



Summary of the COVID-19 Committee's *Life Beyond COVID* work

What we did

1. The Committee was established in May 2020, “to consider the long-term implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economic and broad societal wellbeing of the United Kingdom.”¹ Given the very broad nature of our remit, we decided to begin our work by gauging the UK’s current thinking on possible long term impacts, as a way of better understanding the issues and helping us decide what to prioritise as topics for future, more detailed, inquiries.
2. The key question we wanted to explore was: “In 2-5 years’ time, what do people think will be (or should be) different because of the pandemic, for our daily lives and for how we function as a society?”.
3. We wanted to hear from as wide a range of people as possible, and to make it as easy as possible for people to share their views with us. Over 300 people submitted written evidence to us via our website (which you can read [here](#)). We also received over 500 social media posts (which you can see [here](#)), and nearly 6,000 people shared their views via questionnaires created by the campaign group Organise and by the charity Scope. We held an oral evidence session with other organisations who have been collecting views on the long-term implications of COVID (which you can watch [here](#)), to hear what they had found, and we held eight online discussion groups with members of the public (including specific sessions with older people, younger people, parents and people with learning disabilities; you can read the transcripts [here](#)). 37 groups used our discussion packs to gather views from a total of over 4,000 people and 366 academics and researchers responded to a survey run for the Committee by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (you can read the findings [here](#)). We are extremely grateful to everyone who took the time to share their views with us.

What people told us

4. We recognise that, although we took steps to make getting involved as easy as possible and to reach out to groups who wouldn’t normally engage with Parliament, this is not a representative sample of the UK’s population and we cannot pretend that we know what ‘most people’ in the UK think about this subject.
5. What we can say is that the same broad themes came up again and again in the responses that we did receive, and that these themes are broadly similar to those identified by other organisations who have asked people a similar question. They may seem a little obvious, or unsurprising, but they are reflective of what we heard from organisations, from academics and from individuals. They are listed below; please note that the order in which they appear is not intended to suggest the level of importance attached (by us or by contributors) to each.

¹ Liaison Committee, [A Covid-19 Committee](#), (1st Report, Session 2019-21, HL Paper 56)

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6. People told us that they think the long-term impacts of the pandemic will be that:
 - Inequality and poverty will increase;
 - We will be living more of our lives online;
 - Children and young people will experience particularly negative consequences;
 - The world of work will change forever; and
 - There will be long-term damage to people's mental health and wellbeing.
 7. In addition, they told us that they hoped that things would change as a result of the pandemic, particularly in relation to:
 - Greater action on the environment, including a 'green recovery';
 - Changes to the built environment (particularly access to green space); and
 - Caring more about care.
 8. These eight themes are broad; a range of different issues and concerns were raised under each, and many also overlap with each other. Setting them out in headlines in this way does not do justice to the range of material we received, or the time that organisations and, particularly, individuals took to share what were often passionate and sometimes deeply emotional testimonies about their experiences of the pandemic and their hopes for the future. This will all be an invaluable resource for our future inquiries; we are also, as far as possible, making available online so that others can make use of this resource.
 9. In setting out these key themes, we would also make a number of observations.
 10. Firstly, trying to identify the long-term implications of the pandemic while we are still very much in the middle of it is hard; it is difficult, if not impossible, to make precise predictions. Organisations and academics have not had the time to give this any detailed consideration; many individuals are having to focus on the day-to-day challenges posed by the pandemic, rather than think five years ahead.
 11. Secondly, the widely varying resources (whether financial, practical or emotional) people have had to be able to carry them through the last six months, the very different way that different types of work have been affected, the vast disparities in people's living situations and access to outside space – these factors have been critical in shaping people's experience of the pandemic to-date and the consequent long-term impact it is likely to have on them.
 12. Thirdly, it does seem significant that a great many people chose to tell us not what they think will change but what they hope will change; how they would like society to be different. It is unclear whether organisations and individuals simply gave us the same 'wish list' as they would have done before the pandemic, or whether the pandemic has changed the things people care about and the extent they want change to happen. But the responses we received seem to be in line with the various public polling, media commentary etc that suggests that some people, at least, are viewing this moment as a potential turning point; an opportunity to rethink and to change. Individuals often spoke about how they wanted to hold on to changes they'd made in their own lives – different working patterns, family time, reducing food waste -

changes that, if enough people stick to, will result in societal change from the bottom up. Other changes people hoped for – a ‘green recovery’, a different model for funding social care - would have to come from Government. This could be a window where public appetite for change makes action easier; the test is how policy makers and legislators respond.

13. Fourthly, while many people spoke about the great hardships they had endured during the last six months – losing loved ones, being confined in very restricted living conditions and unable to access support, struggling financially and emotionally – a significant number of contributions reflected positivity and optimism. People told us they had valued the chance to slow down, to spend more time with family, to re-evaluate their priorities. Some people spoke about how the pandemic had shown how they, and society, could adapt to change, and that they hoped this newly discovered creativity and flexibility (both individually and societally) could be harnessed in the long term to achieve lasting positive change.
14. Finally, as broad as the eight themes are, there are some interesting omissions. It is surprising that the direct economic impact – recession, job losses etc – did not come through more strongly, although it sits behind much of the thinking around increasing poverty and inequality. Other topics rarely mentioned in the responses we received, but which clearly relate to the long-term implications of the pandemic, include the UK’s international relations, the long-term health consequences, the impact on high streets, towns and city centres and how building design and infrastructure many need to adapt. The social distancing restrictions imposed by the pandemic has meant that all of our direct consultation has happened online; the loneliness, and fear of further future loneliness, of those less able or comfortable to use the internet also came through less strongly than it otherwise might have, but is something that we recognise and intend to return to.

What we’re doing next

15. We will now be moving on to explore the key themes that emerged from this work in more depth, which will enable us to draw more specific conclusions about the long-term economic and societal implications of the pandemic, and make some detailed recommendations to Government (and others). We are beginning with an inquiry into the impact that our rapidly increasing reliance on digital technology, accelerated by the pandemic, may have on our long-term social and economic wellbeing. Following that, we will return to look at some of the other themes that emerged. In doing so, we will be able to draw on the contributions that people have made to this first piece of work and we reiterate our thanks to all those who took the time to share their thoughts with us.