

To: Cabinet
Date: 15 June 2022
Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)
Title of Report: Draft Oxfordshire Food Strategy

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	<p>An Oxfordshire-wide food strategy has been developed in partnership with the County and District councils and representatives from Good Food Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire community groups. The strategy supports a broad range of Council priorities and strategies including supporting thriving communities, enabling an inclusive economy, pursuing a zero carbon Oxford and the emerging thriving communities strategy.</p> <p>This paper sets out the partnership work that has enabled the development of the strategy and outlines the ambitions established in Part 1 that will guide the development of the action plan in Part 2.</p>
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Health and Transport; Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities, Enable and Inclusive Economy and Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Emerging Thriving Communities Strategy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Endorse the Oxfordshire Food Strategy: Part 1, including the principles and framework for delivery;
2.	Delegate authority to the Executive Director Communities and People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health and Transport and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture to make any necessary amendments to the draft strategy as it goes through the County and District approvals process, with a revised document returning in the autumn;
3.	Note that Part 2 will see the development of a detailed action plan for and that this will return to Cabinet in the autumn; and

4. **Note** the grant allocation proposed by the County Council to assist with the development of Part 2.

Appendices

Appendix 1	Draft Oxfordshire Food Strategy
Appendix 2	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. The strategy was commissioned through joint working between the County Council, City and District Council's within the Joint Community Hub's meeting at the outset of the Covid pandemic. This was a direct reponse to food security and access to food becoming more challenging. Local food banks saw a 3-4-fold increase in demand, with a conservative estimate suggesting that around 6,000 people a week required support to access food.
2. Whilst community food networks have risen to this challenge, the ongoing cost of living increase means that there is still a need to build resilience into our local food systems to ensure better access to food and reduce carbon emissions.
3. The City Council has also been very active in this space over the past couple of years and a few of our activities have been listed below:
 - Set up with GFO the Community Food Network in the City which includes City Council, GFO, Community larders, fridges and food banks. This has since been replicated across the County
 - Helped initially boost the system at the outset of COVID providing over 11,000 food parcels to those most in need that were sensitive to cultural and religious requirements such as Halal and Kosher. This was recognised as a case study of best practice in the region.
 - Invested in the sustainability of the community food system including providing funding for fridges, freezers, training, support for volunteers and providing a community accessible van.
 - Supporting the system to help tackle root causal issues directly and also indirectly through funding to community groups and advice centres.
 - Several funding rounds targeting those most in need.
 - Supporting families to access Healthy Start Vouchers.
 - Supporting families receiving free school meals to access vouchers.
4. The government published a National Food Strategy in July 2021 that made recommendations to address climate change, biodiversity loss, land use, dietary related illness, health inequalities, food security and trade. For local government, it

recommends that local authorities work with communities and partners to develop local food strategies to reduce health inequalities.

5. This was further supported by the publication of the Levelling Up white paper in February 2022 where the government committed to narrowing the gap in health inequalities between the highest and lowest life expectancy areas.

Developing the strategy

6. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy has been developed by a multi-stakeholder partnership including County, City and District councils, Good Food Oxfordshire, community groups, local food producers and other major institutions. It has been developed to tackle the challenges of health and wellbeing; climate change and biodiversity; fair incomes and employment and a vibrant and sustainable food system. Part 1 of the strategy (attached as annex 1) seeks to identify priority areas for action, links to existing initiatives and policy and showcase examples of excellence that can be learnt from and built upon.
7. Public and stakeholder engagement in developing the strategy initially took place during August – October 2021. This included consulting with relevant Councillors/officers across Oxfordshire local authorities, farmers markets and producers and members of the public attending food related events. A detailed timeline of engagement events will be published on the Good Food Oxfordshire website.
8. To support the ambitions of the strategy, action plans will be developed in partnership which will be tailored to meet the different needs of the City and the District Councils. This work will be undertaken in partnership with established community groups in each local area.
9. The action plan supports the delivery of a number of the Council's priorities, including:
 - Supporting Thriving Communities
 - Enable an Inclusive Economy and
 - Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
10. It will also link into and support the emerging Thriving Communities Strategy.
11. This strategy spans the portfolio areas with an underlying priority to address inequality and improve the health of our residents.

Partnership Ambitions

12. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy has been created in partnership because we recognise that in order to address the challenges of food poverty, food supply, climate change and public health tipping points we need a whole system approach.

13. The strategy presents a vision which seeks to ensure that everyone in Oxfordshire can enjoy the healthy and sustainable food they need every day through the following ambitions:
 - a. Food justice: healthy and sustainable food is affordable and accessible to everyone
 - b. Sustainable food economy: Local food businesses flourish, with more productions, more outlets, more employment and better standards for workers
 - c. Good food movement: more people can enjoy and engage with healthy, sustainable food and 'good food for everyone' is part of our culture
 - d. Food for the planet: We waste less food and the food that we do produce, consume and waste has a less negative impact on the planet
 - e. Sustainable supply chains: More locally produced, sustainable food is bought and consumed locally, and supply chains are more resilient
 - f. Governance and strategy: Continue, evaluate and strengthen existing initiatives. Build foundations for new initiatives. Establish enablers to manage and monitor progress.
14. We are therefore asking members to endorse Part 1, including recognising the challenges faced, vision and ambitions.
15. Cabinet are also asked to note the intention to spend the next six months developing action plans that each council will seek approval for in the autumn.

Next Steps – Action Plan Development

16. It is estimated that 8 – 10 % of all households in Oxfordshire experience food insecurity (Good Food Oxfordshire, 2021). The ambitions within the strategy seek to address this by supporting more locally produced and sustainable food and enabling all residents the equal opportunity to access healthy food all year round, through education to minimise food waste or grow their own, and through accessing food banks or community larder schemes. There are longer term ambitions within the strategy to grow Oxfordshire's local food economy through local enterprises, local jobs and local wealth generation.
17. As part of the strategy, an action plan is in development with responsibilities for all local councils to meet the ambitions. These actions are yet to be defined but will include communications and marketing, practical support such as identifying opportunities, providing local business support to address food waste and explore locally sourced food options.
18. Whilst several actions will be completed as 'business as usual', there is a need to ensure that we can collectively deliver on our ambitions to address issues around cost of living and food poverty for all of our residents. To facilitate this, the County Council is proposing to allocate funding to the City and District Council partners and to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to support delivery of our joint commitments.

19. The County Council are looking to award £250k of funding to the City and District councils to be put towards delivery of actions that will directly impact accessibility to food that can be used internally or put towards community groups within the district area.
20. The allocation for the City has been initially allocated as £70k, which was based on a previously established Department of work and Pensions formula, on population weighted by deprivation as measured by the index of multiple deprivation index.
21. Examples of actions the funding can be used towards include:
 - Communications including signposting for residents to access existing schemes, raising awareness on available options and providing advice and guidance
 - Supporting infrastructure, guidance and access to funding for Community Food Services including distribution networks, foodbanks, larders and fridges.
 - Exploration of providing access to vacant and shared spaces and resources to enable communities to come together to grow, cook, eat and share food together

Timelines and Communications

22. The key timetable for the Oxfordshire Food Strategy is:
23. A joint communications plan will be developed by the county-wide steering group to ensure consistent messaging from all partners across the food system.

Date	Action
15 June 2022	Phase 1 proposal to Cabinet for adoption
April – Sept 2022	Development of action plan
October 2022	Phase 2 proposal to Cabinet for adoption

Financial implications

24. Note the proposed grant allocation of £70k outlined in point 19 of this report.

Legal Implications

25. None known.

Level of risk

26. The creation of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy was intended to address the risks identified around access to food, particularly for vulnerable people and to increase resilience in local food supply chains.
27. By not creating a county-wide Food Strategy, there is a risk that residents and suppliers may be more disproportionately affected by the anticipated cost of living increases.
28. There is a risk that trying to create a 'one-size-fits-all' strategy will mean we do not recognise the different food related challenges across the county. This will be addressed in Phase 2 as partners seek to develop district level action plans to address challenges at a local level.

Equalities impact

29. The The Oxfordshire Food Strategy has a specific focus on providing support to people living in food poverty. The report notes elsewhere that Oxfordshire has seen a significant increase in people requiring support to access food, including the use of food banks.
30. People with protected characteristics are more likely to experience food poverty and therefore the creation of the strategy will have a positive impact.
31. The strategy also seeks to promote fair wages for people working in the food economy and will therefore seek to positively impact on those living in areas of social deprivation.
32. A full Equality Impact Assessment will be developed to support the funding proposal and the action plan and will be brought to Cabinet in the autumn.

Environmental Impact Assessment

33. The ambition 'Food for the planet' is specifically designed to focus on reducing food waste and reducing the carbon impact that food consumption has in the county.
34. The 'sustainable supply chains' ambition will also seek to encourage the development of local, sustainable supply chains which will support local producers and reduce the carbon impact of food supply.
35. A full Environmental Impact Assessment will be brought to Cabinet in the autumn.

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Background Papers: None

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