

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 December 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Thriving Communities Strategy Update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and an Inclusive Economy Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 2 December 2024 to consider the Thriving Communities Strategy Update. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 11 December 2024, recommends that Cabinet notes the update on the delivery of the Thriving Communities Strategy.
2. The Committee is grateful to Councillor Chewe Munkonge (Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford), Councillor Lubna Arshad (Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford), Peter Matthew (Executive Director – Communities and People), Hagan Lewisman (Active Communities Manage), and Paula Redway (Culture and Community

Development Manager) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford, and Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford introduced the report.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including the practicality and clarity of the measures outlined in the strategy, particularly where baselines or specific targets were unclear, and whether all measures were equally useful or specific enough to monitor progress. Questions were also raised about the use of data to provide comparative analysis overtime, identify demographic disparities, and refine interventions.
5. The Committee expressed concerns about residents' awareness of and access to programmes, particularly in areas of deprivation, and how strategic coordination between the Council and its partners support both social and financial goals. In addition, the Committee queried how the locality plan aligns with broader Council priorities and the importance of applying lessons learned to improve future strategies.
6. In particular, the Committee discussed the significance of targeting health inequalities by prioritising walkability in areas with the greatest deprivation in physical activity, suggesting that specifying this focus within Measure 6 of the Strategy would strengthen its alignment with the motion passed by Full Council on 25 November 2024 to create a truly walkable Oxford. The Committee believed that doing so would emphasise the Council's commitments to improving accessibility and health outcomes, particularly in communities where the need is most acute.

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet makes the Council commitment to creating a truly walkable Oxford clear, by specifying in Measure 6 of the Strategy that focused attention will be given to improving walkability in areas most affected by physical activity deprivation, in line with the motion passed by Full Council on 25 November 2024.

7. Further discussions highlighted the value of incorporating comparative data over time to provide a clearer picture of the Strategy's impact. Recognising that the Strategy is still new and evolving, the Committee suggested that such data would not only provide essential context on progress but also help identify demographic disparities, such as gender gaps in swimming participation, that require targeted interventions.

Recommendation 2: That Cabinet incorporates comparative data over time in future updates of the Strategy to contextualise the scale of progress and identify gender disparities, particularly in activities like swimming, to guide and refine targeted interventions.

8. The Committee recognised the importance of learning from the current implementation of the Strategy to inform the next iteration. It was suggested that identifying practical lessons and areas for improvement, where appropriate, would

enhance future strategies by focusing on outcomes rather than outputs. This approach, the Committee felt, would strengthen the Council's ability to meet community needs effectively and ensure that policies remain grounded in evidence and best practices.

Recommendation 3: That Cabinet draws on and incorporates lessons learned from the implementation of this strategy to inform and strengthen the preparation of its next iteration, ensuring future improvements are grounded in evidence and best practices.

9. The Committee acknowledged and commended the success of the Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit in Rose Hill as an innovative model of community health support, noting that promoting this initiative as a national case study would showcase its positive outcomes and encourage other councils to replicate its success.

Recommendation 4: That Cabinet promotes the Early Pregnancy Assessment Unit health hub in Rose Hill as a case study to highlight its positive outcomes and innovative practices, disseminating these successes nationally to encourage other councils to adopt similar initiatives.

10. Lastly, the Committee underscored the need for stronger Member engagement in the development and review of locality plans to address deprivation across the city. The Committee suggested that involving ward councillors in identifying and targeting pockets of need within their ward would ensure that resources are allocated effectively and that no communities in need are overlooked.

Recommendation 5: That Cabinet ensures strong Member engagement in the development and review of measures relating to locality plans, by involving all ward councillors in recognising and identifying pockets of deprivation within each ward, with an aim to target resources effectively and ensure that no communities in need are overlooked.

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