

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: All

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To: CABINET; SCRUTINY

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Active Communities Strategy

Recommendation

(a) That Cabinet approves the Active Communities Strategy attached at appendix one.

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet's approval of the Active Communities Strategy to support the wellbeing of South Oxfordshire's communities.

Corporate Objectives

2. This strategy contributes to the following corporate priorities:
 - Celebrate, protect and enhance our natural assets, including the River Thames and the AONBs and their setting, promoting our rural district for tourism, leisure and well-being.
 - Work in partnership with the Earth Trust, Chilterns Conservation Board, North Wessex Downs AONB, the Environment Agency and others to improve access to green spaces in and around our towns, reinforcing access to nature as a priority for community well-being.
 - Plan for communities connected by walking & cycling networks, with sustainable, accessible and affordable public transport and reliable broadband, learning the lessons from the Covid-19 experience and enabling more home working.

- Launch a new Community Wellbeing Strategy to encourage and support culture, leisure and the arts.

Background

3. The Active Communities Strategy will sit beneath the overarching Community Wellbeing Strategy as just one in a suite of supporting strategies, such as the Leisure Facilities Strategy and the Arts Development Strategy, and addresses many of the wellbeing and health related priorities of the council's Corporate Plan. The strategy sets out how the Council plans to improve the health and wellbeing of residents and the key role the council plays in providing high quality active opportunities for communities, alongside its partners such as GLL.

Considerations

4. Approval of this strategy will enable the council to target resources, to improve the physical, mental and social wellbeing of South Oxfordshire's communities, at a time when it has never been more important following the detrimental effects of the pandemic on residents' wellbeing on all levels.

5. The proposed vision for the strategy is to 'Be Active, Be Healthy, Be Happy' and the key aims are to:

- To make our districts a better place to live by enabling communities to improve the quality of their own lives and encourage local initiatives that make a real difference.
- To focus on partnership working to increase the range and awareness of opportunities available across the districts for residents to take part in. We will utilise resources for maximum benefit, ensuring value for money in all that we do.
- To reduce inactivity and minimise the impact that may be caused by health inequalities within our communities by offering support that is accessible for everyone

6. In order to meet these key aims six themes are included in the emerging delivery plan; these are:

- i. Inclusively enable everyone to be active
- ii. create healthier communities through walking and cycling
- iii. maximise the potential of our natural environment
- iv. building the skills base of our communities
- v. effective communication, promotion and consultation
- vi. collaborative partnerships and funding advice.

Climate and ecological impact implications

7. The promotion of more active travel opportunities and making better use of our natural resources and open green spaces will have a positive impact on the climate change agenda.

Financial Implications

8. Implementation of the strategy will, in the first instance, be covered by existing resources within the active communities' team, but future consideration will need to be given to the emerging delivery plan to prioritise resources. Currently external funding assists to deliver activities in the short term, and the intention is to seek additional external funding in the future by working jointly with partners.
9. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the council's overarching financial position. For South, the position reflected in the council's medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2022 showed that the council is due to receive £2.1 million less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2022/23 (with the balance coming from reserves).
10. This funding gap is predicted to increase to over £3 million by 2026/27. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisant of the need to address this funding gap in future years.

Legal Implications

11. Supporting the Active Communities Strategy neither imposes nor infers any additional obligations on the council, and it is therefore considered that there are no legal implications.

Risks

12. The only risk considered pertinent to supporting the strategy would be a reputational one amongst partner organisations if we were not to deliver a range of interventions that improve the health and wellbeing of our communities, particularly countywide funded projects delivered in partnership.

Other implications

13. There are not considered to be any other implications.

Conclusion

14. That Cabinet notes the approach being proposed to meet a number of corporate objectives and approves the Active Communities Strategy.

Background Papers

- **Appendix One** – Active Communities Strategy 2022