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NATIONAL BUSINESS RESPONSE NETWORK



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LSEG

FINAL REPORT



Table of Contents

Foreword.....	3
Overview.....	4
Key Activities & Achievements	5
Key Case Studies	7
Media Coverage	11
Future of COVID-19 Recovery	14
Acknowledgments	15
Contact Details	16





Foreword

When we launched the National Business Response Network (NBRN) back in March 2020, none of us foresaw the impact the pandemic would have on our lives; the chaos, the uncertainty and the fault lines that would widen. It is in moments like this, when society is pushed to the precipice, that our values are tested and our true nature revealed.

Business in the Community (BITC) saw that when our communities were most in need, it was business that came knocking on the door – ready, able and willing. From thousands of meals, laptops, household items to professional training, we have seen the full spectrum of what business can offer. The scale of matchmaking we have been able to achieve has really showcased business at its best. With help from companies like JCDcaux, we were also able to amplify our message and make it known far and wide that we were here to help. Since day one, we have now made over 5,000 connections, supporting 1.7 million beneficiaries. 1.7 million lives receiving support in a time of crisis That is something to be proud of. We have come a long way since we first spoke about launching the network, but we have never forgotten who is at the heart of it.

None of this would have been possible without our Founding Partners – AXA, LSEG and the Covid-19 Support Fund – and the tireless efforts of my colleagues; for which you all have everyone’s profound thanks. My hope is that as we step away from the cliff’s edge and into the next chapter, we do not lose this momentum for community engagement or the renewed trust in business. My hope is that business remains well and truly back in the community.

Amanda Mackenzie OBE
Chief Executive
Business in the Community



‘For very nearly four decades I have been adamant about the vital role that business has to play in communities; after all, that ambition was one of the foundation stones of BITC itself back in 1982. At the time, we may not have had a global pandemic in mind, but in many ways the National Business Response Network is the ultimate realisation of the dream that we shared almost 40 years ago: I need hardly say how immensely grateful I am to every business leader who has had the courage to support it. I have no doubt that those who have done so have changed countless lives.’

**His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales at Business in the Community’s
Responsible Business Live Event, 2 December 2020**





Overview

From March 2020 we have shared the vision of activating and enabling business to reach those most harshly impacted by the pandemic. With 5,279 connections as of the 15 October 2021, reaching over 1.7 million worthy beneficiaries we are confident that we have been successful in achieving this. From early comments from Government describing the National Business Response Network as *“the best and most effective response to COVID-19 by the voluntary sector”* to words of support from our Royal Founding Patron, we are so proud of what we have achieved over the past year and a half.

We have leveraged the strength of our membership, engaging 365 members to support our communities across the UK. However, we have also engaged significant numbers of non-BITC members too, helping to promote and enable responsible business practice, and to grow the movement. However, this only equates to 58.8% of the offers received. The NBRN has been an excellent tool in spreading the importance of social sustainability, supporting our communities during difficult times. This is illustrated through Microsoft, Hutchinson 3G UK (Three) and Network Rail joining as new members of BITC as a result of their engagement with the platform.

The interest is understandable from the great exposure BITC has as a result of the network, from major campaigns such as #TogetherWeCan in November 2020 reaching out for clothing and care, technology, digital skills, and food. This had a major impact on public awareness of the platform, with 1777% more impressions on LinkedIn than the previous post before the campaign started, and 275% on twitter. To later donations of physical advertisement by JC Decaux providing 215 sites of outdoor advertising for the National Business Response Network across the UK, the largest appearing in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. Public awareness was raised of the platform with an estimation of over 14 million impressions. Our communications team with support from our members have worked hard to drive engagement through these campaigns all of which contributed to our 5,000 plus matches on the platform.

This report will discuss the different success we have been able to achieve with your support and how we have used this insight to review our next steps as the pandemic 's impact is changing both on business and the community at large.





Key Activities & Achievements

The National Business Response Network has primarily focussed the support of our members on the following high-need issues:

Digital Divide

One of the key needs identified from the first lockdown was technology, with the sudden shift to working from home and schools moving online left many children unable to join virtual lessons with their classmates. We immediately reached out to our network for devices but due to a national shortage of new devices we had to be creative, so to increase our capacity to receive donations through the platform we partnered with Computers4Charities receive, second-hand devices, wipe them, and redistribute.

Major donations including Virgin Media of £300,000 in financial donations and 1,500 laptops and 4G bundles; CVC Capital matching employee donations 5 to 1 of every laptop purchased with employee donations which reached £8,500.

Food Insecurity

Foodbanks saw an exponential rise in demand at the end of 2020 seeing a 61% increase in food parcels distributed across the UK – six parcels given out every minute. We were able to combat this need through the support of our members. We worked with BITC Member Wheatley Group to maximise the value and impact of a £700k donation from Scottish Government,

distributing food vouchers to organisations to those in food poverty in southern Scotland.

Domestic Abuse

There was a 49% rise in calls for support in Wales towards the end of 2020 due to the 'perfect storm' of the pandemic escalating and routes to safety for survivors to escape cut off during lockdown. In response we undertook a 'deep dive' into the domestic abuse sector in Cardiff to review needs and identify the best way to support.

We identified and spoke to 80 local domestic abuse victim support organisations, with 22 in-depth interviews resulting in 82 individual NBRN requests for support. As well as individual requests, each interview fed into the common needs report to help direct future work. We were able to match 10 organisations to Reward Gateway, an online wellbeing support platform which has been well received by these very well-deserved charities.

Youth Mental Health

With 67% of 13–25-year-olds believing the pandemic will have a long-term impact on their mental health, we undertook a deep-dive into the issue in Birmingham to identify where business can best support. Our report concluded that due to long wait times for NHS services, there is a role for business to help build the capacity of front-line organisations in mental





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health awareness to act as a first line of support during these challenging times.

Across all three nations, there has been a continued new flow of people experiencing homelessness since the start of the pandemic, due to the great economic impact of COVID19. To support the vulnerable individuals who are sleeping rough during these uncertain times with restricted access to support during lockdowns we shared the need with our members who supported in the following ways: IKEA providing furnishings to help turn 30 houses into 30 homes and 410,000 items of clothing donated from a major high street retailer which supported 80 charities and community organisations across the UK supporting vulnerable adults, disadvantaged families, and the homeless.





Key Case Studies

Disabled people helped back into work by NBRN connection

One of Britain's best-known retailers has paved the way for disabled people to find employment thanks to a [National Business Response Network \(NBRN\)](#) connection.

[Department store John Lewis](#) donated three top-of-the-range laptops to the Birmingham branch of [Sense](#), a national charity supporting children and adults with complex disabilities, including deafblindness.

The laptops will be a key resource at the branch's job clubs, which serve 32 people. Users will be able to borrow the devices to search for employment and create CVs from home and at the centre.

The donation came in January after Sense asked for support through the NBRN, a Business in the Community (BITC) initiative supporting vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sense fundraising manager, Carl Williams said: "Many of the people we support are deafblind and explore the world through touch. With our centres closed during lockdown, this has caused greater isolation."

Before the pandemic, those with disabilities were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those without. COVID-19 has threatened to

exacerbate this inequality – something Sense has looked to tackle through its [Aspirations For All project](#), which began in 2019.

Carl said: "These laptops can be installed with software to help those with visual impairments. They can build our users' confidence and offer a route to help them back into work. Thank you to John Lewis for arranging this really generous donation."

Technology sales manager, Manoj Jadeja of John Lewis for Business said: "We are glad the laptops were beneficial. Hopefully the job clubs will go from strength to strength. Through our work with the NBRN we are happy to help worthy causes like Sense."

NBRN partnership assists school's food bank

A school in one of the UK's most deprived areas has hailed the National Business Response Network (NBRN) for securing a large donation for its pandemic food distribution programme.

[Manorfield Primary School](#) is based in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, which saw some of the highest infection rates after the first coronavirus lockdown began in March 2020.

Manorfield Headteacher Paul Jackson said: "When COVID-19 struck we hit a huge barrier. Many of our families, particularly those from multi-ethnic





backgrounds, live in multi-generational households. Many of those families saw deaths, and unemployment was heightened as work in industries like the restaurant trade, disappeared completely. As a school, we can recognise when people face difficulties and could see there was a need for basic essentials.”

A community food bank was established within the school and Paul enlisted the help of NBRN, a Business in the Community (BITC) programme created in response to COVID-19 to deliver rapid support for vulnerable communities.

The connection soon paid dividends, as natural soft drinks company [Nexba](#) offered several thousand bottles of sugar-free flavoured fizzy water.

Paul said: “Sometimes there is a stigma attached to going to a food bank, but families were much more comfortable coming to us.”

Working with the Tower Hamlets central food hub, other food banks and their charity partners, Manorfield was able to distribute the Nexba drinks to families across the borough.

Paul said: “The donation was invaluable. Not only did it save our families money, it also delivered joy to people who deserve it. To have this support from a business reminds them there are people that care and who want to help.”

Legal & General: building small business skills in Wales



[Legal & General](#) is a top 20 global asset manager, and the UK’s largest provider of individual life assurance products. Its organisational purpose is to improve the lives of customers by building a better society for the long term, using its assets in an economically and socially useful way to benefit the communities it serves.

Legal & General has long supported the work of Business in the Community (BITC) in Wales, since becoming a member of the network in 2007. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Legal & General has proactively supported communities through the [National Business Response Network \(NBRN\)](#). It has not only offered immediate support and donations to organisations tackling the effects of the pandemic – such as essential items for women survivors of domestic abuse through the charity [Safer Wales](#) – but also encouraged staff to use their skills and experience to support longer-term positive changes that can help Wales [Build Back Responsibly](#).

Colleagues in South Wales have played a prominent role in piloting an SME (small- and medium- sized enterprise) support programme in Newport, South Wales. This programme developed following a local needs analysis and partnership building that took place through the NBRN. It recognised that many communities could benefit from resilience building activities and skills promotion to help local economies weather the impacts of COVID-19. Similar initiatives were trialled in Scotland (Aberdeen), and England (the Fylde Coast).



As well as supporting the promotion and effective management of a series of small business support webinars for local Newport businesses, Legal & General also enabled Business Continuity Manager, Rosie Beech to play a direct role in assisting local businesses. Rosie was able to offer tailored, one-to-one support sessions with small businesses. She provides a space where business owners can talk through their recovery ideas, and explore new approaches to their digital capabilities, business planning, and marketing.

NBRN partners helped keep COVID out of hostel for homeless

One of the country's largest homeless hostels has been able to shield residents through the pandemic thanks to donations made through the [National Business Response Network \(NBRN\)](#).

[Caritas Anchor House](#) provides support to homeless adults in the London borough of Newham, which has the highest rate of homelessness in the UK.

Recruiting more staff and extra cleaning kept the infection risk inside the building to a minimum, but more help was needed.

Andrew Warburton, corporate partnerships specialist at Caritas Anchor House, said: "It was important to reduce the amount people needed to venture out into the local area as the COVID rate was very high. As well as PPE, we needed basic items like food and toiletries."

Andrew contacted the NBRN, a Business in the Community (BITC) programme set up during the first national coronavirus lockdown to offer rapid response to vulnerable communities.

A host of businesses stepped up to answer the call. Donations ranged from face shields from the insurer [Axa](#), T-shirts from [Marks & Spencer](#) and Easter eggs from [Nestlé](#), through to biscuits from [McVities](#), face masks from infrastructure specialists [Costain](#), disposable cups from coffee chain [Costa](#) and bao buns courtesy of train operator [LNER](#). Charity [Relief Aid Logistics](#) were also on hand to deliver the items from donor to doorstep.

Andrew said: "Knowing there was support out there from these businesses was a huge boost to residents' morale.

"More than a year into the pandemic we have not had one confirmed case of COVID among our residents. It's nothing short of miraculous."

Lowestoft's business community: Getting food to those in need

Lowestoft Business Connector Jason Benham, who is seconded by Kier Group to help connect business support for the town, is working with several local Lowestoft partners including: supermarkets, foodbanks, and taxi's to get food parcels to the most vulnerable. As part of the response effort, he is working on a scheme to deliver hot food to the elderly using containers purchased through a generous grant facilitated by Business in the Community (BITC).





With so many elderly and vulnerable people aged over 70 in Lowestoft, it was essential to mobilise business support to ensure that the needs of the community were met and that nobody in Lowestoft went hungry. Businesses of all shapes and sizes have come together to support the initiative – with pubs offering home delivery, businesses donating freezers to store in a community space, and staff to deliver the food. By working with Phil Aves and the East Suffolk Council Community Team who set up a hub in the council Office, we were able to monitor the situation as the pandemic spread. The Community Team used the Hub as the focus point for calls, deliveries and pick ups, ensuring a cohesive approach that meant no one was going without. Deliveries were made 6 days a week, with deliveries made personal to the individual so any issues of social isolation were identified and addressed. Community partnerships forged in good times to transform towns should be put to good use during times when we all face challenges. The key to success is to identify those who need help the most and to deliver food and essentials in a way that is safe from the effects of COVID-19.

Every moment counts [Click here to watch video](#)

Most people, including children, will experience the loss of someone dear to them. For families going through difficult times, every moment counts. me&dee aims to gift families with special moments and to help them make lasting memories. The pandemic may have made holidays an impossibility, yet, me&dee wanted to help families create those special moments. We

connected Capital One with me&dee, to help them build holiday packs to enable 12 families to create lasting and loving memories.





Media Coverage

Here are some of the headlines on the media for the National Business Response Network since its start in March 2020.

Shoosmiths supports BITC's National Business Response Network Business Campaign

The company Shoosmiths shows their support for BITC's NBRN 'Together Business Can' campaign and shares the call to arms for businesses to take action and help those charities in need this year.

[Read: Shoosmiths](#)

What does poverty look like in 2020?

In a discussion on poverty in 2020, Dame Louise Casey promotes the Covid Community Campaign and mentions the efforts of charities and businesses working with BITC to support local communities and feed the hungry this winter.

[Listen: Times Radio's Matt Chorley Show \(from 1 hour 12 mins 39 secs\)](#)

Businesses rally round to support 24,000 people with essentials

Peter Perry, CEO of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and Chair of BITC's Wales Regional Leadership Board praised the National Business Response Network's success in helping 24,000 people in Wales, adding, "Anyone with their ear to the ground in Wales knows that there are many people

who are in desperate need of support. BITC's National Business Response Network is the best way for businesses to lend a hand – and to change lives."

[Read: Wales 247](#), [More: West Wales Chronicle](#), [News from Wales](#)

Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid appeal after Covid surge

Amanda Mackenzie OBE, CEO of BITC, comments on the success of the BITC National Business Response Network as Bromley and Croydon Women's Aid (BCWA) centre were matched through the network with Colas Ltd and Verizon, "which supplied laptops and training to the workers, allowing them to provide support as more and more survivors called on them for help."

[Read: This is Local London](#), [More: London Post](#), [Sutton & Croydon Guardian](#), [News Shopper](#), [Morning Star](#), Daily Express (print),

Big businesses give food, tech and care essentials in South West

Rick Sturge, CFO, Bloodhound Land Speed Record Project and former Chair of BITC's South West Regional Leadership Board, commented on BITC's successful NBRN, adding: "anyone with their ear to the ground in the South West knows that there are many people who are in desperate need of support. BITC's National Business Response Network is the best way for businesses to lend a hand - and to change lives."

[Read: Punchline Gloucester](#)





Big business gives over 29,800 people in Yorkshire and the Humber food

Through BITC's National Business Response Network, businesses have helped more than 29,800 people in Yorkshire and the Humber as they struggle to get the food, digital technology and care essentials that they need to survive the impact of COVID-19 on their jobs, lives and communities.

[Read: Yorkshire Times](#), [More: Lancashire Times](#), [TopicUK](#)

Survey shows public back business handling of the pandemic

Josh Hardie, CBI Deputy Director-General, commented how employers have supported staff during the pandemic, adding how BITC mobilised "firms to support local communities through the National Business Response Network - 2020 has seen strong partnerships, public and private, deliver enormous benefit for wider society."

[Read: Yorkshire Times](#), [More: CBI](#), [Lancashire Times](#), States News Service

Books for Bowlee Primary School

Bowlee Primary School in Middleton has received a gift of around 200 books from book publisher Miles Kelly, via Business in the Community's

National Business Response Network. Councillor Emmott commented: "It's great that BITC are working here on the ground in West Middleton."

[Read: Rochdale Online](#), [Bradford Means Business](#)

Digital Donation Day to take place to drive urgent support for disadvantaged young people

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) have teamed up with the Manchester Evening News and BITC to hold a Digital Donation Day on Friday 22nd January. BITC will repurpose donated devices to support a young person in school or college in Greater Manchester.

Read: [GMCA](#), [More: Manchester Evening News](#), [MSN News](#), [TWNews](#), [Manchester Evening News \(2\) \(Print\)](#), [In Your Area](#), [Manchester Evening News \(3\)](#), [MSN News \(2\)](#), [Manchester Evening News \(4\)](#), [GMCA \(2\)](#), [GMCA \(3\)](#),

Urgent plea for devices and data to solve digital divide that's stopping Manchester's children learning online

Mayor Andy Burnham has made a plea for businesses to support the Greater Manchester Tech Fund, which was set up to help vulnerable families. Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is partnering with BITC to accept donations of tech devices to be distributed to young people.





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[Read: Manchester Evening News](#), [More: MSN](#), [TWNews](#), [Asian Express](#),
[Fe News](#), [GMCA](#), [About Manchester](#), [Invest in Manchester](#), [Manchester
Community Central](#), [UK Construction Media](#), [Bolton News](#), Bolton News (2)
(Print), [Rochdale Online](#),

Anglian Water supports communities with National Business Response Network

Anglian Water has been working with Business in the Community's (BITC) National Business Response Network since the start of the pandemic and mentions Peter Simpson, Anglian Water Chief Executive, who chairs BITC's Regional Leadership Board.

[Read: Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce](#), Lincolnshire Echo (Print),
[Grapevine Magazine](#)

Wrexham community organisation benefits from business donation

The Venture Wrexham Ltd has been given a broadband boost by Virgin Media. Virgin Media also gave The Venture 15 laptops and mobile data dongles to help children and young people to do online learning there, through its partnership with BITC's National Business Response Network.

Read: The Leader (unavailable), [More: Leader](#),





Future of COVID-19 Recovery

As the needs of our communities are changing so too does our response. With the success of our skilled volunteering support through the National Business Response Network, we are evolving this area of work into a longer-term proposition to address the key issues the UK faces in recovery from the pandemic:

- **Strengthening Communities:** As we build-back from the pandemic, it's important that those communities which have been disproportionately impacted are supported to recover. From young people's mental health, supporting victim/survivors of domestic abuse, through to people whose employment and personal circumstances have been impacted, we are focussing the support of our members on improving wellbeing, tackling inequality and taking climate action. We are working to reach more community organisations, mobilise more of our members employees, aiming to make this as simple as possible through an improved digital platform.
- **Helping Small Businesses Thrive:** The pandemic has cost small businesses an estimated £126.6 billion – double what owners predicted it would cost them when asked a year ago. Following our deep-dive pilots in Aberdeen, Blackpool and Newport, we are rolling out support to small businesses in Bradford, Coventry and Enfield, helping ensure they recover from the pandemic, strengthening the local economy, and saving local jobs.
- **Supporting People:** The pandemic has accelerated changes in the labour market, meaning that many of the 1.5 million unemployed need to transition their skills and experiences to new jobs, with different skills requirements. The most disadvantaged, with the lowest income and qualifications are least likely to access training (Parliament – Hansard). Building on over 20 years' experience of supporting jobseekers into work, we are scaling up the availability of job coaching - matching people whose employment has been impacted by the pandemic with a BITC-trained coach. The coach helps the individual navigate the changing employment landscape, identifying their current skills and helping to translate these to new opportunities in areas of high growth. This support helps reduce the time people spend out of work, improving wellbeing and confidence, and preventing long-term unemployment.

In light of the scale and disproportionate impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged communities, we are seeking to scale up our skills programmes, and would like to continue engaging with you on the next steps as how we will tackle the longer-term impact of the pandemic.





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Acknowledgments

We would like to thank AXA, the Covid-19 Support Fund and London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) for contributions as Founding Partners of the National Business Response Network. Your support has made the success outlined in this report possible.

Your support both as Founding Partners and active engagers in our work sets the standard of business engagement with BITC and we will encourage members to take your lead in putting communities at the centre of building back responsibly.





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