

## How does it feel for me during Covid 19? - Weekly real-time report

### Week Commencing 15<sup>th</sup> June

Below is a summary of what we are hearing from stakeholder organisations and the public.

<b style="color: red;">Stakeholder organisations</b> Week commencing 15 <sup>th</sup> June	
<p><b style="color: red;">Leeds Jewish Welfare Board</b></p> <p>In general, people understand what help is available. However, LJWB runs a home for people with <b>learning disabilities</b> and it has been a challenge to keep some residents indoors.</p> <p><b>Isolation</b> is a problem and people have reported losing <b>confidence</b> about going outside, especially in elderly populations. There are also concerns about <b>deteriorations in mobility</b> due to a lack of exercise.</p> <p><b>Mixed messages</b> from the government are another problem, and there is confusion about <b>how long to shield for</b> and which <b>family members</b> people can see. LJWB have set up help and listening lines with support workers, which seem to be successful.</p>	<p><b style="color: red;">St Vincent Support Centre (a community hub based in East Leeds)</b></p> <p>It is mostly only SVSC's volunteers that have reported needing to shield, rather than its service users. It may be that many service users do need to shield but are unaware due to being <b>digitally excluded</b> or having <b>no address</b> to send letters about shielding to.</p> <p>SVSC have more volunteers than they can use at this time.</p> <p>SVSC is not running an immigration drop-in at the moment. Access to <b>food</b> has been a problem for some service users. Also, no services are collecting or delivering <b>furniture</b>, so people in new properties who have to shield are not able to get hold of any homeware.</p>
<p><b style="color: red;">Leeds Syrian Community organisation</b></p> <p><b>Language barriers</b> have been a key issue for the community. The LSC has communicated with Leeds City Council (which has access to translators) so that messages about masks and vulnerable community members can be provided. Even amongst those who speak English, <b>illiteracy</b> is a problem.</p> <p><b>Elderly</b> couples in particular are becoming isolated and lonely (again, in part due to language barriers). Social interaction is particularly important in Syrian culture.</p> <p>Booking appointments with <b>GPs</b> is difficult because of language and a lack of <b>IT skills</b>. SCL often helps with this but it lacks the funding it would need to support everyone.</p>	

## Public Voices: People's experiences of shielding

Since 8<sup>th</sup> June, we have been running an online questionnaire into people's experiences of shielding in Leeds. We have received 560 responses.

### Who did we speak to?

44% (247 people) were aged 66+.  
54% (303 people) were aged 25-65.  
2% (8 people) were aged 24 or under.  
(2 did not provide their age.)

People's responses were broadly similar across all age categories.

### Did you get clear information in an accessible format about what shielding is, what you needed to do and where to get help?

85% (476 people) told us they had received **enough information**.

The remaining 15% (85 people) shared some of the **gaps they had noted**.

People most commonly told us about information arriving **late**:

- "In my job as a support worker, I haven't been furloughed, while I have been shielding. I received the coveted NHS England letter 2 months AFTER the start of lockdown in the UK [...] So, for 2 months, I wasn't paid."
- "I suspected I needed to shield but wasn't 100% certain. I rang the GP but the receptionist said I wasn't. I casually mentioned this to the GP when I spoke to them 2 weeks later & was informed that I should have received a letter, one would be sent out straightaway & I had to shield immediately. I didn't receive the letter for another 2 weeks."

Others felt that **messages weren't always clear**, with some saying that communications have become particularly confusing as time has progressed:

- "The government's message keeps changing and is not clear."
- "The initial letter and information was clear, however as the lockdown is eased I feel no clear information is given to shielders, often in the announcements we are not even mentioned, leaving me in confusion as to if these easing apply to me or not."
- "The initial info was clear but not since then. Why were we suddenly allowed out for a walk? What had changed? This was never explained."
- "The information has been really confusing as the letter from the GP, government website, supermarkets and the media all use different terminology e.g. no explanation of difference between vulnerable and extremely vulnerable, no instructions in letter to sign up to government database"

The lack of clarity has had a significant effect on some people's ability to **access and shop for food**:

- "For the first 4 weeks I found it very difficult to get delivery slots for groceries. I eventually was informed that I was shielded (copd & age 73) and I could get priority slots."
- "I had to ask for food parcels as I couldn't get a supermarket delivery."
- "I didn't realise I needed to register on the government website to get the priority delivery slots until a few weeks in. I was not able to eat well in that period."

- “I didn’t ever receive a letter from the government, so wasn’t able to order food deliveries in the way shielders could.”
- “Confusing about food boxes. Some people are getting them & others such as us are not, we don’t understand why, especially as government briefings imply that we are all getting them. The people I know that are getting them did not have to apply & have the same financial circumstances. It’s not so much about the food, but the feeling that someone cares.”

A few told us that **carers and cared-for people** had not received vital information:

- “I also wasn’t aware for a very long time what my options were for having my carers look after me in a safe way”
- “We are carers for an elderly parent and advice around this has been very haphazard”
- “Confused about what my Carers could safely do for me, eg bathing cooking etc”
- “I’m shielding my 3 year old son rather than myself, the advice was generic to adults, there hasn’t been much guidance for parents or carers of shielders who lack the capacity to follow the guidelines.”

### While shielding at home, how have you been managing and feeling?

A significant number of people have told us they are managing “**fine**” and are adapting well to shielding:

- “With the help of your Covid 19 helpline, I have been able to get volunteers to do shopping and collect prescriptions. Rachel and Brian, our helpers are wonderful dedicated people.”

However, others have seen their wellbeing affected by the demands of shielding. People most commonly tell us they feel “**lonely**” or “**isolated**”.

- “I understand the need but is frustrating to be cooped up with seemingly no end to the isolation”

Often, this loneliness is down to not seeing loved ones. However, sometimes people link it with a sense that they are being **locked out of wider society**:

- “Once the lockdown started to ease off, I’ve felt isolated and lacking in motivation, like I don’t fit in to society now.”
- “Feels like we have to stick to all these stringent rules so everyone else can just get on with their lives. If this thing is not going away what is the point in shielding any longer, yes we are surviving but we’re not living.”
- “Getting harder the longer it goes on, no longer feel part of society, seem bypassed by everything”
- “Like we are living in a bubble whilst the rest of the world carries on.”

Similarly, some people feel that they have been “**forgotten**”:

- “in recent times I do feel as if we are the “forgotten” people, would welcome more clear advice and for it to be reiterated when easing is announced, at least if we are mentioned we understand what applies to us and don’t feel forgotten”
- “We feel forgotten, trapped, disempowered and heavily reliant on the goodwill of friends and neighbours”
- “I have felt very forgotten after the initial text and letter. I think the impression is that everyone shielding is a retired frail person used to staying at home a lot.”

“**Depressed**”, “**anxious**” and “**bored**” are also ways in which people commonly describe their feelings. Sometimes people say that, while they were quite content at the start

(not least thanks to the good weather), they have found themselves struggling as time goes on with no clear end in sight:

- “Initially, shielding was quite a novelty and I enjoyed the opportunity to relax and take advantage of not having to follow a routine, or timetable. However, as the weeks passed I became less enamoured with it all, and resented the ‘imprisonment’ and the change it had made to my life.”

Again, **access to food** continues to be a source of anxiety for some:

- “it has been very difficult &, at times, impossible to get food deliveries so a lot of the time the only meal we have is the meals on wheels.”

A handful of people told us that they have **made the choice not to shield** fully, either because it would have put too much strain on their mental health or they were finding it too difficult to get food supplies.

We heard some shielding people’s concerns about the continuing risk of **catching the virus**. These fears are sometimes exacerbated when they observe other members of the public adhering to social distancing less and less strictly:

- “I feel safer indoors. I know I will find it difficult to leave home because of panic attacks.”
- “Anxious about ease down causing spread.”
- “it feels less safe to go out now than it did when everyone was being careful [...] it feels like we’ll never be able to go out again safely at the moment.”

We also heard that the **suspension of certain health services** has caused worries for some:

- “[I’ve had no] hospital visits at all, all treatments seemed to stop, eyesight has diminished massively and took 4 months to get results from ct scan, and the hospital can’t see me till November!!!! I am having massive trouble breathing and to have to wait nearly 12 months for any help is unkind”

For a few people, following the **news** has become too upsetting and they have made the decision to disconnect from it:

- “Recent events on tv and social media have affected me more than they may have done if I was out and about more. All I seem to hear about now is bad news, people rioting and damaging things, killing or hurting animals, racist comments and hateful comments.”

**Finances** continue to be a concern:

- “I am paid monthly Universal Credit. I constantly run out of electric and food because most of my money goes out on paying bills. It is a nightmare so you have to constantly worry about things like that.”

**If the advice to shield is extended, what could be done locally that would help you?**

People most commonly told us that they would most like to see **social distancing** enforced more strictly or for shielding people to be allocated a specific time of day when they alone can leave the house:

- “it would be useful for all the public to be reminded regularly that some are still shielding and what that means for them so that they can be respectful and supportive”
- “Allow a period of time for shielding vulnerable to go to local shopping areas, not just parks”

- “I have seen people passing each other on footpaths - possibly one way sides of the street or signage reminding people to keep their distance.”
- “I’d feel more confident about going out and about if people were correctly wearing face coverings”

Some would also like opportunities to **meet safely with other shielded people**:

- “Maybe meeting up with other shielding people indoors somewhere where we can share our experiences and get out of the house.”

A number of people say that a **befriending service** would help give them the social contact they are craving:

- “Befriender or someone to talk too when lonely or just feeling fed up.”
- “More help for lonely people.”

Again, having **physical health** problems attended to is a priority for some:

- “As a cancer patient I need to attend my scan. Now overdue.”
- “My biggest problem is not being able to see a podiatrist. I am struggling to cut my toenails!”

It is worth noting that a number of shielding people express a sincere **hope that shielding will not be extended**.

There are also comments **thanking the city** and its services for the support they already provide:

- “Leeds healthcare and services have been brilliant for which I THANK YOU. Both with an emergency box and with help getting supermarkets to cooperate.”
- “you have advised us very well”
- “Just keep up the great work you are all doing on behalf of LCC”
- “Continue to be there for me as you have from the start.”
- “The food parcels are very helpful for the basics”
- “We did need help as I was showing signs of the virus so my husband had to shield, we were then able to get food delivery and food boxes were delivered, so I know if help is needed it will be there. Thank you so much. X”
- “As long as we can keep the existing help and guidance we have enjoyed this far, we will hopefully continue very well, thank you!”

**Have you attended any health or care appointments while shielding, including someone visiting you at home for an appointment?**

282 told us about their recent appointments. Their comments were overwhelmingly **positive**:

- “By telephone, from Chapel Allerton and St James hospitals, doctors very caring and professional”
- “I attended the hospital for treatment and found it very good, I had to wear a face mask and the staff also did this”
- “It was better than an average appointment. Didn’t have to wait long to be seen and there was only one other patient in the waiting area.”
- “Felt anxious about getting there, entering the buildings and moving around within them. It was obvious though, that staff were doing all they could to minimise risk.”

Seeing staff in **PPE** appears to have a significant reassuring effect:

- “Well organised and felt safe. Health professionals had appropriate PPE.”

It is clear that real **fears** remain among shielding people about entering healthcare settings:

- “I needed to have an ECG at my doctors. I was so anxious and could not sleep as I was afraid of going outside. The nurse was lovely. I had to shower and wash my clothes again when I got home as I was terrified of catching the virus.”

### Public Voices: BAME communities' experience of shielding

As part of our shielding survey, we were particularly keen to capture the experiences of people from BAME backgrounds. We had heard that some communities had taken up the city's offer of support in smaller than expected numbers.

42 people from BAME backgrounds responded to our questionnaire.

This group of respondents was statistically less likely than the population as a whole to report receiving **clear information in an accessible format about what shielding is**, what they needed to do and where to get help.

71% of respondents from BAME backgrounds said they had got clear information, compared with 85% of the general population.

Two people told us that the information wasn't in the right language for them, while another suggested the help available wasn't easy to access:

- “Local volunteer help is available but difficult to get”

Like the wider population, many people from BAME backgrounds say they have been struggling with their **emotional wellbeing while shielding**.

One person (who told us their English was limited) explained that:

- “At the beginning I felt very anxious and scared. When I received the letter I felt like a criminal. At the early stages someone tried to register me for council help but the phone line was engaged for long periods and in the end I gave up”

Two people also worried they were a “burden” on others:

- “Zoom and friends doing my shopping have helped but loss of independence is hard and feel like a burden sometimes.”
- “I've been a bit down to be honest. There's a lot going on in the world and I don't want to put upon anyone”

Like many people from all Leeds' communities, a significant portion of people from BAME backgrounds said that easier access to groceries would help them **if the advice to shield was extended**.

### Feedback from our Information & Signposting Line

We recently heard about some of the difficulties one disabled person has observed as they visit newly reopened shops.

**Disabled parking** has been removed, forcing some people to walk long distances (or abandon their shopping trip). For example, the disabled parking spots outside Sainsbury's at the White Rose shopping centre and Boots in Crown Point shopping centre have been removed. **Toilets seats** have also been removed in shopping centres' public toilets, rendering them unusable.

The **mobility shop** in the White Rose centre shuts at 2pm, so disabled people are unable to hire a scooter if they are shopping after that time.

People with disabilities can find it difficult to walk all the way around a **one-way system**. Our caller suggested shopping centres could provide temporary seating halfway around the system, or some wheelchairs for disabled people who may need them.

Our caller also notes that not everyone has a visible disability, so it is not easy for staff to look out for people who may need help.

**These reports are designed to support decision makers during this time. If you find them useful, we would love to hear from you! Please do drop us a line at [hannah@healthwatchleeds.co.uk](mailto:hannah@healthwatchleeds.co.uk) to tell us what you have found most useful.**