

# CCN

COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK



***Coronavirus:  
How counties are  
stepping up to help  
the nation***

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## Introduction

The Coronavirus outbreak has rapidly changed our lives in ways not seen since World War Two. Councils are no exception to this, having to dramatically re-shape their services and re-deploy staff en-masse at short notice.

Despite this huge undertaking, county authorities showed themselves able and willing to take up the mantle, putting in place innovative and distinctive responses to the various challenges almost overnight. Councils are doing some of the heaviest lifting in the national effort: ranging from shielding the vulnerable and protecting the NHS, to helping secure local businesses' futures.

At the same time communities and business have also looked to their county authority to provide local leadership and assistance as they try to adapt to the 'new normal' - with councils doing their best to keep the 'show on the road' for typical local services, such as child protection, bin collection, and road repairs.

This document highlights some of the innovative work that been undertaken by county authorities in going the extra mile across six themes. This is of course not an exhaustive document, and only scratches at the surface of the vital work that is being undertaken by county authorities. CCN will seek to publish more work on this topic as the year progresses.



### Protecting the NHS and adult social care

County authorities have stepped up and played an integral role in the response to the health challenges posed by Coronavirus: protecting the most vulnerable residents from the virus by shielding them in their own homes and helping to ensure that the NHS is not overwhelmed by creating additional capacity for care, whilst ensuring those working in care homes are protected against the virus. They have quickly concluded negotiations with care providers in extra fees whilst channelling additional money and supplies such as personal protective equipment directly and urgently to them in the pandemic.

Whilst being on the frontline Coronavirus response, councils have continued to ensure that the most vulnerable adults, children and their families continue to receive the ongoing support despite the additional strain placed on social care services by the pandemic.



### Going the extra mile to help the vulnerable

One of the most visible areas where councils have had to respond to the outbreak is through their crucial role in the government's shielding programme. With thousands of people classed as vulnerable in each county, CCN member councils have taken on substantial extra workloads to ensure that those people receive food parcels and medicine to their doors, along with emotional support. To date, councils have helped deliver over a million food boxes to those most at risk.

These support services have been put in place at short notice and from scratch, as the number of people looking to the community or council for support has rapidly increased throughout the outbreak. Councils have used their knowledge of their communities, suppliers and businesses to ensure that this system operates as well as possible.





## **Making the best use of staff and services**

County authorities provide a range of services that support many different aspects of people's lives. As part of their response to Coronavirus, councils have had to consider which services they need to continue providing, and which services need to be adapted so that they can continue despite the challenges posed by social distancing.

In some cases these services need to continue because they are statutory services; in other cases councils want to continue with an adapted service, recognising the value that residents place on them and the need to maintain them to support physical and mental health at a time of potential strain.



## **Marshalling England's volunteers**

In the first days and weeks of the Coronavirus outbreak, the country saw hundreds of thousands of people volunteering to help the most vulnerable in their communities: doing their shopping and distributing food, delivering medical supplies, and making sure that people stuck at home on their own are not isolated. County authorities worked with this groundswell in public support, setting up community hubs to marshal and co-ordinate the volunteer response. The hubs - some of which are physical, some virtual - match volunteers with those in need in the first instance. This has been done quickly and with great success. In other instances, these hubs take a physical form whereby they are used to store and distribute parcels and medicines to those who are being shielded.

The voluntary and community sector will also require additional help to help them cope with demand once people are able to physically access services, as well as maintaining the enthusiasm that so many people have shown by volunteering.



## **Helping local economies back to their feet**

Local businesses are the backbone of the economies in county areas, and CCN members are doing all they can to support businesses through this unprecedented time. Since the beginning of the outbreak, they have undertaken a variety of innovative schemes to give advice and provide financial support as quickly as possible – channelling millions in grant funding in a short space of time to keep businesses afloat.

Following the release of lockdown, county authorities will need to maintain this support to business and to preserve local high streets; helping shops and their customers adapt to a new normal of continued social distancing. Partnership working with district councils will also be vital to ensure approaches to easing restrictions are joined up as much as possible.

# STEPPING UP



## How county authorities are helping the country combat Coronavirus



### ASSISTING THE VULNERABLE

Helping deliver over one million food parcels and thousands of medicines to shielded residents by setting up community hubs



### PROTECTING THE NHS

Care home beds have been bought up or brought back into use in imaginative ways, such as re-purposing old homes and even a stadium



### SECURING & DELIVERING PPE

Councils have used local and global trade links to source thousands of PPE pieces for care staff and local hospitals



### KEEPING CARE HOMES SAFE

Thousands of pieces of PPE have been sourced and sent to homes, whilst councils have paid more in fees to providers to keep them afloat



### MOBILISING VOLUNTEERS

Setting up community hubs to direct and co-ordinate volunteer efforts so their efforts reach every person who needs help



### KEEPING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

Keeping day-to-day services going: bin collections, grass cutting, and road repairs to moving services online such as libraries and public health



### SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIES

Ensuring that local businesses receive grant funding quickly whilst planning local economic recovery after the pandemic



### BOLSTERING THE FRONTLINE

Re-deploying and re-training thousands of staff across the country so they can help fight the virus - such as in care settings or call centres





## **Buckinghamshire Council**

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### *Remodelling stadium facilities into a care home*

Buckinghamshire Council transformed the Olympic Lodge and other buildings at Stoke Mandeville Stadium in Aylesbury into a 240-bed social care facility for adults in just three weeks. The lodge was completely repurposed as a care and reablement centre to look after vulnerable adults. The facility is for people who no longer require hospital care but are not ready to go home – helping free up acute beds for Coronavirus patients. It also took in those living at home who were unable to stay in their homes during the pandemic

as they had no support. To prevent the spread of the virus it was not open to visitors.

The council also used local networks to request protective equipment for the health service from the county's businesses, which resulted in 125 responses – including local firms providing supplies to hospitals, a local gin distillery making hand sanitiser, and a local university and business printing personal protective equipment.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Essex County Council**

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### *Piloting a new approach to infection control and protecting providers*

The council, in partnership with Public Health England, piloted a new approach to infection control within care homes from mid-April. The prevalence of the virus in care settings, where it can spread easily, has been a challenge for all levels of government.

Essex's pilot, which went further than the guidance issued at the time, aimed to stop the spread of infection at the earliest point when a single infection is identified, working to test everyone in the home to establish its spread.

The council told homes with a suspect case to contact the council within 24 hours and the authority would arrange support, including testing all staff and residents. Homes with no cases were also subject to regular testing.

In the middle of March, before lockdown – the council announced it was to set aside almost £12m from its reserves for providers to help them cope with the anticipated demands placed on them.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Cambridgeshire County Council**

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### *Using trade links to source PPE*

Cambridgeshire County Council used the trade links it had built up over the years with enterprises in China to help source over 12,000 pieces of personal protective equipment for Addenbrooke's Hospital and local care providers.

The council worked with local partners at the U&K Cambridge International Education centre to source the masks from Yuehai Global Logistics in China, who sent over the masks for use for NHS and care staff in the county.

This came at a time when shortages in personal protective equipment were being felt in care settings across the county. The local authority said the work it had carried out in building links between foreign investors in China and businesses in Cambridgeshire over the past few years had helped source the donation.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**





## **Staffordshire County Council**

### **Delivering thousands of food parcels**

The council delivered its 2,000th food parcel of the pandemic by the middle of May, providing a lifeline to people who had been shielded from the virus. These recipients were those who are vulnerable and unable to leave home but without anyone to help them.

Once they receive a parcel they are put in touch with a local charity or support group to ensure that the problem does not persist.

The council prepared for an influx of requests from those needing support, and bulk bought consignments of non-perishable staples, ranging from basic food items, meats, toilet rolls, as well as sugar, pasta and long-life milk. The packing was done by volunteers, including the council's staff who transferred from other departments.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Cumbria County Council**

### **Thousands call dedicated Coronavirus helpline**

The council launched an emergency helpline for its vulnerable residents immediately after the lockdown, and in little over two weeks it had helped over 5,000 vulnerable or isolated people in need of urgent help. In April the council was receiving 200 requests a day for assistance.

It was launched with the specific aim of supporting people at high risk of Coronavirus who are not able to rely on neighbours, friends, or family members but told to stay inside.

The council sent 2,400 texts and 4,500 letters to these individuals, urging them to seek support if they need it. The council said that the most common requests were for food supplies and medical prescriptions – and staff would then ensure these vital supplies were delivered.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Durham County Council**

### **Supporting families and individuals who fear losing their home**

The council has offered help to residents who fear losing their home due to the financial impact of Coronavirus by asking them to get in touch directly with the council so housing officers can help. With record numbers of people applying for Universal Credit, and the number of people unemployed set to rise because of the pandemic, the council's housing team has been working hard to support residents who are concerned about paying their rent or mortgage.

The housing team set up a hotline and information hub for concerned residents and was able to lower council tax payments for eligible people by utilising the Coronavirus Hardship Fund. Debt recovery for anyone falling into arrears with council tax payments was also postponed by the council. In total, the county was able to take a combined £1.7million off 6,000 households' council tax bills during the outbreak.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**





## Hertfordshire County Council

### Moving public health workers to the Coronanvirus battle

The council moved essential public health services online, with many consultations being conducted virtually, sexual health testing kits and contraception being ordered and sent out by post. Its stop smoking service continued, and the council had to double the amount of specialist clinics available due to demand during the pandemic.

Importantly, putting the service online allowed the council to re-deploy 240 public health staff to roles in combating the virus, including in local

hospitals' A&E departments, working on cancer wards, treating patients, and running testing centres. In addition, 17 firefighters in were re-deployed to drive ambulances.

The council also set up a 'Redeployment Hub' for other members of staff, resulted in over 100 employees saying they are willing to work additional hours during the pandemic. In total, 849 staff were redeployed into Coronavirus response roles, as of April 15.

[Click here to read more.](#)

## Somerset County Council

### Re-deploying and re-training over 1,000 staff

The council has re-deployed over 1,000 staff – including councillors – to help on the frontline.

A further 300 individuals from outside the council answered a call to help out. As a result, their collective efforts have resulted in staff numbers in frontline care being bolstered, taking on roles in the community, and helping distribute over a million pieces of personal protective equipment.

In total, nearly 100 staff and councillors

took training to work in adult social care, Staff in business support and highways teams joined the council's contact centre to help take calls from residents.

With libraries having to close, councils have seen a spike in demand online. he number of people joining Somerset libraries online increased 544% compared to the same period in 2019 with the council stocking up its resources and giving people access to an ancestry service.

[Click here to read more.](#)

## Devon County Council

### Supporting local skills by moving courses online

Devon County Council worked with its registered training provider, Learn Devon, to make more than 100 online courses free for residents in anticipation for people needing fresh skills as a result of the pandemic.

The online courses cover three main subject areas – employability, wellbeing and digital skills, to support people who may have been made redundant as a result of the virus or are currently seeking work, alongside courses for vulnerable people.

There are also online courses that have have been designed for vulnerable people currently self-isolating, volunteers supporting Devon County Council during the pandemic, as well as local businesses. Free GCSE preparation courses are available to help anyone wishing to join its GCSE maths or English courses, starting this September.

[Click here to read more.](#)





## **Nottinghamshire County Council**

### **Recruiting hundreds of volunteers**

The council created a new community hub to offer advice and support to communities over the coming weeks for vulnerable people, families and residents who can't leave their homes or who are self-isolating at home. More than 600 people or organisations signed up as volunteers in the first weeks, to help people with services such as: food supplies and delivery; collecting and delivering medicines; personal and social support: dog walking, collecting newspapers; health advice; and transport needs.

The database includes a search facility so that residents can easily find a volunteer group to meet their needs.

This has been backed up by a new £1 million Nottinghamshire COVID-19 Community Fund, with charities and voluntary groups able to apply for a grant of anywhere between £200 to £10,000 to deliver projects or services that directly help vulnerable people.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Northamptonshire County Council**

### **Delivering Coronavirus information to every house in the county**

Northamptonshire County Council mobilised hundreds of local volunteers to deliver a leaflet to every single household in the county which outlines the help available to them during the pandemic.

The huge undertaking, in partnership with district authorities in the county, aimed to ensure no stone was left unturned in explaining to people what help is at hand from their local authorities. Whilst the council has made this clear through its online channels,

and media work the council wanted to ensure that anyone in any kind of distress knew where to turn for help.

Crucially, these leaflets contained a helpline number for those who are isolated and may fall unwell during the pandemic. All volunteers were given appropriate protective equipment and had safety guidelines explained to them prior to the leaflet drop.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## **Surrey County Council**

### **Helping keep the voluntary and charity sectors afloat**

The council worked closely with the Surrey Community Foundation, which matches donors with charities, not-for profits, faith groups and volunteers, to support their emergency fund for voluntary and community sector organisations providing vital support in response to Coronavirus. The council also established a hardship fund to assist local voluntary, community & faith sector organisations which have suffered financial and other losses as a result of Coronavirus.

The council is also delivering a support package for voluntary and community groups which includes a three-month rent-free period for all voluntary and community organisations who are tenants in council buildings, and increased flexibility around grant and contract conditions and deadlines. The council is in regular contact with the Councils for Voluntary Services and the wider voluntary sector to understand ongoing challenges they face.





## Shropshire Council

### Fixing thousands of potholes during the pandemic

Shropshire took advantage of a lack of vehicles on the road during the early days of the pandemic to begin fixing the county's potholes in a bid to help the local – and national – economy once lockdown restrictions are eased.

On Monday, March 23, there were 5,250 defects on the county's roads – and as of April 9, that number had reduced by over 2,000 to under 3,000 defects on the county's roads.

The council prioritised the most essential repairs during this period and made

sure that workers and third parties were all carrying out the works whilst observing social distancing guidelines.

The council said it was aware that the impact of the roadworks was significantly reduced during the first period of the lockdown when there were few vehicles on the road – so the council looked to maximise its resources.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**

## Cornwall Council

### First council to pay out £200m in business support

Cornwall has been quick off the mark to get funding to businesses who need it most, having allocated over £200m to almost 18,000 businesses in a matter of weeks after the pandemic.

Within days of receiving details of the criteria set out by government, the council had written to around 24,000 small businesses to explain how to apply. **[Click here to read more.](#)**

It was the first local authority in the UK to pass the £200m mark in payouts.

The council received praise from the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick in the House of Commons for acting quickly in distributing the government funding and helping to support businesses.

## Dorset Council

### Supporting local suppliers during the outbreak

The council has helped its local suppliers by paying them immediately during the pandemic, paying over £71m to businesses between March and April to help maintain their cash flows and to try and ensure they do not go bust as a result of the pandemic.

As part of these efforts to keep business afloat the council had to act quickly – changing its procedures and introduced immediate payments on 18th March before the government asked public bodies to consider this.

The council hopes that by working together with partners and ensuring that cash continues to flow through the supply chain, this will help to resume 'normal service' when the outbreak is over.

As part of its efforts, it wrote to all 13,000 of its suppliers, many of whom are local, to reassure them it was 'business as usual' for invoice payments.

**[Click here to read more.](#)**





COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network is the voice of England's counties. A cross-party organisation, CCN develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions nationally on behalf of the largest grouping of local authorities in England.

In total, the 25 county councils and 11 unitary councils that make up the CCN represent 26 million residents, account for 39% of England's GVA, and deliver high-quality services that matter the most to local communities

The network is a cross party organisation, expressing the views of member councils to the government and within the Local Government Association.

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