CONSULTANCY REPORT

Prepared for Charlton Kings Parish Council

Abstract

From Pandemic to Endemic – a post-lockdown investigation into the health & well-being of young people in Charlton Kings.

by Mrs Emily Vincent, Chartered Psychologist
BSc (Hons) PGCE, MSc Educational Psychology
www.educationalpsychologist-glos.co.uk

Contents

Brief/Introduction

The Charlton Kings Parish Council (CKPC) serves Charlton Kings, a community to the south of Cheltenham that encompasses four primary schools, and two secondary schools, including Balcarras, who partnered with us in this investigation into the post-pandemic health and well-being of young people in Charlton Kings.

The investigation is a core element of the CK Health Connect Project, which was launched by Charlton Kings Parish Council in 2019, following concerns about loneliness and isolation in the parish, which has an increasingly elderly population, many of whom no longer have family living with them. Following community research, and the subsequent arrival of the pandemic, it was established that further work on equality of access to services was needed for many of our residents, across all age-groups. It emerged that connecting with local support groups and outreach community services within neighbourhoods is critical to optimal health and well-being.

A post-lockdown Adult Community Survey was conducted in May 2021 by the CK Health Connect 'Core Group' team, followed up by a decision to replicate this with young people of secondary school age. The focus was an investigation into the specific post-lockdown challenges for young people. The following research question was decided upon:

What are young people telling us about how they are doing right now, and how might we, as adults, respond to their needs? (Home, School, Community).

I was asked to assist in compiling a survey of Balcarras School pupils with the objective of understanding and exploring what additional support young people might value from parents, the wider Charlton Kings community, councils and government. The aim was to assess the tools they might need to successfully navigate the uncertainties and challenges they face, including the impact of Covid-19.

This report summarises the process used to compile and deliver the survey, the survey results, and recommendations for action going forward to help meet this objective. The report is organised under the subheadings of 'Local Context', 'National Context', 'Method; what we did and why?', 'Key Findings' and 'Conclusion and Recommendations'.

This work has been carried out in partnership with Councillor Lynda Johnson, CK Health Connect Project Lead with the Parish Council, and Mark Constance, Year Head and Covid Recovery Strategy Lead at Balcarras School.

Local Context

2018: Community open meeting to look at loneliness and isolation.

2019/20: Research & development of a Directory of health services, support groups, social/recreational activities across CK and beyond. A Directory was published.

Report published on gaps in services around five key areas of physical health, mental health, transport & mobility, digital inclusion, and families & young people. Recognition of the need for more research regarding young people and young families, in particular a need to understand what the residents and the local service providers/group leaders require to navigate through the Covid-19 transition period and successfully re-engage with the community once restrictions are eased.

May 2021: Post-lockdown Adult Community Survey: see full report at: https://www.charltonkingsparishcouncil.gov.uk/uploads/post-covid-transition-ck-health-connect-survey-website.pdf

The adult online Health & Wellbeing Survey was part of a wider strategy to support the community to successfully transition out of Covid-19 and to 'sense check' some of the recommendations arising out of earlier research conducted on its behalf. The survey was targeted at people aged 18-75. Four key questions were asked:

1. *What things have you found the most challenging for you or members of your family throughout Covid-19?*

2. *What positives have there been, if any, for you or members of your family throughout the last year of Covid-19?*

3. *What are you most looking forward to after lockdown?*

4. *What supports do you think are needed for you, your family, and your community?*

June 2021: From the adult survey, a key question arose. How can we build on these foundations and even create new ones to support ALL of our young people in Charlton Kings? The idea of a CK Health Connect Young People's Survey was initiated. The Parish Council wished to find out what young people are telling us about their experiences post-lockdown and what they need from adults to enhance their health and well-being.

November 2021: Post-lockdown Young People Survey; a dual focus on what young people tell us is worrying them and creating anxiety, but also listening to what they tell us about any strong foundations and resources (Home, School, Community) some say they already have in their lives to feel happy and secure.

November 2021: Community open meeting to feed-back initial results of the youth survey and to engage with the wider community as to how to respond to the needs of young people

Rise in mental health issues

The CK Health Connect Project has been conducted within the context of various other surveys and reports, which were carried out at national level throughout pandemic-related lockdowns. For background information, I refer to a few of the more relevant surveys below, which point to evidence of a national rise in mental health issues for young people due to the pandemic.

According to NHS data:

"*The mental health of children and young people in England has worsened since 2017. Even before the pandemic, children and young people were facing a mental health crisis. Although children and young people under 25 have always had to deal with personal identity issues in formative years, risks to mental health have been greatly exacerbated by heightened academic expectations and the ubiquity of social media*" (Children and young people's mental health, House of Commons Committee report), (December 2021).

- A study report (September 2021) funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, commissioned by NHS Digital, found that one in six children in England had a probable mental disorder in 2021 - similar to 2020, and up from one in nine in 2017.
- Nearly 40% of six to 16-year-olds, and half of 17 to 23-year-olds, said they felt their mental health had worsened over that time. Girls were more affected than boys.
- The proportion of children and young people with possible eating problems has increased since 2017; from 6.7% to 13.0% in 11 to 16-year-olds, and from 44.6% to 58.2% in 17 to 19-year-olds.
- Problems with sleep on three or more nights of the previous seven affected over a quarter (28.7%) of 6 to 10-year-olds, over a third (38.4%) of 11 to 16-year-olds, and over half (57.1%) of 17 to 23-year-olds. Across all age groups, figures were much higher in those with a probable mental disorder (59.5%, 74.2%, and 86.7% respectively).
- The figures are based on questions asked to more than 3,600 children and young people in 2017, 2020 and March 2021 about their family lives, including family connectedness and family functioning, schooling, access to resources, and feelings.

Similar findings have been reported by YoungMinds, a mental health charity for children and young people, which carried out four surveys. The fourth survey, of 2,438 young people aged 13-25 with a history of mental health problems, during the January 2021 national lockdown, assessed the impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health.

It found that the pandemic was affecting not only those with existing mental health needs but was also causing a second cohort of children and young people to begin to experience early struggles. YoungMinds reported that 80% of children and young people interviewed said that the Covid-19 pandemic was having a detrimental effect on their mental health.

Although the CK Health Connect Youth Survey was not commissioned to investigate existing mental health issues exclusively, it was clearly of interest to listen to and understand from young people what were key health & well-being stressors for them over the last 18 months, 2020/21. It was also of interest to understand the factors and circumstances which lead to the mitigation of such stressors – what worries young people and what makes them happy.

Children's Commissioner's Big Ask

In March 2021 and with a similar remit to our own much smaller survey, The Children's Commissioner launched 'the 'Big Ask' – a national survey of England's children. The survey was open to any child in England aged 4—17 and was launched online between April and May 2021, to capture their views coming out of lockdown.

Over half a million responses were analysed and key results indicated that what children want is remarkably consistent: a good home life, a good education, a job, enough money, friends, to feel well, to be treated fairly, and to look after the environment.

The report highlights:

"This generation have suffered during the pandemic – especially the vulnerable – and made many sacrifices. Learning time lost, cut off from friends and play, supporting struggling parents and siblings, enduring lockdown in homes that are not safe. When asked if there were spheres of life where they wanted to be happier, the main issues were remarkably consistent across all groups: things to do in their local area, experience of school, mental health. Growing up in a world worried about fairness, about the environment, about coronavirus, they are a generation that does feel burdened with a sense of inherited problems.

But they are determined to put the pandemic behind them, to recover well, to get back to school and make good lives for themselves... After lockdown heightened our collective awareness of managing wellbeing, they are newly conscious of the components of being healthy and happy. They want to spend more time outside, and invest in and improve their local areas. They want to participate in more activities. They care…about creating happier families, neighbourhoods, schools, and communities – both local and national… They simply need adults to notice, and to help lift what burdens they can."

Overall, The Big Ask pointed to a vision of supporting children that fell into six key areas.

- ➢ Families. Children told us how much they care about their family, whatever form the family unit takes.
- ➢ Children and community. They want things to do – activities in their local area that are fun and sustaining. They want their lives to be made safer. They want to be treated fairly and to feel part of something larger than themselves – a caring, engaged community.
- ➢ Health and wellbeing. Children told us about how much they care about feeling happy and well. This is a generation newly conscious of the artificial dichotomy between mental and physical health. They want to be able to rely on the NHS to be there for them when they need it.
- ➢ Schools. Children in England care passionately about being able to go to school again. They find school challenging but fulfilling. They do not expect rewards without hard work. However, they do expect to be truly supported, especially given the extent of the demands placed upon them.
- ➢ Work. Children from all over the country told us how determined they are to get on and do well. This is an ambitious generation.
- ➢ Children in care. Children in care share the same hopes and aspirations as their peers.

Method: What We Did (and Why)

The draft survey

Using prior research to inform the questionnaire, a draft survey entitled 'Supporting Young People in Charlton Kings' was drawn up in June 2021 by Lynda Johnson and me with the objective of surveying young people about their lives, what supports they might need, and how the community might help to support them to transition from Covid-19 restrictions. This was a necessary post-pandemic follow-up to the adult community survey, conducted earlier in 2021, and which did not include the voices of young people. The proposal was taken to council members in September 2021 for comment.

Amendments were made in the light of feedback from Councillors Rob Reid and Ned Holt, in particular a widening of the objective and therefore scope of the survey beyond Covid-19 to reflect the varied challenges that young people must cope with. The questionnaire was developed to include topics such as the environment and climate change, thinking about the future, the impact of social media, and money issues.

The objective was:

'To survey young people about life in their teenage years and what additional support they might value from parents, the wider Charlton Kings community, councils and government. The aim was to assess and develop the tools they might need to successfully navigate the uncertainties and challenges they face, including the impact of Covid-19.'

The final survey

The survey structure was adapted to provide an opportunity to gather the young people's ideas on the positives of lockdown, as well as any worries, through students selecting all topics that may have affected them. Additional comments boxes on some questions (questions 2,4, 5 and 6) provided an opportunity for qualitative open-ended feedback. The survey was approved in October 2021 by the Senior Management Team at Balcarras School, and transferred to an online platform. Students completed the survey during October/November 2021. At that point, they had been back in school for at least a full term after the final lockdown.

We asked…

1. *What things have made you sad or worried over the last few weeks?*
2. *From the list, what are your main worries and what is it about these worries that concerns you?*
3. *What has made you happy or excited in the last few weeks?*
4. *Which are the most important things for you and your wellbeing? Tell us a bit more about this.*
5. *What are the top three things that adults in your life could do (school, home, community, councils and government) to help you and your wellbeing as a young person? What do you need from us?*
6. *Is there anything else you wish to tell us?*

Sample

We surveyed a sample of approximately 10% (110 pupils) of the school enrolment through tutor groups across Years 8/9/10, aged 12-15 years; (93 respondents - 52 females, 41 males), and Sixth Form students aged 16/17; (a further 17 respondents – 9 females, 8 males).

Introduction of the survey

The survey was introduced to students via a PowerPoint presentation, originally planned to be presented by the project partners in October 2021. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, form tutors were invited to present instead. An opportunity was given to staff members to ask any questions in advance of presenting the PowerPoint.

The PowerPoint introduction had the following aims:

➢ To introduce the local context; CK Health Connect, a Charlton Kings Parish Council initiative, and the outcome of a recently distributed adult survey to CK residents.
➢ To provide reassurance to the young people that their survey answers would remain confidential; our guarantees to them were trust, confidentiality and feedback.
➢ To put the survey into a national context, by sharing relevant infographics* and sharing insights from Barnardo's survey of 150 children and young people.
➢ To invoke thought about the questions and topics that would be covered by the survey, to encourage validity in their answers.

*The infographics on Page 8 were chosen to provoke thoughts about individuals' experiences and feelings during lockdown (e.g. figures 1 and 2), and to encourage them to think widely about how the adults in their lives might help them achieve their hopes and meet their needs (figure 3). Notes were also provided to staff on key questions and discussion prompts that could be introduced to invoke thought about what was on the minds of pupils as they transitioned from lockdown.

Figure 1: Family Lives Survey on Mental Health During the Pandemic.

Figure 2: Image from Cospace Oxford Survey summarising key findings in behaviour changes.

Figure 3: Five ways to wellbeing, an evidenced-based model.

Helen Johnston, Administrative Officer at CKPC, formatted the survey and uploaded it to Freeonlinesurveys.com. This also allowed results to be compiled.

Results are organised under each of the six survey questions:

1. What things have made you sad or worried over the last few weeks?
2. From the list, what are your main worries and what is it about these worries that concerns you?
3. What has made you happy or excited in the last few weeks?
4. Which are the most important things for you and your wellbeing? Tell us a bit more about this.
5. What are the top three things that adults in your life could do (school, home, community, councils and government) to help you and your wellbeing as a young person? What do you need from us?
6. Is there anything else you wish to tell us?

1. What things have made you sad or worried over the last few weeks?

Figure 4: Number of respondents and areas that students felt worried or sad about.

Students could tick multiple areas, so the number of students indicating a particular response may be more helpful to look at than the percentage.
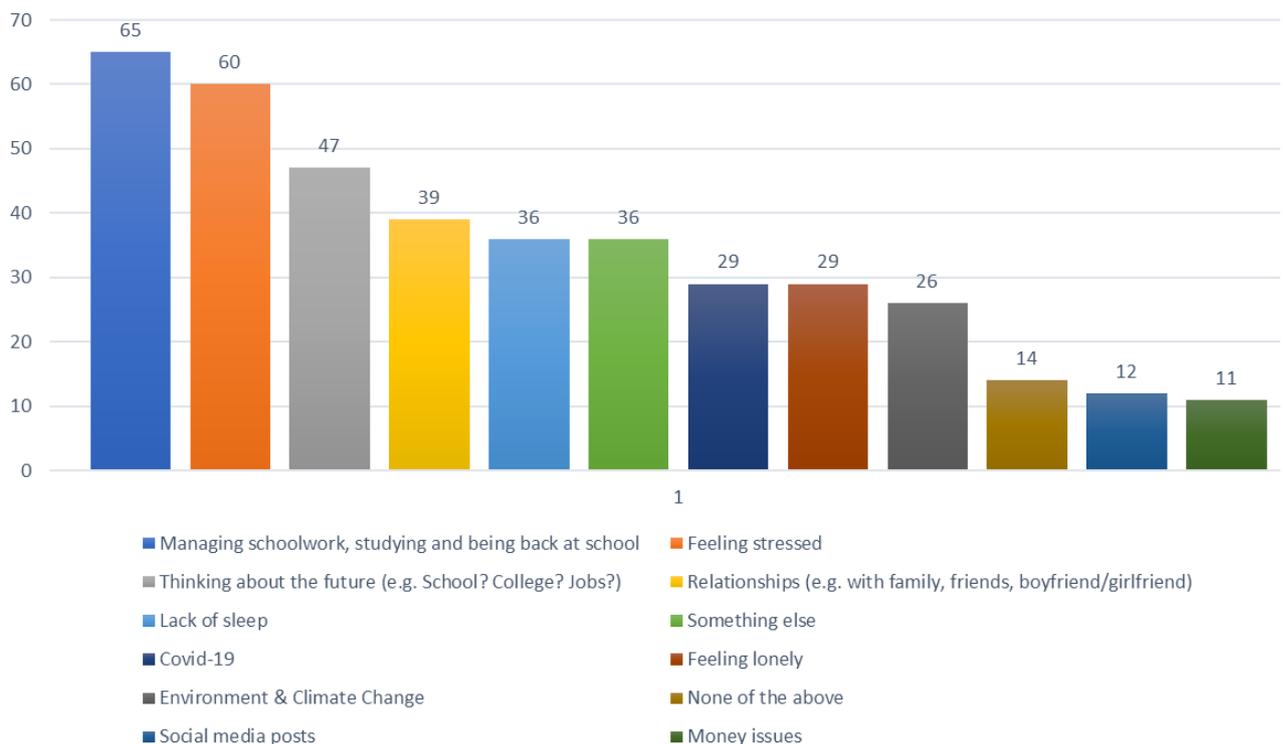
65/110 of the pupils surveyed (60%) mentioned managing homework, studying or being back at school as making them sad or worried in the last few weeks.
60/110 (56%) identified with feeling stressed. We did not ask them to expand on their feelings here, but further information is outlined under question 2.

47/110 of the pupils surveyed (44%) had worried or felt sad about the future. This can be broken down into 59% of the 16/17-year-olds that had felt worried about the future, and 41% of the 12-15-year-olds. This finding might be expected due to the 16/17-year-olds being closer to leaving school.

39/110 (36%) worried or felt sad about relationships, whether that be with family, friends or partners.

36/110 respondents (33%) had been worried about lack of sleep. Of the 36 pupils reporting worries about sleep, this was analysed further according to the two age groups. 28% of the younger age group (aged 12-15 years) reported having difficulties with sleep compared with 59% of the 16-17-year-old age group. The older pupils clearly have more concerns about sleep, possibly related to exam worries or worries regarding their future. This is reflective of national findings.

36/110 (33%) had been worried or sad about something else, for which there was no opportunity for them to expand on that at this point.

29/110 (27%) had felt worried or sad about feeling lonely.

29/110 (27%) had felt worried about Covid-19.

26/110 (24%) had worried about the environment and climate change. Further comment is provided in question 2.

14/110 (13%) had not worried about any of the areas listed.

12/110 (11%) had worried about social media posts and 11/110 (10%) about money issues.

2. From the list, what are your main worries and what is it about these worries that concerns you?

Students outlined their key worry using their own words. Some pupils did not answer the question at all. There were 100 pupils that answered, each providing one key worry. These fell into several different categories, as shown in the pie chart overleaf.

Figure 5: Pie chart showing percentage of students and areas of worry.
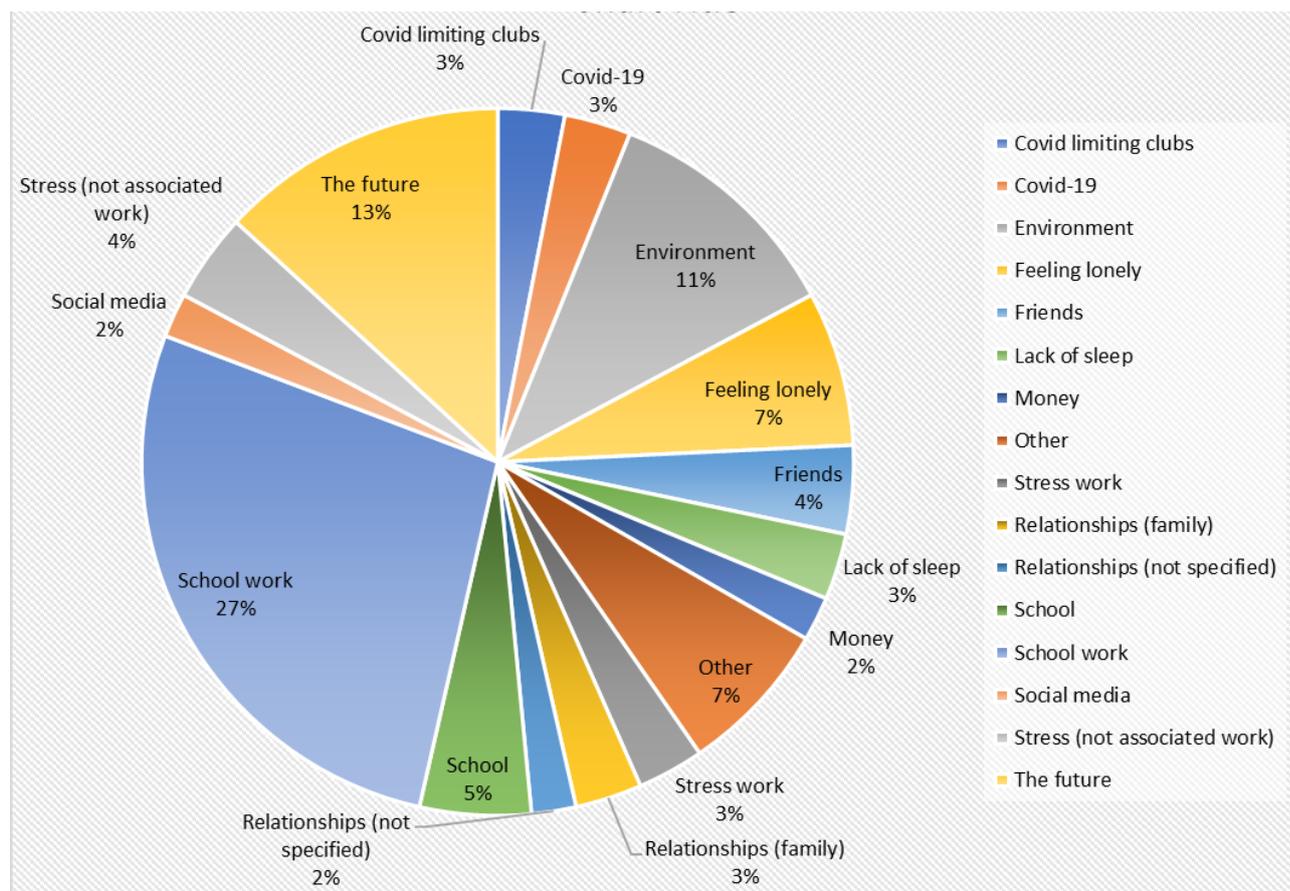
The answers are detailed below:
27% Schoolwork.
13% The future.
11% The environment.
7% Feeling lonely.
5% School.
4% Relationships with friends.
4% Stress (not related to schoolwork).
3% Covid-19.
3% Covid limiting clubs.
3% Lack of sleep.
3% Stress/pressure to do with schoolwork/tests.
3% Relationships with family.
3% Other relationships.
2% Social media posts.

7% of pupils provided 'other' answers, which were individual answers ranging from 'everything', 'tests', 'socialising', 'mental health' to 'losing a loved one'.

Not indicated on the pie chart were four pupils that said nothing worried them or they gave no response. Six pupils said they didn't know.

]Not all pupils explained their choices, but a few themes could be identified to the top answers:

- ➤ 27% who had worries about schoolwork:

'Managing schoolwork, as I don't know whether I will be able to submit it on time and if the pile of my workload will decrease or not… feeling stressed due to workload and lots of things to do at the same time'.

'School, because I don't like it and sometimes I can't keep up with all the work'.

'Managing schoolwork, because I have lots of homework and a science test to revise for and I don't want it to get on top of me.'

- ➤ 13% who had concerns about the future:

Pupils worried about the future for a range of reasons; sometimes it was related to doing well in the future, but for others it was related to the recent pandemic or the pressures they felt.

'Thinking about the future, as I don't know whether I will be able to choose what I want to do and if I will be able to make the right choice for myself.'

'Thinking about the future, as other family members are quite successful and I often worry about whether I can be as successful as them.'

'I worry about not doing well in school and therefore not doing well in the future.'

'Covid-19, and thinking about the future because Covid could affect it.'

- ➤ 11% who had worries about climate change or the environment:

'My main worry would be the environment and climate change because not enough is being done and the consequences are irreversible.'

'I am worried about the environment and that we are changing our planet in ways we won't be able to reverse.'

- ➤ Feeling stressed. Stress was mentioned by only 7% as the main worry in question 2, but 56% rated 'feeling stressed' as a worry in question 1. When stress was mentioned, 3% associated it with schoolwork or tests and 4% felt stress for other reasons:

'Feeling stressed about my parent's money issues.'

Some mentioned that the thought of tests, exams and GCSEs was stressful:

'Stress, because of tests.'

For others, it was the act of getting a balance that was difficult and finding it all tiring.

'Feeling stressed, as I can't keep up with the level of homework given as I have extracurricular clubs on, which in my mind are more important'.

'Stress, because I do a lot and don't want it to become too much.'

'School is tiring as we get a lot of homework, and it can be very pressuring and stressful.'

3. What has made you happy or excited in the last few weeks?

Figure 6: Number of respondents and areas that students felt happy or excited about.
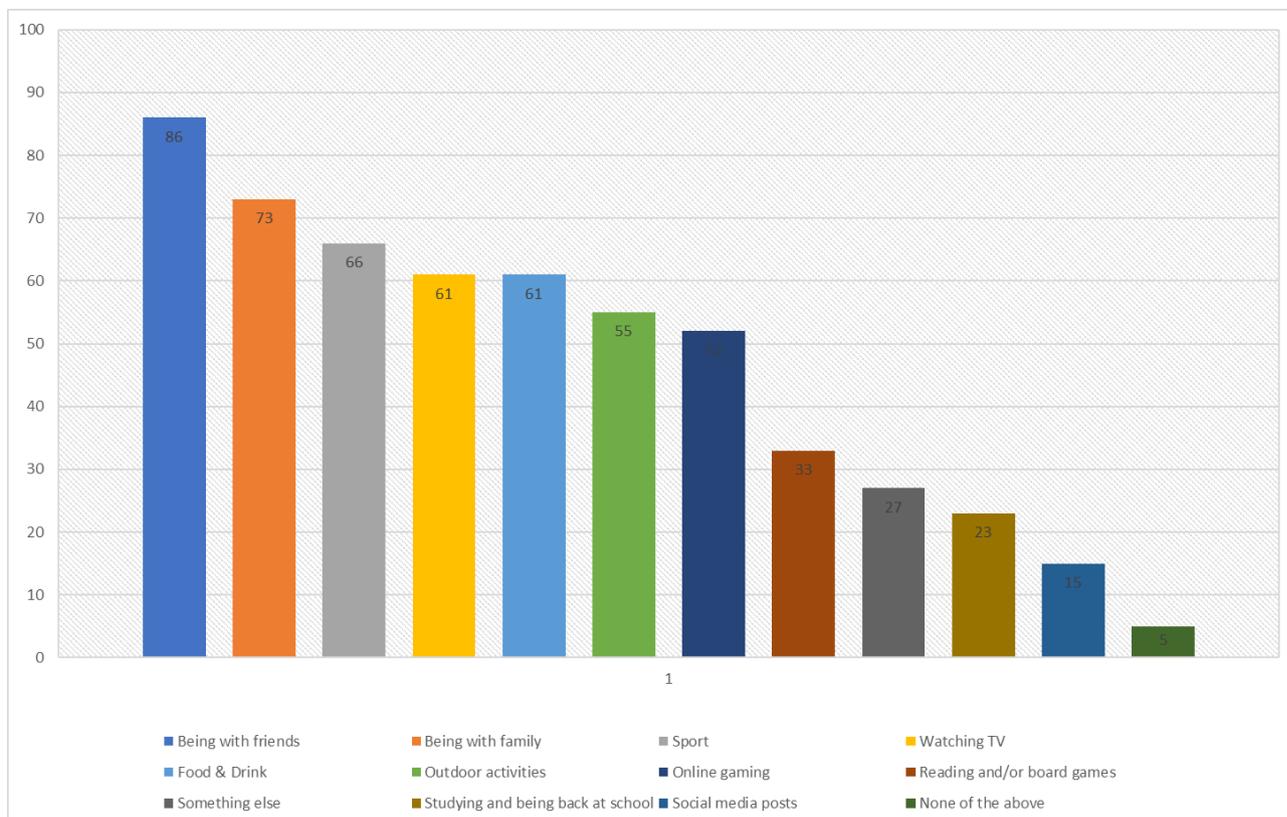
86 respondents indicated that being with friends made them happy or excited.
73 respondents said being with family made them happy or excited.
66 pupils said that sport made them happy or excited.
61 said watching TV, and 61 also mentioned food or drink, made them happy or excited.
55 said being outdoors made them happy or excited.
52 said online gaming was responsible.
33 of respondents said reading or board games made them happy.
27 indicated that it was something else that made them happy or excited.
23 said that being back at school and doing schoolwork made them happy.
15 respondents said social media posts made them happy or excited.
5 indicated that none of the areas listed made them happy or excited.

4. Which are the most important things for you and your wellbeing? Tell us a bit more about this.

The pie chart below illustrates what is most important to these young people's wellbeing, according to them. Where possible (when it did not rely on my own interpretation), these were grouped into similar themes.

Figure 7: Most important areas for wellbeing, shown as percentages.
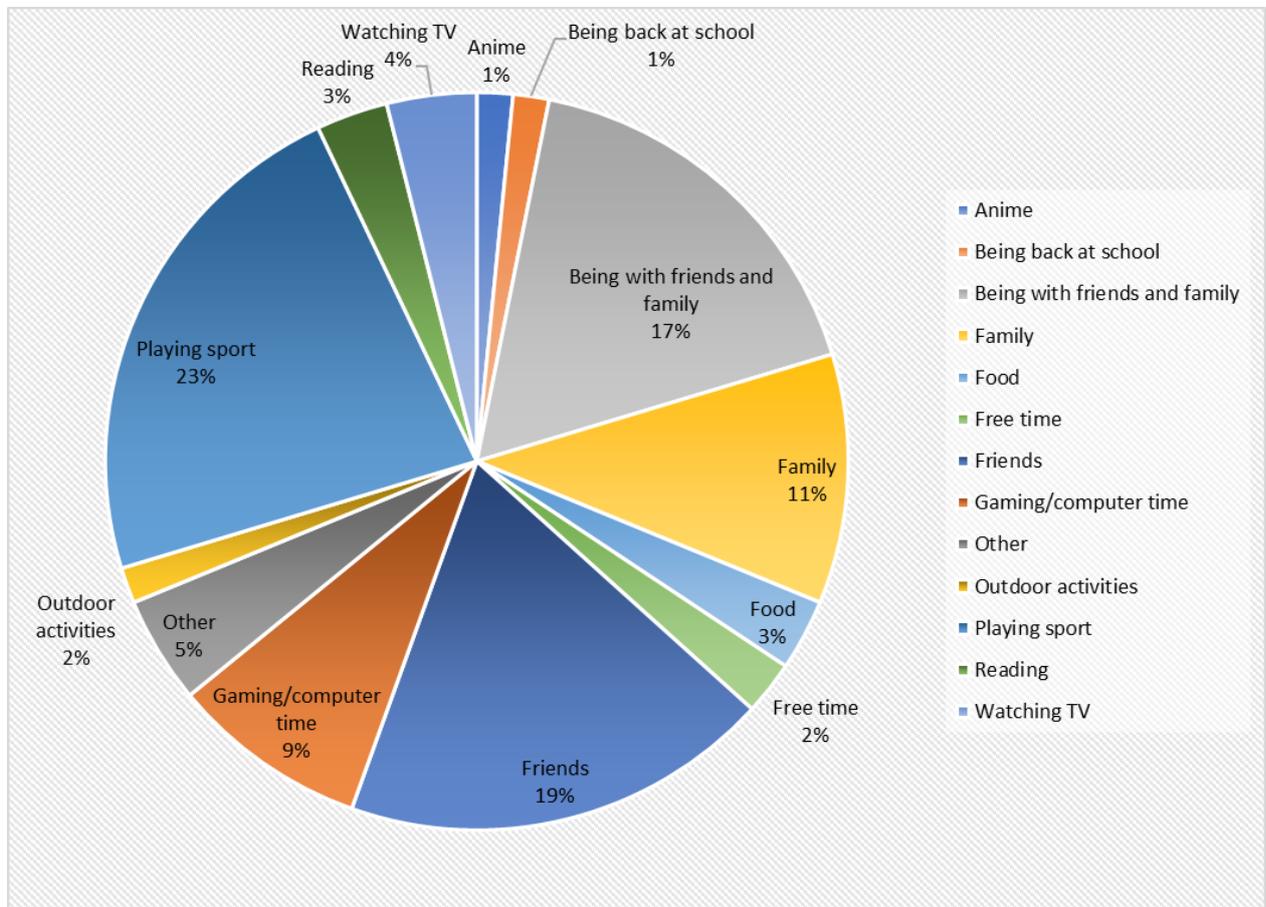
17% of pupils mentioned both friends and family as being the most important (22/128 responses), a further 11% (14/128) responded that family was important, and a further 19%

(24/128) mentioned friends as being the most important to them. Therefore, just under half of those surveyed (47%) indicated that friends and/or family were the most important thing for their wellbeing.

Many made additional comments about why family or friends were so important, with direct quotes shown in Figure 8. The same themes of 'happiness', 'relaxation', 'fun', 'comfort', 'support', 'safety', and 'security' were highlighted.

Figure 8: Quotes from young people explaining why family and friends are important.

'They make me feel relaxed.'

'They make me feel happy and connected.'

'They are fun to be with.'

'They are comforting.'

'They help my wellbeing and give me support when I need it.'

'They care for me and support me.'

'They are loving.'

'They know me best and make me feel better.'

'They make me happy.'

'They make me feel happy and wanted.'

'They make me feel safe.'

'I can share issues with them.'

'I feel I need validation and security from them.'

23% (29/128) felt playing sport was the most important thing for their wellbeing; many explained how it made them forget any problems or it was important to keep fit and healthy.

Figure 9: Quotes explaining why sport is important to young people.

'Takes my mind off things.'   'Keeps me fit.'

'Gets me outside.'   'Keeps me happy and healthy.'

'Makes me forget my problems.'

'Helps me to make friends and gives a sense of achievement.'

Keeps me healthy.'

9% said gaming/computer time was important, as you could 'connect with friends and have fun'.

Then a smaller number of responses were:
4% watching TV.
3% food and 3% reading.
2% having free time and 2% outdoor activities.
1% anime, and 1% being back at school.
5% Other (which included social media, YouTube, playing with animals, sleep, self-care).

5. What are the top three things that adults in your life could do (school, home, community, councils and government) to help you and your wellbeing as a young person? What do you need from us?

Figure 10: Number of respondents and areas that adults could help improve wellbeing.

Responses are broken down into the key areas as shown on the bar chart below.
14 pupils either did not know/were unsure or did not provide a response. Many pupils mentioned one main area where they felt adults could help. There were 87 responses to this question.
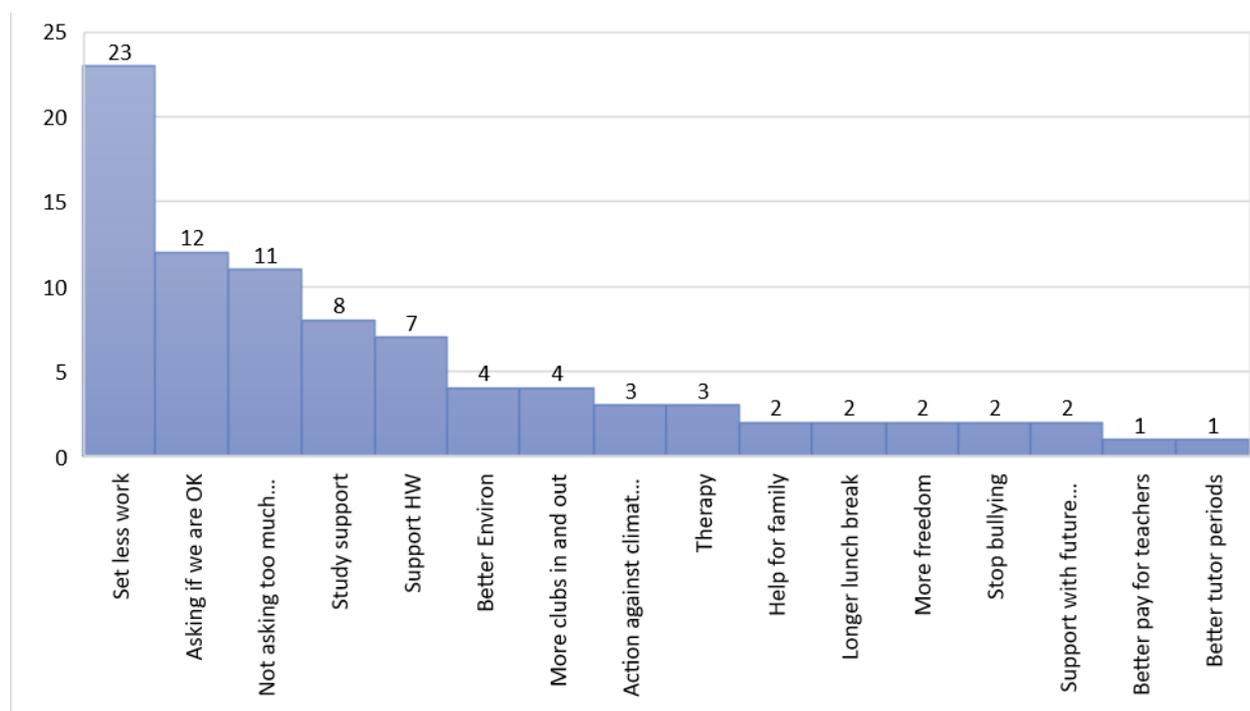
When looking at the individual comments that young people made about the top- scoring answers, there were two distinct themes:

1. Schoolwork

Whether that is setting less work (23 respondents, 26%), having help and support with homework and being organised (7 respondents, 8%) or study support (8 respondents, 9%), this can be summarised by individual quotes such as these…
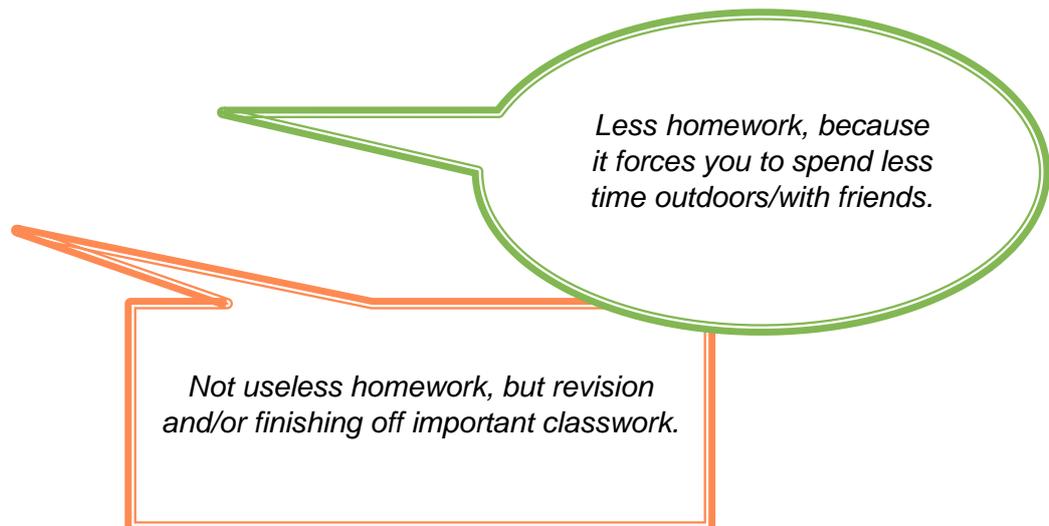
'Less work. More free time'.

'Be available if we need support'.

'Support homework'.

'Help to keep me organised'.

'Help with routine'.

> *Less homework, because it forces you to spend less time outdoors/with friends.*

> *Not useless homework, but revision and/or finishing off important classwork.*

2. Support with mental health/coping skills.

On the whole, young people felt supported and listened to by their families (73 respondents to question 3 said that being with family made them happy or excited).

However, some pupils wanted to be listened to more by the adults around them. 12/87 respondents (14%) wanted their parents to ask after them, to check they were OK (especially if they seemed different), and to help them talk about their feelings. A further 11 respondents (13%) wanted more understanding, to feel less pressure from adults and be less 'nagged'.

'Tell me they (at home) are proud'.

'Put less pressure on us'.

'Understand school is stressful'.

'Listen more'.

'More accepting and more reassurance. Less nagging'.

> *An understanding attitude that we are trying.*

> *Talk about it, help me to understand and move past my feelings.*

> *Understand our thoughts and feelings and support our mental health.*
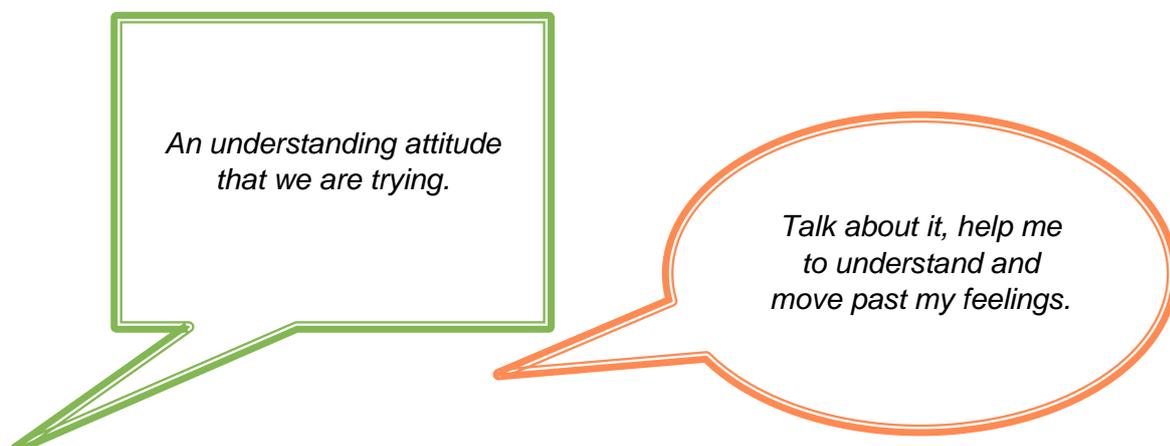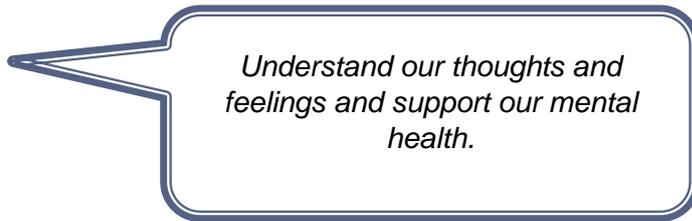
A few young people highlighted issues such as a better environment, more clubs in and out of school (at the time of the survey, school clubs would have been limited due to Covid-19), action against climate change, and access to therapy/mental health support).

6. Is there anything else you wish to tell us?

The majority of young people surveyed said no.

Others took the opportunity to communicate, some sharing interesting facts or thanking us for asking for their comments, while others shared deeper concerns (see overleaf):

We need to do more to help the environment.

Octopuses have three hearts, and their oesophagus goes through their brain!

I wish I could tell my parents everything.

Lockdown was not as stressful as I thought it would be yet I found it hard to do work without having a distraction.

We need more vegetarian and vegan places to go.

One of my favourite words is loquacious (talkative).

Maybe Charlton Kings could add more things for young kids and teenagers.

I think you should do free therapy.

Sometimes I have friendship issues and I really struggle with that.

The due dates on homework need to be longer. No more due the next day.

Thank you for considering my opinion!

We want a youth club.

Make us feel safer.

Drawing on the findings from the survey 'Supporting Young People in Charlton Kings', and with reference to national surveys and research, these are my conclusions and recommendations based on the time I have been given and the scope of my work.

Where further questions/investigations may be appropriate, these have been highlighted below and then summarised in the 'further considerations section', as part of potential investigations with some core groups.

Patterns in the findings of all sources of information have been taken into consideration.

1. Feeding back to the young people surveyed.

One of the key promises to the young people was that we would feed back the findings of the survey. This could happen in several ways, but in order to encourage further engagement by some core groups, it may be better to do this in person and possibly separately to the two main age groups. From there, focus groups could be formed to help with further in-depth questioning.

2. Helping young people to cope with areas of worry.

When considering how to support worry, psychologists might consider evaluating if it is possible to reduce exposure to the stressors that are creating the worry (if appropriate) e.g. by adapting lifestyle, or if we might increase coping abilities, through skill development or aiding resilience. I have indicated below where further investigation (possibly by some focus groups) may be needed to inform further advice.

➢ 60% of participants mentioned managing homework, studying or being back at school as making them sad or worried in the few weeks before being surveyed. It is possible that this was their perception after a period of time of not having homework and schoolwork to manage alongside each other (homework was halted during lockdown and online learning).

➢ Due to the high number of pupils raising managing homework as an issue, does this need investigating further? Over a period of time, a cross-section of pupils from each year group could log the homework and revision they receive (subject and type of homework), how long they were given to complete it, and how long they spent on it. This could be evaluated to see if homework is purposeful and likely to impact learning outcomes, and also if demands are achievable and provide time to pursue other hobbies during the week, to provide a balance to mental health? Teacher's might also evaluate how valuable they found the homework submitted in informing teaching and learning, compared with how time consuming it is to set and mark (being mindful of teachers' own mental health and work/life balance).

➢ 60/110 (56%) identified as feeling stressed. We did not ask them to expand on their feelings here, but some young people provided further information in question 2 about what made them stressed. It might be useful to ask them to elaborate so we can understand if the term is simply being overused or they really are stressed and would appreciate some support, and if so, in what form.

- 47/110 of the pupils surveyed (44%) had worried or felt sad about the future. This can be broken down into 59% of the 16/17-year-olds and 41% of the 12-15-year-olds feeling worried about the future. This difference might be expected because the 16/17-year-olds are closer to leaving school. This was a key finding from *The Big Ask* survey that highlighted that young people thought deeply about what job they might do and how they could earn good money. Does this older age group require any further input or reassurance about this?

- 39/110 (36%) worried or felt sad about relationships (whether that be with family, friends or partners). Do young people have an avenue to discuss such difficulties if they need to, and do they have ways to cope with these challenges?

- 36/110 respondents (33%) had been worried about lack of sleep. This was broken down into 28% of the younger age group (aged 12-15 years) who reported having difficulties with sleep, compared with 59% of the 16-17-year-olds. This is representative of national findings that problems with sleep affected over a quarter (28.7%) of 6 to 10-year-olds, over a third (38.4%) of 11 to 16-year-olds, and over half (57.1%) of 17 to 23-year-olds. Figures were much higher in those with a probable mental disorder.

- Sleep issues could be analysed further by asking respondents what they believe impacts on their sleep, whether they understand what good sleep hygiene is, and if they currently use any methods to aid their sleep. Considering the importance of sleep on learning and health and wellbeing, is there a case for a focus group/s to trial and evaluate different methods to aid sleep, and feedback results to other students?

- 29/110 (27%) had felt worried or were sad about feeling lonely. Again, do young people have an avenue to discuss such difficulties if these feelings are long-lasting? Do they understand ways they can help themselves, such as joining clubs that may interest them?

- 26/110 (24%) had worried about the environment and climate change. Do young people know about local environmental groups outside of school such as Planet Cheltenham, CK Futures or the CK Climate Café, to be able to find likeminded people to talk to and to share concerns or ideas?

3. Helping with access to, and supporting, the things that make young people happy.

Role of home & family.

The young people surveyed value friends and family not only to make them feel happy and safe, but they also place importance on their support with schoolwork and helping them to understand their feelings. *The Big Ask* survey similarly highlighted the critical importance of family support 'in a year where the pandemic has made each household a miniature of all human life'. They found that the love and support of the family unit was a critical part of children's happiness and ability to deal with the challenge of growing up.

Parents may appreciate being made aware of how important their children have found their support (and presence) over lockdown, and how their children continue to value their support practically (homework and organisation) and emotionally (providing positive feedback). Do we need to feedback the results of the survey to parents via school, and provide an opportunity for them to raise their own positives and needs?

For example, at a time when support services are overwhelmed and difficult to access, would parents like help to support their children's wellbeing? If they do, would they prefer face-to-face training/support or online training?

N.B Balcarras school, through sponsorship from The Ladies College, is currently offering all parents and pupils access to The Wellbeing Hub from Teen Tips, an interactive online portal, designed to help understand social and emotional needs.

Role of friends.

Now that lockdown has ended, young people are able to see their friends in person and access well-needed support for their wellbeing. However, it should be considered whether young people need further safe places to meet outside of school, such as youth clubs.

How can we ensure that young people are provided with the space and time to meet friends outside of school? See further comment under role of community.

Role of sport.

Young people have access to a choice of sports within school, especially now that the clubs on offer are back to normal following Covid-19 restrictions. We did not, however, ask about access to sport in the community. This may warrant a further survey (see below).

Role of community.

We did not ask specifically how young people feel about access to clubs and facilities, community events and the choice of things to do in Charlton Kings - the school-based focus groups suggested above offer an opportunity to explore this further. However some young people did highlight the absence of a youth club in the area. Further work on this is to be recommended, including the contracting of professional youth workers to build resilience and break the cycle of adversity present in the lives of some young people. Collaborative working in the form of an inter-agency Youth Taskforce could provide a welcome, integrated approach to co-ordinating youth initiatives, and with reference to other existing projects such as CK Futures.

Role of mental health support.

What is clear from this survey, and from the national picture, is that young people want someone to talk to when they are worried or upset. They want easier access to support when problems are emerging so that they don't start to build up. How can all of the adults in young people's lives ensure this is possible?

4. Actions for CKPC and our local MP.

Consider how the Parish Council and/or invested people might work with Gloucestershire CCG and the One Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership to inform the plan to develop an Integrated Care System for Gloucestershire. This is being launched through an initial engagement exercise with community partners, local people and communities, to develop priorities and plans to inform a new way of working.

Liaise with Alex Chalk, MP for Cheltenham, and ask for his help in ensuring that this new plan will prioritise spending on children and young people's mental health, considering the county's history of low spending, the lack of services that children and young people can currently access, and the long waiting times (please see Appendix 1 and 2 for further details). Results

from The Big Ask highlighted that children and young people wanted to be able to rely on the NHS to be there for them when they need it, which at the moment, for a variety of reasons, is not able to happen for many.

A Summary of Proposed Actions and Resource Implications

1. **Provide feedback through direct engagement:**

➢ Respond to those who took part in the survey and encourage further input/groups.

2. **Further work with Balcarras pupils:**

➢ Investigate homework demands further by taking a cross-section of pupils who could log the homework pieces and test revision for evaluation. Teachers might also evaluate the usefulness of homework.

Carry out research with core groups or a further survey to include questions/further investigation of the following:

➢ How stressed young people feel and about what, if they can be supported to help manage that stress, or if it is young people's perception that they cannot cope when they are actually managing.
➢ There was a key finding from *The Big Ask* survey highlighting that young people thought deeply about what job they might do and how they could earn good money. Does the older age group (16/17-year-olds) require any further input or reassurance about this?
➢ Do young people have an avenue to discuss relationship difficulties if they need to, and do they have ways to cope with these challenges?
➢ Sleep issues could be analysed further; what are young people's views on what impacts on their sleep, do they understand what good sleep hygiene is, and use methods to aid their sleep? Is there a case for a focus group/s to trial and evaluate different methods to aid sleep, and then feedback results to others?
➢ Do young people that feel lonely have an avenue to discuss such difficulties if these feelings are long-lasting? Do they understand ways they can help themselves, such as joining clubs that may interest them?
➢ Do young people feel there is enough to do in the community including access to sports, clubs and facilities, community events and the choice of things to do in Charlton Kings? Would they attend a youth club or similar if one existed? This survey might be carried out by existing groups (see further comment below).
➢ Do young people know about local environmental groups outside of school such as Planet Cheltenham, CK Futures or the CK climate café

3. **Role of parents, caregivers and family:**

➢ Feedback the results of the survey to parents via school, and provide opportunity for them to raise their own positives and needs?
➢ Do they need further support and direction on how to access mental health support or services?
➢ Would they benefit from drop in 'mental health surgeries' run by local experts and/or school staff, held at school or elsewhere in the community?

4. Role of CKPC/the community and Local MP:

➢ Consider how the CK Health Connect Project /or invested people might work with Gloucestershire CCG and the One Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing Partnership to inform their plan.

➢ Liaise with Alex Chalk, MP for Cheltenham, and ask for his help in ensuring that this new plan will prioritise spending on children and young people's mental health, considering the county's history of low spending, the lack of services that children and young people can currently access, and the long waiting times (please see Appendix 1 and 2 for further information).

➢ Consider sharing this report with local GP surgeries, and the key people and organisations mentioned in this report.

➢ Consider how these actions could be achieved using existing resources and contacts in the community, and what local charities or trusts may be able to support the work.

➢ Engage in collaborative partnership working through the formation of an inter-agency Youth Taskforce, as recently initiated by Gloucestershire Neighbourhood Policing, which has the potential to develop an integrated approach to co-ordinating & funding youth initiatives, with reference to other existing CKPC key projects, such as CK Futures.

➢ Recognise that youth initiatives such as *Inspire to Aspire*, can assist in developing programmes of 'steps to success', building resilience and breaking the cycle of adversity amongst some of our young people, who are currently linked to patterns of anti-social behaviour

Report Conclusion

There is much to be considered following this report and I hope that the findings and recommendations are comprehensive and helpful.

I would like to express my thanks to the Councillors and staff of Charlton Kings Parish Council and Balcarras Senior School, who have assisted in the planning, execution and discussion around this youth survey project, which I hope will bring about positive change in the health & well-being of young people.

Conclusions may be limited by a lack of qualitative information, but the nature of the survey means that the findings have provoked thought, which can lead to focus groups for further in-depth discussion. Results from future focus groups may validate the findings and add to the recommendations.

I would be happy to assist with the implementation of any of the recommendations and to review outcomes in the future.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries or would like any further discussion about any of the information.

Mrs Emily Vincent
Chartered Psychologist
www.educationalpsychologist-glos.co.uk
info@educationalpsychologist-glos.co.uk
07552 479561

In order to respond to this brief provided by CKPC, I have:

- Attended face-to-face meetings and liaised via online platforms or by email with Lynda Johnson, CK Health Connect Project Lead, and Mark Constance, Year Head and Covid Recovery Strategy Lead at Balcarras School
- Referred to the findings of the adult survey
- Analysed the young people's survey results
- Presented results at a community open meeting with the parish council and local residents
- Carried out reviews and made references to current research/work:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-60197150

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-58741536

https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/

Department for Education. School Recovery Strategies: Year 1 findings. Research report. January 2022.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-recovery-strategies-year-1-findings

NHS providers Children and young people's mental health services survey, May 2021.

https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-*and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey*

House of Commons, Health and Social Care Committee, Children and young people's mental health, Eighth Report of Session 2021–22. 30 November 2021. https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmhealth/17/report.html

One Gloucestershire: Guide to One Gloucestershire Integrated Care System (ICS). Working better together for you and your family.

https://getinvolved.glos.nhs.uk/ics-gloucestershire

Children's commissioner. The state of our children's mental health services. February 2022.

https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/report/briefing-on-childrens-mental-health-services-2020-2021/

'Accessing Mental Health Services for Children and Young People: the ability to access mental health support and diagnostic services.' Summary report. Emily Vincent (2021).

Appendix 1: The State of Children's Mental Health Services

When considering the rise in mental health issues among the younger generation, and when investigating ways forward, it is important to consider whether young people can access local services to help them when needed.

Since 2017, the Office of the Children's Commissioner has produced an annual briefing on the state of children's mental health services, which assesses the provision of NHS Children's mental health services and the performance of each Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The latest briefing was published in February 2022.

To provide an overall indication of how each CCG compares to the rest of England in terms of children's access to mental health services, a summary score was created for each CCG based on five key indicators of Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) performance.

1. CCG spending on children's mental health as a percentage of total CCG allocation
2. Mental health spend per child
3. Total number of children referred to children's mental health services as a proportion of the under-18 population
4. The percentage of referrals that are closed before treatment
5. Average waiting time for children who receive a second contact

To arrive at a score, it compared local areas based on the five metrics and gave a score 1-5 for each area. The best performing CCGs are given a score of 5 while the worst performers are given a score of 1. The scores were added for each CCG to give a total, which ranged from 5 to 25. An area with a total score of 25 is in the top 20% of areas nationally for each of the five measures. Conversely, a score of 5 would place it in the bottom 20% for each of the five measures.

Gloucestershire CCG had an overall score of 9 and fell in the lowest ten performing CCGs (out of 135 in England) in 2020/2021, according to the indicators. Please see Appendix 2 for the 20 CCGs with the lowest scores).

I have summarised relevant data from the brief below which explains more about the five key areas and Gloucestershire CCG's performance:

Spending on Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS)
Overall, CCG spending on mental health has continued to increase over the past two years. Spend per child has also increased, up from £66 in 2019/20 to £73 in 2020/21.

Half of CCGs spend at least 1% of their budget on CYPMHS. This is the NHS Long-Term Plan benchmark of how much CCGs should be spending on CYPMHS. 68 out of 135 CCGs (50%) spent at least 1% of their budget on CYPMHS. 59 out of 195 CCGs (30%) spent at least 1% of their budget on CYPMHS in 2018/19, and 69 out of 191 CCGs (36%) reached that target in 2019/20.

Gloucestershire CCG falls short of the 1% target and spends 0.81% of its budget on CYPMHS (a slight increase from 0.79% of its budget in the previous year).

Referrals
The number of children referred (for example, by their GP or teacher) to NHS children's mental health services has decreased for the first time in four years. In 2020/21, 497,502 children were referred, a decrease from 539,000 in the previous year. This could be due to disruption caused by the pandemic. The percentage of children being referred nationally has also decreased. Referral rates have dropped from 4.5% to 4% of the under-18 population.

A higher number of children have been struggling with their mental health since 2017 – which covers the pandemic period – than prior to that. One in six children now have a probable mental health disorder. This is up from one in nine children with a probable mental health disorder in 2017. While progress has been made to reduce the treatment gap between those who need treatment and its provision, the increased demand has made this more challenging.

Proportion of children with a mental health disorder accessing services
More children are now experiencing mental health disorders/struggling with their mental health, likely as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This means that it has been more difficult to meet set targets to increase the proportion of children who can access help.

Overall, there has been a reduction in the number of children turned away, which suggests more children are being accepted for treatment. At present, the best proxy measure of how many children are accessing treatment is the number of children and young people who do not receive two contacts after being referred to CYPMHS because their referral was subsequently closed. The measure of two contacts will include some children whose referrals were closed but who may not have required specialist treatment, chose not to pursue further intervention, or were referred to other services.

There remains notable variation across the country in the numbers of children whose referral was closed before treatment, from as low as 8% to 41%. Gloucestershire saw 27% of cases closed before treatment (an improvement from 38% last year).

Waiting Times – For those children who are accepted into mental health treatment services, average waiting times have decreased substantially compared with last year. In Gloucestershire average wait times decreased from 56 days in 2019/20 to 41 days in 2020/21 (although this does not seem to mirror results from my own survey of 25 Cheltenham schools, which report experiencing very long waiting times to receive mental health support).

Appendix 2: The 20 CCGs with the lowest scores in 2020/2021.

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)	CCG Budget Allocation Spent on CYPMHS	Spend per Child	Proportion of CYP Population (Under 18) Receiving CAMHS Treatment	Average Waiting Times (With Two Contact Days)	Referrals Closed Before Treatment	CCG Overall Score
NHS WEST SUSSEX CCG	0.77%	£55.	3.5%	38	28%	8
NHS COVENTRY AND RUGBY CCG	0.84%	£53.	3.7%	47	25%	8
NHS OXFORDSHIRE CCG	0.86%	£51.	4.2%	52	31%	9
NHS MID ESSEX CCG	0.76%	£46.	3.1%	9	35%	9
NHS GLOUCESTERSHIRE CCG	0.81%	£53.	4.3%	41	27%	9
NHS STOCKPORT CCG	0.67%	£47.	4.4%	38	33%	9
NHS EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE CCG	0.87%	£63.	3.7%	41	41%	9
NHS BRENT CCG	0.97%	£58.	2.3%	43	30%	10
NHS GREATER PRESTON CCG	0.88%	£57.	3.6%	50	25%	10
NHS SURREY HEARTLANDS CCG	0.90%	£54.	4.3%	47	23%	10
NHS PORTSMOUTH CCG	0.87%	£61.	3.8%	55	27%	10
NHS SOUTH WARWICKSHIRE CCG	0.74%	£51.	3.8%	54	22%	10
NHS CALDERDALE CCG	0.75%	£51.	4.9%	22	34%	11
NHS THURROCK CCG	0.88%	£45.	3.2%	14	28%	11
NHS KNOWSLEY CCG	0.78%	£67.	3.8%	30	30%	11
NHS SOMERSET CCG	0.85%	£62.	3.4%	15	35%	11
NHS DORSET CCG	0.88%	£70.	3.2%	36	30%	11
NHS HARROW CCG	1.05%	£57.	2.6%	41	24%	11
NHS BASSETLAW CCG	0.89%	£65.	3.4%	41	29%	11
NHS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH CCG	0.92%	£53.	4.6%	34	33%	11