

Mat Jones
Amy Beardmore
Michele Biddle
Jo White
Sanda Ismail
Stuart McClean
Andy Gibson
Abby Sabey

Centre for Public
Health and Wellbeing
UWE Bristol

22nd April 2020

Apart but not Alone

Neighbour Support and the Covid-19 Lockdown

Initial findings

Survey in Bristol and the West Country 6-12th April 2020

[Days 14-20 of the UK Government Coronavirus Restrictions]

Key Points

- An online survey to identify neighbour support in Bristol and the West Country with 522 respondents between 6th-12th April. First stage survey to close 27th April.
- Despite Stay-at-Home restrictions, neighbours are connecting with each other through a proliferation of street-level and postcode social media support groups. Human contact remains important with 88% reporting that talking at a safe social distance with neighbours as a regular activity.
- Support extends beyond people at-risk of coronavirus to include a wide range of groups including people living alone, people with mobility issues, financial issues, or child and caring responsibilities, and people living in homes with no outdoor space.
- Self-organising neighbour groups were reaching out to vulnerable people before formal volunteering had mobilised through voluntary agencies, local authorities and the NHS.
- Neighbour support is wide ranging, and combines humour and creativity with important activities such as food shopping and medical prescription collections for vulnerable groups.
- Neighbour-based support appears to have been going positively, with 51% of respondents strongly agreeing that neighbours are supporting each other very well at this time.
- 68% of respondents provided written descriptions of successful and inspiring things that are taking place in their neighbourhood. However, 56% also reported difficulties and challenges.
- There are indications that negative impacts of lockdown are being experienced more acutely in areas of high social disadvantage. Compared to wealthier areas, people in poorer neighbourhoods were more likely to report they were supporting people with financial issues; people with disabilities or mobility issues; people with an existing medical condition; and people with no outdoor space.
- Given the gender-imbalanced responses (80% female), an important issue is whether the practical and emotional work of supporting neighbours is falling disproportionately onto women.
- The lockdown may change communities. In the future, 44% of respondents want to get more involved in the life of their neighbourhood.

About this research

Between 6th and 12th April 2020, people in Bristol and the West Country told us about the help they've been giving - and getting - from neighbours.

As of 12th April, 522 people have responded to UWE's online survey in days 14-20 of the UK Government's Coronavirus Stay-at-Home Restrictions (Covid-19 Lockdown).

The **survey remains open until 27th April**. Anyone who sees themselves as being involved in supporting their neighbours can complete it at <https://bit.ly/ApartAlone> This is an ongoing research project and there are updates on Twitter [@ApartAlone](https://twitter.com/ApartAlone).

The survey builds upon the UWE Centre for Public Health and Wellbeing's 5-year programme of community research with **Bristol Ageing Better** (BAB) on tackling social isolation and loneliness, and our collaboration with **BAB Community Researchers**.

The survey combines a number of standardised and bespoke questions about neighbour support, community involvement and responses to the coronavirus outbreak.

People in Health West of England (PHWE) Public Contributors and BAB Community Researchers helped pilot and refine the survey.

The online survey is publicised through several channels including area-based coronavirus support groups, such as Facebook mutual aid groups; coronavirus community and voluntary sector support groups; a range of BAME, Disability and Housing support groups; and agencies in areas of high multiple deprivation.

In addition to this survey, we are undertaking **interviews** and plan a **follow-on survey in mid-May**. Even if you have not taken part in the first survey, you can register an interest to take the follow-on survey at <https://bit.ly/2REa8Ah>.

Profile of the 522 survey respondents (6th-12th April 2020)

Gender: 80% female and 19% male

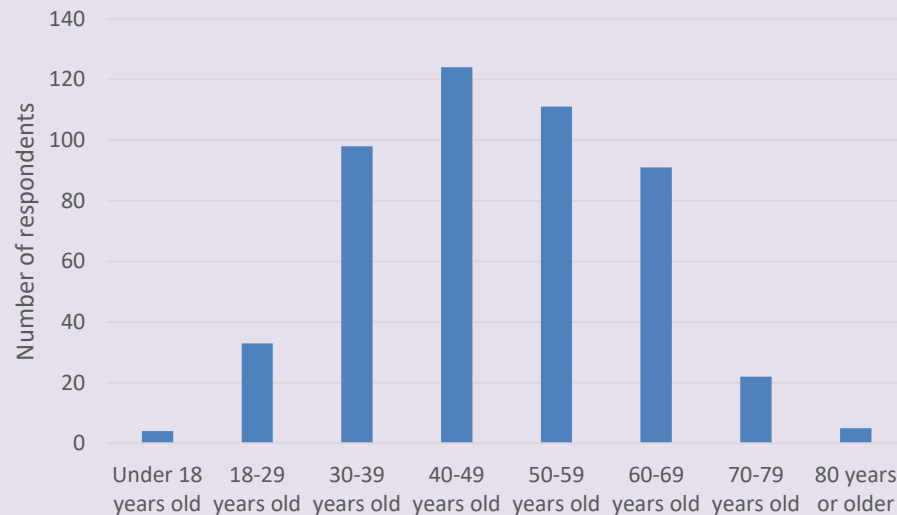
1% = "Prefer to self describe" and "Prefer not to say". Total 489; missing 33.

Race/ethnicity: 95% White*; 4% BAME*

1% = "Prefer not to say"; *=all groups; Total 487; missing 35.

Age: Modal age group 40-49

"Prefer not to say n=2; Total 490; missing 32



Area of residence

Bristol	244
South Gloucestershire	139
Wiltshire	44
Gloucestershire	35
North Somerset	34
Bath and North East Somerset	15
Somerset and Devon	11

Postcode Area: Index of Multiple Deprivation

IMD Decile ONS 2019

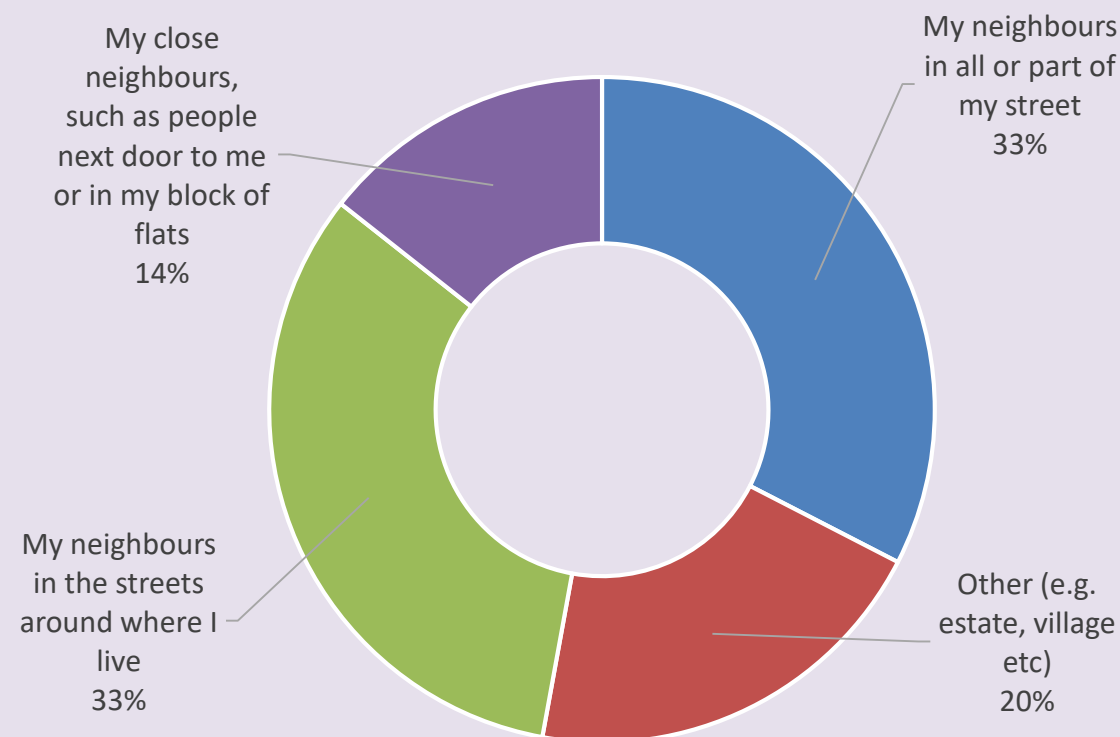


The neighbour support networks of survey respondents

'Neighbourhood' areas mean different things to different people. The start of the survey asks people to choose a definition that best described their experience.

In the context of the current situation, the answers suggest that people have a range of thoughts about the networks in which they have been supporting each other, from close next door neighbours to much wider geographical areas.

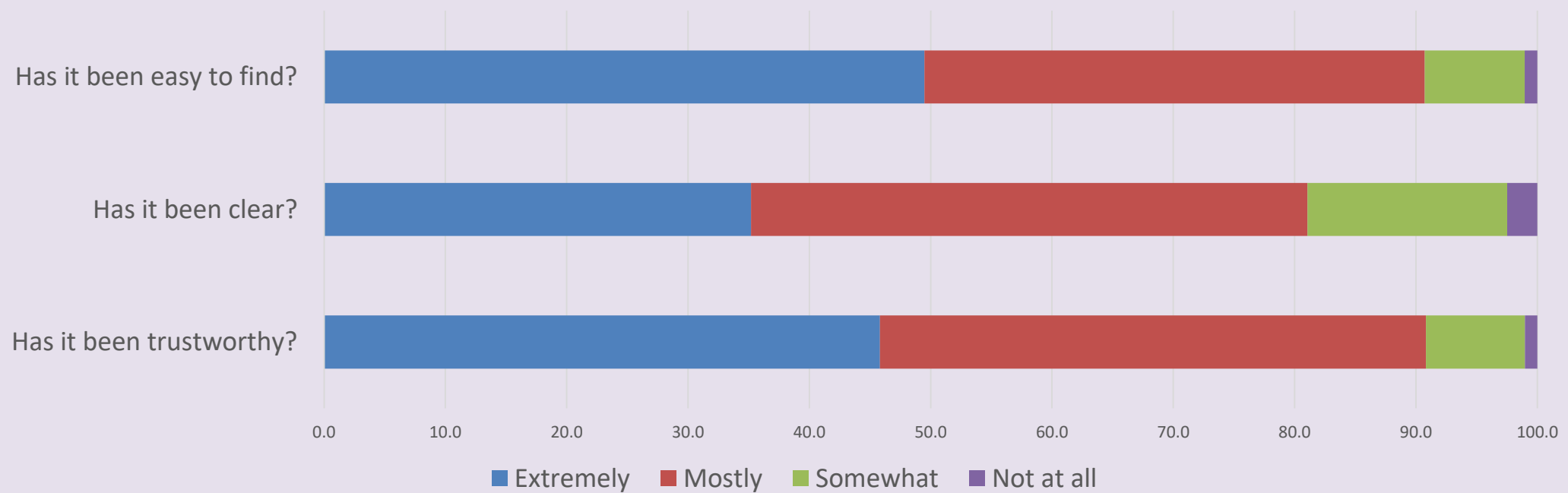
What best describes the local area where you and your neighbours have been supporting each other? (n=522)



Information and advice of health authorities

Overall, a strong majority of respondents gave positive feedback on official health information and advice. This is especially the case with 'accessibility' and 'trustworthiness', although somewhat less so with its 'clarity'.

From your point of view, how have you found the NHS / Public Health England's information and advice on the coronavirus (COVID-19) ?

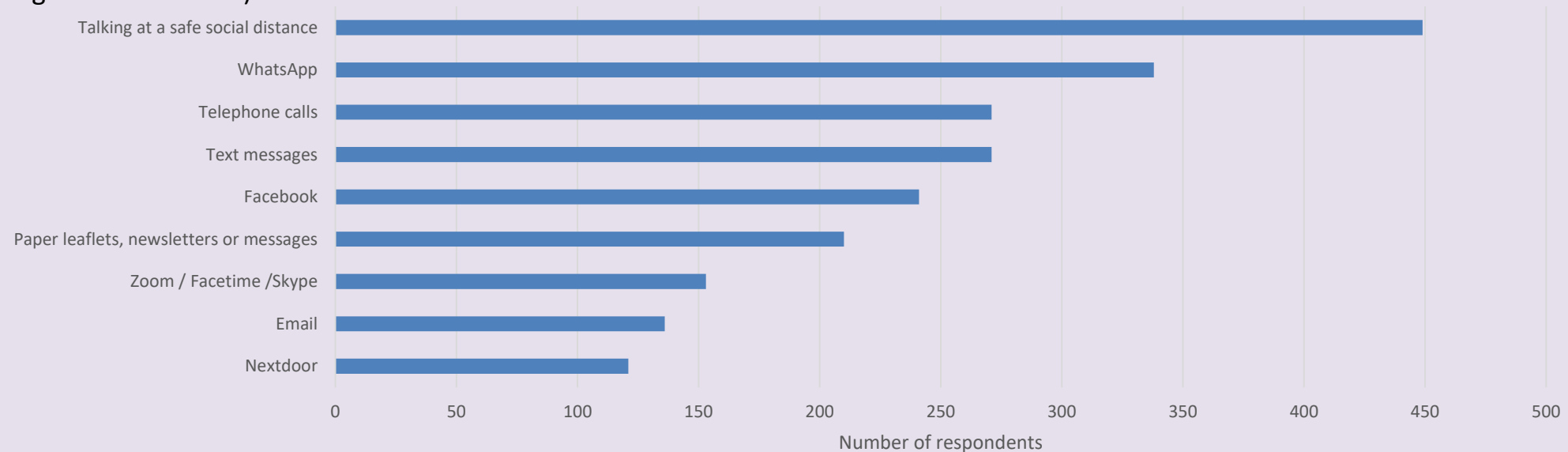


How neighbours are keeping in touch

Despite Stay-at-Home restrictions, neighbours are finding a variety of ways to connect with each other.

Since the beginning of March, street-level WhatsApp Groups and postcode district level Facebook Covid-19 Mutual Aid Groups have taken off across the region, as well as some Nextdoor groups (Nextdoor is a private social network that operates at a neighbourhood level).

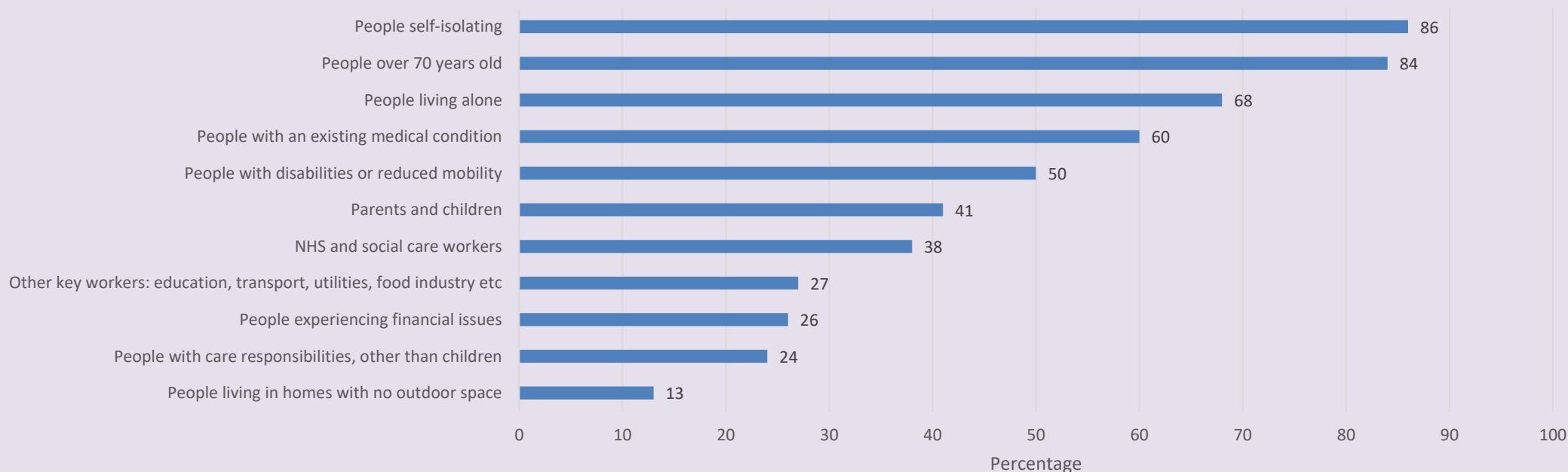
38% of survey respondents stated that they had been helping to organise or manage activities with their neighbours. Most commonly, this involves acting as administrator for a street contact group.



The range of people that neighbours are supporting

A majority of respondents have sought to help people clearly identified as being at high risk of contracting coronavirus. But in addition, it is notable that support is being given to a broad range of groups, for example with 68% of neighbours reaching out to people who are living alone, and 50% contacting people with disabilities or reduced mobility.

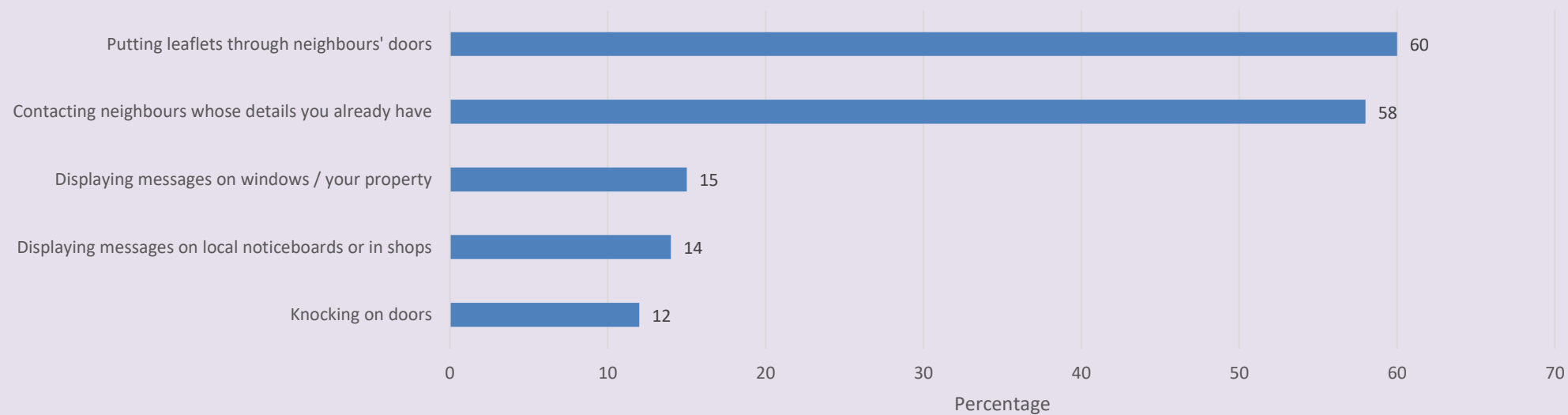
Which groups of local people have you and your neighbours aimed to support? (n=509)



Actions taken to reach out to vulnerable people

Within days of UK Government guidance on social distancing, and before Stay-at-Home restrictions came into effect, neighbours had already been taking a range of active steps to contact people who may be especially vulnerable during the coronavirus outbreak.

What have you or others been doing to reach out to neighbours who may need support during the coronavirus outbreak? (n=509)

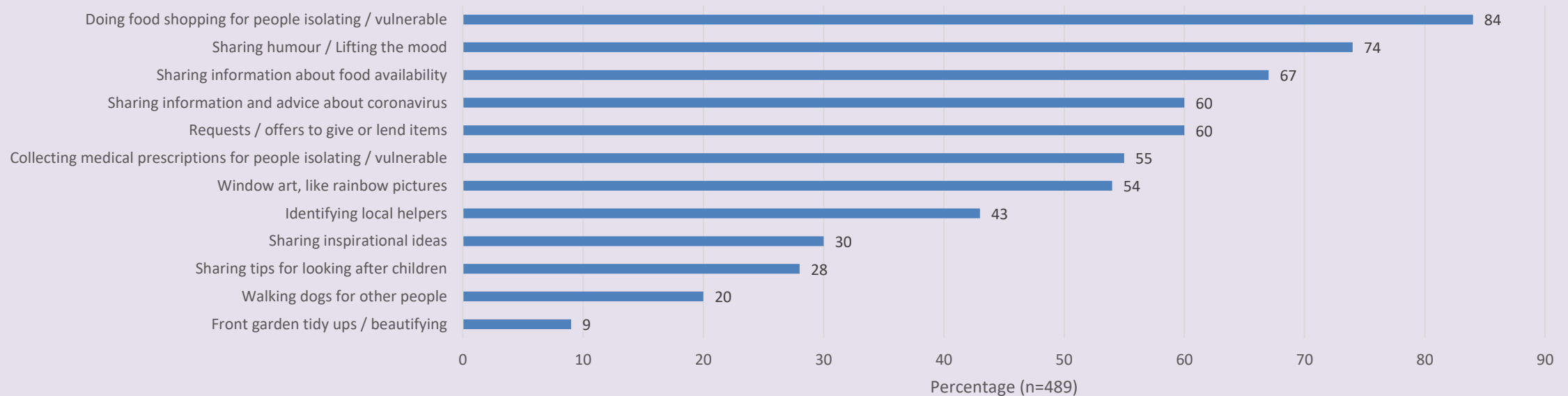


How neighbours are supporting each other

Food-shopping for people isolating or vulnerable (84%), and sharing information about food available (67%) are leading ways that neighbours are helping each other.

Alongside advice and assistance, neighbours are sharing humour and lifting the mood (74%), getting creative, gardening and clearing up – at a safe social distance.

52% of respondents had been involved in collecting medical prescriptions: written feedback shows that this can be complex and time-consuming.

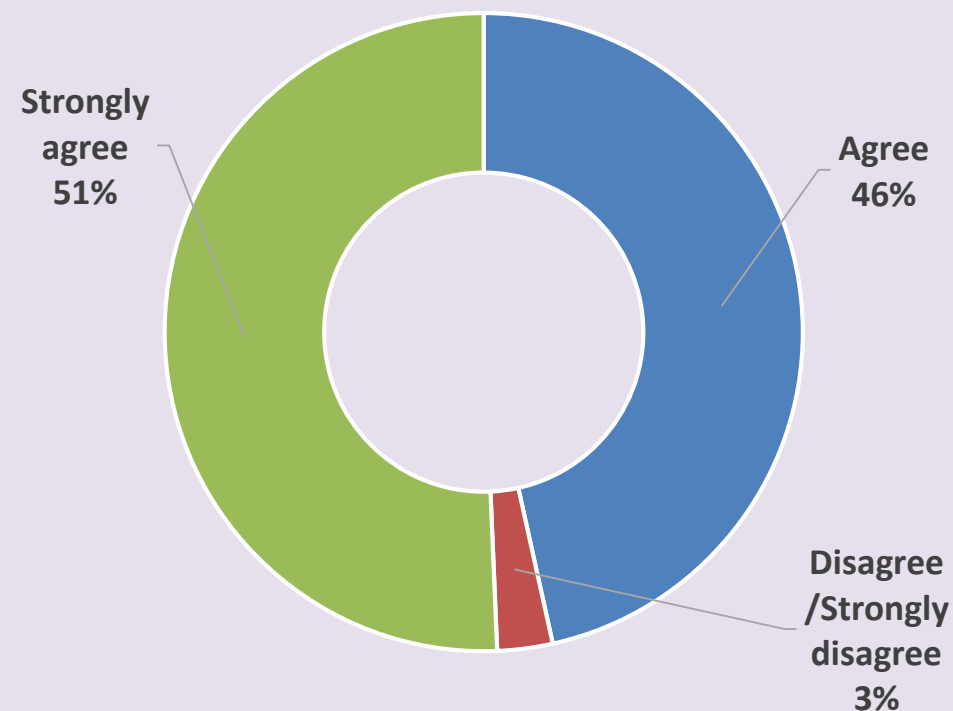


How well are neighbours supporting each other?

At the current time, a clear majority of respondents to the survey felt that people are supporting each other very well in their neighbourhoods.

Note that this is a survey of people who self-identify as having been involved in neighbour support, and the response is not necessarily a reflection of general public opinion.

To what extent do you agree with the statement *"In my neighbourhood, people are supporting each other very well at this time"*? (n=507)



Neighbours coming together – success & inspiration

348 of the 522 survey respondents described the ways in which they had come together in successful and inspiring ways. Here are some examples:

“A lovely old man who is living alone called me, he didn't say but I could tell he would like someone to talk to, so I buddied him up with another volunteer with similar interests and they are now talking regularly.”

“A neighbour's daughter has been in isolation with her family as she has serious underlying health issues. It was her birthday last week and all the neighbours stood on their doorsteps and sang to her and sang her favourite song “Reach for the stars”.”

“I love the fact that my older neighbour who I was looking out for, came over to give me rhubarb from his garden, so actually he ended up caring for me and my family.”

“After living here nearly 35 years we have finally made contact with neighbours whose names we have never known.”

“[We had an] Easter parade - planned two weeks ago so children (and adults) had stuff to make to occupy time. One way parade system up one side of street and down the other and 2m apart. Really lovely to get out there and see all the neighbours have a laugh and make sure everyone is okay.”

“Everyday at 12 noon one of our neighbours plays his saxophone which can be heard around the surrounding area and we all come out into our gardens to listen/ dance. It's a real moment of joy which brings our community together.”

“Just a huge camaraderie and outpouring of generosity. Shared shops have been a great help whilst self-isolating. We are introducing ourselves to each other with some family and historical background on WhatsApp. We plan to hold a street party at the end of all this.”

Neighbours coming together – difficulties & challenges

288 of the 522 survey respondents described difficulties and challenges with neighbour support. Here are some examples:

“Constantly declining going into the neighbour with Alzheimer's as she doesn't remember why everyone has stopped visiting her.”

“Elderly people with no internet knowledge/access. No internet banking facilities to pay for items online. Running out of cash.”

“Everyone in my house has underlying health conditions but we can't ask neighbours to get all our weekly shop only bits we have run out of and it has been impossible to get supermarket deliveries.”

“Feeling like you're reaching the truly truly vulnerable.”

“Getting younger people to open up about their anxieties and fears.”

“Hearing arguments and not knowing whether to intervene.”

“Mutual aid is great concept but the whole street [group] is complex...and people get fatigued with loads of messages. Also including people helping vulnerable people who may be outside that community has lots of safeguarding concerns.”

“I am disabled, but able people with no health conditions think I should run around after them even [though] they have never uttered a word or said hello. Elderly are not getting what they need I am trying my best but means shopping in several places at least 4 days a week!”

“Most of my neighbours keep to themselves. There is no sense of community. Difficult to help or be helped.”

“Not being able to give somebody a hug when they are having a bad day and going round for a cuppa or letting the kids play with each other.”

Social inequalities in neighbour support

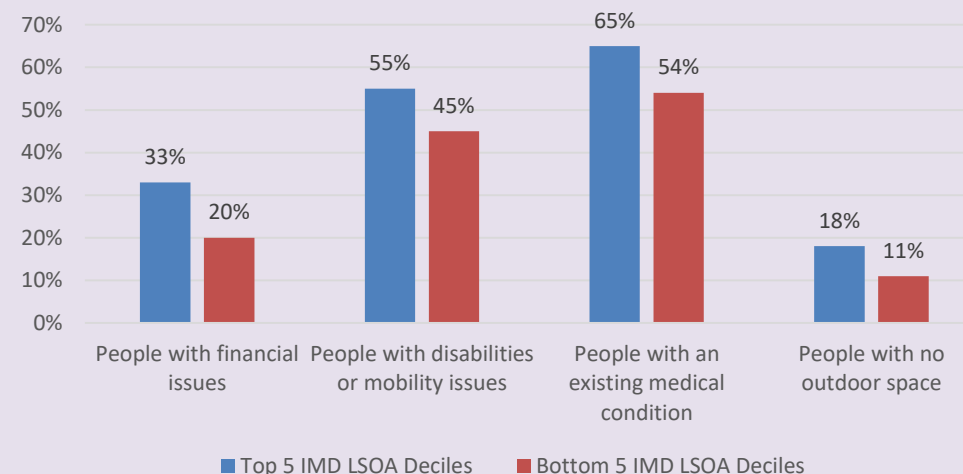
On most issues, the messages are very similar from respondents in different neighbourhoods across Bristol and the West Country. For example, people in both poorer and wealthier neighbourhoods show the same confidence about how well they feel they are supporting one another in their own area. This suggests strong feelings of neighbour support even in areas with fewer economic resources and social assets.

However, there are indications that negative impacts of lockdown are being experienced more acutely in areas of high social disadvantage. People in poorer neighbourhoods were more likely to report they were supporting

1. People with financial issues
2. People with disabilities or mobility issues
3. People with an existing medical condition
4. People with no outdoor space*

* Pearson Chi Square 1. $p=0.004$; 2. $p=0.031$; 3. $p=0.018$; $p=0.022$

Which groups of local people are you and your neighbours aiming to support? (n=515)#



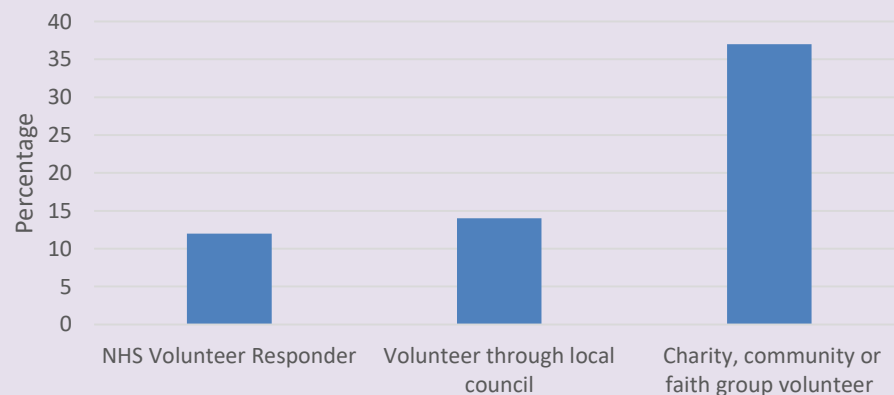
Given the gender-imbalance of the survey respondents, it is also possible that the practical and emotional work involved in supporting neighbours is falling disproportionately on women – an effect that compounds with the additional needs in areas of high social deprivation. We are undertaking further analysis to understand the effects of the lockdown on other social groups such as BAME and disabled groups.

IMD= Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019. LSOA = Local Super Output Area

Wider voluntary roles

As well as being involved in supporting their neighbours, many survey respondents had volunteered to take other roles through the NHS Volunteer Responder scheme (12%), local authority volunteering (14%), and charity, community or faith group volunteering (37%).

Have you registered or do you have any other volunteering role during the coronavirus outbreak? (n=509)



Personal risk of coronavirus

While survey respondents have been offering support to their neighbours, a proportion have their own circumstances to consider.

- 15% of respondents stated that they were 'at high risk/vulnerable to coronavirus'.
- 16% of respondents stated that they are living with someone 'at high risk/vulnerable to coronavirus'.

Written survey feedback from many respondents reinforced the picture that neighbour support travels both ways: neighbours with personal needs are offering to help others as well as getting assistance themselves.

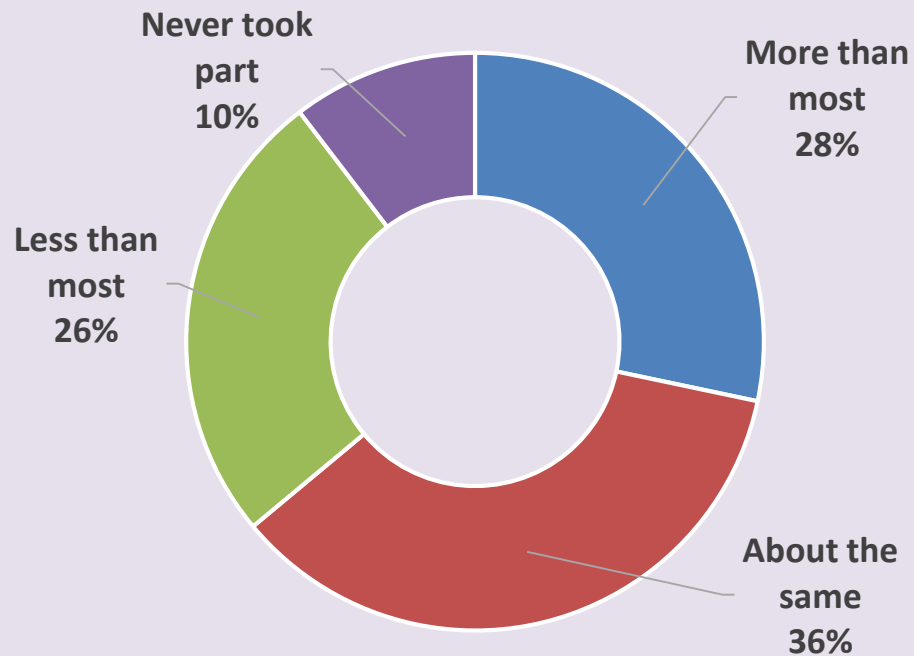
Looking back | Looking forwards

The Covid-19 lockdown may be changing how people think about their place in the life of their neighbourhood. Beforehand, 26% of respondents felt that they had been less involved than most people. In the future, 44% of respondents want to get more involved in their neighbourhood.

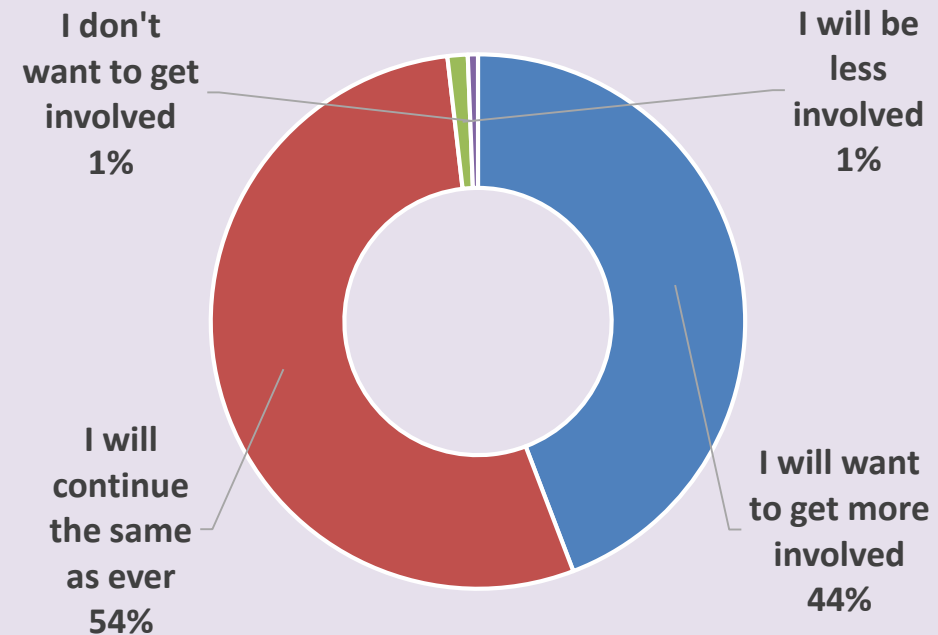
Please think back to before the coronavirus outbreak.

How often would you say you took part in the life of your neighbourhood?

(n=491)



How do you think the coronavirus outbreak will affect your involvement in your neighbourhood in the future? (n=491)



Next steps with Apart but not Alone. Follow us on Twitter [@ApartAlone](https://twitter.com/ApartAlone)

Apart but not Alone **Telephone Interviews**

We are currently contacting survey respondents who have expressed an interest to tell us in more depth about what they are doing in their neighbourhood.

Apart but Not Alone **Follow-on Survey**

The date of the survey is not finalised, but is planned for mid-May. Even if you did not take part in our original survey, you can register your interest in taking part in this survey at <https://bit.ly/2REa8Ah>. For further information, contact matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk.



Amy Beardmore, Stuart McClean, Michele Biddle, Sanda Ismail, Jo White and Mat Jones