

Council
1 April 2025

**A Stitch in Time: Supporting the Mental Wellbeing of Young People
Today to Improve Their Prospects for Tomorrow**

Director of Public Health Annual Report

Report by Director of Public Health and Communities

Recommendation

1. The Council is **RECOMMENDED** to note the Director of Public Health's Annual Report in Annex 1 and to take every opportunity to support actions and initiatives that will progress related work.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The Council is to be informed on the structure and overview of content, including key messages, of the upcoming Oxfordshire County Council Director of Public Health Annual Report (2024/2025) focussed on children and young people's mental health and economic activity.

2.2 Directors of Public Health are required to establish an annual report highlighting key public health priorities for their area.

2.3 This work is timely and closely aligned with the *Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people* framework, published by the Department of Health and Social Care in 2024, and the Health Foundation's *Mental health trends among working-age people* (published in 2025).

3. Background

3.1 For children and young people to lead healthy, fulfilling, and happy lives, good mental health is essential. It is central to overall wellbeing and allows children and young people to take advantage of opportunities that present throughout life. Both nationally and locally, rates of reported mental health problems are rising. This can have significant implications for employment and training opportunities, with adults that report mental health problems at an early age less likely to be in employment, education and training, and more likely to hold lower-quality jobs. As Oxfordshire looks forward to 2040, population models reflecting an aging population and rise in long term conditions predicts an increasing proportion of people living with ill health, which is not matched by the predicted rise in the working population.

4. Report Content

4.1 The Director of Public Health Annual Report has been developed and refined by an interdisciplinary steering group. The primary audience of this report are system partners in health, care, education, and local government.

4.2 The Director of Public Health Annual Report is structured as follows:

Section Title	Main Content
Foreword	Foreword provided by Ansaf Azhar (Director of Public Health)
Executive Summary	Outline of content and key points.
Introduction	Defines what is meant by mental health and briefly summarises why this is an important topic for Oxfordshire. Outlines how the report aims to address the topic and make recommendations.
Section 2: Changing mental health among children and young people	This section presents the evidence base regarding mental health and how it is changing, locally and nationally. It describes the data sources and how these can be interpreted and applied, and where Oxfordshire differs from or is influenced by national trends. It also uses the available evidence to outline key risk factors for mental health problems and suggest how these may influence the Oxfordshire picture.
Section 3: Mental health and unemployment	The relationship between mental health and economic activity is outlined in this section. Wider barriers to quality employment are presented, and how these are often tied in with poverty and deprivation. Economic inactivity can, in turn, influence mental health leading to a cycle of unemployment and mental health problems that can be difficult to break. Oxfordshire data on young people who are not in employment, education or training is included in this section, with exploration of local education indicators, which suggest growing inequity of attainment between disadvantaged children and their peers.
Section 4: What do we now works?	This section sets out a framework for addressing the highly complex factors influencing mental health problems in young people. A multi-level approach is described, with actions at individual, interpersonal, schools and communities, and wider environment levels.
Section 5: What's happening in Oxfordshire	There are many organisations in Oxfordshire working on this. This section describes some of the ongoing work, including systems-based approaches, innovative programmes and community and voluntary sector input.
Section 6: Recommendations	There are 4 broad recommendations, which are then broken down into actions at an individual, interpersonal, schools and communities, and wider environment level. The broad recommendations are:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strive to reduce mental health problems by addressing wider factors • Prioritise opportunity, activity, independence, and community • Prioritising early and effective intervention • Ensuring diverse career and training opportunities are available for all young people
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5. Corporate Policies and Priorities

5.1 The annual report is closely aligned with the County Council vision of “working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county”. Of the “nine priorities”, this work is relevant to ensure that we “create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential”, “work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit”, “tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire”, “prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents”, “support carers and the social care system”, “invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network”, “preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces”, and “put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work”.

6. Financial Implications

Oxfordshire County Council’s budget for 2025/26 reflects the priorities set out in Section 5. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

The resource needed to develop this work will continue to require officer input from partners across the Oxfordshire system.

Comments checked by:

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7. Legal Implications

The Health and Social Care Act 2012, sets out a requirement for all Directors of Public Health to produce an annual independent report on the health of their local population and the county council is required to publish it under the National Health Service Act 2006. This report will enable the Director of Public Health and the County Council to comply with these statutory duties.

Comments checked by:
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8. Consultations and Communications

8.1 To date, summaries and outlines of the annual report have been presented to a number of stakeholders. Their comments and feedback have been incorporated into the final draft of the report. To date, early content related to the report has been presented to the Public Health Directorate Leadership Team, County Council Strategic Leadership Team, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety, Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, County Council Informal Cabinet, Health & Wellbeing Board, Health Oversight and Scrutiny Committee, and District Councils Meeting. The launch of the report is at Full Council briefing in April 2025.

ANSAF AZHAR

Director of Public Health and Communities

Annex: Annex 1: The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health

Background papers: None

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