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Innovative new vaccination bus partnership aims to increase vaccination take-up in Newcastle

The region's largest bus operator, Go North East, is now working in partnership with Newcastle GP Services (NGPS) – the GP Federation for Newcastle – Newcastle City Council and community and voluntary sector partners to provide an outreach vaccination bus in the city.

Go North East has converted one of its buses into a new mobile Covid-19 vaccination unit that will travel the local area visiting communities who are unable to get to vaccination centres, or where uptake has proved low, helping

to make access easier and encourage more people to get their vaccination.

The bus will initially visit hostels in Newcastle, to vaccinate members of the homeless community, and Newcastle Muslim Centre, and is part of work being delivered to address health inequalities in the area.

NGPS has been running the vaccination programme at Gosforth Racecourse and Newcastle Eagles Community Arena since December 2020 and, working with Collaborative Newcastle partners, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue service and others, have vaccinated more than 45,000 people in Newcastle.

The vaccination bus is part of Go North East's Little Coasters fleet operating from its Percy Main depot, and has been converted with a waiting room area and annex tent, two registration desks and two vaccination points, with a one-way system operating throughout the vehicle thanks to fold down steps added at the rear of the bus.

240v electric points, in-situ heating, lighting, and Wi-Fi have all been added to a sustainable battery electric system board which is charged by the bus when driving between locations and supplemented by a solar panel on the roof.

Go North East's engineering teams undertook the conversion in the space of just a week and partners Icomera and Sure helped by supplying upgraded Wi-Fi and a reversing camera to aid the manoeuvrability of the bus in its new role.

The bus will be driven, housed, maintained, and cleaned by Go North East, whilst staff from GP practices and NPGS will deliver the vaccinations and handle patient administration. Their work is conducted in a private area on board behind a privacy screen and with frosted glazed windows.

The bus has full Covid-secure measures on board, including hand sanitisers, socially distanced seating, a Covid safety screen for the driver and is subject to Go North East's enhanced cleaning regime, including using hospital grade 'X-mist' antibacterial fogging treatment.

Martijn Gilbert, managing director at Go North East, said: "We are delighted to be playing a further part in the exceptionally important vaccination effort,

which is essential to both people's health and wellbeing, and the re-starting of the country's economy.

“Colleagues across our company have been busy providing transport for essential journeys and many fellow key workers throughout the pandemic, adopting additional working practices to ensure that our buses are clean and safe for people to use.

“More recently we've been providing additional services to help connect vaccination centres and it's great to be taking this work to the next level with a bus that will go out into the local community and physically deliver the vaccination.

“Our engineering team has delivered a rapid transformation of the bus and we are immensely proud to be working with local NHS and health care partners on this innovative new service.”

Dr Brigid Joughin, clinical director of the Outer West Primary Care Network and GP at Throckley Primary Care Centre, who is the lead clinician for the bus service, said: “From an idea of ours just a few weeks ago, it's been fantastic to see how quickly we've been able to set this up and we've all been really impressed at the speed with which the bus has been kitted out and a plan has come together.

“This is yet another great example of Collaborative Newcastle in practice, with Newcastle City Council playing a key role in making sure we can visit the homeless hostels, and the Newcastle Community Champions helping us to set up vaccinations at the Newcastle Muslim Centre. It's truly a team effort, and one I'm really proud to be part of.”

Councillor Joyce McCarty, deputy leader at Newcastle City Council, added: “The vaccination bus shows how innovative and forward-thinking organisations in our city are and how the strength of Newcastle's partnerships can create bright sparks and fantastic solutions.

“From the outset our vaccination programme has been one of the leaders in the country and by taking the jabs to some of the most vulnerable groups in our city we are continuing to protect those who are at risk of becoming seriously ill from the virus.

“We must continue to support our hard to reach communities and reduce the impact of health inequalities which are impacting every corner of Newcastle.

“Our collaborative approach to health and social care will be essential as we continue to overcome this pandemic and I would like to thank all partners for the role they have played in protecting, supporting and treating anyone effected by the virus.”

This is part of the rollout to priority group 6 within the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI) categories for those with clinical extreme vulnerabilities.

[Go North East website](#)