Section 2.3

Engagement feedback on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities

Introduction

1. Throughout October and continuing into November 2021, we have undertaken public and stakeholder engagement to support the development of the council's new strategic plan and the 2022/23 budget setting process.

2. This had five strands:

   - A residents' survey to understand residents' priorities and experiences.
   - Public discussion groups.
   - Young people's discussion groups to ensure that young people's voices are included.
   - Stakeholder workshops and survey – with participation from the voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils.
   - Councillor engagement and survey – discussions at locality groups and follow-up survey to ensure the views of all county councillors were sought.

Methodology summary and what we did

3. The following table describes the methodology used and responses received.

Engagement strand	Methodology	Responses
Strand 1: Residents' survey 4 October - 21 November 2021 Conducted by independent agency, Marketing Means	Postal survey sent to 4,841 households, stratified by district and postcode. Sent to a random sample of 4,841 households, stratified by districts and postcode. Representative of the adult population of Oxfordshire to +/- 3% @95% level of confidence. Option to respond by post or online.	• 1,091 responses received. • Mix of post and online, giving a response rate of 23%. • Final data has been weighted by local authority area, age and gender against the ONS 2019 mid-year estimates to reflect Oxfordshire's population as a whole.
Strand 2: Public discussion groups 12 October - 10 November 2021	Eight, online (Zoom) group discussions with adults 18+, six main ones and two top-up groups.	• Engaged 35 people.

Qualitative research conducted by independent agency Ask for Research.	Participants were recruited to reflect different geographies (urban, market town and rural) and life stages (young adults who are pre-children, families, empty nesters).	
Strand 3: Young people's discussion groups Conducted by independent agency, Families, Kids and Youth. 18 October - 27 October 2021	Five online group discussions with children and young people aged between 11 and 17, plus feedback from one person who could not join a group. The groups were filmed (with some GDPR restrictions on use/sharing). Most participants were recruited to reflect different geographies (urban, market town, growing towns, and surrounding villages), except for one group that was made up solely of members of the council's Children in Care Council.	• Engaged 29 people.
Strand 4: Stakeholder workshops and survey Conducted by the council led by the consultation and engagement team. Meetings: w/c 18 October 2021 Survey hosted on Let's Talk Oxfordshire: 22 October - 7 November 2021.	Three workshops, two for town and parish councils and one for representatives of the voluntary, community and education sector. Led by Cabinet members and supported by officers. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to listen to a presentation on the priorities and strategic plan process and provide feedback. Participants were sent a follow-up online survey.	• 108 representatives from local councils accepted invitation, and 99 attended (some councils sent multiple attendees). • 66 representatives from the voluntary, community and education sector stakeholders accepted the invitation and 57 attended (some groups/organisations sent multiple attendees). • 29 responded to the online survey.
Strand 5: County councillor engagement and survey Conducted by the council led by the consultation and engagement team and strategy and policy team. Meetings: 4 October - 26 October 2021 Survey hosted on Let's Talk Oxfordshire: 8 October - 7 November 2021.	Presentation and discussion on the agenda at 8 of the 9 councillor locality groups (the Thame locality group discussion did not go ahead due to IT issues). Councillors given the opportunity to listen to a presentation on the priorities and strategic plan process and provide feedback. All cllrs sent the survey.	• All councillors given the opportunity to feedback. • 11 councillors responded to the online survey.

Feedback

4. The five strands of engagement have generated a wealth of feedback and we are just starting to scratch the surface of what we have been told. All the strategic priorities are of interest, but relative importance depends on the audience groups.

Strand 1: Residents' survey

5. The residents' survey has a much wider insight focus than solely the priorities. The wider findings will be shared with officers and councillors.

6. From the residents' survey, our only representative piece of research, a clear hierarchy of priorities emerged when residents were asked 'which two priorities do you think it is most important for the council to concentrate on'. Table 1 shows how prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents and putting action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work were deemed most important. Table 2 shows the importance residents placed on the factors listed in making somewhere a good place to live compared to what they felt most needs improving.
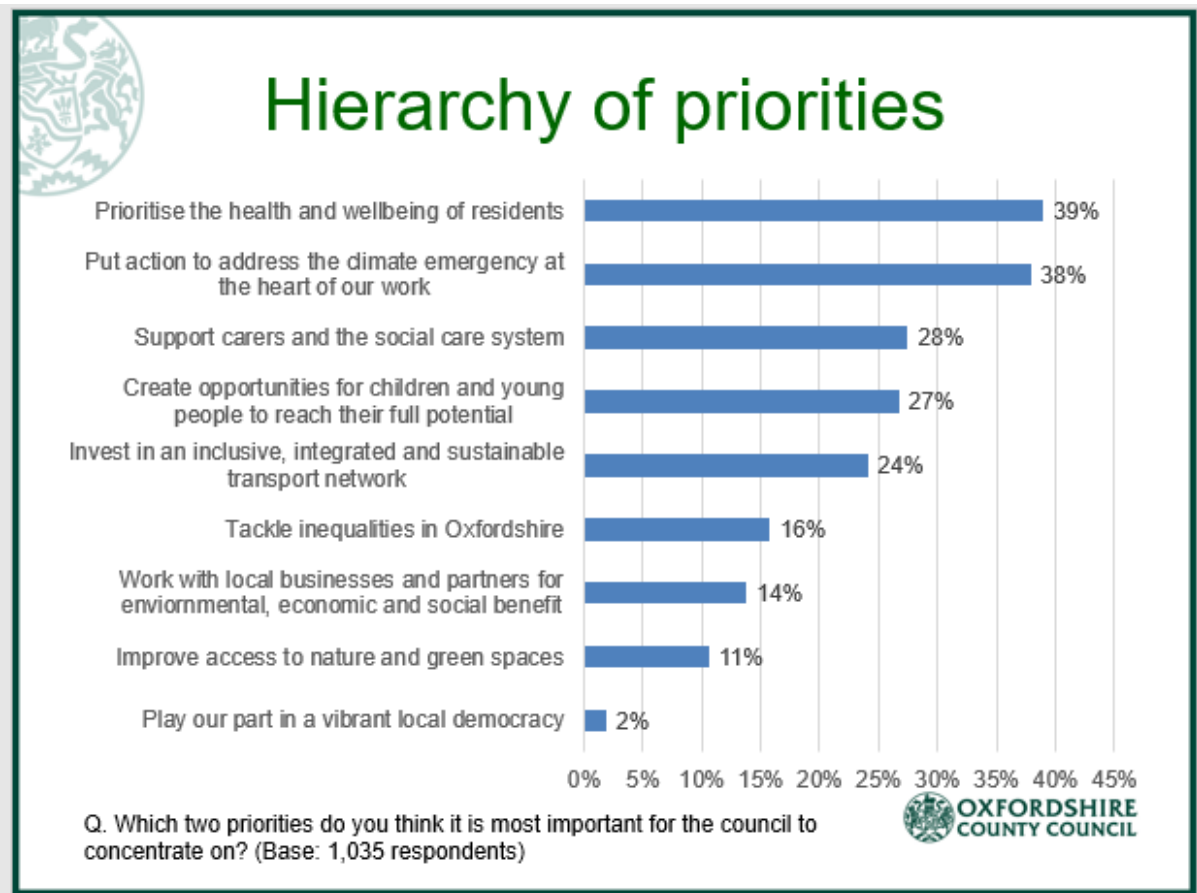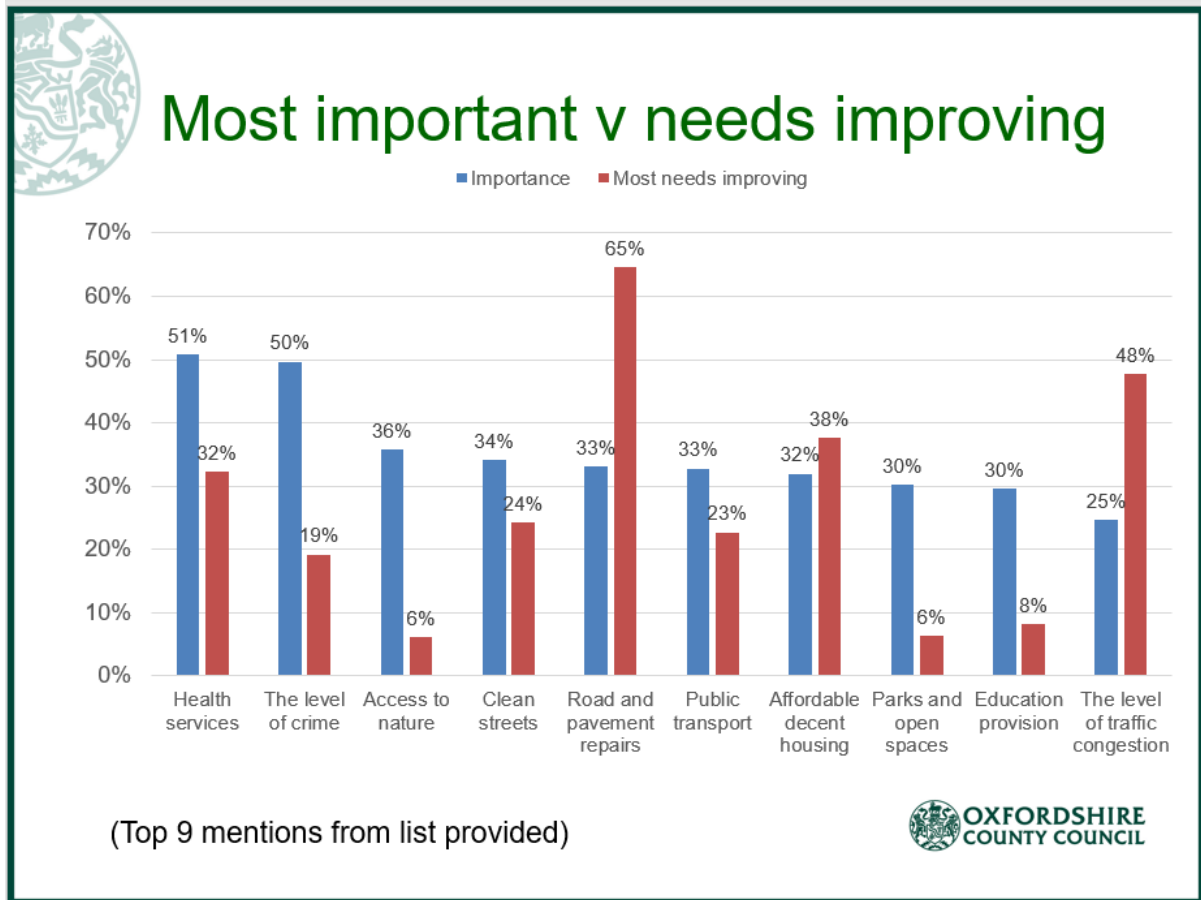
Table 1

Hierarchy of priorities

Priority	Percentage
Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents	39%
Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work	38%
Support carers and the social care system	28%
Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential	27%
Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network	24%
Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire	16%
Work with local businesses and partners for enviornmental, economic and social benefit	14%
Improve access to nature and green spaces	11%
Play our part in a vibrant local democracy	2%

Q. Which two priorities do you think it is most important for the council to concentrate on? (Base: 1,035 respondents)

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Table 2

Most important v needs improving

(Top 9 mentions from list provided)

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Strand 2: Public discussion groups

Overall

7. Residents were asked to rate the two priorities that they personally considered to be of most importance for the council to concentrate on as shown in table 3 below.

8. All nine priorities are seen as i**mportant**, but there is a clear division between the priorities that affect individuals and those that affect the wider county. Residents focus in the first instance on what is of importance and relevance directly to themselves and the people they care about.

9. The clear top two strategic priorities:
   a. prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents
   b. creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

10. Residents recognised the interlinking of the priorities and if this could be better represented visually. They considered the scope of the nine priorities is huge, and the wording and intention positive, but they want this to be supported by realistic intent and detail.

11. Actions to support the nine priorities need to be relevant, support the future, build on strengths, achievable and their impacts need to be measurable. The wording of the actions itself needs to be accessible and inclusive.

12. Residents understand the council doesn't have endless resources and want the council to focus on what can be achieved, rather than wide-ranging promises.

Table 3

Health

13. Health and wellbeing affect everyone, the outcomes of which everyone relies on. Important areas of health to focus on are physical health, mental health, healthy living, and accessibility for all.

14. The impact of the pandemic on the provision of health services was noted. Actions taken by volunteers to support health and wellbeing within the county could be supported by the council.

15. **Mental health:** While improvement in the openness regarding mental health is noted, this needs to be developed and built on. Support needs to be accessible and timely, with demand being exacerbated by the pandemic. Local support, amenities and programmes should be provided.

16. **Physical health:** We need to ensure equality of access for residents of all ages, physical abilities and income to sports and team sports. A specific focus on encouraging girls at a young age to participate was raised, as well as the need to encourage (not enforce) healthy eating when providing information, and access to support.

Children and young people

17. Children and young people are seen as the future for the county. Creating opportunities for them to reach their full potential is crucial to achieving the vision for the county. Education is a significant contributor and the negative impacts of COVID-19 on schooling has resulted in both the loss of schooling and opportunities as well as its impacts on mental and physical health and social wellbeing.

18. Opportunities for older children need to ensure the demand for vocational options are supported, specifically with the availability of relevant apprenticeships, and there is equality of opportunity for all young people.

19. Out of school activities for both children and young people were crucial; these need to be inclusive, accessible and affordable.

20. **Inclusion is required from an early age:**
    a. for education at all ages
    b. equality of access to acceptable living standards; and
    c. equality of opportunity for young people from all backgrounds.

21. **Equality of access within the school system is needed:**
    a. For older children, equality of access to opportunities was raised in the form of both academic and non-academic routes.
    b. The provision of sufficient and relevant apprenticeships and entrepreneurial experience for young people wanting to take a vocational option was raised.

22. **Accessible (free) outside of school provision to support all young people:**
    a. Sports facilities, youth clubs and places for older young people to spend time.
    b. The closure of out of school facilities, such as youth clubs, was a focus of discussion throughout all ages of the discussion groups.

23. **Mental health support within and outside of schools is key:**
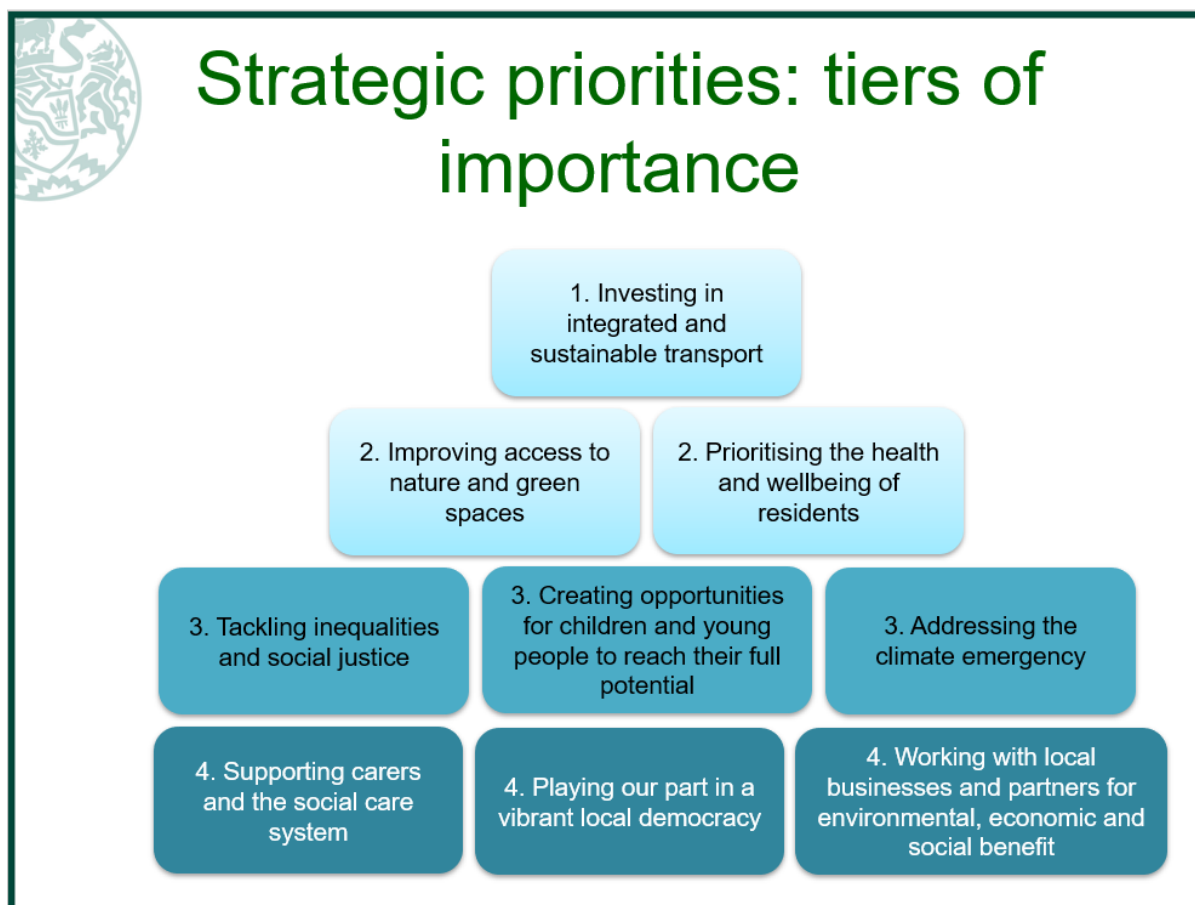   a. Promoted, accessible and timely – an increased need following COVID.

Strand 3: Young people's discussion groups

24. The top strategic priorities among young people were:
    a. investing in integrated and sustainable transport
    b. improving access to nature and green spaces

c. prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents.

25. Independent research company Families, Kids and Youth, tiered the importance of the priorities as shown in table 4 below.

Table 4

Strategic priorities: tiers of importance

1. Investing in integrated and sustainable transport

2. Improving access to nature and green spaces

2. Prioritising the health and wellbeing of residents

3. Tackling inequalities and social justice

3. Creating opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential

3. Addressing the climate emergency

4. Supporting carers and the social care system

4. Playing our part in a vibrant local democracy

4. Working with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit

26. **Transport:**
    a. Young people are keen to resolve issues related to bus/train timetables, expensive fares (young person's concession card?), and safer cycles routes.
    b. Creating additional transport links with popular destinations (eg retail parks) is also welcomed. Let's hear from our young people.

27. **Green spaces:**
    a. Preservation of green spaces was key, new housing developments were cited negatively as a threat to this.
    b. There are few places young people feel they can go to socialise. Being able to visit and socialise in green spaces became a priority during lockdown. Current options are limited and adjusting opening hours in areas such as the local parks is suggested.
    c. Ensuring green spaces are well maintained is a concern – there were requests for more bins in public areas and restrict removing natural areas such as wildflowers.

28. **Health and wellbeing:**
    a. Young people are highly passionate about wellbeing.
    b. There is concern that wait times for mental health support are too long and care for under 16s is insufficient.
    c. Other plans suggested by the council (eg 'Smoke-free by 2050'; measures to support local businesses) are supported but more details are needed, current proposals sound too vague.

29. **Communication is key:**
    a. use clearer, simpler language
    b. hear direct from the council through school visits and posters
    c. use social media that is used by their age group eg Tik Tok not Facebook.

Strand 4: Stakeholder workshops

30. In the group discussions there were short but quality conversations on all nine priorities with practical suggestions.

31. Although not representative, the top three priorities from the survey were:
    a. Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work (15 mentions)
    b. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network (12 mentions)
    c. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents (9 mentions).

32. As per the public discussion groups, stakeholders were quick to identify how the priorities link. For example: "The inequalities for rural dwellers should not be overlooked, this links to the transport priority," and "If an individual's health and wellbeing is poor it hinders their ability to engage on other priorities."

33. The workshops were well received with good engagement on the priorities and there was clear interest in targeted sessions in the future.

34. Several stakeholders openly welcomed the priorities but participants were keen to understand what sits behind the priorities as presented.

35. Rural transport and housing development linked to targets, infrastructure provision, decarbonisation and conflict with preservation of green spaces were the key themes for questions from town and parish councils.

36. The council's commissioning process (collaborative and participatory commissioning) and actively engaging groups and communities was of specific interest to the voluntary and community sector.

Strand 5: Councillor feedback

37. The three priorities that stand out from the councillors' survey (not representative) when asked to consider of the needs of their division are:
    a. Putting climate action at the heart of our work (urgency in action)
    b. Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
    c. Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.

38. In their locality groups and through the survey, councillors provided constructive challenge and put forward practical ideas for taking each of the individual priorities forward.

39. For example, for playing our part in a vibrant local democracy the following ideas emerged:
    a. Need to be more proactive approach in engaging electorate, particularly the younger voters and school children
    b. Citizen assemblies could be part of this
    c. Consultations could be broader and not so objector focused.

Overall messages

40. All the strategic priorities are of interest, but relative importance differs by audience group.

41. Health/wellbeing is an emerging overall top three priority across all strands of feedback.

42. Investing in an inclusive, integrated, and sustainable transport network is the standout priority from the young people's discussion groups and health and wellbeing and children and young people from the public discussion groups. For the stakeholder groups, climate, transport and health and wellbeing were key themes, while for county councillors, key themes were climate, transport and children and young people.

43. It is proposed that positive consideration is given to integrating health into the overall vision statement and 'preserve' into priority six.

44. Language is key, we need our priorities and actions to achieve them to be clear (not ambiguous), accessible and inclusive both in aim and wording to engage audiences.

45. There is some appetite for ongoing engagement and working in partnership with partners and communities to deliver the priorities.

46. Deep dive sessions on the feedback are being planned to maximise its value, incorporate into the development of the strategic plan and subsequent service plans.

Next steps

47. Insight from all five engagement strands has already been used to feed into the budget and business planning process. The county council's budget consultation, launched on 2 December 2021 and closed on 5 January 2022, and included questions on the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance's priorities.

48. The outcomes of this budget consultation will be considered by the council's Cabinet on 18 January 2022 and decided by the council on 8 February 2022. Consultation feedback will also help develop a new strategic plan for the council.

49. Deep dive sessions where the insight gathered from this feedback can be explored in more detail are being planned for January and beyond to inform new and existing pieces of work, service plans and key strategy documents.

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