

COUNCIL

7 OCTOBER 2021

MEDWAY YOUTH COUNCIL – ANNUAL REPORT

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People – Children and Adults Services

Author: Archibald Bean, Chair of Medway Youth Council

Summary

The report, prepared by the Medway Youth Council (MYC), provides the Committee with the findings and recommendations from the MYC Annual Youth Conference 2021, which was entitled 'Covid-19: The Effect on Youth'.

At its meeting on 5 August 2021, the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended that the report be reported to Full Council.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1. The terms of reference for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Chapter 4 Part 5 paragraph 22.2 (b) of the Constitution) states; "to fulfil all the functions of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to children".

2. Background

2.1. In March 2015, the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representatives who sat on the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee brought forward a report to the Committee providing details of the key findings from MYP's 2014 Annual Youth Conference. It was agreed that the MYP should be invited to provide a similar report on an annual basis, informing the Committee of the outcomes of its latest annual conference

2.2. **COVID: The Effect on Youth** is an alternative to the Medway Youth Council's annual conference and looked at how COVID has impacted young people's mental wellbeing and their futures. The campaign had three parts:

- A Mental Wellbeing Support Pack which includes coping techniques, helpful organisations, mindsets and other useful information to support young people.

- A Survey for the Young People in Medway to gather information on how Young People had been affected by COVID. It was sent out to young people through Medway schools and social media and received 396 responses.
 - A Facilitated Question and Answer (Q&A) Session for young people and other members of the community to submit questions to a panel of experts.
- 2.3. The report attached at Appendix 1 gives further details of the conference and the key findings from the campaign.

3. Conclusions of the campaign

- 3.1. The report provides an overview of the support pack, results from the survey and issues discussed at the Q&A event and some recommendations for possible future action.
- 3.2. This year's conference was to look at the impact that the pandemic has had on young people's mental wellbeing and their futures.
- 3.3. The core recommendations from the campaign were:
- Continue to work with mental wellbeing organisations to support them in reaching out to young people throughout Medway as the impact of COVID continues.
 - Continue to share the results and findings from COVID: The Effect on Youth to schools and other relevant organisations to help them to reflect and ensure that the past experiences expressed in the survey are learnt from for the future.
 - Encourage schools to have frequent private feedback with students where students are able to discuss their mental wellbeing as well as any concerns they may have.
 - Encourage schools and youth groups to have dedicated sections in their websites to promote mental wellbeing resources and support students experiencing mental health issues.
 - Build on the positives of online learning, experienced during the pandemic, into learning experiences for the future.

4. Director's Response

- 4.1. The effect on all children and young people in Britain has been beyond challenging throughout the COVID pandemic. We, as a Council, have worked with our partners in Health, Education and the community to ensure that the effect is minimised and repaired as quickly as possible as we emerge, implementing our recovery strategy, 'Build Back Better'.
- 4.2. The findings of the Medway Youth Council are particularly important, providing the voice of the child in such a time when they are endeavouring to recover themselves. This is alongside our recent Ofsted focused visit, the data we

have gathered through other engagement exercises, our Child-Friendly Medway programme and our recent Medway Mental Health Conference, at which MYC led a successful workshop.

- 4.3. As always, we can do more and I will ensure that Council Officers work with MYC to review the key themes and areas for action emerging from the MYP Campaign and to develop a programme of work to tackle this further, looking at how we can improve as a Local Authority, along with our partners, to address the recommendations raised.

5. Risk management

- 5.1. There are no specific risks resulting from the recommendations of the report.

6. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 5 August 2021

- 6.1. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the report at its meeting on 5 August 2021 and a summary of the discussion is set out below.
- 6.2. Archibald Bean, the Chair of the Medway Youth Council (MYC) for 2020-2021 presented the report which provided the Committee with details from the MYC work on 'Covid: the effect on youth' which comprised of three phases; a mental health and wellbeing support pack, an online survey and a question and answers session. He highlighted the key findings, as set out in the MYC report at Appendix 1 and its recommendations.
- 6.3. Members then raised a number of questions and comments, which included:
- 6.4. **Mental Health** – concern was raised about the ongoing support needed regarding mental health and emotional wellbeing. The previous MYC Chair confirmed that one recommendation was for MYC to continue to work with mental wellbeing organisations to support them in reaching out to young people. He also referred to the waiting lists within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for over 11 year olds, which was also an area of concern that he felt needed to be addressed.
- 6.5. **Soft skill development** – comment was made on the loss of opportunity for young people to develop soft skills such as relationships with authority and with peers, which had been caused by the lockdown periods during the pandemic.
- 6.6. **Distribution of report** – the previous MYC Chair confirmed he had made the same presentation to the Secondary Headteacher Association.
- 6.7. **Experiences of remote learning** – in response to a question regarding the experience of students during school closures and the impact on their education, the previous MYC Chair explained that many young people had felt that the way mock examinations were managed should have been more

flexible and that some people's experience of online learning had been poor. He also referred to the way in which information regarding examinations and grading was handled nationally, which had caused confusion and anxiety amongst young people. Positive experience was also shared in relation to the use of online tools such as MS Teams, where students could find all their assignments, calendar appointments, deadlines and markings all in one place, which had been a positive way forward.

6.8. **Accessibility of the survey** – it was requested that if the MYC ran surveys in the future, could they be provided in a way to make it accessible for young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to ensure it also captured the voice of those young people. The previous MYC Chair undertook to feed that back to the current MYC Chair.

6.9. The Director of People – Children and Adults Services thanked MYC for the report and explained that the Medway Education Partnership would work to progress the recommendations and findings forward as part of its work, particularly in regard to supporting emotional wellbeing.

6.10. **Decision:**

The Committee noted the Medway Youth Council report, Covid: The Effect on Youth, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, and the comments from the Director of People – Children and Adults Services and recommended the report be presented to full Council for its consideration.

7. **Financial implications**

7.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from the report.

8. **Legal implications**

8.1. There are no specific legal implications arising from the report.

9. **Recommendation**

9.1. Council is asked to note the Medway Youth Council report, Covid: The Effect on Youth, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, along with the comments from the Director of People – Children and Adults Services, as set out in section 4 of the report.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – MYC Annual Report – Covid: The Effect on Youth

Background papers

None