

BD-CAN PLUS

How the council and civil society have mobilised support for thousands of local people in Barking & Dagenham in a time of crisis



@mpass

**Barking &
Dagenham**

Foreword

A crisis reveals reality – in all its horror and all its beauty. Covid-19 is showing us how unequal our society is, who takes the hit, who dies first, who suffers most and who has to sacrifice themselves to save others. But the mirror the virus holds up also shows us how caring and compassionate we can be. More than anything it reveals our interconnectedness.

The crisis affects everyone but affects them differently. Nowhere is that truer than how different councils have responded to the crisis. Some have reportedly used the crisis to in effect shut up shop and draw back. The crisis reveals their instinct for a minimalist approach – award the contracts, stand back and let the market take over.

For others it reveals a desire to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in. Barking and Dagenham Council in East London, along with many others, exemplify this approach – for them it's an excuse to dig even deeper and build even higher. Compass has been working with the Council developing their work in the frame of our [45° Change](#) analysis of bottom-up civil society action being facilitated by top-down state support – the meeting point of action being the diagonal intersection of the two.

Now the crisis brings that approach into big real time action. Because the Council has invested in relationships and civil society infrastructure it was able to move quickly to both support the community and support the community to support itself. This report, compiled by the Council, shows what they have done, why they've done it and how. Compass is delighted to share and promote it.

The challenge now is to define a new set of relationships between fast moving, agile and empathetic networks like mutual aid, but through the work of the state find ways to accelerate, sustain and aggregate their work. This will demand new approaches and behaviours by the state and civil society – we must learn and develop together. What's happened in B&D over the last few weeks shines a light on what is possible after the crisis if we want to #BuildBackBetter.

Neal Lawson, Executive Director Compass

Executive Summary

Since Covid-19 hit us in Barking & Dagenham, our community and social sector has stepped up to work with the council in amazing ways to ensure there is help for our vulnerable residents. Within a fortnight, we had mobilised a network of support reaching across the borough; linking together the best of local public services and civil society. We have called that network *BD CAN plus*.

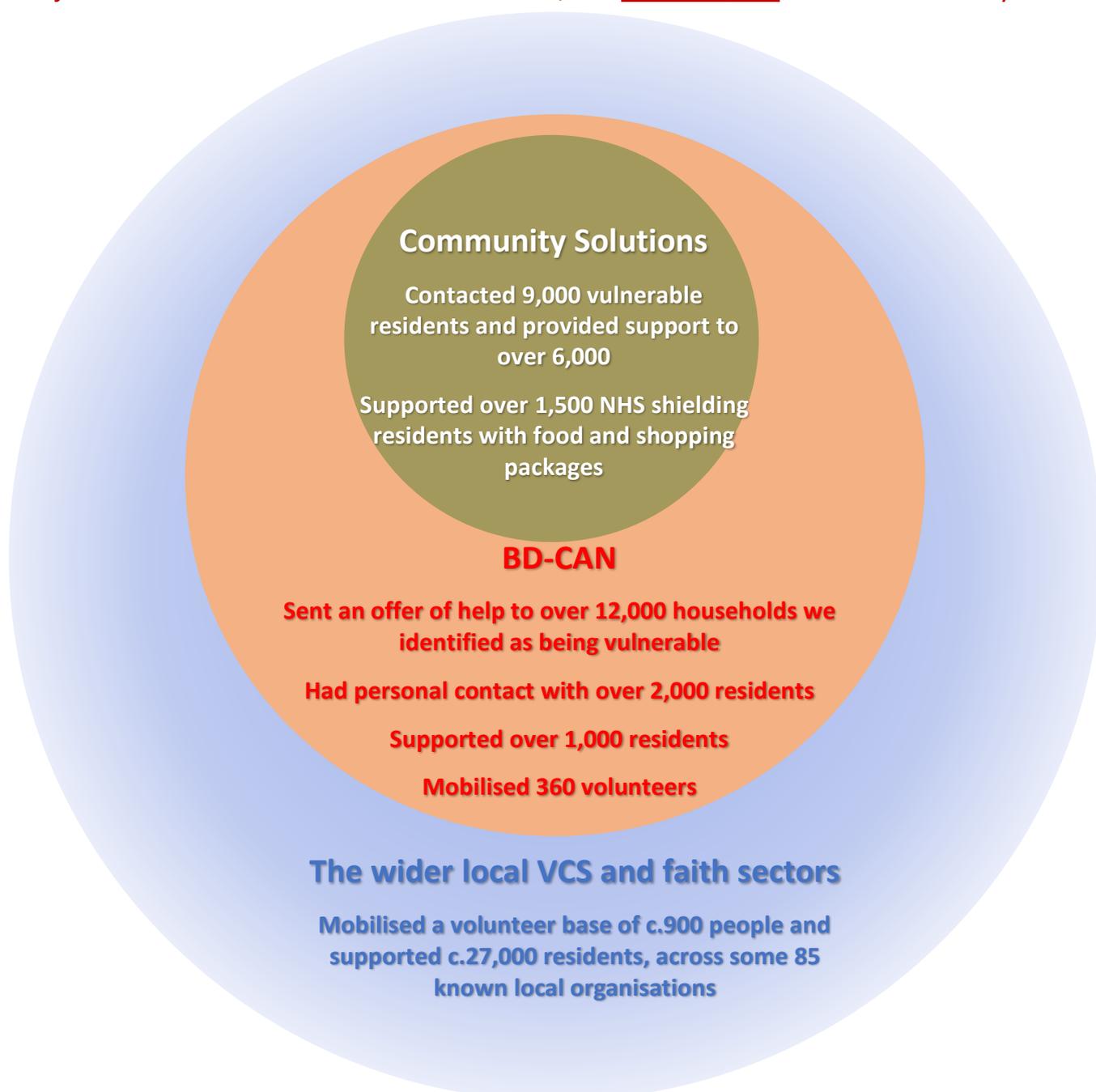
We were able to activate this network so quickly because of the years spent building relationships and supporting the social sector in our borough to grow and connect in new ways. It was also because of the changes we have made to the council itself, in particular the creation of an integrated 'front door' to key support services, which we call Community Solutions. Working together – and alongside all the incredible VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) and faith organisations in the borough – we have assembled and are delivering a seamless support system that is rooted in the community. This system has, quite literally, been a lifeline.

We refer to the overall network of support being delivered in the borough as **BD CAN Plus**, which comprises three elements:

1. **Community Solutions** – the council's integrated 'front door' to support, on issues ranging from homelessness, debt advice, job support and community food clubs (plus running the Covid specialist support hub, for 'shielding' and other vulnerable residents).
2. **BD CAN** – a local platform for the co-ordination of social support being provided by hundreds of local volunteers and orchestrated by an alliance of voluntary and faith organisations from nine locality hubs across the borough.
3. **Wider VCS and faith sector** – a range of other civil society organisations which are providing vital help and assistance to residents struggling in the face of Covid-19.

One month into the crisis, this short report describes that support network we have built, the work it is doing and the impact it has already had. The report also provides some of the recent history and context, which is fundamental to understanding what we have done and why we think it is making a real difference. Finally, the report shares some of the lessons we think our model and approach might have for other areas and national policy debates.

In just the first month of the Covid-19 crisis, the **BD-CAN plus** model has already:



And we have received great resident testimonials about what BD CAN means to local people:

I cannot praise Sunil more highly, he was professional, caring and showed deep concern. He really is a credit to the council. I just wanted this to be passed on as in these difficult time there really are superheroes. Thank you all, my friend is to be referred for continued help .

<  Susan Cripps ► Barking & Dagenham Community page ...

2 hrs · 📍

We just want to say thank you to the young man who delivered my husbands prescription today, We couldnt have got it without him and it's really appreciated. He and the other volunteers are working out of the Barking and Dagenham Future youth zone and its brilliant that they are ready to help people like us that need it. 🍌🍌🍌

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What is BD CAN *plus* and how has it been created?

Barking & Dagenham has a proud tradition of community spirit and civic activism, which has been mobilised rapidly in response to Covid-19. Working in partnership with our voluntary, community and faith sectors, we have, in a matter of four weeks, established a partnership system of community-based support covering the entire borough. At the core of that support offer is BD CAN, which involves a partnership between the social sector and the council to coordinate practical assistance to residents who need help. This rapid partnership response was made possible due to the work done over the last six years where the council has invested in our relationship with the voluntary, community and faith sectors and reconfigured the way our 'front door' council services operate through Community Solutions. This, in turn, has helped to catalyse wider civil society.

Working with our voluntary, community and faith sectors we have together built effective, trust-based, honest working relationships. Crucial to this as been the newly established [BD Collective](#), a consortium platform for the local social sector, which has propelled greater collaboration across the local VCS. Together with the Barking and Dagenham Faith Forum, the BD Collective has worked with the council to activate **BD CAN**: a unique model of community-led support which is enabling us to quickly reach the people who need help in a way that national programmes (based on nationally determined cohorts and delivery models) are struggling with when tested in a crisis.

This strong social sector response has been forged alongside the council's **Community Solutions** service as a key part of the local support system we have been able to rapidly provide for our residents. In 2017/18 we launched Community Solutions – a newly created service with a single core purpose to help people help themselves. It brought together a range of previously separate council services, ranging from: homeless prevention, housing advice and options, tenancy sustainment, temporary accommodation, welfare reform, money, debt and benefits, social care and safeguarding, work and skills, healthy lifestyles, libraries, vocational services and youth work. Through Community Solutions we seek to look beyond a person's presenting issue and seek to understand and address the underlying factors that will unlock meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Both BD CAN and Community Solutions operate within our **wider VCS and faith sectors**, which have dense networks of relationships with residents which they are now drawing on to provide support during this challenging time. This includes providing food vouchers, debt advice, online activities for children and young people, or an opportunity for a virtual cooking session together.

As an illustration of the power and potential of our strong relationships to our local civil society organisations – both those working as part of BD CAN and beyond – we are able to estimate that our local VCS and faith sectors collectively draws on the skills and energy of up to 900 volunteers, with positive connections to as many as 27,000 residents.

How does BD CAN work?

BD CAN is a local platform for the co-ordination of community and voluntary sector practical assistance and support during the coronavirus crisis. It has been forged through a partnership between the council and an alliance of the local voluntary, community and faith sectors.

It is a new form of social infrastructure, built in just over a week by the council and more than 15 lead local civil society groups, to respond to the emerging needs of the community during the pandemic. It is now co-ordinating and delivering a system of community support, covering the entire Borough; getting help to people who need it during this difficult time.



The concept of BD CAN was developed before the Coronavirus pandemic, but has come into its own, and sprung into life, as a result of the need to get urgent support to the community. That help is first and foremost a practical offer of help: picking up medicine; delivering food or essential shopping; offering a friendly phone call; or whatever practical task is needed to enable people to cope.

The target group for BD CAN is people at risk of isolation, in need of simple but vital practical help or a friendly voice, who would otherwise be at risk of falling through the gaps in more formal service provision. It is part of a tiered approach to support for vulnerable residents, and as such works closely with Community Solutions, which provides expert advice and support on issues such as debt, benefits, housing etc – as well as statutory social care and safeguarding services, if greater needs are identified.

Ultimately, BD CAN is an expression of the community of Barking & Dagenham coming together to help the vulnerable and those that need a bit of extra help during this difficult time.



What is the BD CAN process?

- The council provides a single point of contact (phone and email) for any resident needing help with basic tasks they are struggling with given the Covid-19 restrictions – and for any resident wanting to volunteer to provide practical support to their fellow residents.
- This contact is passed on to one of nine place-based locality hubs across the

borough, each run by community organisations that are already embedded in these areas (covering patches of between one and three wards).

- These organisations coordinate the support offer in their area, working with other local VCS and faith organisations and volunteers.
- This support offer has focused on practical help like shopping for vulnerable residents, picking up prescriptions and, more recently, delivering food parcels, but it starts with a friendly phone call confirming what is needed and when it will be delivered. Each locality partner brings their own unique contribution, whether it is adding boxes of celebrations chocolates at Easter or toys for some families.
- Those signing up to be volunteers are shown an online induction video and asked to sign up to do a variety of different tasks. These include shopping, driving, delivering food parcels, picking up medical prescriptions, leafletting to make vulnerable residents aware of BD CAN, making phone calls to isolated residents.
- Our volunteers are now also supporting our local pharmacists – providing additional and much needed capacity to deliver medicines and prescriptions to residents among the most clinically vulnerable (including the shielded population).
- Where additional support or need is identified, the locality hubs connect residents to support through Community Solutions – our early prevention and help service which was already working alongside our VCS and faith partners in providing advice and support to residents (and a single point of contact for any safeguarding concerns).

In short, BD CAN is focused on connecting people who want to be there for others with those who need a helping hand. It often starts with something that is task-based in the first instance, though we are already finding that the personal contact is just as valued, if not more, than the practical help.

In the short-term, we are continually finding more and more ways for volunteers to help other residents during the pandemic. In the longer-term, the hope is that BD CAN will evolve into a permanent platform for community mobilisation and civic activism.

What role does Community Solutions play?

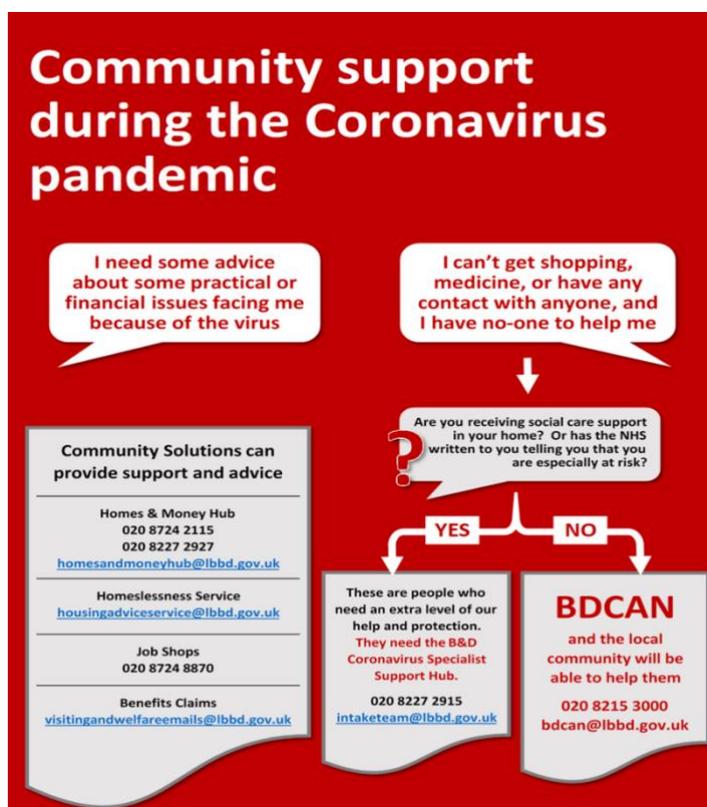
A crucial and distinctive part of our overall model is the role of the council's Community Solutions service, working closely with the civil society-led network of support being co-ordinated and provided via BD CAN. That started with the identification and contacting of the c.12,000 households we identified locally as being potentially vulnerable at the point when Covid-19 hit. Now, where residents require additional help with more complex or multiple issues e.g. with debt or housing issues, or when civil society partners need advice and guidance, Community Solutions is on hand to help.

In particular, Community Solutions, in collaboration with partner services has rapidly co-ordinated proactive contact and an appropriate support offer to around 6,200 residents identified as at greater risk due to their current circumstances. This includes residents aged 70+, council tenants, families and children in hostels or temporary accommodation, those with no recourse to public funds, families and children with lower level disabilities, elderly people through ageing well initiatives and rough sleepers.

Recognising the wider and longer-term implications of economic hardship, and the need to go further than existing national support, we have also launched a new local financial hardship fund. This makes available discretionary financial support to households, to help quickly when they really need it (such as to cover gaps between benefit payments or to cope with lumpy expenditures at a time when household incomes are being hit).

In addition, working with community provider organisations, we have also set up a specialist support hub, to ensure support is available for those with higher needs. This includes help for residents who are 'shielding' from the virus and others self-referring as being medically at risk.

To date, over 1,500 people have been contacted, triaged and the necessary support put in place. This has included 1,120 food and shopping packages and assistance with medication deliveries and welfare check-ins.



Why do we think BD CAN is working – and what are its wider, long-term lessons?

The mobilisation of BD CAN in such a short space of time has been possible because strong networks, connections and relationships have been developed across civil society, community and the council over the past few years, which could be activated and mobilised quickly when the crisis arose. Key elements of this enabling context are:

- The creation last year of the ‘BD Collective’: a platform and alliance of dozens of local voluntary and community organisations which have come together to provide leadership and an anchor institution for the local VCS (and, by extension, a strong partner for the local council).
- An active, engaged and campaigning local Cllr base, with strong roots and relationships with their residents and the wider local community.
- A highly effective council comms capability, able to promote and disseminate messages across the community (in particular through videos and social media).
- A collaborative approach across the council which has enabled officers to be deployed rapidly to contribute to this new form of social infrastructure – and have the frank and honest conversations needed to make BD CAN possible.
- A strong data and insight function at the council, able to generate rapid and sophisticated analysis of the local population and patterns of need within it. For example, we identified the areas of the borough with greater risks of vulnerability and isolation and delivered information about BD CAN to 12,000 homes in just a few days (while waiting for data on our ‘shielded’ residents from government).

This context and capability made it possible to identify the people in need of help and mobilise support for them quickly, while ensuring coverage across the borough. BD CAN is also an example of the local state and the VCS working together and playing to their strengths. Almost three-quarters of local organisations report now being better connected to other organisations in the Borough as a result of the recent BD CAN mobilisation. By linking the spirit of activism, collaboration and civic passion across the community with the capacity of the local council to facilitate, coordinate and communicate at scale, the impact has been amplified and we have been able to ensure that all parts of the borough are able to get the support they need.

Standing back, the current crisis has illustrated the strength and virtues of the NHS, as our most important national institution. However, the crisis has also revealed how difficult it is to identify individuals in need, deliver support to them and coordinate volunteer efforts, through nationally-led programmes. For all their good intentions, the activity surrounding the NHS shielding cohort has been beset by inaccurate and incomplete information, while the volunteering programme has not got off the ground in any meaningful way.



Perhaps the starkest example relates to the delivery of food parcels. Central government has so far been unable to create an accurate target cohort list and has struggled to orchestrate deliveries of food to those households.

Meanwhile, in Barking and Dagenham we have been able to mobilise and provide support much quicker.

We worked with our local supplier to quickly establish a central food distribution hub in the middle of the borough. We pursued a range of food sources and were able to establish a robust food supply into our central distribution hub, capable of meeting the needs of our community. From this central food hub and a number of sister sites strategically located across the borough, council services, civil society organisations and volunteers have worked together to prepare vast numbers of food parcels for delivery to residents every day.

Then, using our own data and insight capability, alongside the intelligence of our civil society partners and the community itself, we have created a large and growing picture of the residents who need help. We got the word out that we were able to provide support through social media, local organisations and faith groups, posters, letters and leaflets. A mixture of volunteers and public servants are now delivering these essential food packages to vulnerable residents every day.

In moments of major crisis, there are some things that only national government and national institutions can do, from securing intensive care capacity in hospital to supporting the macro economy and household budgets. But in recent weeks we have also learned that there are vital and complementary support functions – based around people, place and relationships – where local government, working with its community, is best placed to lead.



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The logo for Compass, featuring a stylized '@' symbol followed by the word 'compass' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

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