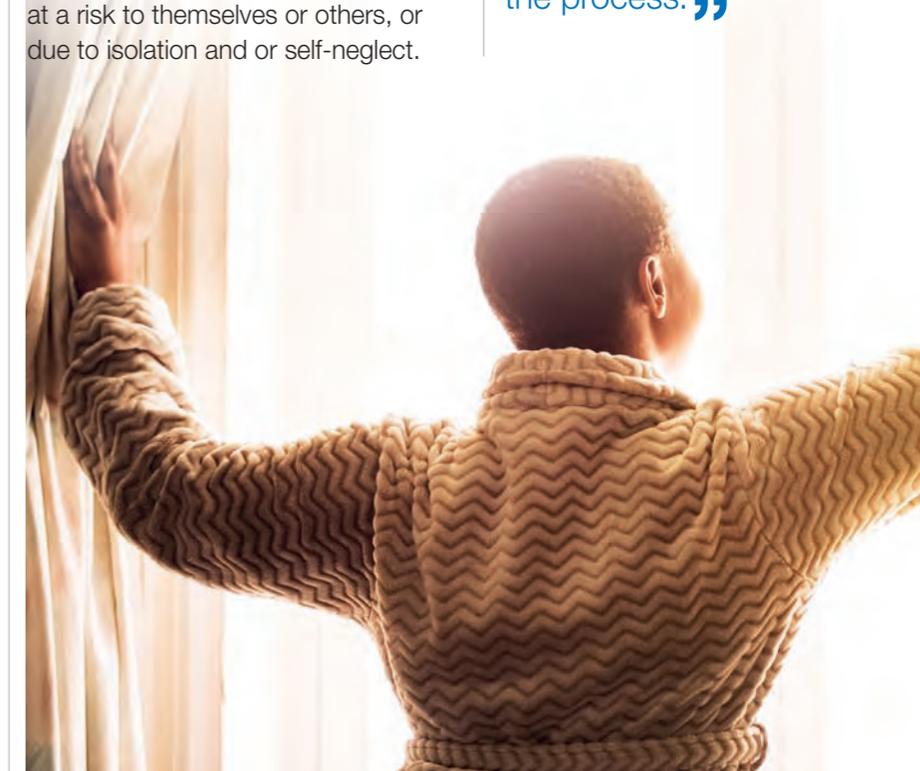
At the same time our mental health services have had to adapt to the social distancing guidelines and still remain open, for example:

- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, our local talking therapies service, has continued to accept self-referrals, with the service being delivered online, by video and by telephone.

- Anyone who needs urgent and crisis support from both our Child and Adolescent and our Adult Mental Health services can still be referred.
- Individuals already known to our local services are continuing to be supported particularly those who may be at a risk to themselves or others, or due to isolation and or self-neglect.



You were a fantastic help. Big thank you to everyone involved in the process.”



Supporting children and young people

We continue to operate our key children's services to meet the needs of residents, tailoring and adapting our provision to meet social distancing requirements whilst going to every length to ensure the most vulnerable are protected.

Many of our schools remain open to support keyworker children and the more vulnerable, we are maintaining a scaled-down face-to-face service to respond to critical safeguarding needs, and we are tailoring local youth provision to keep our young people happy and healthy during this period.

Key pieces of work include:

- Schools have maintained face-to-face education for around 700 children (keyworker children and those with a social worker or EHCP plan) in the borough whilst implementing online learning for the majority who are expected to stay at home.
- Our Educational Psychology team have offered free consultations to support parents with their child's learning needs and emotional difficulties.
- Children who are looked after by Lambeth are receiving increased virtual support from practitioners. We have also invested in additional

placement capacity to ensure we can respond to children's needs in an emergency during the pandemic.

- A team of frontline social care staff are conducting visits with families and providing face-to-face support where this is urgently required.
- In response to the increased risk of domestic abuse, the Violence Against Women and Girls service has stepped up communications and awareness raising, expanded support to the local support centre and sought to increase bed space capacity for those fleeing abuse.
- Our local youth offer has been tailored to digital platforms and used to communicate key messages to young people during lockdown. Providers are working collaboratively to support young people's needs by delivering a broad range of online services.
- Practitioners have worked with enforcement to engage young people congregating in the local community,



signposting them to Council services and raising awareness of public health risks.

- We have extended our online professional counselling service, Kooth, to work with 18-25s to support the mental health of all young residents.

Championing Lambeth's needs

The council has been working closely with central government to co-ordinate the borough's response and has set out areas of concern for Lambeth residents and businesses to government.

In particular, cabinet members have written to government ministers to set out their concerns about the lack of PPE at the start of the outbreak of the pandemic, the need for more testing, the need for more support

for businesses that are missing out on existing government schemes and concerns that use of estimated grades could exacerbate educational inequalities for Black and minority ethnic students. We will continue to work with government to urge them to address these issues.

The Leader of the council, Cllr Hopkins, has also written to the Prime Minister regarding funding for local councils to deal with the outbreak. At the outset,

the government said that councils would be fully funded, but currently less than half of the financial costs that Lambeth has faced have been funded by central government. The financial impact of providing extra services and potential lost income to the council is currently estimated at around £45 million. The council is clear that this must be funded by central government or it would risk enormous financial pressure on local services.

The work to support our residents through the virus has been a truly collective effort. None of this could have been achieved without our community groups, volunteers, charities, council staff, partners like the NHS and individuals who have shown extraordinary capacity to put their communities first. On behalf of the people of Lambeth, we thank for them for their extraordinary efforts.



This has only been achieved by Lambeth working together.

“

We're so grateful to our neighbours Lambeth Council for arranging the printing of Groundswell's guides for people experiencing homelessness during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result thousands of people traditionally cut off by society, have accessible, relevant advice to help protect themselves and their community from the spread of Covid-19. ”

Sarah Hough, Groundswell.org.uk



Thank you

“

Lambeth have been proactive in support of the VCS sector and is passionately working to connect VCS groups and wider stakeholders, with a view to improving outcomes through increased collaboration and stronger networks. The support of the council has been vital in helping to unlock these resources that will benefit our most vulnerable communities. We are also pleased the council recognises the need to strengthen the local VCS infrastructure and this is a welcome step in the right direction. ”

Adam Rinarelli, Social Value World

“

Lambeth Council were really quick off the mark to put out a call for volunteers. Eight of our football coaches volunteered to work at Brixton Hub as soon as we put out a call, and after a month they're still there regularly. They were happy to have something to do in lockdown, to still be reaching out to the community. When this is all over, we'll see that it brought out the good and the bad. When they're back to coaching they'll be able to say "We were there. Young people in Brixton stepped up to help when the community was in need. That's one of the good things. ”

Lee Dema of St Matthew's Project

