



How Local Area Coordination can
help us beyond this crisis towards
a better future for all

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Introduction

In this paper, we outline the Local Area Coordination approach before sharing our reflections on its impact during “Covid times”. We then share how it can support multi-level recovery, renewal and rebuilding efforts by nurturing and sustaining the surge of community action we have recently seen. We conclude by encouraging more areas to join our growing movement, helping us take the Local Area Coordination approach to even more communities across England and Wales.

This is a co-produced report by the members of the Local Area Coordination Network which consists of the councils of Derby City, Leicestershire County, Kirklees, City of York, Thurrock, Wiltshire, Swansea, London Boroughs of Waltham Forest, Haringey and Havering.

Edited by Nick Sinclair and Cat Thomas.
July 2020

“Working with my Local Area Coordinator has not only made me want to live, it has for the first time in years, made me start to see there is a future. It has helped me come from feeling that I am completely useless, to realising that I do have qualities and I do deserve a life”

Recent feedback from citizen of Swansea.

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1

LOCAL AREA COORDINATION IN A NUTSHELL

Local Area Coordination is about:

- Supporting people and families achieve their vision of a good life, use their gifts and make their contribution.
- Helping communities to be self-supporting and to flourish.
- Transforming systems, building bridges and strengthening relationships between citizens, communities and services.

“This is about making services human, building trust, giving people the space to be themselves to make their contribution in their community. Local Area Coordination demonstrates that we do care about one another, that we want to be together and to pull through together.”

Clenton Farquharson MBE.

Key Points:

- It is an evidence-based approach¹ that emerged in Western Australia in the 1980's² & has been in England and Wales since the early 2010's.
- Local Area Coordinators are typically employed by their local authority but are rooted in communities of around 10,000 people.
- They can work with anyone in that community boundary.
- It is based on 10 core principles and key design features but is flexible to build on the strengths of local citizens, communities and service systems alike³.
- It works!

It's about citizenship and resilience not service dependency

The people and families who Coordinators are introduced to are often disconnected from others and facing complex physical health and wellbeing challenges. Coordinators invest time to understand a person's vision for a better life, focussing on their strengths and gifts to share and the natural support around them from family, friends and their community.

- **“Introductions” can come from anywhere and anyone.**
- **They have no pre-determined outcomes to work to, no time limits and no eligibility criteria for who they can support or as we would put it “walk alongside.”**
- **They do not carry out formal assessments but remain highly accountable through something called “shared agreements”.**

Where someone already has services in their life, Local Area Coordinators help people make sense of this, gradually reducing a need for external input by building relationships with those around them. Being so accessible and visible, they are often able to help prevent problems turning to crisis. This means that:

- **Local Area Coordination reduces costs to health and social care systems.**
- **Increases social value in communities as people move from being service users (or potential service users) to healthier, connected and contributing citizens.**

Evidence shows that working in this way addresses the wider determinants of poor health and addresses health and wellbeing inequalities⁴.

“You couldn't capture much of this in an instruction manual. Local Area Coordination is compassionate, patient, thoughtful and relies on initiative, imagination and great relationship building.”

David Robinson, Founder of the Relationships Project.

It's about building community assets and capacity

“Local Area Coordinators perform magic, we all knew that before this crisis, but where we had them in place, they proved pivotal in getting sustainable community-led support networks established. Their guidance, knowledge and example has created a learning network outside the council and all I ever hear is compliments for their work and ‘what would we ever have done without them?!’”

Councillor Mark Child, Lord Mayor of City and County of Swansea and former Cabinet Lead for Health and Wellbeing.

Local Area Coordinators are a resource to all in the place(s) they work. This includes helping local groups and organisations to develop and sustain their work whilst supporting people to establish new initiatives.

- **They are focussed on the assets that exist in communities, building knowledge of hyperlocal, neighbourly, non-service solutions and connections.**
- **They build collaborative relationships with organisations (charities, commissioned services, other statutory agencies etc.), to take and make introductions but also to support community capacity building.**

Evidence highlights that this helps communities to become self-supporting and welcoming places with natural supportive connections between neighbours, reducing a need for external service input⁵.

“I find our Local Area Coordinator very approachable, knowledgeable and nothing is too much trouble to ask for advice. They can and do come to me for my knowledge of working within the community of York, as a volunteer”

John McGall, Community Leader in York.

“I have been consistently supported, advised and motivated by the Local Area Coordinators. My own wellbeing and capacity have been considered, as has my support requirements. As a volunteer and someone who values my community, the Local Area Coordinators have been invaluable.”

Cindy Carter-Foster, Mutual Aid Group volunteer in Derby.

It's about improving and transforming local service systems

The leaders promoting Local Area Coordination often note that many of the systems surrounding local services are not fit for purpose and are in need of reform.

- **The Local Area Coordination approach can either support existing transformation plans or is a helpful starting point for influencing the change required to come up with new ones.**
- **Local Area Coordinators have a foot within communities and also within local health, social care, housing and third sectors. This helps them broker powerful, bridging connections and build trust.**

Leaders of local statutory systems, political leaders and community representatives come together to invest in and sustain Local Area Coordination as a Leadership Group. They do this by earmarking new funding, but also by recycling funding for roles that may be vacant or projects coming to an end. Beyond this, the group takes on a 'leaders of systems change' role, listening to stories of what works well and what doesn't, taking action as a result. It also enhances broader opportunities for collaboration, promoting integrated service working e.g. joint commissioning and co-production with communities. Local Area Coordination reduces costs to the system and supports stronger, more person-centred and more sustainable services⁶.

Local Area Coordination is partly about clearing space in order to listen and learn from communities and citizens as to what works well and what doesn't. This learning provides a platform for people to collaborate together to achieve lasting change⁷. However, Local Area Coordination is also a highly pragmatic and realistic approach that recognises the importance of being alongside people and communities as they go through challenging times both individually and collectively. As a result of the Covid-19 Crisis it is likely that the next few years are going to be some of the toughest our country has ever had to face and just mitigating the impact of these pressures alone will be an enormous challenge. We explore this in the following section.

2

“WEATHERING THE STORM” LOCAL AREA COORDINATION DURING COVID TIMES

“Self-isolating has been a very emotional time for so many people but by listening we have truly made a difference helping individuals find the right connections for them. One of our team has managed to connect five individuals together all of which are shielding but speak on a regular basis over the telephone and will be meeting up once restrictions begin to lift.”

Karen Dobson, Senior Local Area Coordinator Thurrock Council.

The current Covid-19 crisis highlights much of the theory and logic that underpins the Local Area Coordination approach.

- It has been evident across our Network that it fosters hyper local neighbourliness and trusting relationships between communities and local service infrastructure⁸.
- These relationships have enabled and supported community-led groups to use their natural capacity to respond quickly and effectively during the crisis.

Coordinators have had to quickly adjust and adapt the way they work during this time⁹ to support the new challenges faced by individuals, families, communities and local service organisations alike. They have used their creativity to continue helping people to recognise their value and strengths and to tap into the amazing support abundant from neighbours and community groups alike¹⁰.

Although the way we work is different because we’re not face-to-face with those residents, it’s great to be able to focus on strengths and our person-centred way of being...We have also been able to reflect with other colleagues, helping to embed the strength-based way of working more broadly.

Andrea Wershof – Senior Local Area Coordinator Haringey Council.



LACderby @LACderby · May 16

A person called our hub today. No food, struggling with their thoughts and worried about what they would do next. Immediate contact with a MH Firstaider & an LAC. 6 hours later they have food, connection to neighbours, support info and a plan to go forward with. [#NoGoingBack](#)



Stories of Community Power during Covid Times. **Zoom on the Doorstep.**

This story from Waltham Forest highlights the importance of Local Area Coordinators supporting flexible, practical action and holding strong knowledge of community assets.

A Local Area Coordinator was introduced by a Social Prescribing Link Worker to a resident who was due to start learning English (ESOL) through Zoom but who was anxious as she couldn't use it. As she was in the neighbourhood the Local Area Coordinator was able to go round and support a Zoom session on the doorstep to practice using technology. With this practical help she picked it up quickly. It turned out from further chatting that the woman had no access to food. The Coordinator helped arrange this with a community member who she knew spoke the same language as the woman. The community member offered to support the woman with further Zoom sessions so they could get to know each other and so she could connect her with other community activity.



LACderby @LACderby · Apr 17

A neighbour & his family delivered Mary a home cooked meal last night. She called the LAC & they shared an emotional moment together. "I only asked for a prescription, they gave me more than they will know". Unremarkable but beautiful. [#BetterTogether](#) [#NotGoingBack](#)



Tamsin Macdonald @Tamsin_Mac_ · May 13

Heard a great story from L.A.C Janette today about a woman who's gifts could have been overlooked (if not paying attention) as she is shielded. She is contributing in a beautiful, creative way and definitely not needy! Will share some photos soon.



Nick Sinclair @LacnNick · May 12

"Through the language of vulnerability, we have created an expectation of dependency for 100s of 1000s of people – this is not desirable or sustainable for people or society." Great blog from Angela Catley @CommCats

communitycatalysts.co.uk/2020/05/11/val...



Neighbourly Support Without Hesitation

This example of neighbours supporting one another in Wiltshire prevented unnecessary formal interventions.

An older woman had recently been discharged from hospital following radiotherapy. She was introduced to her Local Area Coordinator by someone who worked for the Housing Association she rented from. Due to the treatment and subsequent shielding, she wasn't able to go out and buy her own food, collect prescriptions etc. The side effects caused severe tiredness meaning she wasn't able to cook herself a hot meal.

The Local Area Coordinator made contact with a local community group and explained the situation. Without hesitation they began to organise neighbours and members of the group to support this woman for as long as needed.

The woman is now being supported by her neighbours, receiving a different hot meal from a different neighbour every night and has built some lasting connections.

“A show of solidarity exhibited through neighbourly action is heartening to watch and help facilitate...the benefits to the people offering to help are just as important for overall community health and wellbeing, as the benefits to those who need help.”

Tara Hughes, Local Area Coordinator Swansea Council.

“Thank you very much for all your help and support. I got the parcel, pukka it was! Can you please thank everyone for me? I really appreciate the help - everyone has given me hope...I'm glad I got u in my corner looking out for me - ur a diamond”

from a Thurrock resident to their Local Area Coordinator.

A Supportive Welcome to the Community

This story from Leicestershire shows how, by harnessing the support of community, a family were able to move out of temporary accommodation preventing a nightmare lockdown experience for them.

A Local Area Coordinator was introduced to a family who had been living in a refuge for some time. Just before the lockdown, they were offered housing. Unfortunately, all usual channels of support (such as charity shops and community grants) were not operating as normal and until vital household items had been sourced, they were unable to move. The local community had started a neighbourhood WhatsApp group in response to Covid-19 and the Local Area Coordinator used this to ask for help. Within a few hours, they'd had 12 offers of help and were able to provide all the items the family needed as donations. As a result, the family moved into their new home before lockdown. The family felt welcomed in to their new community and had access to community support.

HOLDING UP A MIRROR TO TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

- Sarah Edmundson, Senior Local Area Coordinator
Derby City Council.



The current crisis has held a mirror up that highlights the limitations of the traditional “top down” approach and generated space for a more collaborative, community-driven response to a wide variety of issues. For example, early in the crisis a number of residents were unable to pay for food as they had no access to money. Working with our local community infrastructure organisation we were able to respond quickly in ways the traditional services could not:

“We have created innovative solutions to meet a range of needs – working together to support community members to support each other. This includes a simple cash and voucher system, operating with minimal input from us, which enables people to purchase essential items for their neighbours who cannot currently access their own money or who don’t have the means to pay”.

- Kim Harper – Chief Executive Officer, Community Action Derby

Circumstances have allowed us to have equal conversations with people at every level within the local authority and our contribution throughout the crisis has been highly valued. There is real opportunity in Derby for a significant culture shift across the whole local authority, across all directorates and beyond into the health, community and voluntary sector and there is a strong appetite for Local Area Coordination values to be at the core.

3

HOW LOCAL AREA COORDINATION WILL SUPPORT RECOVERY, RENEWAL AND REBUILDING

Local strategies are now being developed to confront post Covid challenges and reduce their impact. This is happening against a backdrop of the need to rebalance, reset and reimagine the relationships between local councils, health institutions, communities and citizens. Much of the leadership on how this might look has already been articulated preceding this crisis, for instance Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Social Care Future, Local Government Association (LGA), Coalition for Collaborative Care (C4CC), The Better Way Network, Think Local Act Personal (TLAP), Nesta, Hillary Cottam's Radical Help, The New Local Government Network (NLGN), Collaborate, Human-Learning-Systems and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). This radical thinking has led to leaders adopting Local Area Coordination as part of their efforts to do things differently.

We would like to outline here our collective perspective of the likely challenges on the horizon and the difference we think Local Area Coordination will make.



↻ Jennie Cox Retweeted



Nick Sinclair @LacnNick · May 18

The heart of the approach Local Area Coordinators take when alongside someone moving towards their vision of a better life. They've been doing this for years! It works in 'normal' and 'crisis' times - let's not forget a lot of the vision for a better world already exists now!



LACderby @LACderby · May 16

Replying to @SarahBurslem

Today's conversation focused on - strengths, assets, new connections, networks and resilience. The person was supported to access information and make sense of that information to fit their unique circumstances both today and for the days ahead.



FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES

LIKELY CHALLENGES ON THE HORIZON	THE DIFFERENCE LOCAL AREA COORDINATION WILL MAKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those already facing poverty and exclusion are finding resources further stretched and meaningful support scarce • Many more people may lose employment, undermining the stability of households and families • People have had less contact with primary care and other community health services so much of the preventative/ early intervention work will not have taken place, impacting health • Stressors of isolation and lockdown may have exacerbated or introduced unhealthy habits into people's lifestyles • Poor physical health will have a negative impact on mental health and anxiety and depression will increase, limiting people's capacity to get back into their local communities, further entrenching social isolation and loneliness 	<p>Local Area Coordinators will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be present to help people and families tackle their challenges, rebuild their lives and make their contribution as we start to unlock • Prevent people who are isolated, as a result of lockdown and other reasons, from falling through the net and into crisis • Work alongside individuals and families, reducing future dependency on services by supporting natural connections between neighbours and community groups

THE VITAL LINK AND A CORE SOLUTION

- Karen Starkey, Transformation Programme Manager,
London Borough of Havering



During the Covid-19 crisis Havering Council and our partners have become increasingly connected with the incredible strengths and assets of Havering's communities. Community spirit has shone through and it has brought us much closer with our voluntary and community sector partners. There is a growing sense of optimism and anticipation around where we go next. It has been evident that Local Area Coordination is going to be a vital link between the council, other statutory partners, citizens and communities alike. We have been using the approach alongside our strengths-based practice model in adult social care to train the council's call centre operations for Covid-19, work with our community volunteers to build resilience and keep people out of services. Local Area Coordination is a flagship initiative for Havering and leadership and commitment for this has not waned, but is seen as a core solution going forward.

FOR COMMUNITIES

LIKELY CHALLENGES ON THE HORIZON	THE DIFFERENCE LOCAL AREA COORDINATION WILL MAKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incredible energy that has been unleashed in communities may be lost or eroded especially if groups are overlooked in local service planning and design • Community resources needed to respond to new social challenges will be tighter than in pre-Covid times where they were often already scarce • Decreased resources could increase competition, making groups more insular and less collaborative, putting pressure on many aspects of community life • There may be a lasting and divisive sense of 'the vulnerable' and 'the valuable'¹¹ in communities, exacerbating dependency and inequity rather than redressing it 	<p>Local Area Coordinators will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support plans to ensure community organisations (including local Mutual Aid groups) are at the heart of council, health and housing recovery strategies • Support community groups to re-purpose their efforts to meet future challenges e.g. austerity, unemployment and mental health • Help build/rebuild trust between local institutions and communities • Support growth of the good things / assets in communities, preventing them from being lost and overlooked, sustaining the new energy and passion for neighbourly support

BRINGING OUR DIVIDED SOCIETY BACK TOGETHER - Councillor Carol Runciman, City of York Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health and Chair of York Health and Wellbeing Board



Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our team of Local Area Coordinators have demonstrated just how valuable they are. In York, they were already well established in their communities with plenty of local connections, which were just what was needed to be able to respond to the many issues they met. 'Walking alongside' residents to support them to solve problems themselves, [they] saved precious time for specialist services, enabling efforts to be focussed on those in greatest need. In many cases, some low-level help was exactly what was needed to stop small problems getting bigger, and that's what Local Area Coordinators really do well. Hard working, flexible, adaptable and kind, Local Area Coordinators are just what are needed to help bring our divided society back together again.

FOR SERVICE SYSTEMS

LIKELY CHALLENGES ON THE HORIZON	THE DIFFERENCE LOCAL AREA COORDINATION WILL MAKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The significant loss of revenue during this time will have a detrimental effect, with many areas having to re-enact programmes of cuts to services • Demand for services will increase as needs go unmet during lockdown and pressures on individuals and communities emerge • Health systems will be under significant pressure to respond to poor health, placing higher demand on primary care • Primary Care Link Workers will likely be flooded with referrals from GPs to prescribe people to newly defunded social activities 	<p>Local Area Coordinators will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support service cultures that are risk aware but not risk averse • Give everyone a common lens to see the power and potential of communities through, building trust and confidence and encouraging people to work collaboratively with community members¹² • Enhance existing community facing roles whilst over time replacing funded work that is not having the greatest impact • Save the system money as people are introduced to Local Area Coordinators earlier on for connections and practical support, rather than being referred in crisis to health and social care services for assessment and funded support • Create social value as people start to make their contributions by supporting others in their communities

A CITIZEN LED MOVEMENT

- Sharon Houlden City of York Corporate Director for Health, Housing & Adult Social Care



By using Local Area Coordination as a way to build relations with, and listen to citizens and communities, the council and our health partners have started to understand what is working well and what isn't across our city. We are using this learning to change and improve the systems that are getting in the way of our vision of an asset-based area that starts with people. We describe this as a citizen-led movement of community development, where we will empower people to find solutions that work for them, and where we strive and enable, rather than direct and prescribe.

OUR 'NEW NORMAL'

- Councillor Mark Child, Lord Mayor of City and County of Swansea and former Cabinet Lead for Health and Wellbeing.



This crisis has made significant changes to the way Health and Social Care works, driven by two things; 1. the need for organisations to try and move non-Covid patients and clients out of the system whenever possible, and 2. by individual citizens deciding that they want a different type of support, often less, and in a different environment. Both of these issues play straight in to the work that Local Area Coordinators operate in, i.e. preventing, reducing and delaying service interventions in people's lives and building sustainable, supportive community networks. Both Health and Social Care have been working under severe stress before the Virus, and a new way of working was desperately needed that has now arrived. They see the benefits of this but we need to make it sustainable. This means citizens taking more responsibility for their own health and wellbeing, and who better than your friendly neighbourhood Local Area Coordinator to walk with them to achieve that. It has now become a major priority to secure long-term coverage and

funding in our council and from our health partners as Local Area Coordination will be a key aspect of what our 'new normal' looks like.

It has been a rocky ride at times, particularly in relation to funding, however we have still maximised Local Area Coordinator availability across Swansea, increased political demand for more and embedded the principles in to how we operate. It has met with many of the demands of the Future Generations Act, prevented many calls on stretched services and made massive improvements to many people's quality of life. I hear many heart-warming stories of real positive differences Local Area Coordinators have made in people's lives. It shouldn't be amazing what a difference just sitting down with someone over a cup of tea and having a good chat can do for individual's wellbeing, and yet no service can do this. This is why they are so valued in the communities they work and the grassroots pressure to have them where they don't has grown since day one.

4

THE VALUE OF BEING PART OF A NATIONAL, NETWORKED LEARNING COMMUNITY

Our Network is the home of Local Area Coordination learning and development in England and Wales. It is supported by a number of research partners from different universities who support local and collective learning and evaluation. We have the dedicated resource to help us convene, reflect, share and learn. We also partner with new areas wishing to adopt Local Area Coordination, supporting them in all aspects of their design, development and implementation.

As members, we attend regular gatherings both in the community and online, opening up our learning, experience and resources. We support each other to tackle common challenges and build on our shared vision, principles and values. Since 2018 the Network has been part of social enterprise Community Catalysts.



Swansea Local Area Coordinators Retweeted



Gem Novis @GemmaNovis · Feb 14

Always valuable to spend time with Local Area Coordinators from the @LACNetworkUK Thank you @Swansea_LACs for sharing your experiences, reflections and encouragement. Proud to be a member of this network #LocalAreaCoordination ✨



Nick Sinclair @LacnNick · Feb 13

Lots more stories of community capacity building and system change from the south west crew today. Great to be with you all @Swansea_LACs and Wiltshire Team. It was a good laugh too as always.



Some perspectives on the Network

“The Network has knitted us into a family of people who all think and work to the same set of values and principles. A place where we can learn together and challenge each other’s practice and thinking in a way only a family can do. During this time of Covid-19 it has never been so important. We have been able to share stories and learning together, to inspire and encourage each other. There’s a saying, ‘As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another’. The Network helps us to keep sharp, to put our best foot forward, to work in the best way for our communities for today and the future.”

From Claire McCarthy-Reed – Senior Local Area Coordinator, Swansea Council.

“The Local Area Coordination Network provides a much welcomed and unique opportunity for learning, and challenge, as well as strategic planning and growth. The knowledge and connections that exist within the members is impressively high and generously shared and there is genuine sense of it being a supportive and passionate movement of change. It has been a huge amount of support in our design, implementation and ongoing programme sustainment”

From Joe Micheli - Head of Commissioning for Early Intervention, Prevention and Community Development, City of York Council.

“Both before and during the Covid 19 pandemic our Network has regularly invited us to keep stepping back and reflecting on what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. When we went in to emergency response mode across our system in Kirklees, it was reassuring to know that the team and I had a regular space where we could meet colleagues across the country to connect virtually and share our learning. The Network has really helped us to recognise our achievements and highlight the elements of our work that are aligned with the principles of Local Area Coordination.”

From Tamsin MacDonald, Local Area Coordination Manager, Kirklees Council.

5

WHICH WAY NEXT?

“There is nothing else quite like this and I don’t know why it isn’t everywhere. If you’re interested in doing it though, do it right! There is so much more to this than just connecting and signposting. The people of the Local Area Coordination Network will help you.”

Clenton Farquharson, MBE.

The challenges and opportunities we now face as a society are equally concerning and exciting. As we slowly start to emerge from crisis it feels like councils and other institutions are being presented with a tough question - “which way next?”. One set of paths lead us to perhaps more familiar territory; enhanced gatekeeping of resource, reduction in services, pulling back from community and hoping for better times to come. Whilst another, sees us all intentionally building a powerful new deal based on the strengths and assets of our communities and the abundance of neighbourliness that is now so apparent.

Local Area Coordination is a key piece of this puzzle we now face. It will bring to life visions of more equitable, cooperative localities where people help people first and services remain in place as an essential and supportive backup to a functional society.

Over the next year our Network will be seeking a number of new partner areas to come and join our movement. We will support you from start to finish in the implementation of Local Area Coordination, getting you to a point where you are seeing the results that people, families, communities and service systems alike want.

Come and be part of this movement.

PLEASE GET IN TOUCH TO EXPLORE FURTHER

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www.communitycatalysts.co.uk

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to Ralph Broad, the Founder of the Local Area Coordination Network and to Eddie Bartnik, one of the original key leaders of Local Area Coordination in Western Australia. Both Ralph and Eddie have remained a constant and generous source of support, encouragement and inspiration for our work in England and Wales. We look forward to further collaboration, supporting the international development of the approach.

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Jennie Cox @JennieLACYork · Mar 27

Feeling proud of colleagues in the LAC team and wider system this week. People who have been working so hard, alongside each other and communities to try and make sure we reach everyone in this crisis. Feeling the love ❤️



joemicheli @joemicheli94 · Mar 25

Hi everyone. So proud of Yorks connected ecosystem of citizens communities VCSE public servants business all collaborating. Our focus on people&place, prevention, volunteers & relationships has put the city in a great position to respond to C-19. #StayHome 🏠
#PeopleHelpingPeople

