

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

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-2027 and to recommend that it is adopted as part of the Council's policy framework.
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Members:	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
Corporate Priority:	Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy

Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Recommend to Council to adopt Oxford's Thriving Communities Strategy 2023-27 as part of the Council's policy framework, including the following recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) agree and adopt the Thriving Communities Principles across the Council's work and encourage our partners to do the same; (ii) explore opportunities to improve the inclusivity and sustainability of Oxford's community facilities, and review opportunities as they arise through business cases; (iii) continue to integrate Council services and seek out opportunities to better align our work with partner agencies, including co-location.
2.	Agree 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

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 so 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 protect public services, we will need to find new ways of doing things and 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.

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 England¹. 22% of adults have no or low educational qualifications². 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 £500,000³ 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 with 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 sessions 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 in Appendix 2.
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.
13. All of the actions in the strategy will be tracked through our internal action plan. Some of the actions are straightforward to monitor such as the delivery of projects, while others are complex and require more data and a learning approach to be taken to better understand our impact. We will bring an annual report to Cabinet to demonstrate the progress we are making.

The key themes

14. Our leisure centre 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.

¹ [The English Indices of Deprivation \(2019\)](#)

² [Census \(2011\)](#)

³ [Centre for Cities \(2019\)](#)

15. 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, and better connect them with the wider environment 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. These principles form an important part of the Council's Operating Model, they show how we will work with communities on what matters to them. Demand for many council services continues to increase, and our financial support from the government continues to reduce which places a real strain on the Council's capacity. Embedding the Thriving Communities Principles will help us target our resources where they will have the greatest impact, reduce the demand for our services, and play our role in helping Oxford's communities to thrive.

Financial implications

19. The strategy is focused on using the resources we have to maximise the impact of available budgets. Where 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

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

Level of risk

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

Equalities impact

22. 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 4.
23. A series of four Thriving Communities Videos is being produced to make the strategy as accessible as possible to a wider audience. Once the strategy has been approved by Cabinet we will have it desktop published and include the links to the videos within the

strategy, alongside adding the videos to the council's website as part of our promotion campaign. We have also created an easy-read version of the strategy that is shown in Appendix 5.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

24. 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) Working with residents to create the behaviour change that is needed to reduce the carbon impact of how we live our lives.

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Background Papers: None

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