

Using Behavioural Science to Support Communication Campaigns in North Yorkshire During the Coronavirus Crisis

Final Report – November 2020

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1. Introduction

In late January 2020 the coronavirus first reached the UK. The Department of Health and Social Care for England launched a public health information campaign to help slow the

virus's spread, and began posting daily updates in early February. In February, the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, introduced the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 for England, and hospitals set up drive-through screening. The Chief Medical Officer for England, Chris Whitty, outlined a four-pronged strategy, to tackle the outbreak: contain, delay, research and mitigate.

In March, the UK government imposed a stay-at-home order, dubbed "Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives", banning all non-essential travel and contact with people outside one's home, and shutting almost all schools, business, venues, facilities, amenities and places of worship. Non-essential workers were instructed to work from home if this was possible. Those with symptoms, and their households, were told to self-isolate, while those with certain illnesses were told to shield themselves. It was forecast that lengthy restrictions would severely damage the UK economy, worsen mental health and increase suicide rates, and cause additional deaths due to isolation, delays and falling living standards.

In April 2020, North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to develop communications content to assist NYCC's coronavirus strategy as part of the Local Government Association (LGA) behavioural insights programme.

2. Aims and Objectives

In line with government guidance to curb the transmission of Covid-19, staff at NYCC began working from home in March 2020. Although some flexible working arrangements for staff were in place before lockdown, the move to remote working represented a major shift in how council staff operate and interact with one another. NYCC was keen to support the wellbeing of staff as they adjust to this change, with a particular focus on parents who may be balancing work with increased caring duties.

Over the following months, the general public also had a vital role to play in limiting the spread of coronavirus and helping those in need. Therefore, NYCC was also seeking to encourage and sustain the community response to the coronavirus crisis in North Yorkshire.

During a kick-off meeting between BIT and NYCC on 31st March 2020, we discussed how behavioural science could best be used to support both staff at the council and the wider public in North Yorkshire during the coronavirus pandemic. This discussion was informed by wider work of the council's Covid-19 response work streams, two specific areas were identified;

1. Supporting the wellbeing of NYCC staff as they adjust to working from home.
2. Mobilising North Yorkshire residents to support their local community.

At this initial meeting, the project team discussed what the appropriate format would be for the delivery of the Behavioural Insights (BI) messages. A huge amount of activity with regards to the Covid-19 response was taking place across the whole of NYCC at this time, it was important that the BI project worked in a complementary way alongside the established

Covid-19 work streams. With this in mind (and to avoid any data governance barriers) the project team agreed that a 'message bank' of BI messages linked to the two themes, that could be used in various delivery formats would be the most useable resource.

3. Challenges

Due to this project taking place during a global pandemic and national lockdown the project team faced a number of challenges, meaning a flexible approach was needed.

It was not possible to work to the usual model of taking baseline measurements at the start of the project as the pandemic had already started and people's behaviour and attitudes had already changed significantly in response to this.

There has also been very visible national BI campaigns running during this period, so it is very difficult to measure the specific impact of the NYCC messages against the national backdrop.

Finally, a huge challenge was the speed in which the project team needed to work at. During this period, the situation in the country was changing so rapidly there was a risk that by the time the message bank was finalised it might not reflect the situation at that time. To safeguard against this the project team prioritised the production of the message bank and getting the messages out to the intended audience.

4. Phase 1

In Phase 1, the project team worked with BIT to identify the specific behaviours that we wanted to change, we then explored which behavioural insights might be most appropriate to achieve the desired behaviour change before BIT develop a draft set of 20 messages.

Once BIT had developed the initial set of messages, NYCC gathered feedback. The feedback was not just from within the project team, we consulted with two particular groups that were leading the NYCC Covid-19 response:

- The Staff Health and Wellbeing Workstream- led by Human Resources
- The Communities Workstream – Led by Stronger Communities

In addition to this, BIT held a workshop with other BIT staff members, to gather feedback on their proposed solutions and generate additional ideas.

BIT then use this information to iterate and expand the initial set of messages.

Figure 1: summary of methodology for developing messages



5. Phase 2

In Phase 2, BIT expanded the message bank to produce a set of 57 messages for NYCC to use in their communications. 32 messages were developed to support NYCC staff wellbeing and 25 messages were developed to mobilise communities in North Yorkshire.






Throughout the project BIT combined core principles from the EAST framework for behaviour change (to foster a behaviour, make it easy, attractive, social, and timely) with BIT’s policy expertise and institutional knowledge of the behavioural science literature.

5.1 Supporting the wellbeing of NYCC staff

Following the feedback on the initial messages to support NYCC staff wellbeing three areas were identified for further development:

- Messages including quotes from frontline staff (e.g. carers).
- Messages to help to alleviate anxiety among staff about eventually returning to the office.
- An increased focus on encouraging staff to prioritise their own wellbeing (i.e. be kind to themselves).

BIT expanded the message set further in line with five key strategies.

	Strategy	Summary
	Supporting healthy thinking patterns	Using techniques from the wellbeing and psychosocial literatures to improve motivation and resilience.
	Building community through storytelling	Sharing advice and experiences from NYCC staff to foster a sense of belonging.
	Encouraging behaviours which support wellbeing	Using behavioural science techniques to foster behaviours which support wellbeing while staff work from home.
	Supporting parents who work at NYCC	Helping parents to balance working from home with childcare.
	Easing the transition back into the office	Alleviating any anxiety about returning to the office, and encouraging behaviours which will limit the spread of coronavirus within the workplace.




5.2 Mobilising North Yorkshire Communities

The solutions to mobilise North Yorkshires' communities were developed in line with the following aims:

- Increase the number of people who sign up to volunteer in North Yorkshire
- Sustain volunteering in the longer term

Following the feedback on the initial messages to mobilise North Yorkshire residents an additional area for development was identified; Messages that encourage 'invisible acts of kindness' (i.e. non-formal volunteering).

BIT expanded the initial message set in line with three key strategies.

	Strategy	Summary
	Appealing to people's sense of altruism	Using behavioural science to motivate people to help others in their community.
	Making it easy to make a difference	Creating rules-of-thumb to help people overcome practical obstacles to supporting others.
	Maintaining volunteer engagement over time	Supporting and motivating existing volunteers so that they continue to help once the crisis is over.

As part of Phase 2, BIT also provided NYCC with a detailed report to fully explain the behavioural science principles that had been used to develop the message bank.

6. Phase 3

Once NYCC had received the finalised message bank we entered a period of message delivery. The messages were used in a variety of ways, however, many of the messages were used in two major communications campaigns:

- 'Home but not alone' campaign
- National volunteers week campaign

During phase 3 BIT supported NYCC's communications team by holding a workshop to explain the methodology used to develop the messages and how they could be adapted for different modes of delivery, continuing to act as a consultation point whilst the messages were being delivered.

NYCC's 'Home but not alone' campaign had a focus on building community through storytelling, you can view examples of this content [here](#) and [here](#), staff were encouraged to access staff wellbeing resources including the new service #askSAL, an advice line to support staff with the life challenges or questions that COVID-19 may present, which may or may not be directly linked to work.

The BI messages were also used for NYCC's National Volunteers Week campaign; using social norms, focusing on the positive impact and highlighting the experiences of volunteers. You can see some examples of this below.

North Yorkshire County Council
Published by Hootsuite [?]
1 Jun

This #VolunteersWeek we want to thank people who have looked out for and supported their neighbours during these challenging times.

We'd also like to thank those in towns and villages across #NorthYorkshire involved in setting up groups to help others where they live.

"You might not consider yourself to be a volunteer, but you're making a huge difference and you are a valued part of #TeamNorthYorkshire as we work together to make sure nobody feels alone."

More at <http://ow.ly/cNaK50zVxGN>



4,827 People reached 168 Engagements [Boost Post](#)

20 reactions 2 comments 9 shares

North Yorkshire County Council
Published by Hootsuite [?]
8d

Mick Haves helps to run a football team in #Sherburn.

When players volunteered to donate their subs to help people in the community Mick and others were invited to join the Sherburn #Coronavirus Aid Group.

"I think we get tied up with the negative stuff that goes on in the world. We forget that there are some wonderful folk and when the chips are down people are willing to roll up their sleeves.

"Some of the offers of support and the lengths people have gone to have been nothing short of remarkable."

Find out how you can help at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/how-you-can-help-during-coron...>

Why not also take part in our 5-minute Volunteers Week survey and tell us what you are doing.

Details: <https://consult.northyorks.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp...>



3,355 People reached 41 Engagements [Boost Post](#)

North Yorkshire CC @northyorksc · 4 Jun

In a co-ordinated #TeamNorthYorkshire effort with district councils we've worked with voluntary organisations to make sure people get the support they need during isolation.

#Volunteers have made sure that nobody is left without essential supplies.

[northyorks.gov.uk/help-you-durin...](https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/help-you-durin...)



1 retweet 4 likes

North Yorkshire County Council
Published by Hootsuite [?]
5d

John Walker would normally be out and about volunteering with our countryside service.

Instead, he's helping with the #Bedale COVID-19 Mutual Aid Group as part of the helpline team.

"Beyond the many tragedies that #coronavirus has brought, it has been heart-warming to see communities come together to help each other locally.

"I think everyone's lives have changed forever and our world has changed completely. It's shown us how much we need to work together."

Find out how you can help at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/how-you-can-help-during-coron...>

Why not tell us what you have done in our 5-minute survey: <https://consult.northyorks.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp...>



7. Evaluation Commentary

Due to the nature of this project, the tight timescales and the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, we were not able to run a randomised control trial to measure the impact of the BI messages. Therefore, it has not been possible to rigorously evaluate the impact of the messages on our target outcomes. In this section, we set out key statistics from surveys conducted during the pandemic to illustrate changes in our target outcomes during the course of the project. However, it is not possible to tell how far these changes were due to the BI messages, as other external events may have also affected these outcomes.

7.1 Mobilising North Yorkshire Communities

To inform the evaluation of the Communities strand we have used data collected via the annual North Yorkshire Views Survey, the Volunteers' Week Survey and Website Data.

North Yorkshire Views Survey

The survey was designed to find out what North Yorkshire residents think of their local area and local community and how they are involved in them. It also looked at how the Coronavirus (Covid 19) pandemic has impacted on communities.

The overall themes of the survey related to:

- Your Local Area and Community
- Your involvement (Volunteering)
- Social Connectedness

The questions were designed to allow comparisons with previous Citizens' Panel and the national Community Life Survey, completed in 2019.

Respondents were asked how many times they have checked on a neighbour or done tasks such as shopping during lockdown to assess the level of informal volunteering. 50% of respondents reporting having helped in the past 7 days, with 17% helping three or more times. The most common type of help was social contact (74%), doing shopping (47%), other (24%), collecting a prescription (20%) and looking after a pet (7%). Other ways of helping included moving wheelie bins / recycling boxes, helping tidy up and receiving parcels. Respondents also felt that communities were supportive of each other during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown. The majority of respondents (68%) felt that people were doing more to help others, that other local community members would support them (75%) if they needed help and that people in their neighbourhood have pulled together (69%).

57% of respondents had taken part in either formal volunteering during lockdown or informal volunteering (in the previous week). A further 3% had volunteered but their help was not needed.

In North Yorkshire in 2018, 42% of respondents took part in formal volunteering and 45% took part in informal volunteering.

Nationally in 2019/20, 23% of respondents took part in formal volunteering and 28% took part in informal volunteering at least once a month and at least once in the last year.

Volunteers' week survey

604 people responded to a questionnaire on volunteering that was promoted on social media as part of volunteers' week campaign (which included the BI messages) and kept open for 3 months. This found that:

73% had informally helped with shopping or other essentials since the first lockdown and a further 16% had offered to help but had not been needed. The most common type of help was help with shopping (86% of those who helped), befriending (59%) and collecting a prescription (36%).

Those responding to the survey felt that people in their neighbourhood have pulled together during the Covid-19 pandemic (92% definitely agree / tend to agree).

Website data

The "How you can help during Coronavirus?" page on the website contains information on how people can help others. It covers helping family, friends and neighbours and helping the local community. The number of hits on this page is an indicator on the number of people who are looking at how they can help.

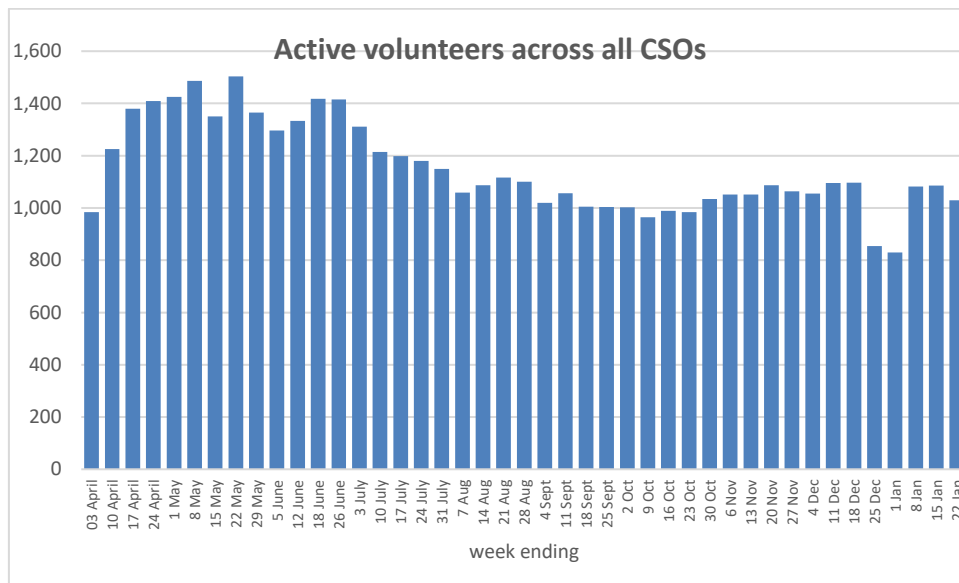
Number of hits on **How you can help during Coronavirus?** webpage

Month	Web page hits
April	1,846
May	606
June	245
July	129
August	90
September	326
October	892
November	513
December	281

Community support organisations

In response to the pandemic North Yorkshire County Council have been working with a network of 23 community support organisations (CSOs) across the county who are bringing together those who can offer help to people who need it. Volunteers deliver shopping, prescriptions and meals, help with pets and make friendship calls.

The chart below shows the number of active volunteers across the CSOs. This does not count all the volunteers in the CSOs network and the volunteers that have not been needed. This clearly illustrates that the county has had a high level of volunteering throughout the past year. The BI messages were used for the Volunteer Week campaign (1st-7th June 2020).



There has been a good response in volunteers to work with the CSOs. Levels reduced as demand reduced and individuals went back to work. On average, the CSOs report that there are 1,836 volunteers available and 1,150 active volunteers delivering 4,494 volunteer hours per week.

Informal feedback from CSOS suggested that amongst the new volunteers were younger people than their existing volunteers.

Further work is planned in the near future with CSO volunteers and North Yorkshire residents.

The Voluntary & Community Sector Resilience Survey co-ordinated in North Yorkshire by Community First Yorkshire found that 60%, 113 of 188 VCSE organisations that responded were able to think of at least one positive that has, or could emerge from the current situation. One of the 10 themes that this highlighted was community action: Greater unity and kindness, greater awareness of/and desire to help the most vulnerable and reaching new people, staff and volunteer commitment in the face of adversity and new volunteers and more social action.

Anecdotally, our communications team reported a high engagement rate with the social media posts containing the BI messages, from North Yorkshire residents.

7.2 Supporting the wellbeing of NYCC staff

To inform the evaluation of the Staff Wellbeing strand we have used data collected via the annual North Yorkshire Pulse Survey.

This survey is issued on an annual basis to staff, this allows us to compare responses to previous years. However, in 2020 a number of new questions were added in response to specific Covid related issues, so not all questions will have a previous figure to compare to.

To the statement, 'I know where to access health and wellbeing resources that might support me (#askSAL)' 92% of NYCC staff agreed. This has not featured on previous surveys, however, the positive response rate to this statement was the highest on the 2020 survey.

To the statement, 'I have adapted well to different working arrangements' 83% of NYCC staff agreed.

To the statement, 'I am able to strike a balance between work and home life' 67% of NYCC staff agreed, this is down 4% on the previous year.

To the statement, 'I would recommend the council as a great place to work' 79% of NYCC staff agreed, this is up by 13% on the previous year.

The overall positive response rate in 2020 was 84%. This was up by 13% on the previous year.

8 Next Steps and End of Project Recommendations

The project generated a useful resource in terms of the message bank and there are plans for the nudge messages to be used in other campaigns planned for the end of the year and beyond, particularly during the period of the current 2nd lockdown.

An important part of this project was the learning and capacity building within NYCC to apply the BI approach across other areas of service. There are already plans to translate this learning in campaigns currently being planned for Fostering, School Readiness and Libraries.

To support this, BIT will develop an online learning module 'An Introduction to Behavioural Insights' which will be available for all NYCC staff to access via the 'Learning Zone' NYCC's training and learning portal.

