



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	<b>COUNCIL – 21 MAY 2025</b>
Subject	<b>STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</b>
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive. Email: <a href="mailto:Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">Giles.Hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Astrid Harvey – Corporate Strategy Manager. Email: <a href="mailto:Astrid.Harvey@westoxon.gov.uk">Astrid.Harvey@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
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 Update.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Putting Residents First</li><li>● A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>● A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>● Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>● Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
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**

### Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee (Future Oxfordshire Partnership)

- 2.1** The Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee has been established (January 2025). 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 has been 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** In light of the conclusion of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, around which much of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's activity was focused, and the need to be prepared to engage with the UK government's evolving stance on devolution and proposed reforms to economic planning and industrial strategy, all Member authorities agreed a reset of the Partnership with its reestablishment as a formal joint committee of council leaders. The newly formed Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee (from January 2025) will focus on delivering the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision, engaging with government on devolution, and coordinating efforts to address infrastructure needs, economic inequality and the climate and nature crises.
- 2.3** The Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee will continue to work closely with other partnerships that contribute to the delivery of its priorities, including the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.
- 2.4** The Oxfordshire 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. A key focus has been the production of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, a requirement of the 2021 Environment Act. This coordinated strategy for nature's recovery will enable wildlife to flourish, improve the quality of our air and water, and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The final version of the LNRS will be published in mid-Autumn 2025.
- 2.5** The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is working to develop a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county. Four working groups have been established made up of experts in inclusive employment, educational attainment social value and procurement, and place-based interventions. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter pledges to help individuals, companies and organisations set out ways in which they will contribute to the achievement of an inclusive economy for Oxfordshire.

- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 Two further areas of focus for the Future Oxfordshire Partnership relate to affordable housing delivery and supporting Oxfordshire's transition to net zero. The Council is hosting a Future Oxfordshire Partnership funded project to accelerate the delivery of Community Led Housing in the District. Community First Oxfordshire's Rural Housing Enabler and Communities Lead is providing expertise and outreach support to newly formed groups (including Community Land Trusts) actively pursuing affordable housing opportunities.
- 2.8 Working alongside the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership, each of the six Oxfordshire councils are being supported to work together to develop their own Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs). As the UK transitions away from fossil fuels to renewable, locally generated energy sources, the energy grid will need to work differently to store and distribute energy. The grid also needs to be prepared for fluctuations in energy demand which result from the delivery of other council ambitions, such as housing delivery and decarbonisation. The LAEPs will provide a plan of clear, community-focused actions for transforming how energy is generated, used and managed in Oxfordshire. The LAEPs will identify the actions needed within each district, alongside cross-boundary initiatives to be delivered at the county level.

#### Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor (Oxford to Cambridge Pan- Regional Partnership)

- 2.9 The Council has been represented by the Leader on Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership since its inception in January 2023. 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, the Partnership's mission has been to secure a future in which communities prosper from the very best in environmentally sustainable ways of living and working. Partners have collaborated to accelerate economic opportunities created through the region's innovation strengths, achieve significant environmental enhancements, and unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development
- 2.10 In December 2024 the English Devolution White Paper set out its ambition to place powers working across regions where a larger geographic scale is needed to coordinate on strategic issues. The Government's intention to support new models for regional collaboration driven by Mayors and their partners was also stated with a commitment to establish Mayoral Strategic Authorities for the Oxford - Cambridge Region. This means a transition away from the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership with a cessation of its funding and wind down of its programme by 31 March 2025 and formal closure by 30 June 2025.
- 2.11 Development and implementation of new models for the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor will be led by Science Minister, Lord Patrick Vallance, in his new role as the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor Champion.
- 2.12 Discussions with Local Authority partners are underway to inform proposals for a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering on the Thames Valley geography with potential to link with other partners across the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor, thus further building on its economic strengths. Forming proposals for Local Government Reorganisation as required by

the English Devolution White Paper also recognize the importance of ensuring new unitary authorities enable the economic ambitions for the Oxford to Cambridge region.

#### South East Councils and the District Councils Network

- 2.13** South East Councils is a cross-party membership association which represents the views of local authorities in the South East region. With most local authorities in the South East as members, the partnership seeks to provide a unified democratic voice on South East interests with elected representatives actively assisting in making the case on priority issues to, and through, Government, Parliament, Industry, and the media. It is endeavoring to promote and maintain the South East's position as a leading global economy, seeking fairer funding for the region, and monitoring and highlighting it's economic profile. The Council Leader sits on the Executive Board for South East Councils.
- 2.14** The District Councils Network is a cross-party network of 169 district and unitary councils of which the Council is a member. It is a special interest group of the Local Government Association that provides a single voice for all District services. As the Council embarks on the task of preparing for Local Government Reorganisation, the benefits of shared learning and advocacy afforded through membership of the District Councils Network will continue to be valuable as the Council navigates its path towards unitarization of Local Government, ensuring that the priorities and needs of residents are met into the future.

#### Enterprise Oxfordshire (Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP))

- 2.15** Established in 2011 to help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within Oxfordshire, OxLEP is a partnership between local authorities and businesses. The public and private sector partnership works to champion and develop Oxfordshire's economy, acting as a catalyst and convenor to drive a dynamic, sustainable and growing economy in pursuit of the delivery of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development.
- 2.16** Following a change in Government policy, from 1 April 2024 it was decided that the function of Local Enterprise Partnerships would be delivered through a mechanism agreed by respective upper-tier local authorities. In November 2024 an agreement with Oxfordshire County Council was reached ensuring that OxLEP could continue to deliver economic development functions across Oxfordshire and from 1 April 2025 the trading name for OxLEP will be Enterprise Oxfordshire. Enterprise Oxfordshire's focus will remain ensuring that Oxfordshire's economic potential is delivered in a sustainable and inclusive way, benefiting businesses, communities and the environment.
- 2.17** OxLEP has led on development of the 2023 Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan with key strategic partners. The 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. Closely aligned with the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development, the aim is to make Oxfordshire a more inclusive, fair, vibrant and culturally rich place for our communities and businesses to benefit from whilst ensuring our environmental assets are protected and enhanced.
- 2.18** In recognition of the importance of the visitor economy to the County, OxLEP has also prepared the Oxfordshire Visitor Economy Vision and Destination Management Plan 2023-28. Endorsed by the Future Oxford Partnership in November 2023, it provides a framework supporting the work of the two new Local Visitor Economy Partnerships covering Oxfordshire (Cotswold Plus and Experience Oxfordshire).

## Other Key Partnerships

### Publica and Ubico

- 2.19 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.
- 2.20 The four Publica shareholder councils commissioned Human Engine to undertake a strategic review of the company operations in 2023, 6 years after its formation in 2017. The review recommended that the majority of services should move from Publica and return to being under greater control of the Councils.
- 2.21 A subsequent report by Local Partnerships, supported by the Local Government Association, endorsed the Human Engine report findings and set out two phases under which the majority of services would be repatriated. A Detailed Transition Plan was then produced to guide the repatriation of services with Phase I on 1 November 2024 seeing 90 roles transferring to the Council. A further 26 roles will transfer in Phase II on 1 July 2025.

### Oxfordshire Migration Partnership

- 2.22 The Council 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.

### Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme

- 2.23 The Council has also been working in partnership with Oxford City Council and Cherwell District Council to determine how it wants to provide waste and environmental services in the future and who it wants to commission these when current contractual arrangements with Ubico come to an end in March 2027. Consultants' 'Activist' were commissioned to undertake a review of service options, outlining the potential financial and non-financial benefits of a more joined up approach across Oxfordshire to waste management and environmental services. The Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme has been established as the vehicle to deliver the service reviews and potential change.

## **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 2024/25 the Council has budgeted £100,000 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 £1,845.
- 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.
- 8. 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.

## **9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None from this report
- 9.2 The Future Oxfordshire Partnership, Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership, and forming Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor delivery model provide valuable forums to help the Council address the climate and ecological emergencies.

## **10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 None

(END)