

Section 1: About the proposal

Title of Proposal
Proposed discontinuation of Cool2Talk service in Argyll and Bute
Intended outcome of proposal
<p>Cool2Talk is a free, anonymous, and confidential online health information service for young people aged 12 to 25 in Argyll and Bute. The service delivers two main functions: a question-and-answer platform where young people can anonymously post questions and receive personalised responses from trained professionals within 24 hours, and an information zone that signposts users to relevant local and national support services.</p> <p>The proposed discontinuation of Cool2Talk by 30th March 2025 is based on evidence of declining usage and the challenges of sustaining funding for the service. This proposal aims to ensure that young people in Argyll and Bute continue to have access to the support they need by utilising existing accessible services, such as Kooth, The Mix, Breathing Space, and others, which provide comparable features and address similar needs.</p> <p>This proposal will cease the Cool2Talk service and advise a health promotion approach aimed at utilising accessible existing services for children and young people in Argyll and Bute, ensuring that substitutes are available and this population is not adversely affected by the cessation of the service. This proposal intends to identify and offer alternatives that can substitute for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The core functions provided by Cool2Talk, such as the ability to ask questions and receive answers from trained professionals. ✓ Key features, including anonymity and confidentiality, which create a safe environment for young people to freely express themselves. ✓ Services that cater to the same age group as Cool2Talk (ages 12 to 25). ✓ Services that address the topics most frequently raised by Cool2Talk users, ensuring that young people have access to tailored and relevant support.

Description of proposal
<p>This proposal recommends the discontinuation of the Cool2Talk service in Argyll and Bute by 30th March 2025. The decision is informed by evidence of declining usage, challenges in sustaining funding, and the availability of alternative services that address the same needs effectively.</p> <p>A scoping exercise conducted by the Public Health team identified a range of local and national services already accessible to young people in Argyll and Bute. These include services such as Kooth, The Mix, Breathing Space, the Self-Harm Network Scotland, Argyll and Bute Befrienders, and Young Minds, among others. These services provide support across the key themes most frequently raised by Cool2Talk users, including emotional health, relationships, sexual health, self-harm, anxiety, and mental health. Furthermore, these services maintain essential features such as confidentiality, anonymity, and accessibility, which are critical to ensuring young people feel safe when seeking support.</p>

Given the financial constraints and the availability of these established resources, the proposal argues that continuing Cool2Talk is neither necessary nor cost-effective. Redirecting attention to promoting and utilising these existing services will ensure that young people in the region continue to have access to appropriate and high-quality support without duplication of effort or resources.

HSCP Strategic Priorities to which the proposal contributes

- Community Coproduction
- Prevention, early intervention and enablement

Lead officer details

Name of lead officer	Samantha Campbell
Job title	Health Improvement Principal
Department	Public Health

Appropriate officer details

Name of appropriate officer	Olena Mishanina
Job title	Health Improvement Senior
Department	Public Health

Sign-off of EIA	
Date of sign-off	

Who will deliver the proposal?

Health Improvement Team, Argyll and Bute HSCP

Section 2: Evidence used in the course of carrying out EIA

Consultation / engagement

A series of discussions and meetings were held over the past two months with NHS Tayside and Mid Argyll Youth Development Services (MAYDS) to explore the reasons behind the significant decline in the usage of Cool2Talk. These engagements highlighted that similar downward trends have been observed in other regions hosting the Cool2Talk service, indicating that the issue is not specific to Argyll and Bute.

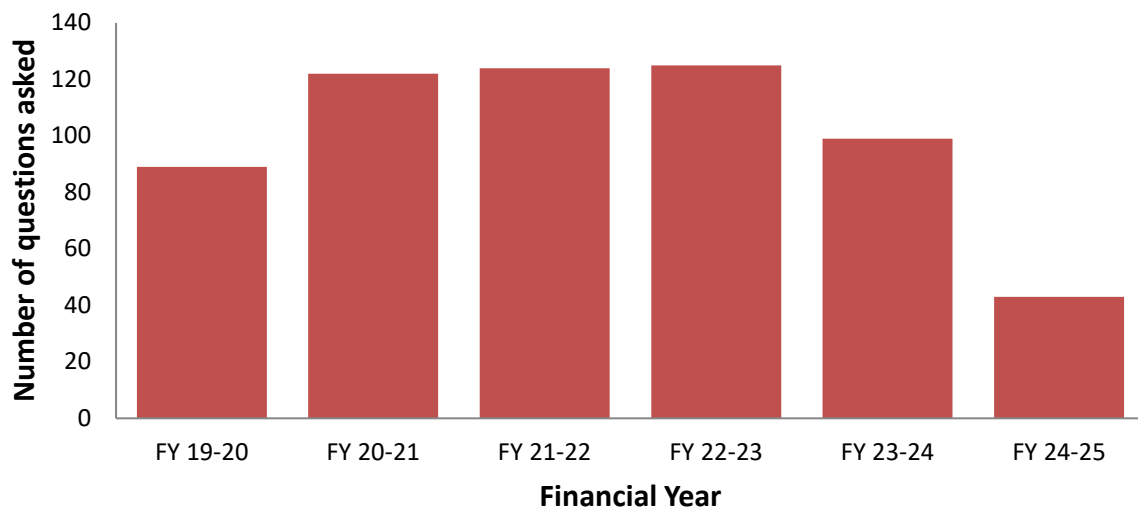
Assumptions suggest that the decline may reflect the service's inability to meet the evolving needs and expectations of young people. Possible factors include the availability of alternative services, such as Kooth's one-to-one instant messenger service, which offers faster and more engaging support, and the emergence of AI tools like ChatGPT. Although no research has been conducted to validate these assumptions, quantitative data demonstrates a steady decline in usage since 2023, with the most significant drop observed in 2024.

Data:

The Cool2Talk website allows data to be gathered on the self-reported demographics of people asking questions on the site. Data also includes the type of questions asked and the number of questions asked about a particular topic.

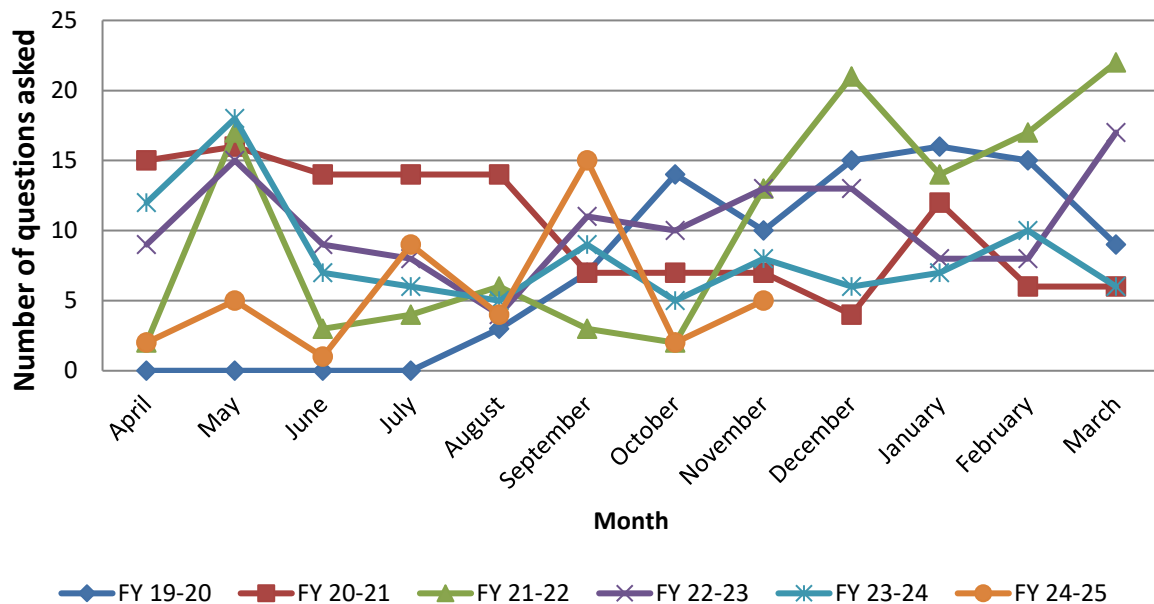
Usage of the site remained broadly similar from 2020 to 2023 with around 123 questions asked per year. This dipped in the year 2023 to 2024 with 99 questions asked with further decrease in the year 2024 to 2025 where 43 questions in total asked.

Total questions asked, by financial year

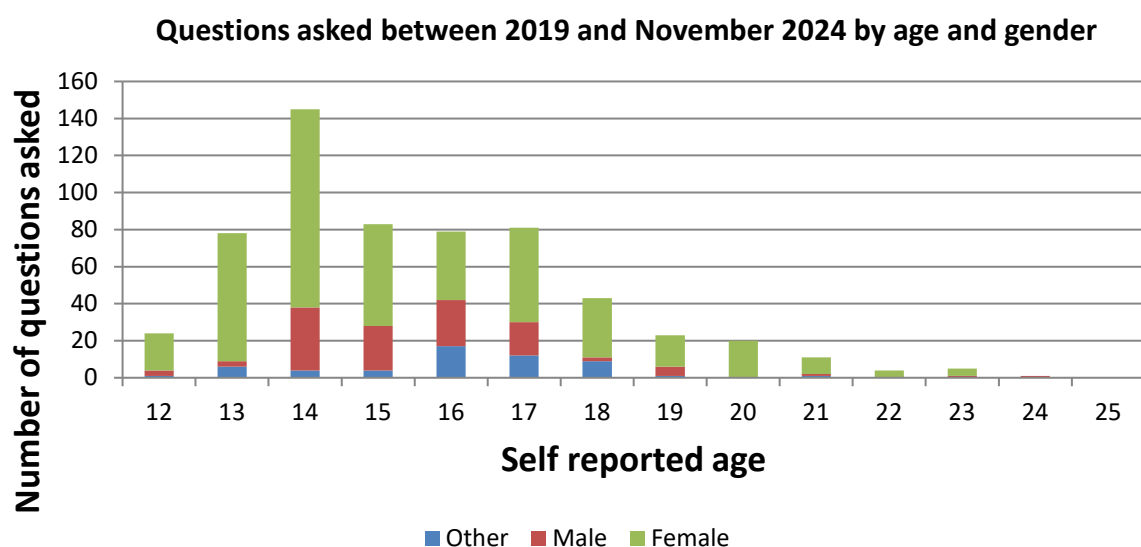


There is variance in the number of questions asked month to month, with months showing higher numbers often associated with increased promotion. It is acknowledged that promotion needs to increase, and MAYDS has committed to using their TikTok account and improving their social media presence to boost site usage. Additionally, a promotional campaign was planned, including the distribution of branded pens, with the expectation that this will help raise awareness of Cool2Talk among young people.

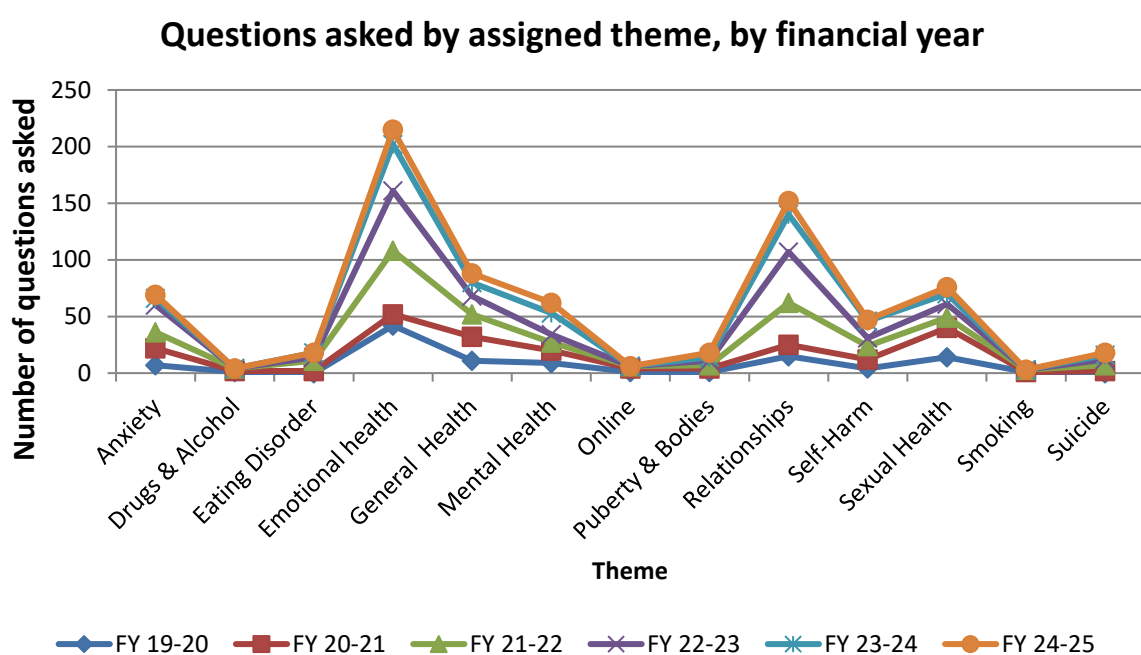
Questions asked per month, by financial year



There is more consistency in the gender and age profiles of those who use the site. Those who report that they are female between the ages of 14 and 16 have consistently been the most prominent users of the site from 2019 to 2025.

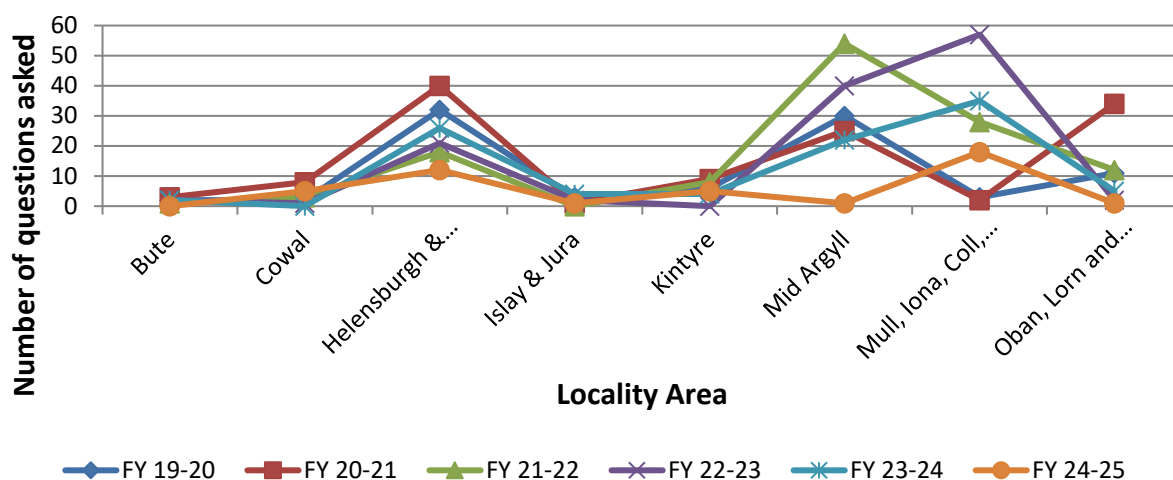


Questions asked on the site are assigned to themes/tags, questions may be complex and are therefore assigned to multiple themes/tags. Questions asked from 2019 to 2025 have consistently been most commonly themed around emotional health and relationships, followed by general and mental health, sexual health, self-harm, anxiety and suicide.



The site is most used by those living in Mid Argyll, Helensburgh and Lomond, Mull and the small isles.

Questions asked by self reported area of residence, by financial year



There are some caveats regarding the data collected on which areas questions are being asked from. Caution should be taken with postcode data, numbers higher than would be anticipated for Mull as they are the first option give to the YP. This is true to in past years when postcode FK20 was first on the list and had high numbers. Also, post code PA29 6 is a cross boundary postcode between Mid Argyll and Kintyre, the site has solely assigned this post code to Mid Argyll. There only one option for Kintyre this may be why there were no self-reported questions from Kintyre.

From the data above, it is clear that the decline in usage of Cool2Talk in Argyll and Bute has been observed since 2023, with the most significant drop occurring in 2024. Although efforts have been made to promote the service through social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, these actions have not demonstrated a significant impact on increasing engagement or usage. For instance, the social media campaign conducted in November 2024 did not demonstrate a significant impact on usage within Argyll and Bute.

The data also identifies the primary users of the service as females aged 14 to 16, with emotional health and relationships being the most frequently addressed themes. This highlights the specific demographic and key areas of concern that the service has supported.

Other information

From scoping exercise we can identify accessible services that can provide substitutes for each of the categories and functions currently offered by Cool2Talk. This will ensure that the needs of the identified population continue to be met through alternative support services.

Service	Purpose	Stakeholders	Area	Referral needed
Services that provides one-to-one free confidential councillor support with possibilities to ask questions about emotional health and relationships, general and mental health, sexual health, self-harm, anxiety and suicide via messenger, phone on in person.				
ChildLine	Support with any issues via offering lots of different ways to speak to a Childline counsellor.	Up to 19 years old	National	No
NHS24	The services they offer include listening, offering advice, and guiding you to further help if required.	ALL ages	National	No
The Mix	Emotional support and one-2-one counselling on everything from money and mental health	Under 25's	National	No

	to homelessness, relationships.			
Kooth	A safe space to chat with counsellors, take part in activities, journal your thoughts, listen to podcasts, and join supportive forums	10-25	Argyll and Bute	
SHOUT	Shout 85258 is the UK's first free, confidential, 24/7 text support service.	12+	National	No
Samaritans	Confidential, non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people of any age who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.	ALL ages	National	No
HOPELINE2 47	24/7 suicide prevention helpline	under the age of 35	National	No
SAMH	Offers a safe space to talk about mental health in a form of helpline and live chat.	11+	National	No
Self-Harm Network Scotland	Compassionate councillor support, resources, and information about self-harm.	12+	National	No
CAMHS	A range of therapeutic interventions are offered by appropriately trained staff.	up to 16 years of age, or up to 19 if in secondary education.	Argyll and Bute	Yes
LGBT Youth Scotland	Support LGB+ young people in Scotland.	Aged 13-25	National (Scotland)	No
Mermaids	Supporting trans, non-binary and gender-diverse children, young people and their families.	under 20	National	No
National Bullying Helpline	Provides practical help and advice for children and adults dealing with bullying at school or work.	All ages (children can contact them directly) If bullied at school, NBH will ask to speak to an adult.	National (UK)	No
Services that provides information zone for mental and physical health for young people				
Young Minds	Provides a range of mental health help and advice for young people: Find Help With How I'm Feeling Advice For Young People YoungMinds	Under the age of 25	National (UK)	No
Papyrus 247	Offers a range of health apps: Papyrus Microsite	Under the age of 35	National	No
Young Scot	Platform for young people with variety of information including topics such as mental health, opportunities to volunteering or trying something new	11-26	National	No
SAMH	Provides information related to mental health and mental wellbeing including self-	11+	National	No

	management tools: samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing			
National Wellbeing Hub	The hub that covers a range of topics including physical and mental health	ALL		
CAMHS resources	Offers variety of resources and services https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/websites?utm_source=chatgpt.com	Up to 19		
Local support services				
Youth Health Drop-in Service			Oban, Rothesay, Arrochar, Campbeltown, Dunoon, Islay, Mull, Tarbert	
Argyll and Bute Befrienders	Provides emotional and social support to children and young people who are affected by adversity or social isolation.	6-16 year olds at point of referral.	Argyll and Bute	Argyll and Bute Befrienders
HELP (Argyll and Bute)	HELP is a support service for young people who are homeless, in threat of homelessness or coming out of care.	Age 16-25	Argyll and Bute	
Young Carers for MAKI (MAYDS)	Supporting children and young people with caring responsibilities.	Up to 18 years old	Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islay	
Helensburgh & Lomond Carers	Support young carers	Ages 5-17	Helensburgh and Lomond	
Victim Support Scotland/ Victim Support Argyll and Bute	Support victims of crime, witnesses and their family members.	12+ (12-16 year olds need legal consent from a guardian)	National/ Argyll and Bute	
Support with physical health issues				
Diabetes UK/ Scotland	Confidential helpline (charges apply) that can provide information about the condition and take time to talk through and explore emotional, social, psychological or practical difficulties.	11-25 with Type 1 Diabetes	National (UK)	
Epilepsy Scotland – have a national youth service	Work with people living with epilepsy to ensure their voice is heard.	Any ages but under 16's speak to their care giver Ages 8-23	National (UK)	No – self-referral.
TalkTime	A unique counselling charity for young	Age 12-25	National	

	people in Scotland who are either physically disabled or have a long-term physical health condition.				
Youth Groups in Argyll and Bute					
Oban Youth Café	Youth Group	High school age	Oban		
Hope 2 Oban (H2O)	Youth Group	TBC	Oban		
MAYDS	Youth Group	TBC	Mid-Argyll		
Route81	Youth Group	TBC	Garelochhead		
Helensburgh Youth Club	Youth Group	TBC	Helensburgh		
The Hub Youth Club	Youth Group	TBC	Campbeltown		
ExP	Faith-based youth group	TBC	Dunoon		
Rural and Island Support					
Young Islanders Network	Aims to build a community for young islanders and empower them to help make the National Islands Plan work for young people.	Age 5-25	National (all Scottish islands)		
Scottish Association for Young Farmers	A supportive network with limitless opportunities to develop new skills for Scottish farmers.	Age 14-30	Argyll and Bute		

Gaps in evidence

The data presented is self-reported and therefore cannot be validated for accuracy or reliability. Additionally, we cannot determine with certainty whether the significant drop in Cool2Talk usage has been caused by a lack of awareness about the service, competition from other services offering more tailored or immediate support, or other external factors such as changing preferences among young people.

Section 3: Impact of proposal

Impact on service users:

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability		X		
Ethnicity				X
Sex		X		
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion				X
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		X		

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation				X
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background				X
Communities of place				X
Communities of interest		X		

If you have identified any negative impacts on service users, give more detail here:

If any 'don't knows' have been identified, when will impacts on these groups be clear?

Although no specific themes were identified regarding questions related to ethnicity, deprivation, financial difficulties, or communities of place, it is possible that such topics were raised but not captured during data collection from the website. As a result, we cannot determine whether individuals from these particular groups would be disproportionately affected by the withdrawal of Cool2Talk.

How has 'due regard' been given to any negative impacts that have been identified?

Impact on service deliverers (including employees, volunteers etc.):

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability		X		
Ethnicity		X		
Sex		X		
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population		X		
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place				X
Communities of interest				X

If you have identified any negative impacts on service deliverers, give more detail here:

If any 'don't knows' have been identified, when will impacts on these groups be clear?

A potential impact has been identified on the local third sector organisation, Mid Argyll Youth Development Services (MAYDS), which has been delivering the Cool2Talk service since its inception. This proposal will terminate the contractual relationship with MAYDS as part of the discontinuation of the service.

While MAYDS may have the capacity to engage in alternative work or partnerships under other models of service delivery, this remains uncertain and would depend on their organisational priorities and future opportunities. The cessation of the contract will, however, have a direct impact on their income and involvement in this specific area of service provision.

How has 'due regard' been given to any negative impacts that have been identified?

Section 4: Interdependencies

Is this proposal likely to have any knock-on effects for any other activities carried out by or on behalf of the HSCP?	No
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Details of knock-on effects identified

Section 5: Monitoring and review

Monitoring and review