

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025

Report being considered by: Health and Wellbeing Board

On: 24 September 2025

Report Author: Matt Pearce

Report Sponsor: Matt Pearce

Item for: Discussion



1. Purpose of the Report

To share the Director of Public Health (DPH) Annual Report 2025 with the Health and Wellbeing Board. The focus of the 2025 report is 'Setting the Foundations for Lifelong Health'.

2. Recommendation(s)

To note the content of the report, and for Health and Wellbeing Board members to share with respective organisations and networks to consider the recommendations contained within.

3. Implications

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no direct financial implications of this Annual Report, although implantation of the recommendations may incur costs should they be supported.
Human Resource:	There are no HR implications for this report.
Legal:	The Director of Public Health (DPH) has a statutory duty to write an Annual Public Health Report to demonstrate the state of health within their communities. The annual report remains a key method by which the DPH is accountable to the population they serve.
Risk Management:	There are no specific risks arising from the report
Property:	There are no property implications for this report.
Policy:	The Director of Public Health (DPH) report should be considered as part of policy making across the council and partner organisations.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:	✓			This report demonstrates the stark health inequalities and poorer outcomes that are systematically experienced by children in the most deprived areas. The inequalities that develop in early years can become embedded throughout their lives. However, providing high quality services for infants, children and young people can prevent ill health in later life, create healthier communities and reduce demand for services.
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		✓		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	✓			There will be a positive impact if recommendations are supported by the council and partner agencies
Environmental Impact:		✓		There are no general implications for the environment arising from this report, although leading healthier lives would have a positive impact e.g. food sustainability, active travel etc
Health Impact:	✓			
ICT Impact:		✓		There are no general implications for ICT arising from this report
Digital Services Impact:		✓		There are no general implications for Digital Services arising from this report.
Council Strategy Priorities:				The report supports priority 5 of the council strategy

Core Business:				Many of the recommendations within the report will be fulfilled through national policy making
Data Impact:				There are no general implications for Data arising from this report, although one recommendation
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Community and stakeholder engagement is not a requirement of the Director of Public Health Annual Report, although the following people have either been involved in the production of the document or consulted</p> <p>Zoe Campbell (Public Health Business Manager) Nerys Probert (Senior Public Health Programme Officer), Alice Luker (Senior Public Health Analyst), Steven Bow (Consultant in Public Health – Service Lead), Paul Coe (Executive Director – ASC and Public Health), Annemarie Dodds (Executive Director – Children and Family Services)</p>			

4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 The DPH annual report serves as a vehicle by which the DPH can highlight issues and areas of focus for universal or targeted attention to help protect or improve the health of their population.
- 4.2 The Director of Public Health's Annual Report for 2025 - 'Setting the Foundations for Lifelong Health', sets out the health of children and parents in West Berkshire and the challenges they face, alongside the work and achievements made in giving our children the best opportunities for good health, both now and in the future.
- 4.3 The report provides an overview of the health and wellbeing status of parents and children during infancy, highlighting areas where West Berkshire benchmarks well, and areas that need attention. The report sets out several recommendations which the Health and Wellbeing Board may wish to consider going forward.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 Since 1988 the Directors of Public Health (DPH) have been required to publish an annual report on the health of their population, this can be an overview assessment or based on a specific theme.
- 5.2 The annual report serves as a vehicle by which the DPH can highlight issues and areas of focus for universal or targeted attention to help protect or improve the health of their population.
- 5.3 The annual report remains a key method by which the DPH is accountable to the population they serve.
- 5.4 The Faculty of Public Health guidelines on DPH Annual Reports list the report aims as the following:

- a. Contribute to improving the health and well-being of local populations
- b. Reduce health inequalities.
- c. Promote action for better health through measuring progress towards health targets.
- d. Assist with the planning and monitoring of local programmes and services that impact on health over time.

5.5 The Public Health Annual Report is the DPH's independent, expert assessment of the health of the local population. Whilst the views and contributions of local partners have been taken into account, the assessment and recommendations made in the report are those held by the DPH and do not necessarily reflect the position of the employing and partner organisations.

5.6 For the 2025 report, the topic of best start in life was chosen and highlights the following:

- What happens in pregnancy and early childhood impacts on physical and emotional health all the way through to adulthood
- Chronic stress in early childhood has a negative impact on a baby's development and can have long-lasting effects on health and wellbeing.
- Significant progress has been over the last few years across a range of health indicators, including; reducing tooth decay, smoking in pregnancy, school readiness and uptake of immunisations.
- Whilst West Berkshire tends to have better outcomes for young children compared with most national and regional averages, there are still areas for improvement including:
 - 44% of babies are not breastfed at 6-8 weeks
 - The rate of emergency admissions for lower respiratory infections among males aged 0-4 years is higher than the national average
 - Childhood obesity at reception age remains high, with significant differences between the most and least deprived parts of West Berkshire
 - Whilst levels of school readiness for children have recently improved, progress is needed for children on free school meals, particularly among boys.
 - 5.9% of people smoked during pregnancy, this equates to around 80 pregnant people smoking, which will likely have profound implications for both mother and child
 - Around a third of people in early pregnancy in West Berkshire (355) are categorised as obese
 - One in six five-year-olds have tooth decay.
 - Whilst coverage levels for childhood immunisations are above the national target for most immunisations, uptake will vary across different population groups. This includes children in care, where uptake is significantly lower than the national average.
 - Approximately one in five eligible parents are not claiming healthy start vouchers which equates to approximately £70,720 of unclaimed food vouchers locally per year.
 - Some areas (most notably antenatal visits and 6-8 week visits) within the Healthy Child Programme need to improve.
 - 11% (3,398) of children under the age of 16 are living in poverty
 - In 2020/21, 6,050 homes in West Berkshire were estimated to be non-decent, 9.0% of the total housing stock, which is significantly lower than the England average.

- 5.7 The report highlights good practice that local organisations are doing to support the outcomes of young children across the district. This includes Home-start, Get Berkshire Active, Swings and Smiles and Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, plus many others.
- 5.8 The recommendations included in the report outline how public health and the wider system can further improve the health and wellbeing of West Berkshire infants, children and young people and to reduce health inequalities, the high-level recommendations are based on the evidence of what works to reduce health inequalities;
1. Invest in parent support programmes
 2. Increase uptake of healthy start vouchers
 3. Ensure the successful implementation of family hubs
 4. Improving school readiness
 5. Improving oral health
 6. Empowering families to plan for pregnancy
 7. Better information and signposting
 8. Adopt a whole system approach to trauma informed practice
 9. Become a 'child friendly' district
 10. Better data and information sharing across agencies
 11. Ensure comprehensive parent support classes
 12. Have a high performing healthy child programme
 13. Develop a health promotion programme for early years settings
- 5.9 These recommendations will need to be delivered through a whole system approach with a focus on joint working across the interfaces to enable the whole to become more than the sum of its parts.
- 5.10 Given the importance of the recommendations contained within the report, it may be prudent to review progress against actions that underpin these in 12-months' time, should the council or partner organisations decide to adopt them.
- 5.11 Since work on this report had commenced, the Government have announced a series of policy measures through their [Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy](#), that will in part, support the implementation of the recommendations set out in the report. It is advised that these recommendations are viewed within this context.

6. Proposal(s)

It is proposed to note the content of the report, and for Health and Wellbeing Board members to share with respective organisations and networks to consider the recommendations contained within.

7. Options Considered

No alternatives were considered as the Director of Public Health Annual Report is a statutory document and forms an aspect of the strategic planning process for protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of West Berkshire residents.

8. Conclusion(s)

The Annual Report from the Director of Public Health presents an independent view to inform local people about the health of their community and identifies important issues, flags up problems and reports on progress across the early years.

9. Appendices

Appendix A – Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025 – Setting the Foundations for Lifelong Health

Background Papers:

None

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Priorities Supported:

The proposals will support the following priorities:

- ☒ Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- ☒ Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- ☒ Help families and young children in early years
- ☒ Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- ☒ Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

The proposals contained in this report will support the above Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities by improving the Health and Wellbeing Board's governance arrangements and working practices in order to increase its overall effectiveness in improving the health and wellbeing of the local population and reducing health inequalities.

