

Gateshead Investigates Bulletin

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Welcome to Gateshead Investigates Bulletin: Winter 2021

In this bulletin you will find information on the research and campaigning activity of staff and volunteers of Citizens Advice Gateshead. Research and campaigns is a key part of our strategy towards achieving our vision of a fair society for all, with lives well lived.

Our digital approach to raising awareness of local issues has continued, with this year's Big Energy Saving campaign. We are also adding our voice to the calls to keep positive changes to the benefits system and keeping up to date with the latest reports on health and social inequalities affecting the people of Gateshead.

www.citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk

 @AdviceGateshead

 Citizens Advice Gateshead

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Gateshead Investigates local carers experiences



Many of the people we advise are providing unpaid care to loved ones every day. We're undertaking research to know more about their experiences to help inform government policy and practices for benefits available to carers.

The term 'unpaid carers' refers to individuals who provide unpaid care for friends, family or neighbours in the community. See our [Summer Bulletin 2020](#) for more information.

**Are you an unpaid carer?
We need you for our
research!**

Contact

alex@citizensadvicegateshead.org.uk

To sign up to our survey panel and help improve social policies in place for carers in Gateshead and across the UK

Big Energy Saving Winter



Big Energy Saving Week is an important campaign in our diaries each year, it is a week in which we help raise awareness of energy issues, empowering people to save energy, money and the environment through everyday actions. This year, because of the pandemic preventing our ability to conduct high profile face-to-face campaigning, the awareness week turned into a longer awareness season.

At Citizens Advice Gateshead we advise hundreds of people each winter on various energy issues. R&C volunteer Molly Hall wrote an article highlighting how the Coronavirus pandemic has worsened the seasonal increase in energy issues we advise on. In December 2020 alone we helped our clients with almost triple the energy issues as we did in the previous December.

You can read Molly's article [here](#).

This BESW our focus has been on raising awareness of fuel poverty; what it is, and what service providers and people who find themselves in fuel poverty can do about it.

To this end, we have produced two booklets. One targeted at our clients (left), and one at stakeholders and partner organisations so we can all be pushing in the same direction to tackle fuel poverty in Gateshead (right).

Feeling Cold? We can help!

A guide to saving energy and saving money



Fuel Poverty: Cold Hard Facts

What is it? How can we help? How can it stop?



The booklets will be available in physical and digital versions.

We must thank our colleagues at Gateshead Council for their valuable input into the booklets and for working with us to support the people of Gateshead in seeking help if they are struggling this winter.

For more information about Big Energy Saving Winter visit bigenergysavingwinter.org.uk

How has the covid-19 pandemic and response affected health and social inequalities?

Niamh Storey, social policy research volunteer.



The Institute of Health Equity at University College London have recently published a new report 'Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review' ¹ which summarises findings on the effect of the covid-19 pandemic and subsequent government response upon health and social inequalities in England. The report summarises data on inequalities in mortality risk from covid-19, effects upon children and young people, issues relating to employment, communities, standards of living, and public health measures.



This report follows on from a recent publication by the same group of researchers ² and suggests that the pandemic has widened pre-existing inequalities in health and the social determinants of health, both between and within regions in the UK. Prior to the pandemic, the largest reduction in healthy life expectancy was observed the top 10% of deprived neighbourhoods in the North East of England¹. Gateshead was amongst the top 15% most deprived local authorities in England according to the most recent data, with 16% of the Gateshead population (32,700 people) living in one of England's 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in 2019 ³. At the beginning of the pandemic, London was the region with the highest age-standardised covid-19 mortality rate, but the latest data from October suggests that the North East and North West regions now have the highest of covid-19 mortality after accounting for population age differences ¹.

Unequal risks

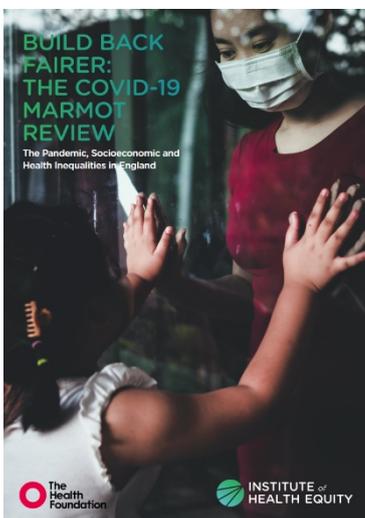
The report suggests that certain groups within the population faced an unequal risk of mortality from covid-19. These communities included people from Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. There are also gender differences, with males seeming to have worse risk of serious illness than females, and age differences, with older people being more at risk. There are several other risk factors which intersect with these inequalities including employment in certain occupations (such as healthcare), living in overcrowded housing or a

deprived area, and having previous health conditions. There are also regional inequalities in risk, some of which mirror inequalities in poverty, ethnicity, age and housing conditions.

Worsening inequality

The findings also show that the pandemic and policy response necessary to reduce the spread of covid-19, which has included measures such as closures of schools and early years settings, may have exacerbated existing inequalities in development, educational attainment and wellbeing amongst children and young people. Concerningly, the data suggests that certain groups of children, such as those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or those living in more deprived households, were impacted more greatly by these measures. For example, parents who are key workers, living in poverty or those with children with SEN may have been less able to give their children the educational resources and teaching needed when schools closed. The authors propose that additional support to children and parents, including free childcare places, catch up tuition, equitable access to internet and laptops, and a more equitable assessment system is necessary in order to reduce some of these inequalities.

How can the inequalities be addressed?



The report provides several implications and suggestions for policy responses which, the authors argue, should prioritise measures to improve the general health and the social determinants of health in the population (such as housing, income and

employment) and to promote feelings of trust and cohesion amongst citizens. The report suggests that this requires a reversal of existing austerity measures, replacing them instead with long-term strategies focusing on investment, and this should be done in partnership across all sectors and levels of government. Certain groups, such as key workers and children and young people, should also be at the centre of these policy strategies due to the unequal impact of the pandemic upon these and other groups. The government's most recent

spending review ⁵, which outlines funding for local authorities across England, prioritised certain policy areas including reducing health and social inequalities, improving education standards, and supporting local authorities to deliver locally-relevant services to local communities, alongside existing efforts to tackle the covid-19 pandemic. The spending review outlined a total of £55 billion extra support to be provided to local authorities in order to control the covid-19 outbreak, resource public services to support families experiencing hardship, and to support local jobs and businesses.

Gateshead's approach

Locally, there are existing public health strategies which will now be even more crucial in tackling these inequalities which have been worsened by the pandemic. Gateshead Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy ⁶ outlines existing priorities to tackle health and social inequalities in the local area, which are in line with several of these suggestions. The council priorities include tackling poverty and inequality, promoting growth of the local economy and subsequent employment levels, and improving health, housing and transport systems ⁷. As such, the suggestions highlighted in the report are key to reducing inequalities and to 'build back fairer' across the entire UK and within regions such as the North East, through the provision of crucial support services both locally and nationally.

You can read the reports mentioned by following the links below.

- 1 Build Back Fairer: The Covid-19 Marmot Review, 2020 – [link](#).
- 2 Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On, 2020 – [link](#).
- 3 English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2019 – [link](#).
- 4 Gray and Barford, 2018 – [link](#).
- 5 UK Government Spending Review, 2020 – [link](#).
- 6 Gateshead Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2020 – [link](#).
- 7 Gateshead Council Budget 2020/2021 – [link](#).

Citizens Advice Gateshead joins the call to keep the £20 benefits uplift

Molly Hall, campaigns & communications volunteer.



Last spring, the chancellor increased two key benefits - Universal Credit and the basic element of Working Tax Credit - by £20 a week to support those in need as the pandemic struck. The move added an extra £1,040 to claimants' annual incomes.

The uplift was meant to be temporary, running only until April 2021. But, with lockdowns set to continue well into 2021 and the country at risk of a double-dip recession, Citizens Advice joins a

chorus of charities and campaigners in supporting its extension.



Citizens Advice has helped over a quarter of a million people across the UK with Universal Credit since March. Seven in 10 of these people had never come to Citizens Advice for help before, indicative of the far-reaching consequences of the pandemic on people's livelihoods. In Gateshead, Citizens Advice has helped over 5,000 clients with Universal Credits since March 2020. Currently, there are around 18,000 Gateshead households receiving Universal Credit (as of August 2020) - all of whom would be impacted by the income reduction.

A vital lifeline

Analysis published in October of Citizens Advice's clients with debt shows that 75% wouldn't be able to cover their essential household bills if the uplift is removed. Furthermore, the Child Poverty Action Group warned that withdrawal of the uplift will hit 6 million families and push 200,000 more children below the breadline. This is concerning as Gateshead is already in the top 20% most deprived local authorities for income deprivation affecting children.

Pandemic aside, the £20 cut would reduce basic unemployment benefits to their lowest level since 1992, according to the Resolution Foundation, or the lowest proportion of average weekly earnings since the Second World War. The year-on-year increase in food bank usage since 2015 would suggest benefit rates were not adequate during 'normal' times, let alone during a crisis.

Furthermore, the current circumstances are unprecedented. New research by the Resolution Foundation shows that lockdowns have increased living costs for low-income families. Higher food and energy bills, additional costs associated with home-schooling, and costly local food shops have increased financial pressures on these families. Losing out on over £1000 of yearly income would only serve to increase pressures on the most vulnerable.

Joining the campaign

We have contacted local MPs; Liz Twist, Kate Osborne and Ian Mearns to make representations to the chancellor to keep the uplift in the March

2021 budget. At time of writing Ian Mearns and Kate Osborne had replied offering their full support.

To add your voice to the call you can find out how to contact your MP [here](#).

Proposed Changes to The Mental Health Act

Niamh Storey, social policy research volunteer



The Government recently released a new White Paper outlining proposed changes to mental health legislation in the UK. The Mental Health Act (1983) outlines the current legal context of mental health provisions, such as appropriate criteria for 'sectioning' of individuals with mental health disorders (involuntary detention and treatment at a psychiatric hospital). However, an independent review of the Act which took place in 2018 recommended changes to promote individual choice in mental health treatment decisions and to reduce unnecessary detentions and restrictive interventions, as well as to address inequalities in their application.

These suggestions are proposed to better protect the autonomy and rights of individuals with mental health issues through changes to mental healthcare provisions and support provided to certain groups, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and learning disabilities. The report also addresses inequalities in the rates of application of restrictive mental health interventions for people from ethnic minorities.

The report prioritises individuals' rights to choice and autonomy in treatment decision-making, such as increased ability to challenge decisions relating to restrictive interventions. The report also outlines proposed changes to ensure that mental health interventions are used in the least restrictive way possible to individuals' rights and that they provide a therapeutic benefit in order to support individuals with mental health issues to recover. The proposals outlined in the paper will now be open to consultation from the public until the 21st of April 2021.

If you would like to have your voice heard on these issues visit the Department for Health and Social Care website via this [link](#)

You can read the full White Paper [here](#).
And the independent review (2018) [here](#).