

Responding to COVID-19 in the Liverpool City Region

Introducing the Heseltine Institute's COVID-19 Policy Briefs

Map of Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) boundary (in red) and constituent local authorities



Data sources: Westminster Parliamentary Constituencies (December 2018 - ONS), Local Authority Districts (December 2018), Boundaries (December 2018 - ONS) and Combined Authorities (December 2018 - ONS)

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Key takeaways

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated an unprecedented planetary crisis with its cascading disruptions prompting responses at global, national and local levels dedicated to remediating the immediate health crisis and its fall out and preparing for the rebuilding project which lies ahead.
2. COVID-19 presents the Liverpool City Region with its most acute public policy challenge for a generation, both immediately and in the longer term. The City Region is especially vulnerable and at risk, with uneven consequences anticipated for different economic sectors, places, institutions, communities, and social groups.
3. To help shape the City Region's immediate response to the crisis and the long term planning, the Heseltine Institute will publish a series of COVID-19 Policy Briefs. These will draw upon the academic expertise of the University of Liverpool, and will complement and add value to the work already underway at the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. As the social and economic impacts of the pandemic become clearer, this spirit of collaboration will be needed more than ever.
4. The COVID-19 Policy Briefs will capture and disseminate the best research expertise, knowledge and resources from across the world to support efforts to: a) mitigate locally the present health crisis and its social, economic, and environmental aftershocks, and b) think anew about how we might *Build Back Better* so as to create a structurally more resilient City Region in the future.
5. Policy Briefs will be published on a dedicated COVID-19 section on the Heseltine Institute website: www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute/covid-19policybriefs

1. Introduction

Indisputably, the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic presents the greatest public policy challenge the world has faced in recent times. There has followed a rush by national, regional, and local governments to both remediate the immediate health crisis and its wider aftershocks and to prepare nations, regions, and cities to *Build Back Better* (UNDRR 2015).

Only part way through a long-term programme of recovery and regeneration, and already challenged by poor health, health inequalities and multiple deprivation, Liverpool City Region is especially at risk from COVID-19 and its fallout. The NHS, Public Health England, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, the six local authorities of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens

and Wirral, and the City Region's Growth Platform, are all working closely together with the multi-agency local resilience forum(s) to lead the local response. The leadership, health, social, economic, and environmental challenges COVID-19 presents are all-embracing but progress is being made in the face of a formidable enemy.

But civic leaders cannot tackle the crisis alone. Risk is everyone's business. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020, 2) emphasises, COVID-19 demands "a combined, co-ordinated effort across all levels of government and stakeholders. It falls on all local anchor institutions and stakeholders from the public, private, and third sectors, and indeed citizens more broadly, to step up.

With COVID-19, everything will and indeed must change. Key to effective remediation and enlightened rebuilding will be world-leading knowledge of the virus, the efficacy of emergency measures, and the merits of various long term transformative visions and strategies. It is here that Liverpool City Region's universities – rich in intellectual capital and committed to civic engagement, knowledge exchange and translational research – can play a critical role.

The University of Liverpool's Heseltine Institute will do this by marshalling and cascading expertise from all three Faculties (Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Life Sciences, and Science and Engineering) and beyond, to enhance the capacity of civic leaders, anchor institutions, and the policy community.

Central to this work will be a series of COVID-19 Policy Briefs written by established experts. These will complement and add value to the work already under way at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

In this first briefing we address the questions: *Why are we commissioning COVID-19 Policy Briefs and what do we want to achieve?*

2. COVID-19 – The scale of the challenge

A global crisis

"If I had to select one sentence to describe the state of the world, I would say we are in a world in which global challenges are more and more integrated, and the responses are more and more fragmented, and if this is not reversed, it's a recipe for disaster."

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, January 2019

These are unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most significant global crisis of the early 21st century, demanding considerable resources and dominating the bandwidth of governments across the world. At the time of writing (April 15th 2020), 2,008,850 confirmed cases and 129,045 deaths have been attributed to the pandemic globally (Johns Hopkins University 2020).

COVID-19 has revealed the full extent to which our health care and governance systems, economies, welfare services, ecologies, and ways of life are globally interconnected. It has also witnessed the fragmented nature of global risk management. Unless new geographies of responsibility to distant others are nurtured, COVID-19 will surely amplify geopolitical tensions and inequalities within and between states.

A national crisis

"We will act like a wartime government to defeat this enemy and we will do whatever it takes to keep the economy going... This is not a time for ideology or orthodoxy. This is a time to be bold."

Boris Johnson, UK Prime Minister, March 2020

In the UK, 98,476 COVID-19 cases (as of April 15th 2020) have been recorded and 12,868 deaths (Public Health England 2020). The UK strategy of "contain, delay, research and mitigate" is being enacted with the current priorities including mass lockdown and social distancing, scaling testing capacity, developing a roadmap for 'reopening', and searching for an effective vaccine.

The intersections between the spread and impact of COVID-19 and the UK's stark regional and social inequalities will soon enough be evident. The immediate economic fallout has prompted

extraordinary fiscal and monetary interventions by the Government and Bank of England, although a deep recession is still anticipated – as the Office for Budget Responsibility indicates in Figure 1, the projected decline in GDP is precipitous. While the priority remains to stem the spread and minimise the loss of life and livelihoods, the longer term challenge lies in strengthening our resilience to the social, economic, environmental, and other (after)shocks. In the midst of the crisis, it is imperative that the UK's levelling up and devolution agendas are not forgotten; they are central pillars of the long-term solution.

A local crisis

“Local government has been unstinting in its support of national efforts to minimise the spread of coronavirus, while protecting our most vulnerable residents, supporting our local businesses and bringing together our communities.”

Cllr James Jamieson, Local Government Association Chairman, March 2020

While the UK government and the NHS are enabling, guiding and coordinating the UK's response, locally it is civic leaders, local authorities, local anchor institutions, and local stakeholders that are playing a critical frontline role.

Local authorities in particular have public health responsibilities and are important partners in local resilience bodies. They are best placed to establish partnerships with civil society actors. They are actively addressing challenges ranging from workforce shortages; additional pressures in health and social care; financial hardship for residents; and economic impacts on local businesses and employers. But they are working to remediate the largest crisis the UK has

faced for decades, after ten years of austerity and cut backs. Greater resources and decision-making responsibilities have never been more vital.

A Liverpool City Region crisis

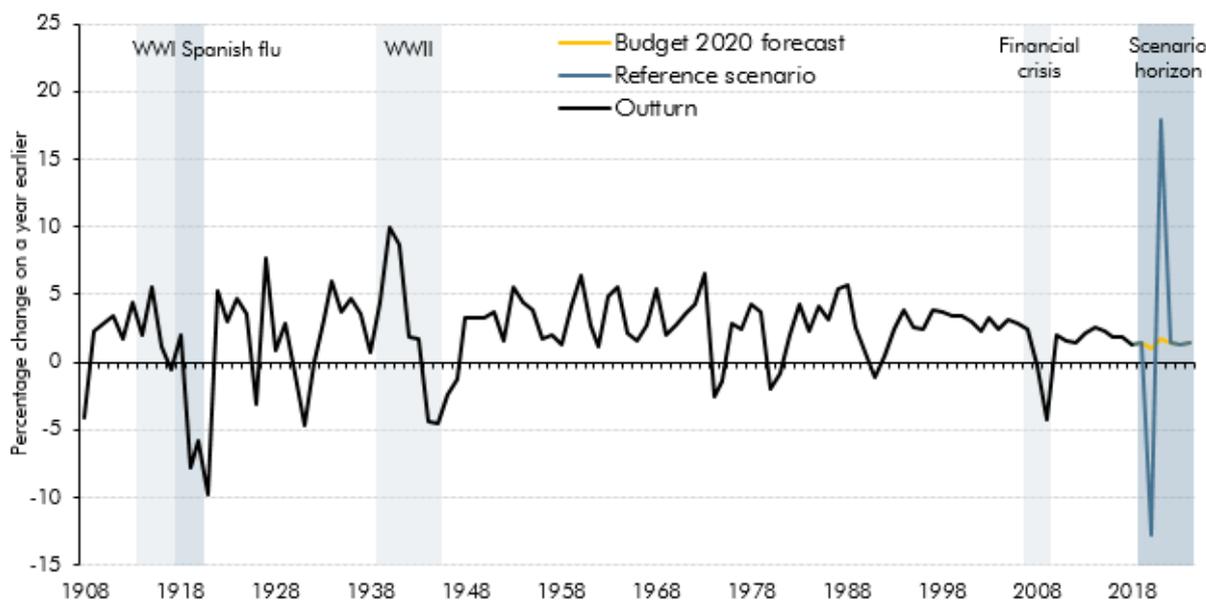
“In these difficult times, it is important that we all work together to safeguard ourselves and others. Our region is famed for its community spirit, its kindness and generosity, and its collective solidarity. As we coordinate our response to COVID-19, those values will be needed.”

Steve Rotheram, Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor, March 2020

To date (as of April 15th 2020), over 3,000 COVID-19 cases have been recorded across the Liverpool City Region's six local authority areas. Local health inequalities increase the susceptibility of many of our residents to its worst effects. Amidst the lockdown, the City Region looks and feels a very different place to just a few weeks ago, with shuttered shops, silenced streets, and drastically reduced mobility patterns.

Regional economic vulnerabilities are rapidly intensifying, particularly given concentrations of employment in “at risk” sub-sectors such as retail and food and beverage, with many people low-waged, precariously employed and unable to work from home. The number of Universal Credit recipients is likely to rise significantly, with almost 1 million applications made nationwide in the last two weeks of March 2020. These radical changes have the potential to drastically alter the structure and trajectory of the Liverpool City Region economy.

Figure 1. GDP decline in historical perspective



Source: Bank of England, ONS, OBR

(Credit: OBR 2020)

3. Our response: COVID-19 Policy Briefs

The Heseltine Institute is an internationally recognised University of Liverpool research institute, bringing together research, data, knowledge, and expertise from across the University and policy communities to co-create, impact upon, and influence public policies for tomorrow's cities and city regions. We focus upon three overarching themes: 21st Century Cities, Inclusive and Clean Growth, and Public Service Reform.

In launching this series our primary objective is to harness the intellectual capital within the University of Liverpool to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its local impacts in the short term and into the future. We work best when we work together and so our collaboration with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority will be needed more than ever. We must work together to understand the new challenges we will face in the coming months and years; and devise deliverable solutions that will enable the people,

businesses and communities of the City Region to overcome them.

Our mission is two fold.

Remediating the immediate health crisis and its aftershocks

First, to help those at the frontline deal with the immediate health emergency and its attendant economic, social, and environmental disruptions – especially in mitigating the greater burdens imposed on vulnerable populations. We will illuminate both the local implications of the pandemic and the current response by civic leaders and policy-makers, translate the meaning and resonances of global and national policies for the local context, and identify and profile exemplars of best practice within the City Region and from elsewhere.

Building Back Better

Second, to help civic leaders and local anchor institutions prepare for the rebuilding work which will lie ahead, we will publish horizon-scanning and future-oriented briefings setting out imaginative

futures and transformative policies for the City Region.

A pandemic of this enormity demands that we question whether a return to normality is a worthy aspiration or whether it is necessary to think our world anew. We need to reflect upon what COVID-19 can teach us about the resilience of the City Region economy and the efficacy of the prevailing political-economic model and its institutions. We will publish briefs that helps us understand how to *Build Back Better*, leaving no one behind.



Community messages of support for frontline workers have appeared throughout the City Region. (Credit: Colin Lane/Liverpool Echo)

4. Themes and critical questions

The COVID-19 pandemic cuts across health, the economy, environment, and society. In the context of this all-embracing crisis (or rather, multiple overlapping crises), the needs and priorities of civic leaders and policy-makers are central to the challenges that the Policy Briefs will address.

Aligning our approach with the "five foundations" articulated in the emerging *Liverpool City Region Local Industrial Strategy* (LCRCA 2019), we will publish briefs which address:

- **People** – What are the potential long-term impacts of the pandemic on mental and physical health and well-being in the City Region? How can policy-makers best support public mental health and well-being in a period of economic uncertainty? How will the disruption to education impact on learning outcomes and the skills profile of the City Region? What are the implications for working with vulnerable groups and volunteering?
- **Business environment** – How might the business environment, sectoral composition, and the quality of the labour market in the City Region change? And what innovations, initiatives, and institutions will be needed to ensure that reopening, recovery and rebuilding leads to long-term resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity for the City Region economy? In what ways is COVID-19 causing us to reconsider what a foundational economy is and who are key workers?
- **Places** – How will our communities be affected by this crisis, and what kinds of initiatives could provide effective support to the most vulnerable? How will the local housing market be impacted? How should the design of public space and place-making projects respond to the experience of pandemic? In what ways has COVID-19 impacted and been impacted by local social cohesion? What lessons can we learn from how local, regional, and central government have responded to the crisis and what are the implications for future devolution policy? How has air quality been impacted and with what consequences for biodiversity?
- **Ideas** – In what ways has the pandemic impacted the local innovation ecosystem? Has necessity birthed new innovations and how can these breakthroughs be captured and

nurtured? How can creative solutions to service delivery and good practice examples inform future public service reform? How has epidemiological research been impacted? What has the City Region learned about coordinated emergency management and resilience and how can this learning help us plan against future risks, not least the pressing Climate Emergency? In what ways has COVID-19 generated new relationships between researchers in local universities and policy and practitioner communities?

- **Infrastructure** – What role has digital connectivity played in business continuity, health care, and social support? What kinds of connectivity will be required in the future, and how will this support environmental sustainability, public health, and an inclusive economy? How can smart city innovations and new data sharing collaborations contribute towards recovery? What have we learned about working from home that might impact future transport policy? How will fiscal burdens impact national infrastructure investments that bear on the City Region? How has the Port of Liverpool been impacted?

Irrespective of the specific theme or topic under scrutiny, each briefing will actively engage with and respond to the following framing questions pertinent to policy-makers:

- **What** (is the critical policy challenge you are addressing in this paper)?
- **So what** (why does it matter to the Liverpool City Region)?
- **Now what** (actions that should be implemented), and by **who** (which

actors should lead and be involved in implementation)?

- And what are the **policy implications** arising from action / inaction?

5. Publication and dissemination

COVID-19 Policy Briefs will be written by invited academics, drawing upon interdisciplinary expertise from within the University of Liverpool, as well as civic leaders, policy-makers, and sectoral experts across the Liverpool City Region and beyond. By working together we will co-create a diverse, current and informative range of research and case studies to help navigate this changed environment.

The briefings will be published regularly on a dedicated section of the Heseltine Institute's webpage, with the intention of creating a significant repository of policy-oriented knowledge focused on the Liverpool City Region. Each will be promoted using the hashtags [#LCRPolicyMatters](#) and [#LivUniCOVID](#).

6. Further information

Should you have any questions concerning Policy Brief 001; want to suggest a COVID-19 related public policy area pertinent to the Liverpool City Region that the series might address; or wish to be considered as a prospective author, please contact Dr Andrew McClelland at the details below.

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7. References

Johns Hopkins University. 2020. "Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases." Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority [LCRCA]. 2019. *Liverpool City Region Local Industrial Strategy: Statement of Emerging Strategic Priorities*. Liverpool, UK: LCRCA.

Office for Budget Responsibility [OBR]. 2020. *Coronavirus reference scenario*. London, UK: OBR.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. 2020. "Cities policies response." Accessed April 7, 2020. http://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126769-yen45847kf&title=Coronavirus-COVID-19-Cities-Policy-Responses Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Public Health England. 2020. "Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK." Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk>.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR]. 2015. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*. New York, US: UNDRR.

8. Useful resources

www.gov.uk/coronavirus

www.local.gov.uk/our-support/coronavirus-information-councils

www.thelancet.com/coronavirus

www.bmj.com/coronavirus

www.ons.org/coronavirus

www.liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk/coronavirus/

www.liverpool.ac.uk/coronavirus/

coronavirus.jhu.edu/

growthplatform.org/business-covid-19-advice/

www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030

www.parliament.uk/covid19-researcher-engagement

The Heseltine Institute is an interdisciplinary public policy research institute which brings together academic expertise from across the University of Liverpool with policy-makers and practitioners to support the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and city regions.

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The information, practices and views in this Policy Brief are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Heseltine Institute.

COVID-19 Policy Briefs can be accessed at: www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute