

Open Letter to all elected members of Oxfordshire County Council concerning proposed mental health cuts of £1.6 million

**From all members of the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership
and associated Oxfordshire organisations**

The Prime Minister recently vowed that austerity was over after eight years of deep cuts to mental health services. Nationally the policy is now to redress the lack of priority shown to mental health over many years. So we are very concerned and surprised to hear, soon after, that Oxfordshire County Council proposed to take out a further £1.6 million from those life-saving, life-changing services.

At the start of another new year, we are forced to write with one voice about our shared concern that austerity is not over for those who rely on our services. This cut will be the breaking point for many struggling with mental ill health in our county.

Health services in Oxfordshire are already amongst the most efficient and cost effective in the country, but they are also under the most serious pressure and seriously underfunded, and they have been for many years. It's becoming harder to recruit and retain staff because of these pressures and the detrimental effect of underfunding on pay and conditions. Our services are being kept afloat by dedicated staff working harder or, for some of the charity partners, relying on the generosity of Oxfordshire residents.

Our organisations are supporting more people, and peoples' needs are becoming more complex. It is a tragedy that just as the stigma of mental ill-health starts to decline and more people feel able to ask for help, our resources and therefore ability to respond are being cut.

This cut isn't just wrong for patients, it's also a false economy. Any reduction of face-to-face support will escalate the very issues that we exist to address. Any reduction of preventative interventions will increase the numbers of people who are acutely unwell. Any reduction of interventions to help people properly recover from a period of mental ill health will create repeated pressures on acute services. And then there's the cost that we don't measure—the human cost of unnecessary suffering and misery that we exist to end.

The County Council says that they need to make hard choices and focus their budget on those for whom they have statutory responsibilities. However, they wouldn't be making a hard choice, they would be making a wrong choice. We know from our collective first-hand experience that many of our service users and patients care for children and elderly or disabled relatives. Budget cuts will impact

on our capacity to support carers, too, producing a negative effect on the other budgets spanning the County Council's social care provision. These cuts may also put further pressure on efforts to safeguard children and vulnerable adults in Oxfordshire. Let's not make a bad situation even worse.

We implore all County Councillors to learn more about the services we provide and to listen to the voices of the 5,000 constituents who currently receive them, and their families and communities. On World Mental Health Day in October 2018, the County Council Leader Ian Hudspeth listened to some of those voices and made important points. We want him to match up his passion in the room with the money those service users need to stay in the services they depend on.

It is false to believe that we can tighten our belts further. We have made every cut we can possibly make in every area of our operations. Our staff soldier on with dedication, but struggle daily with diminishing resources. You cannot make an efficient service more efficient by imposing further cuts. Cuts of a further £1.6m can only produce devastating consequences which we believe are avoidable. We have a duty to warn the County Councillors making a political decision about the budget to push this to the front of their minds when casting their votes on this vital issue.

Signed by:

All members of the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership:

Stuart Bell, CEO, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

Dan Knowles, CEO, Oxfordshire Mind and Chair of the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership

Lesley Dewhurst, CEO, Restore

Tamsin Jewell, CEO, Elmore Community Services

Mark Thompson, CEO, Connection Support

John McLaughlin, CEO, Response



Associated Oxfordshire organisations:

Patrick Vercoe, CEO, Banbury Young Homeless Project (BYHP)

Rick Mower, CEO, RAW Workshop

Jodie Lloyd-Jones, CEO, Oxfordshire Youth

Barry Ingleton, CEO, Synolos

Frances Ashworth, Group Coordinator, Oxfordshire Campaigners for Change

Julie Males, Service Manager, Rethink Mental Illness

Olivia Davies, Operations Manager, Trax Motor Project

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