A Spotlight Report

How people feel about living in Medway

A spotlight report focusing on the Medway town of Rochester.

May 2025

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

Contents

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 to influence positive change for communities across the Medway area. We have the power to influence the NHS leaders and other decision makers 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 May 2025, we engaged with **27** residents living in Rochester.

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 Rochester has on Residents

What's good about living in your area?

We asked 27 residents what they like about the area they live in. *Figure 1* shows the number of mentions by positive theme. 1 person said 'nothing'.
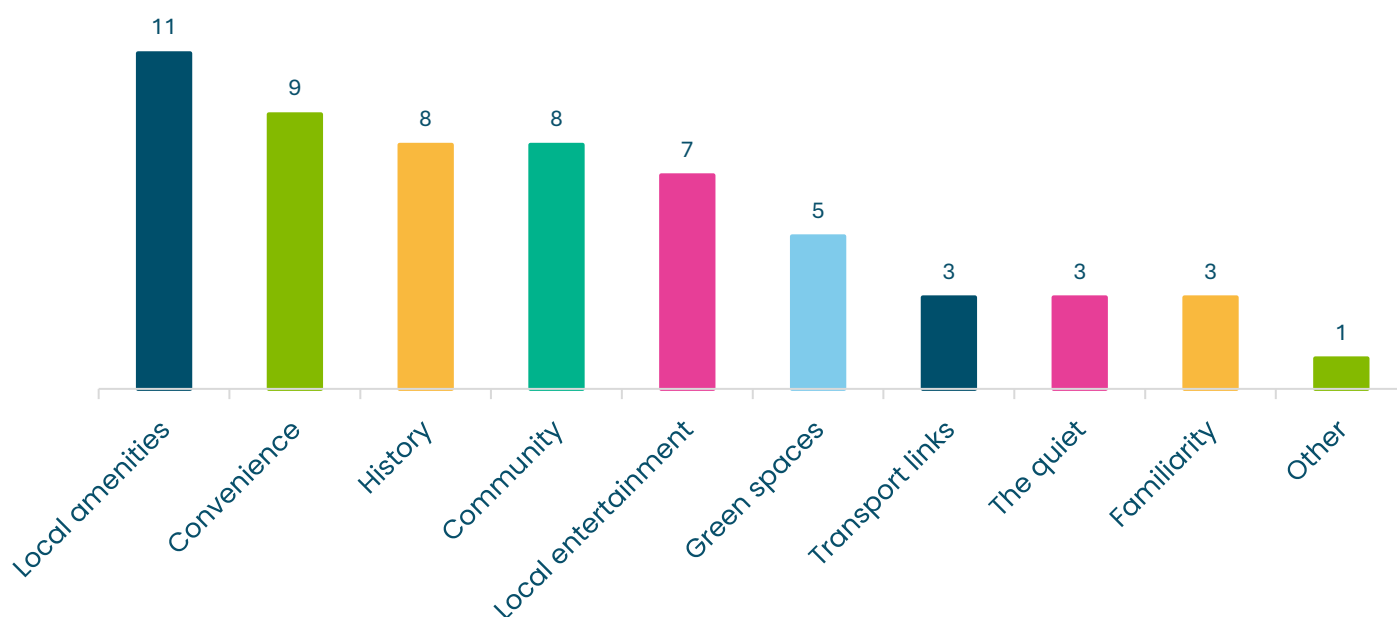

Figure 1 – Number of mentions by positive theme

Local amenities (11 mentions)

41% mentioned local amenities.

- "I moved from London and the schools are much better and things like amenities seem more accessible."
- "I love the High Street there is such an eclectic mix of shops."
- "I like the independent shops, not commercialised."

Convenience (9 mentions)

33% mentioned the convenience.

- "Being five minutes from a shop."
- "Most things are within walking distance."
- "It's a city close to the coast and there is good local countryside."

History (8 mentions)

30% mentioned they like the history of Rochester.

- "The history is nice."
- "There is a sense of community, history and legacy."
- "It's historical you've got the Charles Dickens festivals you can go and visit the Dickens house it attracts a little tourists and brings new people in."

The community (8 mentions)

30% mentioned the community, how friendly locals and neighbours are.

- "The people are very friendly."
- "It has a real village community feel about it."
- "There's a village atmosphere and I know people in the shops."

Local entertainment (7 mentions)

26% mentioned local entertainment.

- "I like things like the Dickens events."
- "[I enjoy the] Theatre in Chatham. Been 11 times last year (2024)."

Green spaces (5 mentions)

19% of respondents mentioned that they enjoy the green spaces around Rochester.

- "There are lots of green spaces to go."
- "There is good local countryside."
- "There are places to walk my dog."
- "[There are] good open spaces and scenery."

Transport links (3 mentions)

11% mentioned transport links.

- "There's a good bus service."
- "I can commute easily to London."

The quiet (3 mentions)

11% mentioned the quiet.

- "It's peaceful and not crowded."
- "It's very quiet."

Familiarity (3 mentions)

4% mentioned familiarity.

- "I've lived in Medway all my life."
- "Our children have grown up here, and we like living here."

Other (1 mention)

4% mentioned that Rochester is 'nice and quaint'.

Positive Impacts of the Area

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

22 of the 27 respondents (**81%**) said that where they live has a positive impact on them, 4 respondents said that it does not (**15%**) and 1 respondent (**4%**) did not answer. Some respondents specified multiple positive impacts. *Figure 2* represents the specified positive impacts of the area.
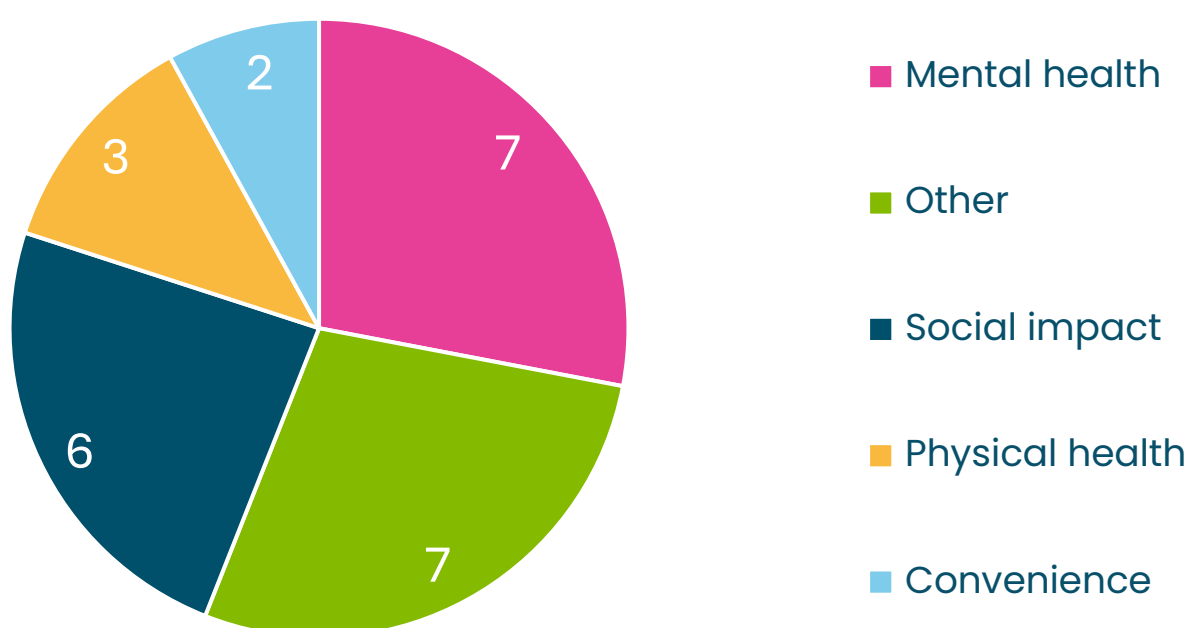
Figure 2 – Number of mentions by positive impact

Mental health (7 mentions)

26% of respondents said that where they live had a positive impact on their mental health.

- "It enables me and my family to get out and go to one of the country parks. It is good for our mental health."
- "Balances and grounds me. De-stresses me"
- "It helps me have a healthy mind, not just body. Its enjoying life."

Other (7 mentions)

26% mentioned other positive impacts.

- "I am quite introverted so [Rochester not being crowded] means I don't have to talk to lots of people."
- "There are a lot of facilities locally, such as different libraries which helps me to focus on my studies."
- "Because I live closer to work I get longer in bed."

Social impact (6 mentions)

22% of people mentioned that where they live had a positive impact on their social life.

- "There's lots to do and to enjoy here there's festivals, a good music scene and lots of history."
- "Good social life. We don't want to stay indoors all the time"

Physical health (3 mentions)

11% of people mentioned that where they live had a positive impact on their physical health.

- "Coming down to the High Street allows me to get my steps in."
- "It's good to be able to get out and about and go walking I walk dogs for people and there's always lovely places to go."

Convenience (2 mentions)

7% mentioned that where they live had a positive impact as it's convenient.

- ""Everything you need is here"
- "There's always somewhere to get your weekly shop and it will be very close by."

What are the negatives about living in your area?

We asked 27 respondents what they dislike about the area they live in. *Figure 3* shows the number of mentions by negative theme.
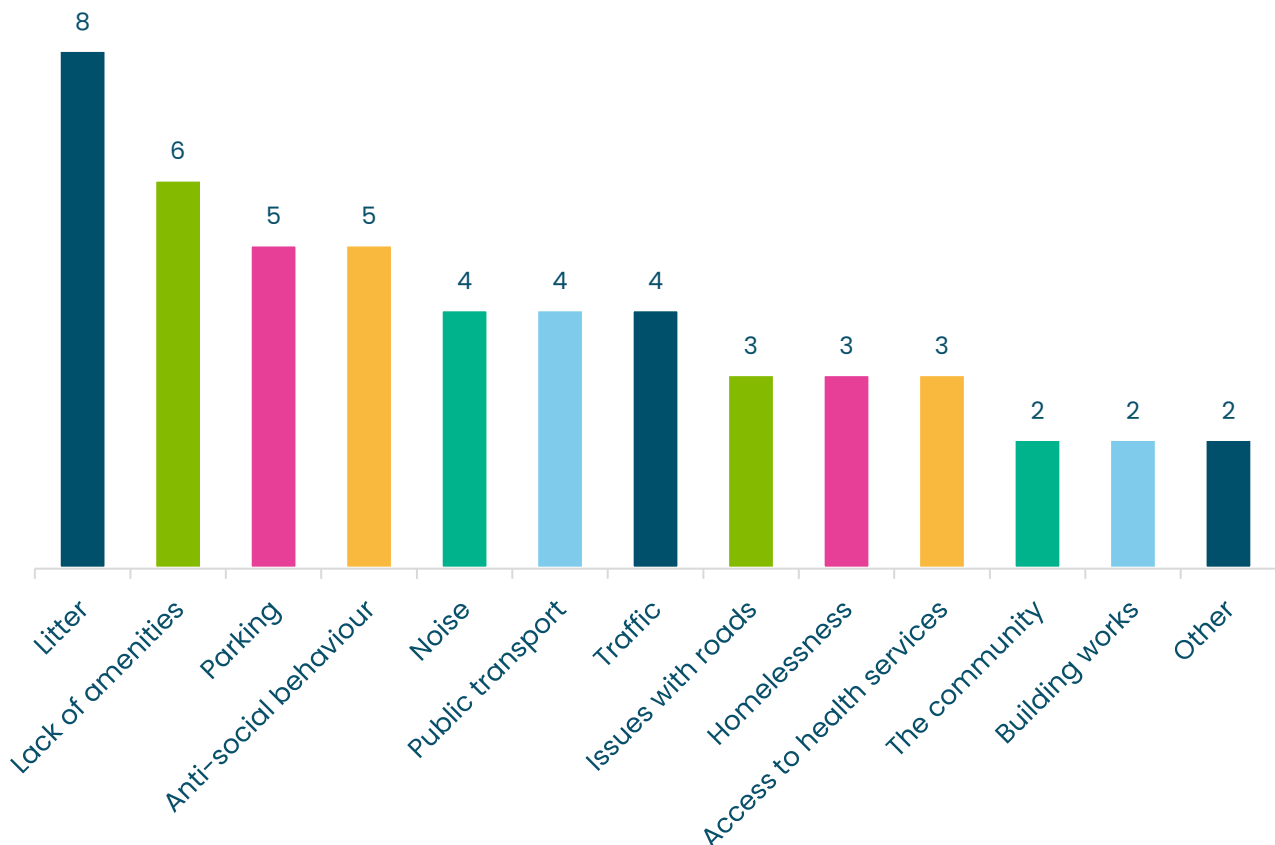

Figure 3 – Number of mentions by negative theme

Litter (8 mentions)

30% mentioned litter.

- "There's always mess everywhere. There's rubbish around the bins. When I was younger it was cleaner and nicer."
- "The street where I live, there is rubbish (partly the council and partly the people don't care)."
- "There is litter everywhere, and it's dumped on the side of the road."

Lack of amenities (6 mentions)

22% of people mentioned the lack of local amenities where they live.

- "For me personally, there are a lack of restaurants, so there is nowhere to really go out with your friends."

- "There are no banks anywhere."
- "All the shops are closing down."
- "There's no big supermarkets nearby."

Parking (5 mentions)

19% mentioned issues with parking.

- "The parking, very little free parking"
- "Parking can be difficult - you need a residential permit."

Anti-social behaviour (5 mentions)

19% mentioned anti-social behaviour.

- "The youth is a problem. They've got no manners and think they're the next big thing. They think they own the paths and will barge you off on their bikes. "
- "Get a lot of people hanging around and being drunk."
- "There are a lot of drunkards outside shops and people who are loud or looking to start trouble."

Noise (4 mentions)

15% mentioned noise.

- "Often there are 'shouty' people in the street during the day which is not nice."
- "Friday and Saturday nights can get a bit lively. It can get noisy due to the clubs and that."

Public transport (4 mentions)

15% of respondents spoke about the lack of public transport.

- "The buses, the bus route 155 is very unreliable and not very frequent."
- "Transport links are not very good; some friends and neighbours struggle to do shopping or get to places, because of the lack of buses."
- "There's not enough public transport it needs to be regular."

Traffic (4 mentions)

15% of respondents mentioned the traffic.

- "I've noticed speeding drivers in the evenings at the back of where I live, they seem to be boy racers going up and down the road."
- "Fast traffic on Rochester Avenue which is used by many cars to cut through."

Issues with roads (3 mentions)

11% of respondents mentioned the state of roads.

- "All the roadworks, they seem to be everywhere and impacting the whole area."
- "the roads have put holes in."
- "Narrow road and narrow pavement."

Homelessness (3 mentions)

11% of respondents spoke about homelessness.

- "The rough sleepers in the carparks"
- "I see homeless people around and I feel sorry for them and their situation."
- "There's been an increase in homeless people, it would be nice if they could be given something."

Access to health services (3 mentions)

11% mentioned issues with health services.

- "It is difficult to get a GP appointment."
- "The medical/health service is dire. GP appointments are difficult to get and you can't get same day appointments. Seeing someone is not like it used to be. The local hospital is not well run. I would rather go to another hospital if I had to go."

The community (2 mentions)

7% mentioned that the community are a negative aspect of living in Rochester.

- "The people, there are too many people from other areas."
- "The people that voted for Brexit."

Building works (2 mentions)

7% mentioned building works, and lack of infrastructure to support this.

- "The fact that there are more houses going to be built with no infrastructure in place."
- "They're building lots of houses and there isn't the infrastructure."

Other (2 mentions)

7% of respondents mentioned other issues.

- "It's not like it was before. People are depressed. I don't usually come down to the High Street."
- "I can't walk around, too hilly areas or areas with steps."

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. 19 people out of the 27 respondents (**70%**) said that where they live does have a negative impact on them and 6 respondents (**23%**) said that it does not. 2 respondents (**7%**) did not answer. Some respondents specified multiple negative impacts. *Figure **4*** shows the specified negative impacts of the area.
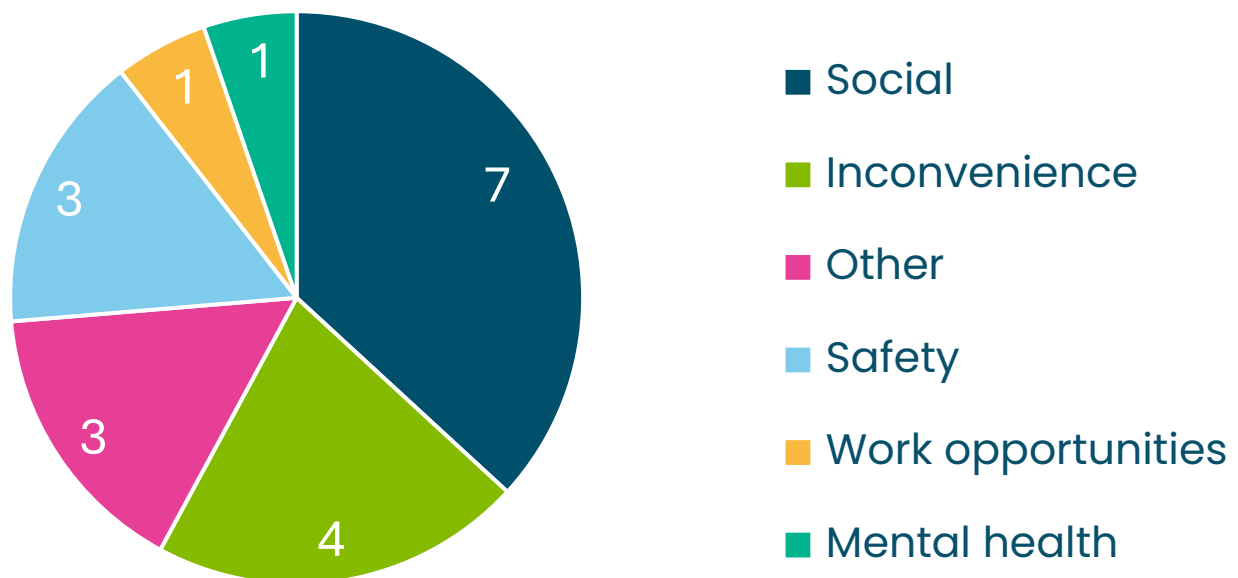

Figure 4 – Number of mentions by negative impact

Social Impact (7 mentions)

26% of people mentioned where they live can be isolating.

- "You know there will be problems if you go out. So, you avoid meeting up, even if it's a simple meet up."
- "Sometimes you'd like to just go and have a drink on a weekend, but usually you avoid Rochester High Street."
- "It makes me not want to come out and I won't come out on an evening on my own and especially not on a Friday or Saturday night."

Inconvenience (4 mentions)

15% spoke about the negative impact of inconvenience.

- "It is difficult to plan journeys and if you get stuck in a traffic jam, the children can fall asleep at the wrong time, which has consequences for the rest of the day."
- "When my child was ill it was really difficult to get to see the doctor, and we ended up going back and forth to the health visitor when we really just needed to see the doctor."

Other (3 mentions)

11% of people mentioned other issues, such as financial burden and the negative impact on those wanting to visit the area.

- "It has a negative impact on me because I quite often end up going back to London, which means that I have to spend more money getting the train there and back plus the cost of the meal."
- "The rubbish gives a bad impression of the local area."

Safety (3 mentions)

11% of people mentioned feeling unsafe.

- "I feel people have not been heard. Why can't this road be speed reduced? I am alert all the time. Is everyone and myself safe?"
- "[Rough sleepers] sometimes damage the car. It is just a nuisance, and I would like it to stop"

Work opportunities (1 mention)

4% of people mentioned the impact on work opportunities.

- "It means I have to find a more local job as I don't drive."

Mental health (1 mention)

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

- "It makes me want to cry...and when you go out no-one speaks to you."

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* shows the number of mentions by response. 1 respondent said nothing, and 1 did not answer.
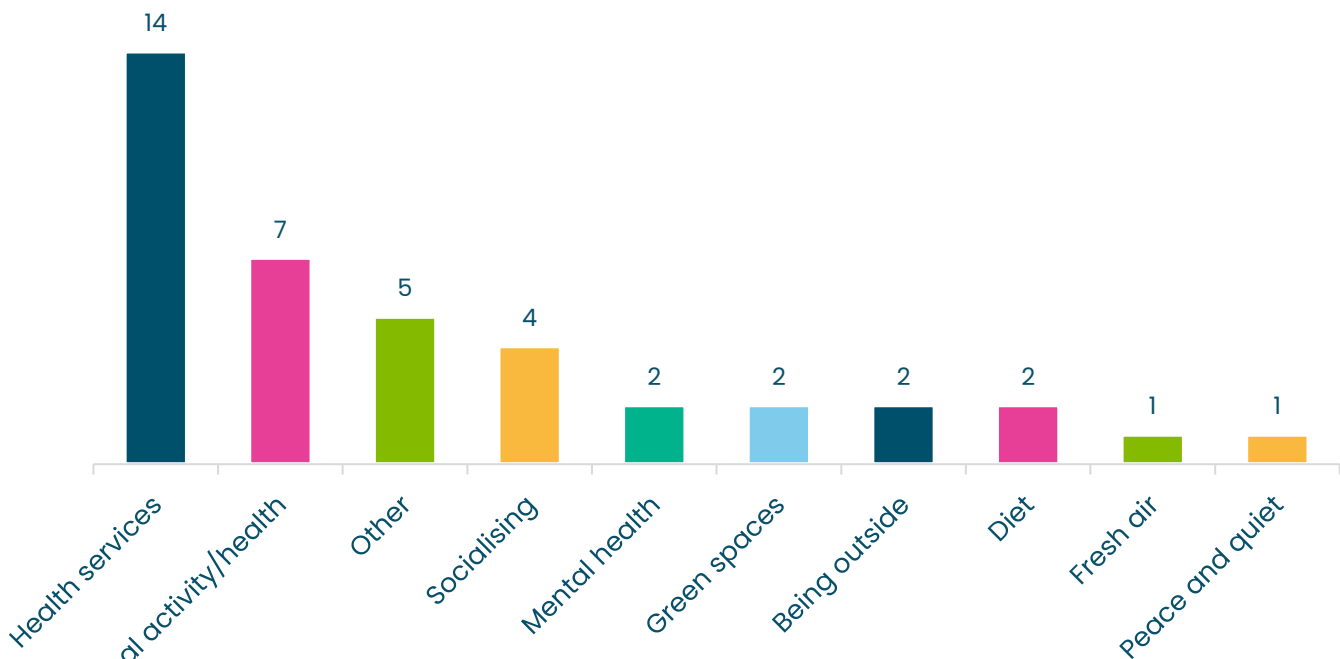

Figure 5 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "When you think of health and wellbeing, what comes to mind?"

Health services (14 mentions)

52% of people mentioned health services as something that comes to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

- "Private health insurance. My [loved one] died a couple of years ago, he was given a diagnosis but because they had to wait two weeks to see this person, two weeks to see that person, they didn't get the treatment quickly enough and within five weeks they were dead. Since then, I took out private health insurance as the NHS can't be relied upon and the waiting times for treatment or to see specialists are too long."

- "Trying to get into Medway hospital. It's so bad my son is paying privately for blood tests and health care."
- "Health care service is poor. If something happens to me tomorrow, would I be taken care of?"

Physical activity/Health (7 mentions)

26% of respondents mentioned physical activity and physical health as something that comes to mind when they think of health and wellbeing.

- "Walking the dog. I hate sitting indoors, but there's too much rubbish, so I don't go out for a walk."
- "I think about being able to get out and about and go on nice walks."

Other (5 mentions)

19% mentioned other things that they associate with health and wellbeing.

- "Enjoying your life can affect your health and wellbeing quite a lot. Because I am retired I can pick and choose which parts of society I take part in."
- "I think the mental health and wellbeing is good there's libraries there's a good adult education centre although I do believe the council is running out of money."

Socialising (4 mentions)

15% mentioned that they associate socialising with health and wellbeing.

- "Social activities and groups. As I said the walking group is not only good for the exercise but for all the chats that go on and the extra things we do like going away or out for the day to different places."
- "Being able to walk and talk and socialise."

Mental health (2 mentions)

7% mentioned mental health.

- "Practical philosophy classes, mindfulness."

Green spaces (2 mentions)

7% associated green spaces with health and wellbeing.

- "[I think about] the green spaces."

Being outside (2 mentions)

7% mentioned being outside as something that comes to mind when thinking of health and wellbeing.

- "Walking and hiking; getting out in the wild."
- "Being outdoors and outdoor activities."

Diet (2 mentions)

7% of people mentioned diet.

- "Enjoying your life, living in the moment and eating healthy."

Fresh air (1 mention)

4% of people mentioned fresh air.

- "Being able to have windows open and fresh air coming indoors."

Peace and quiet (1 mention)

4% of people associated health and wellbeing with peace and quiet.

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. 5 people said, 'don't know/nothing'.
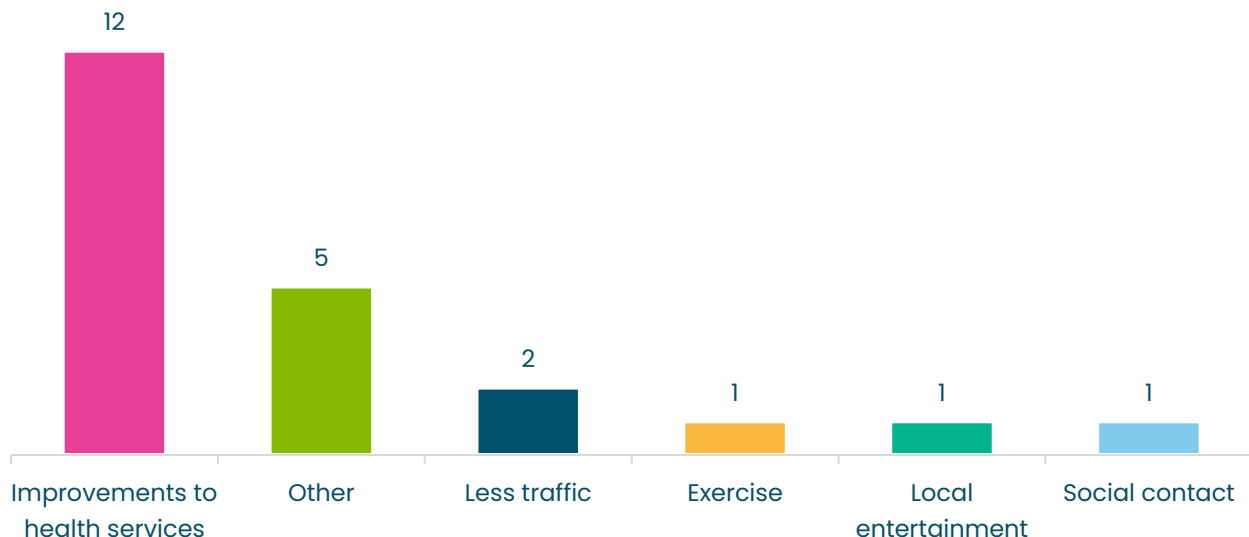
Figure 6 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What would help you to improve your health and wellbeing?"

Improvements to health services (12 mentions)

44% mentioned that improvements to health services would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "I have a good GP surgery, but there is no continuity. If you get sent for tests, you can look at your NHS app to see the results, but a GP or anyone doesn't follow up on the issues whether that be straightaway or in six months time. And there is no continuity, so you feel like you are going round in circles as you have to explain to each GP what the issues are."
- "All the surgeries used to run a well-man and well-woman clinic every year, but that doesn't happen anymore. You only go to see people when you are unwell. It would be able to see somebody before you're ill. Something more like prevention care once a year would be good."
- "Having responsive services really helps your stress. Mental health is such a big thing and Covid had such an effect. People generally have so much to deal with."
- "It would be less anxiety provoking in the health service was better."

Other (5 mentions)

19% mentioned other things that would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "A four-day working week."
- "Our housing development has just been left unfinished and the work on it seems to be never ending."
- "Good open green spaces, space to walk and breathe and think."

Less traffic (2 mentions)

7% mentioned that if there was less traffic, that would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "There's a lot of traffic so it'd be good if there was less traffic around cause I worry about breathing in the fumes from the vehicles."
- "Reducing the amount of traffic in the area due to breathing in all the fumes when walking."

Exercise (1 mention)

4% mentioned that exercise would improve their health and wellbeing.

Local entertainment (1 mention)

4% mentioned that more local entertainment would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "More things for young people to do so they can get off the streets. There's things to do up to about the age of 10, but nothing for older children. The Gaming Bus worked well, but that's closed down now. Schools don't help, there's poor behaviour and a lack of respect in schools and so kids are like that outside school."

Social contact (1 mention)

4% mentioned that more social contact would improve their health and wellbeing.

- "Having more social contact being able to let the children play out where we live would be nice where I am originally from the children can all play outside our houses but that is not the case here in the UK."

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. 1 person did not answer
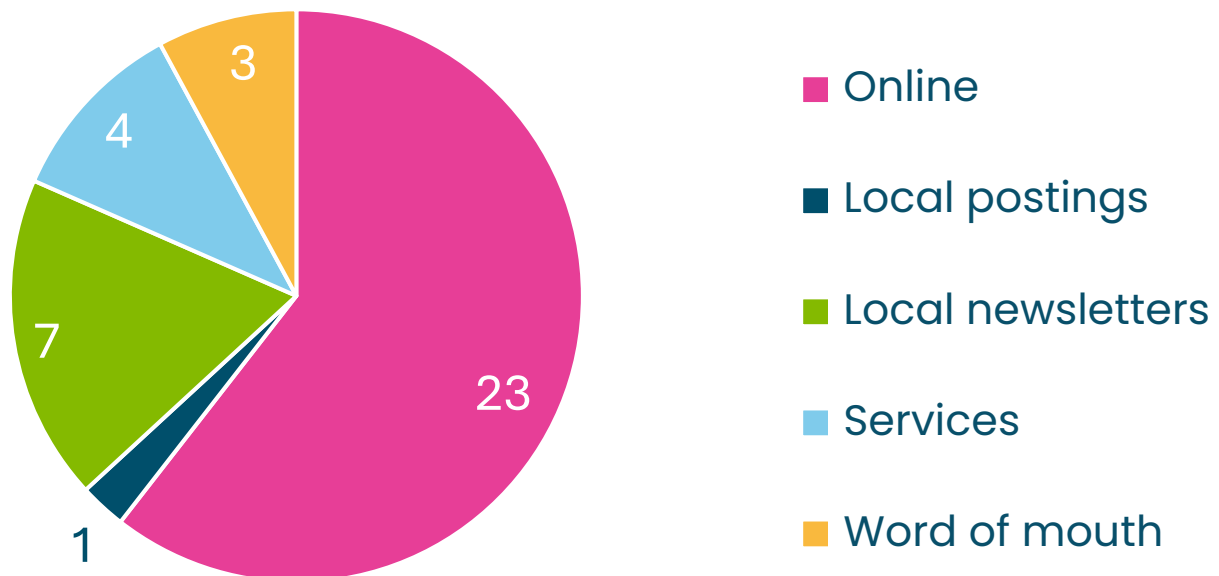

Online — 23
Local postings — 1
Local newsletters — 7
Services — 4
Word of mouth — 3

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

Online (23 mentions)

85% of people mentioned they would go online for information about what is happening locally, with **19%** specifically mentioning Facebook sites.

- "Facebook/social media, Kent Online."
- "I just use the Internet, Bing."
- "On my phone, onto Google, but I don't use social media."
- "Council pages online. Health, NHS online. Practice's own website."
- "Online. You can't talk to anyone to get information anymore."

Local newsletters (7 mentions)

26% get their local information through local newsletters.

- "Medway Matters booklet comes through the door too, which is how we found out about the armed forces parade on VE Day."
- "I get a magazine called 'The Net' and Medway Matters."

Services (4 mentions)

15% said they would look to services to find out local information. 2 people said that they used to go to the information centre in Rochester but it has now been closed.

- "I used to go to the information centre in Rochester but it has been closed down."
- "Rochester hub in the library."

Word of mouth (2 mentions)

7% said that they would find out what is happening locally through word of mouth.

- "Along the high street. Everything you need is here. If I wanted to know something I would find somebody, stand still and ask a person."

Local postings (1 mention)

4% said that they would find out what is happening locally through word of mouth.

- "Quite often for big events there's banners on the High Street telling you what's going on."

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. 1 person did not answer and 1 person said 'nothing'.
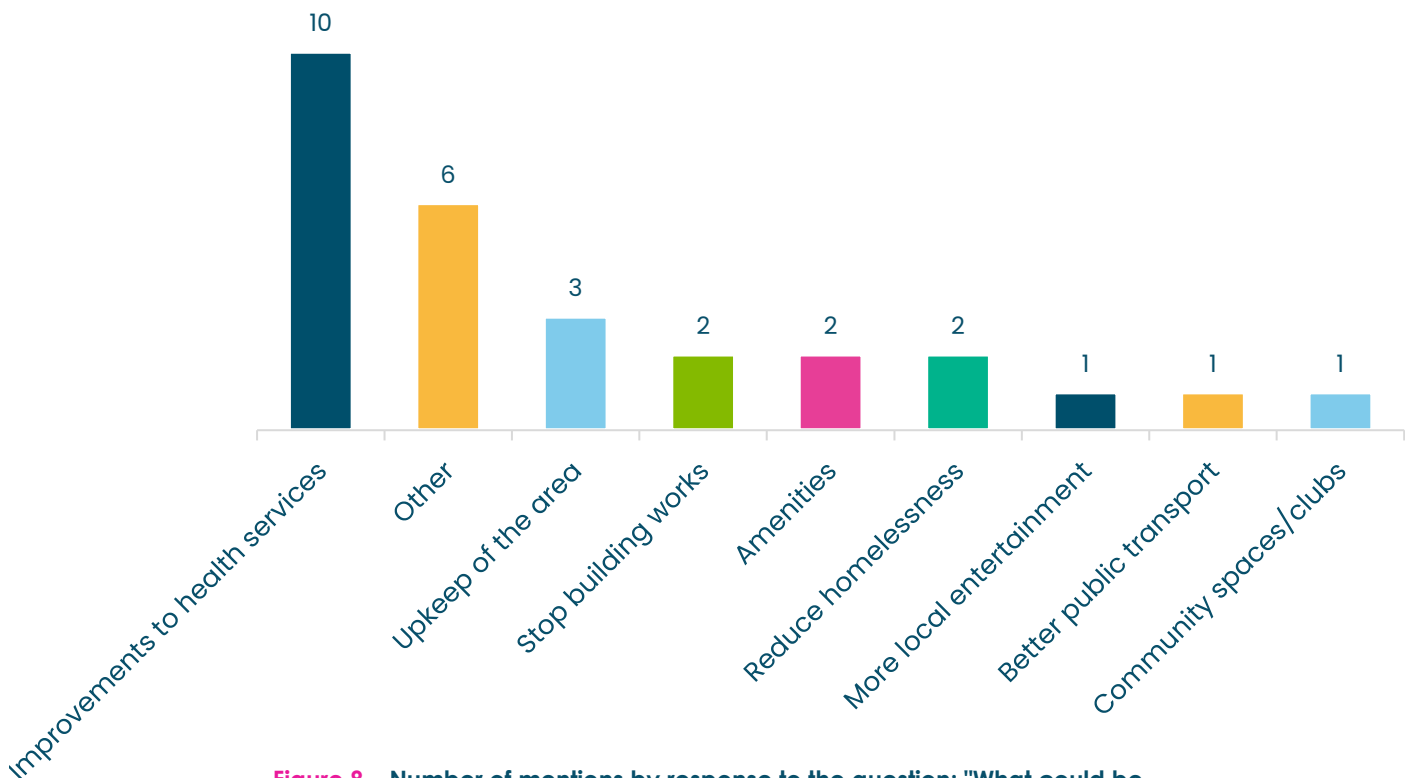

Figure 8 – Number of mentions by response to the question: "What could be done to promote health and wellbeing within your community?

Improvements to health services (10 mentions)

37% said that improvements to health services could promote health and wellbeing for their community.

- "Having more hospitals and being able to find cures for diseases."
- "Build a new hospital."
- "Have walk-in centres."
- "Having more GPs, so that you can get a GP appointment when you need one."
- "There needs to be more access to GPS and dentists and more staff at the hospital and more training and pay for the staff who work in there."

Other (6 mentions)

22% of people spoke about other ways to improve community health and wellbeing, such as food education.

- "We need to get people to be more active and educate them on how to cook properly from scratch. There are too many obese people relying on ready meals."
- "Minimise mobile phone usage and social media for children and young people. Focus on physical activity in the time that would be spent on screens. Encouraging young people to appreciate their surroundings."
- "Advise on the kind of food we should eat and persuade people to eat fresh, healthy food and to stop smoking."

Upkeep of the area (3 mentions)

11% of people told us better upkeep of the area would improve community health and wellbeing.

- "Better upkeep of the area. That would uplift people and motivate them to be better. Areas of natural beauty are so important, and we should do more to upkeep this."
- "Better upkeep of the area. If it was all clean, then people would be happier. Currently it's just a chore to go out."

Stop building works (2 mentions)

7% said that stopping building would improve health and wellbeing for their community.

- "I'd want to stop all the building work that is going on they seem to be putting up flats upon flats with no parking, and the theory is that people will use public transport but there isn't any or enough public transport for that."

Amenities (2 mentions)

7% said that more amenities would improve health and wellbeing for their community.

- "They need to put better facilities in to support families."

Reduce homelessness (2 mentions)

7% said that reducing homelessness would improve health and wellbeing for their community.

- "Address the housing shortage, particularly for the homeless."

More local entertainment (1 mention)

4% said that more local entertainment would promote health and wellbeing for their community.

- "Having more events for families especially if they were free during school holidays and at weekends."

Better public transport (1 mention)

4% told us that better public transport would promote health and wellbeing for their community.

- "It'd be lovely to have more buses, more frequently, that run later and that go past 5:00 o'clock on a Sunday; if you go out, you won't necessarily get back, therefore you do need to have your own means of transport and sometimes I don't want to drive but I have to."

Community spaces/clubs (1 mention)

4% told us that community spaces/clubs would promote health and wellbeing for their community.

- "Medway Council is very good, and there are lots of healthy walks to do and groups to join if you look. But may be some people might need encouraging or have someone to introduce them to a group if they are shy."

Demographics

- **Age**: The largest response was from people aged 65-74 (**33%**). The least common response was from people aged 35-44 and 85-94 (each at **4%**). The full range of ages is shown in *Figure **9***.
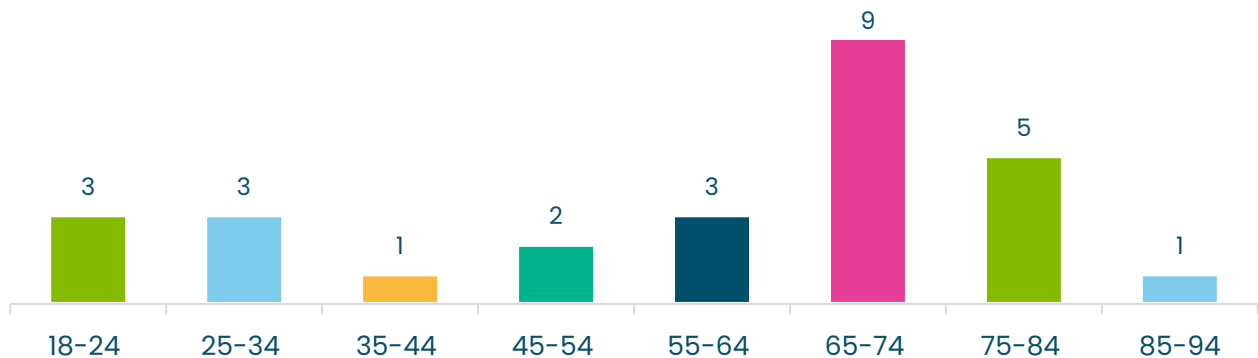

Figure 9 – Number of participants by age

- **Gender**: **70%** of participants identified as female and **30%** identified as male. **100%** of participants' gender identity was the same as their sex recorded at birth.

- **Sexual orientation**: **94%** of participants identified as heterosexual/straight, **3%** identified as bisexual, **3%** preferred not to say.

- **Ethnicity**: **63%** were White/White British, **11%** were from other white backgrounds (Armenian, Bulgarian and South African), **4%** were Black British, **4%** were Asian British, and **4%** were African. **14%** did not answer.

- **English as a first language: 89%** of participants told us that English was their first language, **11%** told us that their first language was not English (Tagalong, Bulgarian and Armenian).

- **Religion: 26%** of participants told us they were Christian, **44%** told us they have no religion, **15%** told us they were Catholic, **4%** told us that they were agnostic, **7%** told us that they had another religion, and **4%** did not answer.

- **Disability**: **7%** reported having a disability.

- **Long-term health conditions**: **19%** of participants reported having a long-term health condition.

- **Mental Health: 4%** 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 were retired (**56%**). The full range of employment status is shown in *Figure 10*.
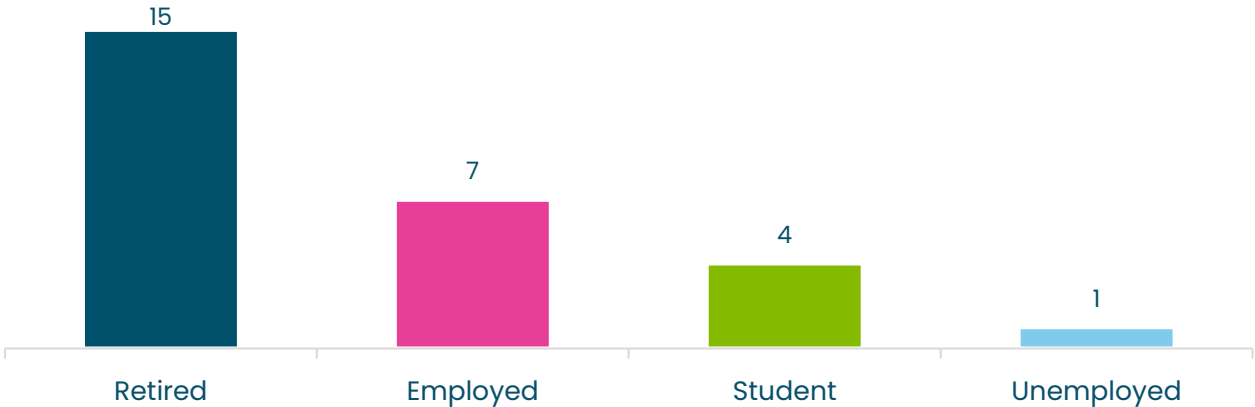

Figure 10 – Number of participants by employment status

- **Financial status:** The largest response was from people who told us that they never struggle to pay for basic necessities (**70%**). The full range of financial status responses is provided in *Figure 11*.
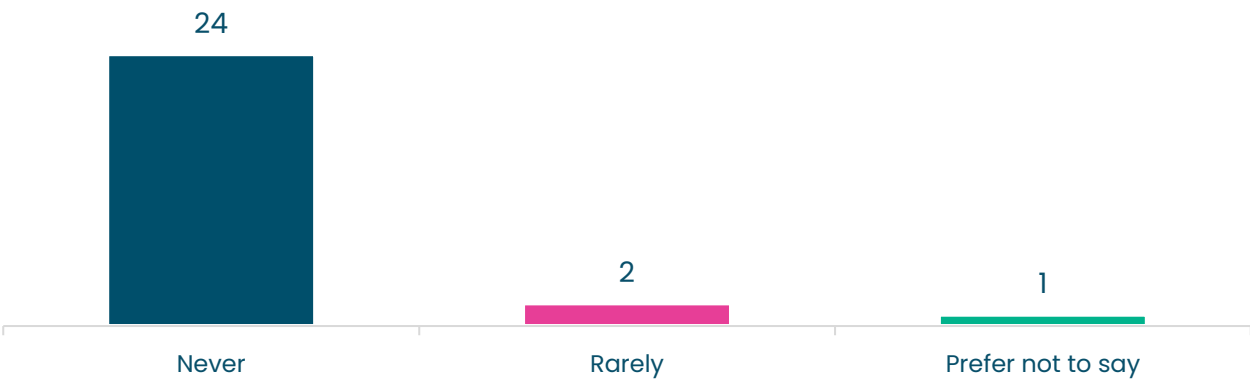

Figure 11 – Number of participants by responses to the question: "In the past six months, have you struggled to pay for basic necessities?"

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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By Text:
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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