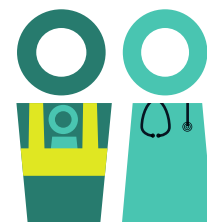


A MANIFESTO FOR MENTALLY HEALTHIER COUNCILS

Local councils have a big impact on the mental health of the communities and people they serve. Councils with public health responsibilities assess and plan to improve the health of their residents. The services they provide, from health visiting and school nursing to stop smoking and addiction services, all contribute to better mental health.



Local councils' wider powers and roles across the building blocks of health have a direct impact on our mental health.



From housing, Best Start Family Hubs and youth services to libraries and leisure centres, local council services can boost our mental health. Councils' planning, economic development and environmental responsibilities also affect mental health. Decisions made with residents' mental health in mind will be better, healthier, and more sustainable.

For the 2026 local elections in England, we're calling on all council candidates to pledge to support our recently published Mentally Healthier Councils Framework.

The Framework aims to embed mental health as a core priority in all council strategies, policies, and operations — creating a mentally healthier environment for both residents and the workforce.

Developed by Centre for Mental Health, this framework is informed by feedback gathered through a survey distributed to members of the Mentally Healthier Council Network (MHCN) in 2024. It reflects the criteria that local authorities identified as most relevant to supporting their ambition to become a mentally healthier council.



WHY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS MORE THAN EVER IN 2026

The public's mental health is getting worse. **One in five children and one in four adults is living with a mental health problem.** Rates of mental ill health among children have doubled in the last 20 years.

Mental ill health costs £300 billion a year in England. That's the equivalent of £2 billion for every upper tier local council area.

People with mental health problems don't have a fair chance in life. They are less likely to be able to work. They have poorer physical health and a shorter life expectancy. Many face long waits for treatment. This is unjust, but it can change with the right support.

The Mentally Healthier Councils Framework is a 10-point checklist of approaches to embed mentally healthier policies and initiatives, which align with the key building blocks of mental health.



1. Embed a mental health in all policies approach.
2. Publish a recent mental health needs assessment and strategy.
3. Adopt the Living Wage Foundation accreditation.
4. Develop and implement an anti-poverty strategy.
5. Ensure planning policies actively promote safe and affordable housing.

FRAMEWORK FOR A MENTALLY HEALTHIER COUNCIL

Strengthen accountability

Tackle poverty

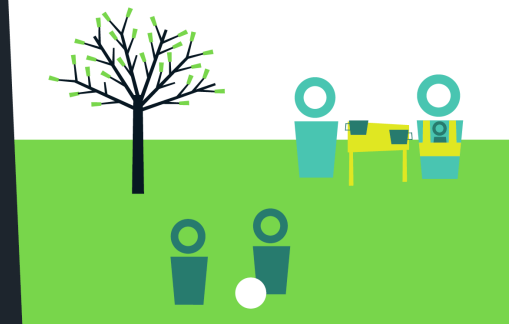
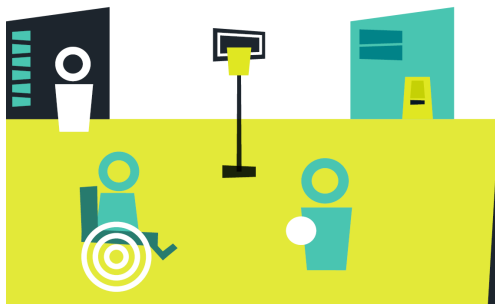
Improve the environment

Support prevention and early intervention

Embed equity and inclusion



6. Adopt planning policies that expand green, play and community spaces.
7. Provide high-quality, free parenting support.
8. Ensure sustained investment in early support mental health hubs.
9. Champion a whole school and college approach to mental health.
10. Adopt a prevention-focused approach to reducing mental health inequalities.



Each point outlines practical steps that councils can take to promote wellbeing and reduce risk factors that harm mental health. All of them have been demonstrated to improve mental health, and they are not too costly to councils.

The Framework sets out a clear, practical call to action for councils of all sizes to strengthen mental health and wellbeing across their communities and workforce. Grounded in prevention, early intervention, and evidence of what works, it recognises that councils start from different places and capacities. Through leadership, collaboration, and shared learning across the Mentally Healthier Councils Network, every council can play a vital role in improving mental health and reducing inequalities.

We urge all council candidates to support this manifesto and pledge to make the public's mental health a priority this year.

All elected members are also eligible to join our Mentally Healthier Councils Network. It's **free to join** and gives you information, advice and ideas to support better mental health in your community.

ABOUT US

Centre for Mental Health is an independent charity. We take the lead in challenging policies, systems and society, so that everyone can have better mental health. Over the last decade, we have worked with local councils across the country to help them to support better mental health in their communities. Our Mentally Healthier Councils Network helps council members and officers to learn and share about how to protect and promote mental health in their local areas. This manifesto sets out ten evidence-based steps for councils, based on our recently released **Mentally Healthier Councils Framework**.

