



A spotlight report on the Building Blocks of Life, focusing on the locality of Gillingham.

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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 March 2025, we engaged with **44** residents living in Gillingham.

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.



Findings

The Impact Living in Gillingham has on Residents

What's good about living in your area?

We asked 44 Gillingham residents what they like about the area they live in. *Figure* **1** shows the number of mentions by positive theme.

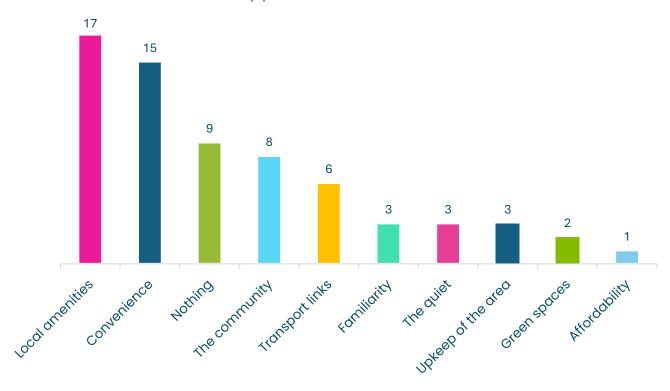


Figure 1 - Number of mentions by positive theme

Local amenities (17 mentions)

39% mentioned local amenities.

- "I guess the shops are improving, people who have lived here for a while wouldn't say that, but you can get anything you need."
- "Not a lot. There is a nice park though and the hospital is good [Medway Maritime]".
- "The local shops and the train services are good."
- "I live in Gillingham now. I used to live in High Halstow and I miss it. Now, I guess the good thing is I am two streets away from the hospital, which I need to access regularly. We have decent shops and a Chinese."
- "Everything is at hand, shops, leisure centres and parks."



Convenience (15 mentions)

34% mentioned convenience.

- "The amenities are very close to me, like the hospital and the train station."
- "Not far from the hospital, not far from the station and has a high street."
- "Quite close to shops, that's handy."
- "Easy access to hospital, good facilities in terms of transportation, shops on your doorstep, the schools, decent African shops, which is not true of all areas."
- "You can walk around, everything is close together."
- "I recently moved here. It's good that it's within walking distances to places."
- "I like that every shop is available to me."
- "Things are close together. The shops and the train station."

Nothing (9 mentions)

20% mentioned nothing.

- "Nothing at the moment.
- "I live in Gillingham, but I don't like anything about the area."
- "There's nothing good about living in this area."
- "I don't like anything."

The community (8 mentions)

18% mentioned the community.

- "There are lots of people who want Gillingham to be better, but they don't realise there is already such a strong sense of community."
- "The community is very positive."
- "I've a good set of neighbours if anything happens, they're reliable."
- "I've lived here all my life, it's all I know. I have friends that live here."
- "There are people who are friendly, but also ones that aren't friendly, some who are nasty."

Transport links (6 mentions)

14% of respondents mentioned transport links.

- "Transport links for the trains and buses."
- "It's close to London and commutable you can jump on the train or drive to London"
- "The transport is good, and you can get to several other places from here."
- "Things are close together, the shops and the train station."



Familiarity (3 mentions)

7% mentioned the familiarity.

- "I've always lived here."
- "I've lived here all my life, it's all I know."

The quiet (3 mentions)

7% mentioned the quiet.

- "It's quiet and calm around here so far, I've only been here for a month."
- "It is a nice quiet place to live."

Upkeep of the area (3 mentions)

7% mentioned the upkeep of the area.

- "The council is good at maintaining the area and the bin collection service is excellent - the only days they do not do is Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Every three months, they drop through the door bags for recycling."
- "The shopping area always looks clean and tidy."
- "The council does their bit, like keeping the parks clean and tidy and the beach."

Green spaces (2 mentions)

5% of respondents mentioned that they enjoy the green spaces around Gillingham.

- "There are lots of open spaces The Strand, Hilly Fields. You can walk around, everything is close together."
- "There is a nice park."

Affordability (1 mention)

2% mentioned affordability.

• "The house prices are a lot more reasonable than London as well."



Positive Impacts of the Area

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

33 of the 44 respondents **(75%)** said that where they live has a positive impact on them, 6 respondents **(14%)** said that it did not and 5 respondents **(11%)** did not answer. Some respondents specified multiple positive impacts. *Figure 2* represents the specified positive impacts of the area.

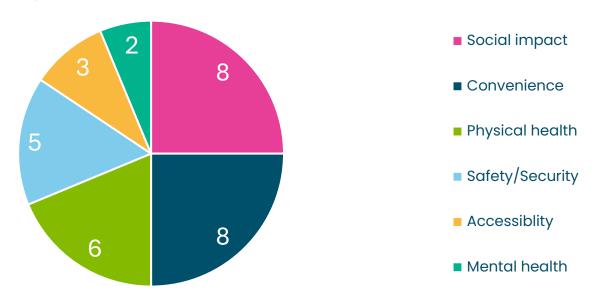


Figure 2 – Number of mentions by positive impact

Convenience (8 mentions)

18% mentioned that where they live has a positive impact as it's convenient.

- "I can get what I need to get."
- "Can get there easily, can walk, trains are reliable. I guess that gives me ease of mind."
- "It gives me a good feeling that I don't have to travel too far to get what I need, the convenience. You don't have to worry about schlepping anywhere."

Social impact (8 mentions)

18% mentioned a positive impact on their social life.

- "Good to know we look after each other, it makes a big difference. Feel part of something."
- "Sense of belonging to something, more than just going about your daily life."



 "You don't have to stay at home or in your area you can go and see different things."

Physical Health (6 mentions)

14% mentioned a positive impact on their physical health.

- "I enjoy being able to walk about easily."
- "It helps with wellbeing; you can go for walks and get to the parks easily."
- "The exercise of walking between places. Good to get fresh air."
- "You can get your daily walk in."

Safety/Security (5 mentions)

11% mentioned feeling safe/secure.

- "Takes [away] the worry knowing Mum is safe."
- "I feel it is a safe place to be, I don't see any bad things."
- "I guess I feel safe here, I haven't lived here long, but it seems a decent place."

Accessibility (3 mentions)

7% mentioned accessibility.

- "Easily accessible and it's less stressful to shop."
- "Everything is easily accessible for me."

Mental Health (2 mentions)

5% mentioned a positive impact on their mental health.

- "It's a reason to get up in the morning."
- "It lends to a good quality of life, it keeps your motivation high, you can see what you want to get and keeps you positive."



What are the negatives about living in your area?

We asked 44 respondents what they dislike about the area they live in. *Figure 3* shows the number of mentions by negative theme.

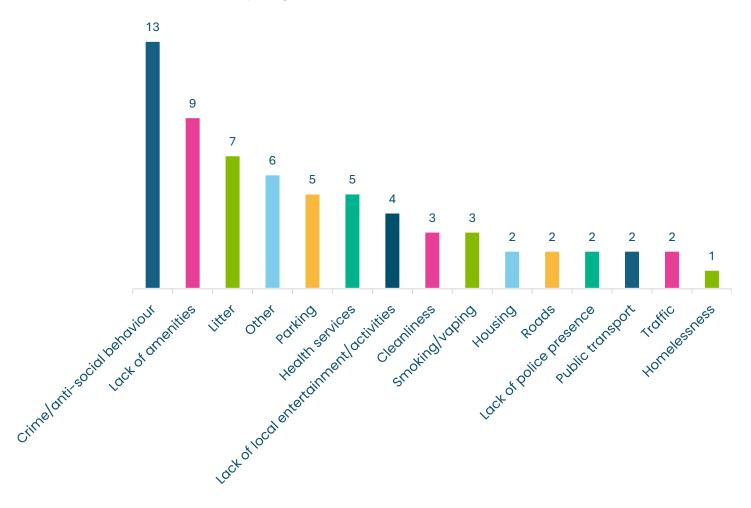


Figure 3 – Number of mentions by negative theme

Anti-social behaviour (13 mentions)

30% mentioned anti-social behaviour in the area.

- "It's quite skanky and quite dangerous around here. A lot of crime happens."
- "A lot of crimes happen. Robberies nearly every day, crackheads hanging around."
- "I do feel that there is quite a lot of violence."
- "There was a stabbing recently."
- "The children's playgrounds activities that shouldn't happen there do, selling and buying drugs. I don't take my children there."



Lack of amenities (9 mentions)

20% of people mentioned the lack of local amenities where they live.

- "The high street is dying. There used to be lots here but not anymore."
- "The high street has gone downhill. There's coffee shops but not much else. Chatham is the same. If I didn't have a bus pass and a car, I wouldn't be able to go shopping."
- "It's shit. What shops there are are shit and they all seem to be closing down anyway. It used to be wonderful – I've lived here 42 years, we had shoe shops, a big Co-op, M&S. I've been here so long and am getting older and the sights we have to see! If I was younger, I would think about moving."

Litter (7 mentions)

16% spoke about litter.

- "Filthiest place roads and pavements full of litter, it's filthy."
- "Lots of rubbish everywhere and the pavements are in a terrible state."
- "There is rubbish left out everywhere, litter. It attracts the foxes. We have foxes pooing in our garden, digging up all the plants, it's horrendous."
- "There is also a lot of rubbish that is dumped on street corners."
- "The rubbish, it's everywhere, I hate to see it."

Other (6 mentions)

14% mentioned other negative aspects of the area, such as over-population.

- "Too many betting shops, too many tanning shops. Just don't like Kent."
- "I would prefer to be back in London because it would mean I would be nearer to my family, cousins etc."
- "The area is getting overpopulated and feeling encroached."

Parking (5 mentions)

11% mentioned issues with parking.

- "Medway hospital parking is an issue, too many people and not enough spaces."
- "Having to pay for parking at Riverside Country Park it used to be free."
- "It's very difficult to park around here as well, even outside of your own house."

Issues with health services (5 mentions)

11% mentioned issues with health services.

• "The GP is bad too, you can't get an appointment when you need one."



- "The GP services are very poor, nowadays you don't ever get to see the same doctor twice. I am diabetic and have to have annual eye tests, but there is nowhere local to have it done."
- "Medway hospital is too small for the area."
- "The NHS is shit. It's rubbish."

Lack of local entertainment/activities (4 mentions)

9% mentioned that there is 'nothing to do' in the area that they live.

- "There's nothing for the young people to do, no picture house or youth clubs. There is a lack of anything to do."
- "There's nothing to do."

Cleanliness (3 mentions)

7% mentioned issues with cleanliness.

- "I would like to see cleaner streets."
- "The smell. It stinks."

Smoking/vaping (3 mentions)

7% mentioned smoking/vaping.

- "The smoking, vaping isn't great."
- "All this smoking doesn't sound great."

Housing (2 mentions)

5% mentioned issues with housing.

 "There is threatened a 2000-house development at the end of the road. There is no infrastructure in place, schools, medical facilities."

Roads (2 mentions)

5% mentioned issues with roads.

- "The condition of the roads."
- "Potholes in the roads everywhere."

Lack of police presence (2 mentions)

5% of people mentioned a lack of police presence.

- "The police don't respond when you need to call them out for an incident."
- "There used to be PCSOs, but I haven't seen one for ages."



Public transport (2 mentions)

5% of respondents spoke about the lack of public transport.

- "The bus system is quite slow."
- "When I need to go to the bank, I have to take two buses to go to Chatham and buses are not reliable."

Traffic (2 mentions)

5% of respondents mentioned the traffic in their area.

- "You can't drive or park around here, it's a nightmare."
- "Traffic such a proliferation of cars now."

Homelessness (1 mention)

2% mentioned issues with homelessness in the area.

"There is a lot of homelessness. One homeless chap died just before Christmas."



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. 37 people out of the 44 respondents (84%) said that where they live does have a negative impact on them and 4 respondents (9%) said that it does not. 3 respondents (7%) did not answer. Some respondents specified multiple negative impacts. *Figure 4* shows the specified negative impacts of the area.

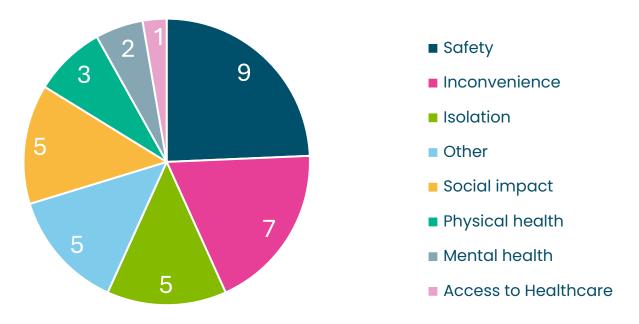


Figure 4 – Number of mentions by negative impact

Safety (9 mentions)

20% of people mentioned feeling unsafe.

- "I won't go out on my own at night as I am too worried/frightened."
- "You don't like to see it. It is better now than before, but it is not nice to see this in a
 place meant for children. You do not want your children to see it, to think that
 behaviour is okay. It is not a good environment."
- "This makes me scared to go out both at night and during the day. I will usually only go out if I am with friends, like I am today."
- "I've not lived here that long. I don't feel safe."

Inconvenience (7 mentions)

16% spoke about the impact of inconvenience in the area.

"[It has a negative impact on me if] I can't park after I've done a night shift and I
have to walk a long way to get home."



- "It'll mean I'll have to travel further afield to get my shopping."
- "It means that I go elsewhere to do shopping, which impacts me because it isn't convenient."

Isolation (5 mentions)

11% of people mentioned where they live can be isolating.

- "I just keep myself to myself, but it's the overall effect on everyone. It's isolating.
 You exist in your own bubble, no connections. You wake up and got to go into
 town, but it doesn't make you feel good."
- "It can be a bit lonely because I don't know anyone around here."

Other (5 mentions)

11% of people mentioned other impacts.

- "I want to go back home to Surrey."
- "You can't rely on anything being there, that you got used to having. Leaves you a bit unsettled. It's a shame."

Social impact (5 mentions)

11% mentioned social impact.

- "Generally, it means I don't go out in the evenings."
- "I don't want to go down to the high street. I shop online now."

Physical health (3 mentions)

7% mentioned the impact on their physical health.

- "Passive smoking is not good for you."
- "I'm asthmatic, so [smoking is] not good to be around."

Mental health (2 mentions)

5% mentioned the impact on their mental health.

- "Makes me feel unsettled, anxious."
- "It makes me feel suicidal."

Access to healthcare (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned the impact of accessing healthcare.

• "Because I am not able to have eye tests done at the local hospital and I no longer drive, I have to ask someone else to take me to these appointments."



Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Gillingham 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** shows the number of mentions by response. I respondent said nothing.

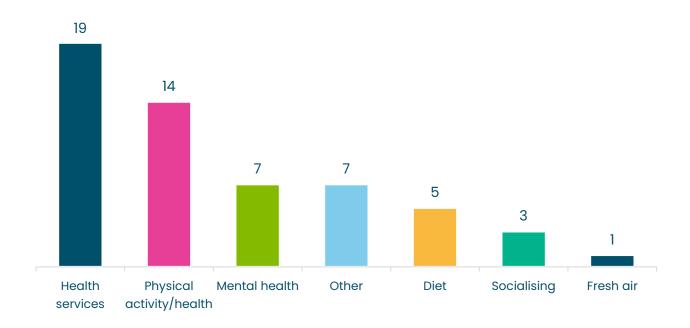


Figure 5 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "When you think of health and wellbeing, what comes to mind?"

Health services (19 mentions)

43% of people spoken to mentioned health services as something that comes to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

- "There is a severe lack of doctors' spaces. I am not too bad and can get in pretty quickly, but that will impact people's health."
- "I think about health services, which I have always found to be good."
- "It makes me think of doctors and hospitals."
- "Easy access to doctors and the hospital. Dentists, services."
- "Doctors, NHS is rubbish. Getting worse and having to pay if you want help."
- "GPs being available when you need them; you cannot just walk in to 'sit & wait' anymore, there's the 8am rush to try and get an 'on the day' appointment."



Physical activity/Health (14 mentions)

32% of respondents mentioned physical activity and physical health.

- "I think about physical health as that affects everything."
- "Going to the gym and swimming, I go two to three times a week."
- "Doing the walks I walk three times a week."
- "Keeping healthy and making sure I'm active."
- "Being alive, exercise."
- "I think about physical health as that affects everything."

Mental health (7 mentions)

16% of respondents mentioned mental health.

- "Feeling good, being positive, happier, trying to do good and being happy with what you've got - that's the secret."
- "Mental health, I am pretty suicidal."

Other (7 mentions)

16% of people mentioned other things that come to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

- "How sanitary it is around here."
- "Being taken care of."

Diet (5 mentions)

11% of people mentioned diet.

- "Healthy living what you eat, drink, your lifestyle, your weight."
- "These days it depends on your lifestyle, and it can be very expensive eating well."

Socialising (3 mentions)

7% mentioned socialising.

- "Positive community, bringing the community together."
- "Being able to relate to things and people."

Fresh air (1 mention)

2% of people mentioned fresh air.

"What I eat and drink, the air I breathe."



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.

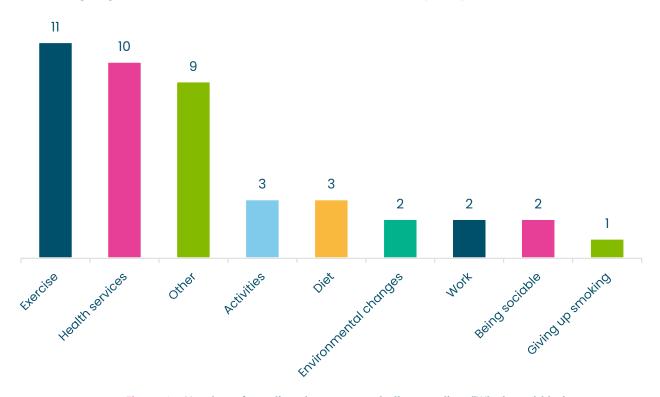


Figure 6 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What would help you to improve your health and wellbeing?"

Exercise (11 mentions)

25% spoke about exercise as something that would improve their health and wellbeing. All respondents who mentioned the gym referred to the need for affordable gyms.

- "Having access to an affordable gym. I have recently had knee surgery, so that would help me."
- "Exercising more because I don't do that enough, I just sit and watch tv most evenings."
- "Going out walking more. I have a dog and I think if I did more walking, it would help my knees."
- "Going to the gym, but one that didn't cost too much money. A cheap one."
- "The gym. Easy to get to and affordable ones."

Health services (10 mentions)

23% mentioned that either an increase or improvement in health and social care services would help to improve their health and wellbeing.



- "Easy access to the NHS. If you call, it can take a while for them to get back to you."
- "Being able to get a doctor's appointment. The online appointment process is a nuisance. I delay my health because of it."
- "Could be more doctors' appointments. I don't bother calling because of the waiting times."

Other (9 mentions)

20% mentioned other things that would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "Being fit and young again."
- "Getting rid of all the injuries I have sustained over the years."
- "Stopping drugs I know would help improve my wellbeing."
- "I think more spaces for non-working people to go to in the daytime, which are not too expensive."
- "Just need more time, more determination, just time for you. Mindset is key."

Activities (3 mentions)

7% of people mentioned that more activities would help to improve their health and wellbeing.

- "Activities, more energy to do things, not waiting around too much, reading, doing sports, things like that. Just do them."
- "I want to go back to fishing again."
- "Having something to do."

Diet (3 mentions)

7% of respondents spoke about diet as a key to improving their health and wellbeing.

- "Being better at having a good diet."
- "Food. Have something in the high street for my culture and my ethnicity."

Environmental changes (2 mentions)

5% of respondents mentioned that changes to the environment would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "Improve air quality."
- "I would like to see some positive changes in the environment stop it looking so rundown, I mean we have a random tree growing out of the shop over there.
 Smarten it up, have a cash injection, so people take a bit of pride in where they



live. I feel sorry for the homeless – you walk one end of the high street to the other and you see them."

Work (2 mentions)

5% of respondents mentioned work-related factors that would improve health and wellbeing.

- "Retiring from work has helped improve my health and wellbeing."
- "Giving up work."

Being sociable (2 mentions)

5% mentioned socialising improves their health and wellbeing.

- "Getting out and socialising a bit more."
- "Spending time with family."

Giving up smoking (1 mention)

2% mentioned giving up smoking would improve their health and wellbeing.

• "Giving up smoking."



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 about information for local events or changes. *Figure* **7** shows the number of mentions by response.

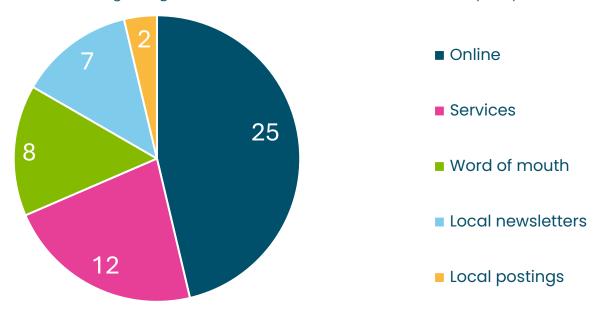


Figure 7 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "Where do you go to find out information for what is available locally?"

Online (25 mentions)

57% of people mentioned they would go online for information on what is happening locally.

- "Online there is a very good Facebook page."
- "The 'Nextdoor' app."
- "Social media because you can look at it any time."
- "The Joy app is good."

Services (12 mentions)

27% said they would look to services to find out local information.

- "I went to my church and they gave me information about a GP."
- "From my own company. I work in care."
- "The library, but that's the really dodgy end of the high street."
- "I go to the local shops to find out what is happening in the area."



Word of mouth (8 mentions)

18% said that they would find out what is happening locally through word of mouth.

- "I usually speak to my friends to find out what is going on."
- "My postman! And word of mouth from people."

Local newsletters (7 mentions)

16% get their local information through local newsletters.

- "I go to the library or read through one of those free newspapers you get on the bus."
- "Online and the local magazine Medway Matters."
- "We also have the Medway Matters booklet, which comes in the post."

Local postings (2 mentions)

5% find out local information through local postings.

- "Sometimes look at the boards when I take my kids to the library."
- "Notices at the health centre."



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.

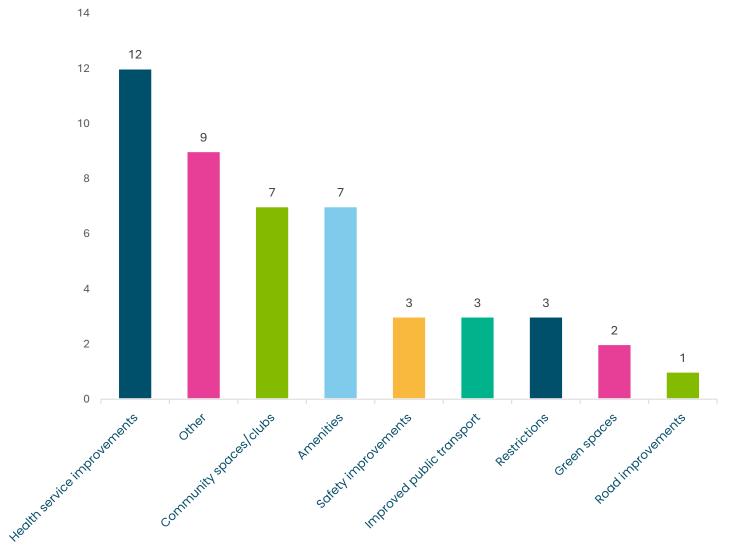


Figure 8 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What could be done to promote health and wellbeing within your community?

Health service improvements (12 mentions)

27% of respondents said that improvements to health services will improve community health and wellbeing.

- "Better pay for the hospital staff and more NHS dentists."
- "More NHS dentists and better health care services."



- "To get more GPs and a bigger hospital."
- "More beds and staff in hospital and less management."
- "The doctors being more accessible, they are the first port of call for health. It gets really congested at the hospital. It's hard for everyone, even getting through to 111."

Other (9 mentions)

20% of people spoke about other ways to improve community health and wellbeing.

- "Promote social interaction and get people talking more and get everybody earning."
- "I think mostly it is okay, but it would be nicer if it was cleaner and all the white spots on the pavements (chewing gum) were removed - I don't like seeing that."
- "I hope this government doesn't take away our bus passes as I would never get on a bus again, it would be too expensive. They've taken our heating away, so what next? The heating back would definitely help health and wellbeing."
- "Start off with the basics and work on the image, try to give Gillingham some pep again, make people want to be here, come here. The Christmas decorations were abysmal, no light on the tree, not sure why they even bothered. It would be good to go back to the old days, back to when there was a sense of community."

Community spaces/clubs (7 mentions)

16% mentioned more community spaces and local clubs.

- "It would be nice to have 'women only' exercise sessions, i.e. walking groups, not just classes in a gym and adult only swimming sessions in the daytime."
- "Have a designated place in the community for people to talk to someone."
- "Every area should have a walk-in base in the community where people can chat to professionals about anything."
- "Maybe more communal things as if people get to know each other better and in a safe environment, then they wouldn't be as nasty to each other. People jump to the wrong conclusions too easily without getting to know you. Community events."

Amenities (7 mentions)

16% mentioned amenities.

- "Bring back the pub we did not use it, but it was good for the community."
- "We need more shops, that bring people out more. Because you have lots of shops all under one roof at the Sava Centre, people go there – but there is only one bus every half an hour."
- "An affordable gym near me there might already be one, I don't know about the cost, but it would be good if they could promote it and make it easy for people to



go to, not too costly. Make people aware that they need to act now for their health and not just in old age – you won't feel the impacts of your choices now until much later. Act now, make real change while you can."

Improvements to safety (3 mentions)

7% mentioned improvements to safety.

- "Make it safer. Reduce crime and have security out at certain times of the day to keep watch."
- "We also need safer communities for our kids the knife culture is scary."
- "It would be good if there were more police around."

Improvements to public transport (3 mentions)

7% mentioned improvements to public transport.

- "Have decent bus services."
- "Bus drivers that aren't happy / uptight, their mood brings you down. They don't run to the timetable. The buses come along and are full up you get a bad vibe. It's frustrating as [you] can wait over an hour for a bus."
- "Make it as easy as possible for people to get to places."

Restrictions (3 mentions)

7% mentioned that more restrictions will improve community health and wellbeing.

- "I also think there should be reduced hours on when alcohol is served, like before
 when you couldn't buy it in the shops or supermarkets until a certain time and
 they closed at different times. Also a ban on betting shops."
- "Get everyone to quit vaping, smoking, taking drugs. Ban it all."

Green spaces (2 mentions)

5% mentioned green spaces.

- "More sunshine. Green spaces and gardens and flowers would help people in the area."
- "More green spaces as they provide a better oxygen supply and are relaxing and tranquil."

Road improvements (1 mention)

2% mentioned improvements to the roads.



"Improve the roads, especially the po holes."

Demographics

• Age: The largest response was from people aged 65-74 (23%). The least common response was from people aged 18-24 (5%). The full range of ages is shown in Figure 9.

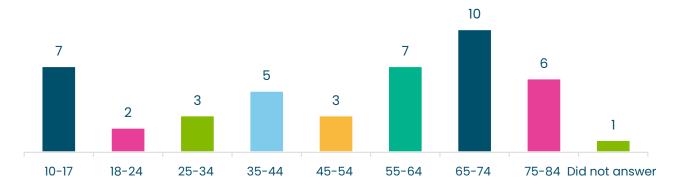


Figure 9 - Number of participants by age

- **Gender: 50%** of participants identified as female, **48%** identified as male, and **2%** opted to prefer not to say. **88%** of participants' gender identity was the same as their sex recorded at birth, **5%** opted to prefer not to say, **7%** did not answer.
- **Sexual orientation**: **79%** of participants identified as heterosexual/straight, **4%** identified as gay or lesbian, **2%** preferred to self-describe, **6%** opted to prefer not to say, and **9%** did not answer.
- Ethnicity: 75% were White/White British, 14% were Black/Black
 British/African/Caribbean, 7% were Asian/Asian British, 2% were any other ethnic
 group and 2% did not answer.
- English as a first language: 84% of participants told us that English was their first language, 7% told us that a different language was their first language (Romanian, Lithuanian and not specified) and 9% did not answer.
- Religion: The largest response was from people who identified as Christian (39%).
 The smallest response was from people who identified as Atheist, Buddhist or Sikh (each at 2%). The full range of religions is provided in Figure 10.



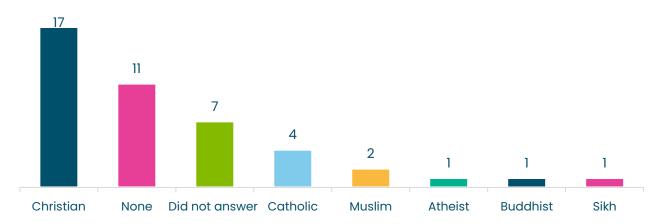


Figure 10 – Number of participants by religion

- Disability: 7% reported having a disability.
- **Long-term health conditions**: **25%** of participants reported having a long-term health condition.
- Mental Health: 9% reported experiencing a mental health issue.
- Neurodiversity: 7% identified as neurodiverse and 93% identified as neurotypical.
- **Employment status**: The largest response was from people who are retired (36%). The full range of employment status is shown in *Figure 11*.

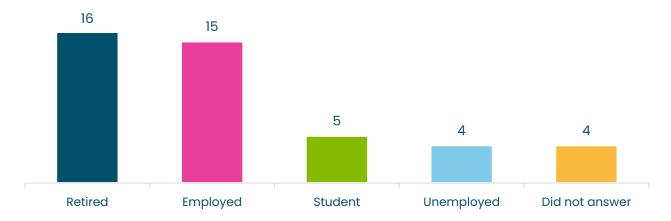


Figure 11 – Number of participants by employment status

• **Financial status:** The largest response was from people who told us that they never struggle to pay for basic necessities **(64%)**. The full range of financial status responses is provided in *Figure 12*.



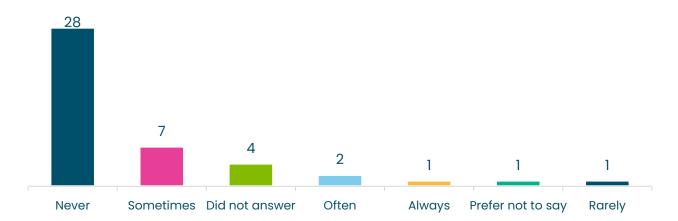


Figure 12 – Number of participants by responses to the question: "In the past six months, have you struggled to pay for basic necessities?"

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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