



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 12 JUNE 2024
Subject	ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Andy Barge – Assistant Director, Communities. Email: andy.barge@publicagroup.uk
Report Author	Jacqueline Wright – Business Manager, Leisure and Wellbeing. Email: jacqueline.wright@publicagroup.uk
Purpose	To highlight the main points from Oxfordshire County Council's Director of Public Health Annual Report on climate change and health 2023/24, together with a call for action to ensure that collectively we accelerate and facilitate more positive health benefits by taking action to address our changing climate.
Annex	Annex A – Director of Public Health Annual Report on climate change and health 2023/24.
Recommendation	That the Executive resolves to: I. Note the contents of the report.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Good Quality of Life for All• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Oxfordshire County Council's Director of Public Health is responsible for producing an annual report on the health of their local population - the Director of Public Health Annual Report.
- 1.2** The Annual Report is a statutory requirement and informs local people about the health of their communities and provides decision makers in local authorities and health services with information about current and future priorities, gaps and challenges and how these can be addressed.
- 1.3** The Director of Public Health for Oxfordshire is Ansaf Azhar. He uses his reports 'as a vehicle to shine the spotlight on a significant issue that is relevant to Oxfordshire partners and public, with a view to creating a strong call to action'.
- 1.4** Last year's report focussed on the increasing prevalence of excess weight and physical inactivity in Oxfordshire and that this issue cannot be addressed simply by looking at individual lifestyle factors but is very dependent on socioeconomic and environmental factors. This includes the important role of healthy-place shaping and highlights the importance of this work to continue in Oxfordshire so that places that promote healthy behaviours in the first place can be created.
- 1.5** This year's report focuses on the health impacts of climate change, and the health and wellbeing benefits of positive climate action on the local population. The next section will summarise the main points from the report.

2. SUMMARY AND MAIN POINTS FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT

- 2.1** It is evident there are immediate and positive health benefits that can be realised through climate action, yet health is not a focus in the climate emergency.
- 2.2** The report highlights the positive co-benefits of climate action and for everyone to see the individual benefits to their health and wellbeing. The wider determinants of health (Figure 1) describe the different factors that have an impact on our population's health and wellbeing. However, challenges to health and wellbeing are still often being addressed through siloed work.

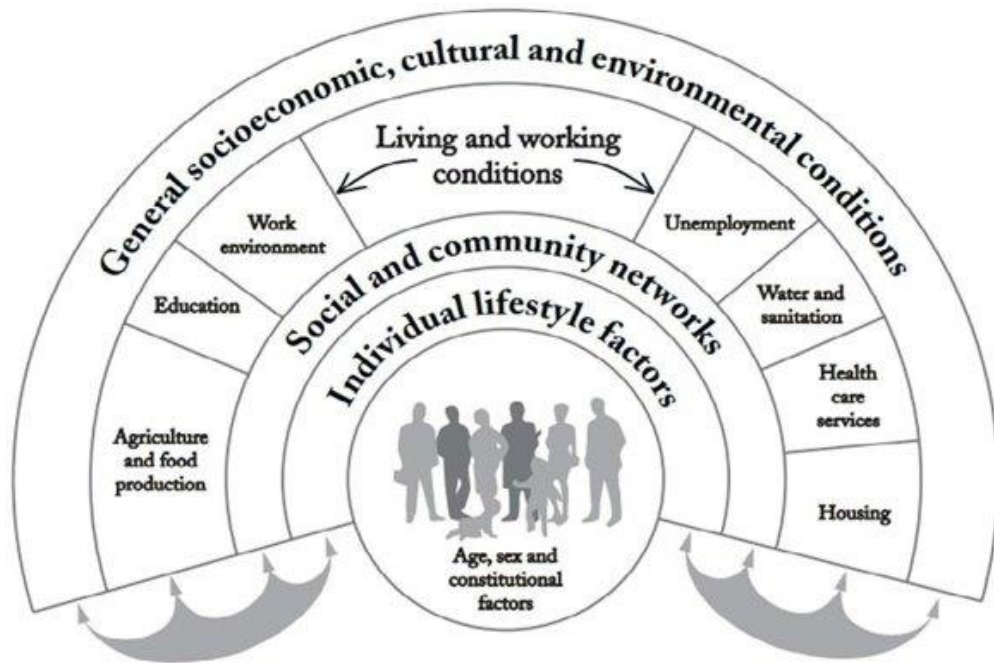


Figure 1: Wider Determinants of Health (Source: Dahlgren & Whitehead)

- 2.3 Individual workstreams to address the climate emergency, cost of living crisis and public health emergency have evidently positive impacts, but working in partnership, more effectively and holistically will likely lead to even greater results and a synergistic effect in the benefits to the populations health and wellbeing.
- 2.4 The recent flooding in Oxfordshire, which impacted people's livelihoods and consequently their physical and mental wellbeing brings the strong connection between climate change and health into focus.
- 2.5 At the same time, any actions and measures taken to mitigate climate change leads to immediate benefits to our health and wellbeing.
- 2.6 The increased frequency and severity of adverse weather 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.
- 2.7 The impact of climate change varies with the worst effects on disadvantaged and more vulnerable populations, which is widening health inequalities even further.
- 2.8 The report mentions five key areas of the climate emergency that impact our health and wellbeing the most:
 - Temperature
 - Direct effects of hot weather such as dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, dizziness and fainting, heat stroke and breathing difficulties.
 - In the summer of 2022 alone, there were 65 excess deaths during periods of higher temperature across Oxfordshire.
 - Air

- Health effects of air pollution a) short term: exacerbation of asthma, cough, wheezing & shortness of breath; and b) long term: stroke, lung cancer, respiratory conditions and cardiovascular disease leading to reduced life expectancy.
- Episodes of high air pollution increase respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions and mortality.
- Roadside air pollution in Oxford is estimated to stunt lung growth in children by 14.1 %
- Cutting air pollution in Oxford by a further 20 per cent may result in:
 - 77 fewer children with low lung function and 31 fewer children with a chest infection each year
 - 83 fewer cases of coronary heart disease
 - 28 fewer cases of lung cancer
 - 1 less baby born underweight.
- Water
 - severe weather events, such as storms and flooding, in the absence of necessary upgrades to the system, have the potential to overwhelm existing sewage systems and water treatment facilities. In turn, this can result in sewage overflow with contamination of water sources and water quality across Oxfordshire
 - In 2020, over ten sewage works across Oxfordshire reported over 100 overflow events each – with some works discharging raw sewage into rivers for over 2,000 hours through the year
 - 18 river locations in Oxfordshire, in and surrounding Oxford City were sampled over the period January – December 2021: only one of eight recreational sites had safe levels of bacteria to allow for swimming and bathing
 - Flooding is becoming more common across Oxfordshire and the UK. In Oxfordshire, there have been 18 significant flood events since 2007, which have caused serious disruption to people's homes, lives and livelihoods
 - The higher risk areas related to the health impacts of flooding include Witney Central, Witney South and Witney East.
- Food
 - Reducing food loss and waste can have a significant environmental benefit and may save the average family up to £700 per year.
 - Globally, food prices are projected to increase by 20 per cent on average by 2050 in the absence of necessary climate adaptation. This exacerbates food insecurity and malnutrition, especially among more deprived populations who may experience limited access to affordable and nutritious diets.

- Nature
 - Greener neighbourhoods and more exposure to green space correspond to:
 - better self-assessed general and mental health;
 - reduced all-cause and cardiovascular mortality;
 - reduced stress;
 - reduced incidence of low-birth weight;
 - maintaining a healthier weight.
 - When it comes to access to nature specific groups are consistently missing out incl. e people living in areas of high deprivation, those on low incomes or unemployed, older people, black and minority ethnic groups and people with a long-term health condition or disability. Many of these groups also experience significant health inequalities.
 - Currently land in Oxfordshire is predominantly used for intensive farming, with only 7.5 per cent for green space and gardens.

2.9 The strongest adverse health impacts are caused by heat and cold, flooding and vector-borne infectious diseases.

2.10 There are several actions that organisations and system partners across Oxfordshire including West Oxfordshire District Council, are already undertaking to address the changing climate, resulting in benefits to our health and wellbeing. This includes the following 5 main themes:

- 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

2.11 Our Council Plan 2023 – 2027 has responding to the climate and ecological emergencies as one of its five priorities; and the food action plan Executive approved in March this year and our support to the Windrush Bike Project through Westhive provide further examples of actions this Council is taking to address the climate change and improve our residents' health and wellbeing.

3. CALL FOR ACTION

3.1 The Director of Public Health's annual report makes a call for action to ensure that collectively we accelerate and facilitate more positive health benefits by taking action to address our changing climate.

3.2 It notes that every climate action, policy and strategy should identify and maximise the opportunity to improve our health and wellbeing. By the same token, every health action,

policy, and strategy should mitigate for and prevent the negative health impacts of our changing climate.

3.3 The six main priorities for action are:

- a. 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 spaces and clean waterways 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 as resources are made available
- 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 and environmental standards for food and catering
- 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 focus on delivery of system wide action to address the risks of extreme weather events
- f. Build and continuously bolster community resilience by adapting infrastructure to meet the needs of our changing climate

3.4 It goes on to call on central government to support local authorities in delivering climate action with a joined-up approach by:

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

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The report calls for partnership work to enable structural changes, and system wide actions to mitigate and adapt to our changing climate and to improve health.

4.2 The Council should continue to support and deliver initiatives like 'Better Housing Better Health', the Oxfordshire Food Strategy, enhancing green spaces within the district and to encourage volunteering as part of its priority to respond to the climate and ecological emergencies.

4.3 The Director of Public Health Annual Report has clearly stated how climate action is impacting positively on health and wellbeing and how important a connected health, wellbeing and climate strategy is in Oxfordshire. The Council should therefore continue to be a proactive system partner. The Council should apply the principle of partnership working internally and seek to further break down silos by recognising that all initiatives and actions in the council plan will complement each other and lead to a synergistic effect in their benefits to the population.

4.4 The council should ensure that every climate action, policy and strategy should identify and maximise the opportunity to improve our health and wellbeing. By the same token, every health action, policy, and strategy should mitigate for and prevent the negative health impacts of our changing climate.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 N/A

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

8.1 There are no significant risks in noting the Director of Public Health's annual report.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1 In noting the Director of Public Health's annual report an equalities impact assessment is not required.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The actions we can take to mitigate climate change and the associated, immediate benefits to health and wellbeing are central to the Director of Public Health's annual report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 [Director of Public Health Annual Report on Climate Change and Health 2023/24](#)

(END)