

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 June 2025

Medway Youth Council Conference Report 2025

Report from: Medway Youth Council

Author: Rose Stokes, Community Engagement, MYC

Summary

On 26th February 2025 Medway Youth Council (MYC) delivered its annual Young Peoples Conference that addressed issues related to Medway, with specific attention to young people's experiences of living, learning, and working in Medway. The report makes key recommendations from young people about how these issues raised should be addressed.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to note the Medway Youth Council (MYC) Annual Conference Report 2025:

2. Budget and policy framework

- 2.1. 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"

3. Background

- 3.1. Medway Youth Council is a diverse youth led organisation that looks to have the voices of young people in Medway heard. Our members come from all backgrounds and are active in the wider community. We are often involved in activities and events hosted by partners and stakeholders. We help young people to build skills needed for the future, both politically and in all aspects of life.
- 3.2. The 2025 conference was held on 26th February 2025, 20 schools were represented with over 119 participants (92 students and 27 teachers). Schools involved included:

Abbey Court, Bradfields, Chatham Grammar School, City of Rochester, Fort Pitt, Inspire Academy, Kings Rochester, Leigh Academy, Rainham Mark Grammar School, Rivermead, Robert Napier, St Joseph Williamsons, Victory Academy, Walderslade GSP, Rochester Grammar school, Maritime Academy, Thomas Aveling, Holcombe, Hundred of Hoo and Snowfields.

- 3.3. MYC are proud of the variety of schools and year groups that attended, which has allowed us to have students from various economic, academic and cultural backgrounds engage and participate at the event.
- 3.4. This year the conference was about 'Our community' (Medway) specifically addressing issues related to education, work and life within Medway. MYC chose this important theme to focus on due to its remit to represent all young people who live, work and go to school in Medway. We also consulted with groups of young people across Medway at community events, Child Friendly Medway's City Hall and through UK Parliament Week, highlighting what would young people change about Medway.

- 3.5. Message from the Medway Youth Council chair, Archie Blundell:

'I am particularly proud of the hard work and dedication shown by all the members of the Medway Youth Council in delivering such a successful and impactful conference. From the planning stages through to the event itself, every individual contributed their time, creativity, and passion to ensure the day ran smoothly and achieved its goals. The level of professionalism, teamwork, and enthusiasm was truly inspiring, and it was clear that our voices were heard and respected. The conference not only sparked meaningful conversations but also highlighted the strength of youth leadership in Medway. It was a privilege to be part of such a powerful demonstration of what young people can achieve when they come together with purpose.'

4. Headline findings

- 4.1. On the lead up to and at the conference a survey was completed by 305 young people across Medway. This suggested some key information.
- 4.2. MYC found that 33% of young people described not feeling safe in the Medway area. With specific reference to Chatham and Gillingham Highstreets.
- 4.3. When asked if there were places for leisure and relaxation in Medway, 58% of participants agreed there was, but many mentioned not being able to access them or didn't know where they were located.
- 4.4. 58% of young people said they felt supported at school, with 46% saying they did not believe there was sufficient mental health support in their school.
- 4.5. 49% of young people believe that there are not enough jobs available for people under the age of 18 in Medway.

- 4.6. Please note that of our 305 survey responders the majority (84.9%) attended a grammar school. However, 6 out of the 19 participating schools were grammar schools. This suggests that we need to look at better ways of engaging with non-grammar students, outside of the annual conference.

5. MYC Annual Conference Recommendations

- 5.1. The MYC Annual Conference made the following recommendations:
- 5.2. MYC requests the support of Medway Councils Education Team to promote MYC's conference and surveys within Secondary schools across Medway.
- 5.3. MYC found that many young people have experienced issues when travelling by bus in Medway. Further investigation into this is recommended and may include a review of the Bus service alongside young people.
- 5.4. MYC recommends that Medway Council reviews how it signposts young people to youth activities, including existing youth service opportunities. This should be undertaken in co-creation with service users to make it more known and accessible. This may include the development of a young person friendly website, the use of contemporary online platforms and pop-up events that advertise local services directly to young people where they are.
- 5.5. MYC recommends that to tackle the general feeling of fear amongst young people when traveling in the dark, through areas with poor lighting, or with higher rates of anti-social behaviour. That there is an increase in visible police presence in these areas, specifically around the highstreets
- 5.6. MYC recommends a push to encourage more students to take part in work experience across schools, starting from year 10. Including more awareness in and out of school of how young people can access careers advice and job opportunities.
- 5.7. MYC recommends that Medway Council's Education Teams further investigate the need for diversity of communication in the classroom. This may include alternative forms of communication beyond just verbal instruction

6. Risk management

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

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. The MYC conference is funded by an annual contribution of £1500 from Child Friendly Medway.

8. Legal implications

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

Lead officer contact

Roy Smith, Operations Manager, Youth Service, 07717507140 and e-mail address roy.smith@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

1. Outcomes of Live workshop
2. Outcomes of Learn workshop
3. Outcomes of Work workshop
4. Market Place and Q&A Panel
5. Feedback

Background papers

None

Appendix 1 Outcomes of Live workshop

In this workshop, students were guided through a 'day in the life' of a young person in Medway. As a collective attendees made decisions on what a hypothetical young person would do and where they would go when faced with choices, e.g. what mode of transport they would take. As part of these decisions, we held discussions on each topic, some of the questions and responses are displayed below:

1) What is the best way to travel around Medway? – Transport

The discussions around transport concluded that students found buses and trains in Medway to be unreliable and expensive. They reported frequent issues with digital tickets not reading through the ticket machines and crowded buses during periods after school. This has often led to young people not being able to travel home straight away after school, not being able to travel at all, and causing apprehension when using these services. As a result, young people told us they were unable to access a lot of the opportunities available to them because they were too far from home. Therefore, we recommend an urgent review of the efficacy and effectiveness of the bus service in Medway in collaboration with young people.

2) What clubs & opportunities are there in Medway for Young People? - opportunities in Medway

There was a lot of praise for the vast number of sports and uniformed clubs available in Medway for young people but alternatives to these sports/uniformed clubs were hard to find. Although when discussions arose it was recognised that there were many opportunities and events available, however three key issues came up frequently:

- Students reported that they were unaware of opportunities available to them and that even when they are aware they struggle to navigate the websites that held important information for them to access these events. With participants claiming 'there's actually a lot to do, but we just don't hear about it'. Therefore, a key recommendation made by the youth council is to review signposting to youth activities, including existing youth service tools. This should be undertaken in co-creation with service users (see recommendation 1.3)
- Students found they were having to travel further for leisure because there was a belief that young people were overlooked when it came to opportunities with a heavy focus on certain age groups. There was a desire for more social spaces and activities targeted at ages 14-17 who felt underrepresented. It is notable to mention that when such activities were mentioned they were not well known, emphasising a need for more communication about what is available.
- Participants also spoke about how they struggled to access some of the activities as they described a growing attention to some regional areas more than others.

3) Do you feel safe in Medway? - Crime & Safety

According to our survey, **33%** of young people said they did not feel safe in Medway, and this was reflected in the response from participants at the conference. Despite some students saying they could 'live freely' and felt 'safe in Medway most of the time', many mentioned a collective anxiety to use the highstreets due to anti-social behaviour and poor lighting – especially in the evenings and at night. Participants felt 'uneasy' going out as they said they might get 'harassed in the streets. Some spoke about having to 'wear clothes to fit in and not stand out' as a safety net to deal with their concerns. When prompted to come up with solutions, students spoke about the need for more visible police officers, highlighting key areas as Chatham and Gillingham highstreets. They also mentioned a need for better lighting so that they can feel safer 'getting home in the wintertime'. Therefore, MYC recommends that this is reviewed to ensure the safety of young people when traveling in the highstreets during the evenings. (see recommendation 1.4)

When asked to rate how much they enjoyed living in Medway in our survey, students averaged at **3.3 out of 5** (1 being hate it, 5 being love it) and over **40%** expressed that there was a sense of community in Medway. This shows that many young people do enjoy living in Medway, but that there is still work to be done to improve this. The final questions asked to young people about life in Medway was: **What is one thing you would change to improve Medway?** the responses and frequency from the survey are below:

Topic/Theme:	Frequency:
Cleanliness/Litter	52
Safety/Crime	42
Opportunities/leisure for young people	34
Potholes/roads	16
Homelessness	15
Community/ people attitudes	11
Transport	9

Appendix 2 - Outcomes of the learn workshop

Within this workshop students engaged with activities that allowed them to understand how different people interpret information in the classroom. The main objectives of the workshop were to understand how young people learn and communicate, but also to highlight what support they receive and how they would like to receive it.

Key themes under these topics are:

- Analyse students' ability to perform
- Understand best learning strategies in schools
- Understand struggles while learning
- Understand different support offered by schools
- Whether support given by schools is effective
- Encourage students to tell their personal experiences in schools
- Understand how effective the workshop has been

Draw a flower activity:

For the first activity we instructed students to draw a flower, highlighting the diverse ways in which we communicate, and which preferences we have that benefit our learning.

Outcomes from first activity:

The activity illustrated that the diverse ways we can communicate, with participants completing the task in different ways, with differing results and ending at different times. This highlighted that everyone has different reaction times, meaning some people can interpret information more quickly and easier than others. For example, some may have had time to add more details as they work faster than others.

Statistics from first Activity

- **54 out of 92 students** (58.7%) finished the task before the time ran out, indicating that there either wasn't enough time for everyone to complete the activity or that some struggled to complete the activity in the given timeframe.
- **No drawing of a flower was the same** indicating that everyone has their own perceptions and approach to completing tasks.

Second Activity (Questions for students)

For the second activity we collected feedback from attendees on what their school experiences. This highlighted differences between students and schools. These are shown below:

Are you someone who finds independent work hard and would rather work in a group or do you like working by yourself?

- “I actually enjoy working by myself. I feel more focused and do not have to worry about communicating with others as I am quite shy”
- “It depends on the task if it is something writing based, I like working alone, but for big projects I prefer groups so tasks can be split”
- “I can’t work in groups as I find it difficult to concentrate”

Do you feel you could get on with a task without in depth explanation?

- “I prefer having all the details up front I don’t like when information isn’t specific”
- “As long as I can ask questions it’s fine”
- “Not really I normally need someone to go over details with me face to face”

Do you get along in lessons or do you feel you are not learning as fast as others?

- “Most of the time but sometimes it feels like others understand things quicker than I do which can make me feel worse than others”
- “I get along well in lessons and sometimes finish early as I like moving on fast so I don’t get bored”
- “Sometimes I struggle to keep up because of my dyslexia which is sometimes a disadvantage”

Do you get lost in class or lose focus when the teacher is not engaging you?

- “Sometimes I try to pay attention but if we are just looking at a PowerPoint, I find is so boring”
- “Yeah, I find it hard to stay engaged if the teacher is just talking the whole time without asking questions”
- “Only if I’m tired or already confused because we are moving too fast”

Is support offered in school effective for you and do you feel listened to when struggling?

- “Sometimes it depends on the teacher some are really understanding but others don’t seem to take it seriously”

- “I don’t feel listened to, so I don’t bother asking anymore”
- “I feel, like they try, but it doesn’t always work for me, and I still struggle with lessons with the help”

Third activity (draw a flower again)

For the final activity we repeated the first task again, this time providing alternative communication methods (written instructions, prompts and examples), and removed the time limit.

Communication styles

- **4 out of 92** (4.35%) students picked to be given face to face instructions on how to draw the flower by one of the youth council members
- **9 out of 92** (9.78%) chose the written instructions on how to draw a flower
- **37 out of 92** (40.22%) chose to follow a step-by-step diagram on how to draw a flower
- **31 out of 92** (33.7%) chose to copy a diagram of a flower
- **11 out of 92** (11.96%) chose to work independently with their drawing of a flower

By offering multiple and varied ways of communicating we learnt that students all work in different ways and can benefit from different approaches. With a step-by-step diagram being the most popular, the majority of students found it easier to visually follow instructions.

Feedback from attendees

Below are some of the feedback responses we collected after the activities:

- “What we have learnt from this is that everyone is different, and no one works the same”
- “Not everyone receives the help they would benefit from, I know that I would benefit from more face-to-face conversations with my teacher”
- “I found this workshop quite fun and engaging I wish my teachers would do more lessons like this”

These quotes together with the preferences of communication style, illustrate the preferences and diversity of learning for young people, and potential areas of development for schools when approaching learning in the classroom. From this we as members of youth parliament and the youth council, hope to take these responses and work to develop effective classroom experiences in Medway.

The Teacher Survey

As a part of our Learn workshop, we removed the teachers from the hall. This allowed us to properly connect with the students so they could interact with freedom and without influence from teachers.

When asked about additional resources they would like to support their teaching, the responses from the teachers included access for the young people to counselling, clubs, wellbeing rooms, Ipad's and trips. But for themselves they suggested more interventions, specialist teachers, TA support and more staff and resources. When asked about sufficient mental health and SEN support in schools for students, the teachers agreed that their schools provided this but highlighted that not all young people needing this support accesses it.

When asked if there were a wide range of subjects being offered at their schools most of the teachers disagreed, continuing to say that although there are wider opportunities for students within their schools, that they were not sure what these were or how best to access them. Most of the teachers expressed that not only did they feel supported to teach at their schools but also felt proud to work there.

Through these questions and subsequent discussions, we found common themes amongst the teachers who said that their schools provided a lot of opportunities and support for their students. The teachers also highlighted that smaller class sizes and access to further staffing and resources would allow them to tailor their teaching approach to suit the needs and capabilities of each individual student.

Appendix 3 Outcomes of the work workshop

The third workshop focused on young people's pathways into careers and the workplace. We asked young people the following statements in order to understand their perspective of the world of work.

We asked the attendees the following statements:

- I want to continue working in Medway post-18
- I know what qualifications I need to get my job
- I would like to go to university when I'm older
- You can't change career once you have started

In response to continuing to work in Medway post – 18 48 out of 92 (52.17%) of the young people responded that they would stay in Medway to work post – 18, with many stating this was due to family and friends. In response to knowing the qualification requirements for desired jobs and attending University, up to 75% of the young people said they knew what was required for their desired job and wanted to go to university. In response to being able to change your career, just over 50% said that you couldn't change your career once you started.

We then discussed careers and the different pathways to access them through a brief activity involving steps to professions. Speaking to young people about how they found work experience in their schools, there was a unanimous agreement over the importance of work experience with an emphasis on starting this process of thinking about and experiencing work from year 10. Those who did it in year 10 advocated that work experience was 'good at helping them try out different career paths and providing invaluable positive experiences when looking into options for GCSEs and post-16 education.

Students told us work experience "gives them something to work towards" and "was key to knowing what it's like to have a job". However, when asked in our survey 66% claimed they had not yet had the chance to complete work experience, highlighting an important opportunity that isn't being carried out as effectively in all schools. As a result, MYC makes the recommendation that more schools take part in this activity and reach out to stakeholders and the community to support the opportunity.

Appendix 4 Market Place and Q&A Panel

Marketplace

Alongside the 3 workshops MYC held a marketplace of organisations and local services that allowed students to interact with those that interested them. We found that we were able to give the organisations involved a way to engage and talk directly to the students and schools about the local offer, helping them make connections and increase interest. Organisations involved were:

- Southeastern Railways
- Medway United Nations Association
- University of Kent – apprenticeships team
- Medway Child Health Team
- Child Friendly Medway
- Medway Interfaith Action
- Mind
- Nucleus Arts
- Medway Parents & Carers forum
- Medway Voluntary Action
- Medway NHS Foundation Trust
- Medway African and Caribbean Association

Feedback from partners involved in the Marketplace exclaimed that “this was a great and easy way to meet with a lot of young people” as well as “we had some really in-depth discussions with some and shared information with others”. Overall, those involved in delivered as well as attending the marketplace found it beneficial in sharing information and raising awareness of support for young people. Some of the young people expressed “it was good to meet Mind and the NHS and learn about support for me and my friends” and “I wanted to come back after lunch and learn more, was having a good conversation”.

Q and A Panel

The event also offered a Q&A panel, allowing students to ask our selected panel of local decision makers and service providers about anything they believed was important. We believe this was essential because it reinforced our ethos of giving young people a voice and a chance to ask decision makers questions. Members included representatives from southeastern railways, the police, Nucleus Arts and Medway Council.

Appendix 5 Feedback

MYC has received extremely positive feedback about the conference from the students, teachers, partners and panellists who attended. Specifically, there were positive comments about the inclusion of young people with special educational needs and disabilities, “thank you for inviting us to conference, our school sometimes gets left out so it’s great that our young people can take part” (Abbey Court), “thank you for placing us by the doors and giving us the slides in advance, this made it easier for some of our young people” (Rivermead).

We have had lots of positive feedback with people asking to come back again next year. When asked for feedback, over 94% of participants felt that their voices had been heard, with students mentioning they enjoyed that they ‘got to share [their] opinions with other people and meet new people’. Students told us they ‘loved’ the interactive nature of the event and found the discussion both ‘informative’ and ‘fascinating’.

Responses from the partners include:

“It was an absolute honour to be part of the Q&A panel at the youth conference. The questions from the young people were very smart and incisive, and I learned a lot from talking to them in the marketplace too” (Nucleus Arts representative)

“It was great to be invited to be part of the event and on the panel, the young people had some great questions” (Southeastern Railway Representative)

“Thank you for inviting us to be part of the marketplace, it was such a well-attended event with lots of young people coming over to our table and having lots of conversations” (Medway NHS Foundation Trust representative)