

OXFORDSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD
14 MAY 2026

HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY UPDATE
PRIORITIES 1 and 2 – Start Well

Report by Director of Children, Education and Families

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Health and Wellbeing Board is RECOMMENDED to:**

NOTE the progress of the delivery of priorities 1 and 2 under the thematic domain of Start Well within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy along with key challenges.

NOTE the Best Start in Life plan, attached as an appendix to this report, and:

- a) **DELEGATE** responsibility for regular monitoring of progress on outcomes relevant to the Best Start in Life Plan to the Children’s Trust Board;
- b) **NOTE** that those outcomes will include the inequality of Good Level of Development (GLD) outcomes for children eligible for free school meals; and
- c) **NOTE** that the Children’s Trust Board will report to the Health and Wellbeing Board on this matter as part of these annual Start Well updates and as required for escalation.

Executive Summary

2. The Health and Wellbeing Board approved a new strategy in December 2023, with the priorities split between four thematic areas of Start Well, Live Well, Age Well and Building Blocks of Health. Delivery against the ambitions within the strategy is the responsibility of all organisations represented on the Board and is supported by an Outcomes Framework agreed by the Board in March 2024.
3. The Board has agreed to receive a rotating update on delivery of 1 of the 4 strategy themes at its quarterly meetings, meaning that over the course of a 12-month period an update on each theme would be presented once. This report is the second annual report of the thematic domain of Start Well covering:

Priority 1: The best start in life

All children in Oxfordshire should experience a healthy start to life and be ready for school, especially in our most deprived communities.

Priority 2: Children and young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health

More children and young people in Oxfordshire should experience good mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Introduction

4. This cover paper highlights some key successes and challenges in relation to Priorities 1 and 2 of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
5. It should be noted that these priorities require a whole systems approach to bring about change and the report does not include every piece of work that is happening across the system in each area but highlights key successes along with key challenges. It should also be noted that it may take some time for the interventions put in place to positively affect the outcome trajectory.
6. Performance information is provided in the attached annex 1 which gives an overview of key indicators as set out in the Health and Wellbeing Board Outcomes Framework.

Priority 1: The best start in life

All children in Oxfordshire should experience a healthy start to life and be ready for school, especially in our most deprived communities.

- Improved parental physical and mental health during pregnancy, birth and after birth
 - Children with good health, feeling safe and secure, living in nurturing environments
 - Children have opportunities for learning from birth and families supported with childhood development
 - Early identification and support for children and families where there is emerging need.
7. We have worked in partnership through our Early Help and Prevention Board to progress our strategy. The implementation plan is now in place for delivery, and a full suite of KPIs has been developed. Education, health, police and voluntary/community sector organisations are working together well, including to develop our shared practice around Strengths & Needs assessment and team around the family work.
 8. Similarly, the Early Years Board has progressed its partnership strategy and implementation plan. This Board has played a key role in the development of our new Best Start in Life plan, which sets out how we will work together to achieve a good level of development for all children. We hosted a successful Baby Week in November 2025, focusing on 'Healthy Parent, Healthy Baby', with events held across Oxfordshire and positive feedback from participants, and we are planning to repeat in November 2026.
 9. The Oxfordshire Best Start in Life Plan sets out a shared ambition that every child in Oxfordshire has the best possible start in life, and that families receive the right support, at the right time, in the right place. The Plan focuses on the

period from pregnancy to school entry, when timely, coordinated support can make the greatest difference.

10. The Plan aligns national policy, local priorities and partner delivery into a single, outcome-focused approach. It strengthens joint working across the local authority, district councils, health, early years, education, early help and the voluntary and community sector, with a clear focus on prevention and reducing inequalities.
11. To meet the National ambition of 75% of 5-year-olds to achieve a good level of development, each local authority has been given a local target. However, in Oxfordshire we are more ambitious to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Our revised local targets are therefore:
 - (a) All eligible children: 79.8% (2% above Local Target)
 - (b) All free school meal eligible children: 59.8% (9% above Local Target)
12. The plan sets out four key priorities to achieving this vision:
 - (a) **Healthy beginnings** - We will focus awareness raising of the importance of pregnancy and early childhood across all organisations in Oxfordshire and ensure additional support for families where this is needed.
 - (b) **Strong foundations** - We will focus on working with partners to deliver coordinated support through Family Hubs and the wider Family Hub Network, including a range of parenting programmes, and resources to support home learning, supporting families to stay safe and nurturing positive early relationships and supporting babies and children to learn.
 - (c) **High-quality early years learning** - We will focus on ensuring that all children can fully participate, achieve, and feel supported in the environments where they grow and develop. To support children to thrive and learn, we will invest in a strong and well-trained workforce and champion inclusive practice across the early years system.
 - (d) **Strengthen our Best Start in Life Offer** - We will focus on working together across services and with families through our Family Hub Network and Family Hubs to continue to develop a wider Best Start in Life offer which is available when families need support local to where they live. We will share our data and use this to identify what families need and where they need it.
13. The Children's Trust Board will hold ongoing responsibility for monitoring the performance and impact of the Best Start in Life plan. To support this, a Best Start in Life Plan Steering Group will be responsible for prioritising the plan, tracking progress, and addressing any risks or issues. The steering group will also ensure oversight of the combined budget and make recommendations on funding allocation to the appropriate boards. The Children's Trust Board will provide regular updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board as outlined in the recommendations above.
14. We have worked to increase early years sufficiency and uptake of the funded childcare offer. Alongside this we have developed our early years SEND offer to strengthen identification and inclusion from the earliest stage. We have

delivered training and support to schools including Making a Difference in Reception, phonological awareness training and support on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Profile.

15. Wellcomm, a speech, language and communication screening and intervention tool has been rolled out across over 400 early years settings and 45 primary schools – and expanding. Over 1000 children have been screened and we are seeing progress made with children on their second screening.
16. We have piloted Targeted Programs such as Tots Talking (36 providers involved) and Talk Boost from Speech and Language UK (12 providers), in areas with low levels of good level of development and high numbers of children eligible for free school meals. The '50 Things to do before you are 5' app for is available for parents to support learning in the home environment with an emphasis on early language and communication, and has been downloaded over 4000 times. We also offer Dad's Pad as digital support for fathers and we have set up a new fathers group with Oxford United.
17. We have progressed plans to develop a network of Family Hubs across Oxfordshire. Our first site in Blackbird Leys is now open with a developing offer and public launch event being planned for the Summer. We have scoped venues for the other primary Family Hubs as well as begun to develop with partners plans for pop-up and outreach venues. Work has begun to develop our digital Family Hub and to align relevant early help staff for Family Hubs delivery. We have also developed plans for our parenting programmes and home learning environment offer.
18. Earlier this year we received a Royal Visit from HRH The Princess of Wales to Rose Buds Stay and Play Group to meet volunteers and families and learn more about the work of Home Start and the support it provides to families and young children across Oxfordshire communities.
19. Oxfordshire's Oxford Parent-Infant Project (OXPIP) was one of the first charities to secure new funding from The 1001 Critical Days Foundation to expand Sapling antenatal and postnatal support to families in Oxfordshire in 2026. The expansion means OXPIP can help hundreds more families develop secure parent-infant relationships. Oxfordshire County Council Public Health team have also provided match funding until 2031.
20. Growing Minds has secured additional funding from Oxfordshire County Council Public Health. Growing Minds is a collaborative, evidence-based early years project based in Littlemore and Berinsfield, two areas of disadvantage in Oxfordshire. The project is delivered by Peep, Home-Start Oxford and The Berin Centre. Their mission is to narrow the early years attainment gap and improve school readiness by empowering families to create strong home learning environments from birth. Growing Minds will be expanding their project into Blackbird Leys. The project includes access to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Peep Learning Together Groups and one-to-one family support.

21. The number of babies being born to teenagers aged 16 years and under is increasing in line with national trends, and this has placed additional demand on the Family Nurse Partnership service. The Family Nurse Partnership is an intensive, targeted home-visiting programme for first-time young mothers, fathers and families. Public Health have commissioned additional capacity within the nursing team.
22. Our Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) has been delivered in partnership with district councils. LIFT has identified over 1,100 households who are eligible for Free School Meals, who will therefore also qualify for YouMove (access to access low cost and free activities), and we have shared information with families about their entitlements. LIFT has also helped to identify households eligible for Household Support Fund and food vouchers, resulting in over 150 families redeeming vouchers to date. 225 households who are experiencing low financial resilience and debt have been identified, prompting targeted outreach through postcards, letters, and leaflet drops across specific wards.
23. As part of the Government's national supervised toothbrushing programme for 3-5 year olds, Colgate-Palmolive have been providing toothbrushes, fluoride toothpaste and educational materials targeted in key deprived areas. So far in Oxfordshire 385 packs have been delivered, with five early years settings actively participating and an additional four getting ready to launch their scheme. This is delivered in partnership with Oxfordshire Oral Health Promotion Service.
24. In line with Government reforms, we have begun to deliver Families First Partnership work in Oxfordshire. A test and learn pilot is now live in the South locality, trialling multi-agency child protection activities with initial positive results. We have also worked to co-design a single assessment to be used as part of the reforms. We have been working to scale up our family group decision making and family network meeting offer for more families, to find collaborative solutions to meet the child's needs.
25. We have been successful in securing Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) funding to develop our youth offer. We are working with district councils and voluntary and community sector partners to develop local youth partnerships to improve provision and access in all localities. A data dashboard, youth voice strategy and youth offer strategy are under development.
26. Our new Oxfordshire Education Partnership has agreed a strategy with five key priorities to improve education and inclusion, from early years to post-16. This work is now progressing in partnership, including to strengthen attendance, supporting curriculum review, ensure sufficiency of provision, and reduce travel to learn distances.

Priority 2: Children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health

More children and young people in Oxfordshire should experience good mental health and emotional wellbeing.

- Improved emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people, with positive transitions to adulthood.
 - A prevention first approach with meaningful measures to tackle drivers of poor mental wellbeing in childhood
 - Increased and diversified capability to support CYP with their emotional and mental health needs at earliest opportunity
 - Closer partner collaboration to align and improve our system approach to accessing help
27. As part of Oxfordshire's role as a Marmot Place, we have worked with the Institute of Health Equity particularly around the Marmot principle 'Giving children the best start in life'. In-depth analysis and research has been carried out, drawing on national best practice and working with a wide range of local stakeholders, to prepare a series of recommendations which we are now planning to implement to supplement the existing work already in place.
28. Our emotional wellbeing and mental health strategy has progressed alongside CAMHS transformation, overseen by partnership boards and with the annual OxWell survey as well as KPIs helping us to measure progress. The roll out of mental health support teams is on track to cover all schools by 2029 and these teams have been supporting schools to develop a whole school approach to promoting good mental health, wellbeing and resilience. We are also participating in the national Well Schools programme.
29. Tellmi, our digital app to provide peer support and counselling for children aged 11-18, has supported over 500 young people, with positive feedback – 77% of users feel less alone since using Tellmi and for 32% Tellmi is their only form of mental health support. Tellmi have engaged with 60% of Oxfordshire secondary schools and received positive feedback from partners on their materials, resources and workshops, as well as the Tellmi directory which signposts to local and national resources. Outcomes from year one have included improved mood, decreased anxiety and increased school attendance.
30. The development of a new public health approach to mental health for primary schools in Oxfordshire began in July 2025 in response to the increasing need for a preventative approach for children, young people and schools. This will provide primary schools with the training, tools and resources to support good mental health and wellbeing as children transition to secondary school and beyond. We have also established new groups to support emotional literacy for young people aged 14+/under 14.
31. CAMHS have developed and implemented a new programme, Supportive Steps, which aims to support parents to be able to help their children who may have mental health difficulties. The team provides workshops covering the fundamentals of mental wellbeing, preparing for change, engaging with therapy and overall understanding the CAMHS pathway. The offer draws on

the power of parent peer support, social prescribing and evidence-based clinical care to ensure families are offered a robust service right from the very start of their journey with us. Self-help videos have been developed for parents and carers and the first cohorts have started.

32. Oxford Health Foundation Trust have worked in partnership with Oxford University to set up a research clinic within CAMHS called AnDY (Anxiety and Depression Clinic). The clinic offers high-quality treatments to young people with anxiety, depression, and/or obsessive compulsive behaviour. Through the clinic research is supported that improves our understanding of the development and maintenance of anxiety-related disorders and depression in young people, and that supports the development of targeted, effective and accessible treatment.
33. CAMHS are working with children's social care on a pilot to improve multi-agency working for high-risk complex families open to both agencies. This involves identifying, screening, consultation and assessing parents together, and delivering a therapeutic parenting group. Additionally, Oxford Health has delivered a programme to support children and young people with complex needs to thrive in the community and to access care in creative ways. This is designed to be integrated, trauma-informed and systemic, working in partnership with a third sector organisation 'RAW' who provide youth workers.
34. A project is underway to support a better transition to adulthood for young people open to CAMHS. The transition process has been mapped alongside learning from real case examples and feedback from young people and their families. Improvements have been made already, including a new Transitions Panel to discuss with adult mental health colleagues young people turning 18, and future focus areas include strengthened working with the voluntary and community sector and an ADHD medication review service for young people aged 18-25.
35. Additionally, we have two dedicated clinicians to work with Oxford University Hospitals and children's social care to support transitions when a young person presents to an acute hospital with mental health difficulties or having self-harmed.
36. We have awarded grants to community projects to support prevention of poor mental health, with three projects directly supporting young people and two supporting new mothers and families. Alongside this, Oxfordshire Mind have delivered Youth Mental Health First Aid and Suicide Awareness training to staff and volunteers working with young people allowing early intervention and support, and the Mental Health Prevention Concordat and Suicide Multi-Agency Group provide opportunities for partners to collaborate.
37. We have also delivered Making Every Contact County training to primary schools and early years settings, using evidence-based behaviour change techniques to help everyday conversations with people to improve their health and wellbeing. We are encouraging schools across the county to take up

Department for Education funding to train a senior mental health lead to develop and implement a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing.

38. Work is underway to tackle some of the wider determinants of health and wellbeing to make a difference for children and young people. This includes Good Food Oxfordshire's work to tackle food poverty, including with a community food map and resources, and work to promote health eating choices, including in the vending machines at leisure centres in the county.
39. Our Sustainable School Streets Strategy has been adopted and a pilot launched looking at green infrastructure to reduce air pollution in school playgrounds and raise awareness of role school runs via car play. CAG Oxfordshire has been supporting the development of two community gardens in areas of deprivation, working with young families and children, to provide access to nature and wellbeing support. The Better Housing Better Health service continues to support families staying warm in the winter and cool in the summer. A project with Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership has started to support confident travel to green spaces for wellbeing or jobs for employment for young people, focusing in the first instance on care experienced young people.

Next steps

40. We will continue to progress the activities outlined in this report. Many of our strategies and partnerships are now in a more mature and established position, giving us the infrastructure we need to work together and deliver the best possible life outcomes for children, young people and families.
41. A key challenge continues to be raising awareness of the offer available and making sure it reaches all children, young people and families. Joined-up partnership working, effective signposting, and the development of our digital Family Hub are crucial to success in this area.
42. There is significant national reform and change taking place that relates to Start Well services and partners. Reforms include the national roll-out of Family Hubs, Families First Partnership and the wider Children's Wellbeing & Schools Bill. Alongside this, there are changes in our health partners, including the development of neighbourhood models, and incoming local government reorganisation. This will require close partnership working and robust prioritisation to manage through change and to achieve compliance with new national expectations.
43. We will progress our Best Start in Life plan, focusing on improving support for parent and infant relationships and the home learning environment to improve good level of development. Additionally, we will host a Best Start in Life Summit in September 2026 in partnership with Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership and Oxford Brookes University.

44. We will develop our Family Hubs network, with a launch event 'open house' to raise awareness of the offer in our first Hub, and more sites coming soon. Libraries will be recruiting early years staff to work across Oxfordshire to engage families with expanded book gifting and events in local libraries for families.
45. We are rolling out a free school meals auto-enrolment scheme, where eligible children will be identified and enrolled without families needing to apply. This removes barriers to access and should contribute positively to tackling health inequalities, as more eligible children receive daily nutritious meals. We will continue to expand engagement with Tellmi, particularly through secondary schools and to develop its support offer for neurodiversity.
46. We will progress our neurodevelopmental conditions redesign project to review pathways and how we best support families. This includes the creation of a multi-disciplinary team of clinical and non-clinical staff to improve specialist knowledge and support.

Financial Implications

47. There are no financial implications that the Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note in relation to this report. Existing budgets from across the system are being utilised to deliver against the above priorities.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

48. This report provides key updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board in relation to the Council's statutory duty under section 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area.

Comments checked by: Craig Cochrane, Principal Solicitor, Child Care Legal Team

Lisa Lyons
Director of Children, Education and Families

Annex 1. Start Well performance indicators

Annex 2. Best Start in Life plan

Contact Officer: Anna Jennings, Head of Transformation (Children, Education and Families)

May 2026