

A Spotlight Report

How people feel about living in Medway

A spotlight report focusing on the Medway town of Chatham.

September
2025

A spotlight report on the Building Blocks of Life, focusing on the area of Chatham.

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About Us

Healthwatch Medway are independent champions for health and social care in Medway. Our aim is to improve services by ensuring local voices are heard – we want to hear about health and social care experiences so as to influence positive change for communities across the Medway area. We have the power to influence NHS leaders and other decision makers to listen to your feedback and improve standards of care.

Healthwatch Medway is hosted by EK360.

Background

Our health and wellbeing can be affected by things that we experience in everyday life. There is increasing interest in these wider determinants of health, and Healthwatch Medway wanted to understand what positively and negatively impacts the health and wellbeing of people in Medway. Medway has a range of diverse settlements, from isolated rural villages and hamlets on the peninsula to densely populated urban towns. In June 2025, we engaged with **48** residents living in Chatham.

Healthwatch Medway will share this report with health and social care services to help build an understanding of how the areas where people live impact on them, and how we can work together with services to improve Medway residents' quality of life. This report summarises what we have heard.

There will be 9 reports in this series coming out across 2025, as a follow on from the 9 reports in our 'Medway Areas' series in 2024.

Methodology

Using a semi-structured interview, we approached people face-to-face in local community areas. Participants were selected by a randomised sample of who was out and about in their local area on the days we were engaging.

Some percentages presented in this report may not total 100% exactly. This is either due to participants being able to select multiple responses for certain questions, or due to rounding of percentages to the nearest whole number.

Findings

The Impact Living in Chatham has on Residents

What's good about living in your area?

We asked 48 residents living in Chatham what they like about their area. *Figure 1* shows the number of mentions by positive theme. 7 people said 'nothing'. 1 person did not answer.

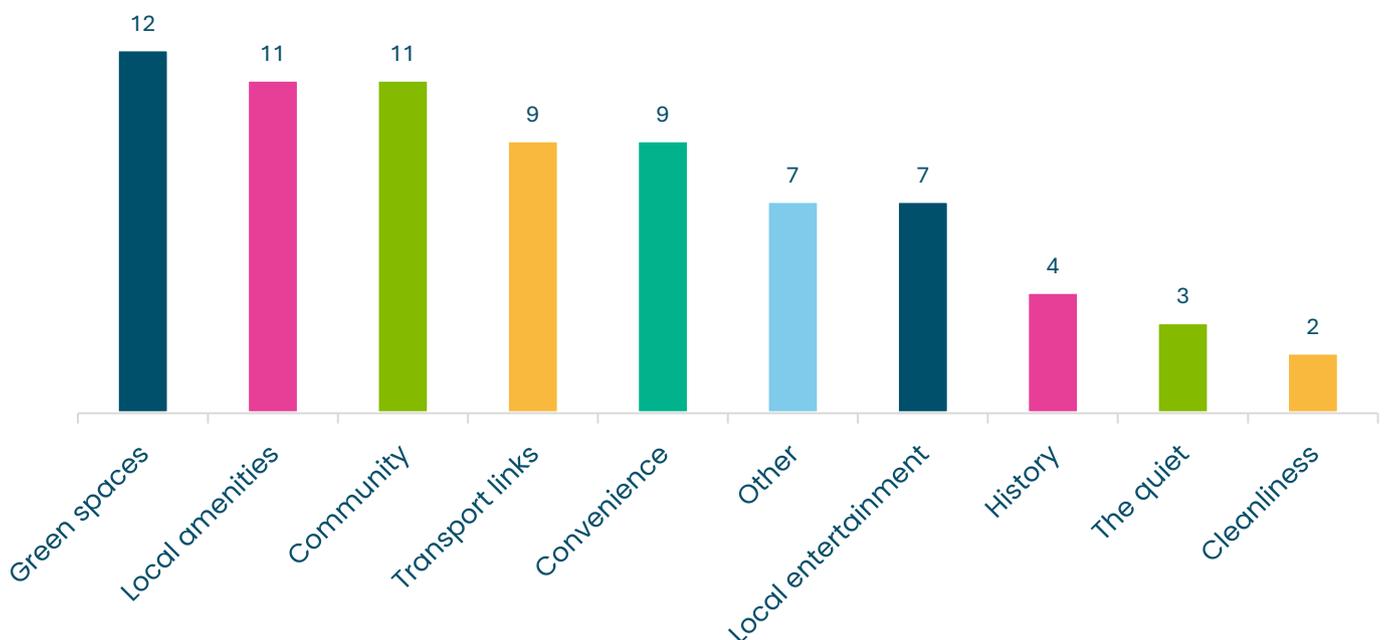


Figure 1 – Number of mentions by positive theme

Green spaces (12 mentions)

25% of participants mentioned that they enjoy the green spaces in their area.

- “We have Capstone Park, which is great.”
- “I like that it's not too far from the countryside as I like to get out of the city, it's good to be in the fresh air, get it into your lungs. I love being surrounded by the greenery. It's beautiful. Good for the soul.”
- “The country parks are nice. It's nice to have a bit of greenery close by.”

Local amenities (11 mentions)

23% mentioned local amenities.

- "There's lots of good places to go shopping and nice places to eat and drink."
- "There isn't anything good about living here, except the school my kids go to. They go to Westbrook [in Brompton], which is a military school. They are integrated and I can't complain. My daughter is at the Sports Camp at Medway park as we got a free school voucher which is great for her and she's really enjoying it as it's all day, 9am to 4pm. She loves it."
- "The amenities are really good here, there's a really good library, we have the Medway archives and community hubs."

The community (11 mentions)

23% told us the community is a positive aspect of where they live.

- "Supportive community groups. Services for those in need. I am not religious but there are lots of places of worship for all faiths, who also provide support across the region."
- " There are some good groups, lots of community stuff."
- "The people, I feel very safe here even at 11pm at night."

Transport links (9 mentions)

19% mentioned transport links.

- "Good access to motorways."
- "There are good train links into London."
- "90% of the bus journeys are also good."

Convenience (9 mentions)

19% mentioned convenience.

- "Everything is on our doorstep. I could walk from my house to the high Street [Chatham], I don't have to get a bus."
- "We have everything we need within walking distance."
- "It's central, I like the fact the motorway is so close which means we can get down to the coast or to London easily."
- "Everything I need is local to my house."

Other (7 mentions)

15% mentioned other positive aspects of their area.

- "There's also a lot of beautiful old buildings."
- "The level of support I have to help with my addictions and the level of support I have with accessing food - I go to Caring Hands when I need to for breakfasts and lunches. AMAT Housing are also amazing, they did everything the possibly could to help get me re-housed when I was homeless"
- "There is a young person's Queer group - BeYou project. It was every Wednesday and they did one-to-one work. They helped with a grant for a freezer and a laptop for college."

Local Entertainment (7 mentions)

15% mentioned local entertainment.

- "There's a thriving arts scene with Nucleus Arts and Medway River Lit."
- "Medway has a lot of artists. A strong, a good arts community."
- "There is a lot of art and culture, history and diversity in the area."
- "Medway Borough Council is good at advertising/organising lots of events for people to do - Park run, walking groups, things for the kids and to do with the kids."

History (4 mentions)

8% mentioned the history as a positive aspect of the area.

- "All the history - more important than the modern places."
- "There is also quite a lot of history if you look for it - Fort Amherst, which also has allotments, Napoleonic history and Halloween events."

The Quiet (3 mentions)

6% mentioned the quiet.

- "I like where I live. It's quiet and there are no fights."

Cleanliness (2 mentions)

4% told us about the cleanliness of the area.

- "The refuse collectors are excellent."

Positive Impacts of the Area

Following up on our first question, we asked respondents, 'How does that have a positive impact on you?'

31 of the 48 respondents (**65%**) said that where they live has a positive impact on them, 2 respondents said that it does not (**4%**) and 15 respondents (**31%**) did not answer or said 'don't know'. Some respondents specified multiple positive impacts. *Figure 2* represents the specified positive impacts of the area.

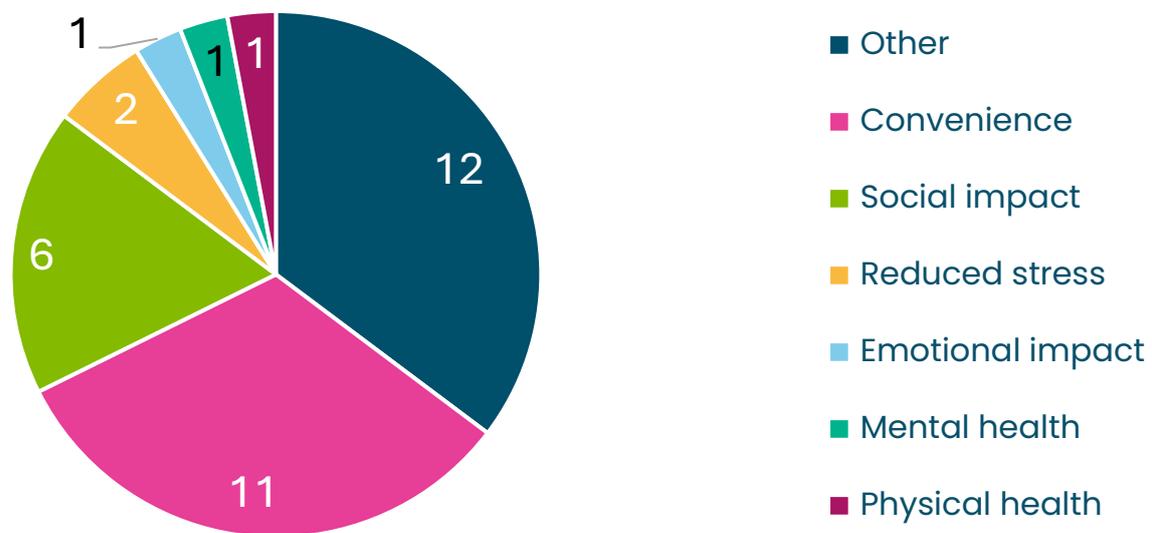


Figure 2 – Number of mentions by positive impact

Other (12 mentions)

25% mentioned other positive impacts.

- "It makes life more meaningful, it is important to be aware of things that are bigger than oneself."
- "It's nice to have the children outside doing activities, much better for their wellbeing and being able to relax."

Convenience (11 mentions)

23% mentioned that where they live had a positive impact as it's convenient.

- "I like the convenience, that you have choices. You don't spend time doing travelling to places you don't want to go."
- "It's easy, convenient, I don't have to think."

- “Gives me confidence to let my kids go to school and know they will be okay and get taught what they need.”

Social impact (6 mentions)

13% of people mentioned that where they live had a positive impact on their social life.

- “It's calming, it's good for the soul. You meet people who are happy to talk to you, especially with the dog, it's gorgeous.”
- “You feel less alone, supported.”

Reduced stress (2 mentions)

4% of respondents mentioned a positive impact of living in the area was that they have reduced levels of stress.

- “It's great that you don't have to stress about a commute to Morrison's – it's not far and you can get there and back without it taking up half your day.”
- “Because everything is local means I don't have to stress about going out.”

Emotional impact (1 mentions)

2% mentioned that where they live had a positive emotional impact.

- “I am happier, people are friendly, I get about my business unmolested.”

Mental health (1 mentions)

2% of respondents said that where they live had a positive impact on their mental health.

- “It make your mental health better – more relaxed and focused.”
- “I am feeling safe living here.”

What are the negatives about living in your area?

We asked 48 respondents what they dislike about the area they live in. *Figure 3* shows the number of mentions by negative theme. 1 person did not answer.

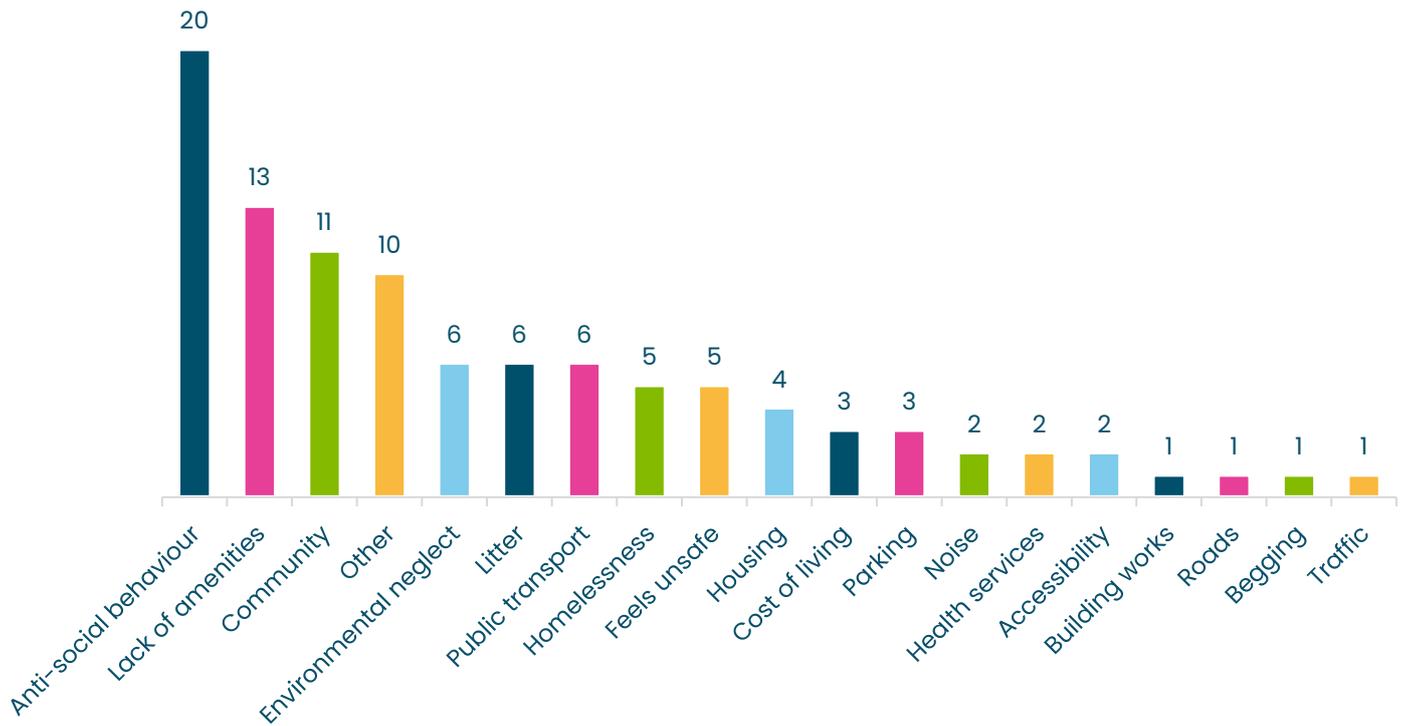


Figure 3 – Number of mentions by negative theme

Anti-social behaviour (20 mentions)

42% mentioned anti-social behaviour in the area.

- “A lot of people are stuck. There is unnecessary drama. Trouble, violence and I have been attacked with a knife. They cut the top of my hand and I needed an operation and stitches (across 5cm gap). I felt I needed to carry a knife on me to protect myself.”
- In the town centre there are too many people with antisocial behaviour, drunk, asking for money, swearing, people going past on scooters and bikes too close and too fast.”
- “There is a lot of antisocial behaviour in the town centre, drunk people, McDonald's seems to be a hub for teenagers to hang out.”
- “The drug addiction, the alcoholics, the homelessness, the violence that comes with it. I have been threatened with syringes placed under my throat, there is a lot of aggro. Drugs are quite rife. It's horrible to see.”

Lack of amenities (13 mentions)

27% of people mentioned the lack of amenities where they live.

- "It's [Chatham] not what it used to be – there is not much left here. Not the shops we used to have. The banks will all go and it'll just be the internet soon."
- "There are too many betting shops."
- "There should be more sports facilities around here, there are more in London."

The community (11 mentions)

23% mentioned the community are a negative aspect of the area.

- "No one knocks on your door and asks, Do you need anything? anymore. I can go days without speaking to anyone."
- "It's not really a community. No one mixes together. Just go straight to their houses."
- "Immigration in the area. There are fewer stereotypical native people in the area, which creates an unbalance that is causing unrest."
- "Now there are too many immigrants."
- "Now it's full of foreigners, it's changed the area."

Other (10 mentions)

21% of respondents mentioned other negative aspects of Chatham.

- "I am hating all the flags up at the moment and wish they would be removed."
- "They have Reform on my road, flags have gone up on lamp-posts – I am not originally from around here and it's not nice to see."
- "It's a dumping ground for ex-prisoners, there is a lot of poverty."

Environmental neglect (6 mentions)

13% mentioned environmental neglect.

- "It is depressing and dirty."
- "It's dirty, people take no pride."

Litter (6 mentions)

13% mentioned litter.

- "Another issue is the amount of litter in the streets, people have no respect, the other day I saw a mum open up the lid on the pram/pushchair and brush all the rubbish on to the floor – what sort of example does that set the children?"
- "The litter is a problem."

Public transport (6 mentions)

13% of respondents spoke about public transport.

- “The buses can be irregular or late, no matter what time you try to get one. If I am ten minutes late for school, I get detention, even if I left home in plenty of time.”
- “There are roadworks. They affect the buses – they are not reliable, don't always turn up.”
- “I work in hospitality so it is difficult to get home as there are no late night buses, even in the day time there can be long waits between the buses coming.”

Homelessness (5 mentions)

10% mentioned homelessness.

- “It is not great at the moment, there is a lot of homelessness.”
- “The increase in visible homelessness, the presence on the streets.”

Feels unsafe (5 mentions)

10% mentioned feeling unsafe in Chatham.

- “I don't feel safe. There's no respect anymore.”

Housing (4 mentions)

8% mentioned issues with housing.

- “The drugs, especially when living in temporary accommodation. You would walk out of the flat and by the time you got to the top of the stairs, you'd already be high from how much you were breathing in. At all hours of the night, there'd be banging on the doors and bonce the fire alarm went on for hours. The flat never felt like a home, always cold, no heating, broken equipment.”
- “The temporary accommodation isn't up to scratch with cold, damp, dodgy electrics. The electrics weren't right and they told us to just turn off the fuse box rather than getting someone into fix it which is what was needed.”

Cost of Living (3 mentions)

6% spoke about the cost of living.

- “The current economic climate is a challenge for everyone with the cost of living.”
- “It's very expensive to live here, the properties are astronomical to buy. That's limiting.”

Parking (3 mentions)

6% spoke about issues with parking.

- “Parking charges – Medway council has put up the cost of parking and started charging in the country parks; it is killing the shops and cafes. People aren't staying to have another drink in the cafés as they can't afford the parking so the cafés are also losing out.”
- “Parking is terrible on the estate on Luton Road. Parking chaos.”

Noise (2 mentions)

4% mentioned noise.

- “At night time, you do sometimes hear the drunk people screaming and shouting.”

Health services (2 mentions)

4% of participants mentioned issues with health services.

- “The lack of access to mental health services when you are in recovery, you get stuck in a rut and sometimes you feel forced to pay for these services in order to get access.”
- “We really do need better for hospital facilities, including staffing and free parking. I was a nurse for 40 years and the hospital is no longer fit for purpose.”

Accessibility (2 mentions)

4% of participants mentioned accessibility.

- “The loos in the Pentagon centre have got steps going up to them so not easily accessible.”
- “I know a lady in a wheelchair who had the bus go past four times in the rain. Disabled services are not there.”

Building works (1 mention)

2% of participants mentioned issues with building works in the area.

- “They need to stop building so many houses without putting in the infrastructure first.”

Roads (1 mention)

2% told us about issues with roads.

Begging (1 mention)

2% of respondents mentioned begging.

- “The area is going downhill fast with all the beggars.”

Traffic (1 mention)

2% of respondents mentioned the traffic in their area.

- “It’s quite crowded and there are lots of traffic jams.”

How does that have a negative impact on you?

We followed up the previous question by asking respondents how the negatives they had identified had had an impact on them. 39 out of the 48 respondents (**81%**) said that where they live does have a negative impact on them and 5 respondents (**11%**) said that it does not. 4 respondents (**8%**) did not answer. Some respondents specified multiple negative impacts. *Figure 4* shows the specified negative impacts of the area.

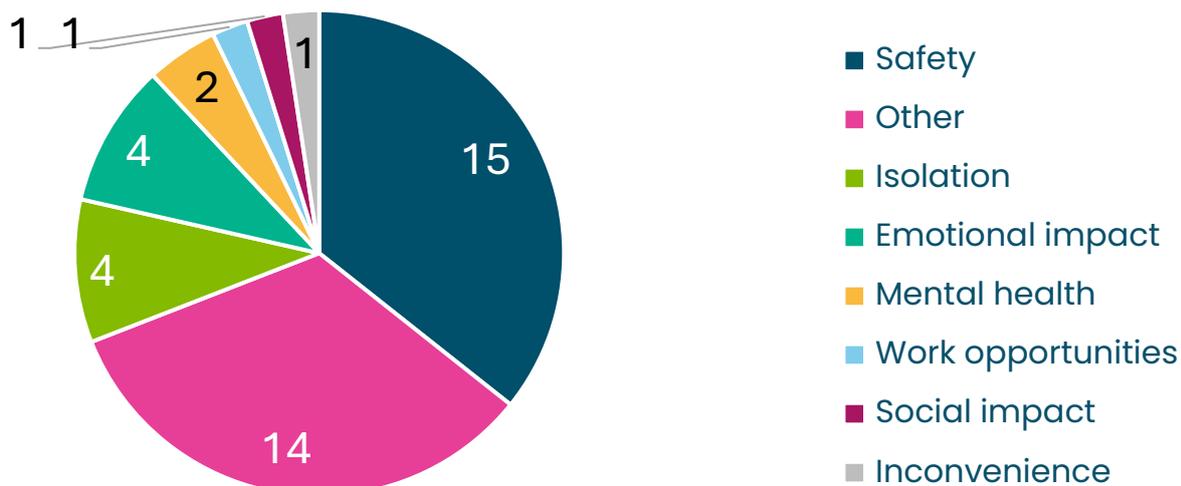


Figure 4 – Number of mentions by negative impact

Safety (15 mentions)

31% of people mentioned feeling unsafe.

- “All the flags make me feel, make me wonder if I am supposed to be here, allowed to live in this area. They've even painted a cross on one of the mini-roundabouts and it's one of the first things I see when I go out the front door. It makes me feel uncomfortable, uneasy.”
- “It makes me feel unsafe, I avoid coming into the town centre and generally only do so when I have to go to the bank.”
- “It makes me feel unsafe when I go out. I've heard about stabbings in the area.”

Other (14 mentions)

29% of people mentioned other issues.

- “Currently, it makes one's cultural identity feel less respected.”
- “Sometimes the screaming and shouting wakes me up.”
- “I don't want to live there anymore.”

Isolation (4 mentions)

8% of people mentioned isolation.

- “You feel a bit restricted, trapped, that you can't change house or area.”
- “I don't want to go there, it makes me not want to go out.”

Emotional impact (4 mentions)

8% of people mentioned negative emotional impact, making residents feel frustrated.

- “Frustrating, wouldn't live here if young enough to move.”
- “It's frustrating on all fronts.”

Mental health (2 mentions)

4% of people mentioned the impact on their mental health.

- “It has made me feel so bad that I have attempted to take my own life – I suffer with PTSD.”
- “It's depressing. It's turning into a pit – it's heart-breaking.”

Work opportunities (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned the impact on work opportunities.

- “I think [the buses are] having an impact on me getting a Saturday job, I can't get one – as once places know where I am coming from and reliant on the buses, they think I am going to be late. For people who work, they are more inclined to get fired. It's limiting.”

Social Impact (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned where they live has an impact on their social life.

- “People don't want to engage, they don't want to come together. Community is being lost.”

Inconvenience (1 mention)

2% spoke about the negative impact of inconvenience.

- “We have a dog and we can't take the dog down to the river because it's polluted so we can't go in and the dog can't go in.”

Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Medway Residents

When you think of health and wellbeing what comes to mind?

We asked respondents what comes to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

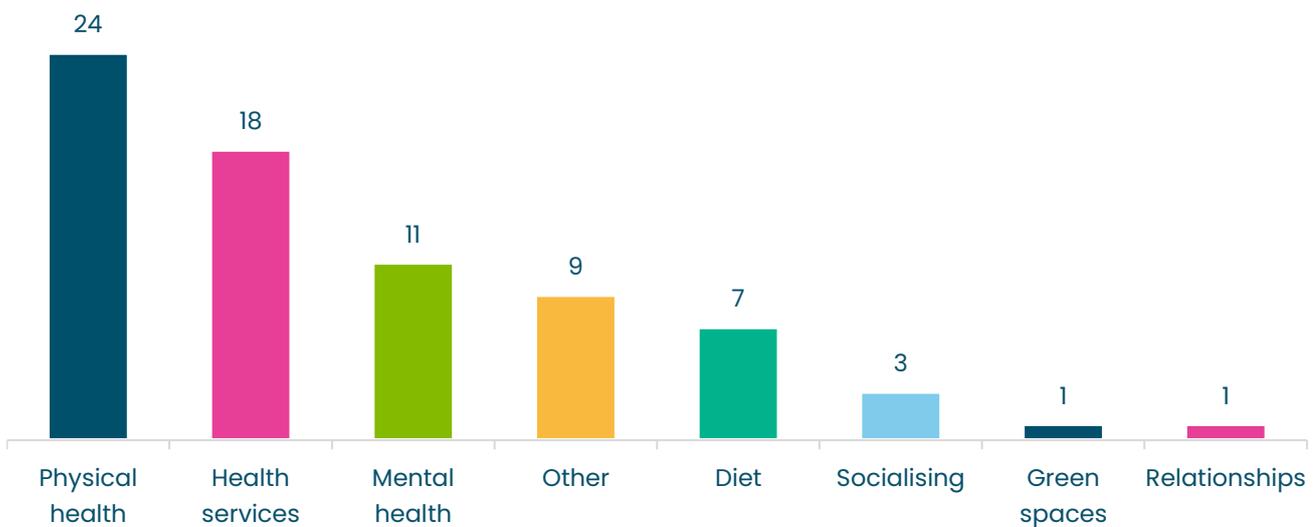


Figure 5 – Number of mentions by response to the question: “When you think of health and wellbeing, what comes to mind?”

Physical health (24 mentions)

50% of respondents mentioned they associate physical health with health and wellbeing.

- “I like my sports, like playing football and cricket. Running with my 2 dogs.”
- “Getting exercise and walking.”

Health Services (18 mentions)

38% of people spoken to mentioned health services as something they think of when prompted by the question.

- “Dentists, doctors. I am worried about how difficult it is to get a doctor's appointment. I have gone through a few health problems over the years, and I tend to just cope. I don't think I am alone in that and worry that things get missed as it is too difficult to get seen. We just get on with it.”
- “Prescriptions and how expensive they are.”

Mental health (11 mentions)

23% mentioned mental health.

- “Depression. My partner and I both have it. Also anxiety. You try to do the best you can.”
- “Mental health and personal wellbeing. Starting to worry about yourself before others.”

Other (9 mentions)

19% of people mentioned other things that come to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

- “It would be nice if there were sculptures or pieces of art dotted around the area.”
- “Safe spaces.”

Diet (7 mentions)

15% of people mentioned diet.

- “Eating properly, organic and fresh foods, cooking from scratch on a daily basis.”
- “People being unhealthy, not making the right choices eating ready meals etc. People need to learn to make more of an effort, to cook from scratch and choose the right foods.”

Socialising (3 mentions)

6% of people mentioned socialising.

- “Uplifting community spaces and social events.”
- “There's lots of groups to join in the area and Medway Borough Council are really active at promoting things to try and get people involved.”

Green spaces (1 mention)

2% mentioned green spaces.

Relationships (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned relationships.

What would help you to improve your health and wellbeing?

We asked people what they think would help them to improve their health and wellbeing. *Figure 6* shows the number of mentions by response. 10 people said, 'don't know/nothing'. 4 people did not answer.

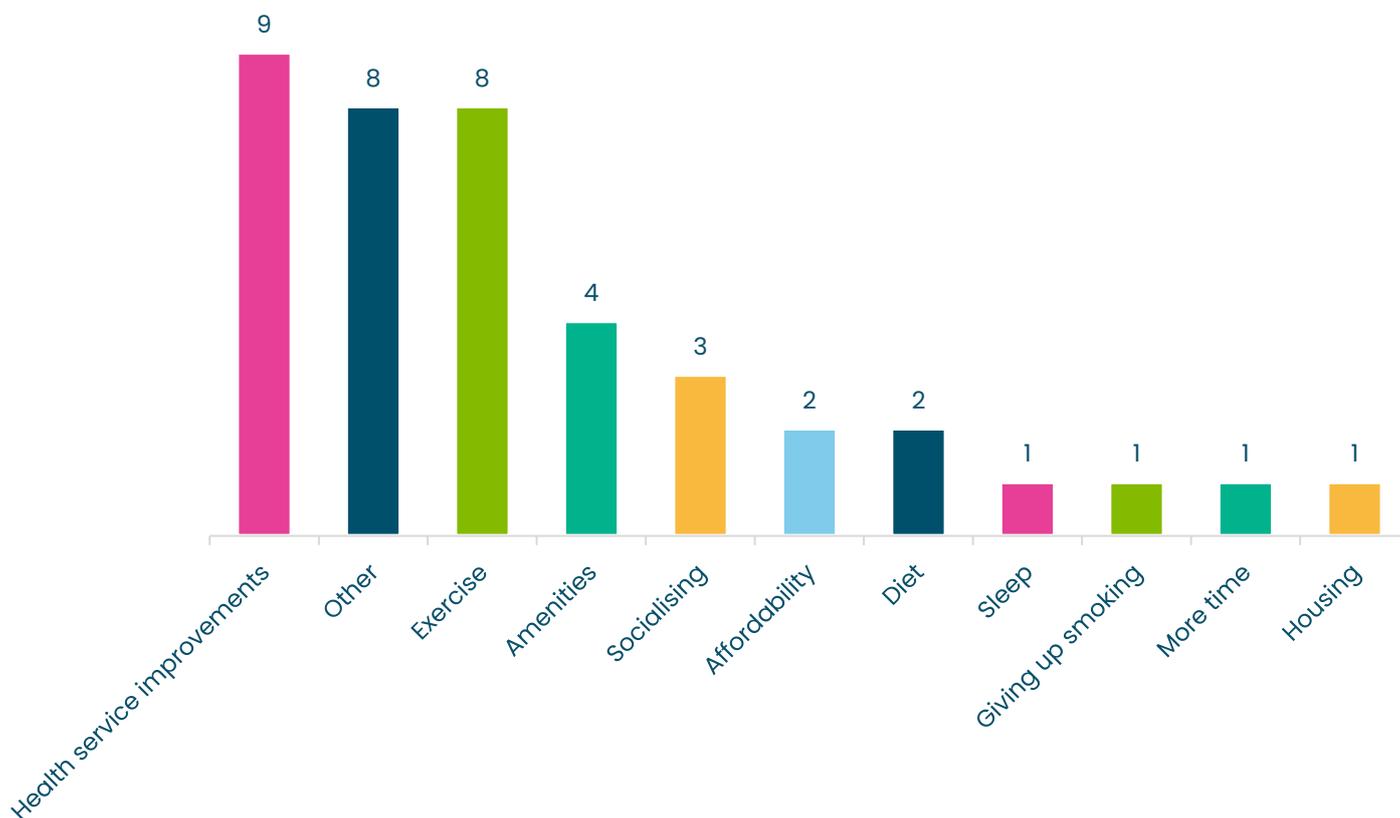


Figure 6 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What would help you to improve your health and wellbeing?"

Health service improvements (9 mentions)

19% mentioned that improvements to health services would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "Having cheaper prescriptions."
- "Some doctors need retraining about addiction and other medical conditions."
- "I would help if there were better access to the GP. It took me 3 weeks to get an appointment."

Other (8 mentions)

17% mentioned other things that would improve their health and wellbeing.

- “I am aware of my age and realise I only have so many years left, so I want to enjoy the time I have left.”
- “Having a safer area to live in especially for females and a cleaner area too.”

Exercise (8 mentions)

17% spoke about exercise as something that would improve their health and wellbeing.

Amenities (4 mentions)

8% mentioned amenities.

- “Companies like ChildLine having physical shops.”
- “More active places around here, like a climbing wall place, rather than drinking in the park.”
- “Gyms, but ones people can afford.”

Socialising (3 mentions)

6% mentioned that more social contact would improve their health and wellbeing.

- “Talking is also good for your mental health. I could join a group but need to have more in our area.”

Affordability (2 mentions)

4% mentioned affordability.

- “More money to buy fresh and better-quality food.”

Diet (2 mentions)

4% of respondents told us that improving their diet would help improve their health and wellbeing.

- “Being able to eat more healthily, but I can’t do this on a low budget.”

Sleep (1 mention)

2% mentioned more sleep would be beneficial for their health and wellbeing.

Give up smoking (1 mention)

2% of people we spoke to said that giving up smoking would improve their health and wellbeing.

More time (1 mention)

2% mentioned more time would be helpful.

Housing (1 mention)

2% mentioned improvements to housing would improve their health and wellbeing.

- “Living in a nice area and in a nice house where there is no mould.”

Where do you go to find out information for what is available locally?

We also asked people where they would most likely go to find out information for what is available locally. *Figure 7* shows the number of mentions by response. 6 people did not answer.

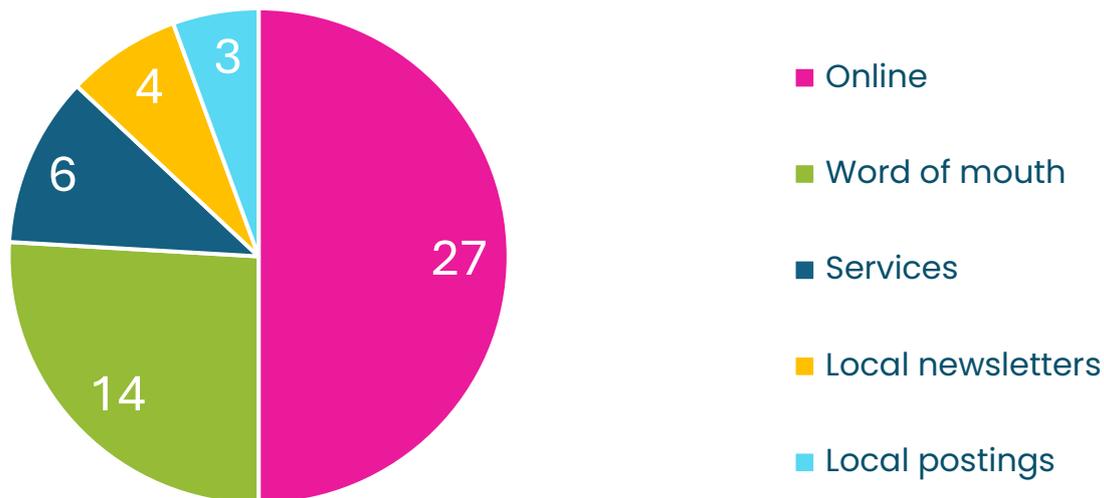


Figure 7 – Number of mentions by response to the question: “Where do you go to find out information for what is available locally?”

Online (27 mentions)

56% of people mentioned they would go online for information about what is happening locally, with **8%** specifically mentioning Facebook sites.

- “There's some community Facebook pages which are always good and full of information or I go online.”

Word of Mouth (14 mentions)

29% said that they would find out what is happening locally through word of mouth.

Services (6 mentions)

13% said they would look to services to find out local information.

- “Open Road, the council hubs/libraries.”

Local newsletters (4 mentions)

8% get their local information through local newsletters.

- “The Medway Matters Magazine.”

Local postings (4 mentions)

8% find out local information through local postings.

- “The supermarket often has posters advertising various events.”

What could be done to promote health and wellbeing within your community?

We asked people what could be done within their local areas and communities to improve their health and wellbeing. *Figure 8* shows the number of mentions by response theme. 3 people did not answer and 2 people said 'don't know/nothing'.

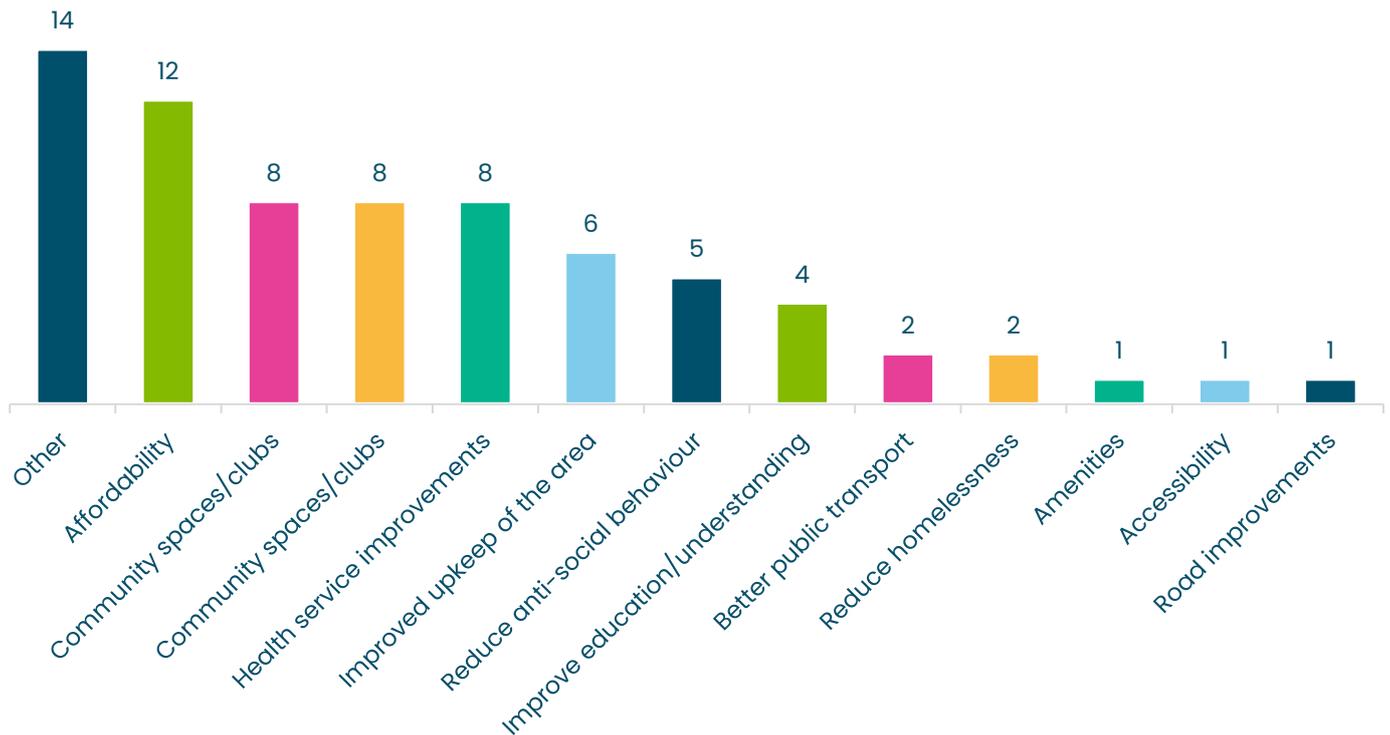


Figure 8 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What could be done to promote health and wellbeing within your community?"

Other (14 mentions)

29% of people spoke about other ways to improve community health and wellbeing.

- "We are all the same - only different colour. Sort out racism."
- "More tolerance. Politicians being more vocal against the flags."
- "Get rid of Reform. I am worrying we are following the US, look at what is happening to women's rights their and access to the pill."

Affordability (12 mentions)

25% of people mentioned affordability.

- "Free access to gyms. Subsidised fruit and veg."
- "Having free swimming for the children especially in the school holidays."
- "Lower the prices of basic foods."

- “Making gyms free, so there is access for everyone. No one is turned away because they can’t afford it.”

Community spaces/clubs (8 mentions)

17% of people mentioned community spaces/clubs.

- “Start from scratch, more support for Early Years, support new parents as much as possible and continue to do so as their children grow up.”
- “Having a nice area for the elderly to socialise.”
- “More clubs to combat loneliness in all ages.”

Health service improvements (8 mentions)

17% of respondents said that improvements to health services will improve community health and wellbeing.

- “Better general health services for all and especially for out of hours services, more walk-in centres.”
- “Better access to mental health services, shorter waiting times for services and not 'here's some medication off you go'.”

Improved upkeep of the area (6 mentions)

13% of people mentioned improved upkeep of the area would improve health and wellbeing.

- “See the area a bit cleaner. People leave smashed glass outside my house. I don't see why it's looking so scruffy but it's the residence. They don't bother. They need to clean up their rubbish.”
- “Keeping the green spaces clean.”

Reduce anti-social behaviour (5 mentions)

10% of people mentioned reducing anti-social behaviour.

- “Stop all the violence in the area. Stop all the selling of drugs.”
- “Getting rid of all the antisocial people including the bikes and scooters.”
- “It would be nice if there was a reduction in the number of people who are drunk and/or if they could be more considerate of other people.”

Improve education/understanding (4 mentions)

8% of people mentioned improving education.

- “Awareness programmes, know where you can go to get more information.”

Better public transport (2 mentions)

4% of respondents mentioned better public transport would improve community health and wellbeing.

- “You need to sort out the shops and buses and taxis, but taxis are expensive.”
- “Improve the bus services.”

Reduce homelessness (2 mentions)

4% mentioned the homeless community.

- “Help the homeless more. If they could get help in getting houses because people assume it is not a nice area if there are a lot of homeless.”
- “More homeless shelters, so they could help those that need it.”

Amenities (1 mention)

2% mentioned amenities.

- “Get rid of the vape shops and pop-up restaurants, bring back the proper trades.”

Accessibility (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned improving accessibility.

- “Make sure all new builds are accessible. Make sure new blocks of flats all have lifts.”

Road improvements (1 mention)

2% mentioned improving roads.

Demographic Breakdown

- **Age:** The largest response was from people aged 45–54 (**19%**). The least common response was from people aged 25–34 and 85–94 (each at **2%**). The full range of ages is shown in *Figure 9*.

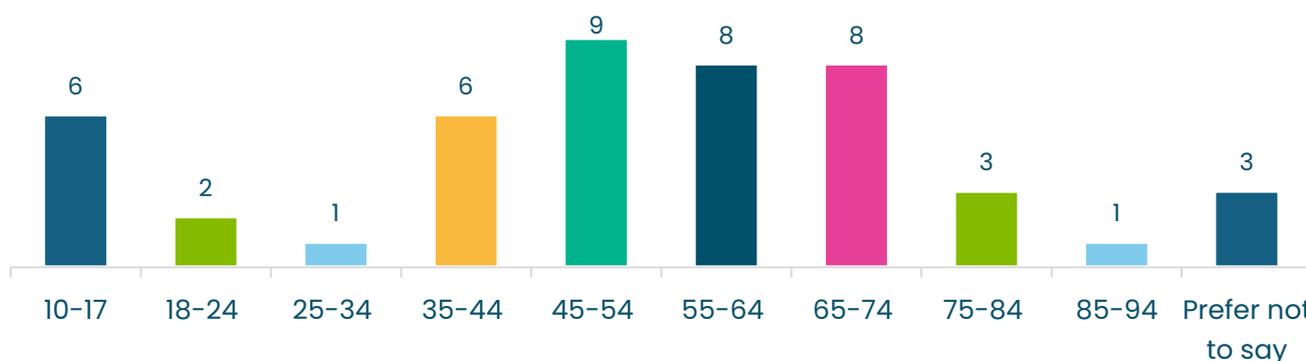


Figure 9 – Number of participants by age

- **Gender:** **52%** of participants identified as female, **42%** identified as male, and **2%** identified as non-binary. **4%** chose 'prefer not to say'. **90%** of participants' gender identity was the same as their sex recorded at birth.
- **Sexual orientation:** **73%** of participants identified as heterosexual/straight, **4%** preferred to self-describe, **2%** identified as gay or lesbian, **2%** identified as queer, **2%** identified as pansexual. **13%** preferred not to say. **4%** did not answer.
- **Ethnicity:** **56%** were White/White British, **13%** were from other white backgrounds (Irish, Polish, Portuguese, English), **9%** were African, **2%** were Black British, **2%** were Black African/Caribbean, **2%** were Indian, **2%** were Asian, **2%** were Gypsy or Irish Traveller. **8%** preferred not to say. **4%** did not answer.
- **English as a first language:** **86%** of participants told us that English was their first language, **8%** told us that their first language was not English (Yoruba, Shona, Portuguese). **4%** preferred not to say and **2%** did not answer.
- **Religion:** **38%** of participants told us they have no religion, **27%** told us they were Christian, **6%** told us that they had other religions (Seikh, Buddhist, Spiritualist), **4%** told us they were Catholic, **2%** told us they were Athiest, and **23%** did not answer.
- **Disability:** **9%** reported having a disability.
- **Long-term health conditions:** **31%** of participants reported having a long-term health condition.
- **Mental Health:** **21%** reported experiencing a mental health issue.

- **Neurodiversity:** 13% identified as neurodiverse and 87% identified as neurotypical.
- **Employment status:** The largest response was from people who were unemployed (29%). The full range of employment status is shown in *Figure 10*. 4 people preferred not to say.



Figure 10 – Number of participants by employment status

- **Financial status:** The largest response was from people who told us that they never struggle to pay for basic necessities (58%). The full range of financial status responses is provided in *Figure 11*. 1 person did not answer.

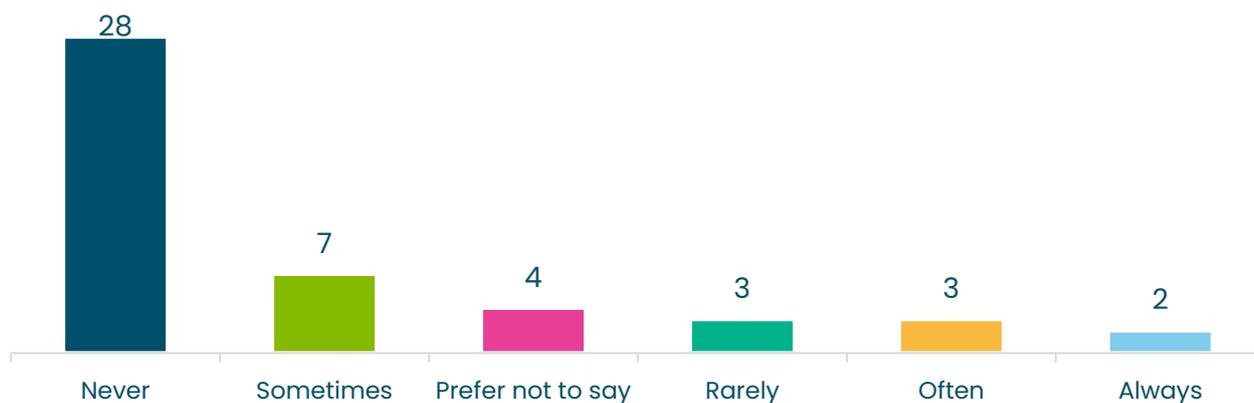


Figure 11 – Number of participants by responses to the question: "In the past six months, have you struggled to pay for basic necessities?"

Insights to Inform

These insights to inform are meant for this series of reports as a whole. There will be 9 reports in this series coming out across 2025, as a follow on from the 9 reports in our 'Medway Areas' series in 2024.

- For Medway Council and the NHS in Kent and Medway to use these insights to inform their work.



If you would like to chat with us about the report you can reach us through the following routes:

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Text us on 07525 861 639. By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face-to-face

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