

Tyne and Wear Citizens: Relaunch of the Listening Campaign in the Context of a Pandemic

The Diocese is a strategic partner of Tyne and Wear Citizens (TWC), which seeks to support the common good and develop civic society and its members. TWC operates on a cycle of listening action and evaluation. Since its launch in 2017, TWC had completed one of these cycles that lead to the establishment of three campaigns: on improving mental health services, fighting food poverty, especially for school children and combating hate crime. All of these campaigns had a number of successes. It was felt by the end of 2019 the time was right to start a fresh cycle with 2020 being a year for listening.

The initial launch was in December of last year at the AGM but our world is very different now due to the impact of the pandemic on our lives and our economy. Due to these dramatic changes on June 24th TWC had a relaunch of the listening campaign.

The relaunch was also very different from the initial one, since it was done online via zoom, but seventy people took part. At least seven of those who were present are part of the Diocese.

In this online event, we were able to share answers to the question that is still the same but it is being asked in a different context.

‘What is putting pressure on you, your family and your community?’

There were many concerns as you would imagine including addressing child poverty, the needs and care of the elderly and the senses of confusion and uncertainty people have with a lack of clarity from the government.

We want to know what the key issues are so that we can work out what our campaigns are going to be in 2021. These are challenging times so it is important that as many people in the diocese are given the opportunity to express their answers.

If want an example of Community Organising, the successful campaign to have the voucher scheme extended for Free School Meal pupils in the summer is a great one. One of our Diocesan schools, St Thomas More Academy, North Shields, was very involved in the campaign, with the head teacher, Mr David Watson, speaking to parliamentary committee via zoom to express his concern.

It would have been nice if the concerns of teachers, parents and pupils had been listened to at first but in Community Organising you have to use what power is available and respect to Marcus Rashford who used his power to great effect to support children who are having similar experiences as of his own childhood.

A final thought: having this relaunch event on the feast of the birth of John the Baptist was very apt. He spoke truth to power. That’s what community organising is all about; we all are called to so the same.