

To: Cabinet
Date: 12 February 2020
Report of: Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive.
Title of Report: Council Strategy 2020-2024 –consultation feedback

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	Approval of Council Strategy 2020-2024
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Susan Brown
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Yes
Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1 Note the report on the public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Council Strategy 2020-24; and	
2 Agree revisions made to the draft Strategy in response to the consultation and delegate authority to the Council Leader and Head of Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications to make further minor amendments as required prior to its publication in March 2020	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Council Strategy 2020-2024 (to follow)

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council’s Council Strategy 2020–2024 (also called the Council Strategy or Strategy in this document) succeeds the existing City Council Corporate Plan 2016-20 and updates our objectives to achieve sustainable systematic change for Oxford.
2. Following an extensive programme of stakeholder input, a draft Council Strategy was issued for public consultation between 20 December and 31 January. In total 208 responses were received.
3. This paper sets out the consultation approach, feedback received and changes recommended to the draft Council Strategy 20-24 following the consultation. It highlights the main areas of focus in the responses, broken down across residents,

stakeholders, young people – through Youth Ambition, and City Council staff. A revised and updated version of the draft Strategy is attached in Appendix 1.

4. To underpin the delivery of the Strategy, the Council will produce an annual Business Plan that will set specific priorities for the year ahead and report on progress against agreed key performance indicators. In turn the Business Plan will be complemented by the City Council annual Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) that will allocate resources against the priorities set.
5. The Business Plan will replace the current Corporate Plan Annual Statement.

Internal & External Consultation approach

6. Officers held a series of workshops and meetings with a number of key stakeholders that have provided inputs for the draft Council Strategy. These include:
 - Oxford Strategic Partnership
 - City Council Corporate Management Team
 - City Council Heads of Service
 - City Council senior managers
 - City Council Policy Officers meeting
 - All City Council Staff
 - Cabinet
 - Labour Group
 - Liberal Democrat Group
 - All-member workshop
 - Information exchange with officers at Oxfordshire's County and District councils

The above consultation and engagement meetings fed back into a revised draft Strategy that was then used to consult with the following:

7. Online consultation for City Council staff ran throughout December 2019.
8. The City Council Tenant Involvement team held two workshops with tenants to get feedback on the draft Strategy.
9. The City Council Youth Ambition Team held a session to get feedback from young people.
10. An online public consultation ran from 20 December 2019 – 31 January 2020, supported by a communications campaign on social media. This resulted in 160 questionnaires completed with hundreds of free text comments that further expanded on participants views.
11. In addition responses were received directly from individual stakeholders, following a targeted programme of contact via email, phone and in person, to feedback on the Strategy, with a range of flexible options to respond.

Feedback from external online consultation

12. Across the 160 responses received, there was support for the four priorities and the 42 individual outcomes or objectives identified in the draft Strategy. The level of support varied from strong agreement, to slight agreement to each individual stated outcome or objective the Council was seeking to achieve. There were no instances

of more respondents disagreeing than agreeing to any of the 42 outcome/objective statements.

13. Around one third of respondents (55) also provided additional comments in the free-text boxes provided under each priority area, and in overall summary. At the headline level the highest number of comments received covered two broad areas:

- The Council should give even greater priority to reducing carbon emissions in the city above all other actions (24 responses)
- Dealing with traffic congestion and improving transport infrastructure should be the Council's highest priority (7 responses)

14. Taking each priority area in turn, more detailed comments were provided, typically urging greater prominence, or action in a particular area.

Enable an inclusive economy

- Addressing traffic congestion and improving public transport and cycling infrastructure was key to a more inclusive economy (15 responses)
- Some support for planned expansion of the city centre to the West, creating new areas around the Station, Oxpens and Osney Mead, but concern that this should not be at the expense of the economic health of High Street, Cornmarket and other areas of the city (7 responses). It should be highlighted that in the overall responses 71 respondents supported the plan for city centre expansion westward, with 39 opposed
- Some respondents called for a more sustainable economy – with increased focus around repair and reuse (6 comments). A handful opposed further economic growth (5 comments)
- A number of comments highlighted the need for closer partnership working with the universities, and a more balanced economy alongside the dominance of the universities (4 comments)

Deliver more affordable housing

- There was a call for a greater focus on social housing, rather than other forms of affordable or market housing (12 comments)
- A number of respondents raised concerns over any development of the Green Belt, while some asked for more clarity on proposals to utilise part of the inner fringe of the Green Belt, immediately around the city, for urban extension, while expanding the outer fringe of Green Belt to compensate (15 comments). It should be highlighted that in the overall responses 66 respondents supported the creation of urban extensions, with 45 opposed
- The need for good public transport and cycling infrastructure was again highlighted, explicitly to reduce the reliance on cars in new housing development (12 comments)
- The importance of building new housing to very low or zero-carbon standards was highlighted (10 comments), along with the need to ensure new housing was provided with adequate green space (6 comments)

- There were a number of comments concerned over the impact of the universities on housing in the city, through housing used for student HMO accommodation, or the building of student blocks (7 comments)

Support thriving communities

- A number of respondents highlighted the need to do more to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping across the city (10 comments)
- There were a number of comments about the need for the Council to increase the level of community engagement and involvement. This included greater involvement of community groups in decision-making, working more closely with churches, and involving more older people who are retired and keen to commit time and expertise to supporting community initiatives (8 comments)
- The importance of maintaining and improving parks and green spaces was highlighted by several people – often linked to the benefits to health and wellbeing (7 comments). Others highlighted the importance of supporting walking and cycling for health and wellbeing (6 comments). And a few people asked for a more explicit reference to working with health bodies and others to help support health and wellbeing (3 comments)
- Other comments included support for the Council's Youth Ambition programme and calling on it to work more closely with schools (4 comments)

Pursue a zero carbon Oxford

- The greatest number of individual comments were expressing support for the Council's zero carbon Oxford objectives, making this the first objective, or suggesting that the Council could be more ambitious still (15 comments)
- As above, there were a number of comments highlighting the need for improved cycling and walking infrastructure, with some asking that this is drawn out under the zero carbon Oxford objective (10 comments). A similar number called for reduced car use, more support for public transport, or a rapid expansion of the planned Zero Emission Zone (8 comments)
- There were mixed views on the Council's objective of taking a leading role in the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), with 4 comments opposing a focus on EVs – due to particulate emissions, 3 supporting it, and one calling for a promotion of electric car-shares instead. There were also concerns expressed over the affordability of electric vehicles (5 comments)
- There was support on tree-planting and greater biodiversity, including a call for more wilding in managed green spaces (10 comments)
- A number of respondents called for greater public, stakeholder, Government and community engagement by the Council to encourage a reduction in carbon emission by others (8 comments)
- Other comments included the need for a greater focus on recycling (4 comments), increased pedestrianisation of the city centre (4 comments), and improved flood defences (3 comments)

Feedback from Youth Ambition

15. The Youth Ambition team ran a session involving 31 young people to gain their views on the Council Strategy. In order to better engage, staff redrafted the outcomes to simplify them, and devised a different scoring system of smiley faces. A sad face meant the responder did not agree with the outcome, a neutral face meant that they did not agree or disagree, and a smiley face meant that they agreed and didn't see any need for change.
16. The responses were mixed which may be due to some young people not being fully clear about the outcome options presented as picture of the future, as opposed to the current position. However the following areas either had the highest response or highest levels of agreement:

Enable an inclusive economy

- Strong support for the statement: 'Oxford City Council helps employers to care about the environment and those working for them by paying the Oxford Living Wage' (19 supported)
- Young people were neutral about the City Centre, business and tourism. There were 20 neutral responses to the statement that 'Oxford City Council supports more local businesses so money from those businesses go back into local people's pockets' as well as 16 neutral to the statement 'The city centre is attracting more local people not just tourists and local people are benefitting from that'

Deliver more affordable housing

- Young people were positive about proposals to tackle housing supply and homeless. 12 agreed with the statement 'We have increased the amount of high quality, energy efficient housing with a balanced mix of homes for sale and rent at different prices' with only 2 unhappy with the statement. And 13 agreed with 'work with Housing Associations to provide more supportive homes for people to move into who are living in homeless hostels'
- Young people were neutral about Blackbird Leys. 14 were neutral about the following statement 'Our new buildings in Blackbird Leys are high quality homes and use space better' with 7 people supportive and the same number negative

Support thriving communities

- Young people were positive about communities, public spaces and diversity. Over 17 people agreed with the objective: 'Local voluntary and community groups are supported to take greater roles in improving the city and the lives of residents' with only 1 person seeing that as a negative
- 16 people agreed with the aim that: 'our public spaces stay clean, safe, well looked after and more people can use them' and 15 people agreed with the goal that 'people from all ethnic backgrounds are celebrated and communities are more united'
- Young people were more neutral about the statement civic life 'people in Oxford take responsibility of their civic duties and political life' with 17 people choosing a neutral response

Pursue a zero carbon Oxford

- Young people were positive about energy efficiency and recycling and waste. The highest score was 15 people agreeing with the following two statements 'our existing council houses are being made more energy efficient' and 'residents, businesses and other organisations in the city recycle more and produce less waste'. 13 people also agreed with 'all Oxford City Council buildings have no or nearly no carbon emissions'.
- Young people were more neutral about the Council taking a leading role in supporting electric vehicles. 15 people were neutral about the statement 'Oxford takes a leading role in electric vehicles' although 10 people supported the statement and only 2 disagreed.
- 13 people were also neutral about 'residents, businesses and other organisations in the city are taking action to reduce carbon emission and increase biodiversity' with 9 people agreeing and 6 people disagreeing.

Feedback from Oxford City Council tenants

17. The Tenant Involvement team ran workshops involving 4 tenants with a range of ages and backgrounds. Time was spent looking at the way the document was written as well as the content and a range of recommendations were given.

- There was concern that some of the language used in the draft Strategy was unclear – were these objectives for the future, or a description of what the Council had already achieved? The context of some of the outcome/objectives statements was unclear and needed further explanation
- There was a sense of some repetition in the document, with a number of headline intentions re-stating what had already been well set out
- Tenants felt there were too many goals for the Strategy to be achievable – given the constraints of staff resources, funding, and social and political constraints
- A number of the outcomes/objectives were not considered SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound). There should be clear measurement and success criteria
- There was considered a risk that the positioning of equality and diversity so high on the agenda could validate and reinforce divisions, rather than reduce and challenge such divisions. While it is important to recognise there are disadvantaged and unequal groups in Oxford, if an individual felt they were in those groups, might that make them even less likely to want to get involved?

Feedback from the staff consultation

18. The staff consultation that ran for 2 weeks across December 2019 and 13 people responded. Of those that did there was broad agreement with all 4 priorities with marginally more support for 'Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford'.

- When considering the five enables set out under the "How we work – a customer first approach" there was strongest support for the statement 'we

work in partnership' (9 agreed) and the least response for 'We are a campaigning organisation' (3 agreed)

19. The following themes emerged in the staff comments on the four corporate priorities:

- A need for greater clarity on what the headings actually are e.g. state that these are 'our priorities' before the heading.
- A need for greater clarity on the outcomes e.g. in 4 years' time we will see / have achieved....
- Avoiding jargon and semi-technical language and expanding all acronyms
- Ensure the final published document meets all accessibility requirements

Feedback from Oxford Brookes University

20. Oxford Brookes University was the only organisation that provided a separate response via email. Its response was overwhelming positive, with nearly all response strongly agreeing with the outcomes set out in the strategy.

21. Brookes was strongly supportive of the Council's priority to enable an inclusive economy and stated 'The University's own emerging strategic position for the coming years looks set to place an even greater emphasis on inclusivity as part of its guiding principles. Additionally, the University's emerging strategy looks set to include Partnerships and Place as one its four main pillars. This will be with an aim of further enhancing the University's position by 2035, within the vibrant and globally-recognised innovation ecosystem that is Oxford. This commitment again reinforces the importance that Oxford Brookes places on joint and cooperative working with Oxford City Council, and more broadly with stakeholders across the city and county.'

22. Brookes also reiterated the benefit of ongoing partnership work to support the aims of the strategy for example they said 'Oxford Brookes can build on the identified outcome to increase "young people's resilience and confidence...through education activities." The broad range of proactive access, participation and widening participation schemes implemented by Oxford Brookes play an important role in this area and the University looks forward to working with the local authority to enhance this work in the future. '

Recommended changes to Oxford City Council Strategy 20-24

23. Language, tone and plain English

24. Review and incorporate the following recommendations from the feedback above such as:

- Amend and simplify language to ensure it is more accessible and in plain English including use of abbreviations and jargon.
- Clarify outcomes as being objectives to be achieved over the next four years
- Provide greater context to help understanding of the outcomes
- Make a clearer reference to annual action plans complementing the 4 year strategy

Content

25. It should be highlighted at the outset that the four corporate priorities were equal in importance and also interlinked in their nature. Housing, community development, better jobs and an overarching requirement to be more sustainable all form part of the same action plan.

26. Amend the outcomes under 'Inclusive economy' to:

- Highlight that expansion of the city centre to the west should not be at the expense of the economic health of High Street, Cornmarket and other areas of the city
- Reference the need for sustainability in the economy

27. Amend the outcomes under 'Affordable housing' to:

- Clarify that the Council's view of affordable housing is either social housing, or Oxford Living Rent housing - and highlight the importance of high quality housing
- Clarify an intention to replace any green belt adjacent to the city used for housing development with additional green belt elsewhere
- Highlight the need for sustainable transport links from new housing

28. Amend the outcomes under 'Thriving communities' to:

- Reference an increase in the level of community engagement and involvement
- Highlight health & wellbeing in relation to active travel and green spaces, and the Council's partnership work with health bodies

29. Amend the outcomes under 'Zero carbon Oxford' to:

- Strengthen the commitment to take the City Council's operational carbon footprint to zero
- Reference plans to extend the Zero Emission Zone beyond the initial Red Zone
- Reinforce our commitment to take account of affordability and the impact on carbon measures on those least able to pay
- Strengthen the commitment on increasing biodiversity
- Strengthen the commitment to engage with public, partners, Government and others to cut carbon

Financial implications

30. The Strategy sets out high level outcomes and is not linked specifically to expenditure commitments so there are no financial implications.

Legal issues

31. There are no legal issues associated with this Strategy.

Equalities impact

32. The Strategy is concerned with high level strategic aims and outcomes. While the Strategy identifies tackling inequality as an underpinning strategic theme for all of the Council's work, it does not specify how the aims and outcomes will be achieved and these may change over time. Therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment is not possible at this point.
33. The designer briefed to produce the public strategy document has been asked to meet all the accessibility requirements.

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Background Papers: None

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