

This report is public	
Mental Health Provision for Young People	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	6 January 2026
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities, Councillor Rob Pattenden
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	10 September 2025
Report of	Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services, Nicola Riley

Purpose of report

Following a motion agree at Council in July 2024 to look at increasing spending in mental health initiatives from policy contingency budget for young people. It was subsequently agreed at the November 2024 Executive that the next step was for an increase in mental health provision within the Youth Activator team along with a research paper to be carried out by external provider to assess the needs of young people in Cherwell around mental wellbeing.

This report will outline the key findings from the research paper *“Unmet Mental Health & Wellbeing Need in Primary School - Aged Children”* that was delivered by MIND and agree next steps to address findings.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To endorse the research paper *“Unmet Mental Health & Wellbeing Need in Primary School - Aged Children”* in Cherwell.
- 1.2 To note the key findings in the research paper and agree to deliver a pilot movement and psychological support programme for a year for 8 – 11 year-olds in fifteen targeted schools through £50,000 Public Health funding and Wellbeing Team staff time to coordinate.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Three options have been developed in response to the findings of the Mind research report, which secured £55,000 of Public Health funding to target fifteen schools. The recommended option utilises this external funding to implement the report’s recommendations, ensuring delivery of a year-long pilot that combines movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies, coordinated through existing Wellbeing Team capacity

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
Finance	<p>Option 1 would not be recommended as would miss out on opportunity to provide provision and would miss out on the grant funding from public health</p> <p>Option 2 is not viable as there is no base budget to fund the Wellbeing Worker, requiring additional policy contingency funding and Option 3 provides everything required.</p> <p>Recommended Option 3 utilises the 55,000 Public Health funding and reallocates hours from an existing Wellbeing Team member to coordinate delivery in schools and community settings at no extra cost. This must be reflected in service levels to ensure clarity on capacity and expectations</p> <p>Michael Furness, Assistant Director Finance, 26 November 2025</p>			
Legal	<p>Any service provision delivered through an external organisation will need to comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.</p> <p>Denzil Turbervill, Head of Legal Services, 26 November 2025</p>			
Risk Management	<p>Risks related to any potential Mental Health programme from the options outlined will be managed through the service operational risk register.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 26 November 2025</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			<p>All potential options are in line with our Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion framework, seeking to ensure that young people who are experiencing difficulties because of mental health pressures can be enabled to help manage their mental health</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 26 November 2025</p>
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Climate & Environmental Impact				N/A
ICT & Digital Impact				N/A

Data Impact				N/A
Procurement & subsidy				N/A
Council Priorities	Healthy, resilient and engaged communities. The provision for young people to help manage their mental health and causes of health inequalities.			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	The programme will be evaluated in partnership with Public Health to show its impact on children and young people's mental health. This means we will collect evidence on how well the intervention works and use that information to keep improving provision. We will also work closely with young people, schools, and Oxfordshire Mind to review progress and make sure the programme continues to meet needs.			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 In Oxfordshire, mental health issues among young people have been rising, mirroring national trends. Recent data highlights a significant increase in school pupils requiring support for social, emotional, and mental health needs. There has also been a notable rise in the number of persistent absentees from secondary schools, which can be linked to mental health concerns.
 - 3.2 Nationally, the prevalence of mental health concerns among young people is increasing. In 2024 in Oxfordshire, around 1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 16 years had a probable mental disorder. This was 20.3% of 8- to 16-year-olds,. (JSNA)
 - 3.3 In the Academic year 2023/24 there was a total of 3,830 school pupils in Oxfordshire supported with a primary need of social, emotional and mental health (JSNA)
 - 3.4 In Cherwell the Wellbeing Team currently supports young people's mental health through its Youth Activator programme, delivered in primary schools during transition years (Years 5 & 6). The programme combines physical activity with mental wellbeing education, covering topics such as stress, anxiety, goal setting, self-esteem, anger, and resilience. So far in in 2025 it has reached 38 schools, helping pupils understand emotions and develop coping strategies. Impact data shows 79% reported improved wellbeing, 79% would recommend the course, and 92% rated their experience as good or amazing.
 - 3.5 Building on the success of the Youth Activator programme, and following an executive motion to explore increased spending on youth mental health from the policy contingency budget, the next step was to expand mental health provision
- Cherwell District Council

within the Youth Activator team which saw the Activators deliver provision in 38 schools in 2025. In addition, an external research paper was commissioned after agreement from Executive to assess the mental wellbeing needs of young people in Cherwell, ensuring future support was evidence-based and targeted.

- 3.6 Cherwell District Council commissioned Oxfordshire Mind to carry out scoping research into the unmet mental health and wellbeing needs of primary school-aged children 5 –11 year olds in the district. The purpose was to provide evidence-based insights to shape future support for schools and ensure interventions were targeted and effective.
- 3.7 The research involved two surveys, one for school staff and one for parents/carers, both developed in consultation with the Council. The school staff survey was sent to all 60 primary schools in Cherwell, requesting one response per school, and achieved a 52% response rate with 31 schools participating. The parent/carer survey was distributed via schools and received 215 responses covering all year groups. Both surveys were open for six weeks.
- 3.8 Oxfordshire Mind also conducted a focus group with four Wellbeing Workers supporting children in GP practices and focus groups and short interviews with staff from two schools. This mixed-method approach was to make sure the research was robust in identifying mental health challenges, assessing current support, along with gathering views on future provision to inform evidence-based interventions for children in Cherwell.

4. Details

- 4.1 The paper reported some great insight into the needs of children, schools and parents in the Cherwell District around mental wellbeing along with suggested recommendations for future improvements.

Key Findings from report

- 4.2 41% of parents/carers reported that their child currently experiences a mental health or wellbeing challenge. This indicates a significant level of unmet need among primary-aged children in Cherwell.
- 4.3 Years 4 and 5 were highlighted as the cohorts most likely to face mental health challenges from research report This may relate to developmental transitions and the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic during their early school years.
- 4.4 Stress and anxious feelings were consistently identified as the leading issues by both parents and school staff. Other concerns included anger, low self-esteem, and low mood, but anxiety was the dominant theme.
- 4.5 Both parents and staff expressed a strong preference for a blended model of support combining universal whole class emotional literacy sessions with targeted one-to-one interventions for children who need extra help.
- 4.6 The majority of school staff reported that they only “to some extent” have the training required to support pupils with mental health needs. This suggests a need for

enhanced professional development, particularly around neurodiversity and emotional regulation.

- 4.7 Parents generally felt confident they would know who to approach if their child needed support, but were less confident that their child would know how to seek help independently. This highlights the importance of equipping children with emotional literacy and help-seeking skills.

Recommendations from Report

- 4.8 Provide targeted training for school staff on supporting pupils with mental health needs, with a focus on neurodiversity, emotional regulation, and managing stress and anxiety. Mental Health Leads in schools should receive advanced training to strengthen whole-school approaches.
- 4.9 Embed Emotional Literacy in Schools into daily classroom practice using age-appropriate resources. This will help children identify and express feelings, build resilience, and develop help-seeking skills.
- 4.10 Offer a blended support model with a mix of whole class workshops, targeted one-to-one sessions, and family engagement activities. These need to be delivered consistently throughout the year to ensure continuity and flexibility in meeting needs.
- 4.11 Improve Communication with Parents by providing clear, accessible information about mental health support in schools and community. This support should be part of core school and community offer, reducing stigma and encouraging early engagement from families

Next Steps

- 4.12 In response to the findings of the recent research report, Cherwell will pilot a public health emotional support package for primary schools for a year. This pilot will target 15 schools in Cherwell, providing tailored emotional health and wellbeing interventions throughout the academic year. The total investment for this pilot is £55,000 which will be funded through Public Health ensuring schools receive consistent support embedded within their whole-school approach.
- 4.13 The £55,000 funded intervention piloted in Cherwell will be for a year through commissioned organisation combines movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies to support mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. It is universal for all pupils, so every child benefits from activities that build resilience, improve mood, and encourage positive coping skills. School staff will be trained to deliver these activities as part of everyday school life, and parents will receive guidance to reinforce these strategies at home.
- 4.14 Alongside being universal the programme will also be targeted for children identified as at risk. These pupils will receive additional early support tailored to their needs, helping prevent issues from escalating. Parents and teachers will be given practical tools to understand and respond to these children's challenges. By combining universal and targeted approaches, the intervention creates a strong support network, reduces stigma around mental health, and ensures that every child whether thriving or struggling has access to the right level of help.

- 4.15 The decision for Public Health to focus on Cherwell for the initial 15 schools is based on evidence from the research, which highlighted significant unmet mental health needs among primary-aged children in the district. By concentrating resources in one area, the pilot aims to deliver targeted, year-round support that addresses local priorities and builds a strong foundation for future county-wide implementation.
- 4.16 Schools will be chosen using a clear set of criteria to ensure support reaches those with the greatest need. These will include:
- Location and deprivation levels (IMD ranking)
 - Pupil headcount and readiness to engage
 - Free school meal and pupil premium status
 - Development and attainment indicator data
- 4.17 Alongside the public health funding of £55,000 to provide a programme of mental health support in 15 schools in targeted schools there is the proposal to have a children and young person wellbeing worker to co ordinate the programme and provide additional support for children and schools. This would be for 18.5 hours a week. The cost of £22,809. includes central costs, HR, Finance, Safeguarding and Line Management
- 4.18 **Option 1** – Do not access and deliver the £55,000 funded intervention from Public Health targeting 15 schools piloted first in Cherwell for a year April 2026 – March 2027 combining movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies alongside not providing a wellbeing worker for 18.5 hours a week to coordinate the work in the targeted schools
- 4.19 **Option 2** – Access and deliver the £55,000 of Public Health funding to deliver a year-long pilot (April 2026–March 2027) across 15 Cherwell schools. The intervention will combine movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies, coordinated by a Wellbeing Worker employed for 18.5 hours per week, funded from the policy contingency budget, to ensure effective implementation and support in the targeted schools and communities settings.
- 4.20 **Option 3 Recommended Option** Access and deliver the £55,000 of Public Health funding to deliver a year-long pilot (April 2026–March 2027) across 15 Cherwell schools. The intervention will combine movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies, coordinated by a current member of the Wellbeing Team, utilising existing hours to provide 18.5 hours per week for implementation in the targeted schools.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Has been rejected due to it would mean not taking up the £55,000 Public Health-funded intervention, resulting in no pilot across 15 Cherwell schools, no integration of movement activities with psychological strategies along with coordination.

Option 2: Option 2 was rejected because, although it secures £55,000 of Public Health funding for a year-long pilot across 15 Cherwell schools, it requires additional funding from the policy contingency budget to cover the Wellbeing Worker's 18.5 hours per week.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 Option 3 is the most cost-effective approach, as it fully utilises the £55,000 Public Health funding without requiring additional internal budget. By reallocating existing Wellbeing Team hours to provide 18.5 hours per week for coordination, this option avoids extra staffing costs while still ensuring dedicated support for delivery.
- 6.2 The intervention combines movement activities with evidence-based psychological strategies, directly improving pupil wellbeing and resilience. Targeting 15 as a pilot in Cherwell schools and communities means that pupils can benefit first from provision along with measuring impact, and a scalable model for future expansion into more schools and communities.

Decision Information

Key Decision	Yes
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Report: Unmet Mental Health & Wellbeing Need in Primary School - Aged Children
Appendix 2	Executive Summary: Unmet Mental Health & Wellbeing Need in Primary School - Aged Children
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Tom Gubbins, Wellbeing Manager
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Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services, Nicola Riley, 26 November 2025