

Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board
3 July 2025

Local Area Coordination in Oxfordshire

Report by Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Health Improvement Board is RECOMMENDED to**
 1. Note the important role that Local Area Coordinators (LACs) play in supporting prevention initiatives and building connected communities, and their contribution to the Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board priorities.
 2. Champion the work of the LACs to support them to continue to work in their respective areas.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council has funded Local Area Coordinator (LAC) posts in four areas each with a c10k population, initially where Census and other data suggested poorer health, wellbeing and life outcomes for residents, but not in the ten most deprived wards.
3. The LAC approach is a valuable component of Oxfordshire County Council's Oxfordshire Way vision to support people in, and build stronger, communities; and supports the Marmot Place programme to enable strong connections to be made with communities most likely to experience health inequalities, supporting families to give children the best start in life, and better understand rural inequalities beyond the ten most deprived wards.
4. LACs are present and accessible in their communities and impose no referral procedures, needs thresholds or time limits. Anyone can introduce themselves or another person to the LAC to receive the right support at the right time for them and at their own pace. LACs guide people to use their own strengths and connect with their community to resolve their issues, gaining confidence and resilience in the process.
5. The outcomes for health and social care are the avoidance, delay and reduction of need for formal services and reduction in 'revolving door' and crisis contacts.
6. The LAC approach in Oxfordshire is being evaluated by Public Health and the University of Oxford. The first phase of the evaluation has just begun with a framework having been developed and the first phase – process review – is

beginning with a desk review of local and national programme documents and interviews of key stakeholders. This is due to be completed in March 2026.

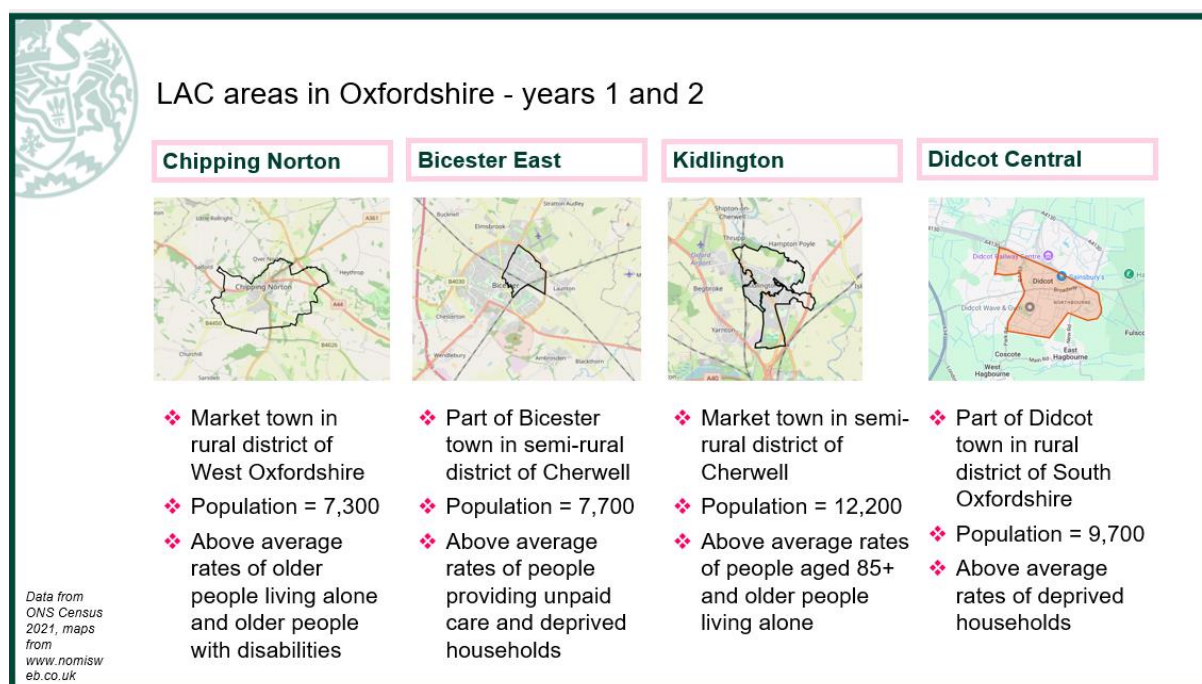
The Local Area Coordination approach

Background to the Local Area Coordination approach

7. Local Area Coordination is a neighbourhood-based, asset- and strengths-focused approach that is accessible, relational, and capacity-building, while remaining connected to the statutory system, offering insight and enabling the prevention, reduction, or delay of unnecessary statutory service demand.
8. Oxfordshire County Council joined the Local Area Coordination Network in 2023. This is a national development organisation helping councils in England and Wales to adopt, embed and sustainably deliver Local Area Coordination, which originated in Western Australia as a new approach to working with people, families and communities.
9. A leadership group was established, comprising members from the county council's commissioning, social care and public health teams, city and district council wellbeing teams, voluntary organisations and primary healthcare.
10. The leadership group used data from Census 2021, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Oxfordshire and Community Insight Profiles (where available) to identify areas in Oxfordshire meeting the following criteria:
 - 11.1 A town / area of a town / village / built up population surrounded by rural area with a population of 10-12k
 - 11.2 Not one of the ten most deprived areas
 - 11.3 Data indicated poorer health, wellbeing and life outcomes for residents
11. Two areas were identified by the leadership group to start embedding the approach – Chipping Norton and Bicester East. District council colleagues helped identify residents, local councillors and organisations working in the areas, who were invited to local meetings to learn more about the approach and to be involved in its implementation. This allowed local groups and organisations within the communities to gain a detailed understanding of the LAC approach, suggest how it could embed into their area and become part of the implementation.
12. During the recruitment process for the Local Area Coordinators, long-listed candidates were invited to a community recruitment event in the respective areas they had applied to work. The candidates were each interviewed by residents employing a method akin to speed dating, and were scored on soft skills such as approachability, ability to listen and whether people would feel comfortable discussing a sensitive issue with them. The combined scores and comments from the community recruitment were used as part of the overall decision. Involvement in the community recruitment gave residents ownership of the Local Area Coordinator approach for their area, and provided the LAC

with a network of people and organisations to assist them embed into and learn about the community in depth once they started working there.


13. The first two LACs began working in summer 2024 and the leadership team then followed the same processes to identify two further areas – Kidlington and Didcot Central – and recruit two further LACs. The Kidlington LAC started in April 2025 and Didcot Central's LAC starts at the beginning of July 2025.



The Local Area Coordination (LAC) approach


14. The Local Area Coordination approach in Oxfordshire aims to foster community resilience and independence by connecting people with local resources and support networks. The approach works closely with local communities to understand their unique needs and strengths. By collaborating with various stakeholders, including council teams, voluntary organisations, and healthcare providers, it seeks to create a supportive environment where residents can thrive.
15. One of the key aspects of this approach is the involvement of the community in the recruitment and integration of Local Area Coordinators (LACs). By engaging residents in the selection process and incorporating their feedback, the program ensures that the LACs are well-suited to address the specific needs of each area. This community-driven method not only empowers residents but also helps build trust and rapport between the LACs and the communities they serve.

16. As the program expands, the leadership team continues to use data-driven insights to identify new areas for implementation. The success of the initial phase in Chipping Norton and Bicester East has paved the way for further growth, with Kidlington and Didcot Central being the next areas to benefit from Local Area Coordination. By maintaining a strong focus on collaboration and community engagement, Oxfordshire County Council aims to create sustainable, long-term improvements in health and wellbeing across the county.
17. The Local Area Coordinators follow an evidence-based design approach and methodology grounded in a set of principles rather than service pathways and targeted outcomes.



10 Principles of Local Area Coordination

- **Citizenship** – All people in our communities have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities to participate in and contribute to the life of the community, respecting and supporting their identity, beliefs, values, and practices.
- **Relationships** – Families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.
- **Natural authority** – People and their families are experts in their own lives, have knowledge about themselves and their communities, and are best placed to make their own decisions.
- **Lifelong learning** – All people have a lifelong capacity for learning, development, and contribution.
- **Information** – Access to accurate, timely, and relevant information supports informed decision-making, choice and control.
- **Choice and control** – Individuals, often with the support of their families and personal networks, are best placed to lead in making their own decisions and plan, choose and control supports, services, and resources.
- **Community** – Communities are further enriched by the inclusion and participation of all people and these communities are the most important way of building friendship, support and a meaningful life.
- **Contribution** – We value and encourage the strengths, knowledge, skills and contribution that all individuals, families and communities bring.
- **Working together** – Effective partnerships with individuals/families, communities and services are vital in strengthening the rights and opportunities for people and their families to achieve their visions for a good life, inclusion and contribution.
- **Complementary nature of services** – Services should support and complement the role of individuals, families and communities in supporting people to achieve their aspirations for a good life.

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18. The majority of the time in the role is spent alongside people and families who are often experiencing some form of exclusion and complex challenges in their lives. The Local Area Coordination role includes:
 - 19.1 Helping people access personalised information and short-term support in their local area.
 - 19.2 Developing longer-term relationships with people/families facing more complex life situations (Local Area Coordinators dedicate time to helping people recognise their strengths, explore options, make choices, plan for the future, and develop sustainable solutions)

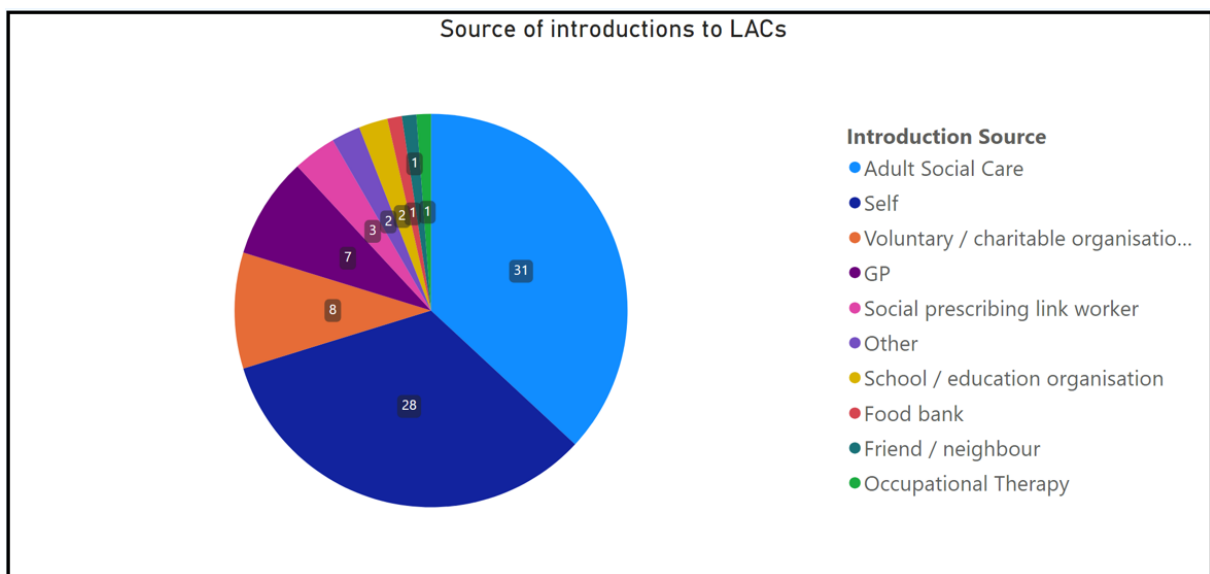
- 19.3 Cultivating strong partnerships with community members, groups, agencies, and services to support local community 'capacity building' and closer collaboration.
- 19.4 Collecting stories and information to drive transformative changes in the wider health and social care system, showcasing how the Local Area Coordination approach and principles can reduce the need for statutory / funded supports, and commissioned services.

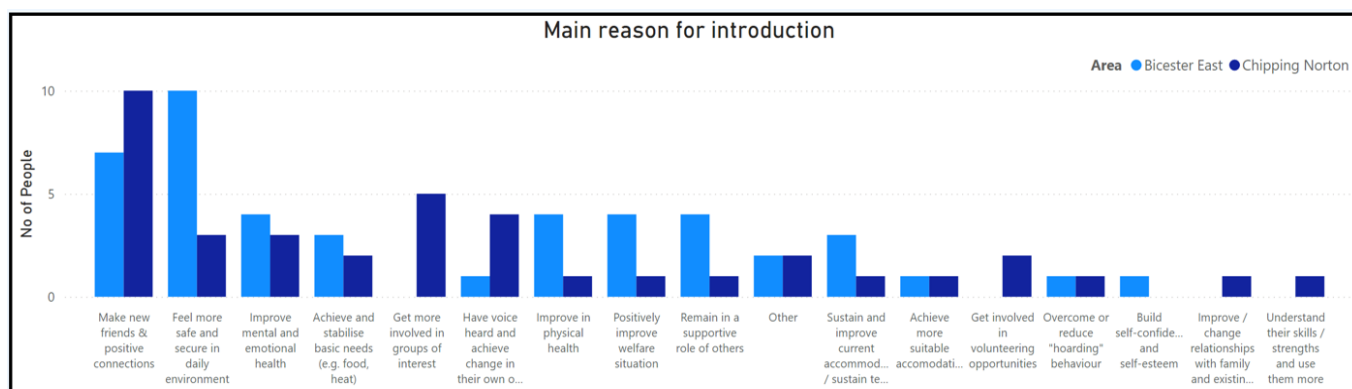
Supporting Oxfordshire as a Marmot Place

19. The role of Local Area Coordinators supports the delivery of the Marmot Place programme as it works directly with residents, partners and communities in areas that are most likely to experience health inequalities in Oxfordshire.

Impact in the Community and links to Health Improvement Board Priorities

20. Data emerging from Chipping Norton and Bicester East where Local Area Coordinators have been working for about a year show that introductions to the LACs are coming from sources across a broad spectrum of partners as well as people themselves and the community. There is also a broad range of reasons for making the introduction.





21. A story which illustrates the Local Area Coordination approach and how working at the person's own pace, building a relationship and guiding them to resolve their own issues improves outcomes for people; also, that by having in-depth knowledge of local services and community assets, LACs help connect people into their community:

A woman (LS) was introduced to the Chipping Norton LAC by a voluntary organisation that was helping her with finances. Through spending time with LS, the LAC learned that having been abused by her father she had later been abused by subsequent partners and had ended up estranged from family and friends, in poor physical and mental health and, when her partner died, discovered he had taken out debts in her name. She was further feeling judged and dictated to by those who were helping her. Through taking time and encouraging LS to come up with her own solutions, the LAC facilitated LS stopping smoking, attending a domestic abuse course and gaining confidence to attend community groups. Through those groups she gained friends and skills, including IT skills. Just as life had improved for LS, she was hospitalised following a stroke. The new friends she had made visited her in hospital, cared for her dog and then provided a support network to assist her at home after discharge. She is now concentrating on getting better and planning to volunteer as a befriender once she is stronger.

Evaluation of Local Area Coordination in Oxfordshire

22. Local Area Coordination is a nationally evaluated approach (NIHR-funded research project carried out by the Universities of Sheffield, Hull, Exeter, York and Leeds [6037030615-Hull-University-4pp-A4-Report-Print-Version-St5.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nihr/6037030615-Hull-University-4pp-A4-Report-Print-Version-St5.pdf)).
23. The LAC approach in Oxfordshire is being evaluated by Public Health and the University of Oxford. The first phase of the evaluation has just begun with a framework having been developed and the first phase – process review – is beginning with a desk review of local and national programme documents and interviews of key stakeholders. This is due to be completed in March 2026.



Phase 1 – deliverables and activities

June 2025 to March 2026



Output	Activities
A detailed contextual analysis highlighting key enablers and barriers.	Desk review of programme documents Interviews with key stakeholders Environmental and situational analysis
A refined set of programme goals , ensuring they are specific, measurable, and achievable.	Review of original programme objectives Stakeholder consultations to validate goals Alignment check with community needs
Recommendations for programme enhancements in structure, resources, and engagement strategies.	Process evaluation to compare planned vs. actual implementation Surveys and feedback sessions with participants Gap analysis of resources and service delivery
A lessons-learned report outlining adaptive strategies and best practices.	Case study documentation of challenges faced Key informant interviews on adaptive responses Recommendations for risk mitigation
A stakeholder engagement framework with improved communication and coordination strategies.	Stakeholder mapping and relationship analysis Workshops on best practices for collaboration Creation of a stakeholder communication plan



Phase 2 – deliverables and activities

April 2026 – March 2028



Output	Activities
A comprehensive stakeholder feedback report identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.	Surveys and interviews with key stakeholders (families, staff, local authorities). Focus groups to assess satisfaction and challenges.
A comparative analysis report highlighting similarities, differences, and lessons learned.	Comparative data collection (programme design, implementation process, stakeholder engagement). Benchmarking with other LAC programs.
A summary report on peer learning, key insights, and best practices.	Engage Tom Richards for knowledge sharing. Document lessons from other LAC programs.
An early outcomes report assessing the impact of the LAC programs.	Collect and analyse data on early outcomes (e.g., participant satisfaction, improved outcomes for individuals and families). Identify common patterns in outcomes across the programmes.



Phase 3 – deliverables and activities

April 2028 – March 2029



Economic evaluation

• Phase III

Output	Activities
Measure improvements in health and wellbeing, independence, relationships, access to community resources, and personal safety and security.	A report on individual-level improvements, including health, independence, relationships, safety, and security.
Measure cost deferral, avoidance, and prevention in key areas such as health, housing, and finance.	A report on the economic impact of the programme, including savings in health, housing, and finance.
Examine the improvement in relationships and community involvement , with a focus on participant engagement.	A report on the improvement of relationships and community engagement, including access to local services and resources.
Examine routine performance data collected by LACs , focusing on introductions, sources, presenting issues, and outcomes (e.g., entry into paid employment).	A report on the performance data, including the scale of activities, types of issues, and specific outcomes.

24. A recent informal survey of residents and organisations asking for feedback about Local Area Coordination in the town returned overwhelmingly positive comments including ‘there are lots of good projects going on but the LAC ties all the threads together’.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

25. The Local Area Coordination approach seeks to help to address inequalities by working with people of all ages or families to help them surmount issues that are important to them.

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June 2025