

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 14 December 2022  
**Report of:** Executive Director (Communities & People)  
**Title of Report:** Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-2027

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present the Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27 and recommend its adoption by Council as part of the Budget and Policy Framework.
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Cabinet Members:</b>	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for Leisure & Parks  Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities & Culture  Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Health & Transport
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Support Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24

<b>Recommendations:</b> That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	<b>Recommend to Council</b> the adoption of the Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27 as part of the Council's budget and policy framework, including the following recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Agree and adopt the Thriving Communities Principles across the council's work and to encourage our partners to do the same;</li> <li>(ii) Explore opportunities to improve the inclusivity and sustainability of Oxford's community facilities, and review opportunities as they arise through a business case;</li> <li>(iii) Continue to integrate council services and seek out opportunities to better align our work with partner agencies, including co-location.</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Agree</b> that an annual progress update should be produced for Cabinet, and that the action plan should be regularly reviewed based on new data and insights such as the census.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	The Thriving Communities Strategy
Appendix 2	The City Conversation Report
Appendix 3	Thriving Communities Strategy Risk Assessment
Appendix 4	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 5	An easy-read version of the strategy (to follow)

## Introduction and background

1. Oxford's Thriving Communities Strategy brings together leisure, culture, and our work with communities to tackle inequalities. We will do this by encouraging well-designed neighbourhoods and parks where healthy lifestyles are the norm (sometimes called healthy place-shaping) developing skills, ensuring growth is inclusive, strengthening communities and improving access.
2. This strategy sets us on a journey to [\*build back fairer\*](#), to work *with our inspirational* communities and collaborate with partners and ensure that everyone in Oxford can access leisure, culture and community opportunities. COVID-19, and now the cost-of-living crisis, have exposed further inequalities, which are on a trajectory to get worse without a concerted effort.
3. Like most councils, our budgets are under immense pressure, we have seen a £7m reduction in funding because of austerity measures. While the Council will do all it can to prioritise protecting services that support the most vulnerable, we will need to find new ways of doing things and need to take tough choices to balance our budget.
4. The strategy is ambitious and is focused on creating a shared purpose, it is also realistic and looks to make better use of the resources we have, ensuring our investments have the greatest possible impact, and that our work is based on insight.
5. Our strategy is purposefully high-level, demonstrating how we will work using our Thriving Communities Principles and it outlines the main activities we will be undertaking. There is a detailed delivery plan that will be monitored monthly to ensure that we remain on track.

## Design

6. The Strategy brings together four outdated strategies that had overlapping outcomes (leisure, culture, community centres and our children and young persons' strategy) and uses a simple 4Ps framework to better align this work:
  - ❖ **People** – implementing our Thriving Communities principles – e.g. *doing things with people not to them, and building on what works well*
  - ❖ **Pride** – *celebrating diverse cultural heritage, encouraging trust and belonging and ensuring inclusivity*

- ❖ **Place** – *inclusive spaces and places*
- ❖ **Progress** – *a range of ways to demonstrate the impact of our work and continually learn.*

## The scale of the challenge

7. Oxford is the second most unequal city in the UK. Ten out of Oxford's 83 neighbourhoods are amongst the 20% most deprived in England<sup>1</sup>. 22% of adults have no or low educational qualifications<sup>2</sup>. The cost of living is rising faster than wages, with [inflation at its highest level in 40 years](#). Average house prices in Oxford are over £500,000<sup>3</sup> which is 17.3 times average earnings. After housing costs, one in four children lives below the poverty line; this rises to 36% in Blackbird Leys.

## Developing the strategy

8. We started work on the strategy pre-COVID supported by a fantastic group of partners, this work included a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review, which provided helpful insights.
9. At the start of the year, we undertook a series of workshops to create a discussion paper which was used over the 10-week Thriving Communities City Conversation where we have spoken to hundreds of partners, community groups and residents. The City Conversation took place at three levels:
  - i) Discussion at high-level strategic meetings.
  - ii) Partner forums, two online and one in person at Rose Hill Community Centre, over 200 partners took part in these conversations.
  - iii) Community conversations - with individuals and community groups, they included conversations with young people through our Youth Ambition session and Asylum Welcome facilitated a conversation with refugees.
10. Positive feedback has been received about our approach, with people saying they valued having the time to discuss real issues that would then help to shape the strategy.
11. The Council's Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) which has been developed to help pull data sets into meaningful insight wrote a report to share the key points from the City Conversation. The full report is included as appendix two.
12. This strategy is based on these insights, it recognises the need to be flexible, to treat people as individuals and to shape our approach so it helps local people find local solutions to what matters to them.

## The key themes

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<sup>1</sup> [The English Indices of Deprivation \(2019\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Census \(2011\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Centre for Cities \(2019\)](#)

13. Our leisure centres contract expires in 2024, which provides an opportunity for these facilities to better meet changing community needs. We will explore with partners, such as Oxfordshire County Council public health and the NHS how Oxford's leisure centres, especially those in areas of significant health inequalities can play a greater role in tackling health inequalities.
14. We will complete our investments in Bullingdon, East Oxford and Blackbird Leys Community Centres creating fantastic facilities. We will continue to seek out opportunities to join up our community facilities – to create sustainable spaces for communities. Our preferred approach remains that where possible we want communities to manage community assets. We want our community facilities to be accessible and well-governed with a diverse and representative group of trustees, staff and volunteers.
15. To make sure we don't lose the learning from the pandemic, we have implemented new locality structures with teams from across the Council, working more collaboratively with Oxford's communities. Increasingly, we will look to align our work with partners, generating shared insights and co-creating better services for our residents.
16. We have developed our Thriving Communities Principles, and while these are not set in stone, they show how we will work with communities, collaborating and building on what's strong:
  - ❖ **Doing with, not to**
  - ❖ **Building on what's strong, not what's wrong**
  - ❖ **Collaboration**
  - ❖ **Always learn**
  - ❖ We will use **clear language that reinforces our values**
  - ❖ Use **meaningful ways to measure** and demonstrate the impact of our work.

### **Financial implications**

17. The strategy is focused on using the resources we have to maximise the impact of available budgets. Where an investment is needed, business cases will be developed to be considered as part of the budget process. Alternative funding options will be sought such as the Community Impact Levy which is paid towards community infrastructure to mitigate the impact of developments.

### **Legal issues**

18. Legal considerations are reviewed separately for each part of the strategy.

### **Level of risk**

19. All of the projects referred to have risk assessments, appendix three shows the risks around the delivery of the strategy.

### **Equalities impact**

20. The equality impacts have been considered from the onset and at every stage of the development of the strategy, the Equalities Impact Assessment is shown in appendix four.

21. An easy-read version is shown in Appendix 5, it has been created with the support of My Life My Choice, who are a charity run by people and for people with learning disabilities.
22. A series of Thriving Communities Videos has been produced to make the strategy as accessible as possible to a wider audience.

### **Carbon and Environmental Considerations**

23. There are three main strands within the strategy for carbon and environmental considerations, these are:
  - 1) The development of community facilities such as East Oxford Community Centre, reducing carbon emissions is a primary benefit of these redevelopment projects.
  - 2) Improving the way our community facilities are operated and managed, £13 million has been invested in reducing the carbon impact of leisure centres over the past year.
  - 3) Supporting residents with the behaviour change that is needed to reduce the carbon impact of how they live their lives.

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**Background Papers:** None

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