

Divisions Affected – ALL

CABINET

15 March 2022

Plant Based Food

Report by Corporate Director of Commercial Development, Assets, and Investment

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Ensure that food provided at full Council meetings and all civic events is entirely plant based and, where possible, sustainably and locally sourced.
- b) Endorse a graduated approach to incorporating plant-based options for school meals provided by the council, in partnership with schools who buy this service and in line with School Food Guidelines.
- c) Agree to the development of an Oxfordshire County Council food policy to support the delivery of sustainable food provision and its disposal within the Council.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 As part of the Council's strategic plan, the Council is committed to making Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county.

Following an approved motion to Full Council this paper sets out some initial measures to enable the council to meet its strategic priorities.

2.2 The Council is committed to addressing issues of food poverty and has funded the development of an Oxfordshire wide food strategy, led by Good Food Oxford, which will enable the Council to work in partnership with local voluntary and community sector, food businesses and public sector partners to collectively address the issues of food inequalities in Oxfordshire.

2.3 The Council has committed to lead positive change and will be introducing the provision of locally sourced, plant-based food, at its full Council meetings and Civic functions.

3. Context

- 3.1 The recent National Food Strategy, which is based on a review of the whole UK food system, recommends meat consumption in the UK should fall by 30 per cent over the next ten years. In addition, the Government appointed Climate Change Committee sets out in its 2020 report the first ever in-depth advice on UK agriculture and land use practices. The report is clear that significant change in reducing food waste and more sustainable farming practices are needed.
- 3.2 We believe that the council has an important leadership role in developing the discussion and debate locally. Farming is a significant contributor to the Oxfordshire Economy, and local sustainable approaches which aim to accelerate sustainable food systems will be increasingly important over the coming years.

4. Catering in the Council

- 4.1 Currently there are six to seven meetings of full Council each year at which locally sourced, plant-based food only would be served at lunchtime. Occasionally the Chair of the council holds civic events that involve catering and these too would involve locally sourced, plant-based food only.

5. School Meals

- 5.1 The Council provides school meals in 57 of the county's 400 maintained schools and academies (14% of the total number of schools). All of the 14% schools the County provide catering for are primary or nursery schools.
- 5.2 We currently have a 'Climate Day' in our three-week menu cycle where the emphasis is on sustainable foods and it should be noted that 40% of our menu choices across the 3 weeks do not contain any meat, although these choices are not necessarily plant based but are vegetarian.
- 5.3 We are in the final planning stages of our next menu cycle for launch after the Easter break and in addition to our 'meat free daily option, we will be introducing a dedicated plant-based day, once a week, for all of our main meals. This means that on average 62% of our meals will not contain meat.
- 5.4 All of our menus meet the School Food Guidelines and are independently analysed for compliance through LACA (The Lead Association for Catering in Education) However, we recognise that we must balance the need for more sustainable food against maintaining uptake for school meals, therefore we will focus on less and better meat and dairy, ensuring there remains a choice and that all types of food provided is sustainable and of high quality.

6. Oxfordshire Food Strategy

- 6.1 Through our lessons learned from COVID-19, we identified an issue with food inequalities across the county and funded Good Food Oxford to lead on the

development of an Oxfordshire wide food strategy. In partnership with Good Food Oxford, the district and city councils and a range of voluntary and community sector partners and local food businesses, the Council is involved in the development of this strategy which addresses food poverty, diet-related ill health, and growth of our local food economy.

- 6.2 This strategy will support the Council in its wider commitment to addressing issues of food within the county and will provide a joined up, collaborative approach to meeting the needs of our residents, communities and local businesses and farmers.
- 6.3 The joint strategy is scheduled to come to Cabinet to seek adoption in April 2022, with a joint action plan to be developed in partnership and brought for adoption in September 2022.
- 6.4 This broad ranging and collaborative commitment will focus on the wider needs of the county and support the council's strategic priority to tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire. It will also ensure these healthy and sustainable food messages and relevant impact measures are linked to Net Zero targets. It is therefore recommended to Cabinet that the Council food policy will focus on the council's commitment to sustainable sourcing and disposal of food in council led provision, which will seek to complement the commitments of the wider food strategy.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There may be some minimal financial implications in relation to the sourcing of locally supplied, plant-based food but this will be managed within existing budgets.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

8. Legal Implications

The Human Rights Act 1998, Article 9, protects an individual's right to hold a broad range of views, beliefs, and thoughts, and to follow a religious faith. The courts have ruled that a genuine and sincerely held belief must attain a certain cogency, seriousness and cohesion relating to an important aspect of human behaviour or life. Having a personal choice not to have a plant-based diet is not a right that is recognised by the Human Rights Act.

This report does not have direct legal implications arising out of a decision to adopt a plant-based approach to the provision of diet options.

Comments checked by: Sukdave Ghuman, Head of Legal Services

9. Equality & Inclusion Implications

The wider Oxfordshire Food Strategy will provide all stakeholders with a collective responsibility to proactively address inequalities. The development of a food policy to support the council's internal ambitions will include a completed Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure there are suitable mitigations put in place should there be any identified disadvantage to any individuals or groups.

10. Sustainability Implications

There are proven links between food, food waste and climate change. By taking steps to provide locally sourced plant-based food at council events and on school menus, the council is supporting the transition to healthier and less carbon-intensive diets, as set out in its Climate Action Framework.

A food policy for council food provision and disposal may cover wider considerations of what constitutes a sustainable diet: reduced food waste, reduced packaging, locally sourced food, support for agricultural practices that restore soil health and biodiversity.

11. Risk Management

There are no immediate risks associated with the proposed approach to develop a food policy and to introduce a graduated approach by means of a trial for introducing plant-based menus in our recipient schools. The wider food strategy being developed in partnership will provide a more holistic look at addressing longer term issues around accessing healthy, environmentally responsible and sustainable food.

12. Consultations

All schools that are recipients of County Council food provision will be engaged throughout the trial period and will be asked to provide feedback on the scheme which will be used to inform future decisions. Once the scope of the food policy is agreed, a consultation and engagement plan will be implemented if required.

NAME

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Annex: N/A

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