



Surrey Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment

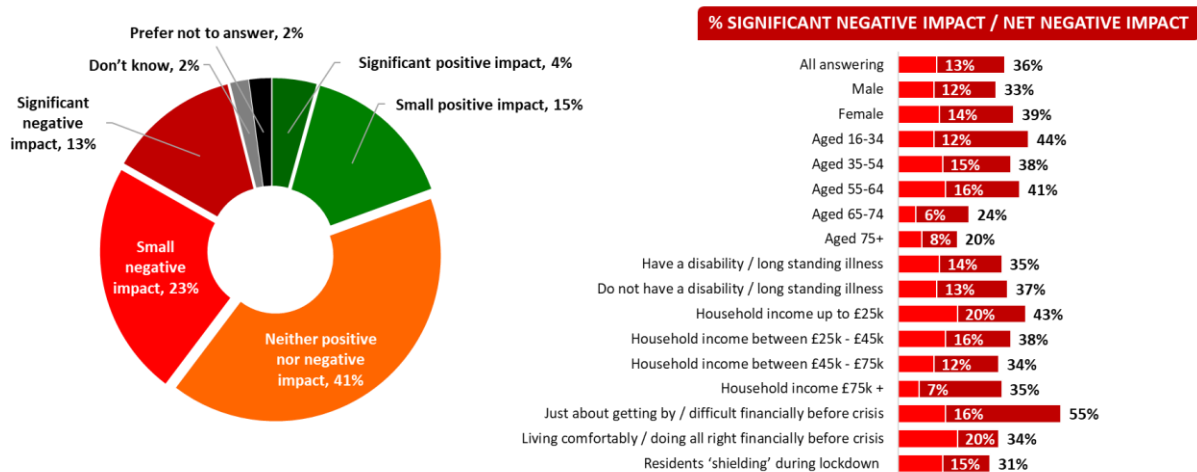
Economic and Finance Findings



1. A third of residents have reported that Coronavirus has had a negative impact on their household income. Vulnerable groups were also significantly impacted financially

Prior to the pandemic, just over half of residents surveyed reported that they were living comfortably; 38% were doing all right and 11% were just about getting by or finding it difficult. Since then just over a third of residents have reported experiencing a negative impact on the income of their household as a direct result of Covid-19, one resident expressing that “we fell off a cliff really” due to such a sharp cut in their income. On the other hand, 41% of those surveyed reported neither a positive nor negative impact and 19% have seen a positive impact, one resident noting that “financially, it's done us a favour” as they were spending less and earning more due to doing more overtime.

What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on the income of your household, if any?



Base: all answering (2,104)

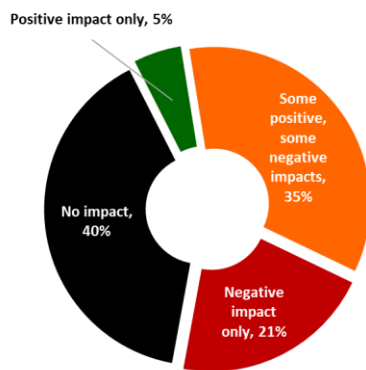
Financial challenges were highlighted with many GRT community members generally self-employed and the impact on individuals, families, carers and services was also a common concern amongst vulnerable groups; many of whom also felt there was little financial support available to them.

2. Over half of residents report a negative impact on the employment of their household with furlough having an emotional toll on residents

56% of surveyed residents have seen their household negatively impacted in terms of employment, with 40% experiencing no impact and only 5% reporting a solely positive impact. Over half of freelance or self-employed residents have seen their business reduce, one resident saying that it “will be years to make up the losses”. 59% of those surveyed who are employed are now working from home more, and 16% have been furloughed.

The ethnographic research particularly highlighted the emotional toll on furloughed residents. Furlough created a sense of never-ending uncertainty that prohibited many residents from moving forward, one resident describing it as “fluffy furlough, as it is like the rug could be pulled from beneath you at any time”. As a result, many saw the end of furlough as a key juncture at which they would finally know their employment status and would then worry about the future.

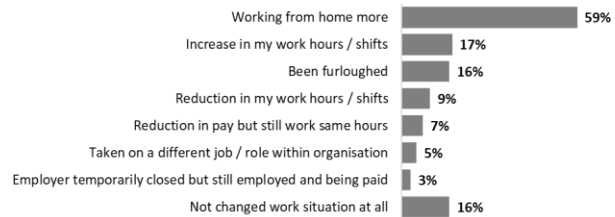
How has the coronavirus crisis impacted your household in terms of employment?
Excluding 'Not applicable'



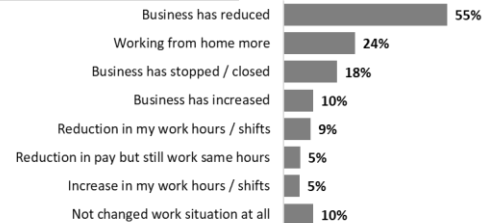
Base: all answering (2,025)

Has the coronavirus crisis changed your work situation in any of the following ways?

Those employed full / part time / zero hours contract (n=793)



Those freelance / self employed (n=123)



3. Furloughed and commission-based residents suffered greatly, despite having an income, and would have benefited from additional support with adjusting to decreased incomes

Support offered to residents who relied on commission for most of their salary was limited. Although, technically, those on furlough were receiving 80% of their total salary, residents working on a commission basis were typically earning just a third of their usual income and received no guidance on how to adjust to this change.

Some furloughed residents expressed that if they had been equipped with the knowledge and resources to do so, they would have liked to have used furlough as a point to explore a career change. A lack of information and networking opportunities combined with a general lack of awareness of opportunities for professionals who have not found themselves unemployed before has proved to be a barrier for change.

4. Certain industries and sectors felt that they missed out on much needed financial support

A lack of guidance on how to adjust also resonated with those working in severely economically impacted industries such as hospitality and construction, who felt excluded from governmental support. This was due to residents being unable to do any usual overtime and business owners often having the title of Company Director and therefore being ineligible for financial assistance. As a result, industry resources became the main source of

filling the 'information gap' left such as a construction-based radio station or an online angler's society.

Many self-employed and business owners 'fell through the cracks' when it came to relief schemes, having to rely on Universal Credit. Even where this was available, residents reported that payments were unpredictable during lockdown and therefore didn't provide much financial stability. There was also a lack of information as to why someone did or did not qualify for assistance, and those who didn't qualify for the self-employment scheme felt let down that they had 'paid into a system' that in turn was not there when they needed it.

5. Economic strain was heightened for parents of school-aged children

Only 2% of surveyed residents felt that Covid-19 had impacted on their children's education positively, with 49% saying it has been entirely negative. The sudden switch to online classes and homework placed a financial burden on struggling families as schools require technological devices that many families do not have. Without access to technology, parents feared that their children would fall behind.

New school restrictions also placed a large burden on parents who were already juggling multiple instabilities. We heard from parents looking for new jobs that they are restricted by a lack of childcare, combined with the inability for children to share lifts to school and the new and very specific school pick-up and drop-off times. There is also a fear that they will have to take time off any potential work if their child is infected, combined with a fear for their children's health and safety. In extreme cases, an inability to pay for childcare has prevented some parents from returning to work, leading to a fear of redundancy.

6. The concept that financial assistance is only for the worst off further prevented residents from seeking help

Over 75% of surveyed residents reported feeling that government financial assistance was only for the 'worst off', preventing them from seeking help; and there were direct physical and emotional repercussions of these impacts.

Almost everyone we spoke to expressed that they had something to be grateful for and that "there are others worse-off" than them. Many residents returned food parcels or were hesitant to accept government assistance because they felt that others needed it more, despite having reached the limit on their credit card or defaulting on their mortgage.

All residents expressed positivity and gratitude for something; those that were unwell were grateful for their homes, those struggling financially were grateful for their family, and the lonely were grateful for their health. While a survival mechanism, this sense of positivity has prevented residents from getting help until they are desperate with no alternatives.

Worries of both a local and global recession in the long-term made many residents hesitant to accept handouts, with many concerned that "we will have to pay it back someday".

7. Financial assistance was beneficial for some residents but also left those who were ineligible facing difficult choices

Residents who found themselves eligible for financial assistance did so through a mixture of governmental assistance (such as grants, low-interest loans, mortgage holidays and universal credit) and local assistance (such as council tax holidays, business grants and food parcels). However, those who were ineligible for assistance resorted to lifestyle changes to get by. Examples we heard from residents include cancelling subscriptions (gyms, Netflix etc.), removal of all travel and eating out, a greater reliance on credit cards and eating more simply such as swapping meals for beans on toast.

8. Some residents reported that Covid-19 had a positive impact on their financial situation

It is also important to note that not all residents had dramatic changes to their financial circumstances, and in fact 13% of residents say that Covid-19 has only had a positive impact on their finances. Some were promoted or earned more working overtime, and many were able to save more money than pre-lockdown due to not paying for childcare, travel, eating out or holidays. In addition, those who had experienced financial struggle before lockdown were aware of what was available to them in terms of benefits and therefore received assistance.

9. There is widespread support for local business

Over half of residents surveyed believe the County Council and partners should focus on supporting local businesses over the coming year, making this the number one highlighted priority in the survey.

We found that eating out locally was seen as “stimulating the economy”, and many residents were willing to eat out for this purpose. Our survey also found that encouraging residents to shop locally and support local businesses was the most popular priority that respondents believed the County Council and health partners should focus on over the next year.

However, the positive impacts have not always been felt by local business owners. One restaurant owner expressed that “the local customers are loyal here, but those who came during Eat Out to Help Out only wanted a deal and haven’t been back since” and so he feels the initiative was introduced too early in the pandemic.

Economy and Finance - Opportunities for Action

1. Work with partners to support residents who have been impacted by employment challenges. For example, work with Job Centre Plus to review their offer and ensure it

meets local needs (e.g. providing financial planning tips to those who are not used to living with less income).

2. Explore ways to promote information to residents on how to access advice, guidance, or training at a Further Education College to improve their skills and support a return to employment.
3. Consider ways to work with partners and local employers to help incentivise an increase in apprenticeship starts locally. For example, areas where the government has recently made new announcements or utilising the council's apprenticeship levy to transfer to local businesses.
4. Encourage local industry to emphasize hiring candidates from linked industries (e.g. cabin crew and customer service).
5. Improve support for families identified as struggling the most by helping to maximise take-up of government support schemes, for example Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance, access to food banks and financial counselling and providing incentives for childcare, school transportation and nursery fees.
6. Signpost information to government education technology initiatives (laptops and tablets for children).
7. Explore with partners innovative approaches to signpost support and listening services for mental health and emotional wellbeing for 16 to 34 year olds, who are typically "hard to reach" (e.g. targeted social media/advertising, paid partnerships with local influencers to amplify key messaging).
8. Run communications campaigns that encourage residents to support local businesses and encourage businesses to purchase locally and use local supply chains.
9. For all the above, focus efforts in the areas that have been most impacted economically, for example areas in Spelthorne and Reigate & Banstead.