

it starts with
YOU

healthwatch
Blackpool



**Coronavirus and
homelessness. How are
you coping?**



About Healthwatch Blackpool

Healthwatch Blackpool is the local consumer champion of Health and Social Care in Blackpool. We were established as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our role is to bring the community voice to the attention of decision makers locally , to support improvements and really shine a spotlight on experience.

Our role is to listen and understand what it is like to access Health and Social Care in Blackpool. We write reports and try to ensure that the community voice is considered in improving and celebrating our local services.



Rationale for Research

The Covid-19 pandemic has been uncertain and challenging for many. The emergency response and 'lockdown' took effect in March 2020. Advice from Public Health England on 19th March provided guidance for providers of services for those experiencing homelessness. The Government then announced that Local Authorities should find appropriate accommodation for all rough sleepers by the end of March. According to information by Groundswell 4,200 people in England had been provided accommodation in a matter of weeks.

Healthwatch Blackpool and Blackpool Lived Experience Team created a survey in response to the pandemic and subsequent changes. The survey hoped to capture and hear the voices of those in Blackpool who were experiencing homelessness or may have subsequently received housing support. The survey endeavored to find out how people were feeling and coping during the pandemic. We wanted to hear peoples stories and really find out what support has been working and feed this back into the system.

The Survey

Our survey was designed with Blackpool's Lived Experience Team who worked to write questions in collaboration with Healthwatch Blackpool. Blackpool's Lived Experience Team work closely with people who are facing multiple disadvantage. The team provide peer mentoring and work closely with Blackpool Fulfilling lives supporting those with interconnecting needs of mental ill health, are homeless/at risk of homelessness, substance misuse and or offending.

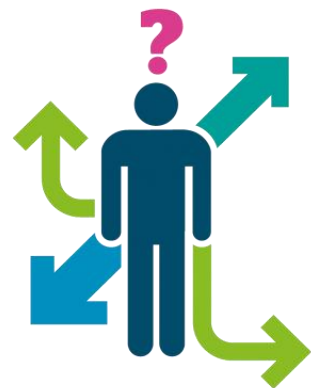
The survey asked 19 questions relating to experience and concerns currently. They were carried out between the months of June – August 2020.

The Lived Experience Team used their experience of engaging with the Blackpool Community to encourage feedback whilst carrying out welfare checks and food parcel deliveries across the town. In July , the Lived Experience Team begun outreach work and spoke to people in Blackpool who were experiencing homelessness due to breakdown in initial housing options and placements.

Feedback and responses

The survey yielded 41 responses.
32 of the people that gave feedback were Blackpool residents.
1 person was from out of area
2 people had been released from HMP prison.

Respondents were between the age of 18 -54.
30 of the respondents were male , whilst 11 were female.



How have you been affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic?

- *'It has benefited me , I have been given housing and food'*
- *'Messed mental health'*
- *'No soup kitchens , no washing facilities and clothes and less money from tourists'*
- *'I have nowhere to live. I have been released from prison today after five months and have no money'*

Many respondents felt they have not been affected by Covid-19 whilst Some respondents said that they have struggled because there weren't many people around, so they didn't have any money or support they needed from places like the Salvation Army and tourists visiting the area.

One person stated they can't find work, and others have lost connections with people and places making life hard.

Two respondents said that they have been released from prison, without support, housing or finances. One of these respondents released from prison stated that they were unable to move forward with their life because they could not visit family as they did not live close to Blackpool.

One respondent said that the lockdown had 'messed with their mental health'. And one respondent sated that they had found it difficult not being able to go outdoors freely and felt trapped, describing Covid-19 as a 'nightmare'.

One person highlighted the wait to access the Chemist.

Two respondents felt that Covid-19 had been a positive experience. One respondent noted that they have gained support with housing and food. The second respondent stated that they contracted Covid-19 in March and from that is now rehoused and no longer living on the streets.

Where are you currently residing?

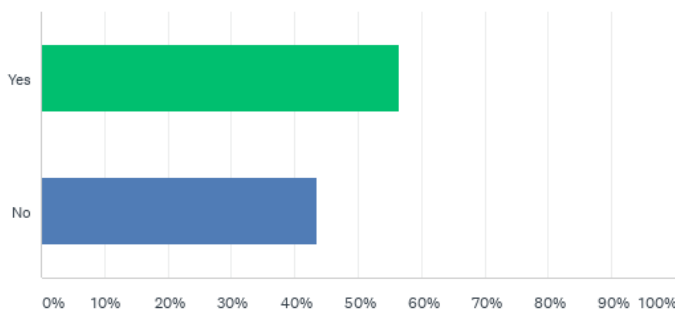
We asked the 41 respondents where they are currently residing. 2 respondents declined to answer. Of the 39 other respondents:

- **4 Hostel**
- **3 B&B**
- **0 Sofa Surfing**
- **19 Rough Sleeping**
- **2 Own accommodation**
- **12 Other**



8 people noted that they were currently in the **emergency bed unit**
3 people noted that they were in properties.

We asked the 41 respondents **if they felt safe where they currently reside.**



22 respondents felt safe

Members of the **Lived Experience Team** have tried to understand why some of the respondents have felt unsafe. Some of the things that they have heard to date are:

- There are too many people in my hostel
- Support services are closed and I need to see my worker.
- Covid and health concerns
- I cant stay there because I don't want to be living with a 'drug gang'
- There's a mixture of ages
- I don't like my neighbours

What are your biggest concerns?



The survey design asked respondents to comment on what their concerns are. This question was a qualitative question and allowed respondents to highlight what matters. It must be noted that respondents have completed the survey between June and August 2020. Some respondents were asked to complete the survey on outreach work in Blackpool Town Centre.

- Six respondents reported that things were **OK** and did not wish to comment.
- One of the main concerns evidenced in responses was **housing** with 19 respondents making reference to this.
- 7 respondents highlighted that they were struggling with **finances** and 2 with accessing **job centre support**.
- Receiving **face to face support** and being **listened to** was commented on in 6 occasions.
- 7 respondents were concerned regarding their **alcohol and substance misuse** and **relapsing**.
- 7 respondents felt that they needed support with their **mental health**.
- 3 respondents noted being concerned about their **friends ,family and support**
- 3 responses had concerns about the correct **information** about the pandemic, when it was going to end and what would happen if they caught it
- 3 responses noted concern for **food** and **hygiene**
- 2 respondents were concerned for lack of activities and noted **feeling lonely**
- 2 respondent were concerned about **GP's and their own health**
- 1 respondent was concerned **shops were all closed**.



'The Council and the police disregard me as a person'

'Charging my phone'

'Getting back into a normal routine'

'Mental Health - no face to face support'

'Being made homeless again'

'Using Covid-19 as an excuse to penalize me even more'

Do you have any concerns for the future?



- *'Loose everything including my new home'*
 - *'Not getting Covid-19'*
 - *'Back on the streets'*
- *'Insecurity around my housing, are the Council going to continue to house people?'*
 - *'I have two younger children and wonder how they are coping'*
 - *'I feel scared'*
 - *'Keeping off drugs permanent accommodation'*
- *'Not having a job still being in the same situation not coping on my own'*

5 respondents did not have any concerns for their future

19 respondents had concerns for their housing

3 respondents commented on their desire for permanent residency

8 respondents had concerns over employment and job opportunities

4 respondents were concerned about what support will be available

7 respondents made comment on their mental health

4 respondents had concerns that they would be in the same situation as before

5 respondents had concerns for their children and how will they cope

6 respondents had concerns about returning to their addiction and relapsing

3 respondents were scared for their future

2 respondents were concerned they could return to being homeless

7 respondents had concerns for treatment for their health needs

2 respondents were concerned about criminal behavior and returning to prison

2 respondents stated that they were concerned for their future finances and food

1 respondent was concerned for their current disability and their future health

1 respondent was concerned about Covid-19 and the possibility of catching it again



Benefits **Family**
Safety

What changes have worked for you during the pandemic? Things to be celebrated..



Emergency Bedded Unit was acknowledged as a positive by 3 respondents.

Housing and being supported into accommodation was commented on 5 times.

Having a phone was deemed as helpful

Going to prison was noted

Self control

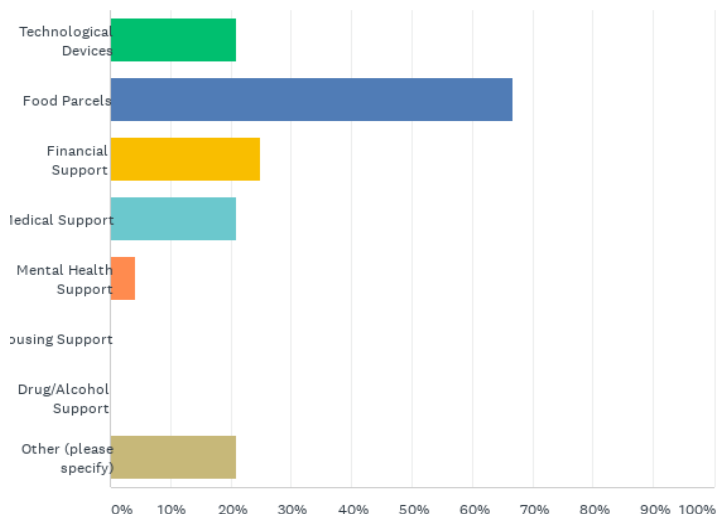
Quick accommodation following prison

Reducing drug use was commented on 3 times with one respondent stating:
'Coming off drugs , I have now cut half down'

1 respondent said that *'all has been fine and helpful'*

19 respondents said that things hadn't improved

We asked the 41 respondents if they have received additional support?



Methadone Scripts, Masks, Streetlife and Salvation Army were acknowledged in this question response.



'Being put in the emergency bedded unit'

How useful was support?

'I was given a face mask when I left prison'

'Streetlife and Salvation Army have helped'

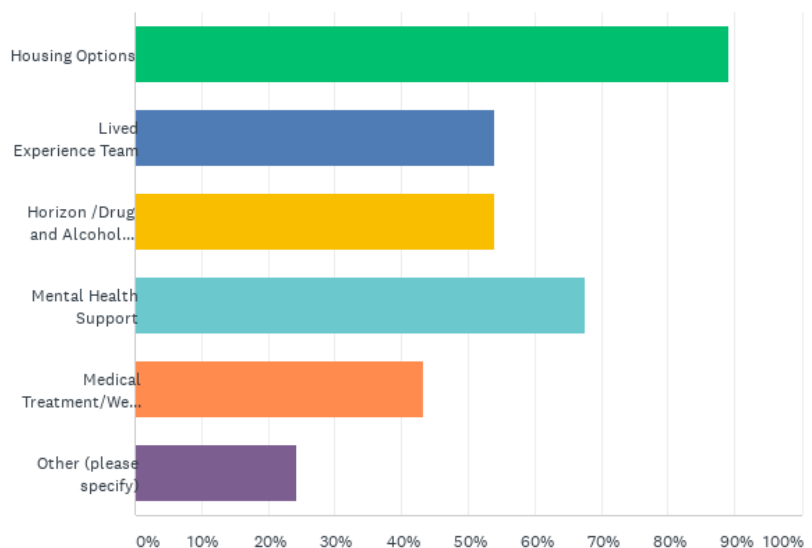
9 people responded to this question with the remaining respondents choosing not to comment.

Of the 9 responses we have learnt:

- *'I felt that I was on my own at the start of lockdown. I have had issues with the Council , they didn't listen to the Ashley Foundation and didn't bother to ring me to find out the bigger picture or return my calls. A lovely lady called, she has helped me to get food parcels'*
- *'I don't have the internet , so I cant access emails and updates for my universal credit'*
- *'Fullfilling Lives and Public Health food parcels and phone calls to make sure I am OK have been helpful'*
- *'Streetlife and Salvation Army have helped'*
- *'Three respondents stated that support has been good'*

Would you like continued support?

37 respondents answered this question. Housing and mental health support was deemed to be a support need required by many. Streetlife was a service that was acknowledged within the 'other' responses.



We asked respondents if they felt confident that they would continue to receive support post pandemic? 32 people responded to this question , with 50% choosing 'Yes'

Some of the comments included:

'I am concerned. If I don't get the support I have now I will end up back on the streets'

'Because i'm not getting it now, help just stops'

2 people noted that they are on mental health waiting lists

1 person noted *'I have not had contact with hardly anyone'* and one person stated *'we seem to be forgotten about'*

We asked the 41 respondents if they have a current addiction and what actions are they taking to support?

6 respondents declined to answer.

- 8 respondents do not have an addiction
- 23 respondents have a drug addiction, 7 are not ready for support with this.
- 2 respondents were addicted to cannabis and have either cut down or just stopped smoking it
- 6 respondents are on a methadone prescription and receive support with this
- 1 respondent is in recovery and is concerned they may relapse
- 3 respondents are addicted to alcohol
- 1 respondent is waiting for support from Horizon

We asked the 41 respondents how are you taking care of your physical and mental health?

7 respondents declined to answer.

Thirteen respondents feel they are maintaining good mental health by **exercising** and **eating well**, keeping on top with their **prescriptions , medication** and maintaining **friendships** and **writing** their thoughts and feelings down to express themselves. One respondent is maintaining her well-being by not self-harming but is suffering with insomnia.

Two respondents acknowledged that their **scripts** support their health.

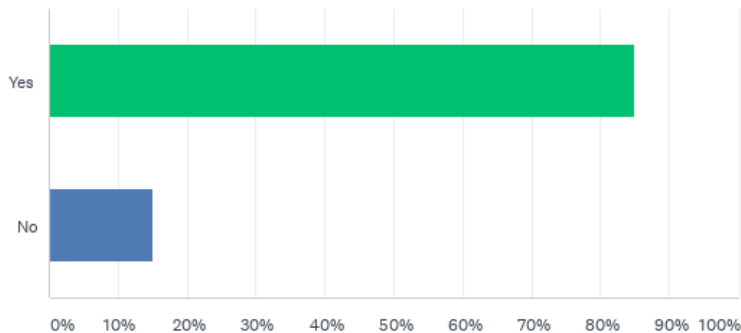
One respondent stated the **EBU** has helped

However, four respondents feel their mental health is suffering and feel depressed, and having difficulty sleeping.

The remaining respondents said that they are not taking care of their physical and mental health.

Social Distancing

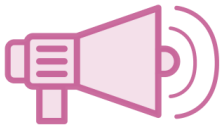
Do you social distancing when you go out into the community?



28 respondents answered yes to this question whilst 5 respondents stated that they have chosen not to distance.

We asked participants how they can be supported to stay indoors, we received 7 total responses to this question which acknowledged a need to go out for supplies, contact with friends and for essential travel

We asked where do you look to find information about Covid-19?



- 6 Word of mouth
- 5 T.V
- 5 Everywhere
- 1 Radio
- 4 News
- 1 NHS
- 5 Internet

We asked what changes/information would help support you at this time.

15 respondents answered this question, responses acknowledged the need to be listened to and supported. There has been concern around what will happen post Covid, housing support, safety and security.

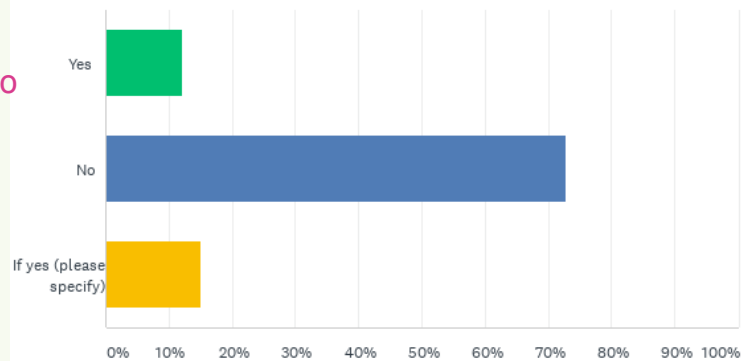
'I would like some security and knowledge around what will happen to me when all this is over. I am very concerned.'

'Listening to what I am saying, blame my mental health.'

'A roof over my head'

We asked if any respondents were receiving medical treatment not related to Covid-19 that has now stopped

This question was responded to by 33 participants, 4 of which answered 'yes'.



1 respondent noted that their home treatment plan and welfare checks stopped. 1 respondent was attending regular clinics for leg treatment and struggles with the GP. 2 respondents commented on medication and methadone whilst 1 respondent stated that support was received in prison.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

We received 10 responses to this question:

- ***I have been released from prison after 5 months no benefits , no housing or anything put in place. I was Covid tested on release***
- *I used to collect my medication*
- ***Thank you for your time***
- *Nothing was in place when I was released from prison*
- ***All good***
- *I cant go to groups at the Salvation Army*
- ***I am scared***
- *I want this Coronavirus to finish*
- ***I went to a hostel last night and they said that they hadn't received an email from the Council so refused to let me in , even though they sent me there. I am going down to housing again today***
- *I am concerned*



In Conclusion



The reality of lockdown was unknown back in March 2020. We have learnt that as the weeks progressed, those facing multiple disadvantage have had concerns about a multitude of things including housing , finances , mental health and services to support and listen. Some respondents have found it difficult with accommodation placements and are subsequently experiencing homelessness again.

We have heard positives relating to housing, prescriptions and additional support measures but have also learnt that this has not suited everyone within the Blackpool community and some respondents have felt alone.

We know that lived experience of homelessness and trauma has been shown to lead to reluctance to accept interventions (Magwood et al 2019). As a result of this survey we now have an insight to those who have been affected by the pandemic and lockdown. We will be continuing to listen and work with the Lived Experience Team to hear individual stories and understand , share and learn how to best support.

Thank you to all participants that have shared their views.

Speaking up about your experiences of health and social care services is the first step to change.

