

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 March 2024
Report of: Executive Director (Communities and People)
Title of Report: Oxfordshire Food Strategy – City Food Action Plan

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	An Oxfordshire-wide food strategy was developed in partnership with the County Council, District Councils, representatives from Good Food Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire community food groups and endorsed by Cabinet in June 2022. This paper sets out the City Food Action plan that accompanies the Strategy and seeks Cabinet endorsement of it.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet member for Planning and Healthier Communities
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities, Enable an Inclusive Economy and Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Oxfordshire Food Strategy, Thriving Communities Strategy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Recommendations: That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Agree the City Food Action Plan which is part of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy;
2.	Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Communities and People) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities to make any amendments to the action plan which are necessary following approval of the plan by the other local authority partners; and
3.	Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Communities and People) to negotiate and enter into the necessary grant agreements to deliver the City Food Action Plan.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft City Food Action Plan
Appendix 2	Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The Oxfordshire Food strategy ('the strategy') was commissioned through joint working between the County Council, City and District Councils within the Joint Community Hub's meeting at the outset of the Covid pandemic. Good Food Oxfordshire ('GFO') were commissioned to coordinate this.
4. The strategy was a direct response 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.
5. On 22 June 2022 cabinet endorsed the strategy and requested that a City Food Action Plan was developed working with the food system (various partners, businesses, community groups and organisations who work within the food industry) to support the delivery of the strategy and that the action plan was brought back to cabinet.
6. 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.
7. The City Council has also been very active in this space over the past few years and some 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
 - 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.
 - A locality approach to enable positive partnership working including supporting local food larders and community food groups
 - Working with Public Health and the health system to fund the city council's Community Health Development Officers who help support and promote key health priorities within our localities.
8. The City Food Action Plan ('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
9. It also links strongly to the Council's Thriving Communities Strategy. This strategy has a key underlying priority to address inequality and improve the health of our residents.

Developing the City Food Action Plan

10. The City Food Action Plan is shown in Appendix 1. It has been developed by a multi-stakeholder partnership called the Food Action Working group (FAWG) including Good Food Oxfordshire, community groups, local food producers, City Council Councillors and officers 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.
11. The FAWG met on 8 occasions late 2022 and throughout 2023 to start to develop the action plan. This culminated in a public consultation event at the Town Hall in September 2023 that was well attended with 28 different stakeholder food groups represented, which helped to significantly shape the action plan as well as pledging to work together on its delivery.

Partnership Ambitions

12. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy and City Food Action Plan have 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. Through this approach of working together, we can achieve more, working collaboratively towards a vision for a better food system for Oxford City. The plans have been developed following a Theory of Change (shown in Appendix 1 page 4) to ensure that the actions will deliver the intended outcomes and impacts.
14. In tandem, the other District Councils within the County will also be taking their District based action plans to their respective decision making Council bodies over the course of the next few weeks. It is unlikely that there will be any changes to the action plan going forward, but recommendation (2) to Cabinet is detailed above in case further amends are made to it.

Governance

15. The City FAWG will continue to meet regularly to monitor and review performance related to the City Food Action Plan
16. Exceptions and general progress updates will be provided from the City FAWG to the GFO Countywide Steering Group. The steering group is made up from representatives from GFO, members of the community food system, University of Oxford, County, City and Districts.
17. Whilst several actions will be completed as 'business as usual' across the system, there is a need to ensure that we can collectively deliver on our ambitions to address issues particularly around cost of living and food poverty for our residents. To facilitate this, the County Council has allocated funding to the City and District Council partners and to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) to support delivery of our joint commitments.
18. The City has been allocated a sum of £61k, 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. A County Council funding agreement administering the allocation of this funding to Oxford City Council will be put in place.
19. 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.

Financial implications

20. Note the proposed grant allocation of £61k outlined in point 18 of this report. As with all grant funding received by central government or lead authorities, there is a risk of clawback of grant funding if grant objectives are not met.
21. The purpose of the funding is to help seed fund community and voluntary groups, it can also be used to help drive additional value by enabling groups to apply for additional external funding opportunities from other funders should they arise.

Legal Implications

22. Under Part 4.5 (45) of the Constitution, Cabinet is empowered to agree to develop any new major executive plan or strategy and under Part 4.5 (26) to approve the giving of grants.
23. Cabinet can delegate any of its functions to an officer under Section 9E of the Local Government Act 2000.

Level of risk

24. The creation of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy and City Food Action Plan was intended to address the risks identified around access to food, particularly for vulnerable people and to increase resilience in local food supply chains.
25. By not implementing a City Food Action plan, there is a risk that residents and suppliers may be more disproportionately affected by the anticipated cost of living increases and that the aims of the strategy endorsed in June 2022 will not be able to be delivered.
26. There is a risk that the funding doesn't cover all of the action plan in full, so not all of the objectives are delivered. The County, City and community partners have worked through the plan and believe that the funding supplied and resource identified is sufficient to deliver this. In addition the funding can act as seed funding to attract additional funds from other funders should it be required.

Equalities impact

27. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy and City Food Action plan have 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.
28. People with protected characteristics are more likely to experience food poverty and therefore the creation of the strategy will have a positive impact.
29. 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.

Environmental Impact Assessment

30. 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.

31. 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.

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Background Papers:
1 The Oxfordshire Food Strategy