# State of the Area 2020

**December 2020**

**Heather Thrussell**

# Contents

# Executive Summary

Every year the Elected Mayor calls a State of the Area event as detailed in the Council's Constitution. The Authority's approach to the event this year was somewhat restricted as it had to be conducted in-line with Government COVID-19 secure guidelines. In person, face to face engagement was not able to take place so for the first time the event was held online.

This year the State of the Area was based around recovery from the pandemic and concentrated on four main topics climate change, community resilience, town centre recovery and developing an inclusive economy which were key topics highlighted as priorities by residents in the Big Community Conversation held in 2020 and they are also important aspects in the council's Covid recovery plan.

Engagement with residents and stakeholders at this year's State of the Area Event took place in four separate sessions, on four different days, over a two-week period between 24th November and 4th December 2020. Each session focused on one of the topics, climate change, community resilience, town centre recovery or the inclusive economy. Attendance was high with 122 different people (excluding facilitators), taking part over the four sessions.

The Elected Mayor, the Chair of the Council, the Young Mayor and Member for Youth Parliament gave a welcome and set the context for the event in short films at the beginning of each session.

The workshops consisted of presentations and then further discussion with opportunity to give views and suggest ideas in break out groups. Delegates came together at the end to give feedback.

Regarding views and suggestions from delegates, it has confirmed that there is wide interest in the Climate Emergency and that solutions whether simple or costly will be welcomed by some and not others, but the will is there. A change in mindset will be the challenge.

There was an overall commitment to maintaining our town centres but with changes. The idea of a town centre being a community hub was interesting. The workshops on community resilience and an inclusive economy also demonstrated a strong argument for the potential of community hubs.

Community resilience was felt to be key with more needing support but a growing number of those willing to give it. Harnessing and co-ordinating this suggests that the future looks very positive and has a role in delivering a more inclusive economy within North Tyneside.

Moving forward, it will be important to consider how we can support communities to continue to be involved. Central to this will be keeping participants informed of any outcomes.

North Tyneside Council

## Introduction

Every year the Elected Mayor calls a State of the Area event as detailed in the Council's Constitution. The Authority's approach to the event this year was somewhat restricted as it had to be conducted in-line with Government COVID-19 secure guidelines. In person, face to face engagement was not able to take place so for the first time the event was held online.

The State of the Area event gives the council, its key partners, residents and stakeholders the opportunity to reflect, share ideas, and discuss solutions.

This year the State of the Area was based around recovery from the pandemic and concentrated on four main topics climate change, community resilience, town centre recovery and developing an inclusive economy.

## Context

The four main topics were chosen because they were highlighted as priorities by residents in the Big Community Conversation in August 2020 and they were also important aspects in the council's Covid recovery plan. The Big Community Conversation focused on people's experiences during the COVID19 pandemic and their concerns for the future. This engagement showed that the pandemic had focused people's minds on the environment and their enjoyment of it. It had raised issues about the way people shop and the need for certain services in communities. It highlighted that community spirit is still there and the importance of harnessing this. Finally, it raised the issues of employment, training and jobs and the need to ensure that everyone, especially young people have a future here in North Tyneside.

## Attendance

Engagement with residents and stakeholders at this year's State of the Area Event took place in four separate sessions, on four different days, over a two-week period between 24th November and 4th December 2020.

Each session focused on one of the topics: climate change; community resilience; town centre recovery; and, inclusive economy. The sessions were 2 hours long and included presentations and break out groups for discussion. Many people attended more than one session which was an advantage of holding the event online. Each session was attended by 30- 40 people plus facilitators and in total 122 different people (excluding facilitators), including Cabinet members and Youth Council members, took part. Short films by the Elected Mayor, the Chair of the Council, the Young Mayor and Member for Youth Parliament set the context at the beginning of each session.

## The Workshops

After presentations further discussion, with opportunity to give views and suggestions, took place in break out groups. Delegates came together at the end to give feedback. Delegates were also given 15 minutes at the end of each session to add any further comments.

**Climate Change**

**Presentation**

There were 3 presentations. The first presentation explained the story so far around how North Tyneside Council had declared a climate emergency, set targets regarding carbon reduction and developed an action plan and next steps. Following this there were two further presentations – one on the health implications of a changing climate and its local impact and the other on transport and active travel. Health and transport were the basis of discussions in the breakout groups.

**Break out groups**

The groups discussed how they could influence behavioural change with limited funding and whether a change in mindset could be achieved, given that compromise and inconvenience would be needed to support measures that address climate change.  Lastly the groups looked at how behavioural change might be incentivised.

**Health**

There was discussion around improving air quality by removing the number of cars in use across the borough. The group debated how this could be done and concluded that any solution would have to be easy and affordable. A move to hydrogen or electric cars would help, but reducing car use with design, speed limits, banning running engines could disincentivise car use. It was agreed that small changes to the frequency of car use would help but an integrated transport system would be the key to change.  It was felt that further work at a community level to ensure all needs were catered for could be reflected in the current North East Transport Plan consultation.

The other main topic of discussion was around wood-burning stoves and their negative effect on air quality.  It was felt that more enforcement powers were needed to prevent their installation, or the introduction of technology was needed to deal with particulates. Clean Air Zones were highlighted as an idea to help.

**Transport**

The group agreed with the need for a carrot and stick approach mentioned above to using cars less or switching modes of transport and highlighted some of the simpler and cheaper solutions, like speed and parking restrictions which could be tried first.

The group concluded that lack of local authority powers around public transport is preventing solutions around affordability such as mobility credits.  It was acknowledged however that expansion of the Metro and the Northumberland rail line were positive steps forward but again access and affordability are crucial factors in their impact.

Cycling and cycle ways were also discussed with mixed views on whether developments in this area should be demand-led and whether improved cycleways and storage options would help create increased use. It was felt that safety in cycle lanes was paramount and that they shouldn't always follow roads.

There were also discussions around road user charging, car sharing at major employment sites and the need for regional public transport powers.


**Town Centre Recovery**

**Presentation**

This session looked at the four town centres; Killingworth, North Shields, Wallsend and Whitley Bay and the challenges they face and opportunities they present. It explored the effect that the pandemic 9 has had on local town centres but the ambitions that the council have for them.

**Break out groups**
The breakout group discussions aimed to list the five big challenges ahead and the five big opportunities for town centres

**Challenges**
1. Empty properties and sprawling nature of some of the town centres
2. Online shopping taking away loyal customers and out competing local businesses
3. Accessibility by local transport and car plus infrastructure leading into town centres
4. Design and attractiveness including amenities such as toilets
5. Inclusivity and how to make places more attractive to young people

**Opportunities**
1. It was agreed that there are opportunities for regeneration to fill empty properties and centralise retail by including community and creative hubs, housing and housing over shops. It was felt that home working would remain in the long term, resulting in less need for offices. It was highlighted that certain essential services like post offices and the provision of toilets might need to be incentivised as well as an offer for larger retailers.
2. There was an interesting discussion on how to use online shopping to bring people back into the centre. Online hubs for people to use, get help and advice as well as click and collect service points would encourage people into town centres, especially the digitally excluded. It was also felt that campaigns could encourage loyal customers to celebrate shopping and buying local and encouraging more people to try it.
3. There was support for the consideration of parking options which could be linked to a validation scheme and minimum spend or some sort of loyalty scheme. It was also suggested that there could be a town centre experience/tour bus pass which would take people around the different town centres across the Borough.
4. There was discussion about the need for any regeneration designs to design out anti-social behaviour with partners and business to make town centres as safe as possible.
5. There was a strong desire to make our town centres attractive to all. The view was that young people will be key and would welcome a programme of events, live venues, outdoor seating and should be consulted more. It was also felt that older, lonely and vulnerable people of all ages could be attracted to a place that can reconnect and support them through community hubs.

## Community Resilience

### Presentation

The introduction looked at the impact of the pandemic, the local response and the challenges and opportunities created. The workshop presentations looked at volunteering and the role of volunteers and the at the importance of community centres and hubs and lastly at digital challenges and opportunities.

### Break out groups

### Volunteering and role of volunteers

The group discussed how the pandemic had led to the development of different types of volunteering and different volunteers, many of whom were younger. It was suggested that in the future there would be a need to work closer with local colleges and universities to encourage volunteering. It was also suggested that volunteering be more task based and that the Voluntary and Community Service work closely in partnership on this to create flexible volunteering opportunities. The group discussed the need for digital buddies to support more people to access online services. The group looked at access to volunteering and how advertising and promotion of volunteering opportunities could be improved including via the council magazine, on community Facebook pages and on VODAs Volunteer Plus platform.

### Community Hubs and digital inclusion

This group looked at different models of community hubs and agreed that they should be led by what the community needs and delivered via the community themselves.

It was felt that community hubs whatever their purpose would be great places to help and support more people to get online It was felt that to achieve this, online activities should be practical and linked to real life activities. It was suggested that if at the hub you could have a fitting service for online clothes shopping or an online dance programme it would encourage people in and give people confidence to try more things online.

Secondly the group looked at how community groups and hubs could better link up with each other, sharing space and back office staff. It was suggested that all the hubs could network with each other, learning from each other. The development of an online platform Living Well was also discussed. This platform would let people know what community services are out there and where. It was suggested that this started simple, so it was quick to use and people understood its purpose. It could be tested with residents before launch and advertised widely on all types of media when finished.

Finally, it was felt that digital service access should always be a choice and there should always be an alternative

**Inclusive Economy**

**Presentation**

The presentation explored what an inclusive economy is and in the context of North Tyneside what that means for people living here. It explored the impact of the pandemic and looked at the main challenges for the future in three different areas: digital inclusion, education and employment and skills.

There were three questions for discussion

- Who is currently excluded?
- What barriers do residents have to overcome?
- What actions can we take together to address these barriers to achieve an inclusive economy?

**Break out groups**

**Digital Inclusion**

**Who is currently excluded?**

It was agreed that many older people and people with disabilities are excluded from using digital along with those people experiencing 'digital poverty'.  This includes people who cannot access any appropriate hardware, reliable access to the internet and technical support and repair when required.

**What current barriers do residents have to overcome?**

After discussion the following barriers were highlighted; Accessibility, including infrastructure and connectivity, the skills or training to use it and the wealth to afford to have the technology to access the internet and pay for it.  Other barriers were around learning. This included lack of access to IT courses and promotion of these. It also included poor experience of learning in the past especially those which makes attending courses in a classroom setting uncomfortable.  It was also recognised that there was a generational gap issue which has an impact on confidence and finally it was acknowledged that there were people not wanting to learn or improve their digital skills.

**What actions can we take together to address these barriers and to achieve an Inclusive Economy?**

The groups felt that North Tyneside needed to have a delivery approach for the Digital Strategy which is developed and shared by all key partners in the Borough. The strategy should include an audit and mapping of what is available regarding services and support as well as aims to tackle digital isolation with improved access and infrastructure.   It was agreed that it was important to have different projects which tackle digital isolation and improve skills and literacy and to find ways to teach people digital skills in a more relaxed setting, not a classroom one. It was recognised that digital should support services and ways of doing things but not replace them because human connections are important.

**Education**

**Who is currently excluded?**

It was agreed that some children who are carers, non-academic students and students who speak English as a second language could be excluded and that there were some challenges linked to culture.

**What current barriers do residents have to overcome?**

There was discussion around the current outcomes across education in North Tyneside with a difference between outcomes at Key Stages 1&2 and those at Key Stages 3&4. It was felt that a curriculum not based on real life skills was a barrier to non-academic pupils

Lack of aspirations and family support were discussed

The issue of discrimination was discussed exploring how being underrepresented, such as the BAME community and being from a deprived area, can potentially cause barriers especially regarding language.

The impact from the pandemic was discussed with issued raised around the difficulty of home learning during isolation because of lack of IT skills, facilities and software. It was also raised that the impact that the pandemic has had on mental health creates a barrier.  It was felt that resilience, mental health and wellbeing are key issues and that supporting young people on how to deal with 'good stress' and 'bad stress' and understanding that mental health is different from mental illness was vital.

The lack of financial and practical support when transitioning into work was also felt to be a barrier.

It was acknowledged that barriers around education were very complex issues and not easy to solve

**What actions can we take together to address these barriers and achieve an Inclusive Economy?**

Firstly, it was agreed that further consultation was needed.

It was also felt than more opportunities in communities for awareness, learning and raising aspirations would help and could be done with Community Hubs and Day Centres and this would help with communication and signposting.

It was felt to be important to tackle family and cultural issues that don't support educational achievement by greater use of early intervention and prevention and the creation of more routes for non-academic children looking at a greater range of skills.

It was mentioned that the schools could have a role to play by focusing on personal development and soft skills, how to write CVs, clarify what employers are looking for and base more examples and learning on real life.

North Tyneside Council

It was also suggested that further research might help to understand the different outcomes at key stages 3&4 and also how to encourage and support children with language barriers to integrate better.

There was also discussion about how to move focus away from an academic route to creating new routes to qualifications where experience is key.

It was also felt important to upskill people for job growth areas and encourage people from different employment backgrounds to share information and advice to enable young people to understand different types of work such as construction and engineering.

**Employment and Skills**

**Who is currently excluded?**

It was felt that young people have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and that although there is Government funding for 16 to 24year olds, Kick Start schemes and apprenticeships more could be done.

The delegates felt that people already in employment missed out on opportunities to help with job progression or changes in direction, especially those without the correct skills.  This would be especially true for older people who've worked in the same job for a long time and may have difficulties in finding new opportunities if they have been made redundant.

**What current barriers do residents have to overcome?**

It was felt that some  people might have to overcome a barrier of self-doubt, self-confidence or resilience which may be routed in where they come from and their background but could also be linked to learning styles at school.

Where you live could also be a barrier if there is no local work or easy access to transport to work.

It was also recognised that people with disabilities might face particular barriers and possible discrimination.

The lack of digital skills can be a barrier to work and the education system is not geared to this often leaving people who want work lacking the ability to find work.

The reliance of the educational system on getting pupils to University has resulted in young people leaving university and not being able to find any jobs they're qualified for , overqualified and underexperienced for others and lacking the ability and confidence to understand how they can transfer their skills.

It was also acknowledged that there will always be some residents who don't want to work.

**What actions can we take together to address these barriers and to achieve an Inclusive Economy?**

Firstly, it was felt schools should not be solely focusing on academic qualifications and pushing young people towards university. It was felt young people needed more practical opportunities, such as apprenticeships and technical courses. It was also highlighted that young people need to be encouraged to look at all their skills in combination when trying to find a job and not be too narrowly focused on looking for the job they have in mind. Improved career advice in this area was seen to be beneficial especially if there were more links between employers and schools. Careers advisors also have a role in dealing with young people's expectations and make young people aware of what they can expect from their first job and the likely level of salary.

Secondly there was a view that help needs to be there whether it is supporting young people at that key school/work transition point, the Business Forum and Business Factory supporting adults into small businesses and self-employment or transitional training and support after long term unemployment or redundancy.

It was agreed that there needs to be sustainable job growth, and there were opportunities in the work underway through the North of Tyne Combined Authority.

It was also felt that information and communication should be improved along with better funding and signposting to courses. Training for people who are excluded from schools is also needed. A greater use of role models would be useful in representing different demographics and removing systemic barriers

It was also acknowledged that volunteering for all age groups would be useful regarding getting job experience.

**Event Evaluation**

The 122 participants of the State of the Area event had the opportunity to take part in up to 4 sessions held on different dates.

All participants were asked to fill in an Evaluation form and 36 were completed.

Of the 36 people who submitted their feedback, 86% were satisfied. Only 2 people were dissatisfied.

**Questions Asked in the Evaluation Survey**

**1. Why did you choose to attend this year's state of the area event?**

The majority of people said they attended to give their views and felt it was important for the future of North Tyneside. Many felt it was a good way to get information and the actual topics encouraged them to get involved.

## 2. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the workshops?

Of those that completed the evaluation form satisfaction was high.

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Neither /nor | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Climate Change Transport | 3 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Climate Change Health | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Town Centre Recovery | 5 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Community Volunteering | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| Community Hubs and Digital | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Inclusive Economy | 10 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 |

## 3. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the following aspects of the event

Again, satisfaction for every aspect of the event was high

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Neither/Nor | Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Its organisation | 16 | 18 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| It being an online event | 14 | 12 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| The information provided | 8 | 18 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| Your opportunity to take part | 16 | 12 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| The event overall | 11 | 20 | 3 | 2 | 0 |

## 4. What did you enjoy about this event?

People said they enjoyed listening to others, learning and being listened to. They enjoyed the discussions and felt engaged, empowered and as if policy was being formed.  The presentations were enjoyed and informative and included topics which were relevant. One person said they did not enjoy it.

## 5. What do you think could be improved?

Many people felt there should have been less talking by staff and the length of presentations should be cut.  More time to discuss the issues would have been beneficial. It was suggested that information be sent out in advance along with an attendance list. An online event was a problem for a few people.

## 6. Do you think the event has provided an opportunity to explore how we can all work together to tackle the challenges we are facing in North Tyneside?

People were generally positive and found it a place where a diverse group of people had their input, were listened to and had their views recorded.  It was good teamwork and showed increased co-operation through networking.

Some people felt that there was not enough time to discuss and drill down and the agenda was a bit prescriptive.

North Tyneside Council

Generally, it felt like only the start to many and needed to include more people and maybe take on a more area-based approach. People however will await judgement on action taken and feedback given.

**7. This event takes place annually – do you plan to attend future events?**

94% of people who completed the evaluation said they would.

**8. Please could you explain your answer?**
People who had attended more than one session felt that they improved over time. People said the advantages of online were time savings in travelling and parking, but many people also hoped in-person events would resume in the future. People also felt more sessions like these with more people would be beneficial as long as there was feedback on what impact their involvement had had.

# Conclusion and recommendations

This was the very first online State of The Area event and overall attendees felt it was very successful. There was a certain amount of learning as we progressed with the sessions around the use of technology, needing more time for discussion and the need to read out views and questions from the Teams Chat function.

People appreciated the detailed and useful information in the presentations but felt this could have been provided beforehand leaving more time for discussion in the workshops.

The four topics were very popular, each session was very well attended and despite the pandemic the appetite for participation is very high. Moving forward, it will be important to consider how we can support communities to continue to be involved. Central to this will be keeping participants informed of any outcomes.

Participants were once again impressed by the passion and enthusiasm of the young people involved in the event and it is important to make events such as these inclusive.

Regarding views and suggestions from delegates, it has confirmed that there is wide interest in the Climate Emergency and that solutions whether simple or costly will be welcomed by some and not others, but the appetite for change is there. A change in mindset will be the challenge.

There was an overall commitment to maintaining our town centres but with changes. The idea of a town centre being a community hub was interesting. The workshops on community resilience and an inclusive economy also demonstrated a strong argument for community hubs and their potential.

Community resilience was felt to be key with more needing support but a growing number of those willing to give it.  Harnessing and co-ordinating this suggests that the future looks very positive and has a role in delivering a more inclusive economy within North Tyneside.

The role of an inclusive economy was very well covered in the breakout group and again suggests that together we are up for the challenge to provide a future for all residents in North Tyneside.