

Thursday 9th September 2021

Report on the Mental Wellbeing Needs Assessment

Purpose / Recommendation

1. **The Health Improvement Board (HIB) is asked to receive the findings from the Mental Wellbeing Needs Assessment.**

Executive Summary

Mental wellbeing is a key part of the HIB's health promotion agenda. It can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole - it allows us to make healthy choices and get the most from life.

This paper presents the Mental Wellbeing Needs Assessment, which aims to broadly understand the mental wellbeing needs of people living in Oxfordshire, including needs relating to the wider factors in our communities that make it easier or harder to stay mentally well, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and areas of inequality. A summary of the aims and findings of the assessment can be found in appendix 1.

Background

2. The promotion of mental wellbeing is a key component of the "keeping yourself healthy" priority area of the Health Improvement Board (HIB).
3. The HIB signed up to the Public Health England (PHE) Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health in May 2019. [The Mental Health Prevention Framework - 2020-2023](#) outlines how organizations within the Prevention Concordat will work together to improve mental health and wellbeing across Oxfordshire. One of the focus areas of this framework is insight and evaluation.
4. This mental wellbeing needs assessment has been undertaken as part of the work of the Health Improvement/Public Health Team at OCC and as a priority for the Mental Health Prevention Concordat Partnership.
5. Findings from this mental wellbeing needs assessment will be used to influence and promote mental wellbeing for Oxfordshire residents going forward.
6. The aims, structure and a summary of the findings of the needs assessment can be found in appendix 1.

Key Issues

7. Improving and promoting mental wellbeing for all requires a whole systems approach; building on the current and sustained efforts of the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health and continued partnership working.

Budgetary implications

8. Findings are intended to influence and shape mental wellbeing promotion and services going forward. There is no new funding currently allocated to implement the recommendations of the report. However, some parts of the system do have funding available which can be used to implement their own initiatives on wellbeing.

Equalities implications

9. One of the aims of this needs assessment was to identify inequalities in mental wellbeing and the enablers and drivers that can promote mental wellbeing in the community; positive mental wellbeing and health are not equally available to all. COVID-19 has exacerbated many of these existing inequalities, which are present across many protected characteristics. Wherever possible, this needs assessment examines inequalities in mental wellbeing and its wider community enablers to inform recommendations to reduce these.

Sustainability implications

10. There are no significant sustainability implications arising from this paper. However, access to and use of natural green and blue spaces is known to be beneficial for mental wellbeing and physical activity is also known to promote wellbeing. Oxfordshire [Climate Action Framework](#) specifically includes healthy place shaping as a guiding principle to inform action.

Communications

11. Findings from this needs assessment are being shared with key stakeholders, many of whom have contributed to the findings in the report.
12. The needs assessment and key summaries will be made available for reading through OCC's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) webpages.
13. Care needs to be taken to ensure that language used around mental wellbeing and the findings are inclusive and reduce any associated stigma around mental health and wellbeing.

Key Dates

14. N/A

Report by Specialist Trainee in Public Health

Contact: Katherine Arbuthnott, Specialist Trainee in Public Health, Oxfordshire
County Council

Katherine.arbuthnott@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

September 2021

Appendix 1: Context, aims and findings of the mental wellbeing needs assessment

Context

1. Our social circumstances, environment where we live, learn, work and play, economic factors, physical and mental health, can all support mental wellbeing. They enable us to feel connected, be healthy and to get the most from life. However poor mental health can affect the quality of lives lived and lead to preventable early deaths.
2. Nationally and across Oxfordshire, diagnoses of depression and anxiety have risen year on year since 2012. In 2019/2020, there were 73,648 patients (aged 18 or over) with a diagnosis of depression registered by Oxfordshire's GP practices.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the promotion of good mental health and wellbeing across the whole system. It has shone a light on health inequalities and the need to build back fairer.

Aims of the needs assessment

4. This mental wellbeing needs assessment aims to:
 - a. Provide a broad picture of mental wellbeing and the wider factors in our communities and everyday lives that make it easier or harder to stay mentally well; many people don't have the same opportunity to be as healthy as others.
 - b. Focus on promotion and prevention: keeping people well. The needs assessment does not cover mental illness and specific treatment pathways or clinical mental health services.
 - c. Gather data and information from a wide range of sources, to understand the mental wellbeing needs of people living in Oxfordshire through different perspectives. For example, statistics, views and experiences of wellbeing – from surveys and research.
 - d. Include the impacts of COVID-19, where possible, on mental wellbeing and the wider factors which affect wellbeing within our communities. However, it is not a specific COVID-19 impact assessment.
5. The needs assessment is divided into 4 main sections:
 - a. Chapter 1 – setting the scene and context
 - b. Chapters 2 -3 general mental wellbeing in Oxfordshire– in adults, children and young people, including the impacts of COVID-19 on mental wellbeing
 - c. Chapters 4-8 community drivers and enablers to mental wellbeing based on the Oxfordshire Mental Health Prevention Framework, the

- assessment is across four areas; financial drivers/enablers, physical activity, access to and use of green space and connections to others.
- d. The recommendations – highlighting where we need more information and where we can move forward for better mental wellbeing for all.

Summary of Findings

6. For adults, Oxfordshire scores similarly or well compared to the South East and England for measures of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness using Office for National Statistics ([ONS measures of wellbeing](#)). However even before the COVID-19 pandemic, around **1 in 5 Oxfordshire residents reported a high (>6/10) score for anxiety, using ONS measures.**
7. Research, such as [Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 2021 report](#) into Oxford's new and emerging communities has highlighted the issues that affect these communities wellbeing including pressures of life - money, jobs and family concerns, cost of housing and food in Oxford, racism and discrimination, immigration worries and the impact of COVID-19.
8. The impact of COVID-19 has been different for individuals and different communities but has exacerbated existing inequalities. Levels of anxiety, depression and loneliness have [increased during lockdowns](#).
9. In children and young people, data from the local [2019 OxWell](#) survey tell us that in pupils attending Oxfordshire school and FE colleges, **that overall mental wellbeing is worse with increasing age. Girls reported lower happiness levels.** The [2020 survey](#) across the South-East, found that during the pandemic– **40% of pupils taking part in year 13 reported being too worried to sleep often.**
10. Both national research and insight from local communities highlight the relationship between **financial stress** and mental wellbeing. Oxfordshire is a relatively wealthy county, but there remain areas of [inequality](#). **COVID-19 has contributed to financial hardship:** across Oxfordshire, the **number of people claiming unemployment benefit rose to 16,420 in December 2020,** compared to 6,230 in December 2019. Amongst those aged 16-24 years the number of people claiming benefits more than tripled.
11. Feeling connected is fundamental to our mental wellbeing. People who feel lonely are also more likely to visit a GP or A and E, or enter local authority funded residential care. This report demonstrates the **need to view loneliness as a life course and equality issue:** [Nationally](#) over 1 in 10 of 10-15 year olds report feeling lonely often and loneliness is increased at life transition points. Analysis of [ONS data](#) found three profiles of people more likely to be lonely: widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions; un-married, middle-agers with long-term health conditions; and younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area are more likely to be lonely. There are many other factors associated with being

lonely, such as being unemployed, having a low income and identifying as female. The pandemic has also highlighted the issue of digital exclusion in our ability to stay connected and access services.

12. **During the pandemic, loneliness has increased.** In April-May 2020, [5.0% of adults](#) in England said that they felt lonely “often” or “always” rising to just over 7% of adults between October 2020-February 2021. Amongst some, for example older adults who have been shielding, there has been a loss of social and physical confidence after periods of isolation. During the pandemic, loneliness statistics for [Oxfordshire](#) and for district and city levels varied: increased understanding of loneliness within our communities and who is most at risk of being lonely is needed.
13. Being physically active improves our mental and physical health – for example through improving sleep, self-esteem, helping us manage stress and improving connections with others. [Oxfordshire adults have higher levels of physical activity compared to England. However, activity levels vary across districts and there are inequalities.](#) Those over the age of 75 years are much less active. Data from the [Active lives survey](#), suggests that although children and young people across Oxfordshire are more active than children across England as a whole, **around 4 in 10 children and young people across Oxfordshire are not achieving an average of 60 minutes physical activity a day.** During the pandemic, less affluent families have seen larger drops in activity levels compared to wealthier families.
14. Children and young people who spend more time in green and natural spaces have increased emotional wellbeing, reduced stress and improved resilience. In adults, greener environments are linked to higher life satisfaction and reduced mental distress. Even before the pandemic, **94% of the [English population](#) agreed having open green space close to home is important.** However, there are inequities in access to quality and quantity of greenspace. In **Oxfordshire, national survey data indicates most visits to natural environments are made by wealthier families, and those that identify as white.** Barriers to visiting the natural environment in Oxfordshire include poor health, living with a disability, older age and being too busy.
15. Across the lifecourse, there are different challenges of wellbeing and different impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
16. There are **many examples of innovative and diverse partnership working and programmes to improve mental wellbeing across Oxfordshire and making use of the multiple community-based enablers.** Some examples include:
 - a. **Sleep Campaign delivered by Oxfordshire Communications Group** delivered in June 2020, responding to COVID-19s impacts on our physical and mental health: affecting our sleep
 - b. **Cherwell District Council in partnership with Oxfordshire Mind and Resilient Young Minds** working with primary school children to

help them understand more about stress, anxiety and self-esteem .
More information [here](#).

- c. **Move Together** - a county-wide pathway into physical activity to support people who have been shielding as a result of COVID-19, as well as people with long term health conditions to help reduce isolation and loneliness. Read more [here](#)
- d. **Mental Wellbeing Grant Scheme** launched May 2021 by Oxfordshire County Council one of the successful projects included: **Ways to Wellbeing project**, [Style Acre](#) supporting adults with learning disabilities through promoting wildlife & nature activities, working with Element 6 and the Wildlife Trust & Sustainable Wantage.
- e. **Active Reach** - Residents from Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys were supported throughout COVID-19 to keep physically active by a wide range of partners. Report from phase 1 [here](#)
- f. **Health Education England's** funding for suicide prevention training for Oxfordshire frontline professionals and volunteers in roles that involve supporting people with financial difficulties. For example, people working across community larders, asylum seekers and many more.

17. There are opportunities to better understand mental wellbeing within our communities, and the **lived experience of residents**. The needs assessment has highlighted gaps in current understanding that could inform future action.

18. There are opportunities to improve mental wellbeing early - before people access formal healthcare - and to make our services more inclusive. Findings from local research such as the [Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 2021](#) and [2020 OxWell](#) school survey show opportunities to provide early and diverse support for mental wellbeing.

19. The last section of this report makes recommendations, based on the included data and the gaps in understanding. Overall, an overall a whole systems and life course approach to mental wellbeing is recommended.

20. Specific recommendations are grouped under five different themes: data and monitoring; wellbeing in all policies and partnership working; inclusive services; prioritising areas of need and reducing inequalities and building back from COVID-19.

Next Steps

1. Continued engagement and sharing of the report's findings with key stakeholders, to identify where there are opportunities to take forward recommendations and build on existing action.
2. The needs assessment and key summaries will be made available for reading through OCC's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) webpages.

