

To: Cabinet
Date: 21 October 2024
Report of: Peter Matthew, Executive Director - Communities and People
Title of Report: Thriving Communities Strategy Progress report

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide an update on the delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Cllr. Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities Cllr. Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford Cllr. Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and an Inclusive Economy Cllr. Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Note the update on the delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Thriving Communities Strategy Action Plan 2022-24
Appendix 2	Thriving Communities Strategy Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix 3	Thriving Communities Strategy Risk Register

Introduction and background

1. The [Thriving Communities Strategy](#) brings together leisure, culture and our work with communities to help address the inequalities detailed in Oxfordshire's [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#). The assessment provides information about the county's population and the factors affecting health, wellbeing, and social care.
2. The Strategy also creates a mechanism for collaboration, enabling partners to share information and resources, building on the sense of community that so many people have shown over recent years, to deliver better outcomes.
3. This collaborative approach has enabled officers to raise £2.8 million towards programme delivery costs via funders such as the Youth Investment Fund, National Lottery, Sport England and Arts Council England.
4. The Strategy is a key element of the Thriving Communities Pillar of the Corporate Plan. It commits the council to continue to hold an annual City Conversation with our partners and to update Cabinet annually about the progress being made.
5. Our work on collaborating with the Community and local partners in shaping the strategy through events such as the City conversation, has been recognised at a national level as good practice by bodies such as International Public Policy observatory Local Government Physical Activity Partnership and APSE (Association for Public Excellence).

Strategy delivery progress 2022-24

6. The ultimate outcomes the Thriving Communities Strategy aims to achieve are for everyone in Oxford to:
 - Have a great customer experience when using Oxford's places and spaces where they feel safe and enjoy themselves
 - Be able to positively contribute to society; feel connected, accepted and respected for who they are.
 - Meet the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for physical activity (especially children and young people)
7. The outcomes within the strategy are shared with partners and, where possible, we have adopted shared measures. There are 11 measures of success in total. The Thriving Communities Action Plan at Appendix 1 details the delivery progress made to date against these 11 annual measures of success.
8. To deliver the measures in an effective way that aligns with the strategy principles, it has been essential to work with national and regional, as well as local partners, whilst allocating appropriate levels of internal resource. Against each measure we have highlighted the work that has been undertaken and any outcomes or impact that has been achieved to date. This is set out below.

Measure 1 - Produce and annually review Locality Plans – these will be based on insight, with a focus on tackling inequalities

9. To ensure that we deliver against this measure, we have started work on developing the locality plans with an aim of having these approved and ready for implementation in April 2025. The tasks highlighted below detail the work to date.

10. A locality-based staffing structure was developed building on the collaborative models of working set up to support communities in response to the pandemic. This included moving customer-facing support to accessible community spaces, participating in and facilitating strategic networks across the city.
11. The approval of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy and the City Food Action plan has enabled a framework for helping to reduce food related inequalities and will be reflected within the action plans. Particularly the work that has been delivered around supporting the community larders and community food system.
12. The work on locality plans is being developed around the four quadrants below:
 - OX1&2 - Oxford City Centre, South Oxford (including Friar Wharf & Riverside Court), West Oxford, Jericho, Summertown, Cutteslowe, and Wolvercote
 - OX3 - Barton, Sandhills, Risinghurst, Quarry, Wood Farm, Headington, Headington Hill, Northway and Marston
 - OX4 - Littlemore, Rose Hill and East Oxford
 - OX - Leys
13. The work being undertaken and that will be included within the action plans is prioritised through the following aims:
 - Reduce health inequalities
 - Support residents with cost of living crisis
 - Improve the life chances of young people
 - Create opportunities to increase skills and employment in localities
14. A [whole systems approach](#) has been taken to deliver work within the localities, building cross-sector partnerships with statutory services working alongside Third Sector voluntary, cultural and community groups in order to deliver preventative programmes of support whilst also providing for those in critical need. An example of this is Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust's Community Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit health hub being in Rose Hill Community Centre to provide a less medicalised and more social environment to support women in early pregnancy.

Measure 2 - Increase the diversity of recipients of Oxford's Community Impact Fund

15. The [Oxford Community Impact Fund](#) was established and funding distributed following a grant review – different grant streams were pooled and criteria were revised to align with corporate priorities.
16. Oxford Community Impact Fund started in April 2022 and comprises four strands: Commissioning essential services (£943K budget per year); Grants for rent (£150K budget per year); Big Ideas – 3 year core funding grants for strategic partners (£338K per year) and Small and Medium grants (£84K budget per year).
17. To increase the diversity of recipients, the grant scheme is publicised widely through locality networks and targeted promotion with underrepresented groups e.g. via the Anti-Racism charter network and City of Sanctuary events.
18. Officers also hold individual grant advice and briefing sessions throughout the year to assist those wishing to apply for both internal and external funding. This has helped organisations to generate/lever in over £10 million additional income through grants, Oxford lottery, earned income and business support.

19. The additional support given led to over 20% of funding being allocated to new applicants during each funding round.
20. The increase in successful new applicants also increased the diversity of beneficiaries with the funding supporting wider diversity within communities of identity, geography and interest as represented in the pie charts below for Big Ideas funding allocated from 1 April 2023-24:

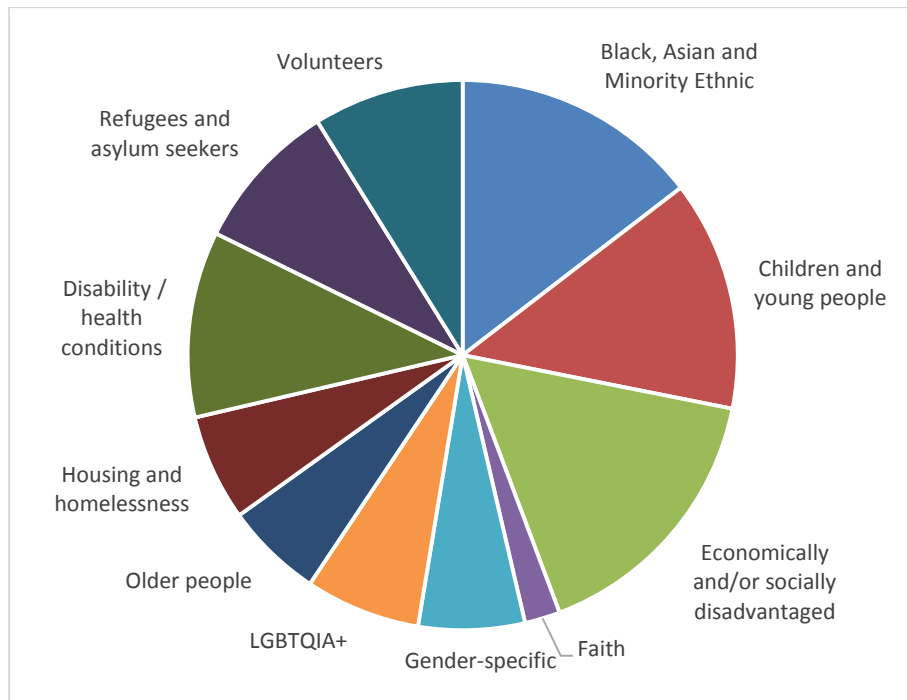


Chart 1: Demographic diversity

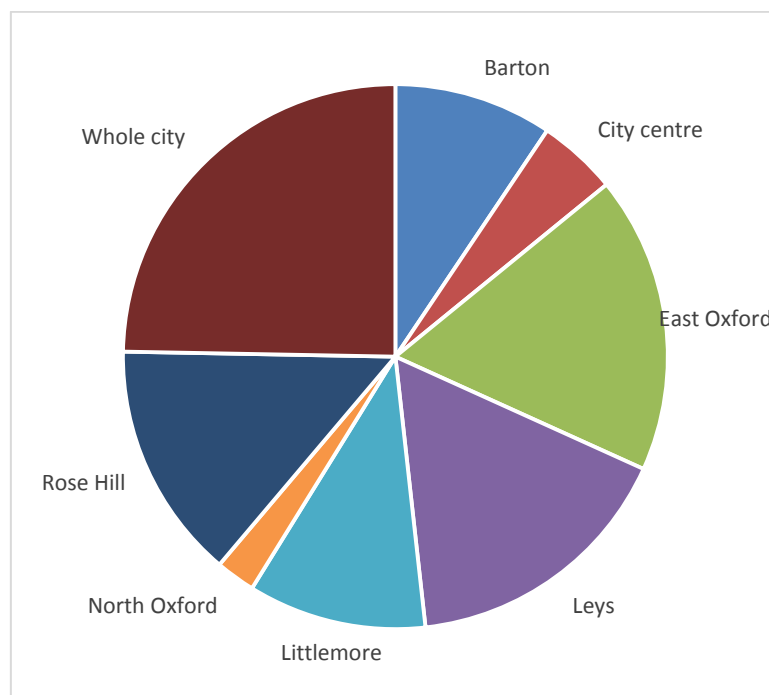


Chart 2: Geographic diversity

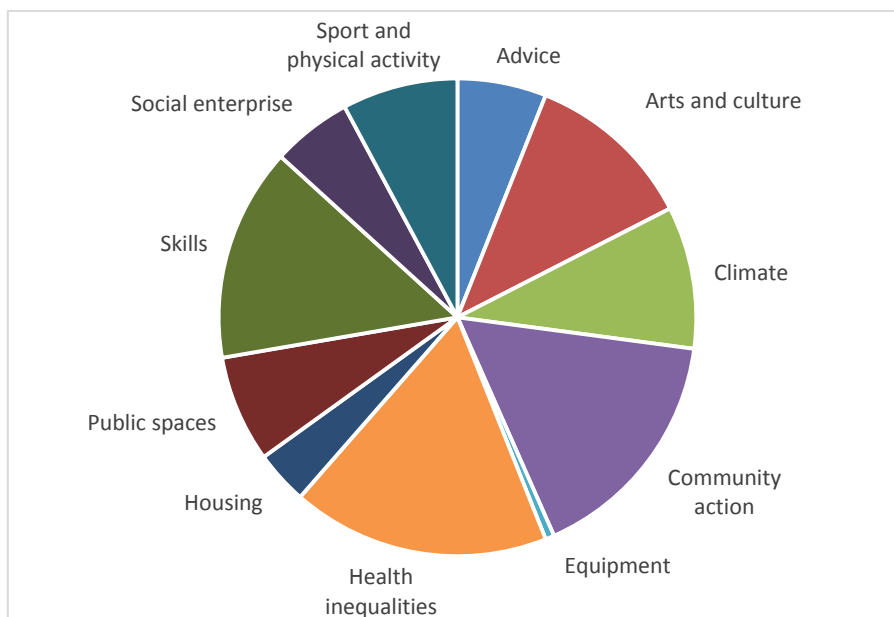


Chart 3: Diversity of activity

Measure 3 - Increase the diversity of volunteers and trustees – we will focus on our community champions programme, Community Associations, Friends of Parks and the Museum of Oxford (MOX)

21. We have increased the diversity of Community Champions and now have 11 active champions. All champions are from our priority neighbourhoods: Rose Hill: 2; Barton: 2; Blackbird Leys: 3; City: 4. There are 7 women, 4 men and 90% come from non-white ethnic backgrounds.
22. Following an open call, additional publicity and engagement events, the diversity of volunteers and trustees at the Museum of Oxford (MOX) has increased over the Oxford average in all but one category: 15% have a disability (Oxford average is 14%), 33.9% are aged 18-29 (Oxford average is 30%), 22.6% are from a non-white ethnic background (Oxford average is 29.9%), 7% are LGBTQIA+ (Oxford average is 6%), 60% are female (Oxford average is 51%).
23. We have monthly meetings with all 14 community centre associations to build relationships of trust and understanding and to support them in diversifying their volunteers and trustees.
24. Community organisations and Friends groups applying for funding are also supported to diversity their volunteers and trustees via tailor made advice sessions as well as through the grant funding awards. Successful applicants are required to feedback about their progress as part of the grant monitoring process.

Measure 4 - Reduce the number of children leaving primary school who cannot swim 25 metres from four to two in ten over the lifetime of this strategy

25. To deliver this measure we have been focusing our work around working in partnership to ensure that data going forward is fully reported and robust. The section below highlights the work around this and other areas of work where we can maximise our contribution and impact.

26. Schools are asked to report on this figure but the data has been found to be inconsistent with many schools not having up to date information. Work is being undertaken with Active Oxfordshire and local schools to improve the data and ensure that it is more robust.
27. Oxford City Council is working with More Leisure, who are the Council's leisure centre operator, to increase the awareness and promotion of under 17s free swimming offer. In addition we have been working with the operator to increase the number of schools running swimming lessons in our pools and have improved communication with the schools as part of this.
28. School swimming numbers are increasing with the new expanded pool programming. More Leisure has also recruited additional swimming teachers to accommodate this with an uplifted hourly rate.

Measure 5 - Increase the number and diversity of young people taking part in Oxford's Youth Ambition activities

29. To deliver this measure we have been ensuring that we are delivering high quality, inclusive and accessible young people sessions across areas of high inequality in the City. We have been working with young people to promote the sessions through word of mouth and social media. Partnership working has also been key to this with work through the Community Impact Zone and Children and Young people's partnership. The items below highlight some of the key outcomes of this work.
30. 330 youth sessions were delivered (youth clubs and sport sessions) supporting 1701 young people including 57% from BAME backgrounds which is an increase from previous years; 10% described themselves as disabled.
31. In addition, 35 sessions of summer holiday activities were run engaging a total of 84 young people in 3 priority areas.
32. We secured £1.3 million funding from DCMS and have started work on the new Youth Hub in the Leys Leisure Centre and to ensure that we are ready for completion of this exciting project we have been working in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and many other local partners on delivery of young people's sessions across the Leys. These sessions will be moved to the Leisure Centre in Spring next year once the construction project has completed.

Measure 6 - Reduce physical inactivity in the areas of the city where it is the highest

33. We have looked to deliver the above measure by working very closely in partnership with the health and physical activity systems. This has also enabled us to deliver more value through securing partnership funding. The key delivery and associated outcomes are shown below.
34. £110,277 funding was secured from ICB and Public Health for [Move Together](#) and [You Move](#) programmes until the end of March 2025. This funding enabled development of the programmes; Move Together expanded into [maternity provision](#) and You Move into [early years](#). We also continued to promote the [GO Active](#) brand to support free and low cost physical activity in Oxford. This has delivered 2,256 individuals registered on the You Move pathway (inclusive of parents); 82% are individuals from priority neighbourhoods; 716 sessions were attended by family groups. The Move Together programme reduced GP visits by 36% (equivalent to 4 appointments per participant, per year) and NHS 111 and GP out of hours contacts by 28%. Oxford City Council made 21% of Move Together referrals.

35. Over £60K funding was secured from Arts Council England, trusts and foundations each year to 2026 to run Dance for Health programmes in target areas of the city supporting [older people](#) who are at risk of falls and those with Parkinson's and Dementia as well [young people and their families](#) who may not otherwise engage in exercise.
36. Dancin' Oxford Dance for Health programmes have been [assessed](#) and clinically proven to build core strength and reduce falls. The programme was shortlisted for an APSE award in 2023. Feedback showing benefits for individuals has also been filmed for some [older participants](#) and [family participants](#).
37. £174K funding was secured from Public Health to pay for Community Health Development Officers including a new Officer for Wood Farm as well as a £30K operational budget (£5K per area) to March 2025. £30K of funding/year for 3 years was also secured from Oxfordshire County Council for Healthy Place Shaping in Barton, The Leys and Shotover. Our [Community Champions](#) programme has also been extended.
38. £3m investment is being made in our leisure centres, making the sites attractive with higher quality provision. In addition there has been significant investment across our tennis court portfolio including [Botley and Hinksey Parks](#). A new multi-activity hub site opened at Bury Knowle - £800k external investment resurfaced courts, built a cafe and family activity areas; over 100+ activity hours were planned in the hub each week and the café took over 900 café transactions per week. The estimated social value for this is over £336K per year.

Measure 7 - Increase satisfaction levels with leisure centres

39. At the end of March 2024 we entered a contract with More Leisure to deliver our leisure services with a focus on reducing health inequalities and a move towards more active wellbeing. The first year of the contract is a baseline year where satisfaction will be measured over the course of 2024/25 and an indicator developed for the 2025/26 year. Whilst the indicator is being developed the following items show some additional progress.
40. Complaints have significantly reduced and we are hearing anecdotally much more positive feedback including from the user groups.
41. Externally conducted mystery shop customer experience scores ranged from 63% to 90% (June 2024); the next mystery shop exercise is due in January 2025 and quarterly thereafter.

Measure 8 – Continually increase our score in our Customer Service Excellence accreditation

42. Customer Service Excellence accreditation is a national standard that recognises organisations that prioritise customers in their services. The Standard tests in great depth those areas that research has indicated are a priority for customers, with particular focus on delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude. Compliance plus elements are areas which show behaviours and practices that exceed the requirements of the standard.

43. Community engagement through the design and delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy enabled Oxford City Council to gain insights and make changes to our Community Services delivery, bringing services closer to people and offering a wider range of support in partnership with other organisations.
44. Oxford City Council retained Customer Service Excellence standard in 2023 with 13 compliance plus ratings. This accomplishment includes the retention of the 11 compliance plus ratings previously awarded, as well as the addition of two new ratings, signifying the Council's commitment to going "above and beyond" in meeting the criteria.
45. Building on the recommendations from the 2023 assessment, we are working towards maintaining current compliance and gaining additional compliance plus ratings in 2024.

Measure 9 - Achieve accreditation to National quality award schemes such as Quest (the UK quality award scheme Sport and Leisure)

46. The above measure aims to demonstrate the quality of what we are delivering through continuous improvement. The aim is to use nationally recognised quality assurance marks to demonstrate this. In the items shown below, we detail our work and performance to date against this measure.
47. Within the new leisure contract with More Leisure we added a requirement to achieve 'Excellent' or above at all Leisure facilities (aim to achieve in 2025/26) and work is ongoing to ensure that this is delivered with progress monitored in client meetings.
48. Oxford City Council's Sport and Physical Activity team and the Youth Ambition team have scored as Quest Outstanding (highest level) and National Youth Agency quality assurance respectively.
49. The Museum of Oxford (MOX) has been awarded full accreditation by Arts Council England. This accreditation recognises the museum's commitment to engaging visitors and residents with Oxford's history and keeping collections safe for future generations. Museum accreditation is a benchmark for well-run museums. It demonstrates the museum is professionally managed, looking after its collections, meeting the needs of its users, and working to industry-wide standards.

Measure 10 - Complete the redevelopment of Bullingdon, East Oxford and Blackbird Leys Community Centres

50. Bullingdon Community Centre was completed in January 2024. The development of the community centre at Bullingdon has exceeded stakeholder expectations and has facilitated closer working with the Council and partners. The new facility has enabled [more and diverse user groups](#) at the centre.
51. East Oxford Community Centre is under construction, with an anticipated completion date of Autumn 2025.
52. Work has started on the Blackbird Leys district centre redevelopment which will see 294 new homes, open public space, shops, a purpose-built Community Centre as well as a segregated cycle route; residents, community and cultural groups were more deeply engaged in key development projects helping to ensure that designs better meet community needs.

Measure 11 - Contribute to the Council's commitment towards pursuing zero carbon Oxford

53. Zero Carbon Oxford is the goal for Oxford to achieve net zero carbon emissions across the city by the year 2030 - ten years ahead of the legal deadline set by Government.
54. In July 2021, Oxford City Council published the Zero Carbon Oxford roadmap which divides almost all the city's emissions into the five sectors with the greatest climate impact - domestic, commercial, industry, institutional, and transport.
55. We are working to achieve zero carbon emissions across our own operations, which includes buildings and operations where we pay for energy, fuel, and water bills. Actions we have taken are included in Appendix 1: The Thriving Communities Strategy Action Plan 2022-24. Some key actions are outlined below.
56. £110K was secured from Sport England to install additional solar panels and LED lighting upgrades at Barton Leisure Centre. Several other upgrades have been made to leisure centres via budget-neutral Salix funding e.g. Hinksey Pool water source heat pump and a low-emissivity ceiling at Oxford Ice Rink.
57. Partnership work continues with Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) to support those in fuel poverty in Oxford. Jointly funded by City, County and District Councils, it gives residents expert advice about how to improve energy efficiency and save money and signposts those in need to the NHS, social care, charities and community groups.
58. Oxford City Council is working to improve green skills in the local area and has recently launched an upskilling project to increase the knowledge base needed to help Oxford reach Net Zero. We have a £60k funding pot to enable training/qualifications for a range of beneficiaries from individuals to businesses, social housing providers and non-profits.
59. The Council secured £2.5m through the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and is investing £5m of its own capital to retrofit council houses in Oxford. New windows, loft insulation, draft proofing, external wall insulation and heat pumps have been installed which, when finished, will bring around 300 council homes up to EPC C rating, reducing energy needed for heat and so cutting carbon emissions and bills. The project is due to be completed in 2025.

Next Steps

60. Work will continue to progress on delivering the strategy and the 11 key associated measures of success.

Financial Implications

61. This report has been produced as a consequence of Cabinet's decision on 14 December 2022 that an annual progress update on the Thriving Communities Strategy should be provided to Cabinet. As the recommendation is to note this report's contents there are no financial implications.

Legal issues

62. This report has been produced as a consequence of Cabinet’s decision on 14 December 2022 that an annual progress update on the Thriving Communities Strategy should be provided to Cabinet. As the recommendation is to note this report’s contents there are no legal implications.

Level of risk

63. See the attached Risk Register at Appendix 3.

Equalities impact

64. See the attached Equalities Impact Assessment at Appendix 2.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

65. The environmental impact of Thriving Communities Strategy delivery is considered carefully as part of programme design and mitigations put in place e.g. encouraging active travel and use of public transport, reuse of materials, using sustainable sources, local procurement.

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Background Papers:	
1	Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/joint-strategic-needs-assessment