

Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Briefing Paper

– 22 January 2024

Director of Public Health Annual Report: Climate and Health

Report by Ansaf Azhar (Director of Public Health) and Dr Louisa Chenciner (Public Health Registrar and Academic Clinical Fellow)

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to

1.1 Endorse the focus of the Director of Public Health Annual Report (DPHAR) on climate change and health.

1.2 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 the changing climate, and similarly every climate action, policy and strategy should identify the impacts and maximise the benefit for health and wellbeing.

1.3 Comment on how the DPHAR can best be disseminated into the local system (see questions for review in section 5)

2. Executive Summary

2.1 HOSC are to be informed on the structure and overview of content, including key messages, of the upcoming Oxfordshire County Council DPHAR (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 concerning given the immediate and positive health benefits for individuals, families and communities which can be delivered through climate action. Climate action means better health across the life course – whether we are talking about newborn babies, children, teenagers, working age adults or older people. Amidst mounting pressure in the NHS, tackling the impacts of the changing climate across Oxfordshire should conserve resources for those most in need. It will also benefit the building blocks of 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.

3.2 Despite some 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 already experiencing the effects of the climate emergency with increased frequency and severity of adverse weather events. These events are having direct and harmful impacts on health and wellbeing, and will continue to lead to premature deaths and preventable suffering unless necessary climate action is taken. For example, many infectious diseases are sensitive to the climate, and with warmer temperatures we can expect a greater risk of new and emerging infectious diseases locally. The impact of climate change on individuals will vary, with the worst effects on disadvantaged and underserved populations, and without necessary action this will further widen health inequalities.

3.3 The draft DPHAR is aligned with delivery of a range of plans that already seek to support climate action within the health system in Oxfordshire (in adjacent to plans within other sectors), 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 the [Royal College of GP's Decarbonising General Practice Guide](#).

4. Report Content

4.1 The draft DPHAR has been developed and refined by an interdisciplinary steering group, with collaboration between colleagues in public health, data intelligence, climate action, transport, emergency planning, food policy and wider health partners including Oxford University Hospitals, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, South Central Ambulance Service and Greener Practice Oxfordshire. It follows on from work undertaken through the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy which included public engagement on climate change and health (cited as priority 8) – with the majority of respondents fully or partly agreeing that this priority reflects the needs of people in Oxfordshire (80%; n = 340). The primary audience of this report are system partners in health, care, and local government.

4.2 The Director of Public Health draft annual 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 pressures.
Section 1: Why the focus on the impacts of climate change on health now?	This section explains why we 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 positive benefits for health and wellbeing. We will discuss five areas of climate initiatives with positive health benefits including: <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.

5. Specific Areas for Discussion with System Partners

5.1 How can local government work more with the health and care system to accelerate their efforts to deliver our net zero ambitions?

5.2 For NHS partners, how are you seeking to meet national NHS Net Zero targets? (including the targets that for the emissions the NHS controls directly (the NHS Carbon Footprint), the NHS will reach net zero by 2040, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2028 to 2032; for the emissions the

NHS can influence (the NHS Carbon Footprint Plus), the NHS will reach net zero by 2045, with an ambition to reach an 80% reduction by 2036 to 2039; and that adaptation measures should be included in all NHS Green Plans by 2027)

6. Corporate Policies and Priorities

6.1 The DPHAR draft 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 “put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work”, “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”, “create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential” and “work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit”.

6.2 The draft DPHAR is also aligned with the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report published in 2021 in conjunction with the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford.

6.3 The draft DPHAR is closely related to the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy which cites climate change and health as a strategic priority, and there has been considerable collaborative work to incorporate the implementation of the DPHAR call to action on climate and health into the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy outcomes framework.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The Officer resource required to develop this work has required and continues to require contribution from colleagues in the DPHAR steering group.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 The Director of Public Health annual report will meet the Director of Public Health statutory duty to publish an annual report focussed on the most pertinent health needs of the local population.

9. Equality & Inclusion Implications

9.1 From the outset, health and social inequalities, and barriers to inclusion across Oxfordshire have been considered in the planning and delivery of this year’s DPHAR report. This follows on from work undertaken through the 2019/2020 DPHAR on inequalities in health outcomes across the county “Some are more equal than others: hidden inequalities in a prospering Oxfordshire”.

10. Sustainability Implications

10.1 This paper relates to climate and sustainability directly, as it focuses on the intersection between climate and health. This work has been undertaken in collaboration with the climate action team at Oxfordshire County Council.

11. Consultations and Communications

11.1 To date, the DPH annual report has been presented to a number of stakeholders, including portfolio holders for public health and climate action. Their comments and feedback have been incorporated into the final draft of the report. To date the report has been presented to the Public Health DLT, County Council Strategic Leadership Team, Climate Action Programme Board, Climate Action Team Meeting, Portfolio Holders for Public Health and Climate, County Council Informal Cabinet, Public Health Whole Team Meeting, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Environmental Advisory Group, and the Districts Chief Executives Meeting.

12.2 Upcoming presentations include the Health & Wellbeing Board, Full Members briefing, and the launch of the report at Full Council briefing in April 2024.

12.3 Throughout the development of the draft DPHAR, clear and concise language has been used which avoids jargon. The communications team have been involved from the outset to ensure the DPHAR is accessible and widely available to the general public when it is launched in April 2024. The draft DPHAR builds on the Health and Wellbeing Board public consultation with respect to climate and health.

Annex: Nil

Background papers: See links embedded into the document.

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