



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 TH FEBRUARY 2026
Subject	MENTAL HEALTH UPDATE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Rachel Crouch - Executive Member for Stronger Healthier Communities Email: rachel.crouch@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Phil Martin – Director of Place Email: phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Heather McCulloch – Community Wellbeing Manager Email: heather.mcculloch@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update on activities undertaken by the Council to promote good mental health.
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	That the Scrutiny committee resolves to: I. Note the report.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	None

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the current data across Oxfordshire relating to Mental Health. It also sets out what action the Council is taking to promote better mental health both amongst staff and residents.
- 1.2 According to the Local Government Association – *‘One of the most pressing issues is poor mental health, which affects every council and resident to a greater or lesser extent. Mental ill-health costs many thousands of early deaths and over £105 billion every year in England alone – an average of £700 million per upper tier council area. COVID-19 and the measures taken to counter it have caused huge health and harm that makes supporting mentally healthier communities even more important.*
- 1.3 *‘The evidence shows that the things that matter most for our happiness and for our misery are our social relationships and our mental and physical health. This demands a new role for the state – not ‘wealth creation’ but ‘wellbeing creation’.* Lord Richard Layard, Economist and founder of NHS Increasing Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT)

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Oxfordshire Mental Health and Wellbeing JSNA 2024 summarises:

- Above average and increasing rates of school pupils supported with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- A very significant increase in secondary pupils recorded as persistent absentees.
- Rates of adult (GP-recorded) depression continuing to increase.
- Decline in unpaid carers reporting enough social contact.
- Financial pressures from unemployment, children in low-income households, fuel poverty and the rising cost of renting.
- Above average rates of volunteering

2.2 Oxfordshire facts and figures in greater detail:

Facts and figures		Oxfordshire
Children and young people	Children with a probable mental disorder (estimate from national survey)	35,700
	Children (0-15 years) living in relative low-income households	14,000
	Pupils supported with primary need of social, emotional and mental health	3,800
	Persistent absentees - secondary school pupils	10,200
Adults	Adults feeling lonely often/always or some of the time	24%
	Adults with a common mental disorder (national survey)	17%
	Adults with GP-recorded depression	13%
Older people	Estimated living with dementia	9,600
	Carers with as much social contact as they would like (2021/22)	27%
Communities	Volunteering aged 16+ (any amount)	27%

- 2.3 In 2023, around 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 25 years had a probable mental disorder. This was 20.3% of 8 to 16 year olds; 23.3% of 17 to 19 year olds and 21.7% of 20 to 25 year olds.
- 2.4 Children with a mental health disorder are also financially less likely to be able to access activities.
- 2.5 Those aged 17 to 25, with a probable mental disorder were 3 times more likely to not be able to afford to take part in activities such as sports, days out, or socialising with friends, compared with those unlikely to have a mental disorder (26.1% compared with 8.3%).
- 2.6 As of the academic year 2022/23, there was a total of 3,830 school pupils in Oxfordshire supported with a primary need of social, emotional and mental health.
- 2.7 The greatest increase for those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health as a primary need between 2019 and 2023, was females at secondary school, where numbers increased by +391 (134%).
- 2.8 Young people aged 17 to 23 with a probable mental disorder were more likely to have not participated in a range of activities in the previous 7 days than those unlikely to have a mental disorder. They were less likely to take part in the following activities: – Exercising (26.6% compared with 8.7%) – Spending time in green space (34% compared with 20.1%) – Taking part in groups or clubs (80.0% compared with 52.7%)
- 2.9 Applying the England prevalence of common mental disorder to the Oxfordshire adult population gives an estimated 100,600 people aged 18+ years with a common mental disorder in Oxfordshire
- 2.10 As of 2022/23 there was a total of 86,662 people with GP-recorded depression in Oxfordshire (county). This was an increase of 5,485 (+7%) compared with the previous year, a similar trend to England.
- 2.11 For the 3 years 2019 to 2021 there were 181 deaths from Suicide in Oxfordshire.
- 2.12 According to the 2024 Carers Week report, by far the biggest negative impact due to unpaid caring is on mental health. 63% of current and former unpaid carers saying that caring had a 'slightly' or 'very' negative impact on their mental health with 24% saying it had a 'very negative' impact.
- 2.13 Financial pressures across Oxfordshire include recent increases in unemployment, high cost of renting and increasing numbers of households in fuel poverty.
- 2.14 The national NCVO survey (2019) found that three-quarters of volunteers (77%) reported that volunteering improved their mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.15 In pregnancy, depression and anxiety are the most common mental health problems, affecting around 12% and 13% of women, respectively. In the first year after birth, around 15–20% of women experience depression and anxiety.
- 2.16 The number of emergency hospital admissions for intentional self-harm in Oxfordshire fell significantly between 2021/22 and 2022/23, similar to the England trend.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1** The data above sets out the context which informs work coming forward in Oxfordshire to support those living in our neighbourhoods experiencing poor mental health. Whilst the provision of treatment services is not within the remit of this Council, we are in a strong position to make a difference to some of the wider determinants of good health and be active in efforts to prevent the development of poor mental health.
- 3.2** Having good health and wellbeing depends on a number of factors. Whilst access to clinical services is one element of what makes a good life, evidence shows that lifestyle factors, socio economic factors and the built environment make significant contributions. The wider determinants of health are set out below:



- 3.3** Given the Council's leadership role around the delivery of Leisure, Housing, Planning, Economic Development and Community Safety services and its corporate priorities around Environment, Climate and Community, it is well placed to influence the wider determinants of health across a wide range of its services beyond Community Wellbeing.

4. ACTIVITIES TO DATE / STEPS TAKEN

- 4.1** The following elements are relevant:
- A Mental Health summit was held in July 2025 with a range of local voluntary and statutory sector providers, hosted by Cllr Crouch.
 - A programme of training for Councillors has been developed with Oxfordshire MIND funded by OCC. The training is open to Councillors at all levels of local government including Parish and Town Councillors.
 - Cllr Crouch participated in the inaugural West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership meeting and talked to a range of services supporting young people to better understand the significant challenges they face around mental health.
 - Research has been undertaken in Central Witney Ward into the health inequalities facing residents. Action around improving support around mental health was identified as a key priority.

- A Health Development role has been recruited as part of the Community Wellbeing team to focus on the Central Witney ward and the particular health challenges in that area.
- Funding of £60k has been invested in APCAM and Transition Chipping Norton to deliver a 2-year mental health programme aimed at supporting those who find it hardest to access services.
- Funding of £90k, secured for Mental Health support, was invested into the 3-year SLA programme – primarily directed towards funding Age UK, HomeStart Oxford and Banbury, the Theatre Chipping Norton and Volunteer Link Up.
- Cllr Crouch in her capacity as Mental Health Champion has visited Chipping Norton Theatre and The Branch Chipping Norton to discuss their mental health services. A visit to APCAM is planned.
- A directory of Mental Health Services in West Oxfordshire has been produced and published on the Council's website.
- Community Health Engagement activity taking the form of research and focus groups about tackling health inequalities particular to those living rurally, has just launched in Chipping Norton, Charlbury, Long Hanborough and Freeland.
- Cllr Crouch is attending the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing and Health Improvement Boards and representing West Oxfordshire's residents in discussions around Mental health policy including Suicide Prevention and Self Harm, and associated unhealthy behaviours such as Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Smoking.
- Funding has been invested through Westhive into 15 projects which take steps to create opportunities for residents to engage in activities and opportunities which contribute to the prevention of poor mental health.
- We are delivering the You Move and Move Together physical activity programmes which are tackling inactivity and seeking to increase participation in physical activity by children, young people and adults who face financial and physical barriers to participation.
- The Council is co-commissioner of the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service ensuring there is support for victim survivors of domestic abuse in West Oxfordshire.
- The Council has a range of staff in roles which provide support to residents with complex needs which will include some form of mental health challenge – these include Housing Specialists Complex needs, Tenancy Support officers and Community Builders.
- Through UKSPF funding the Council has invested in projects to deliver skills and employment support for those needing additional help to access the job market – eg the No Limits Programme and FarmAbility's supported employment programme.
- The Revenue and Benefits Team are utilising the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform for Benefits maximisation – contacting residents to inform them where they may be entitled to further support and how to access this.

- The Council coordinated a Volunteers Fair on Thursday 22nd January attended by over 250 residents. There were 28 organisations present, each hoping to attract more volunteers.
- Wellbeing Advocates are voluntary staff roles in place to support colleagues by signposting to relevant organisations and providing a listening ear.

5. SUPPORT FOR COUNCILLORS

- 5.1 **Explore the [Councillors workbook supporting mentally healthier places](#)** published by the Local Government Association (June 2024). This is a valuable resource for all Councillors.
- 5.1.1 It was designed as a distance learning aid to support councillors to plan for and develop mentally healthier communities.
- 5.1.2 It has been structured to reflect the three most important factors influencing health as identified by the World Health Organisation:
- Individual characteristics and behaviour
 - Physical environment
 - Economic context.
- 5.1.3 Although health and social care services are vital, the workbook focuses further ‘upstream’ on prevention. The idea behind which is to focus on prevention as opposed to remedy.
- 5.1.4 The LGA strongly encourages Councillors to engage with the challenges set out in the workbook and use the increased awareness and understanding to inform service design.
- 5.2 **Book a place on the free Mental Health Training for Councillors**, delivered by MIND. Upcoming dates are 11th and 26th February and 4th and 19th March.
- 5.2.1 The aim of the sessions is to:
- Raise awareness of mental health issues likely to be experienced by constituents served by Councillors.
 - Explore some of the most common symptoms of poor mental health.
 - Identify best practices for starting a conversation about mental health.
 - Provide resources for dealing with a mental health crisis.
 - Discuss options for Councillors to look after their own mental health.
- 5.2.2 There are other general Mental Health courses available – Suicide First Aid Lite - February in Witney or online 12th March; Youth Mental Health First Aid 4th and 5th February or 25th and 26th March. These go into greater depth and are not Councillor specific.
- 5.3 **Encourage Town and Parish Councillors to attend the above Councillor training**. This training is available to Councillors at all levels of local government.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no alternative options.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no financial implications to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications to this report.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 There are no risks associated with this report.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT

10.1 The report has no negative impact on any groups on the basis of:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

11. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Climate team has agreed to give an exemption in this case as there are no measurable outcomes of the report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 No additional background information.

(END)