

Cherwell District Council

Executive

6 March 2023

Reducing Food Insecurity in Cherwell

Report of Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing

This report is public

Purpose of report

To share the progress the Council has already made across the district towards reducing food insecurity through a wide-ranging support package that has included a food voucher scheme and new community food grant programme. This is in addition to the work the council delivers in partnership, which includes Winter Warmers, Play: Full and expanding the number of growing spaces across the district. The report also sets out further steps the council can take such as contributing to the Good Food Oxfordshire Strategy.

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended:

- 1.1 To acknowledge progress made over the last 7 months to reduce food insecurity across the district through coproducing projects, enabling community food network partners to make their offer more sustainable and accessible to residents experiencing difficulty in securing food.
- 1.2 To endorse Cherwell District Councils input into a Food Strategy for the district; promoting partnerships with volunteer groups and charities, businesses and system partners to improve outcomes for residents.
- 1.3 To approve the continuation of the Community Food Grant for 2023-2024 financial year at £20,000.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Council declared a Food Insecurity Emergency last year and established a working group of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to respond to the emergent issues around Food Insecurity in Cherwell District.
- 2.2 The scope of the work of the group was determined to include specific actions:

- Designating a Food Champion: a lead member for food poverty at Cherwell District Council
- Establishing and reporting to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the scale of the food poverty crisis in Cherwell
- Drawing up a Cherwell Food Action Plan that supports local communities in helping to relieve the food poverty emergency, in line with the new countywide food strategy
- Developing a promotional campaign that raises awareness of underclaimed Healthy Start food vouchers
- Supporting local communities to reduce food waste and improve the food choices of residents and continuing to be an active member of the Cherwell Community Food Network.

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 It was determined that Cherwell District Council should have a Food Champion. Councillor Phil Chapman, Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities was appointed to this role.
- 3.2 The council approved the spend of £352,000 to provide £100 in food vouchers to qualifying residents in receipt of housing benefit. The scheme ran from the end of November until the end of February.
- 3.3 Insight and data is being gathered and services mapped to refresh the Good Food Oxfordshire research into food insecurity. A dashboard is being developed to track the scale of the issue and mitigations locally and the Cherwell District Council website has been updated with interactive maps and information.
- 3.4 Healthy Start vouchers have been promoted through the Cherwell Community Food Network and the Cherwell District Council website.
- 3.5 Community Food Grants have been offered to groups providing food support to local communities and to date 10 grants have been approved.
- 3.6 The bulk of the work undertaken by the Food Insecurity Group has been to identify where Cherwell District Council could add value to the 5 aims of the Countywide Food Strategy. See Appendix one
- 3.7 The cost-of-living crisis also prompted Cherwell District Council to promote a Warm Welcome in community spaces and encourage those spaces to offer food where possible. 38 venues are part of the Warm Welcome network.
- 3.8 Winter warmers, a programme that offers free soup, often made from surplus food, to people on a weekly basis has grown this winter from its start at The Hill in Banbury during the pandemic and now operates across the district, supported by The Cherwell Collective.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The progress made to date in this area of work has to a great extent fulfilled the ambitions of the July 2022 Council Motion. Putting residents at the centre of the tasks enabled improvements in access, information, and delivery. Working with a range of partners is central to how Cherwell District Council enables and supports improvement in the outcomes of programmes. Results are cost effective and more sustainable. The working group recognise the interconnected nature of food insecurity, the cost-of- living crisis and health inequalities.
- 4.2 The Executive is invited to endorse the proposed approach to developing a Food Strategy for the District, articulating what the District Council can offer to enable the delivery of a local food strategy in conjunction with Good Food Oxfordshire. The Food Action Working Group (FAWG) will begin its work in Cherwell on 7th March. The Food Insecurity Working Group will provide oversight and consider the developing data to shape future action plans.

5.0 Consultation

Informal consultation with community partners has informed the local offer

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to endorse the response to the Food Strategy developed by the Food Insecurity Working group – Rejected. This work has brought together a cross party group who have considered what the District Council could offer to enable partners and use its influence to best effect, to improve the food security of many local residents.

Option 2: Not to approve the continuation of the Community Food Grants – Rejected. The small-scale contribution of funds enables community groups to develop new offers and respond to local need.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 There is sufficient funding available to provide the allocated budget. Otherwise, all recommendations are within resources.

Comments checked by:

Leanne Lock, Strategic Finance Business Partner, Tel: 01295 227098

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Legal Implications

7.2 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations.

Comments checked by:
Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law and Governance,
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Risk Implications

7.3 There are no immediate risk implications associated directly with this report. Any arising risks will be managed through the project and service operational risk and escalated to the Leadership Risk Register as and when necessary.

Comments checked by:
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader
Celia.Prado-Teeling@Cherwell-DC.gov.uk 01295 221556

Equalities and Inclusion Implications

7.4 There is a positive impact on equality associated directly with this report. All the council's proposals, changes, and decisions are developed with careful consideration of our commitments to equalities and inclusion, as set in our equalities and inclusion framework, keeping those principles at the core of all we do.

Comments checked by:
Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader
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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision	No
Financial Threshold Met:	N/A
Community Impact Threshold Met:	N/A

Wards Affected

All Wards

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

These recommendations link to the Councils ambitions and to the corporate plan aims of

- Supporting environmental sustainability
- An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres
- Healthy, resilient, and engaged communities

Lead Councillor

Cllr Phil Chapman – Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Appendix 1- Cherwell District Council's contribution to the Oxfordshire food strategy

Background papers

- None

Reference Documents

- Good Food Oxfordshire Food Strategy

Report Author and contact details

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