

From: Dan Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

To: Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee
– 11th March 2025

Subject: Young People and Vaping – an update on the Kent School Survey

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Report: N/A

Future Pathway of Report: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Not applicable

Summary:

Although vaping is much less harmful than smoking, it is not risk free and should be discouraged in children and young people and people who have never smoked. It is illegal to sell e-cigarettes and vaping products containing nicotine or tobacco to under-18s and yet there is growing concern that more children in our communities appear to be taking up vaping. The Tobacco and Vape bill introduced in November 2024 aims to protect young people by reducing the accessibility and appeal of smoking and vaping products. One of the key measures will be to strengthen enforcement activities and impose stricter regulations on the flavours, display and packaging of vapes. A ban on the sale of disposable vapes will be introduced in June 2025 under separate legislation.

To understand the local issues and identify how to effectively tackle them, Kent Public Health and Kent Analytics commissioned a school survey on young people and vaping in June 2024. The initial results of the survey have provided useful insights into the attitudes and behaviours of young vapers, including what influences vaping and where vape products are sourced. Further demographic analysis and planned focus groups will provide the detailed information needed to develop an effective partnership action plan.

A full report of the findings is being prepared and will be shared with the Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee when available.

Recommendation(s): The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report, and to **COMMENT** on the survey and related work.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Vaping is an established and effective aid to help smokers quit smoking. However, it is not risk free and should be discouraged in children and young people and in adults who have never smoked. It is not risk free, but vaping is less harmful than smoking and nicotine containing products can be highly addictive. It is illegal to sell vape products containing nicotine, or tobacco, to under 18s.
- 1.2 Despite the age of sale laws, there is a clear emerging trend in vaping among young people, generating public concern of potential health risks, nicotine addiction and fear of introducing a new gateway into smoking.
- 1.3 Vaping prevalence among young people is reported nationally from NHS surveys ('Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in schools') and annual YouGov surveys providing national context on the attitudes and behaviours of vaping among 11–18-year-olds. The latest estimates inform us that in 2024, 7.2% of 11–17-year-olds currently vape and 18% report that they have ever vaped. Although there has not been a significant change from 2023, there is perceived greater visibility of young people vaping in public and growing concern among schools, youth leaders and others who work with young people.

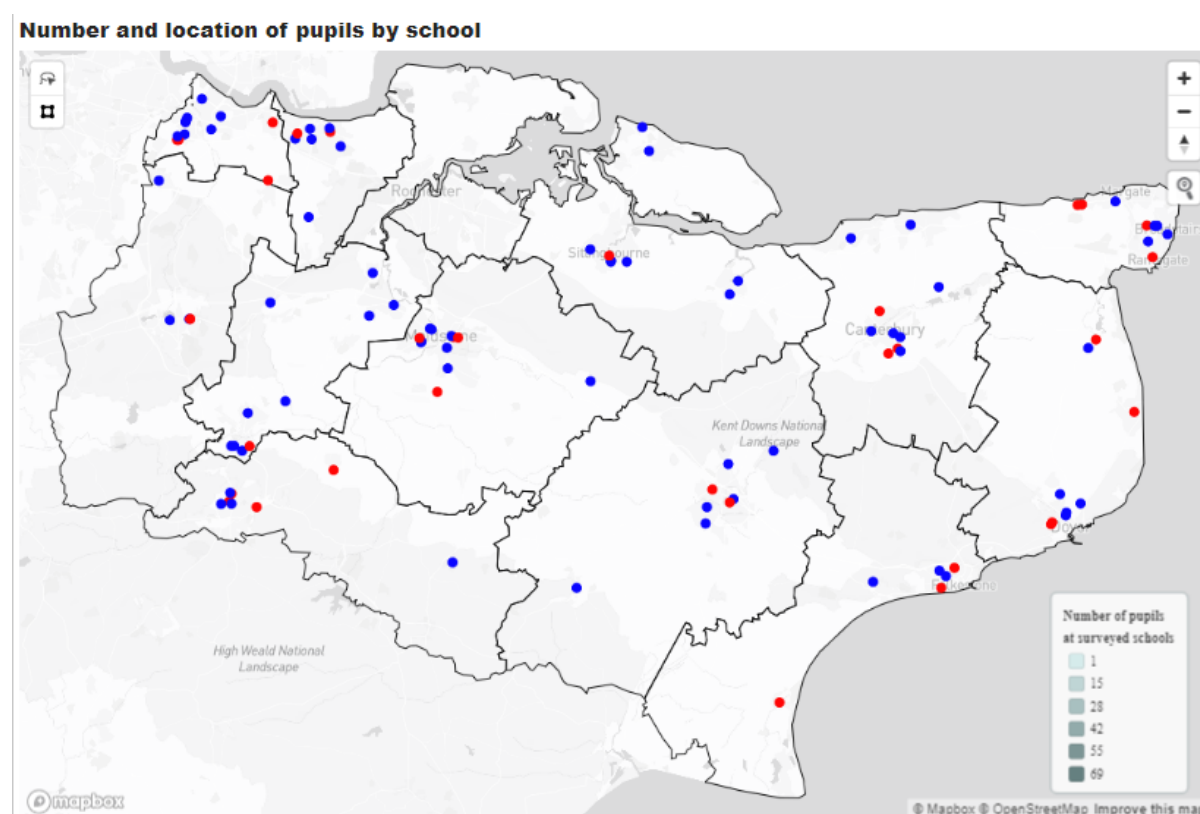
2. Background

- 2.1 Vaping prevalence among young people is reported nationally from NHS surveys ('Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in schools') and annual YouGov surveys providing national context on the attitudes and behaviours of vaping among 11–18-year-olds. The latest estimates inform us that in 2024, 7.2% of 11–17-year-olds currently vape and 18% report that they have ever vaped. Although there has not been a significant change from 2023, there is perceived greater visibility of young people vaping in public and growing concern. In 2023, a multi-agency partnership group was set up to share concerns and deploy practical solutions to young people vaping in Kent. [Vaping - The Facts](#) webpage was developed to provide public-facing factual information on youth vaping and a signpost platform to educational resources for schools. In addition, the group agreed that a local survey among Kent's young people would help identify the scale of the concern locally.
- 2.2 In April 2024, Kent Public Health and Kent Analytics commissioned a school survey based on YouGov survey questions on vaping, which was conducted by Lake Market Research. The aim was to ascertain the local vaping prevalence and learn more about the attitudes and behaviours of vaping among local young people.

- 2.3 A further survey is intended in 2026, following the impending government ban on disposable vapes and further restrictions on other vape products to identify potential changes in attitudes and behaviours following the ban.

3. The Young People and Vaping Survey

- 3.1 In 2024, secondary schools in Kent were invited to participate in the delivery of the survey to 11–18-year-olds and 33 secondary schools agreed to take part. There were 5,493 survey responses in total with a good representation across Kent. The diagram below shows the location of the participating schools (red) relative to the coverage of all secondary schools in the area (blue).

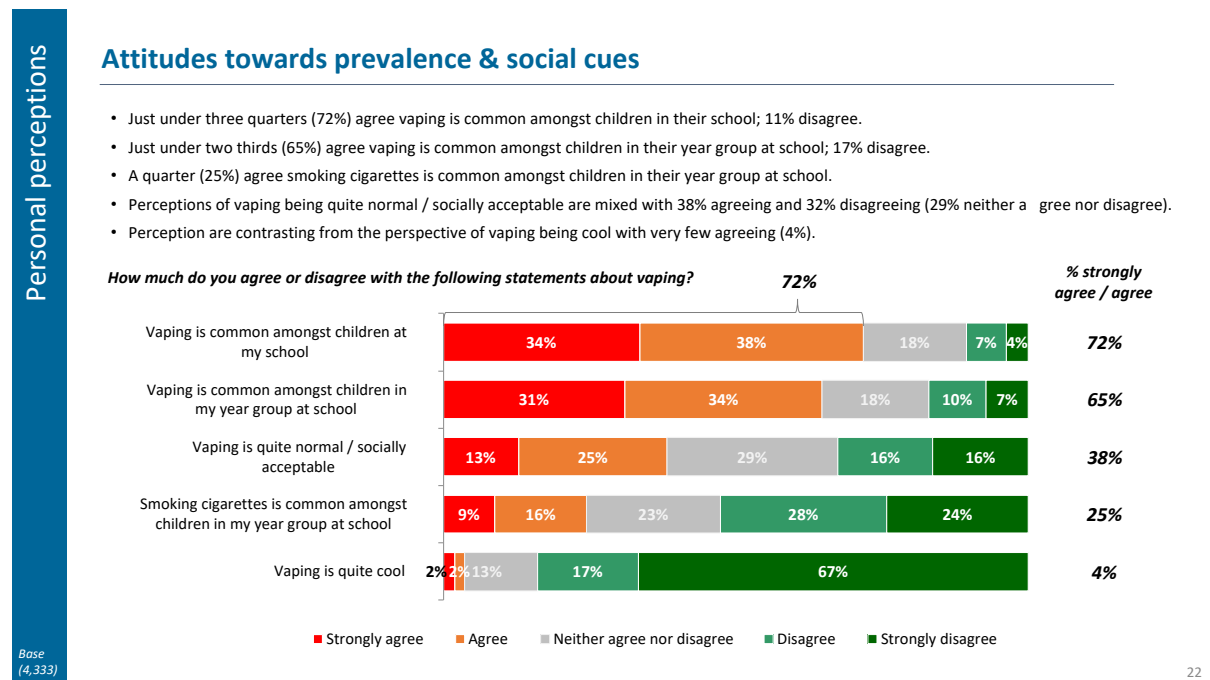


- 3.2 Headline data arising from the survey is insightful and will be used locally to inform a multi-agency action plan to tackle the main issues. However, due to the differing survey methods, the data cannot be used to compare with the national YouGov online survey data and the survey outcomes for Kent cannot be used to benchmark against the national average. The Kent survey adopted the pen-and-paper methodology to reassure underage children that have used vapes that their responses were anonymous and not digitally identifiable. The intended second survey, after the disposable vape ban has been introduced, would use the same methodology with the same schools to directly measure the impact of the ban.
- 3.3 The initial survey data has been released but is currently being prepared in a full report to provide context and explanatory meaning behind the figures. This is crucial to avoid misinterpretation of the data. In the meantime, further analysis and demographic profiling is being conducted to identify the key

drivers and causes of vaping across age, gender, locality and socio-economic groups.

3.4 To date, some of the key findings are:

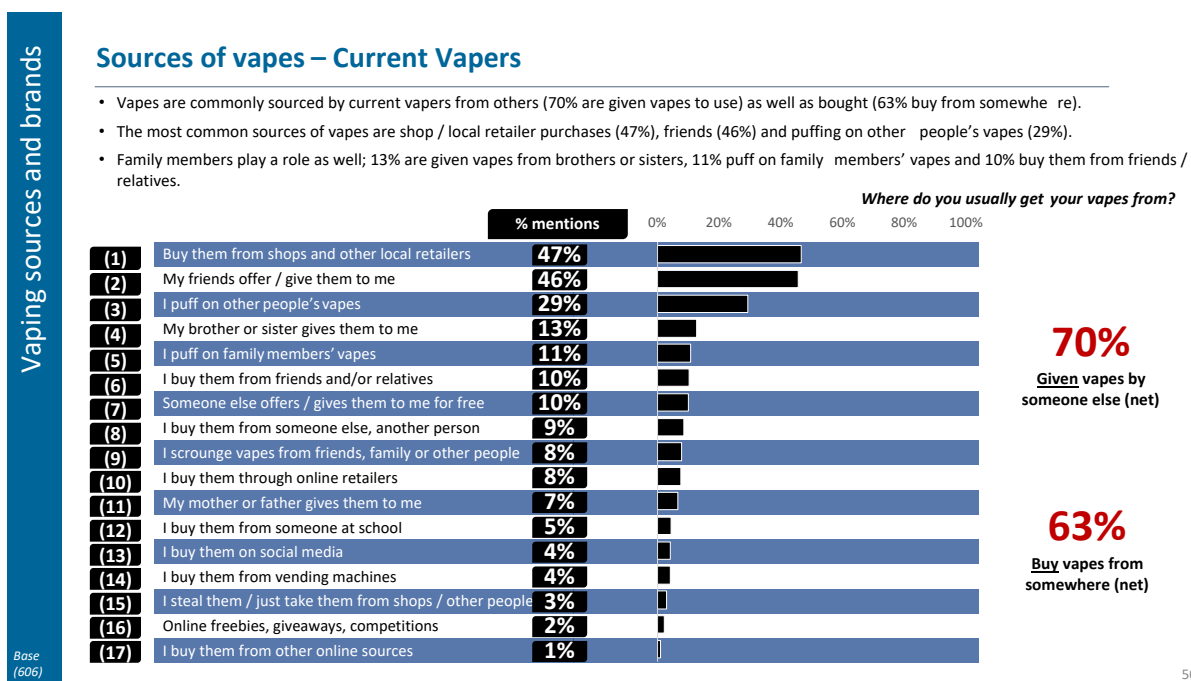
- a. **Perception of vaping:** Vaping is perceived as common amongst children in their school (72%) and amongst children in their year (65%). Perceptions of social acceptability are higher among higher age groups and among those who have ever tried or who currently vape. *Please see the diagram below.*



- b. **Trialling/experimenting:** Just under a third of respondents reported ever having tried a vape and just under half of these have at least one family member who vapes. Nearly half of those who currently vape said they had been given vapes by friends and nearly a third puff on other people's vapes. Reasons for not vaping now vary from just experimenting to see what it is like, concerns about health risks and worries about becoming addicted.

- c. **Vape Promotions:** The most common platform for recalling promotion of vapes is Tiktok (52%), Snapchat (36%) and Instagram (33%) and two thirds recalled seeing influencers or celebrities promoting vapes on social media. Further investigations are taking place to address these sightings alongside social media policies.

- d. **Reasons for vaping:** The most common reason for using vapes are liking the flavour (46%) although it is concerning that 45% of vape users feel vaping helps them feel relaxed and 39% reporting using vapes to make them feel less anxious.
- e. **Vape Use:** 47% of current vapers felt the desire to vape every few hours and over a third felt the need to vape every hour. The frequency and desire to vape was higher among 11–15-year-olds and current vapers who also smoke. More than half of current vapers said they do not wish to stop.
- f. **Sourcing Vapes:** The most common source of vapes are purchased from retailers, with corner shops being most popular (49%) although 81% of 11–15-year-old current vapers report obtaining their vapes from other people; predominantly friends and family members to a lesser extent. *Please see diagram below.*



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4. Wider Influences

- 4.1 As part of the government's smoking and vaping bill, disposable vapes will be banned in the UK from June 2025. One of the intended outcomes of the ban is to discourage young people from taking up vaping, so further legislative measures are likely to be introduced to restrict flavours and packaging to make them less appealing to young people. A further local survey is intended in 2026 to understand vape use among young people following the legislation.
- 4.2 Kent Public Health and Trading Standards are working together to tackle under age vape sales using local intelligence. Trading Standards are conducting test

purchasing and promoting the Under 25 challenge to ensure retailers comply to UK standards and age of sale laws.

- 4.3 Once further analysis of the Kent survey data has been concluded, focus groups will be conducted to better understand the key drivers for vaping and help co-design a comprehensive action plan to tackle vaping among young people in our community.

5. Funding

- 5.1 Kent Public Health funded the vaping and young people survey (£50,000) and is funding the Trading Standards under age sales programme at £108,000 per year for 2 years.
- 5.2 Further funding may be required to deliver focus groups and an agreed action plan although existing resources will be used where possible (for example, working with existing partners to facilitate focus groups and the delivery of campaigns).

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 A school survey was conducted to understand the attitudes and behaviours of vaping among Kent young people across 33 schools and resulted in 5,493 responses.
- 6.2 The main headlines of the survey results have been released and further analysis is being conducted to further understand the key drivers of vaping among different demographic groups. This will then inform the content of a number of structured focus groups to further understand some of the key issues and challenges of vaping among young people and help co-design a local action plan.
- 6.3 A further survey will be conducted to consider the impact of the delivered action plan and any changes in attitudes and behaviour in vaping resulting from the disposable vape ban.

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7. **Recommendation(s):** The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the information contained within this report, and to **COMMENT** on the survey and related work.
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8. Report Authors

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