



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	COUNCIL – 27 SEPTEMBER 2023
Subject	STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive. Email: Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive. Email: Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To enable the Leader to provide an update to Council on his portfolio responsibility for Strategic Partnerships.
Annexes	Nil.
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Council Resolves to:</i> <i>1. Note the contents of the Strategic Partnership Report.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Putting Residents First● A Good Quality of Life for All● A Better Environment for People and Wildlife● Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency● Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Nil.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Leader has portfolio responsibility for Strategic Partnerships. These strategic partnerships include the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, South East Councils and OxLEP.
- 1.2** The West Oxfordshire Council Plan recognises that in order for the Council to deliver on its aspirations it is essential to work collaboratively with others. Strategic partnerships provide opportunities to tackle issues of common interest, share best practice, and provide a strong voice back to Government on areas of concern.

2. MAIN POINTS

Future Oxfordshire Partnership

- 2.1** The Council has been a longstanding member of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership alongside the other Principal Councils in Oxfordshire and other key partners. The purpose of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership is to build collaboration across the county to deliver the bold aims of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development, which all six Principal councils have adopted.
- 2.2** The Leader sits on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Council is also represented by Executive Members on the four Advisory Groups that report to the Partnership (Infrastructure, Housing, Environment and Planning), and by Members on the Scrutiny Panel. Each of the Advisory Groups is chaired by a Council Leader. Cllr Andy Graham chairs the Planning Advisory Group.
- 2.3** Also linked to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Strategic Vision are the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership. The Local Nature Partnership aims to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it's given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is working to create a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.
- 2.4** A new Future Oxfordshire Partnership website is close to completion and is expected to be launched in October. This help inform interested parties about the work of the Partnership. Websites for the Local Nature Partnership and the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership will follow later in the Autumn
- 2.5** The Future Oxfordshire Partnership has been responsible for oversight of several programmes, including the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal, City Deal, and Strategic Economic Plan. As the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal and other programmes come to an end the Partnership is considering its focus for the future.
- 2.6** A workshop is planned for the 26th September to consider the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's forward work programme. The focus will be on those activities that make sense to deliver at an Oxfordshire scale, that add value to the individual actions of the partners and that are supported by all of the partners. The workshop will also consider the economy

theme and consider how best this could link into the work of the partnership given the Government initiated changes to the arrangements for Local Enterprise Partnerships.

- 2.7** One important item on the existing Future Oxfordshire Partnership work programme is a refresh of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OXIS). This strategy identifies the strategic infrastructure requirements needed to support the planned growth in Local Plans. Earlier versions of this key strategy have helped support successful funding bids to Government through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal and the Housing Infrastructure Fund.

Oxford to Cambridge Partnership

- 2.8** In January 2023, Council resolved that the Council should be a participant in the proposed pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area. This new partnership was then formed by a group of leaders from local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, and with government support.
- 2.9** The Oxford to Cambridge partnership's mission is to secure a future in which communities prosper from the very best in environmentally sustainable ways of living and working. The partners will collaborate to accelerate economic opportunities created through the region's innovation strengths, to achieve significant environmental enhancements, and to unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development.
- 2.10** The Partnership includes two key workstreams on the Environment & Sustainability, and also on Innovation & Economy. The Council Leader is a member of the Environment & Sustainability Group. Early activity includes an Environment Agency Integrated Water Management Project that is underway for the Oxford to Cambridge Area. The intention is to use West Oxfordshire as one of three case studies alongside Milton Keynes and Cambridgeshire. The Integrated Water Management project seeks to create an interconnected water (resource, quality, environment) and flood risk approach to planning and decision making, this aligns with the ambition to 'join up management of the water system' and 'manage the water system in a holistic way'.

South East Councils

- 2.11** South East Councils was established in April 2009 to represent the views of local authorities in the South East region. With most local authorities in the South East as members, the partnership aims to work in partnership to make the region a great place to live, work and do business. Each member council nominates a senior councillor to SEC, with elected representatives actively assisting in making the case on priority issues to, and through, Government, Parliament, Industry, and the media.
- 2.12** South East Councils is endeavouring to promote and maintain the South East's position as a leading global economy, seek fair funding for the South East region, and monitor and highlight the economic pulse of the South East.

Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP)

- 2.13** OxLEP in common with other Local Enterprise Partnerships elsewhere in England is a partnership between local authorities and businesses. It was set up in 2011 to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within Oxfordshire. The Council Leader sits on the OxLEP Board alongside other Oxfordshire Council Leaders and business representatives.
- 2.14** OxLEP is currently preparing a new Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire. This will provide a post-pandemic statement of economic priorities for Oxfordshire and sets out a strategy to 2033. The Strategic Economic Plan links to the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development. The draft plan will be presented to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership on the 26th September for consideration. The Strategic Economic Plan acknowledges that Oxfordshire has a world class innovation ecosystem and a knowledge economy of international renown but that this is linked to a wider foundational economy that accounts for the majority of jobs. The foundational economy is therefore important to the extent to which Oxfordshire thrives.
- 2.15** OxLEP is also preparing a Destination Management Plan for Oxfordshire. This recognises the importance of the visitor economy to the County. The plan will provide a framework supporting the work of the two new Local Visitor Economy Partnerships covering Oxfordshire (Cotswold Plus and Experience Oxfordshire). The Destination Management Plan is due to be presented to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in November for endorsement.
- 2.16** Earlier this year the Government announced that it would cease the direct funding of Local Enterprise Partnerships from April 2024. Instead funding will be routed through County Councils in two tier areas like Oxfordshire as part of a transfer of economic functions (business representation, strategic economic planning, and the delivery of government programmes) to Local and Combined authorities. The Government notes that some Local Enterprise Partnerships may choose to continue operations without core funding, and states that where an upper tier local authority wishes to continue using the Local Enterprise Partnership as a vehicle they are free to do so. The nature and status of such arrangements are a decision for upper tier local authorities to make.
- 2.17** This decision has prompted discussion in Oxfordshire on the future role of OxLEP and its relationship to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, which provides a partnership vehicle that could help coordinate future economic activity between the Councils and OxLEP. This issue will be explored at the Future Oxfordshire Partnership workshop planned for the 26th September.

Other Key Partnerships

- 2.18** The Council works with a number of other key partnerships. In particular the Council delivers a wide range of its services through Publica and through Ubico, both of which are local authority owned companies of which the Council is a shareholder.
- 2.19** The four Publica shareholder councils have commissioned an external review to help us improve the partnership and outcomes for each of the partner councils. Publica was formed

in 2017, and 6 years after the formation is a good time to review how the partnership is working.

2.20 This review will look at a range of topics including how to achieve best value for money, how to improve services for residents and the governance of the organisation. It is a strategic review of the company operation. The outcomes of the review are expected to be reported to Executive in November.

2.21 The Council also works closely with other Councils in Oxfordshire on refugee and asylum seekers as part of the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership. This has enabled close working between the Councils and other partners to support a range of people in need including Ukrainian Refugees, Afghan Refugees and also those asylum seekers placed in the County by the Home Office. A Silver Group of Officers coordinates the activities of partners on this programme and reports through to the Council Chief Executives and Leaders.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1 The Council could choose not to participate in strategic partnership activity, however this would limit its ability to tackle cross boundary issues and share best practice.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council provides funding to help support the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and its associated bodies. For 2023/24 the Council has budgeted £92,000 in total for the partnership, the Local Nature Partnership and Inclusive Economy Partnership. Over the years the partnership has attracted significant Government investment into Oxfordshire, including the £215 million Housing and Growth Deal.

4.2 The annual membership cost for the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership is currently £10,000. This Partnership has also attracted significant revenue support from the Government.

4.3 South East Councils membership is currently £2,000.

4.4 The Council does not provide core funding for OxLEP.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None from this report.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 A partnership approach helps mitigate some of the risks facing the Council, although there are potential impacts on the Council if one of these partnerships should fail both in terms of direct services and reputational risk. Partnership risks are addressed in the Council's risk register.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

7.1 None from this report.

7.2 The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is working to create a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None from this report

8.2 The Future Oxfordshire Partnership, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, and Oxford to Cambridge Partnership provide valuable forums to help the Council address the climate and ecological emergencies.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None

(END)