

Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board Briefing Paper

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Director of Public Health Annual Report: Climate and Health

1. Recommendation

1.1 The Board is RECOMMENDED to endorse the:

Call to action for system partners to ensure that every health action, policy and strategy should mitigate for and prevent negative health impacts of our changing climate, and similarly every climate action, policy and strategy should identify the impacts and maximise the benefit for our health and wellbeing.

2. Summary and purpose

2.1 This paper informs the Health & Wellbeing Board on the structure and overview of content, including key messages, of the upcoming Oxfordshire County Council Director of Public Health Annual Report (2023/24) focussed on climate and health.

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 UK Health Security Agency's first [Health Effects of Climate Change report](#) (published December 2023), the [Lancet Countdown on health and climate change report](#) (published December 2023) and the British Medical Journal's editorial on treating the [climate and nature crisis as one indivisible global health emergency](#), co-signed by 200 major health journals (published October 2023).

3. Background

3.1 Health is the untold story in the climate emergency. This is staggering given the immediate and positive health benefits for individuals, families and communities which can be delivered through climate action. Climate action means better health for everyone – whether we are talking about newborn babies, children, teenagers, working age adults or older people. Amidst mounting pressure in our NHS, tackling

the impacts of the changing climate across Oxfordshire will save lives and money, and conserve resources for those most in need. It will also benefit the building blocks of our health: providing homes which can be heated and cooled affordably, infrastructure for people to walk and cycle to keep communities active, connected, and healthy, and green spaces to boost mental health and store carbon. It will also support delivery of a range of plans that seek to support climate action in Oxfordshire, including Building a Greener Oxford University Hospitals 2022 – 2027, Oxford Health Trust Strategy Sustainability Strategic Objectives 2021 – 2026 , SCAS People Strategy Sustainability Plans 2023-2026, and nationally in Delivering a ‘Net Zero’ National Health Service – July 2022 and Royal College of GP’s Decarbonising General Practice Guide.

- 3.2 Despite progress to reduce fossil fuel use and polluting greenhouse gas emissions, climate change is happening now in Oxfordshire, posing a real and current threat to health and wellbeing. We are all experiencing the effects of the climate emergency with increased frequency and severity of adverse weather events. Since 2007, there have been 18 severe flood events, 10 named storms, 8 severe cold snaps, 4 major heatwaves and 3 periods of drought. These events are having direct and harmful impacts on our health and wellbeing, and will continue to lead to premature deaths and preventable suffering unless necessary climate action is taken.
- 3.3 Of real concern, many infectious diseases are sensitive to the climate, and with warmer temperatures we can expect a greater risk of new and emerging infectious diseases on our doorstep. The impact of climate change on individuals will vary, with the worst effects on disadvantaged and more vulnerable populations, and without necessary action this will further widen health inequalities.

4. Content

- 4.1 This report has been developed and refined by an interdisciplinary steering group, with collaboration between colleagues in public health, the NHS, data intelligence, climate action, transport, emergency planning and food policy. The primary audience of this report are system partners in health, care and local government.
- 4.2 The report is structured as follows:

Section Title	Main Content
Executive Summary	Executive summary provided by Ansaf Azhar (Director of Public Health)
Introduction	This section sets out the need for this timely report on climate and health. We present that health is the untold story in the climate emergency, and that immediate and positive health benefits can be delivered through climate action. This means better health throughout the life course. We set the context in terms of current NHS pressures and cost-of-living crisis.
Section 1: Why the focus on the impacts of climate change on health now?	This section explains why we all need to take urgent climate action in Oxfordshire to protect and improve our health. We discuss five key areas of the climate emergency and their implications for our health: temperature, air, water, food, and nature. We present a body of current evidence describing the local health impacts of our changing climate across these five areas in Oxfordshire.
Section 2: What are we doing now?	This section explains what Oxfordshire County Council, local anchor institutions, system partners and community action groups are currently doing to address our changing climate – with immediate and longer-term

	<p>positive benefits for health and wellbeing. We will discuss five areas of climate initiatives with positive health benefits including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy efficient healthy homes and buildings - Sustainable travel and clean air - Green health and social care - Healthy and sustainable diets - Accessible green spaces, clean water, and nature
Section 3: Call to Action	This section sets out a call to action on climate and health across Oxfordshire – this includes: system actions, national policy and funding, and individual actions (see below).

5. Call to action

5.1 The final section of the report consists of a call to action which consists of:

5.1.1 System Actions

- a. Work together for cleaner indoor and outdoor air by promoting active, sustainable travel and adopting low-carbon energy and supply chains
- b. Increase and improve access for all to safe, inclusive green and blue spaces with positive impacts on wildlife, biodiversity and adaptation
- c. Adapt and upgrade buildings, estates and facilities to ensure high-quality services can be delivered now and in the future
- d. Work with suppliers and the supply chain to reduce carbon emissions, ensure decisions consider carbon impacts, and encourage suppliers to develop more sustainable practices, including maximising social value
- e. Ensure partnership working through existing forums and networks to accelerate action on climate mitigation and adaptation, whilst maximising benefits for health and wellbeing, with a particular
- f. focus on delivery of system wide action to address the risks of extreme weather eventsBuild and continuously bolster community resilience to meet the needs of our changing climate

5.1.2 National Policy and Funding

- a. Reduce air pollution by investing in low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure including public transport, renewable energy, and electric vehicle charging
 - b. Create good, secure employment and reduce inequalities by supporting reskilling, retraining, remote working and research to accelerate the move to a net-zero economy
 - c. Improve our resident's health and wellbeing by upgrading our homes, healthcare facilities and schools to ensure they are fit for the future
 - d. Boost our physical and mental health by making it easy for people to walk, cycle, and use active, sustainable transport
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- e. Improve our mental and physical health, capacity for natural cooling, and air quality by ensuring access for all to green spaces and other green infrastructure

5.1.3 Individual Actions

Last, but not least, there are many practical things that each of us can do, with very little time and effort. Some of these are free, and many save money. Almost all improve our own health and the health of others. These small changes can add up to big action.

Take a look at [Climate Action Oxfordshire](#) or [Community Action Group](#) Oxfordshire where there are plenty of suggestions to get started.

There are also resources and support available if you are experiencing the effects of climate anxiety, or eco anxiety (often defined as a longer-term fear of environmental doom, and worries about what might happen if we do not take action to avert disaster due to the climate emergency). There is also tailored support available for young people.

6. Delivery of the DPHAR Recommendations

The recommendations for system action on climate and health have informed the development of the Health & Wellbeing Board strategy. Climate change is a key priority of the strategy and its recommendations are included in its outcomes framework and delivery plan.

All system partners are asked to consider how they can contribute to delivery of the recommendations.

7. Communications

- 7.1 The report has been tabled at meetings of the Environment Action Group of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Oxfordshire's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee where its recommendations have been supported.
- 7.2 The report will be the focus of an All Member's Briefing of the County Council on 18 April and will then go to full Council for adoption on 16 April 2024.
- 7.3. An engagement plan is being finalised to support awareness of and action to support its recommendations by system partners.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The 2023/24 annual Director of Public Health report is aligned with local, national, and international priorities of addressing both the climate emergency and health. At the recent COP28, over 120 countries backed the Climate and Health Declaration. Endorsed by 123 countries, the Declaration marks a world first in governments
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acknowledging the growing health impacts of climate change on communities and countries. It also acknowledges the large benefits to people's health from stronger climate action, including by reducing air pollution and lowering health care costs.

7.2 The 2023/24 annual Director of Public Health report mandates accelerated and stronger action on many of the objectives set out in local 'green' plans. These actions have the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Oxfordshire immediately, and for future generations.

9. **The Board is RECOMMENDED to endorse the:**

Call to action for system partners to ensure that every health action, policy and strategy should mitigate for and prevent negative health impacts of our changing climate, and similarly every climate action, policy and strategy should identify the impacts and maximise the benefit for our health and wellbeing.
