

**SUMMER  
2022**

# ROCHDALE BOROUGH EQUALITIES ASSEMBLY



*A one off paper brought to you by Action Together and the Elephants trail, capturing the voices and experiences of the Grassroots, Anchor community organisations and decision makers from across our townships.*

Read the full reports from the first three Equality Assembly sessions online at  
**TINYURL.COM/ROCHEQ**

In 1871 Rochdale was one of the richest towns in all of the United Kingdom. Today, it is the 15th poorest. After two years of a pandemic, and the inequalities it exposed, we ask:

## WHAT'S CHANGED?

Our Community Reporters have brought their personal experience of hardship to ask the people closest to it how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how we view inequality.

*“You can have the best of service or the worst of service just by the fate of geography”*

*“We don't want the doorstep clap at 8 o'clock, we want you to go out and get vaccinated”*

*“This is your community. Rochdale welcomes everyone into the area: there's always somewhere you can go”*

## WHAT DO WE WANT? EQUALITY!

The original Equality Assembly gatherings shared experiences of the pandemic across Rochdale's communities. Their recommendations and reflections picked our 4 major themes:

### HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

There's so much more to health than medicine and hospital appointments.

&

### SUPPORTING THE SUPPORTERS

The role played by key workers, carers and volunteers.

### DISCRIMINATION AND MARGINALISATION

How our experience of life is different, due to our race, age or disabilities.

&

### ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Who counts as 'poor' in our borough? How does that shape you?

What do you think would make Rochdale more equal?  
Share your thoughts on social media by tagging

**#EQUALITIESASSEMBLY #TOGETHERROCHDALE**

# EDITORIAL

## “A FAMILY THAT HAS MEALS TOGETHER, WORKS BETTER”

That quote stuck out above all else when the Editorial Team came together to make sense of everything gathered in this paper. They meant this: that when people sit together at the same tables, doing something they all have in common like eating a meal, they communicate. They share. They understand. They hide less, and create bonds. They become more equal.

Does Rochdale have meals together? Do the different parts of the borough occupy the same spaces? Do we know about the experiences of those who live alongside us? Are all invited to cook, to decide what to order, to help themselves to a dish? Is there enough trust that we can serve each other, pass someone the salt, or tell them they're eating with their mouths full?

Based on our reporting for this paper, it was clear that for a time at the beginning of the pandemic, we did and there was. There was hardship, there was fear, there was struggle and there was challenge, but also connection and trust. That environment allowed many wonderful things to happen that began changing how equal we are in our borough. Through struggle, we became one tribe, and began to collaborate rather than compete.

We heard that the struggle was real, and it will continue. It takes a lot to maintain the level of communication that allows for trust, and those involved are under a lot of pressure. However, when we have trust, heart and we help each other free from judgement, we can make our place more equal.

The Editorial Team consists of Robbie Cowbury and Kerry Bertram from Action Together, alongside Patrick Tierney, Melanie Humphreys, Laura Hampson, Juliet Eastham and Linda from the Elephants Trail. Graphics and design by Selva Mustafa and Keir M-Barnett.

## WHO IS ‘WE’?

Although many examples were shared, there's no way to capture everyone's experience.

So when 'we' is used in the report it refers to the Editorial Team from Action Together and Elephants Trail, or the opinions of those who contributed to the research.

**THERE'S CERTAINLY MORE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVEN'T BEEN HEARD, AND THOSE ARE EQUALLY VALID.**



**DOES ROCHDALE HAVE MEALS TOGETHER (AND SO KNOW HOW EACH OTHER WORK)?**

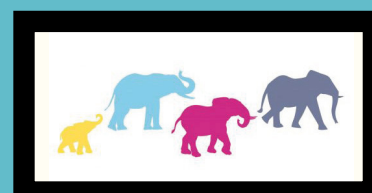
## HOW THIS PAPER WAS PUT TOGETHER

Over 250 people from a range of backgrounds contributed to the original three Equality Assembly sessions from Summer 2020 to Spring 2021. These sessions were hosted by Action Together with the help of Healthwatch Rochdale and Rochdale Borough Council.

The results of those Assemblies were reviewed to draw out 16 Reflections and 13 Recommendations across 4 themes outlined on the front page. Our team of 5 Community Reporters from the Elephant's

Trail then completed interviews with 9 people representing Grassroots, Community Anchor and Decision Making perspectives, alongside discussions at 5 Networks facilitated by Action Together.

These interviews have discussions were then analysed by the Action Together team in Rochdale alongside the Elephants Community Reporters. Further copy-writing, editing and publishing was made possible by support from designers and illustrators.



## THE CRACKS REVEALED BENEATH

**What Changed? We've been made starkly aware of the deeper inequalities that were there, and new ones which have emerged.**

The upheaval of the pandemic shook everything up. Like lifting a stone, it exposed the inequalities underneath that had been hidden or overlooked. "You see a lot of the older people more isolated now. They're not enjoying their retirement, they're not seeing their families."

We heard particularly worrying accounts of people just starting out or later in life. Older people were told they were vulnerable, to stay home. But then things moved on, leaving them anxious, isolated, left to sit at home doing nothing for the rest of their lives. We heard lots of concerns that many older people continue to stay at home, even now they are 'allowed' to go out.

## THANKS FOR COPING, SORRY YOU HAD TO COPE

**What's changed? We've demonstrated the value of an effective, supported, resourced social support workforce.**

The heroic efforts of our key workers have rightly received a lot of praise. The same for grassroots volunteers who provided mutual aid to their neighbours.

**THEIR EFFORTS WERE INCREDIBLE, BUT SHOULD WE HAVE BEEN IN THIS POSITION IN THE FIRST PLACE?**

This storm hit when we were out at sea, in a boat already taking on water. We made it to shore, with all hands on deck, but the message

For younger people, there was a huge concern about the missed education, the missed work opportunities, the missed social interactions, the missed experiences that mark transition into adulthood. What we are doing to recognise this and make it up for them? Will they just roll on into being adults without any of the rites of passage they had expected and others experienced before the pandemic?

We also heard big differences in how people who aren't the majority experience life. This could be speakers of different languages, from different ethnicities, genders or disabilities. The barriers were even more serious for people who were a minority within a minority – a Kashmiri woman for instance.

**“ISOLATION WAS DIFFICULT FOR THOSE WHO COULDN'T AFFORD IT. I WAS PAID, OTHERS WERE NOT.”**

What we did hear was a greater appetite to address these cracks. It is no longer a silent howl by those who experience inequality. The frustration is shared across those in the minority and those in the majority, and this willingness to accept these inequalities exist is creating motivation to prevent people being unequal.



is clear: it shouldn't have had to be such a near run thing.

Staff are too stretched. Services too precarious. People experiencing too much pressure. Grassroots groups are taking on lots of the slack, but the issue is bigger than one person or one street. The responses need to be too. Everyone needs time for reflection, processing, offloading and recharging before they break completely. Services need resources to be able to meet the huge need people have.

**“IF NO FUNDING AND WE CAN'T SURVIVE, EVERYTHING WE ARE DOING IS GONE!”**



# THINGS TO BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT

The Pandemic was hard on us all. Yet as the ‘gems’ highlighted throughout this paper show, there is lots to be positive about and the way Rochdale came together. There are other themes that we heard from the people we spoke to that we can learn and carry with us into whatever comes next.

## THE GREAT LEVELLER

**What’s changed? We have a better understanding of emotional wellbeing and how everyone is affected by it.**

Are you a have or a have not? Have you been Helped, or are you a Helper? Are you a Service User or a Do-er of Good Deeds?

The Pandemic put everyone under a lot of pressure, gave everyone a lot of anxiety, and affected the work and incomes of so many. But you can’t deal with anything unless you can talk about it. And the types of people who were willing to come forward during the pandemic and say they were struggling changed hugely.

Not just that, it was those who’d previously ‘received’ who were ones now doing a lot of the ‘giving’!

**“BE A SHOULDER, BE AN EAR, DON’T JUDGE, DON’T GUIDE.”**

This was particular true of people looking for support for mental health. More men, more ‘professionals’, and more people of different ethnicities were opening up about their struggles. This meant they could get the support, rather than bottling things up until it was a crisis. And with everyone’s understanding of mental health increasing, the knowledge of those who’d struggled before was viewed as an asset not a burden.

The experience of the pandemic has made us less “us” and “them”. More and more we recognise how everyone needs support at some point, how everyone has something to give, and attaching less stigma to accessing what we’re entitled to.

## THE POWER OF CHOICE

**What’s changed? We’ve provided more options and in doing so reduced discrimination and marginalisation.**

The ‘bio-diversity’ of support available is growing, as more ways to meet different people’s needs bloom around the borough.

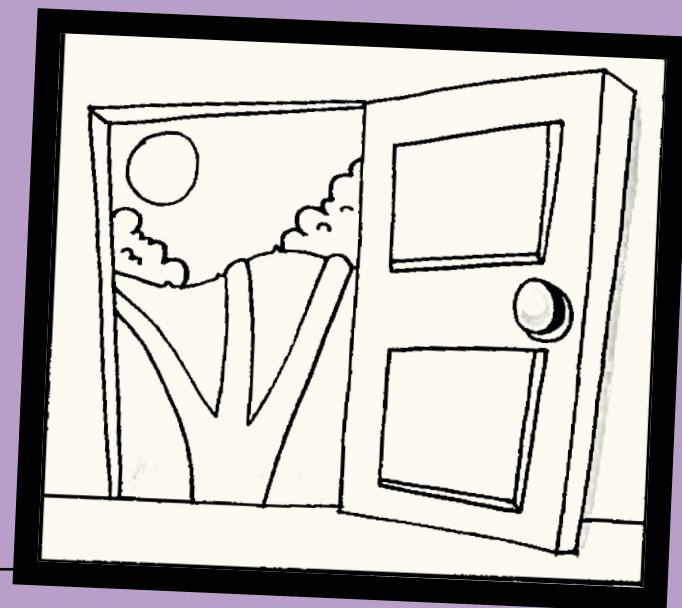
**“NOT EVERYONE WANTS THAT SERVICE SO ITS APPRECIATED THAT ISN’T A TICKBOX OR AUTOMATIC YES FOR EVERYBODY.”**

Especially for people who don’t fit the ‘average’ template, having options in how you get support or hear a message can make a massive difference.

In some places, people are hugely benefiting from things moving online. We heard how people who have to pick their kids up from school, for example, can now consider many different roles which they can do from home and fit around these responsibilities.

We also heard how some people still need and want that face to face offer, with people who know them and can interact with directly. When it comes to people’s health, many people don’t have the words to describe what’s happening but in person they can show it. This is particularly true when people are speaking English as a second language.

It’s also the case that just because you’re part of one community, you’re not the same as everyone else in it. Even at a time of stress and uncertainty like the COVID Pandemic, we were able to recognise this and give people choices in how they accessed things. That meant they could find the one where they feel most comfortable – and not miss out.



## PURPOSE IS THE NEW PROFIT

**What’s changed? People are seeking out work that has a positive social impact.**

Grow up, get a job, make it big, buy all the things you could possible want.

Once upon a time, that seemed to be all people cared about.

Thanks to the pandemic, this is changing. Our COVID heroes weren’t those with the flashiest cars going on the fanciest holidays. They were people in unglamorous jobs doing long hours to save lives. They were those with little, sharing out what they had so that no one went without.

Rather than enjoy a long holiday, many on furlough hated not being able to contribute – even within the health service, we heard.

**“A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE STRUGGLED BECAUSE THEY HAVEN’T FELT AS BUSY. THEY WANT TO HAVE A PURPOSE”**

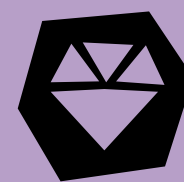
We have also seen more interest from people in doing those things that make a difference. One interviewee told us they were seeing some of the highest subscriptions in years to nursing courses, as more people valued the impact they could have through those jobs.

Once upon a time, profit ruled supreme. Now, social purpose is more meaningful than ever.

**“IF THERE’S ONLY ONE OPTION, BUT IT DOESN’T WORK FOR MY NEEDS, WHAT DO I DO THEN?”**

# THE GEMS OF ROCHDALE

PART ONE



*The local jewels forged during the pandemic that should we treasure*

## DOOR TO DOOR SHOPPING

Like lots of places around the country, Rochdale rose to the challenge and made sure people who were isolating or unable to get to the shops were able to get everything they need.

Some of the groups and communities in our borough who stepped up also took on the challenge of getting toiletries for Key Workers who barely had time to wash between shifts; or culturally appropriate food packages for communities like those from the African continent so they had food they were familiar with and knew how to cook.



## CARERSHUB' CHAT LINE

The Carers’ Hub, Rochdale supports anyone who is an unpaid carer for a family member, neighbour or friend in the borough. They’ve been doing this for many years through one-to-one or group support, information and advice, community health & wellbeing services and a 24/7 ‘CHAT Line’ (Carers Help and Talk) for people who want to talk to a volunteer who offers a listening ear and emotional support.

Early in the pandemic, the CHAT Line and volunteer recruitment moved to operating remotely – and it worked. New technology allowed new people to participate, and now they can recruit more volunteers to support more carers who need to chat at more times. A great example of flexibility and adaptability helping unlock more community resources which will reduce inequality!

## MENTAL HEALTH FOOTBALL

“Goals” is a programme designed to aid positive mental wellbeing through weekly football sessions. We didn’t just struggle with mental health during the pandemic, it was also hard to get out and be physically active.

We know that taking part in regular physical activity can have huge benefits for our mental, as well as our physical health. So Rochdale AFC Community Association decided to blend the two and offer people a chance to do both!



## NORTHERN CARE ALLIANCE SCARF PACKAGE

Wellbeing at work has been a buzzword for a while, but maybe it took the pandemic for us to take it really seriously. NCA (who run a lot of the health services in Rochdale Borough), launched their ‘SCARF’ Package during the pandemic, to support their key workers with all their psychological, economic, spiritual and social needs.

It takes into account all parts of people’s lives that contribute to their wellbeing and recognises that for many people what’s going on in their home life can really significantly impact their work-life as well as the other way round. It’s about helping them balance out the two, so they can feel well at both work and home.

## CAMERADOS

At the end of the last series of restrictions after Christmas 21, Rochdale’s first ‘Camerados living room’ was set up at Spotland Community Centre. Camerados is a national movement of people who want to look out for each other when they’re having a tough time.



One part of doing this is through ‘public living rooms’ that are comfortable, relaxed and people can pop in any time to have a chat when they’re struggling.

It’s somewhere we can be together more and carry on that spirit of the pandemic where we all struggle, and we all support each other.

## HOUSEHOLD FUND

There is a lot to be said for teaching a person to fish, but if they are starving, what they need is a fish so they can eat that day.

This was recognised during the pandemic as people who had never struggled financially lost work and income. In Rochdale, national government funding was put into a ‘Household Fund’ which families could access via registered charity partners and council teams to purchase white goods like fridges or cookers. Support was also offered for supermarket vouchers so people could do their own shopping, and for fuel vouchers.

In Rochdale, a number of partners were specifically signed up who could access on behalf of people with ‘No Recourse To Public Funds’ due to immigration restrictions. Barred from even receiving benefits and often not allowed to work, this was one of the few lifelines for them.



# What would a Rochdale that was fair & equal look like?

## 1 How things are organised

We have a deeper understanding of emotions so we can better support each other || And a bias toward offering support through neighbourhood or community locations || So that the first place people turn is each other or their neighbours || Which makes it easier for professionals to support with things that are more complex || And intervene earlier so problems don't get too big.

“WE HAVE TO FIND PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE OFF THE RADAR.”

“DECISION MAKERS NEED TO SPEAK TO PEOPLE IN AS WIDE OF AN AUDIENCE AS POSSIBLE USING DIFFERENT METHODS”

## 2 How things are communicated

Opportunities to share experiences and perspectives are many and often || So there is trust and understanding between decision makers and people affected by the decisions made || Decisions are always taken with a mix of partners and perspectives || And reported back with maximum transparency of what was decided, by who, and when || In plain English, with translations easily available for those who want it.

## 3 How things are paid for

Funding relationships are founded on trust, not transaction || With resources shared according to different ways communities and people work || And distributed through collaboration not competition, without strings attached || So that more investment can get flexibly to fuel creative new ways of reducing inequality. || Including the things that make life worth living, right in our neighbourhoods, where we can easily get to them.

“WE DIDN'T HAVE TARGETS. IT MEANT THAT WE COULD DELIVER WHAT WAS NEEDED RATHER THAN WHAT SOMEBODY PERCEIVED WAS NEEDED”



HOW WOULD THINGS CHANGE IF SERVICES AGREED HOW TO SHARE OUT PUBLIC FUNDS RATHER THAN COMPETED FOR THEM?

# FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OUR GRASSROOTS REPRESENTATIVES, COMMUNITY ANCHORS, DECISION MAKERS & NETWORKS

## KEY FINDING All our ‘Supporters’ work for Rochdale

One of the most positive things to come out of the pandemic was all the different agencies, organisations, charities and community groups working seamlessly together. It stopped mattering who referred who, as long as the person got referred. It didn't matter that it was your team who provided a certain bit of support to a person in need, if that person got what they needed. Whoever someone was paid, recruited or managed by, everyone providing support worked first and foremost for the residents of our borough.

*“If you went to the doctors and someone else has an office space there: the implication is that the surgery trust you. By definition the patient would trust you. Judge somebody by the company they keep.”*

There are practical reasons why professionals should continue to be paid their wages and employed by different organisations. Similarly with volunteers to ensure they are safe and supported. Regardless of the name on the badge or the payslip, however, one of the biggest things we can keep from the pandemic is all of our Supporters having the mindset that they work on the same team.

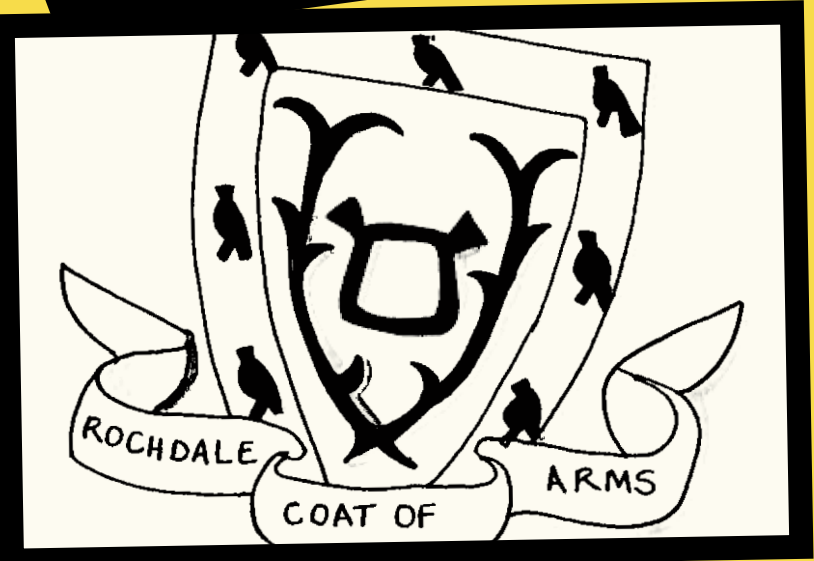
*“It's not just about our place but how we work as a system and how we can work together to support the population and community across Rochdale”*

To do so would need backing from HR teams, in the way people are recruited, by the way Public Sector services are commissioned, and by aligning job descriptions across different organisations. It could also be assisted by a cross-borough training and welfare offer, which would have the added benefit of helping all our Supporters feel better supported themselves. In the most part it doesn't matter to the person getting support whether they have a Council, NHS or Charity badge though, so in a Rochdale that is fair or equal, our Supporters would view themselves as one workforce too.

## MORE IDEAS THAT COULD HELP US GET THERE

- Invest in ‘**Human Signposting**’. People on the ground have the knowledge to work out where people need to go for different types of support. This could be helped by flourishing networks, peer supporters, people working in each other's spaces and giving employees time to find out what others do.
- Introduce an independent ‘**OFTED**’ type body for public decision making. This would set with standards for how decisions made in the public interest should be taken. It would need the power to hold those who don't meet them to account, of course, even if they are the ones writing the cheque.
- Shift to more **Collaborative Funding approaches**. When funding becomes available, everyone who would like some to make use of it is invited to decide how to split it up between them rather than compete against each other for their slice.
- Create more **common referral and appointment systems** across different social support services. The less complicated it is for people to access the things they need, and the more flexibility they have to go to the group that works in the ways that are appropriate to them, the more effective that support will be when they get it.
- Create a vehicle for have **ongoing and regular conversations** between communities and decision makers. This brings people around the same tables, so there is trust and understanding. Trust from people that those taking decisions will do so with the right interests in mind; and understanding on behalf of those taking them of what affect they will have on people.

WHAT WOULD THE IMPACT BE IF EVERYONE WORKED FOR THE PLACE, NOT THE EMPLOYER?





# THE GEMS OF ROCHDALE

## PART TWO



*The local jewels forged during the pandemic that should we treasure*

## CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUICIDE AWARENESS TRAINING

Sometimes it's bridges we need into other people's worlds, but especially when things are tough, it's finding our own spaces where we can talk to each other on our own terms that is most beneficial.

After a number of suicides within Rochdale's South Asian community during the pandemic, that was exactly the case. In response, Rochdale group Awakening Minds arranged Suicide Awareness training specifically for women from the Pakistani community.

Delivered in Urdu, 30–40 women attended to share in a safe space their feelings about the recent suicides and be better able to respond in the future. The successful session will be followed up with further Mental Health Awareness and Mental Health First Aid sessions.

## COMMUNITY WAREHOUSE – A NEW RESOURCE FOR ROCHDALE



The generosity of people and businesses to give items, as well as more and more people helping distribute them to neighbours, shot up in the pandemic. But it presents a logistical challenge – where to store them until they can be distributed?

In response, Action Together with backing from Rochdale Council set up a 'Community Warehouse': a shared location that can be

there to receive donations and distribute through the collaborative Food Solutions Network. After a real team effort, this has now distributed untold amounts of food, clothes and other items, and set up as it's own charitable organisation so it can continue as a resource for all Rochdale.

## CHECKING IN WITH ISOLATED PEOPLE

We recognised in Rochdale during the pandemic that wellbeing isn't just about practical things: the food, toiletries, supplies. It was about contact with people and something to spark you into life.

Many groups have made efforts to ensure social isolated people know they are cared for too. HMR Circle arranged welfare calls, text messages and even letters to all of the older people they support on a regular basis. Through the Community Warehouse, hundreds of 'kindness cards' were written by children and families across the borough and then delivered with food parcels and care packages.

## “MY TIME” –ENSURING CARERS FEEL CARED FOR

Unpaid carers – anyone aged 5 upwards who look after others – have become more isolated during the pandemic. Many organisations haven't been able to organise home visits or respite or groups which would give the carer a break from their caring role. So it was harder than ever to feel they can take a break and do something for themselves.

As soon as restrictions allowed, the Carers' Hub, Rochdale, re-introduced some of their offers to help the unseen caring workforce in the borough take a break from their caring role. The 'My Time' scheme issues vouchers to eligible carers to help them to start a particular hobby or interest or provides an incentive for them to do something for themselves – like get a massage or go out for lunch with a friend. At Christmas in 2021, they put on two Christmas parties giving them the chance to come together and celebrate the festive season without thinking about their responsibilities.

It's somewhere we can be together more and carry on that spirit of the pandemic where we all struggle, and we all support each other.

## SAFE SPACES FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

We've learnt how important safe spaces are for people to find their voice with those they feel comfortable with, especially when times are hard.

Through the Rochdale Women's Services Network this was identified as a key priority. As we came out of the last lockdown restrictions in Christmas '21, Action Together hosted a 'safer spaces for women' online event, inviting partners, VCFSE organisations and guest speakers to discuss the importance of these spaces, what they require to be safe and inviting and the impact they can have on women's lives. This has led to a Safer Spaces section being added to the Rochdale and District Mind Wellbeing Directory and the planning of a wider safer spaces scheme for women.

## CAREER AMBASSADORS & ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE INTO HEALTHCARE CAREERS

For two years during the pandemic young people in further education had almost no input from external speakers. At this point in your life, when you're thinking about adulthood and what you can do, hearing from new people with new perspectives is vital to widening your horizons and giving you as many choices as possible.

The Northern Care Alliance in Rochdale has recognised this gap, and as soon as they good developed a 'Career Ambassadors' programme. As well as help inform more young people about different careers available to them, it will capitalise on greater interest for working in health and social care so Rochdale can recruit it's key worker heroes of the future too.

# THINGS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT

*We have overcome this period of difficulty in Rochdale with a great many positives. We have pulled together in ways we never thought we could. One of these is a greater willingness to accept the problems that exist, without laying blame at anyone's feet. In that spirit, there are still many challenges and worrying trends that we heard about. If they continue unchecked, they could undo much of the good that has come out of this difficult time.*

## BLAMING THE VICTIMS OF INEQUALITY

What's changed? There is still a tendency for us to act like it's people's fault for experiencing inequality.

**Recipe for disaster:**

→ **Step 1:**

Cut away, hollow out, and strip back the investment or resource available for programmes that reduce inequality.

→ **Step 2:**

Put up barriers that make it harder for people to get to it, so things escalate instead into more complex crises.

→ **Step 3:**

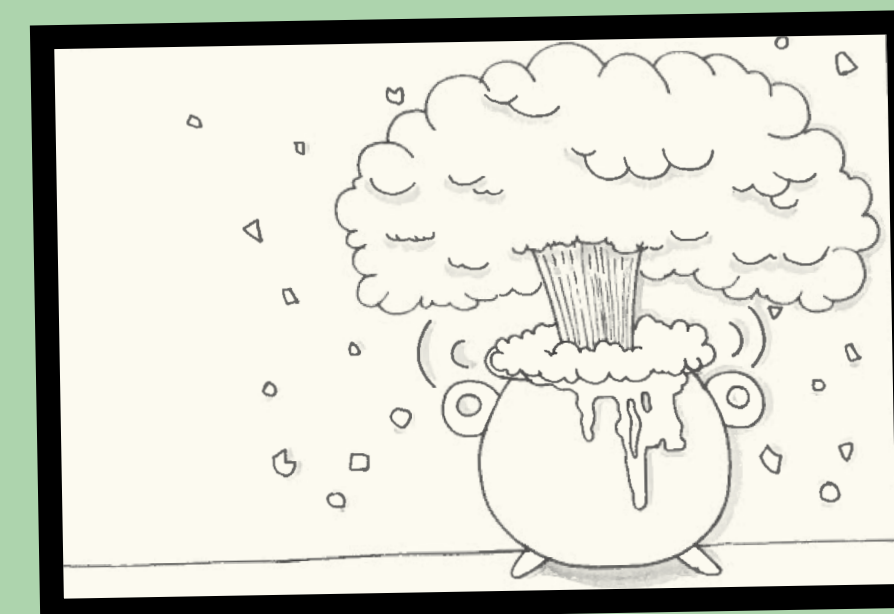
Throw in a global pandemic.

→ **Step 4:**

Hand over power for sharing out the budget and who is allowed to access, then bring down the barriers so demand rockets.

→ **Step 5:**

Blame the people who weren't previously getting the right support for overwhelming the programme and the long waiting lists.



On **PAGE** we shared how more people were willing to come out and ask for the help they needed during the Pandemic. This in turn is helping the people who are there to support them to offer help before things became a crisis.

However, there are also some comments how making support more accessible, or more responsive to the people who might need it, was a bad idea because it would be overwhelming for the service. Noticeably, the more senior the people we spoke to were, the more likely they were to be sceptical of ideas like advocacy, co-location or co-design. In contrast, people closer to the grassroots were more likely to view these things as important tools got getting the right support for people who weren't currently getting it.

**“People excluded themselves, they just didn't bother, they were told not to put pressure on health services “**

With the cracks in society now much less hidden, and more people willing to ask for support they need, what will be the impact on the services who have coped with the Pandemic? Will it be recognised they can't continue without the resources? Or will they be blamed when they buckle under the pressure of more demand but no more funding?

If people's problems escalate because they continue to follow advice not to put pressure on services, will we blame them for letting situations get out of hand? Will we withdraw help because we can neither admit that we don't have enough money to pay for it, or time to navigate it?

Blaming the victims of inequality – whether people or services – for creating the conditions that cause them pain is not the way we're going to end inequality. Much more likely is that we reduce trust and make the divides harder to bridge.

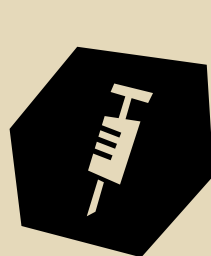
**“With one hand they pat us on the back, on the other hand they are cutting our services! And still sending us clients.”**



# IF A SERVICE IS DELIVERED IN THE FOREST, BUT NO ONE IS THERE TO ACCESS IT, WAS IT EVEN FUNDED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

**What’s changed? We might have even less knowledge of and ability to access available social support.**

Despite the difficult of long term funding cuts to many support services, we heard about a lot of new money came into Rochdale or was made available by the state during the Pandemic. But we also heard concerns about whether it went to the best places, and services made available in a way that people could benefit from it. without being shared with the people who needed it. *So we ask: if a service is funded and provided, but no one is able to refer into it, did it matter that the funding was made available?*



## WRONG INFO

Vaccine clinics were set up in local areas and accessible places for the community. The Government website where people were being directed by national news only listed the Etihad Stadium in Central Manchester for anyone with a post code in Rochdale.



## LACK OF TRUST

A new offer was created to provide support for people who struggled to speak up for themselves. It was delivered by a group and from a place that many who would benefit from it had previously had traumatic experiences of through other offers. They didn’t have the trust to access and so went without the support.



## LOST RELATIONSHIPS

A lot of time was put into setting up a new venue where multiple community projects could be located together. The contact left, and the no one was recruited to replace them. The idea fell apart because there wasn’t anyone to follow up all the good work.



We heard a lot of concern from people about knowing where, how and when support would be available. We heard about programmes being announced nationally but being so hard to find out about how they were delivered locally. We heard about new offers only available at a time, in a place, or in a way that people couldn’t access unless they turned their whole lives upside down.

We heard about services having such little capacity to meet demand, and waiting lists that went on forever, that making a referral was pointless.

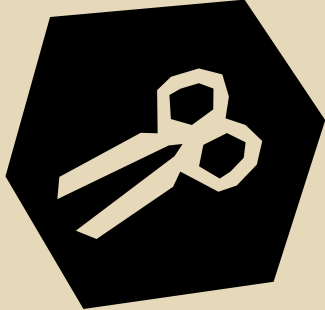
The answer we heard was this: consistent relationships that build trust. For people and communities who’ve experienced hardship, trust is not given freely and needs to be earned. If the hard work and communication to do that hasn’t been put in, then whatever is designed is likely to fail. If the trust is there, then a lot can go wrong and people are still able to access the things that they need.

**“PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE WALKING INTO A COMMUNITY CENTRE. NEED MORE AVENUES THAN JUST AN OFFICIAL BUILDING.”**

Many of the things that worked well in the pandemic were because we borrowed that trust by doing things in community spaces and on community terms. They differed from the perfect design which might come out of an ivory tower, but they were relevant to people’s lives so they worked.



# CUT OUT & KEEP



## IF WE CAN DO IT FOR COVID, WE CAN DO IT FOR EVERYTHING ELSE

**What’s changed?**

We’ve shown we can do better and must channel this into prevention as well as cure.

A list of things we never thought we could do:

- **Feeding thousands of people unable to get out of their homes**
- **Putting up hundreds of people who were homeless in private, clean hotel rooms**
- **Vaccinating nearly our entire population**
- **Sharing information about a new disease so that people speaking countless different languages and from many different cultures could understand it**
- **Educating**

The pandemic brought challenges we never would have anticipated. And we met them nearly every one. With a common goal, we were brought together and delivered. “This is money that arrived that didn’t exist. It existed somewhere but it didn’t exist for this type of project.”

When cash was needed to support business, charities or community groups, it was found. When people needed the authority to take urgent action, it was given. There is concern that the resource won’t continue to be there to continue with the support that is still needed. There is concern about places where power hasn’t been shifted and people have reverted to working in ways that are closed off to other voices.

But we did it for COVID, so what other crisis or challenges can we do this for?

The cost of living crisis is just around the corner, and after years of battling COVID, it is a terrifying prospect.

We must remember how we made the resource available. We came together to find the solutions. We gave away power to people we’d never previously have look to for answers to the problems we were experiencing. We swallowed the excuses we’d previously given for something not getting done.

Nothing is impossible now we’ve managed to overcome this, so let’s keep the excuses for inequality in our borough in the bin where they belong.

*What does the Equality Assembly think we’ve learnt from the Pandemic? If you can take away something from these years, take away these ↓*



## WORKERS OF ROCHDALE, PUT DOWN YOUR LANYARDS!

**What’s changed?**

We recognise that we must continue to work together, and not retreat into our trenches and our silos

Throughout the Pandemic, we heard about how people rose to the challenge of supporting their neighbours. It wasn’t anyone’s job to respond to a global pandemic, and so no one said ‘that’s not my job’.

We just did it. We looked at what we had, at what people needed, who we knew, and how they could help. We picked up the phones, we asked for help and we found solutions.

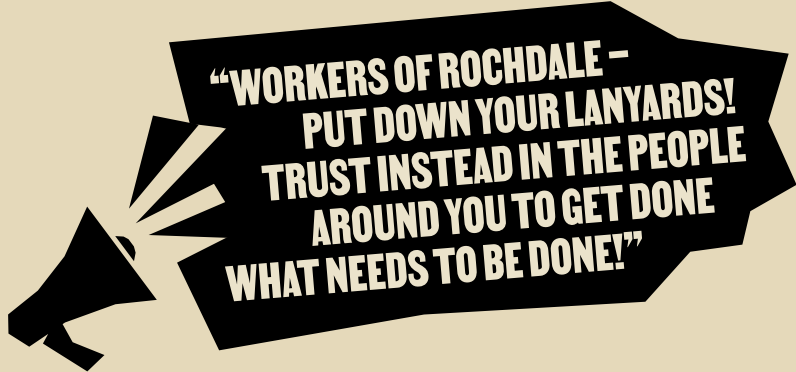
There was no red tape in an emergency. There was no wait for permission to be granted or forms to be approved, because it was urgent and we needed to deliver it. So we did. “Simplify the world, don’t complicate it”.

There was no roadmap for something totally unknown, and no gatekeeping. There was no preciousness about stepping on toes, no food chains that needed recognition and caps doffed. There was an acceptance that all voices from all the backgrounds were needed to find our way through. And so many more were heard.

We didn’t have our offices and our places of work to do things in, so they became closer to where people were and further from the seats of power. The symbols of that power and authority disappeared to: the suits, the ties, the desks, the corporate id’s.

**“We don’t want to be supported by someone behind a computer in a shirt and tie.”**

So this our rallying cry to the borough of Rochdale for the time after the pandemic is this: forget your job title, forget your red tape.





RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS  
FROM THE ORIGINAL ROCHDALE

➔

EQUALITY  
ASSEMBLY'S

REFLECTIONS			
DISCRIMINATION & MARGINALISATION & RACE, AGE & DISABILITY	HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH	ECONOMIC INSECURITY	SUPPORT FOR THE CARERS, KEYWORKS & VOLUNTEERS
“For some young people there is confusion about their identify and it is unfair for children not  to understand their history and heritage.”	“Loss is a symptom of the pandemic.”	“Councils can be quite difficult to work with and don’t always understand the issues affecting people new to poverty.”	"The opportunity to thank people is important. That was the only time I couldn't."
“The inaccessibility of services force many of us with communication disabilities to rely on family, and if you struggle or don’t feel able to come out to those family you feel unable to access most things.”	“The backlog of missed appointments and the impact this is going to have on individuals’ future [is concerning]. There will be an increase in support required.”	“Some skills acquired by living at one’s wits end, are geared to survival and can be transferable for the greater good. We can learn about resilience from people who’ve experienced hardship.”	
“There are huge issues with trust of systems and people with the decision-making power.”	“Countries who are doing better cherish, respect and look after their neighbours.”	“Online services and activities are not appropriate for all and don’t replace face-to-face contact.”	
“Lack of knowledge on culture can lead to assumptions of aggression when somebody in just being themselves.”		“Mutual aid and good neighbours have helped massively to reduce stigma of asking for ‘charity’.”	
“Many people from abroad have been very frustrated and confused by the Governments approach to the lockdown which has been very different when comparing to other countries where their family remains.”		“People are quite aware of issues they have and highlighting them increases hopelessness and feeling they can never escape. Instead, we should look at what people have going for them, build trust, and assist them to take responsibility.”	
RECOMMENDATIONS			
“Decision makers need to come more to (disability) groups, not always (disability) groups going to decision makers.”	“Stability and time for decompression and reflection is needed in activities, services and meetings so people can process and adapt.”	“Make earlier interventions, through those in communities who are 'eyes and ears', and co-location of support, to limit things escalating.”	“Take self care seriously. 'Professionals' can also be 'service users', face similar barriers e.g. digital exclusion, and we need to make use of available support for staff.”
“More services should be at locations that are trusted within their communities, to encourage engagement and uptake of appointments, intervention and support.”	“An improvement in language and literacy of knowledge of mental health will help people in transitions and adapting to circumstances”	“Develop a stronger advocacy/ challenge offer in Rochdale to take up questions when people's rights are not being met.”	
“Avoid blanket policies in favour of ones tailored to different communities, including providing places for intersectionality and minorities within minorities.”	“Better information sharing and consistency in booking appointments is needed so people can access them easier, and have a trusted transition.”		