



Surrey Youth
VOICE

Our Voice Matters Comparison Report 2024



SURREY
COUNTY COUNCIL

Our Voice Matters Comparison Report 2024

Our Voice Matters Introduction

The last Our Voice Matters Survey took place during May-August 2022. The survey received responses from 571 children and young people in Surrey aged 8-25. It focussed on topics like health and wellbeing, education and employment, and digital and social media. Following on from the survey, this report looks at how the findings have been used and how they compare to other local and national reports. We hope this report will help us to create our next survey which is happening in 2025.

What have we done with the 2022 survey findings?

We used feedback from the survey in these different ways:

- We delivered a webinar to people working for Surrey County Council where we told them about the findings from the 2022 survey. Staff who came to the webinar told us how they would use the information we gave them to better support children and young people.
- We have included feedback from the survey in chapters of Surrey's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). The [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA) helps us to see what people's health and social care needs are in Surrey. It supports the people in charge to make good decisions and to create services that are best for their communities. The chapters that we included information from the survey in were community safety, and [emotional wellbeing and mental health](#). The [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA) is an assessment of the current and future health and social care needs of the population of Surrey. It supports local leaders and commissioners to make informed decisions and to shape services in a way that best serves their communities.
- We also shared feedback about community safety with the Office for the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- We included findings relating to health and wellbeing in the [Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy 2022-2027](#). The strategy includes information from lots of people working in areas like health, education and social care. It looks at what is going well and what needs to be better to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. The strategy has an action plan that shows how things will be made better over the next five years.
- We have used findings to back up some of our existing action cards, for example:

"As young people in Surrey we would like colleges to provide more support for our emotional wellbeing and mental health as we don't currently feel like we're getting the support we need."

- We have shared the findings with Surrey Youth Cabinet who will be working on lots of campaigns this year. Lots of the things that young people were worried about in the Our Voice Matters Survey were the same as what Surrey Youth Cabinet have been hearing. The three most voted for topics in Surrey Youth Cabinet's Make Your Mark Campaign 2024 were health and wellbeing, the economy and the environment.

How do the 2022 survey findings link to wider local and national research?

The Our Voice Matters Survey included 5 themes which were:

- Living in Surrey
- Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Education
- Digital and Social Media

We will take a look at each topic and see how it compares to other local and national data. The other sources of data we will use to compare it to are:

Surrey Youth Cabinet's Make Your Mark Campaign results 2024

The 2024 Make Your Mark Campaign gave 11–18-year-olds the chance to vote on issues that were most important to them. The top three issues that young people in Surrey voted for were:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Jobs, Economy, and Benefits
- Environment and Climate Change

And the top three issues voted for by young people across the country were:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Crime and Safety
- Culture, Media, and Sport

Surrey's Health Related Behaviours Questionnaire Results 2022

The Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire was last completed by Surrey schools in 2022. There were 7023 responses from pupils in years 4,6,8 and 10. Of these, 3334 came from secondary aged pupils. The survey includes questions about what young people worry about and who they speak to when they are worried. It also asks what young people do to help themselves feel well.

The Big Ambition Survey Results (Sept 2023-Jan 2024)

The [Big Ambition Survey](#) is run by the Children's Commissioner and last took place between September 2023 and January 2024. There were 253,000 children, young people and adults responding on their behalf who took part in the survey. It asked for their experiences, views and what they want government to do to improve their lives.

The Mental Health of Children and Young People Survey 2022

The [survey](#) is about the mental health of children and young people aged 7 to 24 years living in England in 2022. It asks questions about where they live and their experiences of education, jobs, and services. It also asks about their family life and communities.

The next part of this report focuses on each of the Our Voice Matters Survey topics. It looks at how the survey results compare to the local and national data sources we mentioned earlier in their report. At the end of each section, it says which of the Children's Commissioner Outcomes each of the topics relate to. The [Children's Commissioner](#) promotes the rights of all children and makes sure that people listen to them. The commissioner aims to make sure that all children are safe, healthy, happy, learning and part of their community.

Living in Surrey

Community Safety

Cost of Living

The cost of living is something that has been a big issue for lots of people recently. In the 2022 Our Voice Matters Survey, 60% of 13–17-year-olds and 77% of 18–25-year-olds in Surrey were worried about the cost-of-living. This topic also came up in The Big Ambition Survey in 2021-22. It highlighted that 55% of children living in families with three or more children were in poverty compared to the average UK family. Children and young people commented on the cost of living, poverty and having enough to eat:

'There's a lot of children who don't get to eat, there needs to be more done to make sure families can feed their kids.'

'Most parents can't pay for things for them [...] and they end up only getting the bare minimum which then ends up in most children getting bullied'

The Children's Commissioner wants to make sure that 'every child grows up in a family who has what they need to support them, and no child grows up in poverty.' They hope to do this by reviewing benefits, offering breakfast clubs free of charge and automatically enrolling eligible children on to free school meals so they do not miss out.

70% of unemployed young people who answered the Our Voice Matters survey did not feel there was enough financial support available. The Mental Health of Children and Young People's Survey 2022 found that almost 20% of 7- to 16-year-olds lived in households that earned less money over the past year. This figure was even higher in families who had children with a probable mental disorder 28.9%.

These concerns link to Surrey Youth Cabinet's Make Your Mark campaign results. Jobs, Economy, and Benefits was the second most popular topic for children and young people in 2024. To help with the cost-of-living, Surrey Youth Cabinet collected books earlier this year to help disadvantaged children.

"(The cost-of- living crisis) feels like an ever-growing issue, and it also feels like the only people who can overcome it are ones with major financial support from their parents"

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Safe, All Children are Healthy, All Children are Happy

Activities and Leisure Time

72% of respondents to the Big Ambition Survey reported to have fun activities to do near where they lived. The Our Voice Matters Survey found that over half of young people in Surrey used leisure facilities. Libraries and sports clubs were the next most popular facilities. Around 1 in 7 young people aged 13-25 in Surrey reported to not go to any places or do any activities. The Big Ambition found that young people aged seventeen were the least likely to agree they had fun activities to do near where they lived. Regarding the cost-of-living, one of the reasons that 30% of young people did not access activities was due to how much they cost.

The Children's Commissioner wants to make sure that 'Every child has access to play and fun things to do, and spaces to spend time with their friends.' The Commissioner knows that children use public spaces in different ways to adults, but their opinions are not often taken seriously. She wants councils to ask children, including those with different needs, about what they would like to see improved. For example, lighting on school routes and in parks, access to playgrounds, and safe transport.

"They need to listen to the children more and ask us what we would like done in our area" – Boy, 14.

"Listen to people's views and make [city] a better place for children with and without disabilities so they can go out without feeling scared. Make more playgrounds that include all ages so that people of all ages can access and have fun. Make playgrounds and parks entertaining." – Girl, 12.

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Happy, All Children are Healthy, All Children feel engaged in a Community, All Children are Learning

Environment

Environment and climate change was one of the top three topics in the Make Your Mark campaign. Young people who completed the Our Voice Matters Survey were also passionate about it. Young people answering the survey were very worried about the environment. Their biggest concerns were climate change (75%), impact on animals (65%) and air pollution (65%). Recycling was also important. Just under half of respondents had considered buying items with less packaging, using less energy, and using public transport.

Environment and climate change were not asked about in the Big Ambition Survey. However, 32% of qualitative survey responses included a word that related to a better world such as 'environment', 'fairness' and 'voice'. The survey showed that young people were keen to have their voice heard on a range of issues including war, conflict, and climate change.

Surrey Youth Cabinet are helping to raise awareness of the environment. In 2024 they took on the eco-challenge to help raise awareness of the importance of using public transport.

'I would like there to be clubs were we can help litter pick, or clean dirty spaces and that stuff.'

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Safe, All Children are Healthy

Health and Wellbeing

Anxiety

52% of Our Voice Matters respondents said they had high levels of anxiety. 13% said they felt anxious or worried all the time. Health and Wellbeing was the most voted for issue in the Make Your Mark Campaign. We also know from our participation groups that this is an extremely important topic.

In the Our Voice Matters survey, 49% of 8–12-year-olds and 65% of 18–25-year-olds reported that Covid had affected their mental health. We know that the effects of Covid will be felt for a long time, so it is no surprise that health and wellbeing is a top priority for the Make Your Mark campaign this year.

In the Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire 57% of pupils said they worry 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about exams and tests. 46% of pupils worry about the way they look 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' and 38% worry 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about their mental health.

26% of girls who answered the questionnaire said they 'sometimes' cut or hurt themselves when they have a problem that worries them, or they are feeling stressed. These are very worrying statistics. They also tie in with a theme we have been hearing a lot about from our participation groups which is around improving mental health support in schools. We currently have an action card open around this:

'As young people in Surrey, we would like schools and colleges to provide more support for our emotional wellbeing and mental health. We would like a trained member of staff in each school/college so that we can speak to someone about emotional wellbeing and mental health when needed, like the drop-in sessions at the CYP Havens.'

The Our Voice Matters Survey showed some differences regarding mental health, especially for those with additional needs and disabilities. These included:

- 52% of all young people reported they had high levels of anxiety. This increased to 61% for children and young people with additional needs.
- Children and young people with an additional need or disability are more likely to be unsure where to access support for their mental health (38%) than those without (30%).
- Young people with an additional need or disability reported that their mental health was affected more by Covid-19 than those without:
 - With additional needs and disabilities: 67%
 - Without additional needs and disabilities: 33%

It was also notable that care experienced young people spent less time seeing friends and family as a way to look after their mental health.

- 64% of all young people said seeing friends helped them look after their mental health vs 50% of care experienced young people.
- 57% of all young people said that spending time with family helped them look after their mental health vs 46% of care experienced young people.

Body Image

The Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire found that only 46% of pupils are happy with their weight. This links to the Big Ambition Survey which reported that only 49% of children and young people feel happy with how they look.

The Our Voice Matters Survey asked 8-13-year-olds whether their school had enough healthy food options, and the average score was 6/10. In the Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire, over 50% of young people said they 'never' or 'only sometimes' think about their health when choosing what to eat.

Physical health was important to young people answering the Our Voice Matters survey. 87% of 18–25-year-olds scored the importance of healthy eating as a 6/10 or above.

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Healthy, All Children are Happy, All Children are Safe,

Education

Bullying

Participation in education settings

In the Our Voice Matters survey, 61% of young people said that their school or college has a participation group.

In the Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire 63% of pupils said their school asked them for their ideas and thoughts about what they learn. 53% of pupils said that they are asked for their ideas and thoughts about how they learn in school. 55% said they are asked for their ideas and thoughts about the school environment.

We know that participation is beneficial for teachers and students. For example, it can increase respect between them, help young people build new skills, reduce student inequality or feelings of being excluded. It is good to see that more than 50% of children and young people feel they are asked for their ideas in school. In the next survey, it may be interesting to find out whether young people feel their ideas are listened to and acted upon. This will help us to see whether participation is meaningful or tokenistic.

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Learning, All Children are Happy, All Children are Safe

Enjoyment and support at School

The Our Voice Matters Survey asked young people if they felt supported with things like exams and schoolwork. Young people told us that they felt least supported with independence skills and mental health. This links to the cost-of-living theme and the need to ensure that young people have important life skills such as money management.

The Big Ambition Survey found that 75% of children thought they had great teachers who supported them. It also found that 60% enjoyed school or college. Secondary aged children were the least likely to agree that they enjoyed school. Overall, 56% of children with an additional need or disability said they enjoyed school. This compared to 76% of children in state funded specialist schools. We have heard from our participation groups that some young people with an additional need or disability do not get the support they need at mainstream school. This can affect how they feel, their attendance and their enjoyment of school.

"At a mainstream school you feel you stand out"

"I didn't have the best experience of mainstream generally, but when I was in specialist school, I got pretty much all the support I needed"

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Learning, All Children are Happy, All Children are Safe, All Children feel engaged in a community

Digital and Social Media

The Our Voice Matters Survey reported that over 75% of 13-25-year-olds do things to keep themselves safe online. For example, they use online privacy settings, do not share personal information, and use secure passwords. 91% of pupils responding to the Health-Related Behaviours Questionnaire said that they have been told how to stay safe online. However, only 56% said they always follow the advice they have been given about how to stay safe online. 29% of secondary school pupils responded that someone online who they did not know had asked to see pictures of them. 8% said someone had threatened them or pressured them to send a picture or video of themselves or show themselves on webcam.

The Big Ambition Survey found that 75% of all children and young people said they felt safe when they went online. Boys were more likely to feel safe online (75%) than girls (67%). Only 53% of children not in education felt safe online.

We can see from these findings that young people who are in school feel safer online than those who are not. This may be because they learn in school about how to stay safe online. This learning may help them to better understand how important it is to use strong passwords and not share personal information.

The Our Voice Matters Survey asked young people how much the media affects the way they feel. 57% of young people who expressed they have high anxiety, scored highly on this question. We know that social media can impact on young people's mental health. One of the goals in the Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy 2022-27 is around online safety and social media. It focuses on supporting children, young people, and their families to keep themselves and others safe online.

Children's Commissioner Outcomes: All Children are Safe, All Children are Happy, All Children are Learning

Next steps

We are launching the next Our Voice Matters survey in February 2025. We are currently co-designing the survey with children and young people. We will also be speaking to services to see if they have any questions, they would like us to include in the next survey.

If you would like more information about the Our Voice Matters survey, please email user.voice@surreycc.gov.uk