

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**11 JANUARY 2018**

### **MEDWAY YOUTH COUNCIL – ANNUAL CONFERENCE FINDINGS**

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director, Children and Adults Services

Author: Jade Milnes, Democratic Services Officer

#### **Summary**

The report set out at Appendix 1, prepared by the Medway Youth Council (MYC), provides the committee with the findings and outcomes from the MYC Annual Conference held in November 2017, which was entitled 'The Bully: Understanding Both Sides.'

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that a report on the outcomes of Medway Youth Council (MYC) Annual Conference be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 The MYC's last Annual Conference was held on 7 November 2017 and was entitled 'The Bully: Understanding Both Sides.' The conference consisted of three workshops:

1. 'Tackling Bullying'
2. 'What is Bullying'
3. 'Why do People Bully and should they be punished or helped?'

2.2 The report attached at Appendix 1 gives further details of the Conference and key findings from each session.

#### **3. Conclusions of conference**

3.1 The MYC felt that they had received conclusive and reliable responses from the young people that participated in the workshops at the conference and

that this had enabled the MYC to improve their understanding of bullying. Including knowledge on the specific issue of cyber bullying.

- 3.2 The information gained from the conference would inform an anti-bullying campaign, led by the MYC in 2018.
- 3.3 Additional actions that would be taken forward by the MYC include:
  - The production of literature on bullying which would be shared on the MYC website and with Schools.
  - The production of a series of resources adapted from the conference workshops, which would also be shared with schools.
  - The development of a model Anti-bullying Policy, by working in conjunction with schools and Headteachers.
  - Working with Anti-Bullying Ambassadors in Medway on their anti-bullying campaigns.

#### **4. Risk Management**

- 4.1. There are no specific risk implications for Medway Council arising directly from this report.

#### **5. Legal and Financial Implications**

- 5.1. There are no legal or financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

#### **6. Recommendation**

- 6.1. Members are asked to note the Medway Youth Council Annual Conference Report 2017, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

#### **Lead officers:**

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#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – MYC Annual Conference Report 2017

#### **Background papers:**

None

# Annual Conference Report 2017



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*You may not have the vote, but you do have a voice*

# This report aims to outline the findings and recommendations of Medway Youth Council's Annual Conference 2017, "The Bully: Understanding Both Sides", which took place on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

## **Opening from the Organisation Chair, George Perfect YC**

*Thank you for taking the time to read our 2017 Medway Annual Youth Conference report. This year's conference was a great success, with us achieving one of our highest turnouts.*

*This report will highlight the findings of our conference, and raise the concerns from the young people that attended the conference.*

*As an Organisation we would like to thank Medway Council for their continuing support of the organisation and to the Medway Youth Service for assisting us on the day.*

*We hope you enjoy our report and we look forward to tackling the findings.*



The Medway Youth Council would like to give special thanks to Questor Insurance for donating for free the design of our new branding and website

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## Who are we?

Medway Youth Council is an organisation of passionate young people from all across the Medway towns, dedicated to giving young people a voice across the unitary authority and promoting their role in our community. Medway Youth Council is supported by Medway Council's Youth Service. We are a wholly inclusive organisation, representing a wide range of young people, aged 11-18, from a variety of different schools and youth groups. We campaign on behalf of young people with regards to prominent issues such as transport, mental health, bullying and drugs awareness.

## The Conference

Every year, Medway Youth Council holds an Annual Conference, which grows out of a consultation we carried out with young people from across Medway. Invitations are sent out to every school inviting pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 (years 7 to 13), inviting a small number of students as well as accompanying staff to attend the conference.

This year's conference was held once again at the Corn Exchange, Rochester.



# The Bully: Understanding Both Sides

Medway Youth Council's Annual Conference 2017 was titled "The Bully: Understanding Both Sides" and dealt with the issue of bullying. This was something we felt was an important subject, given its relevance to the lives of many young people in Medway and the effect of the internet and social media. Yet again the conference was well attended, with over one-hundred and seventy students from a range of secondary and specialist schools in Medway. The day included three workshops, each based around different aspects of the topic. These focused largely on how we should tackle bullying and how it should be treated – where can young people go for help? Who should be helping? Why do people bully? Should we punish or help bullies? These were followed by a Q and A after lunch with a panel of relevant professionals addressing questions from students on bullying.

## Aims

Broadly, the conference aimed to both consult and educate young people on the subject of bullying. In particular we explored the causes and, to some degree, opened up discussion as to how we should deal with bullying. We also aimed to understand whether it is better to punish or support bullies and how we can support victims. In order to achieve this we aimed to listen extensively to young people's experiences in order to understand the scope of problem. At the same time we wanted to help young people develop greater resilience and encourage them to support victims and become more proactive in tackling bullying in their schools and communities.



# Workshop 1: Tackling Bullying

This workshop intended to explore how we can tackle bullying or, rather, how young people thought they did and indeed should react to it. In particular we hoped to discuss why bullying was often ignored and how we could encourage people to be more proactive in their stance against bullying.

Young people involved in this workshop were first presented with a series of celebrities who were known to have been involved in bullying – either as a victim or as a bully - and asked to determine whether they were in fact a bully, a victim or both. Following this, young people were given a series of scenarios (two or three depending on the length of the session) and asked to answer a series of questions designed to provoke discussion on both people's responses and attitudes towards bullying. Finally, the workshop concluded with a video showing positive responses to bullying, after which a discussion was held both on whether they thought that young people in their schools/community would react in a similar way and why/why not.

When asked to identify which celebrities were a victim or a bully, there was largely a diverse range of opinion on most, although some of the celebrities had been quite public with their experiences and as such many of the young people already knew the answers to a few. However, we still saw that people struggled to identify correctly the bullies and victims. Interestingly, the young people in all of the groups seemed to base many of their assumptions on the celebrities' appearances – for example many of the young people thought that rapper '50 cent' was bullied based on the fact that he 'was black'. This perhaps shows that young people have preexisting ideas about what victims and indeed bullies look like – relating to things like race, religion and gender. We think that young people should be shown a variety of victims/bullies who break the typical ideas about such.



Additionally, young people participating in the workshop were shown two other scenarios, one about a girl who reported bullying to a sixth former, who later resolved the issue, and the other about a girl who was bullied by her mathematics teacher. They were asked if they themselves would be brave enough to talk to an older student about bullying, whether older students had a responsibility to help younger students. We also asked if reporting bullying to a sixth former could be dangerous, whether they had personally witnessed or experienced bullying by teachers and about how we should deal with teachers who are bullying students, especially if they are unaware of it. The young people again felt that educating bullies, in this case teachers, was important. They thought that teachers should be offered advice and training but also disciplined for bullying and that it was important to, as a student, speak to a teacher who you think is bullying you, about their actions. Additionally, regarding the scenario with the sixth former, many would be reluctant to speak to a sixth former about bullying, as they might not keep the experience confidential. Although many admitted that the young people felt that older students had a responsibility to help younger students and that designated roles for sixth formers make them more trustworthy.

## Findings and Recommendations

When asked whether they thought that young people in their community or school would react in a similar way to those shown in a video highlighting positive responses of bystanders – students and adults – the consensus was largely that young people are perhaps afraid of a bully so don't want to support victims – adults perhaps would be more likely to intervene as they might feel that they have some form of authority -, that young people perhaps struggled to understand what was banter and what was bullying and indeed that there was perhaps a cultural element involved.

Overall, we received lots of positive feedback about the workshop – although many thought that it would have been useful to have offered some cohesive strategies for them to take back to their schools. Those involved felt that it would be a good experience for others to have access to and many said that it was both interesting and thought-provoking





# Workshop 2: What is Bullying?

In this workshop, we looked at the definition of bullying, what makes a bully, bystander and victim, the areas where you are most likely to get bullied and discussed the role that social media plays.

The young people were given time to think about how they would describe bullying, and were then asked to label a figure with the characteristics of a bully, victim or bystander. The rest of the session was made up of the group going back and forth on several topics to do with cyber bullying.

## Findings and Recommendations

All of the young people were confident in their definitions of bullying, and most people spoke about how it is repeated and can be physical, verbal or mental, how it can take place in real life as well as online, and how it leaves the victim feeling inferior and hurt. Some suggested that bullying can sometimes be unintentional if the bully is unaware that their actions are affecting the victim.

Groups that were tasked with describing a bully or a victim were able to get started immediately, however groups that had to define a bystander struggled at first. Generally, the bullies were described as insecure, perhaps from a bad background, sometimes physically stronger and prejudiced. The young people labelled victims as hurt, upset, possibly mentally unwell, different (due to race, gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) and made to feel small. An interesting point that was made was how sometimes a victim of bullying can become the bully in order to feel better about themselves. After the young people had given some thought to it, the bystanders were labelled as cowardly, scared of the bully, possibly a victim as well and maybe afraid that if they speak up, the bully will turn on them.

When discussing where you are most likely to get bullied, the main areas mentioned were school, work and online, but some people picked up on the fact that bullying can actually happen anywhere. It was acknowledged that this is why bullying is such a hard issue to deal with; there is no way that it can ever stop because there are always places where it will be hidden from others.

After the floor was opened to discussion, the young people were asked whether they think online bullying or real life bullying is worse for young people in today's society. In two groups, the majority agreed that cyber bullying was a more difficult problem to tackle and a bigger issue because of how much social media dominates most of our lives. Interestingly, in one group, every single young person said that online bullying was more of a problem.

Finally, we talked about how bullying on and overuse of Social Media can impact on a young people's mental health. One young person spoke about how it can also be a place where great change can happen due to being able to connect with like-minded people from all over the world.

Overall, people said that the workshop was insightful and educational, and some were shown opinions and perspectives that they hadn't considered before.



# Workshop 3: Why do People Bully and should they be punished or helped?

This workshop looked at how young people view bullies and the reasons behind their actions. We also looked at ideas about how bullies should be dealt with i.e. should they be punished or helped after they have been identified.

Scenarios of cyber-bullying were given out, and young people were asked to identify the reasons that people may have made these comments, thinking about the differences caused by the internet. Then, there was a long discussion/ debate about how bullies should be dealt with, the consensus being that the bully should be helped, but the consequence of it happening again would be punishment. After this finding, we discussed the differing forms of help for bullies such as: meeting victims face to face; counselling – group or individual; intervention in school to see if there is a self-esteem/ school issue; and talking to other people that are bullies. Young people were openly expressed own experiences of bullying within school using this to explain their viewpoint.

## Findings and Recommendations

The overall view that was directed towards bullies was negative, but there was an understanding that there is usually a deeper reason for bullying. Young people were open to talking about their own opinions about how bullies are viewed. They believed that bullies are often demonised -which is a key issue which impacts on offering help. The main reasons why people become bullies are: jealousy, to gain attention, to make themselves popular, to exercise authority, peer pressure, they think it's funny, to regain control over their own lives, they don't realise that what they are doing is bullying, they were bullied and are trying to overcome it. This showed how ignorance, or a lack of understanding or help for bullies enables bullying to become such a major issue.



Another area of findings was what should be done when bullying is identified. This caused a divide in those participating, as the variation lay upon whether the bully needed help or punishment. Those who believed bullies should be punished recommended detentions, withdrawal of rewards within school, and being shown the impact of their bullying on others. However, a majority of young people believed that bullies should be helped, to make sure that they are not driven away from their age group at school. The recommendations for helping bullies was also seeing the impact of their actions, but also having access to support networks to help them join back in at school.

From this workshop, there was clear evidence that young people believed that bullying was not the biggest issue facing people in Medway. Some thought that other issues, such as mental health problems are more significant than bullying, highlighting the role they can play in creating the problem in the first place. However, young people were still open to discussion about what should be done in the future, and were invested in trying to improve the situations for the bullied and bullies.



# Q & A

In the afternoon, there was a Q and A session with a panel of four relevant experts answering questions from young people on many of the day's topics. *The panel of experts were:*

Mr Andrew Minchin – Headteacher of The Robert Napier School

Ms Tina Lovey – CEO of Rivermead Inclusive Trust

James Okulaja – UK Anti-Bullying Ambassador

Acting Inspector Adam Duke – Kent Police (Medway Division)

## Findings and Recommendations

The aim of the Q and A was to allow the panel to provide young people with more coherent and informed advice as well as to offer the audience the chance to scrutinise and raise any concerns they might have had with the policies/actions of organisations relevant to anti-bullying. Young people were able to share their experiences of bullying and seek advice from the panel and it was evident that there was a lot of uncertainty about where they should go for help if they experience bullying and how they should react to a bully.

The panel were asked how they prevented teachers from bullying, a problem which had been previously discussed in one of the workshops. The panel stressed the importance of victims recognising and reporting the problem, saying that schools should remain open and approachable to any victims of any type of bullying and should investigate any bullying allegations fully. They said that it was important for senior staff to both to advise teachers on how to have a more positive relationship with students and to reprimand them where necessary.



Additionally, the panel were asked how often they hear about cyberbullying and how they identify and help victims of bullying. They all agreed that cyberbullying isn't reported as much as it should be, although it is something that they hear about and deal with on a regular basis. It was also said that it was a problem which was more difficult to tackle as it happens largely outside of school. As for how to identify and help victims, Insp. Adam Duke mentioned the police open door policy in which they liaise directly with youth and school groups and aim to be more approachable to young people whilst it was also agreed that bystanders and witnesses should be encouraged to report bullying and take a more proactive stance.

Finally, the panel were asked specifically what policy ideas they had. The ideas which were mentioned included having a link or "bully button" on a school's website to report bullying, non-teaching support staff or "house mentors" to give assemblies and speak with victims and bullies, the involvement of bullies in strategy as well as victims, having specialist anti-bullying ambassadors and broadly giving clear guidance to students and young people.

## Conference Media Coverage

Courtesy of the Medway Messenger, KM Group.

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# Youth council conference shines light on bullying

**by Nicola Jordan**  
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@nicolajordan01

Getting to grips with bullying was the hot topic at the Medway Youth Council (MYC) annual conference, which was attended by more than 200 students.

Delegates representing secondary schools and colleges crammed into Rochester's Corn Exchange last Tuesday.

They discussed ways of tackling the growing problems of cyber and physical abuse.

Some victims shared their experiences with the audience of young people and the panel of two head teachers, a top police officer and a leading anti-bullying campaigner.

Workshops were held throughout the day looking into the root of bullying and whether perpetrators should be punished or helped.

There was also a Q&A session chaired by panellists James Okulaja, a national anti-bullying ambassador, acting inspector Adam Duke and Andrew Minchin and Tina Lovey, head teachers of Gillingham schools



**Head teachers Andrew Minchin and Tina Lovey, anti-bullying campaigner James Okulaja and acting Insp Adam Duke take part in a Q&A panel at the Medway Youth Council conference**

Robert Napier and Rivermead.

The findings will now be compiled by MYC members, who will report to the council's overview and young people scrutiny committee.

They will also be sending out information packs to schools on how best to implement solutions.

MYC chairman George Perfect, who gave the opening speech, was delighted with the response of the seminar, which was attended by many Medway councillors, including mayor Cllr David Wildey.

George, 17, said: "It was brilliant. We had representatives from comprehensives, grammars and the university technical college and from all over Medway. Discussion was lively

and the panel really related to the audience.

"Some of the stories shared were particularly shocking, including one girl who was too scared to leave her home for fear of being targeted.

"We find being young ourselves they are more likely to relate to us rather than a counsellor.

"Cyber bullying is the biggest problem and is not something that just goes on at school. It is 24/7."

MYC, an elected, non-political forum, has 39 members.

They represent the Towns in the National Youth Parliament - taking on issues such as transport, drink and drug abuse, homelessness and modern slavery. One of the current subjects on their agenda is lowering the voting age to 16.

Robert Napier School pupil George said the Medway group had bucked the national trend and polled against a change.

MYC's mission statement is: "You may not have the vote, but you do have a voice."

George added: "We're not political and totally independent.

"Our doors are open to anyone between 10 and 19."

# Feedback from Students

*At the end of the day we asked students to give feedback on their thoughts on the day. We have included a selection of this here:*

*“This was interactive and educational. I thought I knew a lot about bullying but through this workshop I was able to expand my learning.”*

*“I’d prefer more interactive workshops.”*

*“The idea of young people coming together for one cause is great, the workshops were thought provoking.”*

*“I enjoyed how engaging the tasks were and how they were used to talk about sensitive issues.”*

*“All of the youth council members were enthusiastic and very approachable.”*

*“I’d like to learn about anti-bullying techniques and how to make people feel safe.”*

*“I thought it was very well organised and the MYC were very educated and friendly as were the Q and A panel.”*

*“Thank you to everyone, it showed I am not alone.”*



# Summary and Further Actions

Broadly, we felt the conference proved to be a huge success providing us with a wide array of opinions. We received conclusive and reliable responses from young people on the topics presented in the workshops. We now have a better understanding of the problem of bullying as well as valuable feedback which we intend to use to influence many of our actions with regards to our anti-bullying campaign over the course of the coming year. At the same time many of the young people who attended the conference said that they found that it was overall a thought-provoking and enjoyable day and indeed the majority of feedback we received from young people was positive. Our conference has allowed us to grasp the specific issue of cyber-bullying, something that our campaign will focus on addressing.

## Further Actions

In response to MYC Annual Conference 2017 we are going to be running a campaign to directly address the issues discussed. We have put forward the following further actions:

- MYC will produce literature around bullying, which will focus around the conference workshops to be shared on our website and through schools.
- MYC will work with schools and Headteacher to produce a model anti-bullying policy which we will then encourage schools to adopt.
- MYC will adapt the workshops provided at the annual conference into a series of resources which will be offered to schools.
- MYC will work with Anti-Bullying Ambassadors across the Medway towns on their campaigns surrounding bullying.

**If you would like to get in touch with the Medway Youth Council to assist us in achieving the above, please contact:**

**Medway Youth Council, Gun Wharf, Chatham, Kent, ME4 4TR.**

**Via [angela.taylor@medway.gov.uk](mailto:angela.taylor@medway.gov.uk)**

**01634 338748**



**Thank you for taking the time to  
read our report.**

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