

# Health and Well-being of young people in West Sussex 2010

**West Sussex Youth Cabinet  
2010-2011  
Analysis of Exit Survey from the Elections, March 2010**

## **1. Introduction**

West Sussex has an elected Youth Cabinet that structures itself on 24 regions throughout the county. These young people are democratically elected on an annual basis, and they are heavily involved with the decision-making processes across the county.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010, the West Sussex Youth Cabinet conducted their annual elections, the majority of which took place electronically. Young people were given a unique voter code and were able to view candidates' manifestos online and to vote for the candidate of their choice.

As a part of this election process voters were given the opportunity to complete an exit survey, concentrating on the health and well-being of young people in West Sussex, as well as the voting process itself. In total, 2449 young people completed this survey and the results are analysed fully within this report.

The West Sussex Local Involvement Network (LINK) consults with all residents of West Sussex on issues affecting their health and well-being and feeds views back to those who commission and provide services in the county.

### **Limitations of the survey**

The majority of voting took place within school hours and as a result many voters were extremely limited by time. This meant that many voters were only able to cast their votes and not actually able to complete the survey. In total, over 18,000 young people cast votes and, because of these time restraints, just under 14% actually completed the survey.

### **Survey design**

The first ten questions concentrated on young people and democracy, and the last four on health and well-being. The survey around health and well-being was put together following discussions between the West Sussex Youth Cabinet, West Sussex LINK and public health professionals in the county. Where possible, the survey included closed questions in order to ensure efficiency and easy-understanding for participants. However, three of the four health and well-being related questions were open, allowing young people to feedback their views without constraint.

### **Data entry**

Responses from the survey were collected electronically and so no physical data entry was required. This has been analysed by a trained and employed member of County Council staff.

### **Participants of the survey**

Only young people voting electronically in the West Sussex Youth Cabinet elections were eligible to take part in the survey. All young people were between the ages of 11 and 19 and a full analysis of the participants has been given within this report.

## 2. Participant information

### Question 7 – What are you doing at present (Full-time education, full-time employment etc)?

Current situation	Number of participants
Full-time education	2350
Part-time education	48
Searching for employment	4
Training	6
Other	41

#### Analysis:

It is clear from these statistics that the majority of these surveys were completed during school time and as a result the majority of participants are in full-time education. Nevertheless, there are almost 100 participants who are not in full-time education and consequently the survey has succeeded in incorporating the opinions of young people from a mixed variety of backgrounds and circumstances across West Sussex. A number of survey participants suggested that they are in part-time education or searching for employment. It is true to say, however, that the 'other' category covers a variety of responses, from young people who couldn't understand the question, to those who just decided to ignore it completely and write something different. Nevertheless, this question gave us a sound knowledge as to the current situation of these young people, and as a result we were able to predict the kind of answers that we might get.

### Question 8 – How old are you?

Age	Number of Participants
11	285
12	582
13	532
14	409
15	345
16	222
17	45
18	20
19	9

#### Analysis:

The West Sussex Youth Cabinet elections are open to voters across the county who are between the ages of 11 and 19. As these results suggest, participants were varied in age, though the majority of participants were under the age of 14.

The average age of participants was 15 and the median age was 13.

Total Number of participants	Median Age	Average Age	Majority age range
2449	13	15	11-14

As these results suggest, it was slightly more difficult to capture the opinions of older young people with this survey. There were a number of reasons for this, from exams to college timetables. Almost a quarter of participants were aged 12, which is more than any of the other age groups.

### Question 9 – Are you male or female?

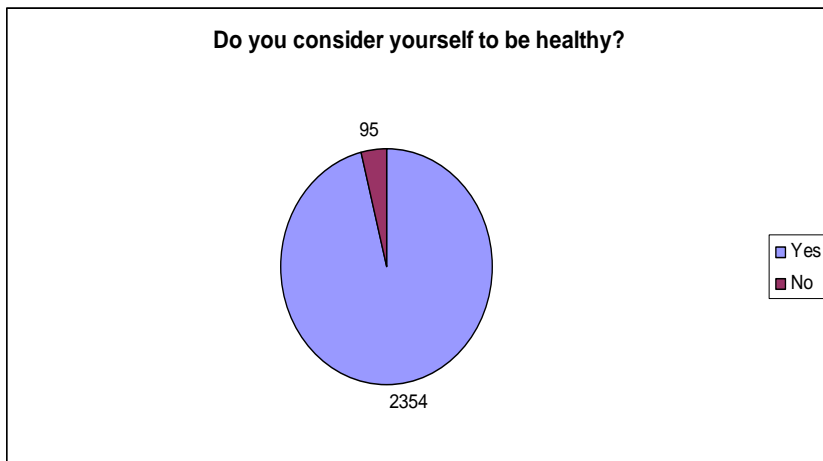
#### Analysis:

	Total participants	Percentage of total
Female	1343	55%
Male	1106	45%

The split between male and female participants was almost equal, with just over 200 more female young people participating than male.

### 3. Young people, health and well-being

#### Question 11 – Do you consider yourself to be healthy?



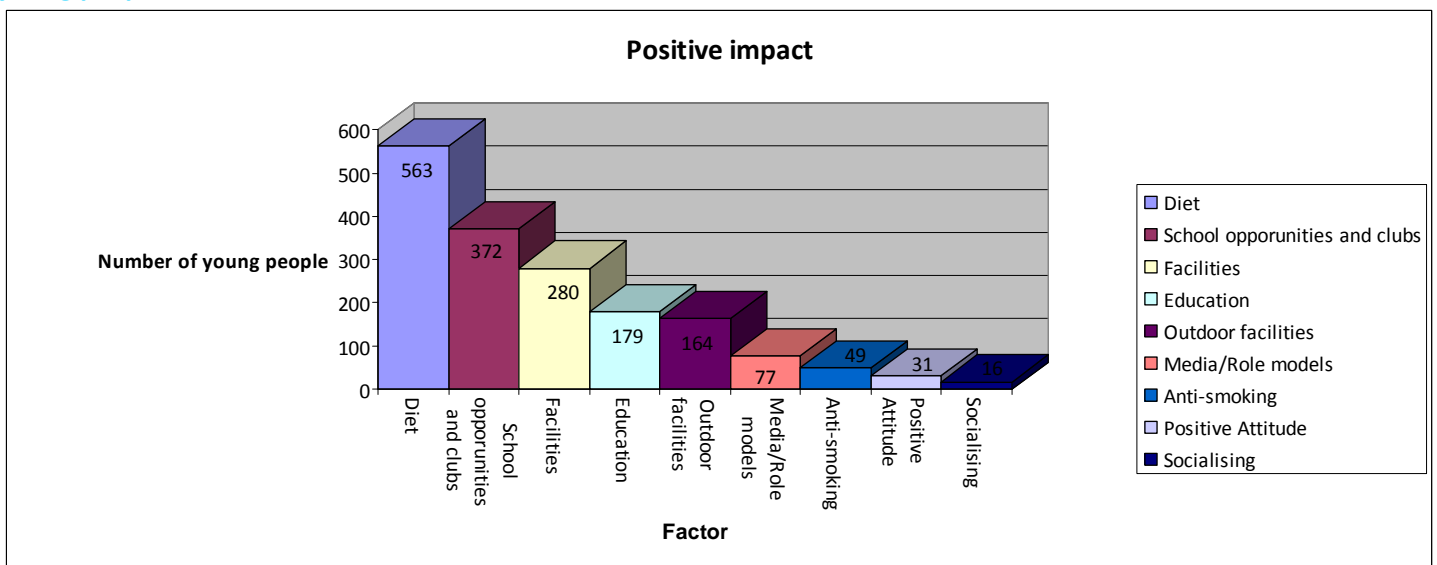
#### Analysis:

As these results suggest, the majority of participants considered themselves to be healthy at the time that the survey was conducted. Over 96% of participants saw themselves as healthy, as opposed to less than 4% who thought otherwise.

It is clear that participants have read the question and taken the most literal definition of the term 'healthy'. Consequently, they seem to have analysed mainly their

physical health, as opposed to mental or emotional. This is further proven later with responses to questions about impacts on health, as the majority of young people have made allusions to diet and fitness rather than stress or peer pressure (though some responses did include references to the latter).

#### Question 12 - In your view, what are the main things that have a positive impact on the health and well-being of young people in West Sussex?



<b>Diet</b>	563
<b>School opportunities and clubs</b>	372
<b>Facilities</b>	280
<b>Education</b>	179
<b>Outdoor facilities</b>	164
<b>Media/Role models</b>	77
<b>Anti-smoking</b>	49
<b>Positive Attitude</b>	31
<b>Socialising</b>	16

#### Analysis:

As suggested by these results, the biggest factor affecting the health of young people across West Sussex is diet. Responses varied, from those who believed that school canteens now offer more nutritious choices, to those who suggested that a good diet can make a young person feel more energetic and able to concentrate with more ease.

Almost 400 young people suggested that there are a huge number of opportunities for them to be involved in extra-curricular activities through their schools.

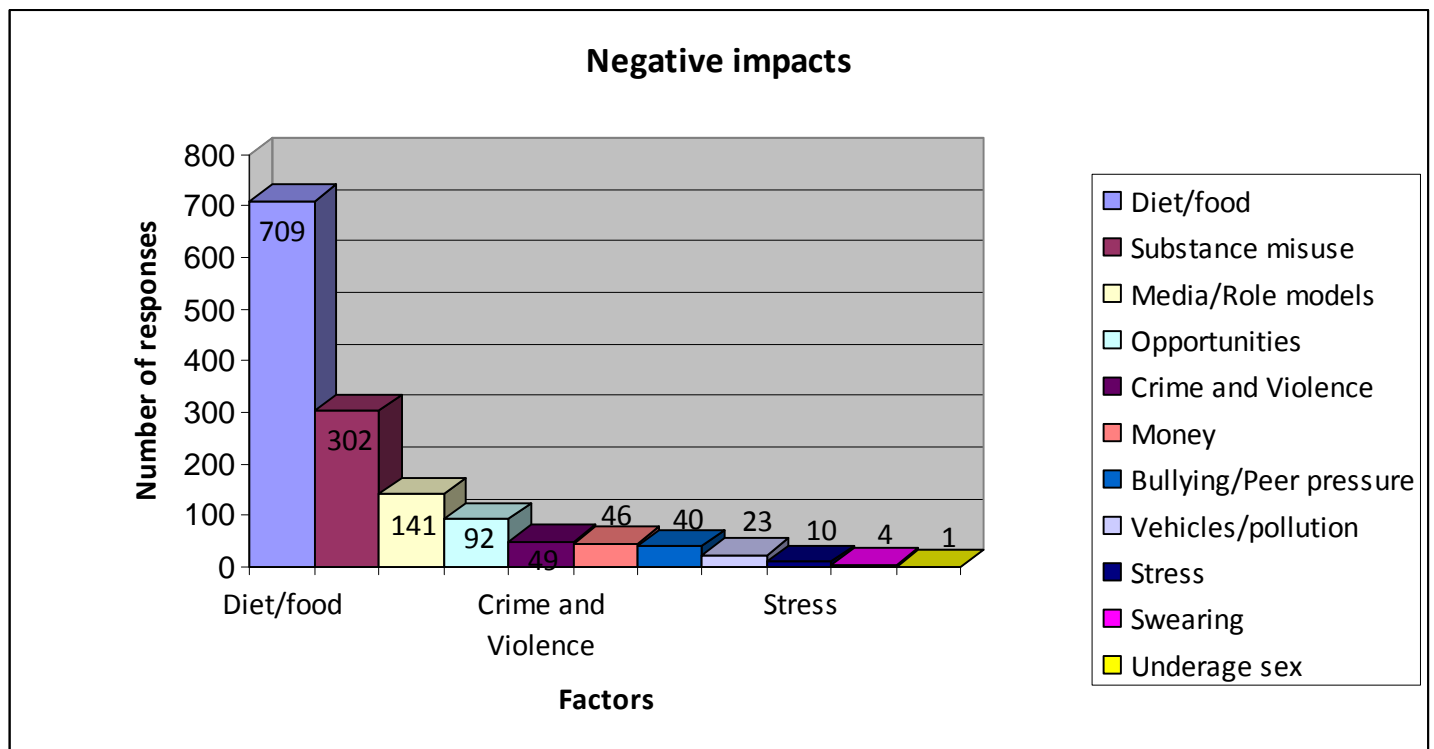
Many put forward the idea that the variety of clubs and facilities on offer within their schools are vast and that they are regularly encouraged to participate.

In relation to the above, almost 300 young people implied that there are great facilities on offer – and there were a huge number of references to leisure centres such as the Pavilions in Horsham, although many too suggested that the price to use such facilities is too high.

Education proved to be another key topic, whereby participants gave mixed views as to wanting more physical education classes within school hours.

Participants often referred to the fact that facilities are available but that they did not know exactly where to go, how to get to them or even if they could afford them. Most young people suggested that they knew about gyms and leisure centres but that they had no idea how they could do something exciting outdoors.

**Question 13 - In your view, what are the main things that have a negative impact on the health and well-being of Young People in West Sussex?**



Diet/food	709
Substance misuse	302
Media/Role models	141
Opportunities	92
Crime and Violence	49
Money	46
Bullying/Peer pressure	40
Vehicles/pollution	23
Stress	10
Swearing	4
Underage sex	1

**Analysis:**

As these results suggest, diet and substance misuse are easily the two most predominant responses when voters were asked what has the most negative impact on the health of young people across West Sussex. The majority of voters said that there are far too many fast food outlets close to where they study and as a result it was difficult to resist the temptation of an unhealthy meal at lunch time. Many also suggested that the cost of food in such outlets is far cheaper than that of healthier options from the school canteen or local supermarket and as a result they had little choice over what they could afford.

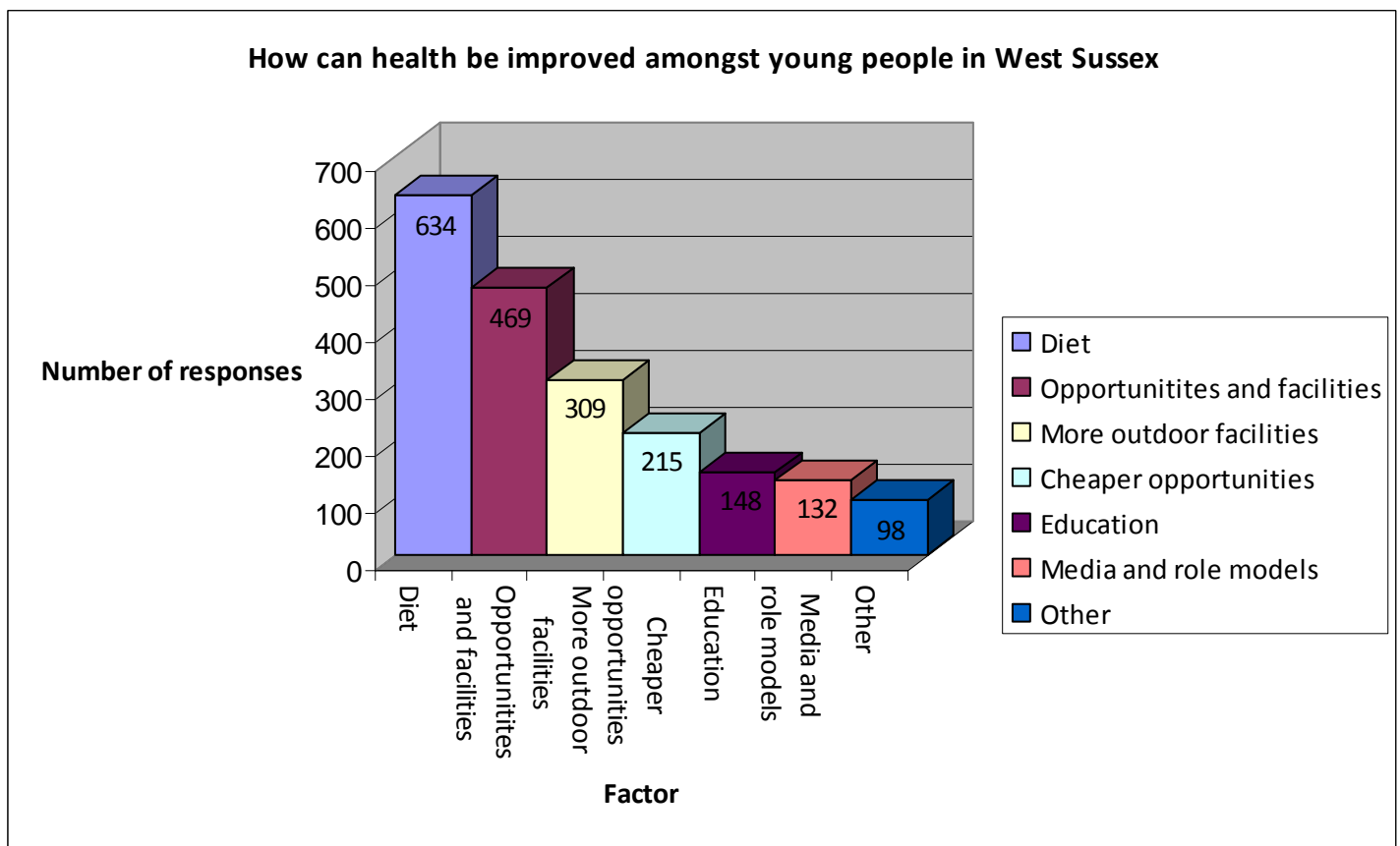
A large number of participants also suggested that substance misuse has a huge impact on the health of young people in West Sussex. In this context, the term ‘substance misuse’ refers to smoking, underage drinking and taking drugs. The majority of young people answering within this context suggested that passive smoking was causing them an unhealthy lifestyle, and that they believe that the lifestyles of those around them were being massively affected by the choices that they are making with regards to such substance misuse.

141 voters made comments about media/role models, implying that there is too much media attention given to overly thin role models and that perhaps it puts far too much pressure on young men and women to be the same. Participants suggested that they would like more local role models to look up to.

As we saw in question 12, a number of voters have made allusions to the idea that there are not enough opportunities for young people to be involved in healthy activities across West Sussex. Many did suggest, however, that they simply do not know *where* to go or *how* to get there, as opposed to there not actually being anything for them to do. This can also be linked to a number of responses which are based around cycle facilities. Many young people suggested that cycle paths are few and far between. One respondent said:

***“There are NOT enough cycle paths. Everyone says that you should cycle more but there aren’t any cycle paths! You either have to cycle on the road which is dangerous or on the pavement which you are not allowed to do!”***

**Question 14 – What do you think can be done to help improve the health of young people in West Sussex?**



***“You should raise the age of legally being able to buy cigarettes and alcohol. This will improve young people’s health because even 15 year-olds are smoking ☹️”***

**Analysis:**

The responses to this question were hugely varied. It is clear that, as in previous questions, diet is one of the key factors that need to be addressed in order to improve the health and well-being of young people across West Sussex. Not only did almost 500 responses suggest that opportunities and facilities need to be improved and advertised better across the county but over 300 implied that they aren’t aware of enough outdoor free facilities that they would be eligible to use.

***“Maybe it would be good to have less fast-food restaurants and more parks and fields and outdoor activities for people to walk around and be outside. Because if we have the correct resources then young people won’t feel the need to become couch-bound”***

A number of young people alluded to the idea that facilities needed to be cheaper and that healthy food should be cheaper in schools. Not only this, but a suggestion came through on a number of occasions that the opposite should be done for unhealthy food and substances such as alcohol; that prices should be increased so that younger people find it more difficult to afford them.

Some young people recommended that they would like to see more activity days within their areas, whereby families and students can come along to try out new sports and to involve themselves in fun and creative activities that they might not have had the opportunity to try in the past.

## 4. Conclusions

***“Eating a healthy diet and taking regular exercise are widely acknowledged as vital to the physical and psychological development of young people. These lifestyle factors have important implications for future health as adults and establishing good habits during childhood is crucial to combating rates of obesity”***

*Lifestyle of 14 to 15-year-olds in West Sussex 2010, May 2010*

As the survey compiled by NHS West Sussex found, diet and fitness play a huge roll in the development of young people into healthy and fit young adults. It’s clear to see from these survey results that not only are young people extremely concerned about the opportunities that are on offer to them in terms of exercise and fitness but that they are very frustrated by the food that is on offer to them both at and around their school campuses.

According to these results, young people in West Sussex are very interested in learning more about healthy living - especially diet and how to choose the healthier options - through schools and extra-curricular activities but they suggest that opportunities just aren’t available to them.

One of the most prevalent ideas that comes from these responses is that there just aren’t enough outdoor facilities for young people to use and that those available are either difficult to get to or not publicised well enough. Moreover, some young people suggested that those outdoor facilities that are available to young people are often meeting places for gangs and groups of youngsters and as a result many participants felt threatened and uneasy at the thought of using them in the evenings. One response suggested that West Sussex should *“lower the cost of some activities that are more expensive, and if they are quite far away they should provide extra buses, encouraging more people to go”*. This was a theme that re-occurred on a number of occasions throughout the survey results, suggesting that young people are eager to take part in leisure activities - they just do not have the money or means of transport in all cases.

Although the majority of responses referred to the term ‘health’ in its most literal form – physical – a few young people did suggest that one thing that has a particularly negative impact on the health of young people is stress. They related such stress to exam pressure, implying that there is often too much pressure on young people at any one time and as a result they feel stressed and unhealthy within themselves.

Not only did the participants suggest that they would like to learn more about the effects of an unhealthy lifestyle on their bodies, but they also advocated that they would like more physical education lessons as a part of their daily school routine, as many of them do not get the opportunity or time to exercise once they return home from school.

This survey has provided a sound understanding of the issues that are being faced by young people across West Sussex with regards to their health and well-being. Although only a relatively small percentage of the eligible population participated, we have been given a true insight into the issues that are most important for the county’s young people.

It is clear that diet, facilities and education are top of the list when it comes to analysing these results, and the West Sussex Youth Cabinet and the West Sussex LINK will be working closely together to ensure that these results are disseminated efficiently and effectively - and that they are taken into consideration when further decisions are made in the future affecting the health and well-being of young people across the county.

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