

# Healthwatch Harrow Covid-19 Survey

*Snapshot of Findings, May 2020*



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It’s nice bonding as a family but everyone also needs their space which is difficult.

The children have taken it all in their stride but my 8 year old who is anxious anyway worries about touching everything and washes his hands all the time.”

Harrow resident

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## 1. Background

In response to COVID-19, health and care services have had to change the way they provide support overnight. Some non-urgent treatment has been suspended and face-to-face appointments have been replaced with video and telephone calls.

While health and care staff are doing everything they can to keep us well and safe, changes to how services work has naturally affected people's experiences of care.

Our role is to find out what matters most to people and to make sure their views shape the support they need. Whilst the current pandemic, changes how support is provided, our key priority at this stage is to identify areas of concern, provide clarity where we can, address issues which can be resolved and learn for the future.



### 1.1 Methodology

To do this we launched our COVID-19 Survey after the UK lockdown was announced to find out about some of the issues people have been facing and to help NHS and social care services understand the effect of COVID-19. We have kept the survey short, asking 3 key questions:

- a) How has the outbreak affected you and your loved ones?
- b) What is your postcode?
- c) Which GP practice are you registered with?

By keeping the question as broad as possible, we were able to reach people who might not have heard of Healthwatch before and it allowed everyone to give as much detail as they wanted regarding whatever aspect that is affecting them.

The purpose of this report is to provide an interim report of what the people living in Harrow are sharing with us through our survey. Please note that this is purely survey based and at this stage does not include other intelligence that we are obtaining, however, the key themes / trends from both are similar.

We are aware that there is a real issue across North West London on how we can gather the views of those people that do not have access to the internet and we are working to identify alternative methods of doing this. The survey was launched on our website at the beginning of April 2020 and will remain open until a clear recovery plan is in place.

Information shared through the survey is anonymous, however, if there are any areas where we can follow up and share information generally through our website and newsletters, we are doing that. For example, there were a number of

comments around how difficult people were finding it to find out if they were entitled to a Shielding Letter and more importantly the support that you can then get when you have one.

We contacted our Clinical Commissioning Group and spoke with the Chair of the Governing Body who is also a GP at a local practice and she provided clear guidance on who should receive these letters and what to do if you think you should have one and haven't received it. This information is now on our website.

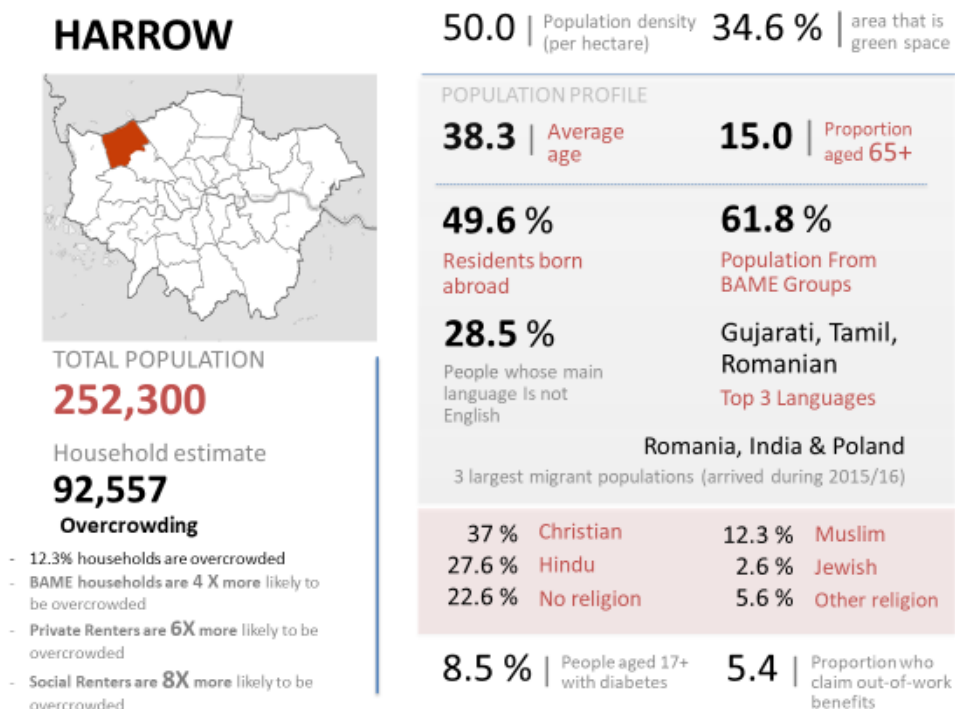
There are other known issues emerging that are not fully reflected in the survey findings at this point, these are:

- Huge impact on the mental health and wellbeing of people through isolation, stress, anxiety and lack of exercise and fresh air
- Language barriers for those whose first language is not English
- Lack of accessibility of information
- Impact on vulnerable individuals who rely on advocacy support for example care assessments being undertaken without notice so an advocate cannot be there
- Individuals living in supported living having their rights restricted by those providing the service
- Increase in domestic violence
- Increase in suicides

Healthwatch Harrow will continue to gather feedback and local intelligence and produce a final report at the appropriate time.

## 1.2 Profile of Harrow

Members from the BAME communities appear to be affected to a greater degree by the COVID-19 virus, below shows the profile in Harrow.



## 2. Findings in Brief

118 surveys were completed as of 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020. At the time of writing, we identified the following themes and issues:

### Top Themes (what are people most commenting on)?

We detect broad themes on:

- Carers and family
- Finances
- Food and shopping
- Activities and stimulation
- Infection risk

### Top Issues Identified

Within the themes, top issues include:

Positives:

- Community goodwill (i.e; looking out for neighbours)
- More time to spend with direct household
- Technology assisting social contact with those outside household
- Slower pace of life a benefit for some

Negatives:

- Isolation at home
- Mental health, anxiety, worry
- Not able to physically visit family/friends
- Digital divide - those without technology particularly 'left out'
- Increased responsibility (ie; working at home while home schooling)
- General lack of stimulation/activity
- Lack of choice (ie; services and shops closed)
- Some people struggling financially
- Shielding letters not received
- Fear of going outside

### Sentiment (how do people feel as a whole)?

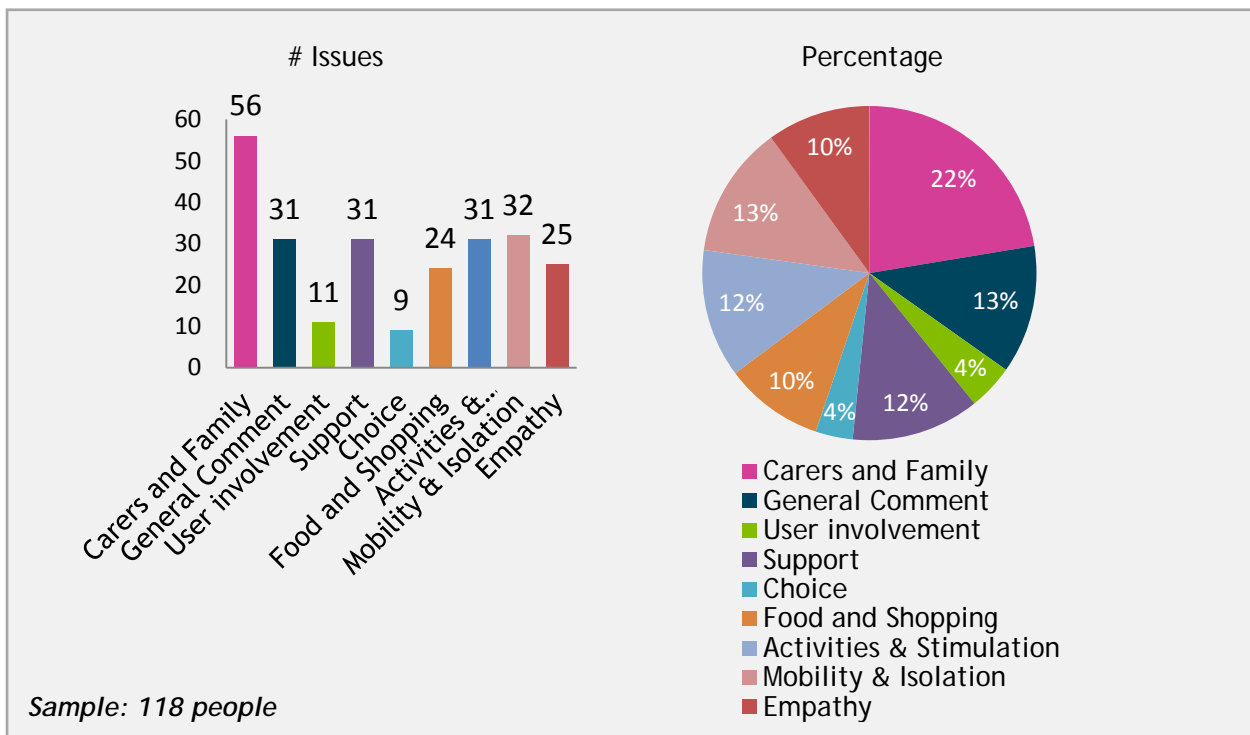
Overall, people are feeling slightly depressed. 45% of issues are negative, 12% neutral and 43% positive.

### 3. Top Trends - What are people most commenting on?

Most important to people - by some margin (22%), is the ability to interact with family and friends, and to receive personal care.

13% of comments are about mobility and social isolation, with a further 12% about the related theme of activities and stimulation during 'lockdown'.

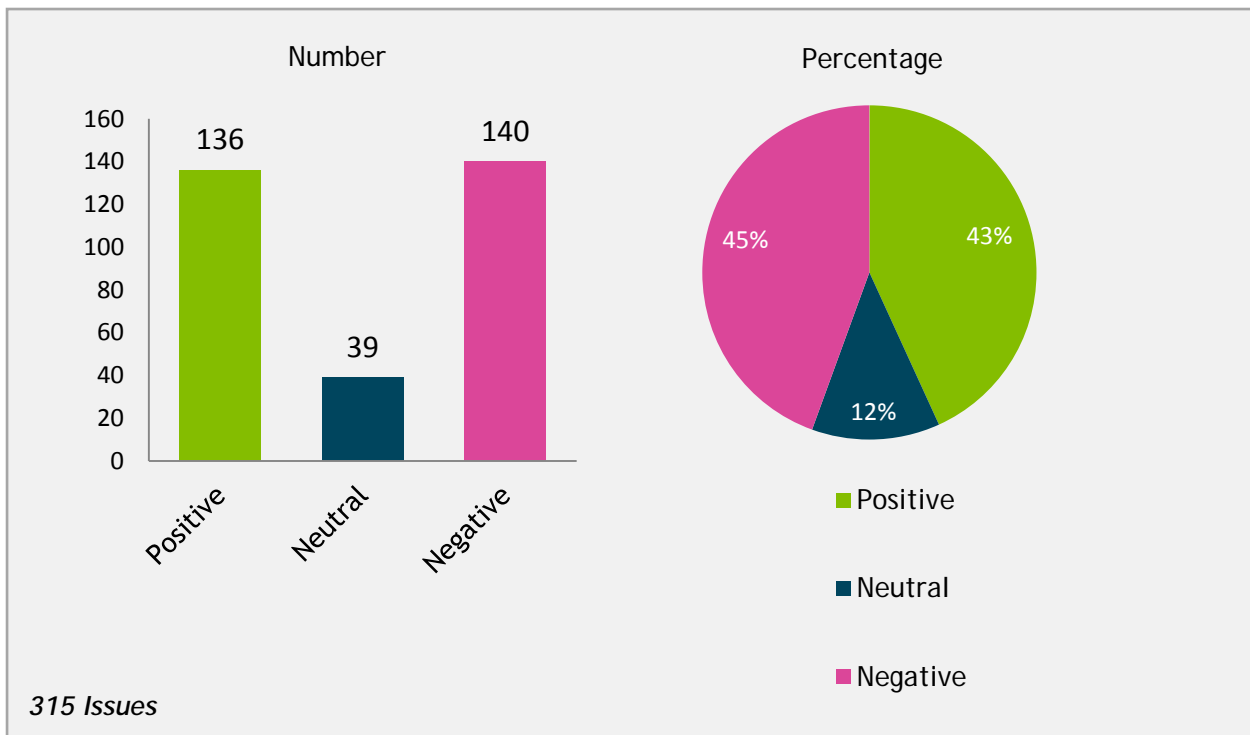
Support from the local community accounts for 12% of comments with 10% about food and shopping.



Lesser, but notable issues include general choice (i.e; services such as libraries closed), availability of testing and protective equipment, job security and cancelled medical appointments - in some cases resulting in prolonged discomfort.



### 3.1 Sentiment - How do people feel as a whole?



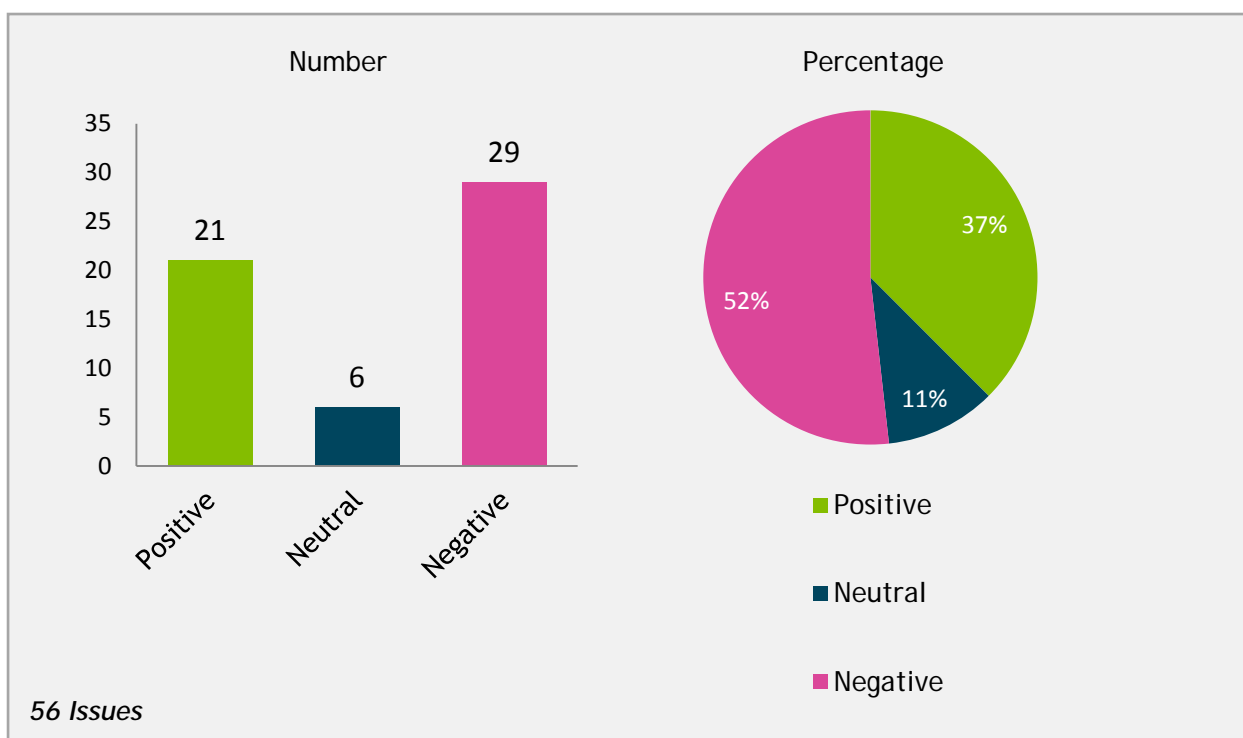
Overall, people are feeling slightly depressed. 45% of issues are negative, 12% neutral and 43% positive.

### 3.2 Carers and Family

Almost a quarter of people (22%) comment on the ability to link up socially with family and friends.

Just over half of people (52%) feel negative, with around a third (37%) feeling more positive.

### 3.2.1 Sentiment, Carers and Family



While those familiar with technology, such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom are able to interact relatively easily, those who are not - particularly older people, comment on missing their families and extended families. Grandparents who formerly had a caring role are now missing their grandchildren - and with it the daily routine.

In other cases, there is concern for relatives - now isolated, who have serious conditions such as cancer.

Parents comment on the 'increased anxiety' of working from home - bringing the added burden of having to entertain, and in some cases home school their children. That said, many do appreciate the extra time together.

We heard sad accounts of relatives not being able to attend funerals, or husbands/partners not able to be present at time of birth.

#### Selected Comments

##### Positives

*"Health is ok for all of us. Doing mostly weekly shopping and going out for 1 hour exercise. Using garden and indoors for other exercise. Keeping in contact with others using WhatsApp etc. Watching more TV and using computer more. No other trips outside. Mentally still ok."*

*"I am working from home but it's so difficult with homeschooling children and also looking after a 3 year old. It's nice bonding as a family but everyone also needs their space which is difficult. The children have taken it all in their stride but my 8 year old who is anxious anyway worries about touching everything and washes his hands all the time."*

*"I have not had the infection and neither has any relative, to my knowledge. I live alone and work from home. I am not in a shielded category so have been able to do my own shopping and go for walks, so the impact on me has been small. I have not been able to go to church or meetings, but have used Facebook for livestreamed services and Zoom for meetings."*

*"My immediate family, spouse, children and grandchildren are all self isolating and keeping in touch online."*

*"So far so good. Working from home so I see more of the kids from before and don't miss my daily commute!"*

*"Spent more time with close family indoors and this is good but some anxiety about what will happen."*

## **Negatives**

*"We are all healthy but missing human contact."*

*"Staying at home not seeing grandchildren."*

*"The outbreak has not really affected myself and my loved ones. The children miss their friends and relatives."*

*"Not being able to see my elderly father who lives alone and has cancer."*

*"As I am at risk I am isolating in our loft. This makes it difficult for my daughter as her family live with us. It is then down to her to look after our families. I feel this is very hard for her at times. She is a teacher and works from home also."*

*"I am at home with my husband and we no longer care for our grandchildren."*

*"Increased anxiety. Increase pressure of caring role."*

*"Increased workload, having to home school children, limited exercise."*

*"Living alone, have not been able to see close family since lockdown."*

*"Locked down like everyone else but able to work from home. Unable to visit elderly parent, recently widowed. Son not at school."*

*"Not able to meet as a family for celebrations (Easter, birthdays already*

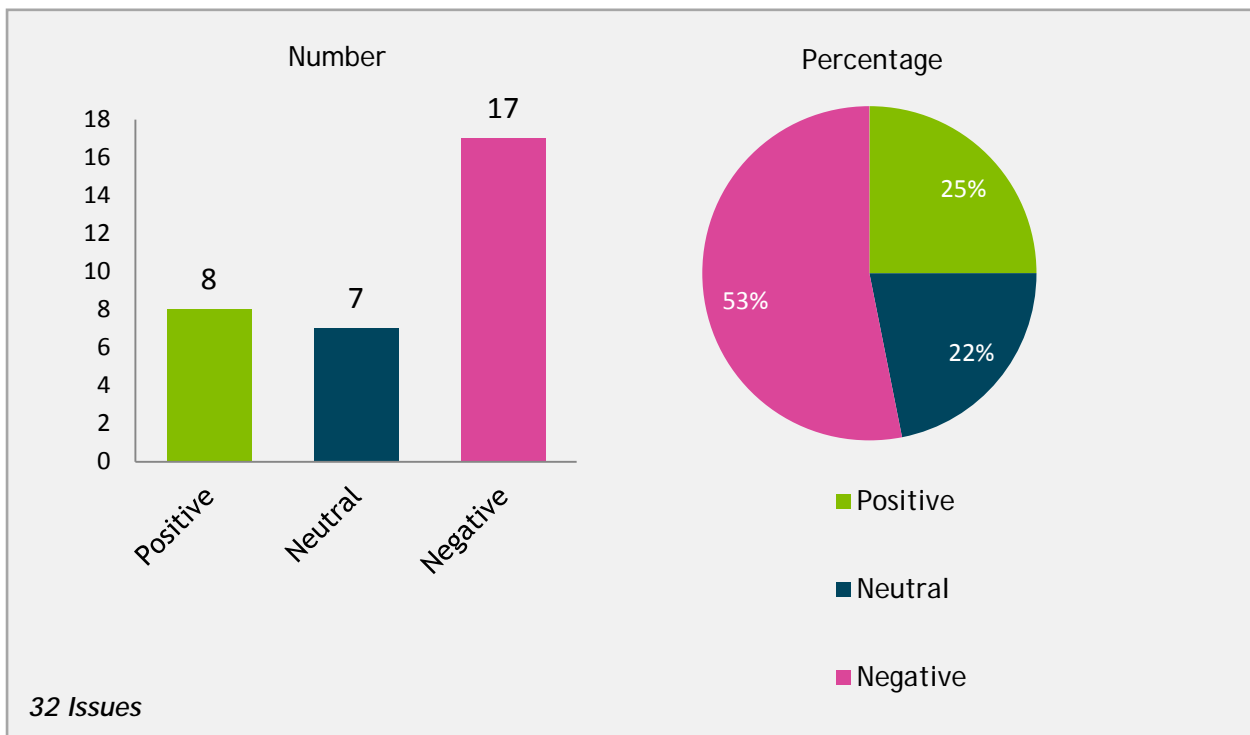
*missed) cannot support daughter-in-law with baby granddaughter. Holiday with other family members (break for the new mum!) now cancelled. Fortunately all safe. Counting blessings!"*

*"We have had a number of deaths in our extended family and have been left to grieve in isolation. The hospital policy of no visitors whilst needed is inhumane, not to be with loved ones at the end, not holding the hand is heart breaking. Our next door neighbour gave birth on Saturday and even the father could not see their baby until they came home on Monday evening. The whole family are together now."*

### 3.3 Mobility and Social Isolation

13% of people comment on being socially isolated at home, or restricted to limited outside activity. Just a quarter of people (25%) comment positively.

#### 3.3.1 Sentiment, Mobility and Social Isolation



People comment on the 'stress' of being at home, with the loss of routine activities such as visiting people, exercise and sporting activities adding to the sense of isolation.

Those with gardens appear to be generally happier with their situations.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*"I have a garden so I am able to get out, so no negative effects on me!"*

*"Lockdown has curtailed movement, no other ill effects."*

### Negatives

*"Cessation of all social activities indoors and out (approx 9 different), no physical contact with grandchildren aged 3 and 8 months, cancellation of all holidays, freedom to go out and do what you want."*

*"Husband is really struggling as not able to get out and play golf or go to the gym, which were his main activities. Fortunate to have a garden, otherwise would be going mad for sure. I am OK but struggling with getting the shopping. Very concerned about people with other illnesses whose treatment is being delayed."*

*"I am 84 with Diabetes Type 2, my wife is 75 and we have not been out except to Clap for the NHS and in the back garden."*

*"I am self isolating and haven't been out for over a month. I am feeling very depressed about this."*

*"I cannot go out of my house or let anyone come in due to my condition. I am not allowed to go even to my garden. I live on my own and disabled so cannot even dress myself properly. So difficult."*

*"Not being able to travel to see them"*

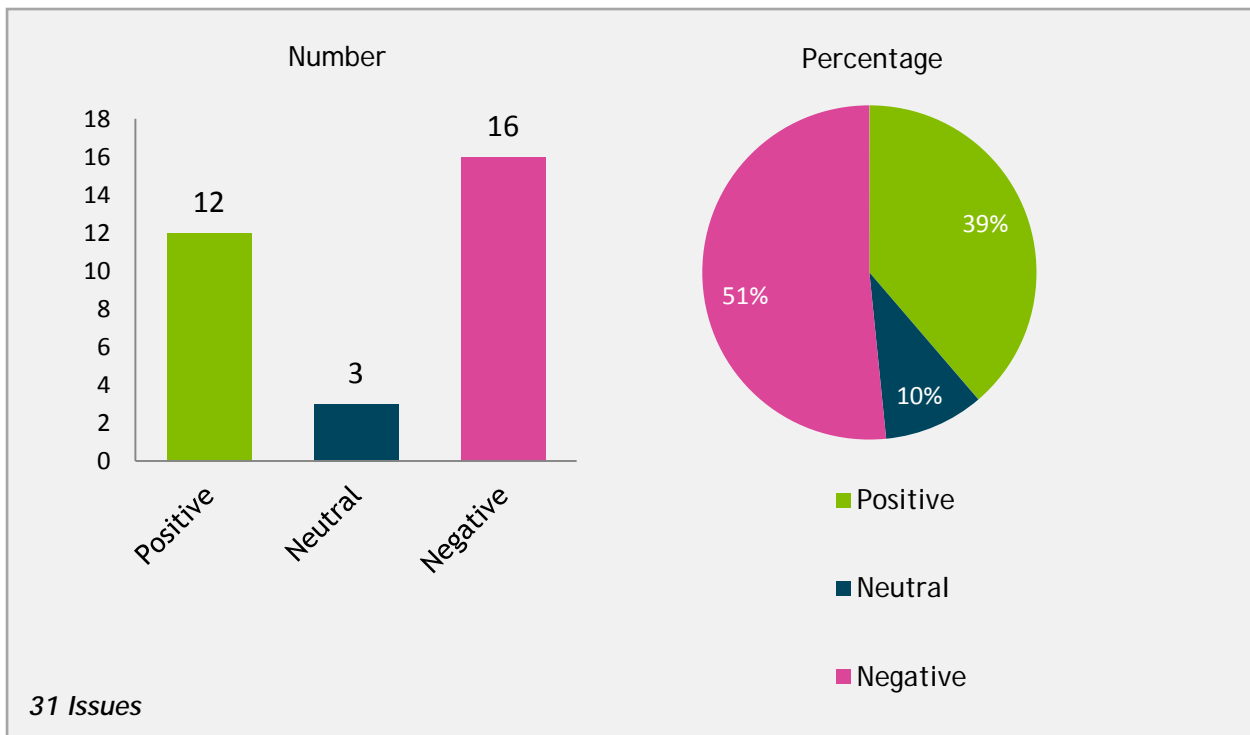
*"Social isolating at home on my own, so lack of interaction with the rest of society can be tough, but otherwise I'm healthy."*

*"Very difficult being in isolation caring for wife with several cancers."*

### 3.4 Activities and Stimulation

12% of people comment on the ability to stay active and stimulated. Just over half of people (51%) feel negative, with around a third (39%) feeling more positive.

### 3.4.1 Sentiment, Activities and Stimulation



Again, many people are thankful to have a garden, and with it outside space. Some appreciate the sudden 'slower pace' of life which has presented an opportunity to relax.

It is notable that some people comment on their 'deteriorating mental health', with some feeling depressed about the loss of activity and daily stimulation.

#### Selected Comments

##### Positives

*"Being apart & alone is difficult, to compensate doing a lot of gardening neglected over years."*

*"Staying indoors, fortunately I have a garden, I do exercises."*

*"We have to maintain isolation but are fortunate to have a decent sized garden."*

*"We're calmer, fitter, and enjoying the sunshine."*

## Negatives

*"Social isolation has severely restricted my activities and severely restricted my contact with family and friends"*

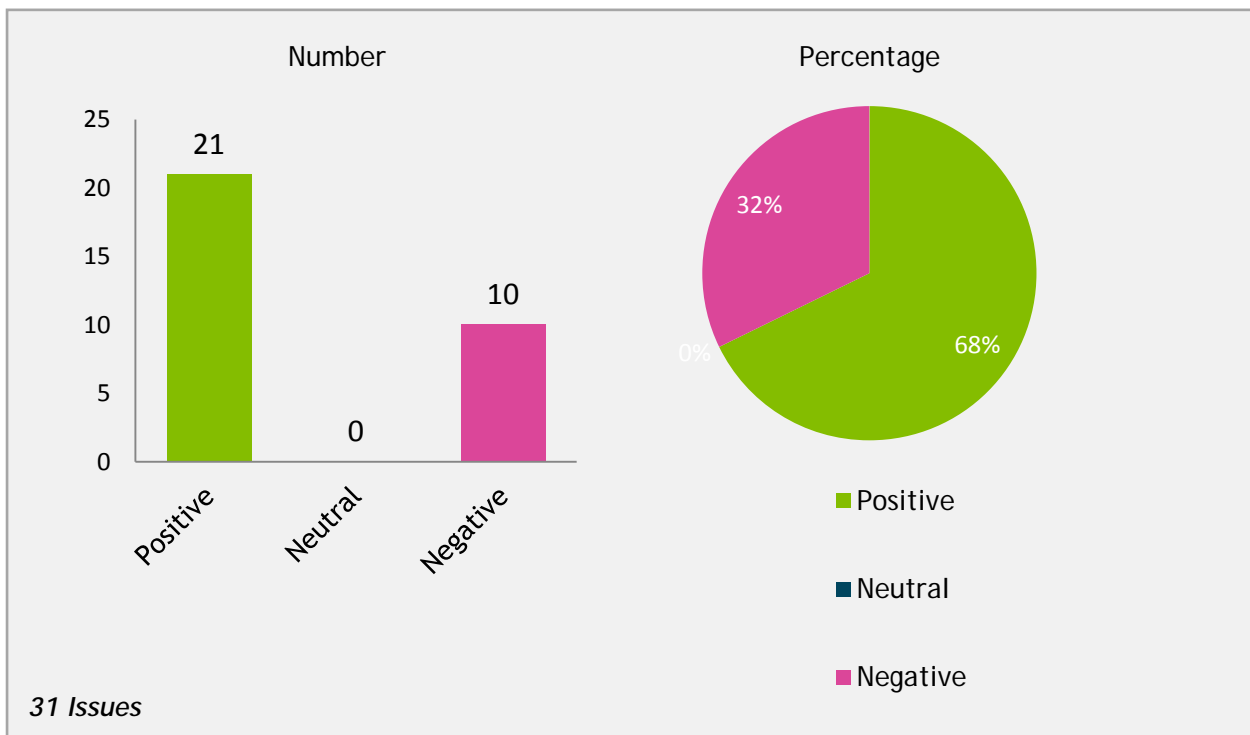
*"As I'm in the high risk group I've been shielding. It has affected my mental health, as I'm unable to see my sister and nephews who I'm very close to and I can't go out for a walk which helps me mentally. I find this very hard. My mum who I live with also finds this very challenging mentally."*

"Most things I enjoy in life have been closed down and I can't even see my friends."

### 3.5 Community Support

12% of people comment on support either given or received. Around two thirds of people (68%) feel positive, with a third (32%) commenting negatively.

#### 3.5.1 Sentiment, Community Support



There is a sense of 'community spirit', with genuine concern for the elderly and vulnerable. Residents living in sheltered accommodation comment on 'looking out for each other' while neighbours offer mutual support.

Receipt of food parcels and other essentials is appreciated, however some people struggle to obtain medication and other necessary items.

## Selected Comments

### Positives

*"I am a widower of 82 years, very great full to receive a food box on Tuesday. Also my local bowls club phone each other which certainly helps with the loneliness."*

*"I live on my own in sheltered accommodation so most of us are self isolating but we also look out for each other and help where we can."*

*"It is keeping us inside, changed our routine due to being key workers so one of us is the shopper whilst one helps our neighbour so we aren't spreading anything picked up in supermarkets."*

*"Shopping for elderly neighbours."*

*"I am lucky and am able, at the moment to work from home. I am a diabetic (which is not currently under control) and have had pneumonia on 3 previous occasions. I am being extremely careful and only leave the house to go for a walk. I keep to the back streets to avoid people and if I see anyone I cross the road to avoid them. I have been lucky so far a friend has done shopping for me...she is not well this week so I will have to venture to a shop which I am not looking forward to. I have ordered face mask and will take wipes to wipe the trolley etc. Not much more I can do as I have been trying for weeks for a shopping delivery with no luck! I don't drive so will only be able to get a limited amount of shopping and that will have to do as I don't want to go more than once a week. I am keeping busy with work and knitting. Friends and family are being great keeping in touch. Lonely but trying to stay positive. I am usually a social butterfly so I am missing it heaps as I live alone. I know, however, it is necessary. I was getting very stressed listening to the news so starting to limit the number of times I have it on."*

### Negatives

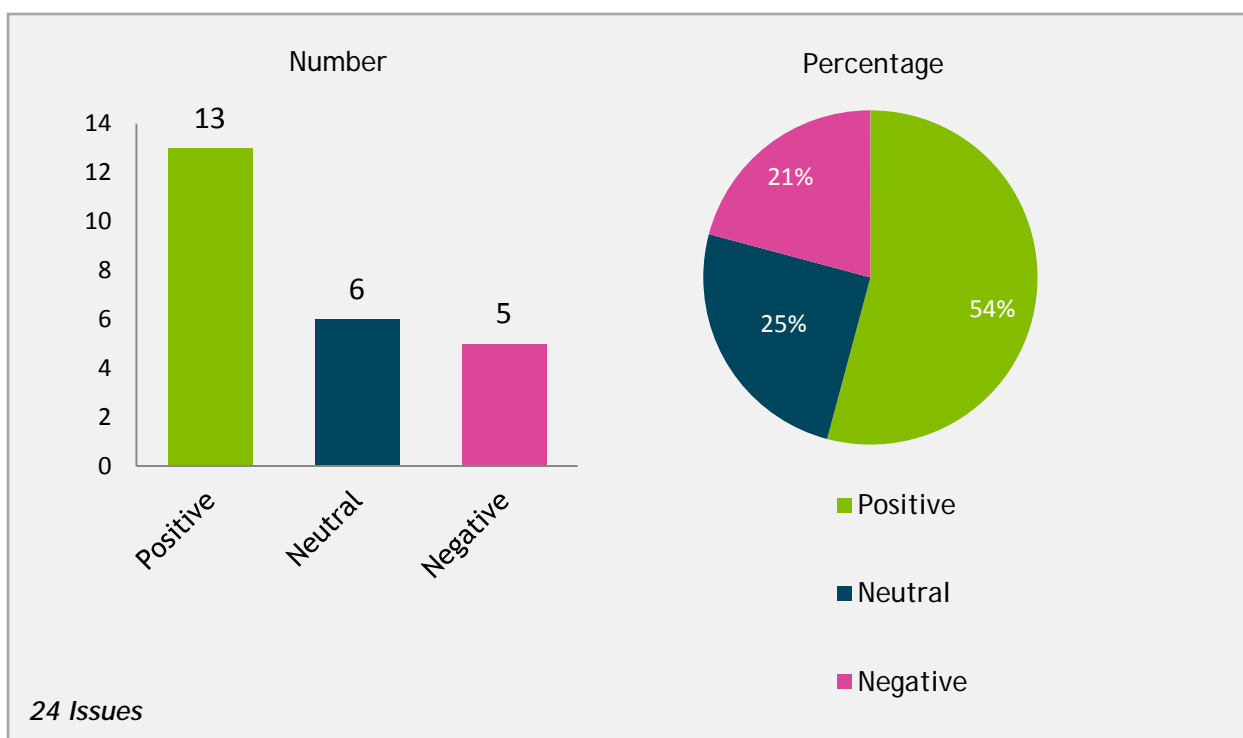
*"Cannot get Sainsbury's pharmacy to deliver medications but I understand that they are overbooked but luckily I have neighbours who are prepared to pick up for me. It is not easy to ask neighbours to go shopping since everyone is vulnerable."*

## 3.6 Food and Shopping

10% of people comment on the ability to shop, or receive food and other items. Just over half of accounts (54%) are positive.



### 3.6.1 Sentiment, Food and Shopping



In terms of securing food and other essentials, experiences are varied.

In some areas, WhatsApp and other groups have mobilised to ensure those living locally are supported. We also hear that some people (one aged 74) find it difficult to acquire groceries in their locality.

While there is appreciation that some supermarkets are prioritising the elderly and vulnerable, one older person (84) could not secure home deliveries and another says 'booking food delivery is very time consuming and unsuccessful.' Some people also miss the 'social experience' of shopping.

#### Selected Comments

##### Positives

*"I'm over 70 and have stayed at home in Pinner with my wife. Spent time doing all those jobs I've avoided, gardening, cleaning paths and patio, painting greenhouse, and so much more, mainly outdoors thanks to weather. Sainsburys giving us priority and through our roads WhatsApp group, buying for others in road. The WhatsApp for road organised by our neighbourhood watch person has brought the road together. We now know our neighbours."*

*"Not been out for over 4 weeks, family and friends getting food and medication delivered by chemist. Just registered with voluntary service for food delivery etc."*

*"I am now working at home, perfectly healthy. My elderly father can't leave the house, I have to shop for him, we are concerned with his vulnerability."*

*"We are coping very well. Obviously missed family and friends. We have local suppliers for food. Getting to know our neighbours better is a real plus."*

*"My husband and I are "imprisoned" for over 5 weeks now but since I am registered as highly vulnerable I receive a food parcel every week which is a big help and a few extra things from neighbours."*

### **Negatives**

*"Stayed at home. Severely restricted religious practices. Holidays & family events cancelled. Only digital access to children and grandchildren. Booking food delivery very time consuming and unsuccessful."*

*"Miss social contact shopping."*

*"We have not been able to get grocery deliveries arranged - I am 74."*

*"I am finding it extremely difficult to handle the self isolating as part of the "shielding" which I have been advised to do. Just over 4 weeks now with another 8 weeks (minimum) to stay in my home alone. I have never suffered from depression in my life but now at 81 years old I am feeling the strain mentally, and this is not helped by the procedure I have to go through to get a few groceries delivered to my home - the supermarkets all say they are working wonders with deliveries so why do I have to be made to feel that I am a nuisance if I need this service? I appreciate there are many thousands of people in the same position as myself so it is a "waiting game" and I do not expect delivery within days or even couple of weeks but have to spend countless hours on the phone trying to get a delivery slot whilst the Customer Service employees do not engage in a conversation with the caller, instead they read from the prepared "script" provided by their employer. It is as if you are trying to have a conversation with a robot! I feel that I should be apologising for existing!"*

### **3.7 Other Themes**

We also detect themes around:

- Lack of testing, resulting in anxiety.
- Uncertainty about livelihood and income.
- Availability of PPE (personal protective equipment)
- Cancelled operations and medical appointments

## Selected Comments

*"I live together with my husband, I am a Covid 19 survivor. My husband had to leave the bedroom and bathroom for 3 weeks. He had to sleep in the guest bedroom and use guest bathroom. We don't know if he is asymptomatic or through our precautions he avoided it. It's imperative he gets tested to know whether he's had it or not. But the system in place for testing doesn't allow for him to be tested."*

*"We have lost our income and as have had to close our business."*

*"Our eldest grandson got his first job last September, training to be an accountant, but he has now been furloughed. The rest of the family are doing quite well."*

*"Unable to go to work, but managing somehow. My son is a doctor in a Covid-19 ward and cannot get adequate PPE. We are all stressed."*

*"Waiting since January for an appointment with a specialist re a problem with my knee. Finally got a phone call from someone who said there is nothing he can do over the phone and he will phone again in 3 months. Meanwhile I am living with daily pain. I asked him to refer me for physio - they have called and this will be done over the phone too!!"*

## 4. Glossary of Terms

PPE

Personal Protective Equipment

## 5. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public via our website, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

### About Us

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