STATEMENT OF PROGRESS

APPENDIX 3: COVID-19 IMPACT REPORT SEPTEMBER 2021

CONNECTED **A COMMUNITY PLAN**
for Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough

Contents

1. Direct Impacts of Covid-19 on Physical Health

1.1 Introduction

This chapter utilises the most recent Department of Health Covid-19 Daily Dashboard statistics to determine infection rates, hospital admissions and deaths and mortality rates for the Borough, at time of reporting.

1.2 Covid-19 Infection Rates

At midnight 23rd September 2021, the Borough had the second highest number of cumulative positive cases out of the eleven Council areas (see Table 1.1 and Table 1.2).[1]

Table 1.1
Comparative Infection Rates

By Midnight 23 September 2021	NI (n)	ABC (n)	ABC Rank
Cumulative Individuals Tested	1,486,226	156,317	2nd
Cumulative Individuals Tested Positive	231,696	27,379	2nd
Cumulative Positive Tests per 100,000 of Population	12,235	12,663	4th

Pillar 1 & Pillar 2 Laboratory Completed Test

Table 1.2
Cumulative Number of Individuals with a Laboratory Completed Test (Pillar 1 & 2) by LGD

Local Government District	Total Individuals Tested	Individuals Tested Positive	Individuals Tested Negative	Individuals with Indeterminate Result	Positive Tests per 100k population
Antrim and Newtownabbey	104,424	15,674	88,742	8	10,922
Ards and North Down	106,996	12,881	94,112	3	7,965
Armagh City, Banbridge and Crai...	156,317	27,379	128,929	9	12,663
Belfast	280,922	44,248	236,655	19	12,880
Causeway Coast and Glens	96,143	15,277	80,860	6	10,548
Derry City and Strabane	127,247	24,611	102,627	9	16,268
Fermanagh and Omagh	85,176	13,887	71,283	6	11,829
Lisburn and Castlereagh	107,796	15,002	92,786	8	10,275
Mid and East Antrim	95,385	14,518	80,865	2	10,424
Mid Ulster	110,600	21,006	89,587	7	14,143
Newry, Mourne and Down	135,431	22,122	113,294	15	12,197
Not Known	79,789	5,091	74,686	12	
Total	**1,486,226**	**231,696**	**1,254,426**	**104**	**12,235**

The Borough is ranked 4th highest infection rate per 100,000 population. This is above the NI average. Figure 1.1 illustrates concentration of positive cases by geographical area.

Figure 1.1

[1] Published 24 September 2021

Positive Cases in last 7 Days per 100K Pop. by Postal District (13 - 19 September 2021)

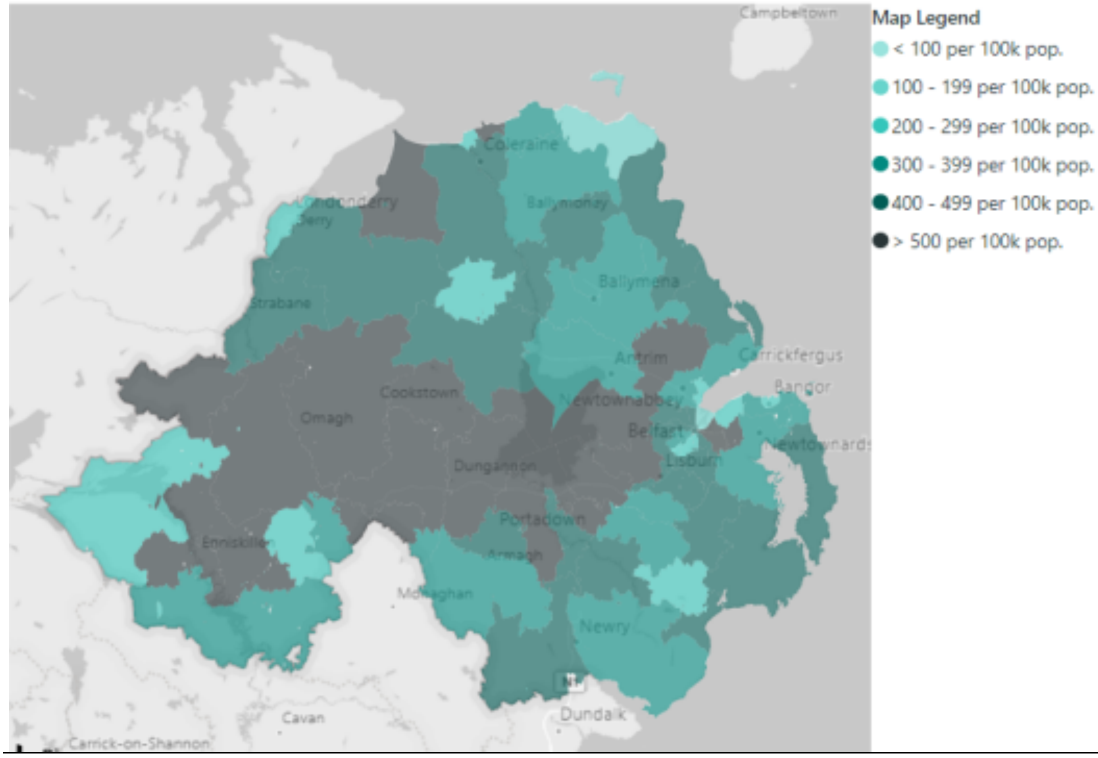
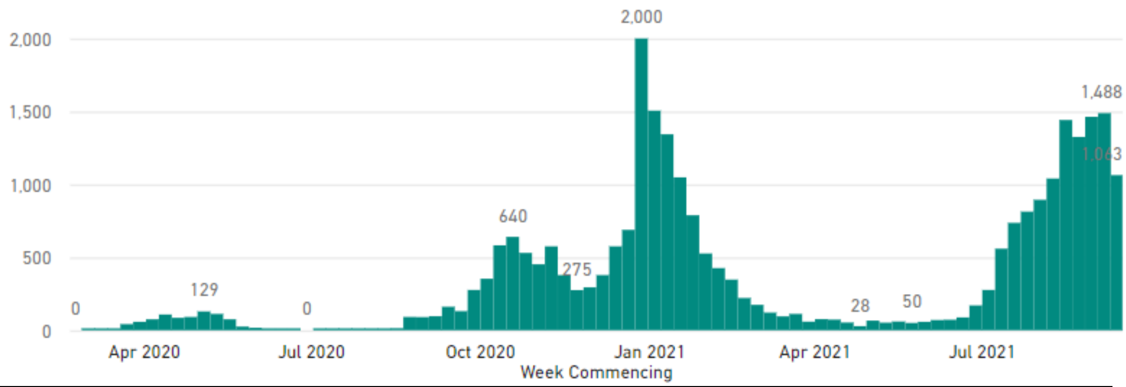


Figure 1.2 illustrates that numbers of positive cases had started to rise after a downward trend in the first half of the year.

Figure 1.2

Individuals Tested Positive each Week (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon)



The majority of positive cases in the Borough are in the younger age groups, with 23% of positive cases aged Under 20 years, 35% aged 20-39and 27% aged 40-59.[2]

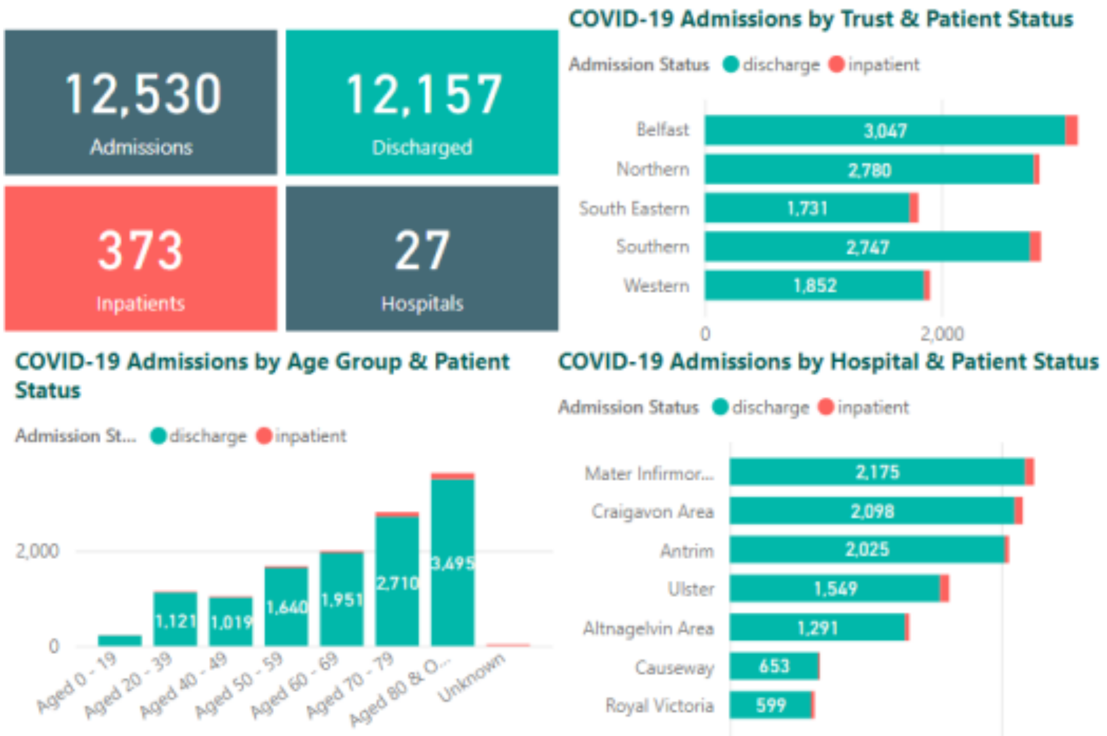
1.3 Covid-19 Hospital Admissions

Of those testing positive, older age groups were more likely to be admitted to hospital for treatment. At the time of reporting, the Southern Trust had the third highest admissions (see Figure 1.3).

[2] Midnight 23 September 2021

Figure 1.3

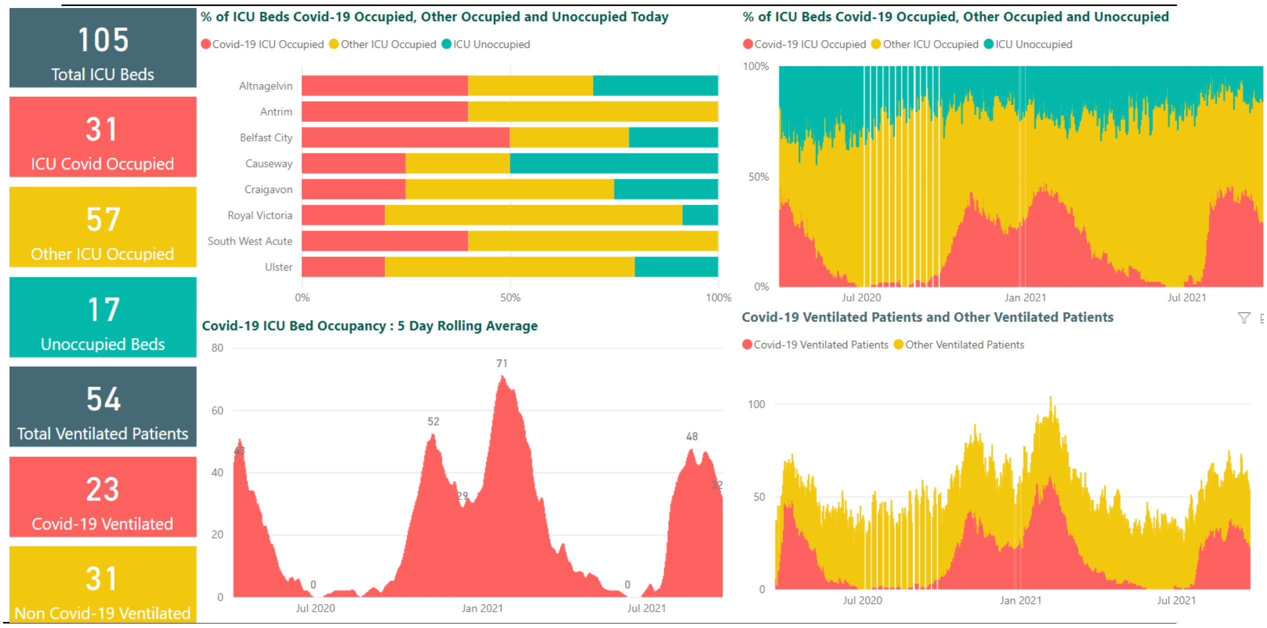
Confirmed NI COVID-19 Admissions by HSC Trust, Age Group and Patient Status



At reporting, there were 373 Confirmed Covid-19 inpatients, 93 of these were in hospitals within SHSCT (25%). This was just behind BHSCT (n105).

Figure 1.4 highlights ICU Bed Capacity throughout NI. As can be seen the extent of Covid-19 Bed Occupancy and Covid-19 ventilated patients is increasing. Craigavon Area Hospital currently has 5th highest proportion of ICU Covid Occupied Beds.

Figure 1.4
ICU Bed Capacity in Northern Ireland



Since 15 March 2020, there have been 924 Total Acute Respiratory Outbreaks confirmed at Care Homes in NI. As of 21 September 2021, there were 103 active Covid-19 outbreaks confirmed.

Table 1.3 provides a geographical breakdown and indicates that 22% of outbreaks (n23) were located in SHSCT area.

Table 1.3
Care Home Covid-19 Outbreaks by HSCT

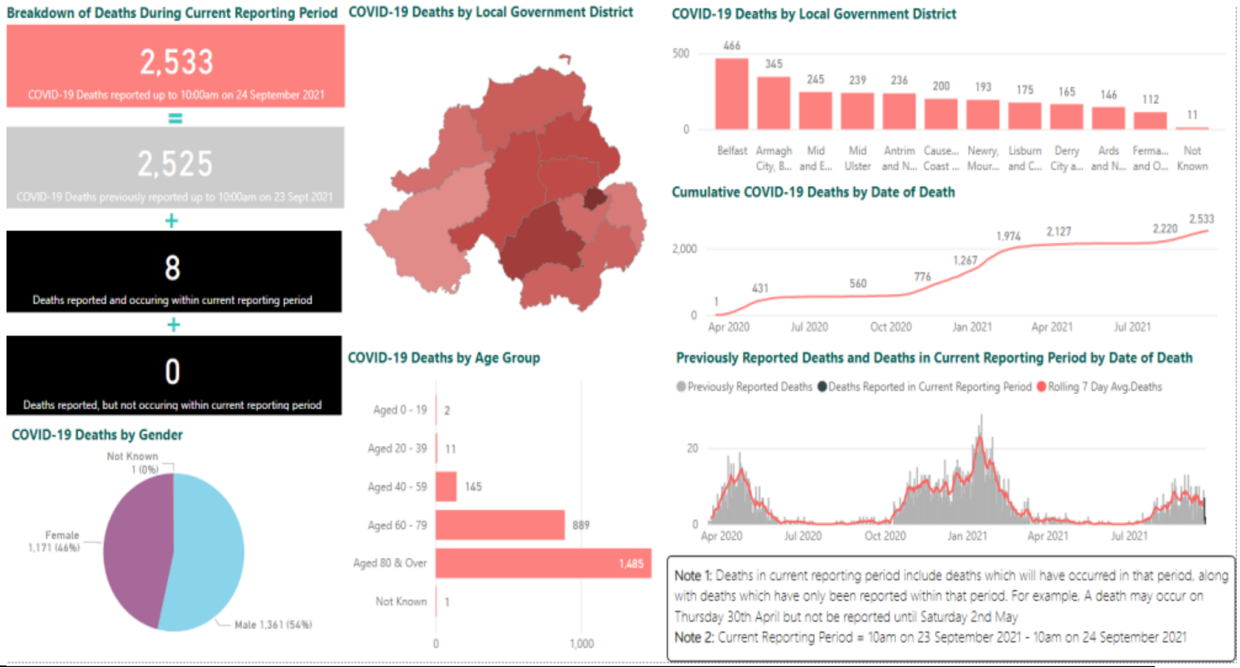
Geographic Area	Number of Outbreaks in Care Homes	Number of Care Homes
Belfast	18	92
Northern	22	132
South Eastern	19	111
Southern	23	78
Western	21	69
Total	**103**	**482**

1.4 Covid-19 Deaths

Between 19th March 2020 – 24 September 2021 there were 2,533 Covid-19 deaths registered in Northern Ireland.

Fourteen percent of these (n345), were located within the Borough.[3] The Borough has the highest population outside Belfast LGD and to date also has the second highest number of Covid-19 deaths in NI, after Belfast LGD (see Figure 1.5). The majority of Covid-19 deaths across NI occurred in hospital (n2,038), followed by residential care homes (n445).

Figure 1.5
Covid-19 Deaths by LGD



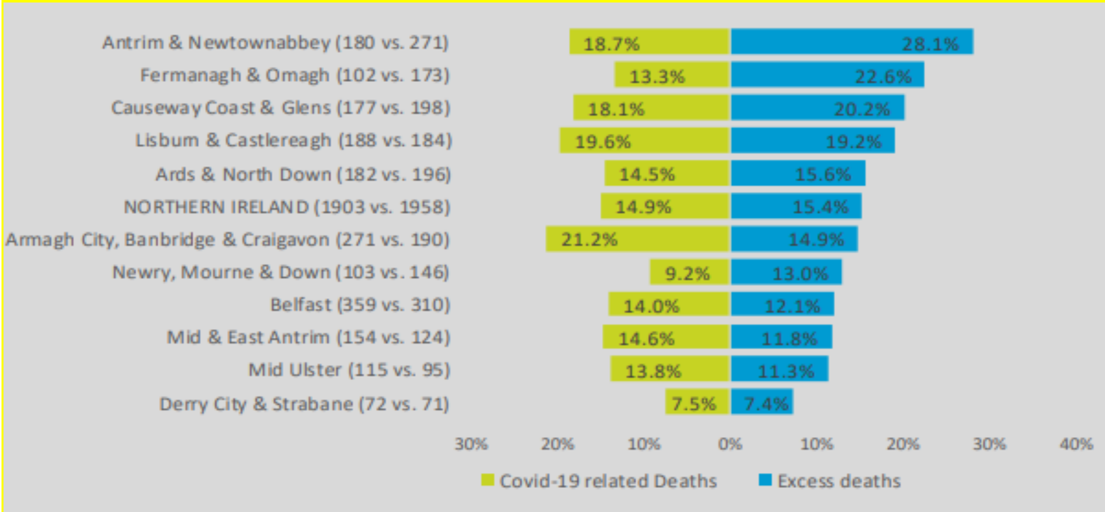
The number of Covid-19 deaths have started to increase over the last few months, with a higher proportion of males and older people impacted. Excess deaths are calculated on an occurrence basis and compared to the number of Covid-19 related deaths for each LGD. Figure 1.6 presents both figures as a proportion of the average number of deaths in the previous five years.[4]

There are six LGDs where the number (and therefore, proportions compared to the 5-year average) of Covid-19 related deaths is greater than excess deaths. The Borough had 271 Covid-19 related deaths (14% of Covid-19 deaths) compared to 190 excess deaths (9.7% of all excess deaths).

[3] NISRA Weekly Deaths Registered Dashboard to 24 September 2021
[4] Excess mortality & Covid-19 related deaths in Northern Ireland-Mar-Dec 2020

Figure 1.6

Excess deaths and Covid-19 related deaths as proportion of average deaths 2015-19, by Local Government District (1st March to 31st December 2020)



The current seven-day death rate per 100,000 people is more than twice as high in Northern Ireland, as in the wider UK and 10 times as high as in the Republic of Ireland. This could be partially explained, by a slightly lower vaccine uptake than in the rest of the UK. Officials estimate that around 5% of the population - roughly 90,000 people, are staunchly opposed to getting the vaccine. However, Northern Ireland also has higher levels of chronic disease and social deprivation than other parts of the UK and this could also influence the death rate.[5]

1.5 Covid-19 and Health Inequalities

A report by the Department of Health outlines the links between Covid-19 infections, hospital admissions and deaths in relation to deprivation, gender, age and geographical indicators in NI in Autumn 2020.[6] The following is highlighted with regards to inequalities in infection rates:[7]

- **The rate among females** (2,050 cases per 100,000 population) **was 8% higher than the rate for males** (1,893 cases per 100,000 population).
- **The infection rate in the 10% most deprived areas** (3,052 cases per 100,000 population) **was almost two-thirds higher than the rate in the 10% least deprived areas** (1,859 cases per 100,000 population) and more than one and a half times the NI average (1,972 cases per 100,000 population).
- The infection rate among those aged over 65 was four-fifths higher in the 10% most deprived areas (3,187 cases per 100,000 population) than in the 10% least deprived (1,773 cases per 100,000 population) and almost double the NI average (1,643 cases per 100,000 population). **While infection rates were highest in the 10% most deprived areas; the 10% least deprived areas had the second highest infection rate for over 65s**.

[5] BMJ, (2021). Covid-19: Why is Northern Ireland's death rate so high?
[6] Department of Health, (2020). Coronavirus Related Health Inequalities December 2020
[7] At 27 October 2020

- **The rate in urban areas was over a third higher than the rate seen in rural areas**, however the rate was highest in mixed urban/rural areas (3,677 cases per 100,000 population).

Inequalities in admissions to hospital:[8]

- The rate among males (211 admissions per 100,000 population) was 55% higher than the rate of their female counterparts (136 admissions per 100,000 population).
- **The admission rate for COVID-19** (confirmed cases) **in the 10% most deprived areas** (275 admissions per 100,000 population) **was more than double the rate in the 10% least deprived areas** (126 admissions per 100,000 population).
- **The admission rate for under 75s in the most deprived decile** (167 admissions per 100,000 population) **was approximately three times that in the least deprived decide** (55 admissions per 100,000 population). In comparison, the 75 and over rate for the most deprived decile was almost three-fifths higher than the rate in the least deprived decile.
- **While deprivation was found to be an important factor of the likelihood of admissions, age was found to have a greater impact**. The standardised rate for the population aged 75 and over (890 admissions per 100,000 population) was over 9 times that for the under 75 population (97 admissions per 100,000 population).

Inequalities in relation to deaths:[9]

- **The COVID-19 death rate in the 10% most deprived areas** (77 deaths per 100,000 population) **was almost two-fifths higher than the rate in the 10% least deprived areas** (56 deaths per 100,000 population) and almost one and a half times the NI average (53 deaths per 100,000 population).
- **The rate among males** (67 deaths per 100,000 population) **was one and a half times the rate for females** (44 deaths per 100,000 population).
- Similar to mixed urban/rural areas, **the death rate in urban areas** (63 deaths per 100,000 population) **was double the rate seen in rural areas** (32 deaths per 100,000 population).
- **The standardised COVID-19 death rate for the population aged 75 and over** (477 deaths per 100,000 population) **was 9 times that for all ages** (53 deaths per 100,000 population).
- **The over 75 COVID-19 death rate was highest in the 10% most deprived areas** (717 deaths per 100,000 population) **where it was three-tenths higher than the rate in the 10% least deprived areas** (549 deaths per 100,000 population) and one and a half times the NI average (477 deaths per 100,000 population).

[8] At 27 October 2020
[9] Position at 30 September 2020

2 Indirect Impacts on Access to Key Services

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines available data on use of primary and secondary care services over time. Information on school attendance is also presented. Information is taken from a variety of sources and shown at LGD level where possible.

2.2 Use of Primary Care Services

Information on the use of dental, ophthalmic, pharmacy and GP services are presented.

2.2.1 Dental Services

On 23rd March 2020, general dental practitioners were instructed to cease all aerosol generating procedures (AGPs) and routine dental treatments were postponed. From that date the provision of face-to-face treatment within general dental practice was restricted to urgent and emergency dental conditions. Five Trust-based Urgent Dental Care Centres (UDCCs) were opened at the beginning of April 2020 to provide care and treatment to non-COVID patients who require an AGP, and to confirmed or possible COVID positive patients who require any form of face-to-face treatment. The rebuilding of dental services commenced in phases from 8th June 2020. The impact of COVID-19 restrictions on dental practices in turn has had an impact on activity levels and the number of patients seen over the last financial year.

Table 2.1 highlights the year-on-year decrease in the number of adults and children treated across NI and in each LGD. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council had a lower proportion of adults treated per 1,000 registered than the NI average at 140. The number of children treated per 1,000 registered was equivalent to the NI average. However, this substantially lower than during 2019/20.[10]

Table 2.1
Number of Individual Patients Treated for a Filling, Crown or Extraction by Children/Adult, Local Government District and Financial Year

[10] Table 1.29 General Dental Statistics for Northern Ireland 2020/21

Local Government District	2019-20 Children Treated[1]	Adults Treated[1]	Children Treated per 1000 Registered[6]	Adults Treated per 1000 Registered[6]	2020-21[7] Children Treated[1]	Adults Treated[1]	Children Treated per 1000 Registered[6]	Adults Treated per 1000 Registered[6]
Antrim and Newtownabbey	5,725	26,904	235	409	2,029	10,742	86	157
Ards and North Down	5,312	30,215	203	386	1,887	12,634	74	155
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	10,044	40,749	245	384	3,515	15,530	88	140
Belfast	14,064	63,550	260	404	4,512	25,602	86	158
Causeway Coast and Glens	6,103	31,550	250	413	2,229	13,595	94	171
Derry City and Strabane	7,435	32,270	282	441	1,923	12,761	77	167
Fermanagh and Omagh	5,659	15,166	267	394	2,088	7,285	102	178
Lisburn and Castlereagh	5,512	24,774	217	368	1,989	10,289	80	147
Mid and East Antrim	4,963	26,264	225	396	1,812	11,099	85	161
Mid Ulster	7,738	26,263	264	402	2,657	11,497	93	168
Newry, Mourne and Down	8,545	33,666	243	382	3,356	15,091	99	163
Unknown	583	2,271			215	921		
Northern Ireland	81,683	353,642	246	398	28,212	147,046	88	159

2.2.2 Ophthalmic Services

On 23rd March 2020, ophthalmic practices in Northern Ireland were instructed to suspend all routine ophthalmic services, including domiciliary eye care services, with only urgent and essential eye care services provided. Urgent care remained available for patients who presented with an acute eye condition. Essential care was provided to patients who required a sight test or repair or replacement of glasses or contact lenses to enable them to remain visually functioning. Care was provided through remote consultation where possible with face-to-face consultations only when absolutely necessary. The rebuilding of ophthalmic services commenced in phases from the 29th June 2020.

Table 2.2 illustrates a decrease in each of the Ophthalmic activity measures between 2019/20 – 2020/21, although these were equal to, or slightly higher than the comparable NI averages.

Table 2.2
Number of Repairs & Replacements, Vouchers Paid and Sight Tests in the Borough by Financial Year[11]

ABC LGD	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	19/20 20/21 ABC % Change	NI % Change
Repairs and Replacements	3,684	3,746	3,580	2,784	-24%	-24%
Voucher Paid	21,919	22,121	22,121	16,158	-26%	-32%
Sight Tests	50,059	52,347	51,906	35,775	-29%	-33%

2.2.3 Pharmaceutical Services

Table 2.3 illustrates a decrease in the volume of items dispensed by pharmacies across Northern Ireland between 2019/20 – 2020/21. Although pharmacies in the Borough had a decrease in the number of items dispensed compared to the previous year, at 86,500 it was still above the NI average.

[11] Annual Ophthalmic Statistics, 2020/21

Table 2.3
Average total number of Items (000s) per pharmacy by LGD and Financial Year[12]

LGD	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Antrim & Newtownabbey	84.6	84.6	84.5	86.6	82.7
Ards & North Down	85.3	85.8	86.5	90.9	88.3
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	86.6	87.4	87.1	89.2	86.5
Belfast	67.7	67.7	67.7	69.2	67.7
Causeway Coast & Glens	76.4	76.5	77.7	80.2	77.5
Derry City & Strabane	90.0	90.9	91.7	94.6	93.3
Fermanagh & Omagh	58.0	58.3	58.7	60.8	58.8
Lisburn & Castlereagh	86.3	89.1	90.4	96.2	91.9
Mid & East Antrim	96.8	96.8	96.0	99.1	93.6
Mid Ulster	76.3	76.8	76.2	79.5	79.0
Newry, Mourne & Down	74.2	74.3	74.6	77.1	75.3
Northern Ireland Average	**77.4**	**77.8**	**78.0**	**80.6**	**78.3**

Dispensing activity in Northern Ireland was dominated by community pharmacies, which accounted for 99.3% of all items dispensed.

2.2.4 General Medical Services

To reduce the spread of Covid-19, in March 2020 UK general practices implemented remote consulting via telephone, video, or online consultation platforms.

One UK study of 21 practices in Great Britain found that consultation rates reduced in April to July 2020 compared to 2019, whilst GPs and nurses maintained a focus on older patients, shielding patients, and patients with poor mental health.[13] It was believed that telephone consulting was sufficient for many patient problems, video consulting was used more rarely and was less essential as lockdown eased. SMS-messaging increased more than three-fold. The shift to remote consulting was helped by low consultation volumes in March and April 2020. As consultation rates returned to normal by July 2020 and patients began to consult with more complex problems, GPs found remote management can be more time-consuming, clinically challenging, and less satisfying.

One British Medical Association survey of members published in December 2020 found over 70% of doctors working in NI say they have been unable to provide a full range of services to non-Covid patients over the last two weeks, with over 66% saying current levels of fatigue or exhaustion are higher than normal.[14] Eighty-nine percent of respondents said they felt uneasy at being unable to provide care to the standard they would like during the pandemic, with over 46% stating that this feeling of uneasiness has worsened. In May 2021 Dr Alan Stout, BMA Northern

[12] Annual Pharmaceutical Statistics 2020/21
[13] https://arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/research/projects/collecting-rapid-covid-19-intelligence-to-improve-primary-care-response/
[14] https://www.bma.org.uk/bma-media-centre/over-two-thirds-of-ni-doctors-say-they-have-been-unable-to-provide-a-full-range-of-services-to-non-covid-patients-as-we-approach-christmas-latest-bma-survey-finds

Ireland GP Committee chair, told the Stormont health committee of the pressures facing the sector:

"… the way general practice has been delivered in recent years has become unsustainable for us to meet the increased workload with a decreased workforce…GPs and their staff, like all healthcare workers, are totally exhausted but continue to be totally committed to serving our patients. That is why it is particularly difficult to listen to daily criticism. We have never worked so hard and yet still find ourselves in a position of needing to defend ourselves and reiterate the message that GP practices are not and never have been closed…Let me be clear, we are in a worse position now than we were pre-pandemic and it will continue to be very challenging. Demand is higher than it has ever been, the workforce is decreasing and the funding is so badly needed…Surgeries are operating at the moment at 150% capacity, they are operating at a capacity way beyond what they can deal with"[15]

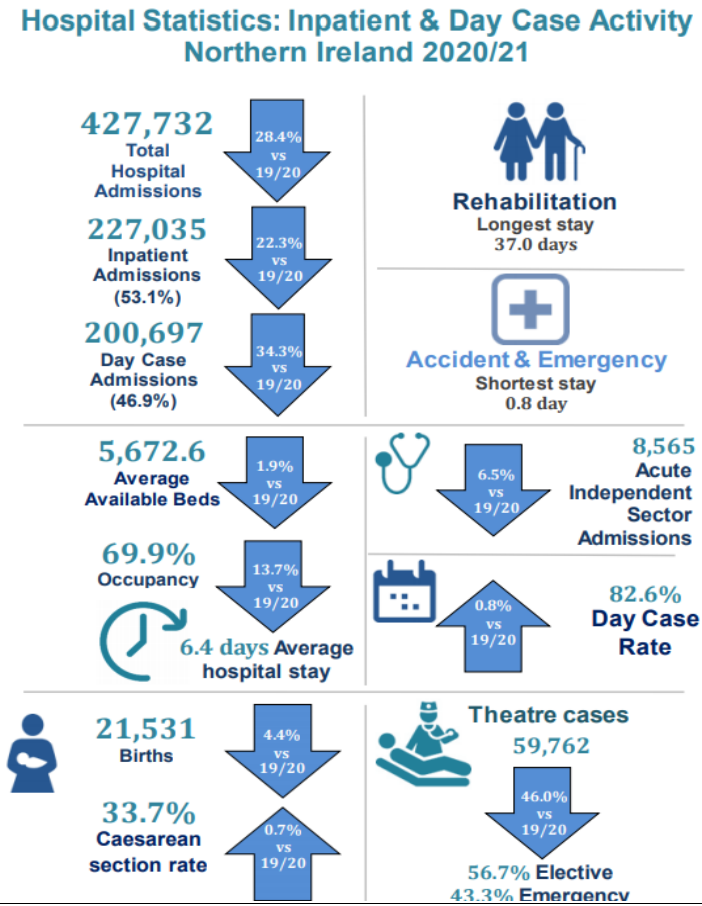
However, anecdotally some practices in the borough have been perceived to be unwilling to see patients face-to-face and this has caused frustration.

2.3 Access to Secondary Care

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges for the planning and delivery of health and social care (HSC) services in Northern Ireland. Within the Southern Trust, many services were suspended or reduced, including many elective procedures, to protect emergency and urgent services. These are now gradually being re-established. However, going forward Covid-19 will continue to impact on ongoing service delivery - to include requirements for social distancing and infection prevention control measures.[16] Figure 2.1 illustrates the impact of Covid-19 upon Inpatient and Day Case Activity across NI in 2020/21, compared to the previous year's figures.

Figure 2.1[17]

[15] https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/full-return-to-face-to-face-gp-services-in-ni-unlikely-after-pandemic-40448973.html
[16] SHSCT, Service Delivery Plan July and August 2021
[17] Hospital Statistics: Inpatient and Day Case Activity Statistics 2020/21

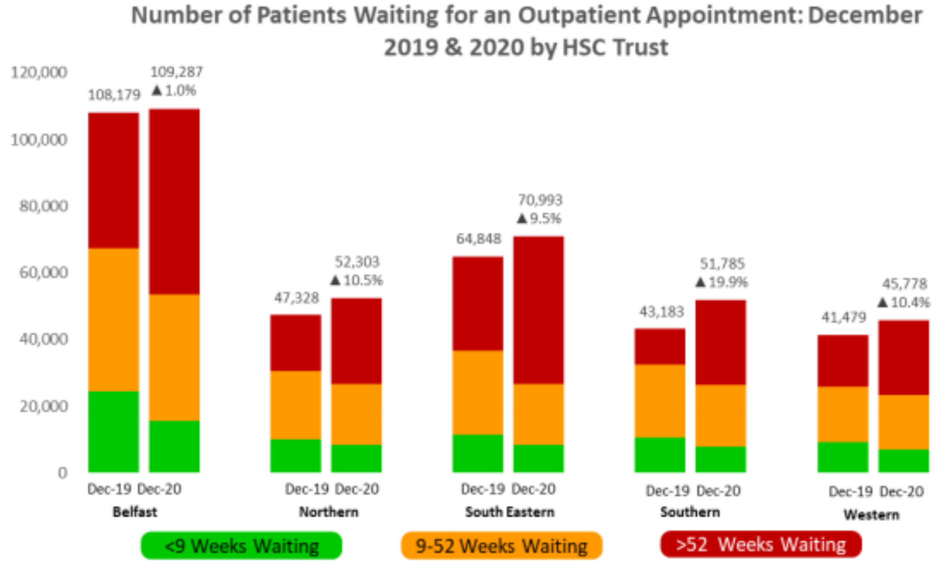


2.3.1 Outpatient and Inpatient Appointment Waiting Times[18]

Waiting lists for Outpatient appointments increased in all HSCTs between December 2019 and December 2020. The SHSCT had the highest year-on-year increase at almost 20% (see Figure 2.2). Across all HSCTs, the number of patients waiting less than nine weeks in December 2020 decreased from December 2019, whilst across the same period, the number waiting over 52 weeks increased considerably.

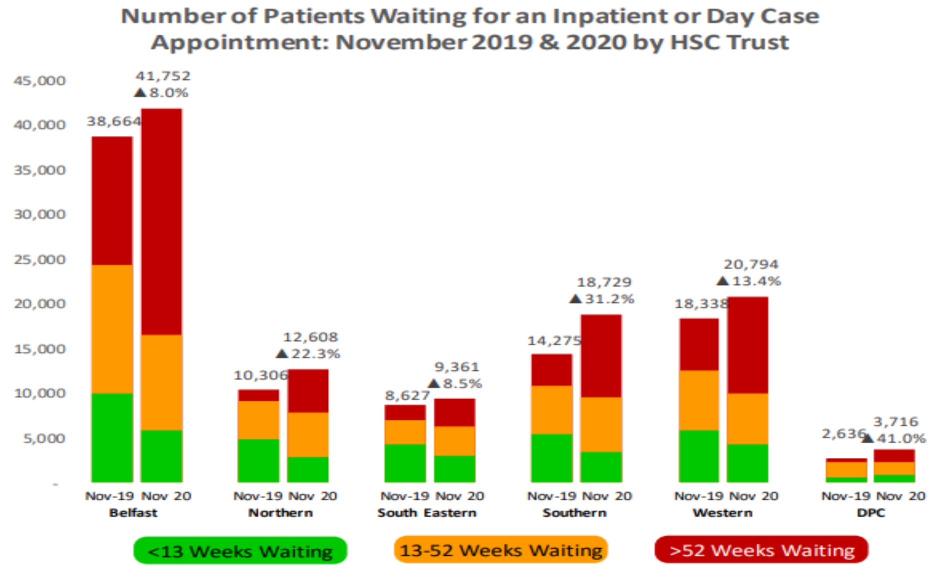
Figure 2.2

[18] Impact of Covid-19 on Hospital Waiting Times – 31 December 2020



Between November 2019 and November 2020, the SHSCT waiting list increased by 30.2% (n4,446). Across the same period there was an increase of 25.9% (n2,670) in the number waiting in the NHSCT, while the Belfast, South-Eastern and Western HSCT waiting lists each increased by less than 15% (see Figure 2.3). The number waiting over 13 weeks in the Southern HSC Trust increased by almost two-thirds (65.1%, n6,224).

Figure 2.3



2.3.2 Waiting Times for Cancer Treatment[19]

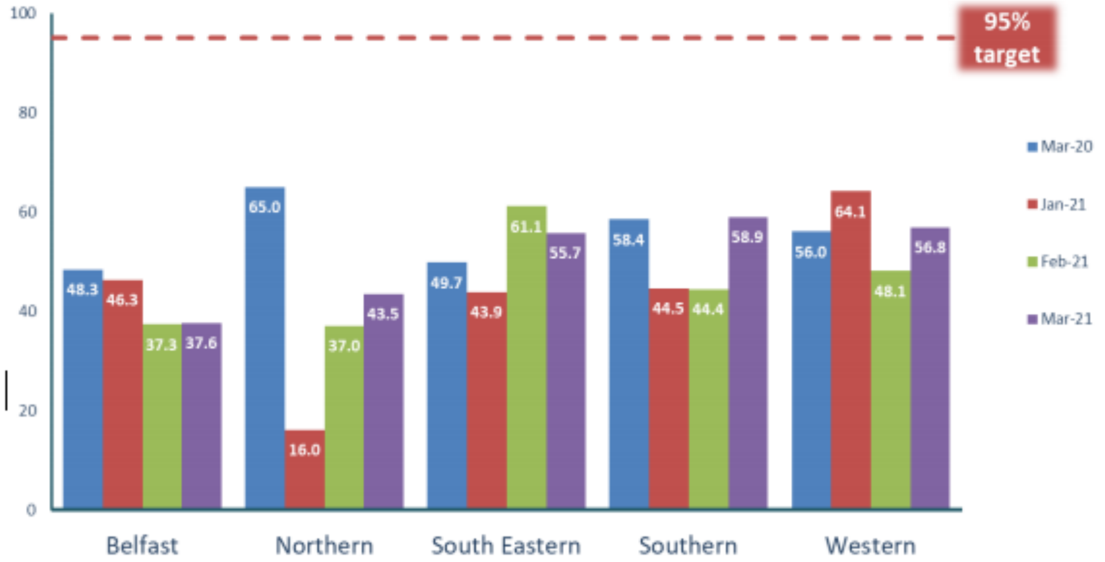
Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Cancer Waiting Times (January – March 2021) presents information on waiting times for cancer services at hospitals in Northern Ireland and reports on the performance of HSCTs against the draft 2020/21 Ministerial Target for cancer care services.

The percentage of patients within the SHSCT urgently referred with a suspected cancer who began treatment within 62 days increased from 44.5% in January 2021 to 58.9%

[19] Information Analysis Directorate, Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Cancer Waiting Times (January – March 2021)

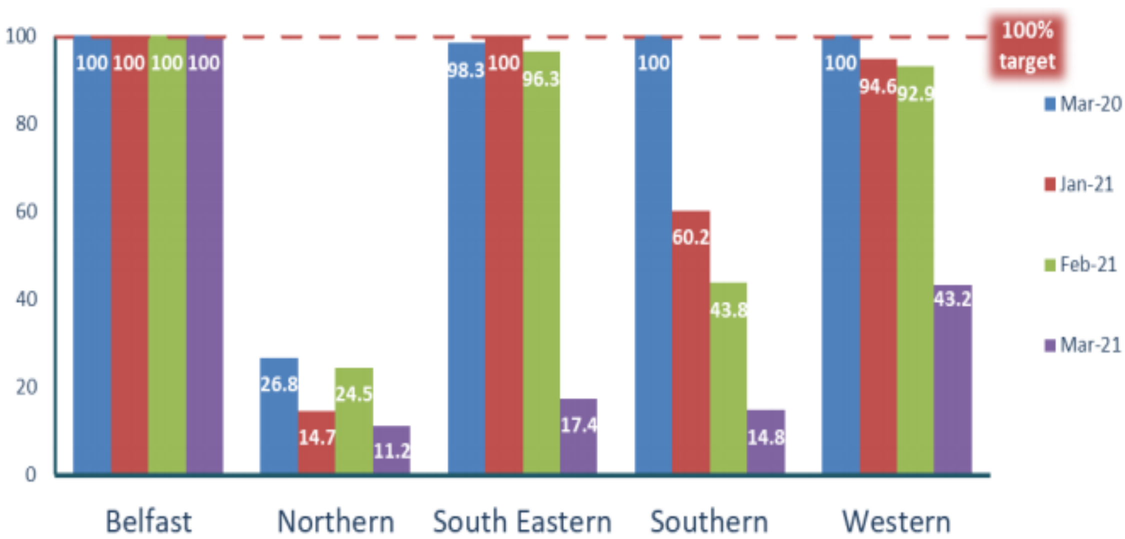
in March 2021. However, this was well below the 95% Ministerial target which has not been met in the last 3 years by any of the HSCTs (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4
Percentage of Patients Urgently Referred with a Suspected Cancer Beginning Treatment within 62 days by HSCT



Within the SHSCT, the Ministerial target was not met in January, February or March 2021 with 60.2%, 43.8% and 14.8% of patients being seen by a breast cancer specialist within 14 days of an urgent referral for suspect cancer respectively (see Figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5
Percentage of Patients seen by a Breast Cancer Speacialist within 14 days by HSCT



2.3.3 Waiting Times for Emergency Care[20]

Emergency Care attendances during January and February 2021 decreased when compared with the same month of the previous year, but saw a year-on-year increase in March 2021.

Table 2.4
Attendances at Emergency Care Departments (March 2020 – March 2021)

Department	New Attendances		Unplanned Review Attendances		Total Attendances	
	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2020	Mar 2021
Mater	2,449	1,311	76	44	2,525	1,355
Royal Victoria	5,713	6,357	196	81	5,909	6,438
RBHSC	2,318	2,452	206	224	2,524	2,676
Antrim Area	5,886	6,462	320	369	6,206	6,831
Causeway	2,658	3,105	160	132	2,818	3,237
Ulster	6,009	7,719	127	323	6,136	8,042
Craigavon Area	4,850	5,722	342	518	5,192	6,240
Daisy Hill	2,848	3,587	161	252	3,009	3,839
Altnagelvin Area	3,807	4,579	267	355	4,074	4,934
South West Acute	2,343	2,548	182	251	2,525	2,799
Type 1	**38,881**	**43,842**	**2,037**	**2,549**	**40,918**	**46,391**
Type 2	**3,468**	**3,363**	**243**	**198**	**3,711**	**3,561**
Type 3	**4,334**	**4,141**	**232**	**147**	**4,566**	**4,288**
Northern Ireland	**46,683**	**51,346**	**2,512**	**2,894**	**49,195**	**54,240**

Source: Regional Data Warehouse, Business Services Organisation

Craigavon Area Hospital reported one of the lowest performances against the 4-hour waiting target at 47.7% of attendances. Waiting times against the 12-hour wait target improved year-on-year.

[20] Emergency Care Waiting Time Statistics: January - March 2021

Table 2.5
Performance against 4 hour and 12 hour Waiting Components (March 2020 – March 2021)

Department	4 Hour Performance		12 Hour Performance		Total Attendances	
	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2020	Mar 2021	Mar 2020	Mar 2021
Mater	63.2%	57.0%	100	35	2,525	1,355
Royal Victoria	54.1%	29.4%	337	761	5,909	6,438
RBHSC	82.0%	84.9%	-	1	2,524	2,676
Antrim Area	67.0%	62.0%	275	583	6,206	6,831
Causeway	71.8%	65.9%	189	189	2,818	3,237
Ulster	60.3%	58.5%	495	747	6,136	8,042
Craigavon Area	52.1%	47.7%	506	465	5,192	6,240
Daisy Hill	70.3%	62.9%	185	165	3,009	3,839
Altnagelvin Area	52.5%	54.1%	319	356	4,074	4,934
South West Acute	59.8%	64.7%	106	187	2,525	2,799
Type 1	**61.6%**	**55.8%**	**2,512**	**3,489**	**40,918**	**46,391**
Type 2	**84.6%**	**85.1%**	**19**	**1**	**3,711**	**3,561**
Type 3	**99.6%**	**99.8%**	**-**	**-**	**4,566**	**4,288**
Northern Ireland	**66.9%**	**61.2%**	**2,531**	**3,490**	**49,195**	**54,240**

Source: Regional Data Warehouse, Business Services Organisation

2.4 Non-Take-Up of Care

The COVID-19 pandemic has both disrupted and changed the delivery of health and social care services and the health care needs of people with long-term conditions have been significantly impacted. Supporting Community Services and Care Home pressures has been challenging. However, due to the reduction in Covid-19 community transmission and related hospital admissions, some services commenced in May and June 2021 in line with that of pre-COVID levels.

Data indicates that mental health service referrals from GPs in Northern Ireland decreased by 29% in the 12 months from February 2020.[21] Across NI there were 1,455 fewer referrals in January 2021 than before the pandemic. Non-inpatient referrals decreased in each of the five HSCTs, but the SHSCT saw a decrease of more than 50%. The Department of Health stated that the fall in GP referrals was an indication of people not seeking help, rather than not needing help.

Current modelling is indicating up to 32% increase in referrals to secondary care over the next three years compared to pre-Covid-19 figures. Data compiled by the BBC's Shared Data Unit illustrate referrals fell significantly during the first Covid-19 lockdown, from 5,086 in February 2020 to 1,969 in April 2020. Numbers fluctuated throughout the pandemic, but in January 2021 there were 3,631 non-in-patient mental health referrals.

[21] Covid-19: Mental health referrals in NI down 29% during pandemic - BBC News

Table 2.6
Percentage Change in Non-inpatient Mental Health referrals in NI (February 2020 – January 2021)

Non-inpatient mental health referrals in NI

HSC Trust	Feb-20	Jan-21	% change
Belfast	1,141	955	-16%
South Eastern	1,349	1,066	-21%
Northern	814	596	-27%
Western	757	529	-30%
Southern	1,025	485	-53%
Northern Ireland total	5,086	3,631	-29%

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts BBC

Those individuals requiring support to include personal care and nursing services within their own homes are amongst the most clinically vulnerable in society. Figures obtained by the BBC in June 2020, state that almost 4,000 domiciliary care packages were suspended across NI during the coronavirus pandemic as families and clients took the decision to stop carers coming into their homes to limit the exposure of vulnerable people to the virus. Almost 1,000 clients in the Western Trust area suspended their packages, with 3,000 suspensions in the four other HSCT areas.[22]

Table 2.7 presents information on Domiciliary Care Services provision trends at HSCT level. Overall, there was an 8% decrease in the number of clients receiving domiciliary care, with the Southern Trust displaying the greatest decrease at -17%.[23]

[22] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-53099476
[23] Department of Health (2021). Domiciliary care services for adults in Northern Ireland 2020, Survey Week September 2020

Table 2.7

Number of Clients Receiving Domiciliary Care Services per 10,000 Population Aged 18 & Over, by Sector and HSCT (2018 - 2020)

HSC Trust	Statutory Sector				Independent Sector				All Sectors			
	2018	2019	2020	*% Change 2019 to 2020*	2018	2019	2020	*% Change 2019 to 2020*	2018	2019	2020	*% Change 2019 to 2020*
Belfast	68.6	67.8	54.7	***-19%***	108.2	105.9	116.5	***10%***	176.7	173.7	171.2	***-1%***
Northern	65.9	64.1	51.4	***-20%***	91.1	94.7	91.6	***-3%***	156.9	158.8	143.0	***-10%***
South Eastern	39.3	44.3	44.0	***-1%***	149.1	149.6	145.2	***-3%***	188.4	193.9	189.2	***-2%***
Southern	70.6	71.3	57.5	***-19%***	101.3	103.9	87.5	***-16%***	171.9	175.3	145.0	***-17%***
Western	54.9	54.0	43.2	***-20%***	140.4	131.6	121.5	***-8%***	195.3	185.6	164.7	***-11%***
Northern Ireland	**60.4**	**60.8**	**50.5**	***-17%***	**115.5**	**115.2**	**110.8**	***-4%***	**175.9**	**176.0**	**161.3**	***-8%***
Rates per 10,000-population aged 18 & over												

2.5 School Attendance

Research suggests that children from low-income households are at most risk of losing out on their education from COVID-19, which may worsen the already existing education gaps between children from areas with different levels of deprivation

OECD, 2021

An Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation[24] report highlights the importance of providing the necessary support for disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. UK wide attendance rates appear lower for more disadvantaged areas and for pupils in special schools. They suggest that when such pupils cannot attend school for COVID-related reasons, it is crucial that appropriate support in terms of access to necessary digital equipment and remote learning materials and replacements for free school meals.

After the Easter Break in April 2021 most pupils returned to their school settings. Following this, people with school-aged children in their household were asked how concerned or unconcerned they were about them being back in school. Forty percent said that they were concerned about the children or young people in their household being back in school, whilst just over half were unconcerned. Those reported concerns about being back in school stated they were most concerned about them spreading Covid-19 at school, about them catching Covid-19 and the impact on mental health and well-being due to the changes in schools because of Covid-19.[25]

Table 2.8 highlights the most recent figures for NI school attendance by school type.[26] The most recent published information indicates that primary schools had the highest attendance levels at 92.1% and special schools the lowest (83.6%), similar to UK-wide trends.

Table 2.8

NI Pupil Attendance by School Type w/c 21 June 2021

School Type	In school	Covid-19 Self Isolation & Learning from Home	Covid-19 Learning from Home - Social Distancing	Total Present	Total Absent
Primary	92.1%	0.7%	0.1%	**92.9%**	**7.1%**
Non Grammar	78.6%	1.0%	0.3%	**79.8%**	**20.2%**
Grammar	85.7%	1.0%	1.5%	**88.2%**	**11.8%**
Special	83.6%	1.8%	0.4%	**85.8%**	**14.2%**
Total	87.0%	0.9%	0.4%	**88.3%**	**11.7%**

Source: School Information Management System

[24] Sibieta, (2020). School attendance rates across the UK since full reopening
[25] NISRA, (July 2021). Covid-19 Opinion Survey
[26] DE, (2021). Attendance of workforce and pupils in Northern Ireland w/c 21 June 2021

3 Impact on the NI Economy and Labour Market

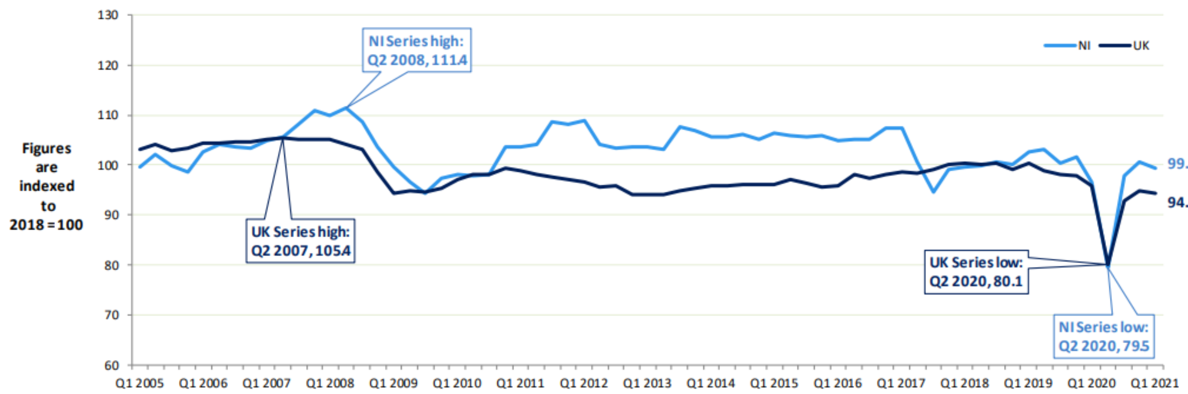
3.1 Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and subsequent measures taken to reduce the transmission of the virus impacted on the economy in 2020 and 2021. Throughout Quarter 1 2021, businesses in Northern Ireland were subject to restrictions which impacted on their ability to operate. This section highlights key indicators relating to the NI and economy and labour market – statistics for the Borough are presented where available.

3.2 NI Economy

Output in the NI Production sector decreased in real terms by 1.1% over the first quarter of 2021. The UK Production sector reported a decrease of 0.4% over the same period. There was a year-on-year increase in NI (2.8%) and a comparable decrease in the UK (1.6%).[27]

Figure 3.1
Index of Production: NI and UK, Q1 2005 – Q1 2021

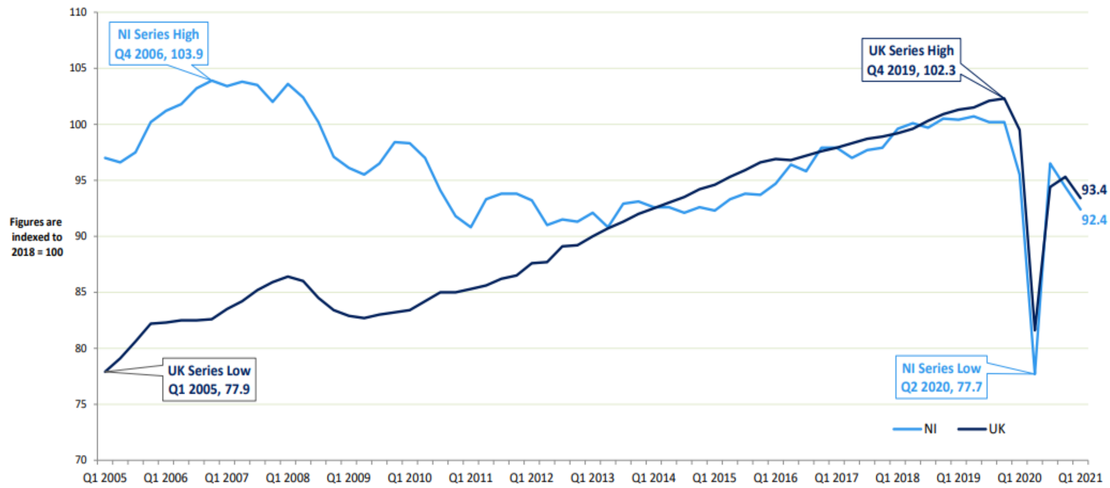


The annual increase in NI production output of 2.8% was driven by increases in three of the four main sectors: Manufacturing (2.0%); Water supply, sewerage and waste management (Inc. recycling) (0.8%) and Mining and quarrying (52.1%) and was partially offset by a decrease in Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (0.8%).

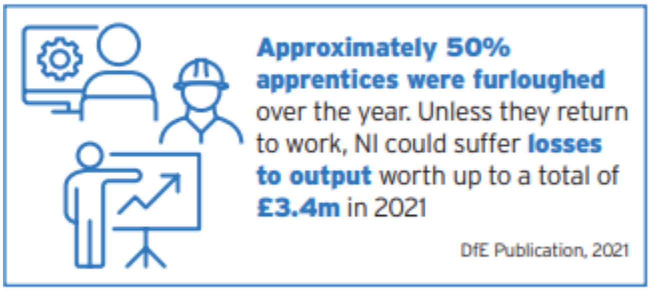
The seasonally adjusted estimate for the NI Index of Services saw a quarterly decrease of 2.1% in Quarter 1 2021 and a decrease of 3.3% over the year.[28] When the most recent four quarters are compared to the previous four quarters the NI services sector decreased by 9.0% while the UK services sector decreased by 10.1%. The annual decrease to Quarter 1 2021 was the sixth successive quarter showing an annual decrease in the NI series. This followed seven successive quarters of annual growth in the NI index between Quarter 1 2018 and Quarter 3 2019.

[27] Northern Ireland Quarterly Index of Production, 17 June 2021
[28] Northern Ireland Quarterly Index of Services Quarter 1 (January – March) 2021

Figure 3.2
Index of Services: NI and UK, Q1 2005 – Q1 2021



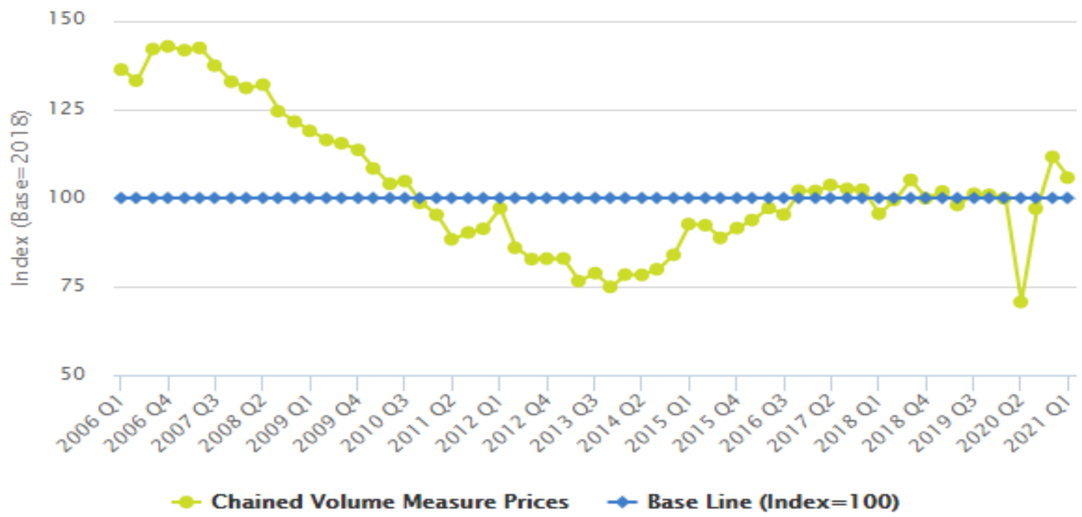
The annual decrease in NI services output was caused by decreases in three of the four subsectors, with a decrease of 23.5% in the Other services sector; a decrease of 4.7% in the Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, accommodation and food service sector; and a decrease of 2.3% in the Transport, storage, information and communications sector. In contrast an annual increase of 11.4% was seen in the Business services and finance sector.



The total volume of construction output in the first quarter of 2021 decreased by 5.3% over the quarter, increased by 5.8% over the year but decreased by 3.8% on a rolling four quarter basis. Construction Output has seen five consecutive quarters of decline within the annualised growth rate (see Figure 3.3).[29]

[29] NI Construction Bulletin Quarter 1 2021 (January – March)

Figure 3.3
Volume of Construction Output: NI Q1 2006 – Q1 2021



In Quarter 1 2021, both the Housing (-9.6%) and Other Work (-2.9%) sub-sectors showed a decrease when compared with the previous quarter, this was partially offset by a 1.7% increase in Infrastructure over the quarter.

3.3 Impact on NI Business Activity

In response to the increasing coronavirus threat, measures to restrict nonessential travel came into effect in the UK in mid-March 2020 with a full lockdown enforced at the end of March. These regulations had an immediate impact on businesses, forcing some to close immediately. In early April, during the initial lockdown, one in three businesses in Northern Ireland were temporarily closed. The two sectors most impacted, in terms of inability to operate, were Arts, Entertainment & Recreation and the Accommodation and Food Service sector.[30] Approximately 80% of firms in each of these sectors were temporarily closed (just over 7,100 firms). Although most sectors had largely re-opened by end of June 2020, the Accommodation and Food and Arts, Entertainment & Recreation sectors were exceptions and still face restrictions in August 2021.

More than half (57%) of all NI firms that were able to continue trading, during lockdown, still experienced an immediate decrease in turnover. Of this group, 41% experienced a reduction in turnover of more than 20% with around half of those experiencing a drop of 50% or more. The impact on turnover decreased in the weeks that followed, but by the end of June 2020, half of businesses were still experiencing lower than normal turnover.

Arts, Entertainment & Recreation and Accommodation & Food sectors remained most vulnerable to the effects of Covid. Business Administration & Support, Transport & Storage and Construction were also in a highly vulnerable position relative to other sectors. The sectors proving most resilient financially were those least impacted in

[30] Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, The Impact of Covid-19 on Northern Ireland Business Activity, September 2020.

terms of business activity interruptions, which included the public sector, ICT and Professional Services.

Sub-regionally Causeway Coast and Glens and Newry, Mourne and Down had higher than average employee concentrations in three of the five most vulnerable sectors. The Borough has higher concentrations of employees in two vulnerable industries - Transport & Storage and Construction sectors.

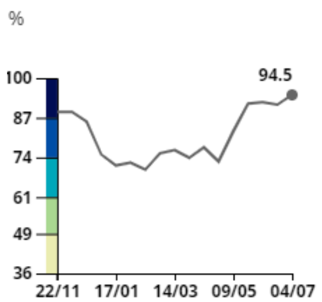
Table 3.1
Location Quotient Analysis by Local Government District of the Most Vulnerable Sectors, June 2020

	Accommodation & Food	Arts & Entertainment	Administration services	Transportation & Storage	Construction
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0.8	0.5	1.4	2.4	0.9
Ards & North Down	1.4	2.1	0.6	0.6	1.0
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.5	1.1
Belfast	1.0	0.9	1.7	0.7	0.4
Causeway Coast & Glens	1.5	1.1	0.6	0.8	1.4
Derry & Strabane	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.7	1.0
Fermanagh & Omagh	1.0	0.9	0.3	0.9	1.3
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0.8	1.2	0.9	0.6	1.2
Mid & East Antrim	1.3	0.9	0.8	1.4	1.0
Mid Ulster	0.7	0.7	0.3	0.9	1.8
Newry, Mourne & Down	1.1	1.2	0.5	0.8	1.4

Source: UUEPC estimates based on Workforce Jobs

Figures 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6 highlight the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on NI businesses that have a single business site only. There was an increase in the percentage of single-site businesses currently trading at July 2021. In line with easing restrictions, there were falls in the reported proportion of single-site businesses' workforce on furlough from late April to late June 2021. Around 28% of businesses reported a loss of income at July 2021.[31]

Figure 3.4
NI Single Site Businesses Currently Trading (2 Nov 2021 – 11 July 2021)



31 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/work

Figure 3.5

NI Single Site Businesses on Partial or Furlough Leave (2 Nov 2021 – 11 July 2021)

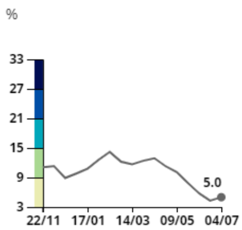
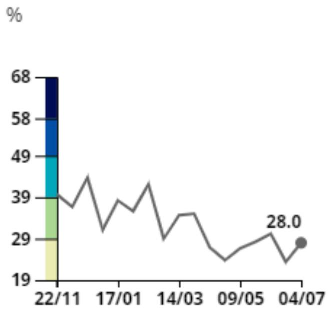


Figure 3.6

NI Single Site Businesses Decrease in Turnover (2 Nov 2021 – 11 July 2021)



There have been **240 confirmed redundancies in the Borough between March 2020 – June 2021, 35% of the NI total.**[32] From the start of the year, the majority of redundancies in NI have been in the Manufacturing and Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles sectors. Lesser numbers have been in Financial and insurance institutions.

3.4 NI Labour Force Summary - July 2021

The latest labour market data shows improvements in the number of employees, although the number of proposed redundancies has continued to increase through May, June and the first half of July.[33]

- The HMRC payroll data indicates that, the number of employees is above pre-COVID levels for the first time (0.7% above the peak in February 2020) and the highest on record.
- Provisional HMRC data show the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme supported 59,000 jobs at the end of May (equivalent to a take-up rate of 8%). This was a decrease from 93,000 supported jobs at the end of April and equivalent to approximately half the number of jobs supported in January.
- Households reported, via the Labour Force Survey, some improvements in the labour market over the quarter to March-May 2021 with an increase in the

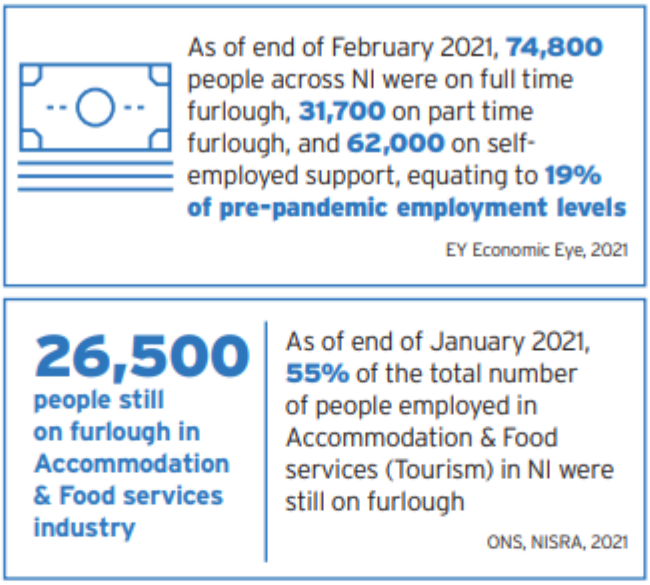
[32] Please note some monthly data has been suppressed due to returns from less than 3 businesses

[33] Northern Ireland Monthly Labour Force Summary (July 2021)

employment rate, no change in the unemployment rate, and a decrease in the economic inactivity rate. Compared to the pre-pandemic rates (December – February 2020) the employment rate is 2.2 percentage points (p.ps) below, while the unemployment rate and economic inactivity rates are 1.1pps and 1.4pps higher respectively.

- The recent increase in redundancy proposals in May and June has continued into July with 150 redundancies proposed in May, 490 proposed in June, and a further 850 in the first two weeks of July. These levels of proposed redundancies remain below the peak months one year ago (June: 2,470 and July: 1,940).

3.5 Boroughwide Job Retention Scheme and Self Employment Support Scheme Uptake

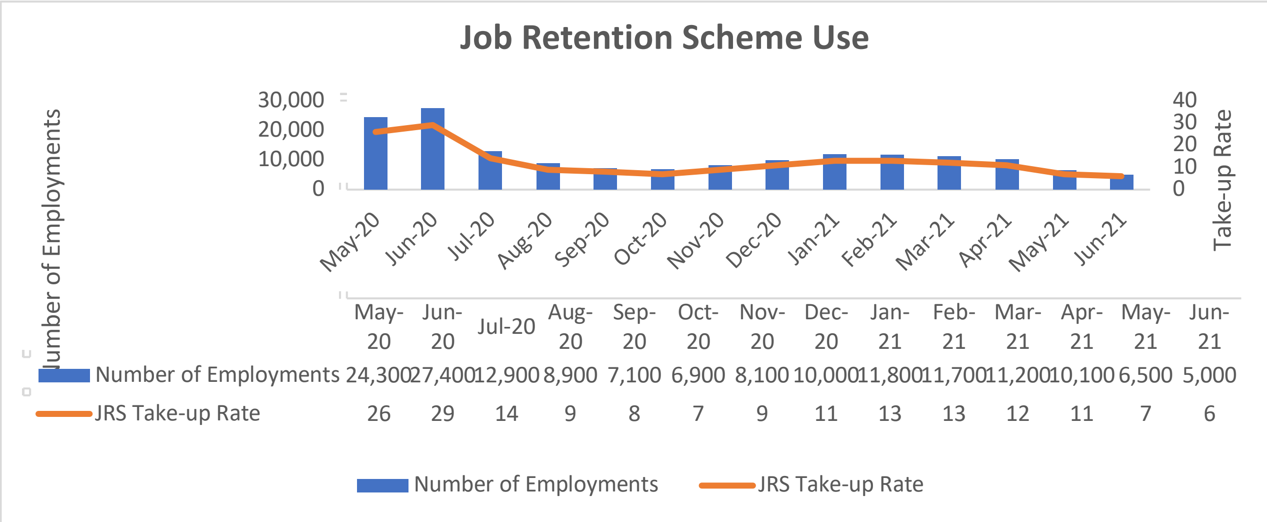


Employments furloughed peaked in the borough in June 2020 with three in ten eligible employments furloughed (28,800). At the end of July 2020, the number of employments furloughed began to decrease. This coincided with increased employer contributions. For example, employers to pay National Insurance and pension contributions for the hours the employee was on furlough and from August 2020 to contribute 10% of wages.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) has been extended until 30 September 2021. From 1 July 2021, the level of grant will be reduced to 60% and employer contributions will increase. To be eligible for the grant employers must continue to pay furloughed employees 80% of their wages, up to a cap of £2,500 per month for the time they spend on furlough. Take-up for the CJRS in the Borough was at its lowest by the end of June 2021 (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme usage in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough[34]



Source: Table 12, Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Statistics, HM Revenue and Customs

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme provided grants to the self-employed. The first scheme saw 9,300 claims made in the borough, 82% of those eligible. To date, the claims made in the borough totalled £86.6m – behind Newry, Mourne and Down at £98.2m. **Take-up rate has started to decline and is lower than the NI and UK average** (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme claims made in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough[35]

Scheme	Claims	ABC Take-up Rate	NI Take-up Rate	UK Take-Up Rate
1	9,300	82%	81%	77%
2	8,400	78%	73%	69%
3	7,200	64%	65%	65%
4	6,100	54%	56%	58%

Source: Table 5a, Self-Employment Income Support Scheme Statistics, HM Revenue and Customs.

3.6 Boroughwide Claimant Count

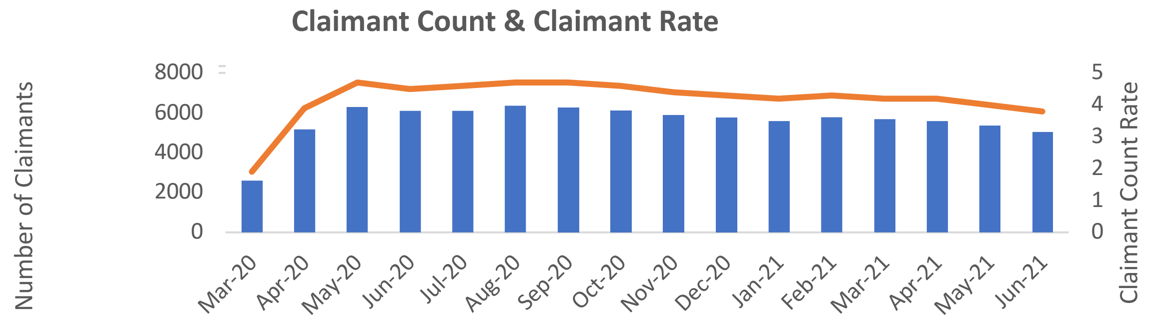
The experimental Claimant Count is a measure of unemployment. It includes Jobseeker's Allowance claimants and those Universal Credit claimants who were claiming principally for the reason of being unemployed. At March 2020 the claimant count rate (claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16 to 64) for the Borough was 1.9%. Since then, the number of claimants has doubled, peaking in August 2020 at 6,250 claimants. **The number of claimants and claimant count rate has started to decline and in June 2021 is 5,030 and 3.8% respectively.** This is comparative to the NI average of 4.3%.

[34] May 2020 to 30 June 2021

[35] Up to 6 June 2021.

Figure 3.8

Claimant Count in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough[36]



	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
Claimant Count	2610	5175	6285	6090	6095	6350	6270	6105	5880	5750	5570	5775	5670	5595	5355	5030
Rate	1.9	3.9	4.7	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.2	4	3.8

Claimant Count Rate

Source: Table 3a Claimant Count, NISRA via NOMIS. Please note claimant figures are rounded to the nearest five.

Sixty-one percent of claimants in the borough in June 2021 were male. Male claimants increased 98% from March 2020 to June 2021, compared to an 85% increase for females. In terms of age, more than half of claimants in the borough in June 2021 were 25 to 49 years old. This age group also had the largest percentage increase in number of claimants from March 2020 to June 2021 (see Table 3.3).

[36] March 2020 to 30 June 2021

Table 3.3

Claimant Count in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough by Gender & Age[37]

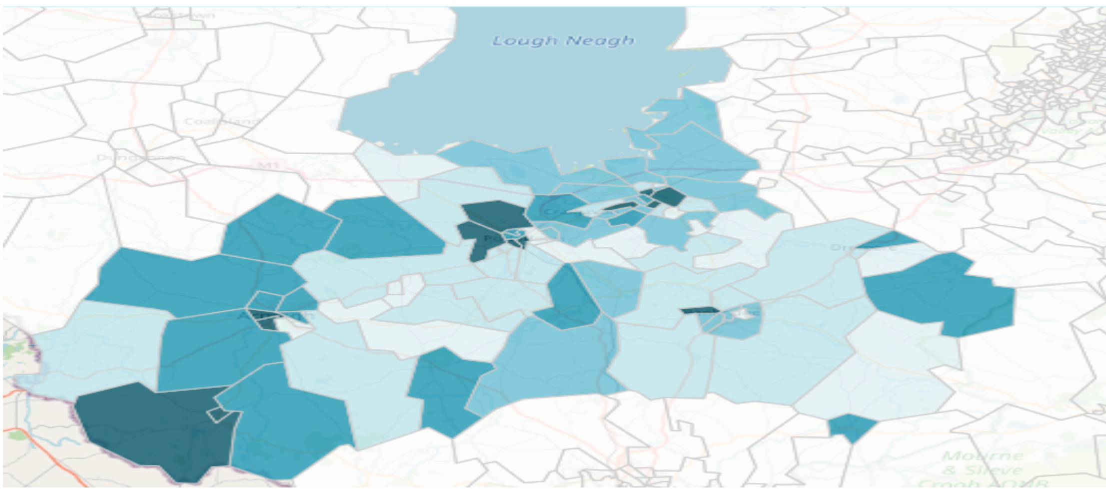
Date	All Claimants	Male	Female	Aged 16-24	Aged 25-49	Aged 50+
March 2020	2,610	1,550	1,060	505	1,350	725
April 2020	5,175	3,210	1,965	1,010	2,960	1,170
May 2020	6,285	4,000	2,285	1,310	3,525	1,405
June 2020	6,090	3,830	2,260	1,350	3,330	1,370
July 2020	6,095	3,810	2,285	1,400	3,295	1,380
August 2020	6,250	3,895	2,355	1,385	3,370	1,440
September 2020	6,130	3,765	2,365	1,345	3,320	1,415
October 2020	5,980	3,660	2,320	1,310	3,260	1,365
November 2020	5,880	3,590	2,290	1,265	3,175	1,400
December 2020	5,750	3,550	2,200	1,225	3,095	1,385
January 2021	5,525	3,425	2,095	1,160	2,975	1,340
February 2021	5,775	3,570	2,200	1,190	3,125	1,410
March 2021	5,670	3,525	2,145	1,150	3,095	1,390
April 2021	5,595	3,430	2,165	1,085	3,080	1,370
May 2021	5,355	3,275	2,080	1,015	2,950	1,320
June 2021	**5,030**	**3,075**	**1, 960**	**940**	**2,745**	**1,265**
% June 21	-	*61%*	*39%*	*19%*	*55%*	*25%*
% Change Mar 20-June 21	*93%*	*98%*	*85%*	*86%*	*103%*	*74%*

Source: Claimant Count, NISRA via NOMIS. Claimant figures are rounded to the nearest five and therefore may not sum totals.

The highest number of claimants were in the Annagh 2, Ballybay, Ballyoran, Church, Parklake, Taghnevan, Tavanagh, Woodville 1, Derrynoose, Downs and Callanbridge SOAs.

Figure 3.9

Claimant Count Rate for SOAs in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough[38]



Source: Claimant Count, Unemployed Monthly SOA (June 2021), NISRA via NOMIS.

[37] March 2020 to June 2021

[38] June 2021

4 Impact on Mobility

4.1 Introduction

The data in this chapter is sourced from Covid-19 Community Mobility Reports which show movement trends across different categories of places. These insights are calculated by Google based on data from users who have opted into share Location History for their Google Account, so that the data represents a sample of users. As with all samples, this may or may not represent the exact behaviour of a wider population. Figures shown relate to mobility for that date compared with a baseline day and are reported as a positive or negative percentage. A baseline day represents a normal value for that day of the week. The baseline day is the median value from the 5-week period January 3 – February 6, 2020.

4.2 NI Activity Trends[39]

From mid to late March 2020 when the initial restrictions came into place in NI there were notable decreases across all activities with the exception of mobility for places of residence (time spent at home). Since the start of the year, activity around parks had generally been below normal levels. However, from late February 2021 there have been some large increases for visits to parks, most likely due to the better weather and longer daylight hours. On Friday 30th July 2021, park visits were 33% above the baseline level. It is important to note that visits to parks are heavily influenced by the weather and experience more dramatic changes.

While there was a sizeable increase in supermarket and pharmacy activity before school closures were announced on the 20th March 2020, activity then fell and as of the 12th April 2020, activity was 63% below baseline levels. Activity has since gradually increased to normal levels since early June 2020. However, there has been a recent increase in activity and as of the 30th July 2021 activity was 18% above normal levels.

Activity for retail and recreation, workplace and public transport had generally shown similar trends since the initial lockdown in March 2020. While activity for these categories fell steadily for a few weeks when UK guidance on working from home was announced on the 16th March 2020, activity then gradually increased (while generally remaining below normal levels) as restrictions eased.

The Eat Out To Help Out scheme which applied to restaurants on Mondays to Wednesdays during August 2020 had led to increases in activity above baseline levels on days when the scheme was in place however since the scheme ended, activity levels have remained lower. The introduction of stricter restrictions on the 26th December 2020 led to decreased activity in most mobility categories. As of the 30th July 2021, activity for public transport and workplace both stood at 18% and 33% below normal levels respectively. Activity for retail and recreation increased in the last two months and since the reopening of indoor hospitality on the 24th May 2021 there has been a

[39] Covid-19 Mobility Report 31 July 2021

further notable increase. As of 30th July, activity levels for retail and recreation stood at 3% above the normal level.

Table 4.1
Mobility Changes for NI Council Average and UK for 30th July, 2021 vs Baseline

	NI Council average	UK
Retail & Recreation	3%	-11%
Public Transport	-18%	-33%
Parks	33%	49%
Workplace	-33%	-40%
Supermarket & Pharmacy	18%	4%
Residential	7%	9%

4.3 Activity Trends in the Borough

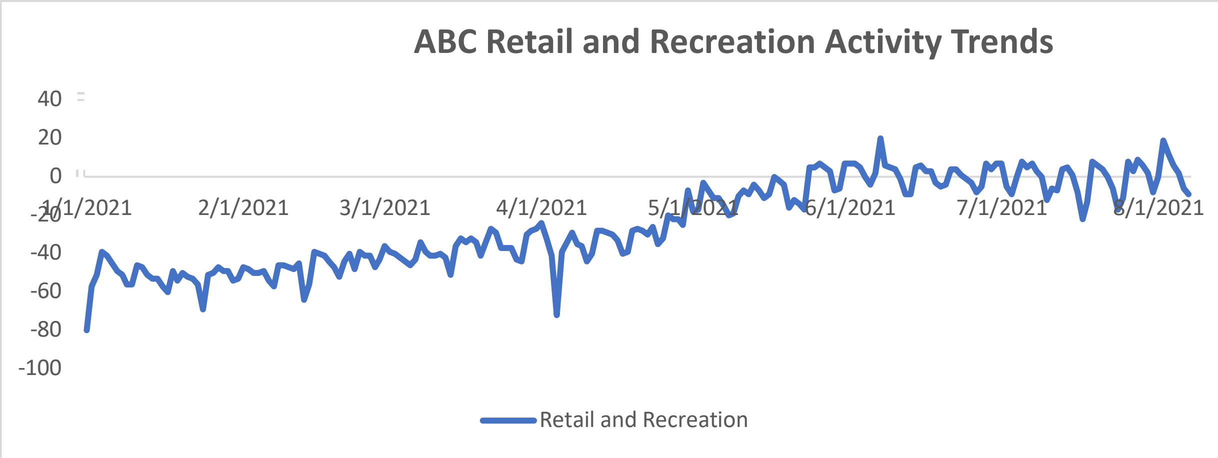
Table 4.2 indicates that activity trends for the Borough are similar to the NI Council average. However, the extent of time at Supermarket and Pharmacy is comparatively lower (-5%) than the Council average, whilst time spent at Parks is higher (+7%). Use of public transport is low, with insufficient numbers to report.

Table 4.2
Mobility Changes for Borough and UK for 30th July, 2021 vs Baseline

Retail and Recreation	Supermarket and Pharmacy	Parks	Public Transport	Workplaces	Residential
2%	13%	40%	-	-34%	6%

Figure 4.1 illustrates some substantial peaks and troughs in Retail and Recreation activity over time. However, activity is now closer to baseline than at the start of 2021. Retail and Recreation activity on Saturday 7th August 2021 was -9%.

Figure 4.1
Mobility Changes in Retail and Recreation in Borough



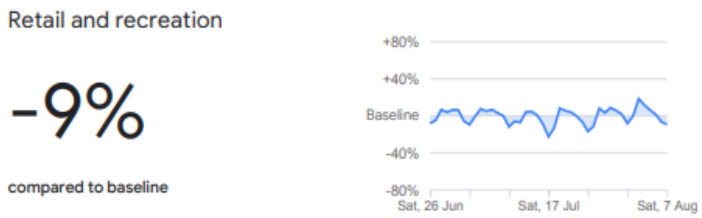
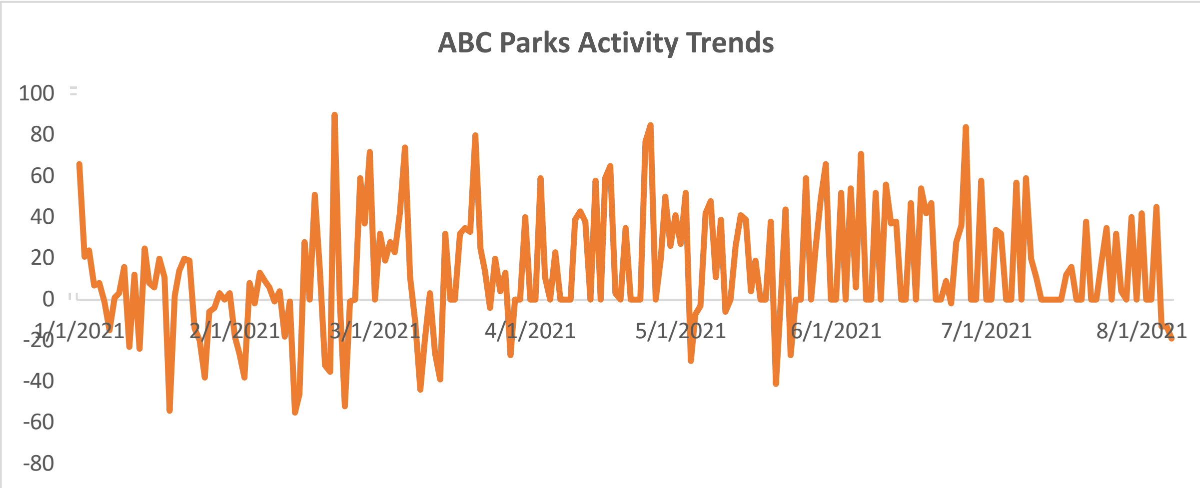


Figure 4.2 indicates a quicker recovery in Supermarket and Pharmacy activity in comparison to Retail and Recreation, with activity reaching baseline around March 2021. Activity on Saturday 7th August 2021 was +7%.

Figure 4.2
Mobility Changes in Supermarket and Pharmacy in Borough

Figure 4.3 demonstrates higher than normal Parks activity, similar to the rest of NI and the UK. This activity is highly weather dependant and activity on Saturday 7th August 2021 was -19%. However, the Borough was subject to heavy rainfall during this time.

Figure 4.3
Mobility Changes in Parks in Borough



*Data does not meet quality thresholds during the period

Figure 4.4 is reflective of the work from home message, with time spent in workplaces below baseline levels. Related activity on Saturday 7th August 2021 was -9%.

Visits and time spent at places like public transport hubs such as bus and train stations had been gradually falling across all LGDs since mid-September 2020. However, activity then increased slightly in most council areas in the week leading up to Christmas. As of 30th July 2021, public transport across all LGDs was below usual levels with the exception of Causeway Coast and Glens where activity was 21% above normal levels, most likely due to the summer holidays as this is a popular tourist area. Activity for Public Transport does not meet quality thresholds due to small numbers.

Figure 4.4
Mobility Changes in Workplaces in Borough

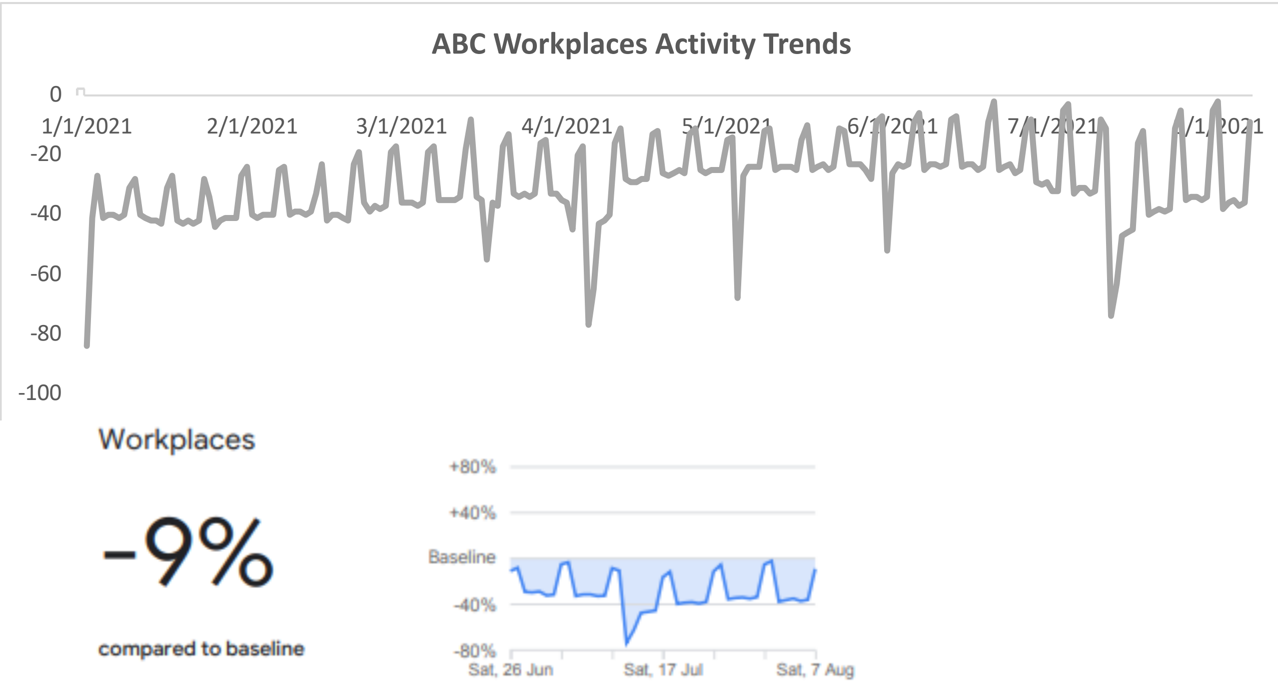
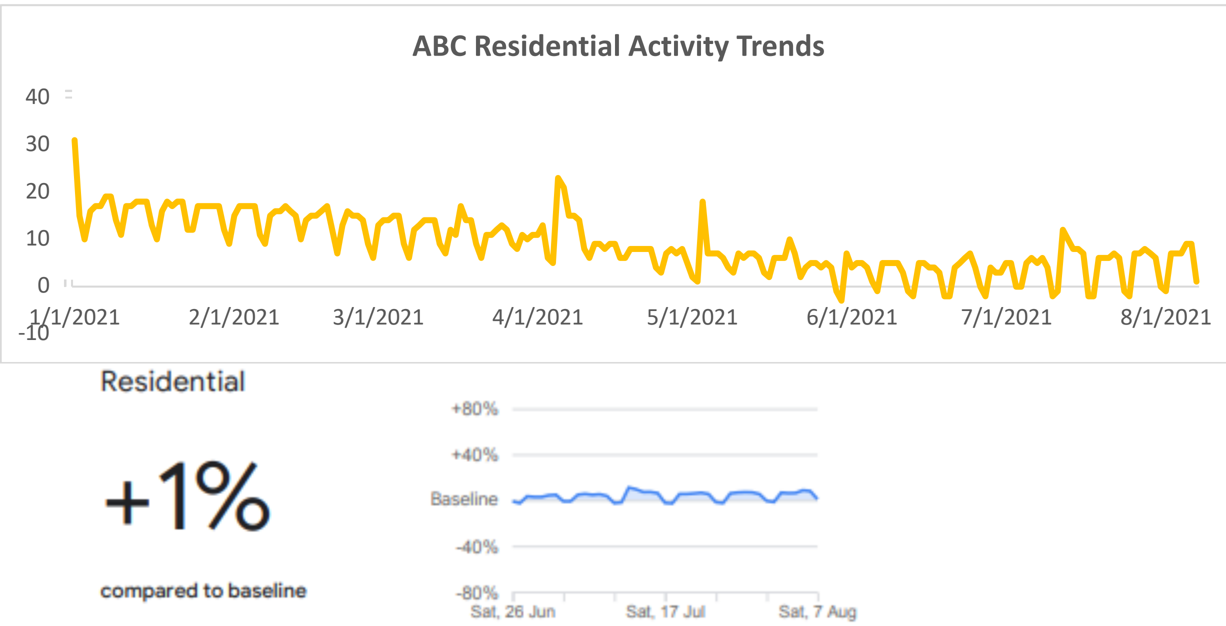


Figure 4.5 illustrates that more time is spent at home due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, with the gradual lifting of restrictions this has started to decline. Related activity on Saturday 7th August 2021 was +1%.

Figure 4.5
Mobility Changes in Residential in Borough



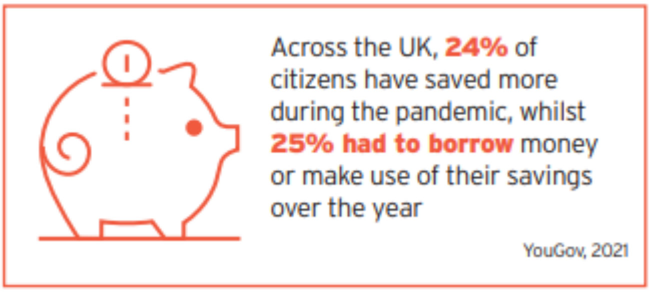
5 Exacerbation of Issues

5.1 Introduction

The economic crisis generated by COVID-19 threatens to hit those who are most vulnerable in society the hardest. The chapter provides insights from data and research in Great Britain and NI on indirect impacts of the pandemic on systemic issues such as poverty, mental health and violence/instability within the home. Localised data is presented where available.

5.2 Loss of/Lower Income

An individual is in relative poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60% of UK median income in the year in question. For the combined years of 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18, 15% of individuals in the borough were in relative poverty (rank 9th= LGD), slightly below the Northern Ireland level (17%).[40] For the combined years of 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16, 23% of children in the borough were in relative poverty, the same as Northern Ireland (rank 7th LGD).[41]



Research conducted in Great Britain[42] indicates that groups that were financially impacted at the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic were still worse off up to mid-April 2021, such as the self-employed, who were three times as likely to report reduced income and twice as likely to use savings to cover living costs compared with employees. Those in the lowest income bracket (up to £10,000 per annum) continued to be more likely to report negative impacts to personal well-being in comparison with higher brackets such as the coronavirus pandemic making their mental health worse and feeling stressed or anxious. Employed parents were less likely to be furloughed since the beginning of 2021, unlike in the first phase of lockdown, but were still more likely to report reduced income than non-parents.

A report on the impact of Covid-19 on private renters in NI shows that those living in the private rented sector have been disproportionately affected, experiencing low incomes (often as a result of job loss, furlough or reduced hours), job insecurity and tenure insecurity.[43] The research states that those in lower paid work were more likely to be furloughed and that the rate of new benefits claims from private tenants was more than double that of social tenants. Case file analysis highlighted:

[40] Individuals in relative poverty by district council area 2015/16 – 2017/18. Source: Family Resource Survey, Department for Communities.
[41] Children in relative poverty by district council area 2013/14 – 2015/16. Source: Family Resource Survey, Department for Communities
[42] ONS, (2021). Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: May 2021
[43] Housing Rights, (2020). THE 'PERFECT STORM': THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PRIVATE RENTERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- Almost half of those who had affordability issues were fearful of being evicted as a result of rent arrears. A high proportion of those affected worked in hospitality or were self-employed;
- Many people were applying for benefits for the first time and found the system difficult to navigate. Particular elements of the system (such as the five week wait for first Universal Credit payment) were difficult to withstand;
- Students who contacted Housing Rights were particularly affected by lay-offs and reduced hours (and income) at work, many of whom relied on their income from part-time work to pay for their rent, with little or no alternative support available to them;
- The support provided for many employees and the self-employed did not reach everyone affected.

5.2.1 Food Insecurity

> According to the Trussell Trust, more than **79,000 emergency food parcels** were distributed to people facing crisis in Northern Ireland between April 2020 and March 2021, **including 31,000 for children**
>
> Trussell Trust, 2021

The Food Standards Agency conducts research in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to monitor the experience and behaviours of consumers when it comes to key food risks during the pandemic. Data indicates that concerns about food availability, food affordability and skipping meals for financial reasons were high in April 2020 but declined significantly in August 2020.[44] They have since risen again to the latest statistics in March 2021. The proportion of respondents who reported use of food banks/charities also dropped in August 2020. Otherwise, this proportion has remained relatively stable across all waves.

Participants from larger households (4+), those in younger age groups (aged 16-24), and households with a child present were more likely to be 'food insecure', across all these measures of food insecurity. Qualitative research showed how people in food insecurity were coping with income loss, which has rapidly exacerbated existing vulnerabilities:

- Basic costs rising (such as utility bills or caring for parents or children) impacted access to affordable food;
- Impacts reached far beyond missed meals and participants were experiencing complex physical, emotional, social and financial challenges;
- People were unable to access sufficient help to meet their needs, or alternatively were unaware of support that may be available or unwilling to access charitable help due to perceived stigma.[45]

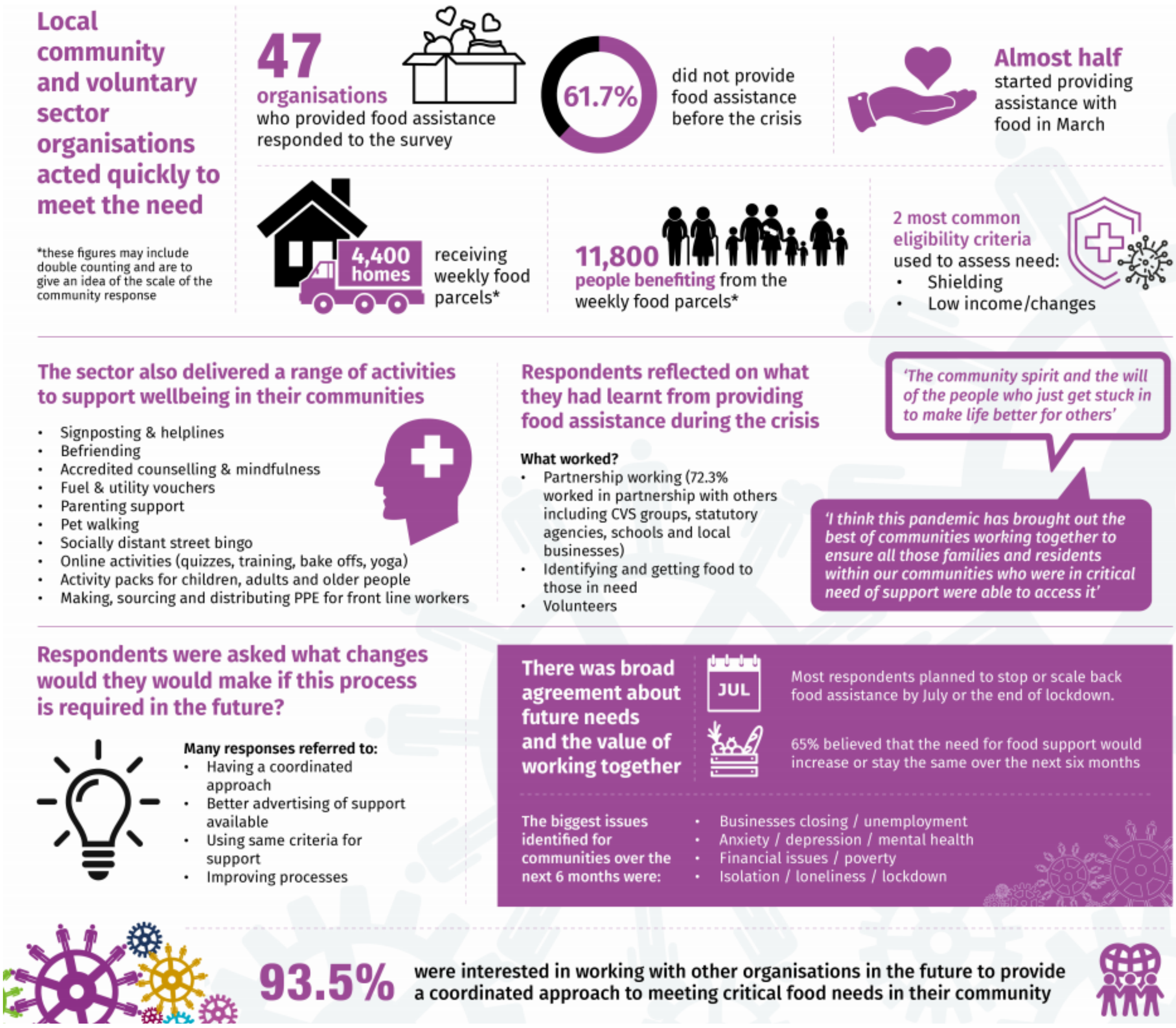
The Family Resources Survey[46] indicated that seven percent of households were estimated to be food insecure in 2019/20 and when looking at households which are

[44] *Covid-19 Consumer Tracker April 2020 – March 2021*, Food Standards Agency, Ipsos Mori
[45] FSA, (2020). The lived experience of food insecurity under Covid-19
[46] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-58100957

defined as being in poverty, food insecurity rises to around 15%. Indeed, one in 10 children in Northern Ireland live in a "food insecure" household. Although data is not yet available to measure the NI-wide impact of Covid-19 on food insecurity, it is likely to have increased as evidenced through the growth of local foodbanks and initiatives.

Figures released by the Trussell Trust indicated that it gave out 2.5 million emergency food parcels in the UK in 2020-21, up from 1.9 million in 2019-20.[47] The trust said demand across the UK rose by a third as the pandemic hit many family incomes. In NI, the Trussell Trust provided 45,134 food parcels in 2019-20 and 78,827 parcels in 2020-21. Almost 48,000 food parcels went to adults (26,000 in 2019-20) while just over 31,000 were given to children, around 12,000 more than the previous year.

The Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partnership's Community and Voluntary Sector Panel (CVSP) undertook a Covid-19 Food Initiatives Survey in June 2020 to understand the food assistance needs and the sector's response to the pandemic. Key findings are summarised below.



[47] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-56845560

In 2019/20 Armagh Foodbank issued 1,102 food parcels. This increased to 1,700 in 2020/21 (+54%). Via Wings Dare to Care Project supported 139 households in 2020 (+96% higher than the previous year). The Storehouse, Banbridge also registered increase demand with an estimated 36% additional food parcels. Craigavon Area Foodbank distributed 41,475kg of food in 2020/21 (+17% year on year increase).[48]

5.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Loss of income and economic uncertainty can negatively impact upon mental health and wellbeing. Recent wellbeing research conducted in England, Scotland and Wales illustrates that wellbeing is below pre-pandemic levels.[49] Younger adults had the largest increase in rates of depressive symptoms in early 2021 when compared with pre-pandemic levels. For adults aged 16 to 39 years, rates in early 2021 were more than double (29%) when compared with before the pandemic (11%). In comparison, Ten percent of adults aged 70 years and over experienced some form of depression in early 2021 compared with 5% before the pandemic.

Recent research[50] conducted in NI to determine trends in wellbeing found improvements on a number of wellbeing indicators, comparative to the beginning of the pandemic:

- The proportion of people who had a high GHQ-12 score, which could indicate a possible mental health problem, has decreased significantly from a high of 30% in January 2021 to 19% in May and June 2021;
- The average wellbeing ratings of people interviewed in the period April 2021 - June 2021 for 'life satisfaction' and 'happiness' were significantly higher than that reported for the period April 2020 – March 2021, signifying better wellbeing in these measures (see Table 5.1);
- Anxiety levels were also significantly lower than that previously reported. Just over half of people (53%) interviewed in the period April 2021 - June 2021 said that they were worried about the effect COVID-19 was having on their lives. This was significantly lower compared to any time in the period April 2020 – March 2021.

Table 5.1
Trends in NI Wellbeing

Average (mean)	Life Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety
April – June 21	**7.61*#**	**7.93**	**7.60***	**3.05***
April 20 – March 21	7.36*	7.84	7.43*	3.37*
Personal Wellbeing in NI 19/20	7.86#	8.05	7.68	3.00

*A significant difference has been observed between Apr –Jun 21 and Apr 20 –Mar 21

#A significant difference has been observed between Apr –Jun 21 and Personal Wellbeing in NI 19/20
**Apr 20 – Mar 21 data has not been compared with 19/20 data in this table, however all differences are significant.

48 Internal databases, 2021
49 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19latestinsights/wellbeing
50 NISRA, (July 2021) Covid-19 Opinion Survey. Phases 1-12.

Seven percent of respondents in the period April to June 2021 reported feeling lonely 'often/always'. This is similar to the figure reported in 2019/20 (5%) and to results the period April 2020 – March 2021 (6%). The proportion of people reporting 'never' feeling lonely in April - June 2021 (24%) was significantly lower than in 2019/20 (30%) (see Table 5.2).[51]

Table 5.2
Trends in NI Loneliness

	Often/always	Some of the time	Occasionally	Hardly ever	Never
April – June 21	**7%**	**14%**	**18%**	**36%**	**24%***
April 20-March 2021	6%	15%*	18%	35%	26%
Personal Wellbeing in NI 19/20	5%	12%*	19%	33%	30%*

*A significant difference has been observed
**Apr 20 – Mar 21 data has not been compared with 19/20 data in this table, however significant differences were observed in the 'some of the time' and Never categories for when comparing these time periods.

Anti-depressants were dispensed to 357,122 people in NI during 2020/21, equating to almost 19% of its total population. This figure was virtually unchanged compared with 2019/20. There was significant variation in relation to the proportion of individuals receiving antidepressants across different groups within the population. The majority of individuals who received anti-depressants were female. The level of dispensing also varied across different parts of Northern Ireland. Looking at LGDs, the proportion of the population receiving antidepressants in 2020/21 was highest in Derry City and Strabane at 21.4%, closely followed by Belfast at 21.0%. The Borough ranked 7th highest, below the NI average.

Table 5.3
Number of Individuals Receiving Anti-depressants by LGD, 2020/21

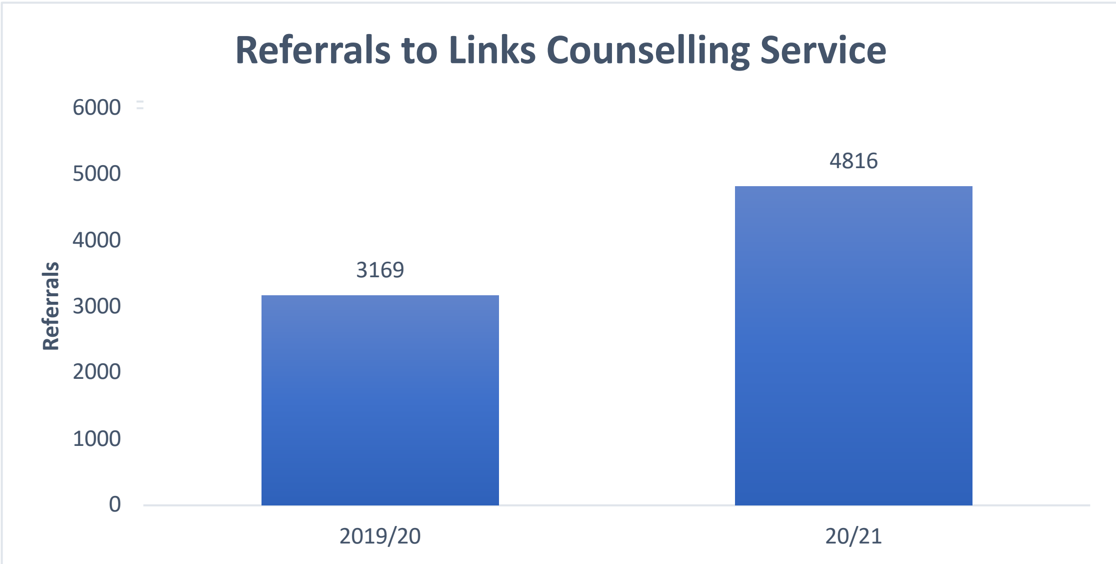
Local Government District	Number of Individuals	% of total Population
Antrim & Newtownabbey	27,357	19.0
Ards & North Down	30,905	19.1
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	38,627	17.7
Belfast	72,164	21.0
Causeway Coast & Glens	26,647	18.4
Derry City & Strabane	32,392	21.4
Fermanagh & Omagh	19,551	16.6
Lisburn & Castlereagh	25,176	17.1
Mid & East Antrim	26,907	19.3
Mid Ulster	23,243	15.5
Newry, Mourne & Down	32,006	17.5
Unknown[13]	2,147	N/A
Northern Ireland	**357,122**	**18.8**

[51] NISRA, (July 2021) Covid-19 Opinion Survey. Phases 1-12.

People interviewed in the period November – January 2021 for the NI Covid-19 Opinion Survey were asked about their alcohol consumption since the pandemic. Of those people who do drink alcohol, approximately one in five people (22%) said they were drinking more alcohol since the outbreak. Almost half of people (48%) were drinking about the same, whilst just over a quarter of people (26%) said they were drinking less. A small proportion (4%) said that they had not drank alcohol since March 2020.[52]

Links Counselling Service is a Community Planning partner based in Lurgan, although it receives referrals from across NI. The organisation reported a dramatic increase in demand for their services over the last year, with a 52% increase in referrals year on year (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1
Number of Referrals to Links Counselling Services, 2019/20 and 2020/21[53]



Thirty-eight percent (n1,824) of referrals in 2020/21 were from people living in the Armagh City, Craigavon and Banbridge Borough Council area. Forty-five percent of these were from schools within the Borough (n813). Ninety-eight percent of these (n793) were from post-primary schools and two percent (n20) were from primary schools. Referrals to Links Counselling Services are typically female (n3,200; 66%) and 39% are under 25 years old (n1,899).

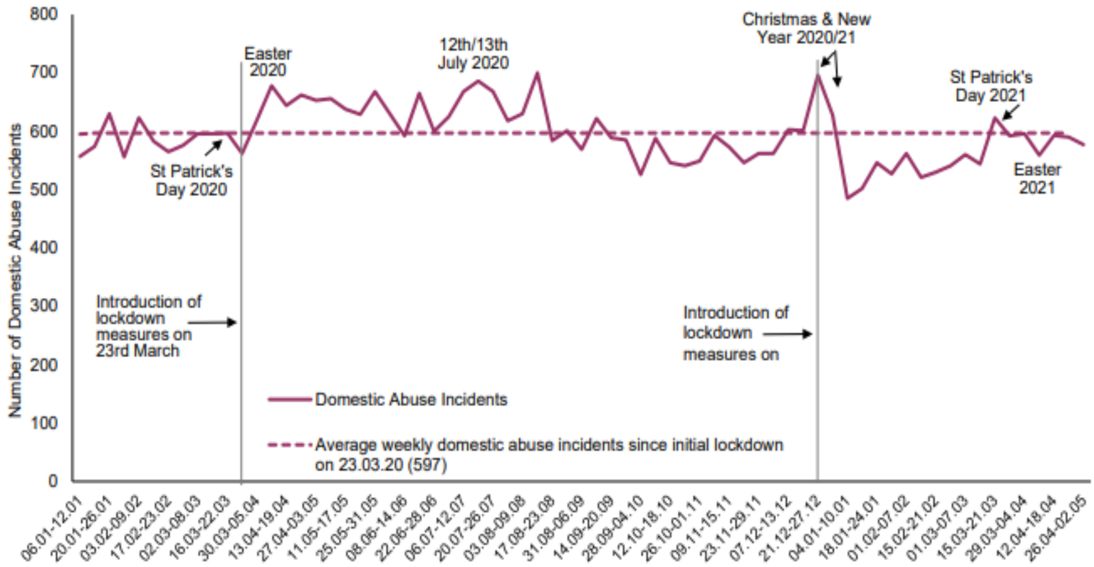
5.4 Domestic Abuse

Figure 5.2 shows the weekly number of domestic abuse incidents in NI from the 6th January 2020, compared with the average weekly number of domestic abuse incidents since lockdown measures were first introduced. The number of domestic abuse incidents recorded were mostly above the weekly average between the 23rd March 2020 and mid-August 2020. Since the late summer, figures typically remained below the weekly average for the remainder of the financial year, with a few exceptions, such as the Christmas and New Year period.

52 NISRA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Opinion Survey Phases 1 to 8 Results, February 2021
53 01/09/19-31/08/20 and 01/09/20 -23/08/21

Figure 5.2

Reported Domestic Abuse Incidents



Reported Domestic Abuse incidents in the Borough increased by 6% in 2020/2021, despite a year-on-year decrease in the overall NI figures (see Table 5.4).[54] Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon has ranked 2nd, behind Belfast for the highest number of reported incidents over the last two years.

Table 5.4

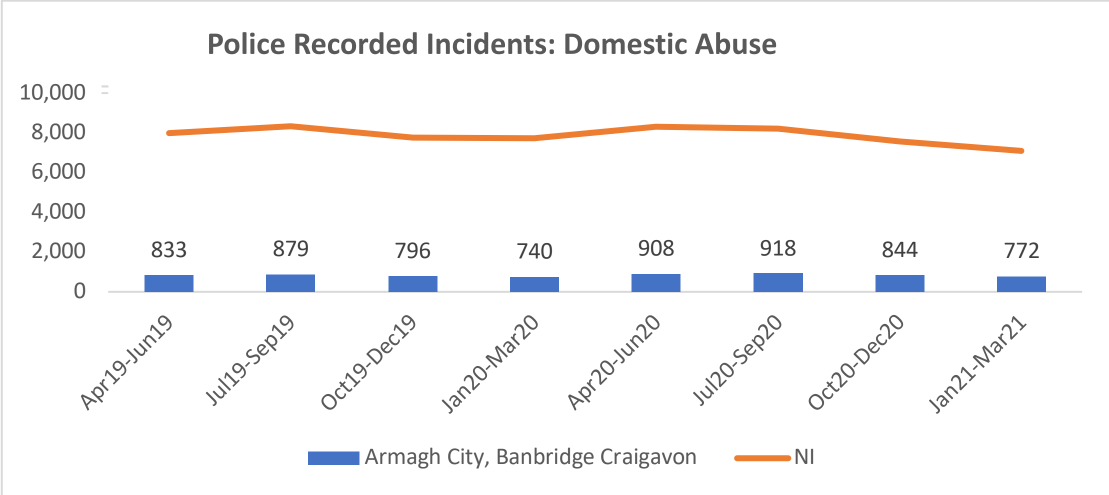
Reported Domestic Abuse Incidents

Reported Incidents	19/20	20/21	% Change
Armagh City, Banbridge Craigavon	3,248	3,442	6%
NI	31,817	31,196	-2%

As with the previous year, incidents were highest in the July-September period (see Figure 5.3).

[54] Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland up to 31 March 2021

Figure 5.3
Police Recorded Domestic Abuse Incident Trends



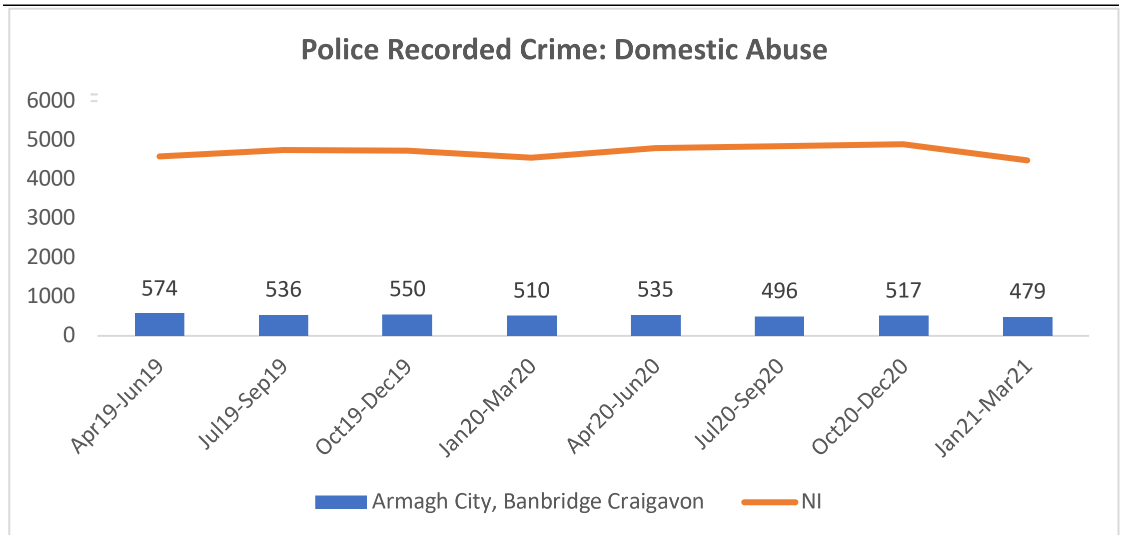
Reported Domestic Abuse crimes in the Borough decreased by 7% in 2020/2021, despite a year-on-year increase in NI figures (see Table 5.5). Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon has ranked 3rd, behind Belfast and Derry City & Strabane for the highest number of reported crimes in 2020/2021 (ranked 2nd highest in 2019/20).

Table 5.5
Reported Domestic Abuse Crimes

Reported Crimes	19/20	20/21	% Change
Armagh City, Banbridge Craigavon	2,170	2,027	-7%
NI	18,628	19,036	2%

As with the previous year, incidents were highest in the Oct-December period (see Figure 5.4).

Figure 5.4
Police Recorded Domestic Abuse Crime Trends



The increase in domestic abuse crimes combined with a fall in overall NI crime levels has contributed to domestic abuse crimes rising to 20.2% of all police recorded crime during 2020/21, compared with 17.5% during 2019/20. This proportion is the highest seen since the domestic abuse data series began in 2004/05.

Community Planning Partners, Women's Aid received 397 referrals for women living within the Borough in 2019/20. During 2020/21, 549 referrals were received. There was increased need for practical support such as food, finances and clothing to the families Women's Aid support. Since March 2020, the organisation has provided 60 woman and 112 children per month with a range of essentials. Within the Borough, the following support was also provided:

- 27 families to access food vouchers supported by Cash for Kids to the value of £2,380;
- 26 families to access food vouchers supported by Red Cross at £1,200;
- 79 children received Christmas presents at £7,900;
- 42 women received Christmas gifts at £1,500;
- 30 families received Christmas fresh meat vouchers at £900;
- 40 food parcels (approx. 160 beneficiaries) at £1,600;
- 13 families supplied with heating oil supported by "Digg Mama" at £1,300;
- 23 families secured a family action grant at £29,000.

5.5 Children Referred to Social Services

The information presented derives from a temporary weekly data collection for children's social care services during the period of COVID-19. These data returns have been extracted from administrative systems for each of the five Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland.[55]

Between May-August 2021, the number of children referred to social services in NI is higher than pre-Covid-19 levels. However,[56] the number of Child Protection referrals is comparatively lower than pre-Covid-19 levels (see Figure 5.5).

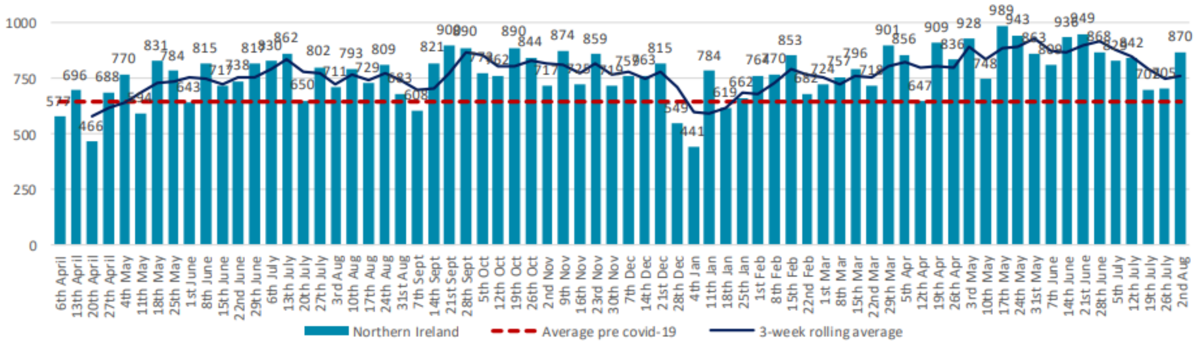
[55] Northern Ireland Children's Social Services Data during COVID-19, 4 August 2021

[56] A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children's social care and is in respect of a child who is currently not assessed to be in need. A referral may result in an episode of care which may be an initial assessment of the child's needs, the provision of information or advice, referral to another agency or alternatively no further action. A Child Protection Referral is one for which the initial assessment indicates that there may be Child Protection issues.

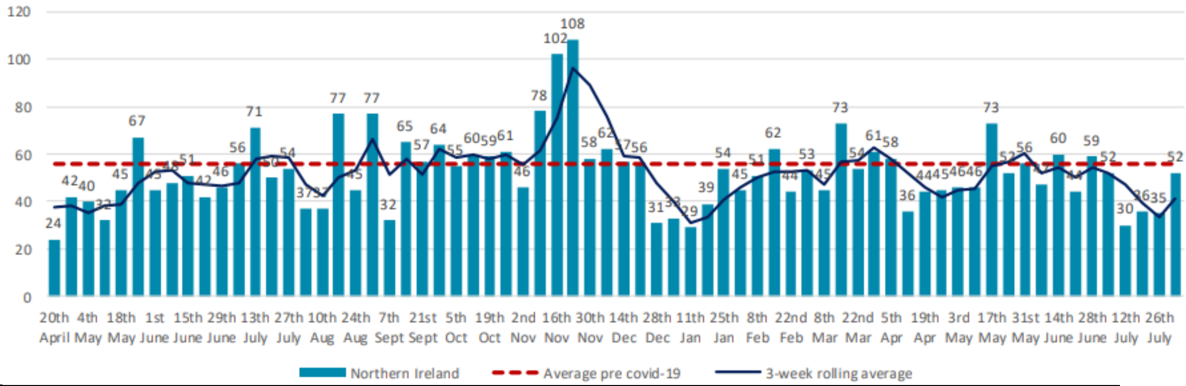
Figure 5.5

Number of Children Referred to Social Services/Child Protection Referrals

Number of Children referred to Social Services[A] (provisional)



Number of Child Protection referrals[A] (provisional)



The child protection register is a confidential list of all children in the area who have been identified by the relevant agencies as being at significant risk of harm. Tables 5.6 and 5.7 illustrate higher numbers of children on the Child Protection Register and in Care in the SHSCT area between May-August 2021, compared with pre-Covid-19 levels. These figures reflect the wider situation in NI. SHSCT consistently showed the highest numbers of children on the Child Protection Register and lowest number of children in care.

Table 5.6

Number of Children on Child Protection Register by HSCT

HSC Trust	*Pre Covid19[1]*	10-May-21	17-May-21	24-May-21	31-May-21	07-June-21	14-June-21	21-June-21	28-June-21	05-Jul-21	12-Jul-21	19-Jul-21	26-Jul-21	02-Aug-21
Belfast	*277*	334	322	318	316	311	313	312	310	320	327	327	331	331
Northern	*512*	476	485	480	489	497	493	486	481	467	469	479	472	456
South Eastern	*335*	345	350	350	342	345	347	340	320	312	320	319	329	339
Southern	*545*	581	573	583	569	559	564	566	567	556	556	561	564	573
Western	*577*	512	503	493	494	496	498	485	490	486	483	496	495	497
Northern Ireland	*2,246*	**2,248**	**2,233**	**2,224**	**2,210**	**2,208**	**2,215**	**2,189**	**2,168**	**2,142**	**2,155**	**2,182**	**2,191**	**2,196**

[1] Source: "Quarterly Child Protection Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter ending 31 December 2019", DoH.
Figures are provisional and may have been revised from previous weeks.
Weekly figures from 6th April 2020 in Excel format: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/temporary-information-releases-during-covid-19.

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Table 5.7

Number of Children in Care by HSCT

HSC Trust	*Pre Covid19[2]*	10-May-21	17-May-21	24-May-21	31-May-21	07-Jun-21	14-Jun-21	21-Jun-21	28-Jun-21	05-Jul-21	12-Jul-21	19-Jul-21	26-Jul-21	02-Aug-21
Belfast	*826*	876	881	881	893	892	887	894	897	896	895	896	898	901
Northern	*680*	745	745	750	750	754	750	749	746	745	746	749	747	746
South Eastern	*621*	632	631	632	633	627	632	626	627	624	624	625	627	633
Southern	*582*	591	597	592	597	599	599	568	592	592	597	600	601	604
Western	*653*	685	685	686	684	686	679	682	683	688	688	690	688	690
Northern Ireland	*3,362*	**3,529**	**3,539**	**3,541**	**3,557**	**3,558**	**3,547**	**3,547**	**3,545**	**3,545**	**3,550**	**3,560**	**3,561**	**3,574**

[2] Source: 30 September 2019, Delegated Statutory Functions report, Health & Social Care Board.
Figures are provisional and may have been revised from previous weeks.
Weekly figures from 6th April 2020 in Excel format: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/articles/temporary-information-releases-during-covid-19.

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6 Unintended Opportunities Arising from Covid-19 Restrictions

6.1 Introduction

Covid-19 has had some positive impacts on social and community networks and has encouraged some people to make significant lifestyle changes. There is evidence of increased civic participation in response to the pandemic and a positive impact on social cohesion, with new volunteer groups established across the Borough.

The impact on transport use has been mixed. Falls in road journeys during the early period of lockdown have generally been short-lived and there are concerns about the lasting damage that may be done to public transport systems. A positive impact has been seen with more people cycling, but it remains to be seen whether the changes to cycling infrastructure will have a lasting impact. Similarly slight improvements in air quality over lockdown have resumed to similar levels to previous years.

This chapter presents a snapshot of opportunities evidenced over the course of the pandemic.

6.2 Increased Business Births

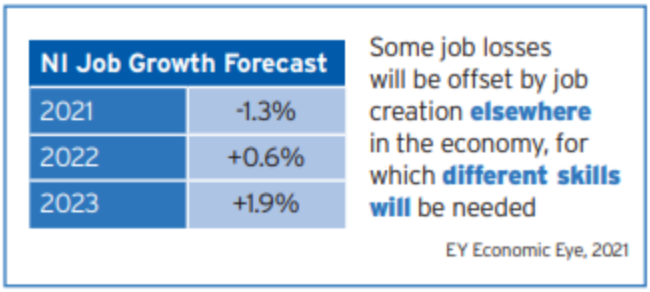
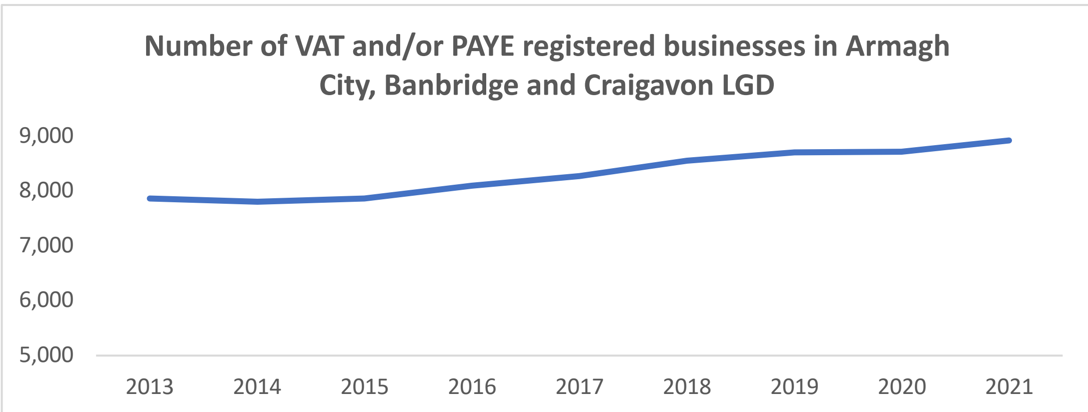


Figure 6.1 illustrates an increase in the number of VAT and or PAYE registered businesses over the last year within the Borough and stands at 8,930 (+n205; +2% compared to 2020).

Figure 6.1
Number of VAT and/or PAYE Registered Businesses in the Borough



Source: Inter-Departmental Business Register, NISRA

It is suggested that the recovery and indeed acceleration of business births in the latter half of 2020 in many economies can be attributed partly to opportunity-driven responses to the pandemic, and partly due to necessity-driven entrepreneurship in the absence of other paid employment opportunities.[57]

Table 6.1 highlights that local entrepreneurship has continued throughout 2020-2021 despite uncertain economic circumstances. In 2020/21 309 business cases were developed and approved through the GoForIt programme in partnership with the Council's Economic Development department. Although this represents a year-on-year decrease, the Borough has continued to perform comparatively strongly and equates to 190 jobs created. This was the highest job creation figure outside of Belfast.

From April 2020 up to end of July 2021, 114 business plans and 68 new jobs have been created. Council has also agreed as part of its economic recovery and growth plans to provide a £500 grant for new budding entrepreneurs to help them meet start-up costs for new business starts from July to September 2021.

Table 6.1
Business Plans Approved by LGD

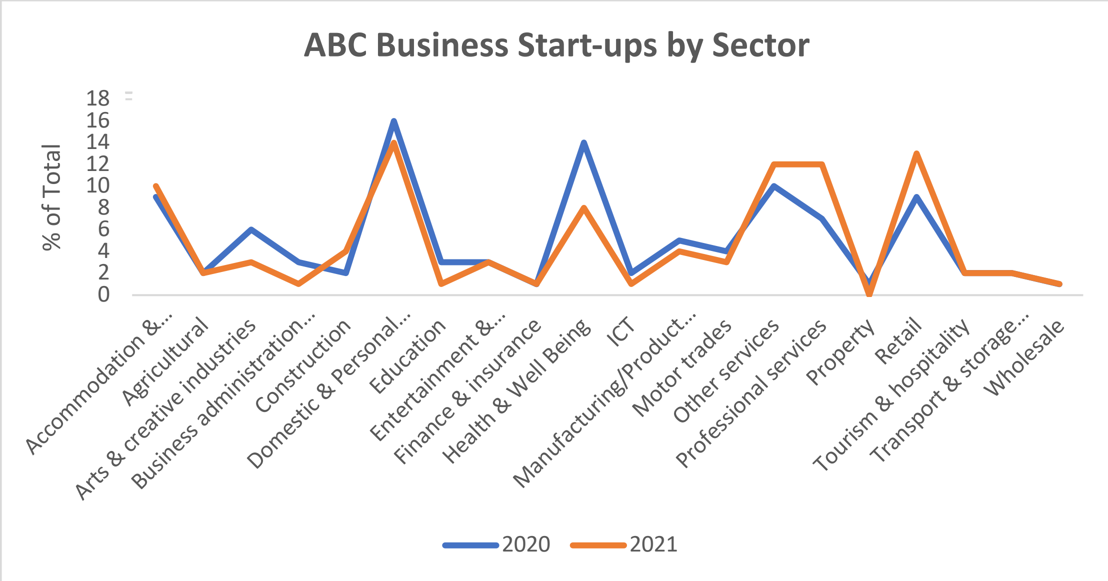
COUNCIL AREA	2020/21	2019/20	Change (n)
Antrim & Newtownabbey	137	173	- 36
Ards & North Down	165	171	- 6
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	309	373	- 64
Belfast	342	419	- 77
Causeway Coast & Glens	216	195	21
Derry & Strabane	184	217	- 33
Fermanagh & Omagh	165	278	- 113
Lisburn & Castlereagh	173	182	- 9
Mid & East Antrim	153	199	- 46
Mid Ulster	214	301	- 87
Newry Mourne & Down	267	298	- 31
TOTAL	2,325	2,806	- 481

Source: NIBSUP Year End Dashboard

Figure 6.2 indicates that the Domestic and Personal and Retail sectors continued to be the most popular for local start-ups in 2020/21. Although the overall changes are small, there was a slight increase in the professional services and retail sectors when analysed as a proportion of total start-up activity.

[57] Bonner and Pollard, (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 on Northern Ireland Business Start-up Activity

Figure 6.2
Comparative Sectoral Breakdown of Start-Ups 2019/20 and 2020/21



Source: NIBSUP Year End Dashboard

Forty-eight percent (n128) of start-ups in the Borough were led by females and 15% were led by under 25s (n39).

6.3 Decrease in Recorded Crime

Police recorded crime has shown an overall downwards trend over the last seventeen years.[58] In the 12 months from 1st July 2020 to 30th June 2021 there were 98,897 recorded offences in NI, a decrease of 2.5% when compared with the previous 12 months. Covid-19 lockdown measures were first introduced on 23rd March 2020 and have had an impact on the lower crime levels seen in July 2020 through to February 2021. Crime levels in the four months March 2021 through to June 2021 were higher than the same months in 2020 (by 8%, 30%, 15% and 17% respectively). Six policing districts experienced a lower level of crime. Lower crime levels were seen in robbery, theft and burglary. However, higher crime levels were seen in violence against the person, sexual offences, criminal damage, drug offences and public order offences.

Table 6.2 indicates a 4% decrease in recorded crime within the Borough in June 2020-July 2021, compared to the same period the previous year.

[58] Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland, July 2021

Table 6.2
Police Recorded Crime by Policing District

Numbers and percentages

Policing district	Police recorded crime			
	Jul'19-Jun'20	Jul'20-Jun'21[1,2]	change	% change
Belfast City	31,452	29,911	-1,541	-4.9
East[3]	*5,495*	*5,413*	*-82*	*-1.5*
North[3]	*9,186*	*9,507*	*321*	*3.5*
South[3]	*10,691*	*8,825*	*-1,866*	*-17.5*
West[3]	*6,080*	*6,166*	*86*	*1.4*
Lisburn & Castlereagh City	6,292	6,346	54	0.9
Ards & North Down	5,481	5,614	133	2.4
Newry, Mourne & Down	8,522	8,632	110	1.3
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	10,330	9,904	-426	-4.1
Mid Ulster	5,277	5,047	-230	-4.4
Fermanagh & Omagh	4,468	3,835	-633	-14.2
Derry City & Strabane	9,807	10,209	402	4.1
Causeway Coast & Glens	6,433	6,483	50	0.8
Mid & East Antrim	6,734	6,392	-342	-5.1
Antrim & Newtownabbey	6,651	6,519	-132	-2.0
Northern Ireland	**101,447**	**98,897**	**-2,550**	**-2.5**

[1] Changes can be expected to in-year figures each time they are published, as records from 1st April 2020 are subject to ongoing validation and quality assurance processes until publication in May 2021.
[2] Individual policing districts may not add to Northern Ireland total as there will be some crimes yet to complete the validation process and be allocated to a policing district.

6.4 Increased Time Spent Outdoors

For many, Covid-19 shifted created a new appreciation for the ability to spend time outside. Research by Outdoor NI indicated that:[59]

- 22 million outdoor visits taken in November and December 2020 during Covid-19 restrictions;
- Seventy percent made outdoor visits at least once a week during 2020;
- Most of the population in November and December stated that they had changed the amount of time they were spending outdoors compared to a year ago. Twenty-two percent were spending more time outdoors. Younger age groups and more affluent socioeconomic groups were more likely to say this was the case.
- Just over half of outdoor visits taken in November and December 2020 involved walking to the place visited (55%), while most of the remaining visits involved a journey by car or another private vehicle. Potentially reflecting the COVID-19 restrictions on travel and transport, a very small percentage of visits involved public transport.

[59] Outdoor NI, (2021). Outdoor Recreation: People, Nature and Health

7 Looking Forward

7.1 Introduction

As well as the direct impacts of Covid-19 disease, the social distancing and lockdown measures have had a huge and unequal impact of their own on individuals, households and communities as a result of associated restrictions. Social isolation and loneliness have impacted on wellbeing for many. There are also serious concerns about how the combination of greater stress and reduced access to services for vulnerable children and their families may increase the risk of family violence and abuse.

This chapter highlights potential implications for future planning based on information snapshots from international and local opinion surveys.

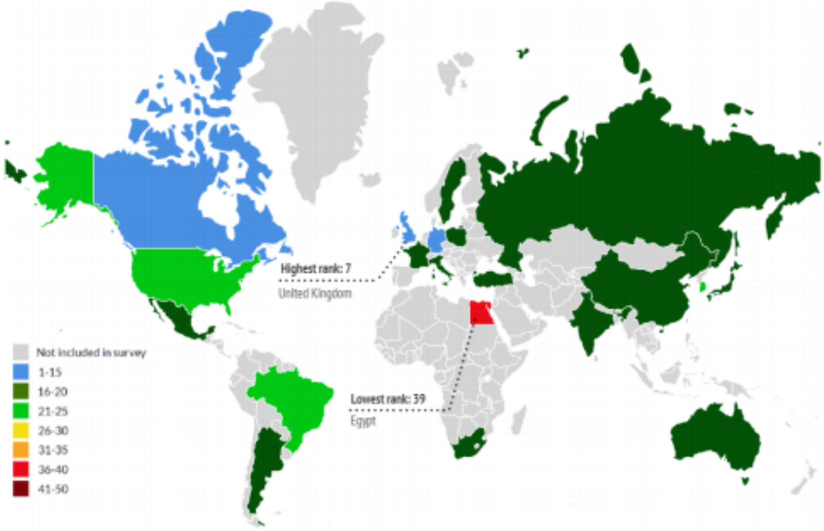
7.2 International Perceptions of NI Response to Healthcare Crises

In order to assess and monitor its international reputation, NI has been included on the Nation Brands IndexSM (NBISM) each year since 2016. In 2020, a number of questions were added to the survey in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These looked at how 20 nations around the world perceive NI's response to healthcare crises (including COVID-19) and, with that in mind, how comfortable respondents would be visiting NI in the next five years.[60]

Almost one third of international respondents (32%) rated NI favourably in its handling of healthcare crises and 34% felt comfortable about visiting NI in the next 5 years. NI was ranked 17th of 50 nations for its response to healthcare crises, and 18th of 50 for comfort of visiting NI within the next five years. NI is ranked within the top half of NBISM nations by all panel countries with the exception of Egypt, where Northern Ireland is ranked 39th of 50. For the 19 other panel countries, Northern Ireland has a rank of 23rd or higher, with the highest rank (7th) coming from United Kingdom (see Figure 7.1).

[60] TEO, (2020), Nation Brands IndexSM 2020 International Perceptions of Northern Ireland's response to COVID-19. September 2020

Figure 7.1
Map of NBISM Ranking on Comfort of Visiting Northern Ireland in the Next 5 Years

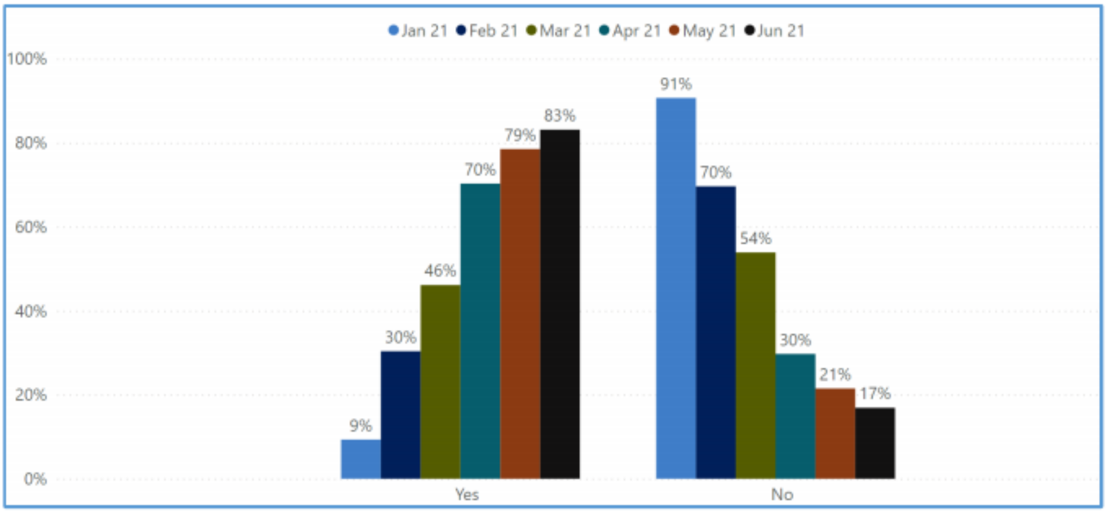


7.3 Impact on Local Opinions and Behaviour

In April 2020, NISRA launched a new Covid-19 Opinion Survey designed to measure how the pandemic was affecting peoples' lives and behaviour in NI. Interviews have been carried out with 14,984 members of the public between 21 April 2020 to 30 June 2021. The following data focuses mainly on the attitudes, behaviours and circumstances of people interviewed in the most recent period between April - June 2021.

Figure 7.2 shows increasing vaccine uptake month on month with 83% of people interviewed in June 2021 reporting that they had received a vaccine for Covid-19.

Figure 7.2
Proportion of Respondents who had Received a Vaccine for Covid-19 by Month



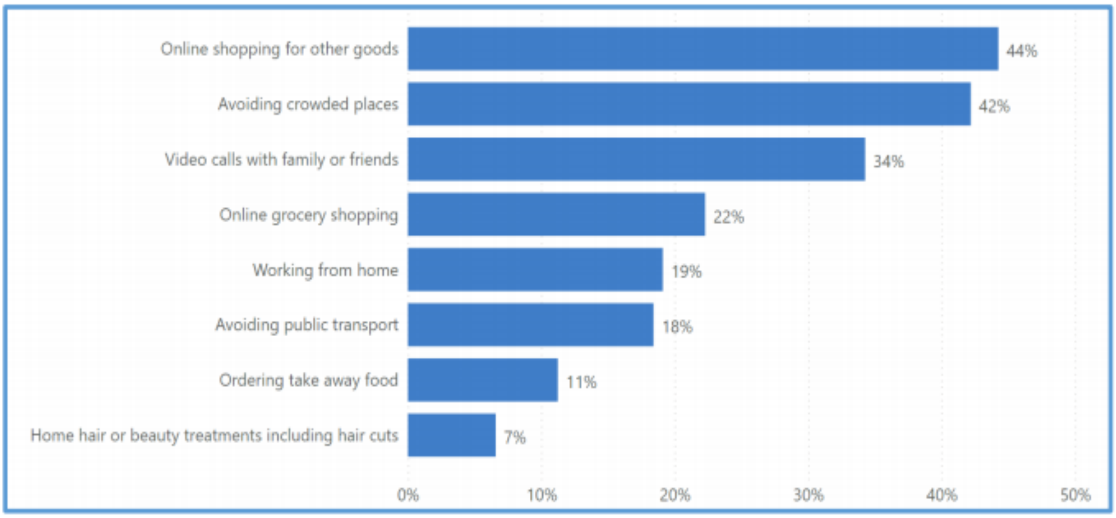
Seventy-six percent of those who were unvaccinated indicated that they were likely to take the vaccine but 24% said that they were unlikely to do so. The most common reasons given by those people who said that they were unlikely to have a vaccine were that they were worried about the side effects (57%), they had worries about the long-term effects on their health (56%), they would wait to see how well the vaccine works (50%) or they did not think it was safe (44%).

Seven percent of the most recent sample reported that they had tested positive for Covid-19 and one quarter reported that they had experienced Long Covid. Seventy-seven percent stated that Long Covid had negatively affected their general wellbeing, 55% said it had negatively affected their work and just under half (46%) reported that their ability to exercise was also negatively affected by Long Covid.

Eighty percent of respondents said that they supported the easing of stay-at-home measures put in place in NI, whilst nine percent did not. Just over half of people (53%) interviewed in the period April - June 2021 said that they were worried about the effect the Covid-19 was having on their lives. This was significantly lower than previous levels. Forty percent of respondents stated that it would be more than a year before their life would return to normal and this has been a consistent finding since the survey commenced.

Figure 7.3 ranks the actions or activities that people think they will keep doing more often after the end of the pandemic. The top three highest ranking actions or activities reported were increased online shopping (44%), avoiding crowded places (42%) and video calls with family or friends (34%).

Figure 7.3
Perception of Increased Activities After the Pandemic

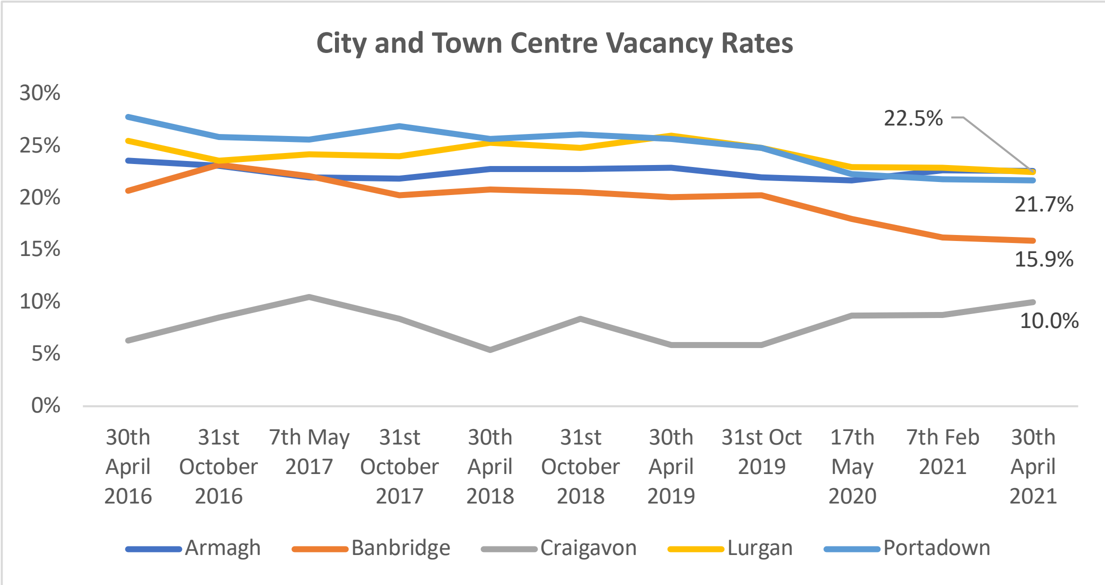


[1]Multiple responses allowed

The movement towards online shopping, home-working and avoiding crowded places could negatively impact on the vitality of town centres. Vacancy rates in Armagh and Craigavon town centres have increased compared to levels at May 2020. However

Portadown, Banbridge and Lurgan vacancy rates have decreased slightly (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4
City and Town Centre Vacancy Rate Trends in the Borough

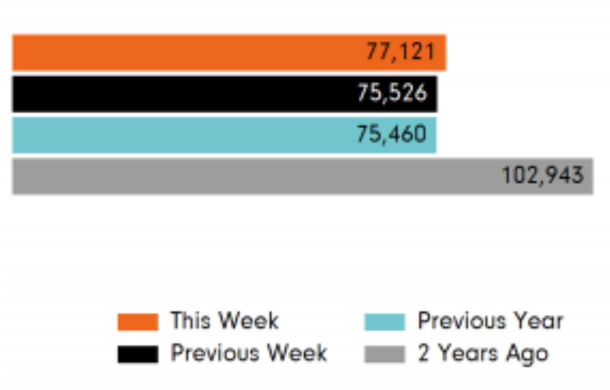


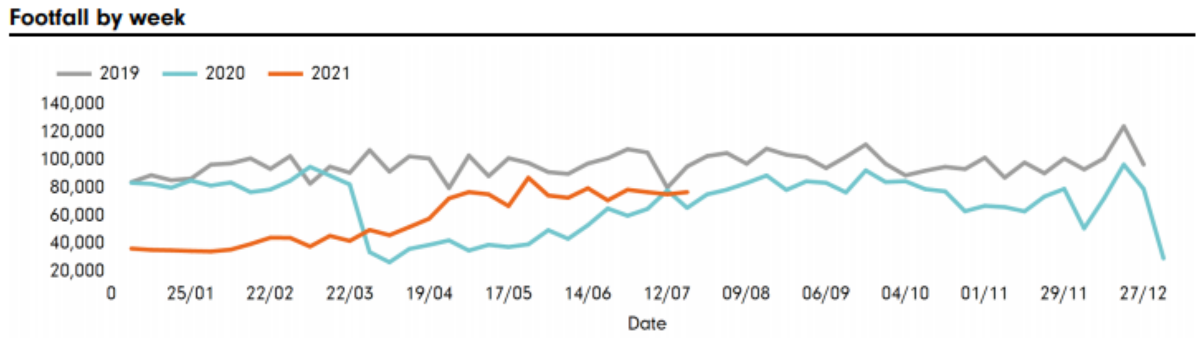
Source: Town Centre Database, Department for Communities

The total number of visitors to Town Centres in the Borough in week commencing 19 July 2021 was 77,121, a decrease of 8% compared to the same period last year.[61] The total number of visitors to the Borough for the last 52 weeks is 3,397,773 which is 16.8% down on the previous year.[62] In order to gauge the impact of Covid-19 on footfall a comparison of 2021 versus 2019 is made. This is provided in below and compares performance w/c 19th July 2021 against the similar time-period in 2019 (see Figure 7.5).

[61] Footfall Report for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. Week 29, 2021. 19 Jul 2021 - 25 Jul 2021
[62] W/C 19th July 2021

Figure 7.5
Trends in Town Centre Footfall in the Borough





W/C 19th July 2019-2021

Table 7.1 indicates that year-on-year footfall figures for 2021 are 25% lower than the same period in 2019. Whilst this is slightly better than the UK differential it is lower than the NI differential.

Table 7.1
Comparative Trends in Footfall for Town Centres in the Borough, NI and the UK

	Year to date %	Year on year %
	2021 Vs 2019	2021 Vs 2019
ACBC	-40.1 %	-25.1 %
Northern Ireland	-42.4 %	-21.3 %
UK	-44.4 %	-28.4 %

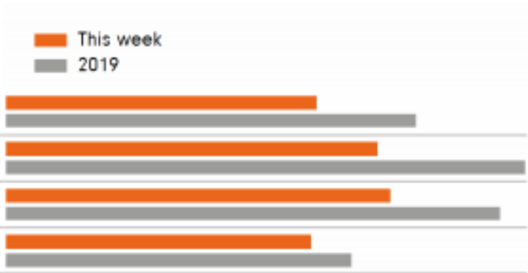
ACBC is compared to the high street index.

Table 7.2 indicates that w/c 19th July 2021, footfall was highest in Newry Street, Banbridge (n21,580), followed by Market Street, Lurgan (n20,876), Armagh (n17,490) and West Street, Portadown (n17,175). Although all locations had lower footfall compared to the same period in 2019, Market Street Lurgan had the largest decrease of -36.5%.

Table 7.2

Comparative Trends in Footfall within the Borough's Town Centres by Location

	This week	2019	2021 - 2019 %
Armagh	17,490	22,992	-23.9 %
Market Street	20,876	32,874	-36.5 %
Newry Street	21,580	27,673	-22.0 %
West Street	17,175	19,404	-11.5 %



Community and voluntary service providers have continued to work together during the Covid-19 global pandemic, with many still playing a pivotal but quite different role within their communities. However, some organisations face difficult challenges in sustaining both premises, staff/volunteers and activity.

For example, Sport NI launched the 'COVID-19 Survey: Understanding the current sporting landscape in Northern Ireland' in May 2020 to better understand the range of current and future challenges.[63] The survey was designed to be completed by any organisation providing sport services operating in Northern Ireland, including National and Regional Governing Bodies of Sport, sports clubs, charitable sporting organisations, voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises. Nine percent of respondents provided services within the Borough.

Ninety-five percent of all respondents stated that the pandemic had a negative impact on their organisation. Forty-seven percent of respondents reported a negative impact on club membership or service use. The biggest challenges for organisations were reported to be finance and income, managing social distancing and the easing of lockdown restrictions, athletes/players and competitive uncertainty. Some responses highlighted the need for knowledge and skills in relation to the retention and re-engagement of coaches and club members, following the enforced break to coaching and participation.

7.4 Covid-19 Related Impacts on Community Planning Partners

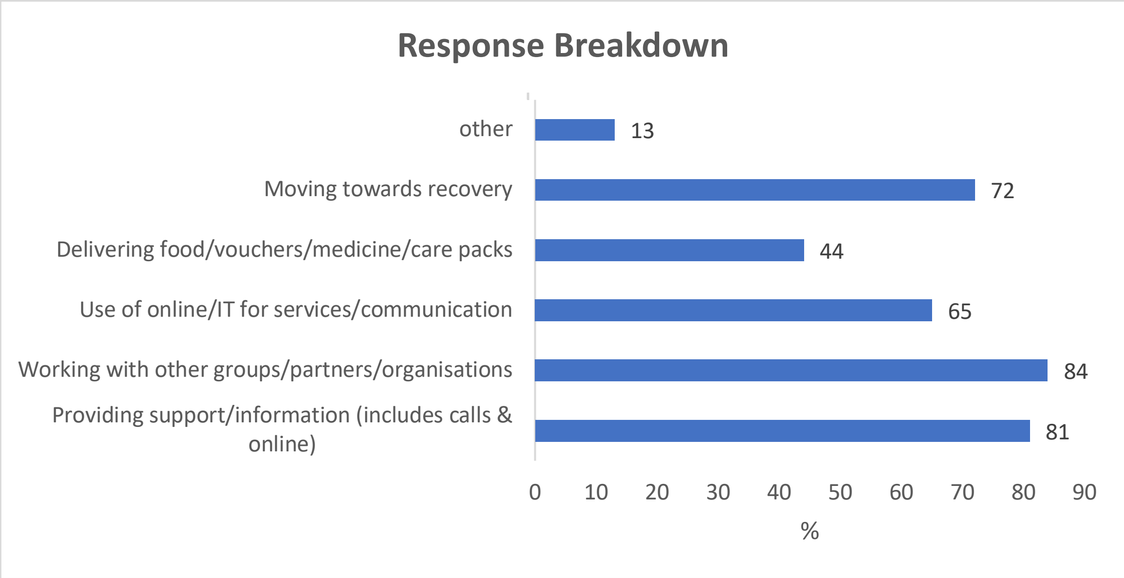
A survey was distributed to the 160 Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partners which remained active amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The fieldwork ran between 11 June and 8th July 2021 and 41 responses were received. The survey included questions on continuing partner organisation response to Covid-19, perceived impact on the Borough and key areas for mitigating action.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents (n32) stated that their own organisation was still engaged in mitigating actions as a result of Covid-19. Working with other groups (84%; n27) and providing support (81%; n26) were the main ongoing activities. A small number of respondents stated that they continued to be involved in emergency responses arising from the pandemic.

[63] Sport NI, (2020). Covid-19 Survey Understanding the Current Sporting Landscape in Northern Ireland

Figure 7.5

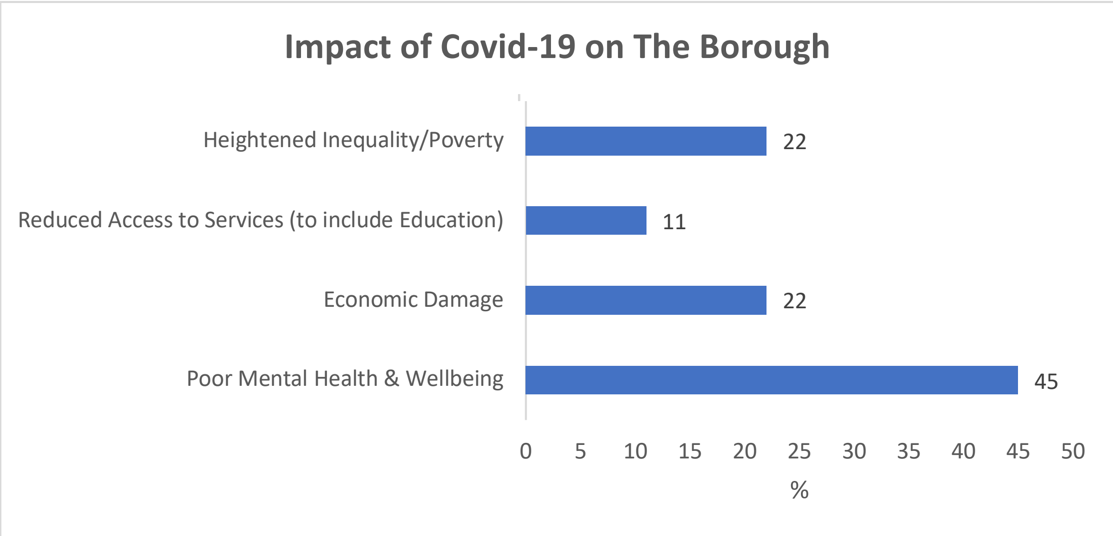
Organisational Response to Covid-19



Respondents reported that the negative impact on physical and mental wellbeing (45%; n25), damage to the economy (22%; n12) and exacerbation of poverty and inequalities (22%; n12) amongst marginalised groups, were the greatest impacts of Covid-19 on the Borough (see Figure 7.6). Loneliness, through bereavement, reduced face-to-face contact and social isolation was perceived to be evident within the community rather than restricted to older age groups.

Figure 7.6

Perceived Impact of Covid-19



"Economic difficulties, job losses, closure of businesses, rise in mental health issues, isolation and loneliness for range of people (e.g. young people, BAME, older people)." [PB Working Group]

"Mental health difficulties within our young people. Increased anxiety, self-harming and suicidal ideation. Lack of social support and access to services." [CVSP]

"Impact on people and families who have lost loved ones. Disruption of education. Impact on mental health, including impact of job insecurity, increased feelings of isolation and fear, impact on those mourning loved ones." [Leadership and Engagement sub-Committee]

"Increased levels of poverty have become apparent, the damage to retail and hospitality businesses and the manufacturing businesses supplying the aerospace sector." [CPSP]

"Impact on physical and mental health as a direct result of the virus and the suspension of other NHS services including for cancer treatment, heart conditions, elective surgery etc. People of all ages have been affected by the lockdown, lack of physical and social contact, loss of employment and income, loneliness, absence of services and closure of schools, leisure facilities, sporting clubs, churches etc. The severe toll on the mental health of people cannot be forgotten in the push for economic recovery." Leadership and Engagement sub-Committee]

Despite lasting negative impacts on health and livelihoods, some respondents highlighted the effectiveness and agility of the community response to increased need and the benefits of collaboration to deliver multiple services.

7.5 Prioritisation of Issues for Community Planning

Many issues were put forward by Partners as longer-term priorities for community planning. However, many touched on mental health interventions.

"Actions to deal with loneliness for all age groups and including partnering older people's organisations with younger people's organisations subject to the relevant safeguarding being in place." [CVSP]

"Early intervention on mental health difficulties, investment in community initiatives to highlight connection and purposeful living, reduced isolation and loneliness, funding resilience for the CV Sector." [CVSP]

The need to upskill community groups, businesses and individuals both in terms of improving resilience and preparing for the future was also suggested.

"Restoring the economy, supporting business creation and ensuring opportunities for young people in jobs and community engagement." [ABC Peer Network]

"Upskilling those that are unemployed/under employed. Raising digital skills, developing community capacity to become more self-sustaining and bringing in new and younger representation, supporting volunteering." [CPSP]

"The shift from Community Support to Community Empowerment. As we move through covid, a strong focus on a collective approach to Population Health in its widest sense.

The Economy and the Environment, as the former has suffered a lot and plunged families into Poverty." [CPSP]