

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board

Title of Report: Growth Board Review Stage 1 Implementation

Date: 28 July 2020

Report of: Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director
Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager

Executive Summary and Purpose: This report sets out progress to date in implementing early actions from the Growth Board review, and requests endorsement and approval for a suite of revised governance documents, which have been updated to reflect the outcomes of the review.

Recommendations: That the Growth Board:

- 1) Endorse its revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. These will take effect following approval by each local authority Cabinet, the last of which meets on or before 7 August 2020.
- 2) Approve the revised Advisory Sub-Group Terms of Reference.
- 3) Approve the revised Executive Officer Group Terms of Reference.
- 4) Approve the revised Public Participation Protocol

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Revised Growth Board Terms of Reference.

Appendix 2: Revised Growth Board Memorandum of Understanding.

Appendix 3: Revised Advisory Subgroup Terms of Reference (three documents).

Appendix 4: Revised EOG Terms of Reference.

Appendix 5: Revised Public Participation Protocol.

Introduction

1. This report provides a summary of progress made on early actions arising from the Growth Board's review of its functions and recommends a series of governance documents for endorsement or approval. Designated as stage one of two in the review implementation plan, these documents bring forward a series of changes to working practices, led by a clear refreshed purpose for the Board which is to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits.
2. This renewed focus will need to permeate various levels of the Board's work going forward and be supported by a demonstrable change in how this is communicated with partners and the public. This report and recent work however focusses on providing a robust baseline of core governance documents, on

which other changes can build from. This work has been undertaken following the support given by the Growth Board in January 2020, informed by an open and wide-ranging consultation exercise that was undertaken with the public, partners and councillors across Oxfordshire at the end of 2019.

3. The review found that there have been a series of unique successes and opportunities realised through the Growth Board collaboration and the duty to cooperate, including securing over £500m of investment in Oxfordshire in recent years. There were however areas identified for improvement concerning communication and the integration of environmental issues within the Board's work.
4. The Growth Board is asked to endorse its revised ToR and Memorandum of Understanding, which will be adopted only once they are approved separately by each of the six local authorities through their respective Cabinets / Executive. The Board is also asked to approve revised versions of the three Advisory Sub-Group ToR (Infrastructure, Housing and Oxfordshire Plan 2050), Executive Officer Group ToR and Public Participation Protocol.
5. Before further progress is made in implementing the outcomes of the Growth Board review, it is critical that these documents are agreed, as they inform the next stages of work. Whilst the local, regional and national context continues to evolve concerning the role of Growth Boards and sub-regional governance structures across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, there is, and there will continue to be, a need to keep these documents under regular review. This report is divided into three sections; governance documents, other ongoing progress and work still to do.

Part 1: Governance Documents

Terms of Reference

6. The Growth Board's revised ToR have a clear purpose from the outset, with an emphasis on sustainable development, the pursuit of a zero-carbon future, and the oversight of delegated programmes of work within this remit. This includes amendments throughout to give a greater emphasis on sustainability in the Board's work. This is perhaps the most significant change in how the Board is organised, reflecting the specific importance of environmental preservation and tackling climate change in Oxfordshire's future. An early draft of this new purpose received positive feedback from some contributors to the review, as well as support from the Board's Scrutiny Panel. It also incorporates suggested revisions made by the Panel to reference to the Government's stated aim of net zero carbon by 2050. The new proposed purpose states that Growth Board will:
 - a) *Coordinate local efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits;*
 - b) *Support the development of local planning policy that meets the UK Government's stated aim of net zero carbon by 2050, and contributes towards biodiversity gain whilst embracing the changes needed for a low carbon world; and,*

c) Seek to secure funding in the pursuit of these aims and oversee the delivery of related work programmes delegated to it by the Joint Committee's constituent local authority members.

7. When the Growth Board's ToR were last considered in April 2018, the Advisory Sub-Groups and the Scrutiny Panel ToR were still in development. Now that they have been established, the Board's ToR do not need to list the specific detail of how each of these external groups will operate. The revised ToR instead now summarise in general terms the role of these groups and redirects to the separate ToR that now exist.
8. Non-voting members have been renamed as associate members. This has been done in order to move away from voting terminology being a defining feature of their role. Instead, the associate status brings a parity of esteem between colleagues on the Board. The revised draft does however retain the distinction that associate members will not be able to vote on local authority matters.
9. Included in the new ToR is a provision to request a subscription fee from each member of the Board. This is to raise the visibility and transparency of the need for continued joint funding arrangements for the Board's work to be delivered. The Board currently has a spending pot for administrative costs of approximately £24k which has no current commitment to top up. Separately, approximately £118k in staffing costs are divided equally and recharged in arrears to all six local authorities each year. Subscription fees will enable a more formalised budgeting structure to exist for the Board's operations, and for budget approval to be recommended to each authority in February. This will bring greater visibility to the ongoing costs and improve our ability to plan for future budget rounds.
10. The Board is now recommended to continue with six meetings each year, with four of these being scheduled for the timeliest consideration of quarterly progress reports. A further two dates will be scheduled to accommodate the breadth and depth of the anticipated future work programme.
11. As required under the emerging Oxford to Cambridge Arc governance arrangements, it has been made clear in the ToR that the Growth Board may appoint representatives to relevant bodies as required. Greater clarity will come forward later this year about the implications of the emerging Arc concept, the opportunities it presents, and the role of local authorities, the Board and the public in that process.
12. Provision has been included in the new ToR for members to withdraw from the Board, which provides certainty around the process if this were to occur. Importantly, it specifies periods of notice which will allow enough time for withdrawal to take place, and for budget impacts to be assessed.

Memorandum of Understanding

13. The Memorandum of Understanding between Oxfordshire County Council and the Growth Board was established in April 2018. This is principally an operational document to support the administration of the Board's work. A revised version is included at Appendix 2 for the Growth Board's endorsement, though this will

need to be agreed by each council's Cabinet / Executive. The updated MoU provides greater operational clarity concerning the handling freedom of Information requests related to the Growth Board. Several minor changes have also been included to mirror the terminology and arrangements now included in the revised ToR for the Growth Board.

Advisory Sub-group Terms of Reference

14. The Growth Board has three Advisory Sub-groups covering three workstreams within the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (Housing, Infrastructure and Oxfordshire Plan 2050). These non-decision-making groups are made up of senior councillors from each local authority, plus a member of the Growth Board as Chair. Responding to feedback received during the review, a new section within the Advisory Sub-group ToR has been added concerning the role of members and the Chair, to emphasise their role in communicating and being a conduit between their respective councils. Further work is needed however to ensure that members received the support they need in that role. Provision to elect a temporary chair when the usual chair cannot attend, but still wishes for the meeting to progress, has also been included in the new Sub-group ToR.

Public Participation Protocol

15. The Growth Board agreed its public participation protocol in March 2017. This was done to ensure consistency in procedures for the public when the hosting arrangements rotate each year to a different local authority. The current protocol requires one day notice for addresses, and three for questions, for which the text is required. This difference in timing has caused confusion. The Growth Board review report presented on 28 January 2020 recommended aligning both to three days' notice for constancy. Since the protocol was last considered, the agenda publication deadline has been brought forward by two days to allow more time for the public to digest any papers before submitting questions, offsetting the change in notice required for addresses. A further change is the provision of a supplementary question, if the Chair can manage this within the total time allocated for public speaking. The protocol has also been updated to welcome any member of the Board to respond to public representations, and not just the Chair.
16. The Growth Board resolved at its meeting on 2 June 2020 to adopt the Vale of White Horse's virtual meeting procedure rules, as the host authority, where they can be applied. As the response to Covid-19 evolves, the Board will need to maintain flexibility in how best can best facilitate the business of the Growth Board whilst ensuring public access and participation.

Executive Officer Group (EOG) Terms of Reference

17. The Growth Board Executive Officer Group is the lead operational group that supports the Growth Board in its work. Its purpose is to support the Board and provide advice on the range of functions that it covers. Brought into existence and agreed in 2014, it is now timely that the ToR of this group be updated. The revised ToR included at Appendix 4 have been updated to identify EOG as the lead operational group for supporting the Growth Board's role within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, whilst reporting into local authority Chief Executives.

18. Responding to feedback received during the review, there is now provision for local Health and Environmental bodies to be members of this group, though more work is needed to identify the specific nominations. The new ToR, much like the Advisory Sub-group ToR, have strengthened the role and accountabilities of members surrounding communication and acting as a conduit with their respective organisations.

Part 2: Other Ongoing Progress

Annual Work Planning Event

19. Officers had previously planned for an annual work planning event to take place in June this year with the Growth Board's membership, Local Authority Chief Executives and EOG. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, a new virtual approach is being pursued, in which all parties can feed into the agenda setting process for 2021/22.

Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups

20. The Scrutiny Panel welcomed, as did the Growth Board, the opportunity to hold Task and Finish groups to look in depth at specific issues related to the Housing and Growth Deal. This can still be facilitated virtually, and support for this can be provided from within existing resources. It will however be for the Panel to establish and scope its own reviews, taking account of advice from the Panel's Scrutiny Officer and technical officers involved.

Communication

21. Good communication is fundamental to the work of the Growth Board. As shown through the recent review, a step change is required for the Board to become more proactive in informing people about its work and engaging them in the process where appropriate. The Board's ability to provide a systematic means of communication with a variety of stakeholders is the subject of an ongoing operational review that is taking place to assess the resource requirements needed to effectively support the Board. The Board continues to issue a newsletter to all councillors, which is administered through each local authorities' communications resource. A new facility to record virtual meetings of the Scrutiny Panel and the Growth Board has boosted our ability to share the content of meetings, with early analysis showing that viewing numbers of our virtual meetings far exceed attendance at physical meetings.

22. Across the Board, its Advisory Sub-groups and the Scrutiny Panel, most local authorities have seven elected councillors involved in the formal governance structures of the Board and its work. There are equally officers involved in supporting those councillors, either through the Executive Officer Group, Growth Deal and Board Officers, or through bespoke briefing structures that have been developed within individual councils. This critical mass will go a significant way in helping to distribute important information throughout each local authority, and on to residents. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 programme will be supported specifically by a dedicated central communications resource to ensure that it engages at the right levels and at the right time.

Establishing a standalone Environmental Body

23. The Board provided its support to establishing a standalone environmental body or Local Nature Partnership which could link in where appropriate with the Board's work. A workshop is being arranged which will review work undertaken by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust on behalf of the Oxfordshire Environment Board which will consider best practice nationally with respect to Local Nature Partnerships (LNP).
24. That workshop provides the opportunity to develop clear recommendations on a preferred approach by early autumn. It is possible that any new LNP will be an important part of an emerging wider environmental workstream under the Growth Board, but this needs further discussion and development.

Part 3: Work Still to Do

Oxfordshire Leadership Conference

25. This Growth Board Review showed support for wider public and stakeholder engagement and debate outside of the Growth Board structure on matters affecting the county. The Review recommended that an annual conference take place for example, with workshops, debates and exhibitions. It would provide a space for clear place-based civic leadership and debate on the most important strategic issues for Oxfordshire. The Board endorsed further exploration of this concept with other community partnerships across the county. As set out in January 2020, firmer proposals can be brought forward later in 2020, as part of a wider stage 2 update on progress with the review's implementation. Again, the impact of Covid-19 needs to be considered in how this proposal evolves, and in particular, how a wider group of stakeholders and the public can be engaged in an effective, open and transparent way.

Working Groups

26. Officers reported in January 2020 that there would be merit in exploring the creation of thematic working groups, potentially reflecting the Arc sub-structure (i.e. Place, Environment, Connectivity and Productivity). More time is needed before settling on any firm arrangements, given that the Arc concept is still evolving.

Timescales

27. The Growth Board Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding are matters reserved for decision by each local authority's Cabinet / Executive. The list of meeting dates below set out a timetable for these documents being considered by each local authority. Pending agreement by all, the revised ToR and MoU will take effect from 7 August 2020; the date on which the last council's cabinet meets.

- Cherwell District Council: 6 July 2020
- South Oxfordshire District Council: 9 July 2020
- Oxford City Council: 15 July 2020
- Oxfordshire County Council: 21 July 2020

- West Oxfordshire District Council: 22 July 2020
- Vale of White Horse District Council: 7 August 2020

Report Authors:

Bev Hindle, Director Oxfordshire Growth Board

Stefan Robinson, Growth Board Manager

Contact:

bev.hindle@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Stefan.robinson@southandvale.gov.uk