

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

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### **THE EMOTIONAL AND WELLBEING IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CYP**

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#### Summary

This paper outlines the findings of primary insight work undertaken to understand the impact of the COVID19 pandemic and resulting lockdown on the emotional health and wellbeing of young people in Medway. It outlines the actions taken and planned in response to the findings of the insight work. It also identifies how schools have responded to the pandemic and endeavored to remain open.

#### 1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. The report aims to meet the following objectives within the Council plan: every child reaching their potential in school and happy resilient families. The NHS long term plan seeks to deliver a strong start in life for children and young people recognising that the health of children is influenced by a healthy environment.
- 1.2. There is no direct financial implications from this report but there will be a need for the Council to continue to monitor and support the impact of COVID-19 on the young people of Medway over the coming months and years.

#### 2. Background

- 2.1 In March a Kent and Medway commissioner and provider group was established to manage the response to Covid19, with representation from Kent and Medway CCG, Kent County Council, Medway Council and NHS Children's Health Providers. Collectively this group identified that the impact of lockdown and Covid19 on children and young people could be significant and as such we needed the voice of young people to understand how we could support them better.

- 2.2 This insight could also be used to shape how we best target our services to support young people as part of the recovery and restart plans, highlighting any areas of concern to the relevant services and learning from feedback to better meet need.
- 2.3 The aim was that the research was large enough to be statistically valid and could be used as a benchmark, moving forward, to monitor progress.
- 2.4 An independent social research organisation was identified, through Invitation to Quote process, who could develop the survey with local service specialists but produce an independent report with recommendations for the wider systems that supports young people (Health, social care, education etc).
- 2.5 TONIC were commissioned in May 2020 and developed and promoted the Medway Children and Young Peoples Lockdown Survey (see appendix 1) from the 20 May - 19 June 2020.
- 2.6 The survey targeted 11–19 year olds and was promoted on social media by Medway Council and by TONIC – predominately through Facebook. Overall, well over 1100 young people in Medway completed the survey from a good geographical spread of areas and ages which meant that it was statistically relevant for that age group. Males were underrepresented (at 30% compared to 70% female respondents) in this survey and there was a higher number of young people who self-reported a learning need or special educational need that completed the survey than was expected.

### 3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 There were several themes the questions in the survey formed and a number of headline results as detailed below:

#### 3.1.1 Experience of Lockdown

- Most young people (61%) felt that life had been “ok”, however, 15% felt their lives had been “bad” during the lockdown period. Although over 1/3 (36%) have been feeling good about themselves in the last week, ¼ (25%) had not.
- Around half reported feeling more stressed and worried than normal (53%), experiencing worse sleep (48%), and are getting less exercise (51%) than before the lockdown.

#### 3.1.2 Coping with Lockdown

- Most found it hard to cope with not seeing friends and family (74%), boredom (69%) and schoolwork (61%). More than half found stress hard to cope with (51%) and over 1/3 found it hard to cope with anxiety (43%), loneliness (42%), and the lack of exercise / going outdoors (37%).
- The majority found TV/films (73%) and music (72%) helped them cope with difficult feelings and the lockdown more generally. Around half said video calls (61%), social media (54%), being with family (53%), gaming (49%) and pets (48%) helped them to cope.

- 11% said no one was giving them support, and 30% did not know who to contact if things got difficult for them or they needed support.
- Sub-analysis shows that negative experiences of lockdown increase with age, as support decreases.
- Girls are more likely to have negative emotions during lockdown and less likely to get support from family or to access computers.

### 3.1.3 Food And Dental Hygiene

- Most (60%) had spent more time than usual doing activities together with family, including eating meals (49%) and preparing food (37%). However, 1 in 5 (21%) said they had not spent more time with family doing any of these activities.
- Although the majority (91%) had no problems accessing food, 8% had sometimes and 2% had often gone hungry or not eaten for a day.
- 1 in 4 (25%) said they only sometimes brushed their teeth twice a day and 14% said they were often not doing this.

### 3.1.4 School Work

- 1 in 5 (20%) said they have not had enough support to be able to continue with schoolwork.
- Around 1 in 10 do not have regular access to a computer (13%) or somewhere to do schoolwork at home (9%).
- Although most used a laptop (42%) or tablet (18%) to do schoolwork on, 14% predominately used a mobile phone, and 4% said they had not been set any schoolwork.
- Over 1/3 (35%) felt good about going back to school, but more than 1 in 5 (22%) felt bad about this prospect and 42% felt unsure about it. This may be because the majority (63%) were unclear about Government guidance on how to behave.
- Older young people, girls and those with Special Educational Needs were more likely to need support in a number of areas on the return to school.

## 4. Actions and Response

4.1 A number of actions were developed and delivered to form part of the recovery response and address the issues identified:

### 4.2 Government Messages

**Issue** – Young people do not understand messages from the government about COVID and what they are allowed to do.

**Response** – A social marketing company was commissioned by Medway Council (NEL CSU) to create multimedia messages that appeal to the 11-25 age bracket. These messages seek to encourage behaviour change and explain government messages in a clear and engaging manner. These are being pushed out via Instagram, SNAPCHAT, Facebook, Twitter and for the first time in Medway, TikTok (see Appendix 2).

#### 4.3 Information about mental health and wellbeing

**Issue** – That there was not a single location for young people to visit to access the range of information and support needed around mental health and emotional wellbeing.

**Response** – A one-page document has been produced to highlight the different services available against the Thrive model and will be distributed widely in January. A Kent and Medway Mental health and wellbeing website is also in production and aims to be up and running in spring 2021.

#### 4.4 Exercise and physical activity during lockdown

**Issue** – Teenagers were doing less physical activity than normal during lockdown and were not the target audience for the Joe Wicks workout.

**Response** – In response to this and other evidence such as the National Child Measurement Programme figures for this year, which demonstrated a rise in obesity for our younger children (YR and Yr6), a whole systems obesity approach and an additional post has been appointed to, to try and tackle the issue of childhood obesity.

#### 4.5 Increased low-level mental health issues

**Issue** – The survey showed an increased level of low-level mental health conditions such as anxiety, health anxiety and stress.

**Response** – Additional funding from the LTP was put in to expand the Emotional Wellbeing team within the school nursing service, online support KOOTH was commissioned, the Self-Harm action plan was put in place and the bid for Mental Health support teams was successful and teams will be in place early 2021.

### 5. Pupil Attendance

5.1 Schools remained open throughout lockdown to ensure there were places for vulnerable and key worker children. The full return of pupils to school was a crucial national driver and ensuring that our children and young people could come back to Medway schools in the most Covid secure way was a priority for both Medway Council and schools.

5.2 Since the 'full return' to school in September, Medway Council officers have been recording pupil attendance in Medway schools compared with pupil attendance across England. This data has been taken from the returns schools are required to submit daily to the DfE. While it must be noted that compliance varies, in Medway four in five schools on average completed the return each day, which makes it likely that the pupil attendance in terms one and two, is likely to be similar to those in the attached table (Appendix 1).

In summary, in term 1:

- pupil attendance was very good at primary schools in Medway in term 1 – almost 9 in 10 pupils attended their school in week one, which built up to 19 in 20 (95 per cent) in weeks 5 and 6 of the term, almost at pre-pandemic attendance levels;

- pupil attendance in primary schools was better than the national average in every week – most weeks between three and five points better;
  - attendance at secondary schools was also very good, starting at 85 per cent – compared with 76 per cent nationally – and consolidating to 90 plus per cent, leading to a termly average of 88 per cent, five points better than nationally;
  - attendance levels at our all-through school were very good, at 93 per cent, a full 12 points better than all-through schools nationally;
  - attendance at special school was commendably high and consistent through the term, which is especially creditable given the higher numbers of clinically vulnerable and shielding in the schools.
- 5.3 School leaders reported that, as well as attendance levels being high, pupils returned to school with enthusiasm. The fears (expressed generally across the country) that pupils would find return to study challenging has not appeared to be the case in Medway. Our schools are to be commended at the level of confidence they gave parents and pupils alike, that has translated into high attendance levels in term 1.
- 5.4 The effects of the sharply increasing infection rate across Swale and North Kent generally, affected our Medway schools from the second week in term two. In the first week of the term, pupil attendance remained high, and indeed above term one average levels in primary, secondary, all through, special and pupil referral units.
- 5.5 However, after week one:
- attendance levels fell sharply in primary schools each week of the term, as the effects of infection and enforced isolation grew significantly – in the penultimate week of term, attendance was 71 per cent, down from 94 per cent in week one;
  - our secondary schools were badly affected, with attendance levels dropping from 91 per cent in week one to fewer than three in five (58 per cent) in the last week of term;
  - our all-through school did comparatively well, with almost four in five pupils attending in the penultimate week of term; and
  - special schools were badly affected, with only 54 per cent of pupils at school in week six.
- 5.6 The attendance figures for the final week are from only the first three days. It is likely that parents keeping their children out of school in order to have ten clear days before Christmas was a factor, alongside a great deal of publicity about school leaders and their professional associations calling for the early closure of schools (on 11 December).
- 5.7 Our schools have continued to offer on-line learning to pupils and have worked closely with council officers to ensure that vulnerable children and their families have been appropriately supported if they are unable to attend school. Regular weekly meetings have been established between head teachers, officers and Portfolio Holders to monitor the impact of Covid on

attendance and wellbeing. Subgroups of this meeting have been established including one which focuses on pupil vulnerability and one which addresses more operational issues.

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 The project was aimed to consult young people about their experiences of lockdown and is part of an ongoing piece of work.

## 7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The initial survey was funded via a small amount of COVID funding and most of the other work and service has been externally funded through the CCG and other funding streams.

## 8. Legal implications

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

## 9. Next Steps

- 9.1 A number of timely and swift actions were put in place following the survey results and more work is planned in early 2021 such as:

- Completing the DFE Return to Education Wellbeing programme with schools. Five sessions around areas such as staff wellbeing, pupil wellbeing and signposting and services happened in the autumn term and more sessions are in place for early 2021.
- The annual Medway Youth Service conference being planned for March 2021 is having the focus on the impact of COVID on young people and will further develop this work and understanding.
- Public Health will be using the MOJO Meter tool in early 2021 as a bespoke interactive survey and school profiling tool to allow us as a system to continuously monitor the impact of COVID and general wellbeing of pupils. This will work alongside the school profiling tool led by Public Health Nursing which will work with the schools to create a real-time profile of their school and pupils health and wellbeing needs (e.g. how many children looked after, how many children have asthma, how many children on behavioural pathways etc).
- New physical teams and staff in both NELFT and MCH will be deployed early 2021 to try and pick up some of the lower level mental health and wellbeing needs.
- New bereavement support for young people is being commissioned across Kent and Medway to meet the increased need

## 10. Recommendation

- 10.1 That the Committee note the report.

## Lead officer contact

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## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Full Lockdown Report

Appendix 2 – COVID-19 Messaging for Young People

Appendix 3 – Pupil Attendance Data Term 1 & 2 2020

## Background papers

None