

The impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in Croydon North Constituency

Office of Steve Reed MP
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Introduction

Public Health England's (PHE) report, *Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups*, found 'clear evidence that COVID-19 does not affect all population groups equally.' The PHE report shows an association between some ethnic groups and the likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19, with death rates from COVID-19 higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups.

Despite this, the Government has failed to seriously attempt an explanation as to why Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities have been so heavily affected by the virus, nor have they provided adequate solutions.

To get a better understanding of this effect on our community, I invited residents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds living in Croydon North to take part in a survey. This report provides an insight into the experience of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents in Croydon North during the pandemic. It was presented as evidence to the Labour Party's national inquiry, led by Baroness Doreen Lawrence, into the virus and its impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. You can see the full Doreen Lawrence report here: <https://www.lawrencereview.co.uk>

The findings show that while people from white backgrounds generally report having a slightly better experience of the virus, the negative impact of the virus cuts across ethnic groupings. The feedback suggests there was a shared Croydon experience. There is a deep sense of mistrust towards the Government and disappointment in their handling of the virus. Respondents told of their concerns for vulnerable family members, initial fear about not being able to access food in supermarkets, and the negative impact the virus had on their social and economic wellbeing.

Above all, this report shows that the story of COVID-19 isn't just a health crisis, but a crisis of inequality. The data shows that people's pre-existing problems linked to inequality, which disproportionately affect Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in Croydon North, were made worse; and the most vulnerable, such as those in insecure work, physically ill or living in overcrowded accommodation, were disproportionately affected.

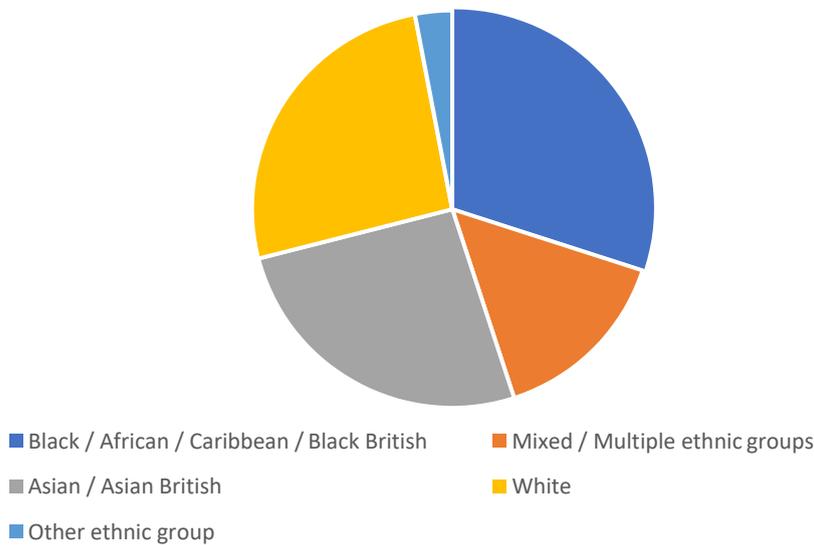


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Survey respondent's breakdown

The survey was conducted over a six-week period between May and July 2020.

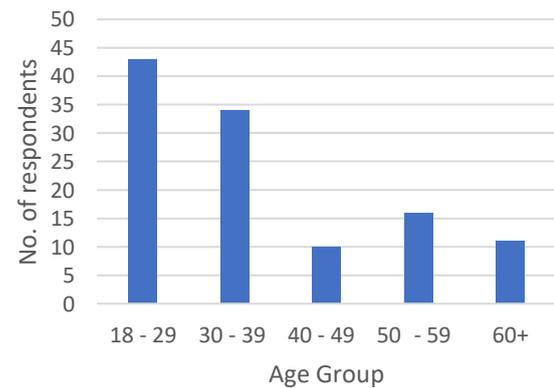
Respondents by ethnicity (%)



114 total number of respondents

75% female

Respondents by age group



Key Findings

1. COVID-19 does not just impact people's physical health but people's social, mental, and economic wellbeing.
2. COVID-19 disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable and has exacerbated existing hardships.
3. Society was not prepared for a pandemic, with many initially unable to access food and medical services.
4. 89% of respondents do not believe the Government's communications have been clear.
5. Despite most respondents following the Government's guidelines, 70% do not believe it will keep them or their family safe.
6. There is widespread confusion about the Government guidelines including around eligibility for testing and how to access it.
7. The Government has failed to pro-actively contact individuals with serious underlying health conditions.
8. Most respondents across all ethnic groups were generally positive about their employers.
9. Where bad employment practices exist, they can have a detrimental impact on an individual's wellbeing.
10. 41% of respondents have not been employed at any time during the pandemic and many respondents do not have access to private outdoor space.

The role of Government during the pandemic: disappointment and distrust

“The Government's handling of the pandemic has been fairly appalling in recent weeks. I feel unsafe in following current guidelines ...” (R. 51)

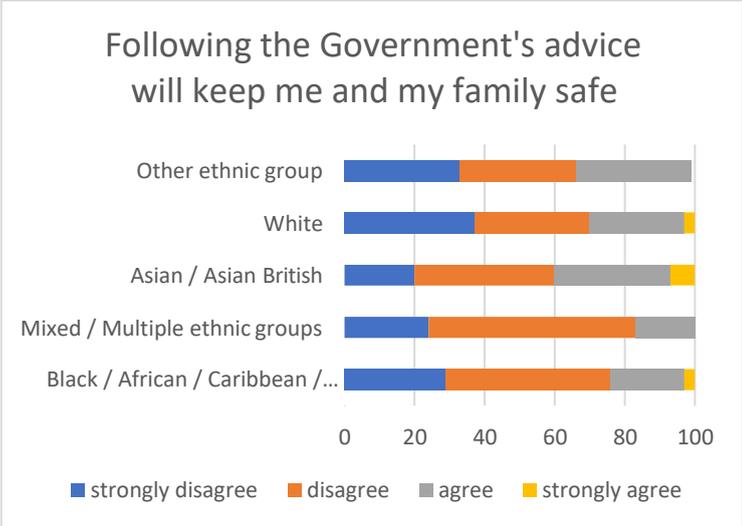
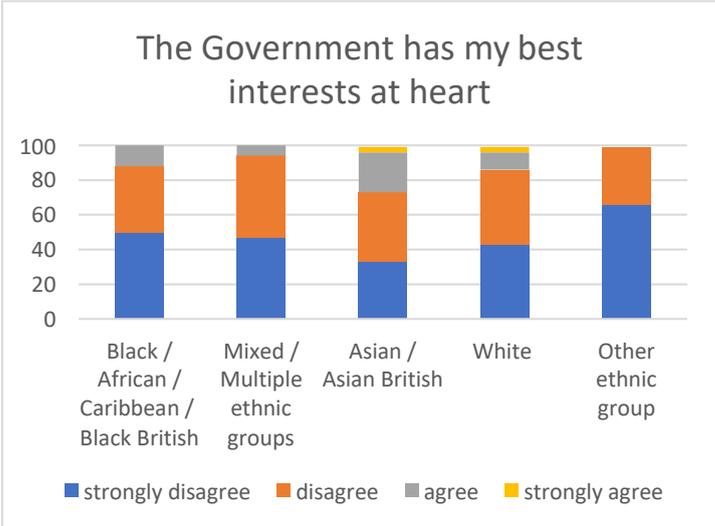
“The government's handling of the pandemic has been absolutely atrocious.” (R.43)

“I am in the high-risk category ... The defence of Cummings is appalling, and I feel all actions are underlined by herd immunity. The government continually lie to us and generally do not care. I feel totally let down by their actions.” (R.31)

Respondents across all ethnicities were overwhelmingly critical of the Government’s performance during the pandemic. Respondents felt the Government was too slow to act, had failed to adopt and implement a coherent strategy, and has failed to adequately communicate with the public.

- 89% of respondents disagreed (26%) or strongly disagreed (63%) with the statement ‘the Government’s communications have been clear and concise’.
- The primary role of any Government is to keep its people safe, yet some deem it wholly or partially responsible for the loss of loved ones.
- Respondents stated that the Government not only failed to adequately respond to the pandemic, but it fostered conditions over a ten-year period that enabled the pandemic to thrive. One respondent said:

“I am completing this survey on behalf of my late mum, [name]. She died at home on 26th March, after self-isolating with symptoms of Covid-19, in line with government and NHS guidelines. On 26th March, my sister tried and failed three times to get through to 999 services for an ambulance. By the time she did get through, my Mum had already died. We firmly believe that if the government had imposed the lockdown earlier, my Mum and thousands of others like her, may still be alive.” (R. 29)



Health and wellbeing

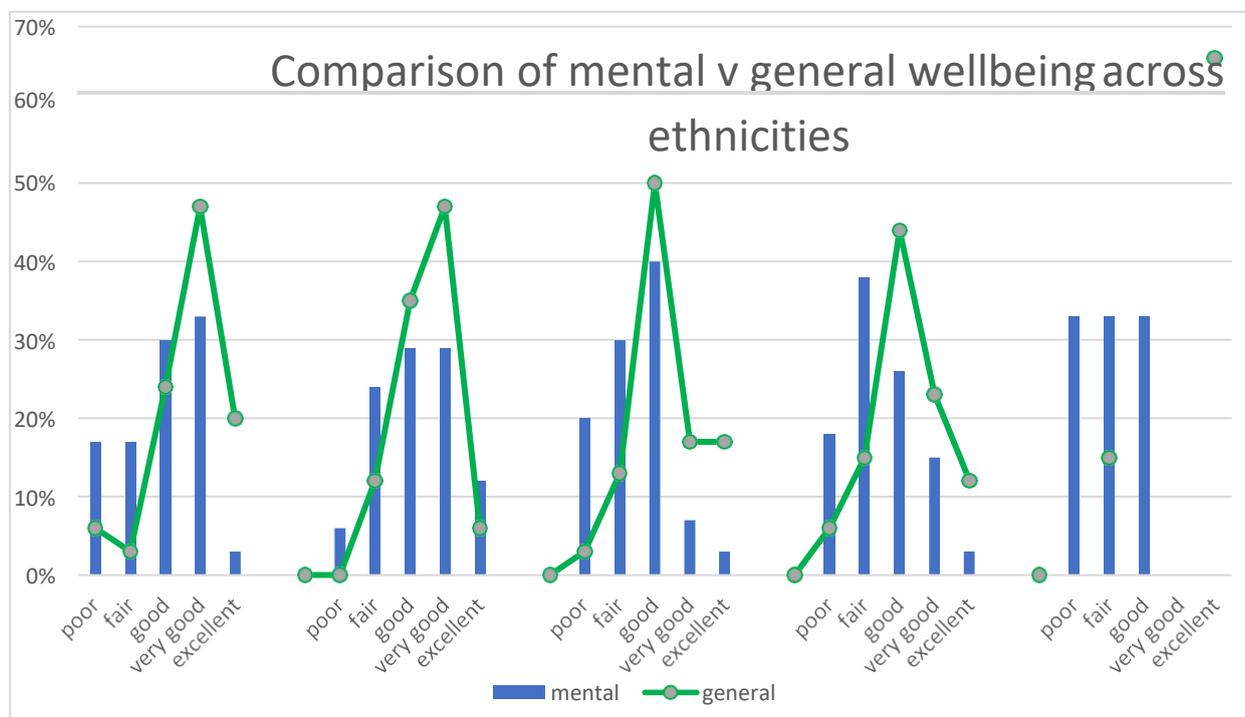
“It’s been difficult getting our prescriptions for our health problems, and our GP has made it clear they don’t want to see anyone right now” (R. 9)

“The test locations are far away and not conducive if travelling is required on public transport.” (R.69)

“I must also add no tests were offered to any of our family when my dad was taken to hospital and passed away. My mother is “high risk” and I believe this should be standard [practice] to see patterns of a virus.” (R. 80)

The impact of COVID-19 on people’s mental wellbeing has not received as much attention as it should have. Respondents across all ethnicities reported lower levels of mental wellbeing when compared with physical wellbeing. The average self-rating for general health was 4.4/5 and 3.7/5 for mental health. COVID-19 has simultaneously exacerbated pre-existing issues and brought about a whole new set of challenges for many people. The pandemic deterred people from accessing non-COVID related medical help, delayed access to vital prescriptions making pre-existing illness worse and prevented people from caring for already ill loved ones. Added to this were stresses around not being able to access tests, the threat of unemployment and broader uncertainty about the future.

- 34% of respondents raised concerns about accessing medical support, including getting tested, during the lockdown.
- Respondents noted confusion about how to access tests and take them, concerns about visiting GP practices or the hospital for other health issues, and delays with receiving prescriptions.
- Over 60 respondents stated they or someone in their household had underlying health issues, yet only four people had been contacted by the Government. Underlying issues included heart disease (x6), high blood pressure (x26), and having had a stroke (x3) or lung disease (x19).



Employment

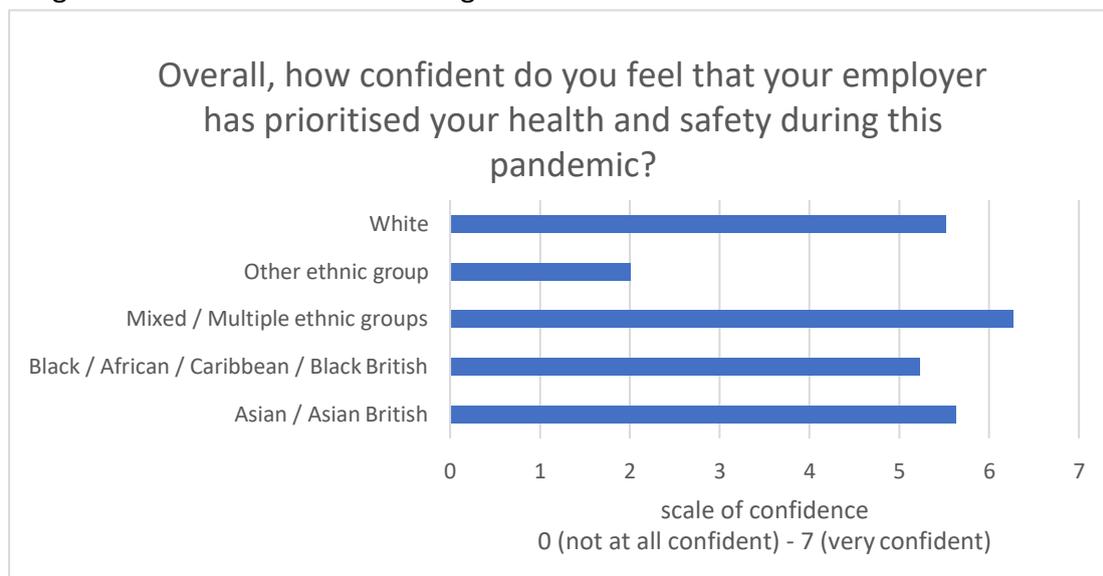
"I was unemployed just before the pandemic hit the UK and therefore my job search has been hindered by the pandemic" (R. 26)

"I am working from home, but my company has done everything to ensure that I am safe" (R. 81)

"Government does not care about the people in this country and COVID-19 has made a major impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups particularly for NHS staff. If we speak out about lack of PPE management will consider you as a problem instead of supporting you." (R. 82)

Respondents were generally very positive about their employer. Overall, 75% of respondents stated that they felt confident that their employer had prioritised their health and safety during the pandemic (rated 5-7/ 7) compared to 11% who did not feel confident (rated 1-3 / 7). However, where bad employment practices existed, it had a detrimental impact on an individual's wellbeing. Some respondents told of being pressured to return to work, feeling powerless about defending their own wellbeing or forced into choosing between earning and isolating.

- 89% of respondents stated that their place of work had given them clear guidance about social distancing rules with 11% saying their employers had not.
- 76% feel safe in their working environment.
- 82% of respondents feel comfortable speaking with their employer about any concerns they may have about COVID-19.
- 65% stated that their workplace provides staff with enough PPE compared to 45% of respondents who said their workplace did not.
- Despite over 60% stating they can, people from Black / African backgrounds felt the least comfortable with speaking with their employer about any concerns they may have regarding the Coronavirus when compared to other ethnic groups.
- People from white backgrounds reported the higher levels of satisfaction about being able to speak with their employer and feeling that their employers were concerned for their safety and well-being.
- That said, people from Black/ African backgrounds were more likely to receive clear guidance about social distancing.



Employment continued

My place of work has given me clear guidance about social distancing rules.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
20	2	3	27	15

My employer is concerned about my safety and well-being.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6	2	5	28	26

I feel safe in my working environment

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6	2	3	14	9

I feel comfortable speaking with my employer about any concerns I may have regarding the Coronavirus.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6	3	8	33	17

My employer approaches me for feedback about social distancing or other guidelines.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
20	5	10	21	11

My place of work enables me to do my job whilst respecting social distancing rules.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
15	3	3	21	25

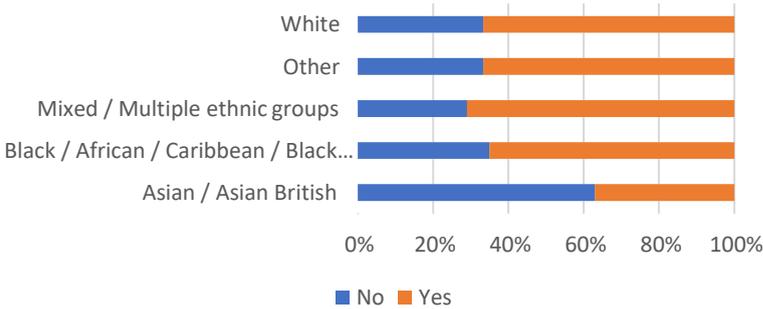
My workplace provides staff with enough Personal Protective Equipment e.g. facemasks, hand gel etc.

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
36	0	11	13	7

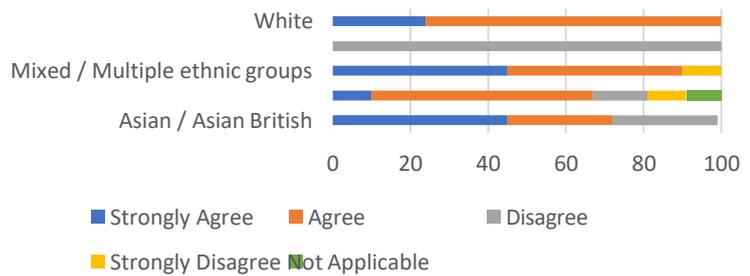
Overall, how confident do you feel that your employer has prioritised your health and safety during this pandemic?

1 (Not at all confident)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Very confident)
2	2	3	10	11	12	27

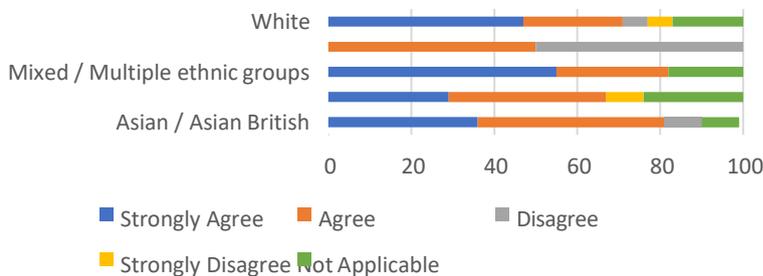
Have you been employed at any time during the pandemic?



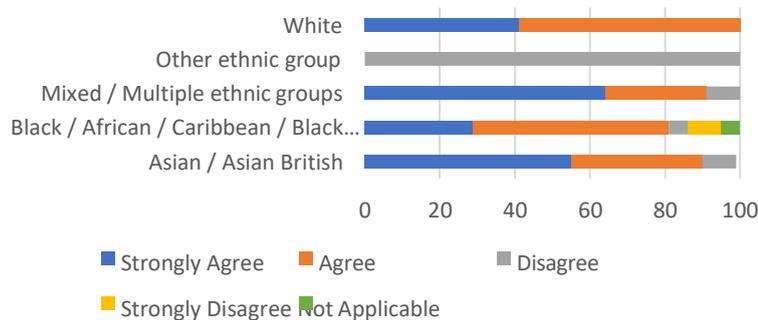
I feel comfortable speaking with my employer about any concerns I may have regarding the Coronavirus



My place of work enables me to do my job whilst respecting social distancing rules



My employer is concerned about my safety and well-being



Housing

“Speaking for my own experiences lack of access to private outdoor space has significantly affected my lockdown experience and ultimately my mental health. Being confined to a small studio apartment is very different from that of a large house with gardens.” (R. 13)

“I live in a third floor flat, as soon as I step out of the internal front door I often have to squeeze past people ... it is impossible to keep a safe distance” (R. 6)

“The main issue faced for my family was the inability to properly be able to self isolate at home” (R. 37)

Overall, respondents reported living with more people in their household compared to the national average. Respondents were also three times less likely to have access to private outside space compared to the national average. Despite these hardships, over 90% of respondents adhered to the Government guidelines and less than 25% of people left the house more than once per day. Peoples living circumstances placed a great deal of strain on them and their families and made living in isolation incredibly difficult. Responds told of not being able to properly isolate, raised concerns for elderly relatives living in their homes, and noted the negative impact that their living conditions on their mental wellbeing.

- Respondents from ethnic minority backgrounds averaged 3.26 people per household compared to 2.5 per white household. The national average is two people per household.
- 18% of respondents did not have access to private outdoor space, 6 per percentage points higher than the national average.
- Those without access to outdoor private space reported having poorer mental health than those with access to outdoor private space.
- During the peak of lockdown, people predominantly left the house to go shopping and for exercise / fresh air.
- People were more likely to leave the house if they had to care for someone.
- One respondent noted frequently leaving the house to visit a foodbank.

“North Croydon is over run with unacceptably high volumes of unsuitable housing which invariably is occupied by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic households, hence the high levels of Covid19 in our area.” (R. 34)

Life in lockdown in quotes

Government handling of the virus

"I strongly believe that since the fiasco with Dominic Cummings and with the Government choosing to back him, lockdown has failed in my local area." (R. 40)

"The government moved too slow to begin lockdown. They have blood on their hands." (R. 75)

Supermarkets

"Supermarkets ran out. Bulk buying, cleared shelves and there were extremely long queues." (R. 19)

On testing

"How the bloody hell do I do it safely?" (R. 39)

"Both my parents felt like they had the virus however we was unable to get medical support during the time they were ill and to get tested." (R. 52).

Health

"My daughter needed medical advice and needed a scan. She was told that all scans had all been put on hold for 3 months." (R. 46)

"But there are many families like us who can't meet anyone outside and are being mentally affected." (R. 35)

PPE

"I work from home, however, social workers have tried to visit without PPE when challenged they state non was provided" (R. 114)

Work and the economy

"Yes as even though I can do my job from home I am pressured to go in" (R. 83)

"The Government has done nothing for people on low income or out of work. The procedures to access anything is a joke for many. I walk past food bank [place] and sadly, donations are coming from ordinary people like me. Not the Government." (R. 85)

Summary

COVID-19 has been incredibly hard for everyone, but it has particularly impacted those from lower socio-economic backgrounds which includes many black and minority ethnic communities. The virus has had a devastating impact on people's mental wellbeing, income and personal lives. It has exacerbated pre-existing issues whilst bringing about new challenges.

What was needed was a Government with a clear strategy to lead us through and out of this crisis. But that leadership was lacking. Constituents reported a host of issues – from confusion about the guidelines or accessing tests, to uncertainty about their jobs, concerns about loved ones, and complete frustration in the Government's basic ability to manage the pandemic. The Cummings fiasco didn't help, but neither did the Government's constant U-turns, policy-decisions and poor communications strategy. "I've received no help from the government" said one self-employed individual, whilst another lamented not being able to look after their ill mother: "I'm shielding so couldn't look after my mum like I'd wish to." Where was the Government's support?

People from specific ethnic groups and poorer socioeconomic groups have been affected harder than most, and many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Croydon North residents fall into both categories. Moving forward the Government must tackle structural inequalities in order to mitigate the impact of the virus. It is simply unacceptable that those most in need carry the brunt of the pandemic on their shoulders.

Key recommendations

Communications: The Government should improve general and targeted communications on Covid safety.

Social Security: The Government must do more to ensure individuals and businesses can financially survive the current restrictions and any future lockdown.

Testing and Tracing: Test, trace and isolate is not working and must be improved.

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing: The Government must ensure that people facing mental ill health are better supported.

Tackling Inequality: The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 is linked to disproportionate levels of poverty which must be addressed.