

Minutes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

HELD ON MONDAY 11 MARCH 2024 AT 6.30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING VIEWABLE BY WEBLINK

Present:

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair), Councillor John Broad, Councillor Michael Brooker, Councillor Andy Cooke, Councillor Tiago Corais, Councillor Debby Hallett, Councillor Lois Muddiman, Councillor Lynn Pratt, Councillor Leigh Rawlins, Councillor Emily Smith, Councillor David Turner, Councillor Richard Webber and Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Bill Cotton	Corporate Director for Environment and Place, Oxfordshire County Council
Andrew Down	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director
Susan Harbour	Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Kevin Jacob	Democratic Services Officer – Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Valerie Lambrechts	Infrastructure Portfolio Manager, Oxfordshire County Council
Amber Lyford	Assistant Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Babatunde Ogundele	Assistant Democratic Services Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Paul Staines	Programme Manager, Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Chloe Taylor	Head of Economy, Oxfordshire County Council
Nigel Tipple	Chief Executive, OxLEP
Kathy Wilcox	Head of Financial Strategy, Oxfordshire County Council
David Yates	Policy and Projects Officer, Future Oxfordshire Partnership

60. Apologies for absence, substitutes; declarations of interest, Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Yvonne Constance, Oxfordshire County Council, Councillor Charlie Hicks, Oxfordshire County Council and Councillor Jo Robb, South Oxfordshire District Council.

There were no declarations of interest or Chair's announcements.

61. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

62. Public participation

It was noted that no requests for public participation had been received.

63. Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal: Update at the end of Quarter 3 2023/2024

The Scrutiny Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which set out progress and spend for schemes included as part of the Housing and Growth Deal as at the end of Quarter Three, 2023/2024. Kathy Wilcox, Head of Financial Strategy at Oxfordshire County Council and Valerie Lambrechts, Infrastructure Portfolio Manager introduced the report and highlighted that:

- As of December 2023, total Housing from Infrastructure, (Hfi) spend for the 2023/2024 financial year was £14.3m up from £9.2m at the previous quarter.
- Considering the commencement of several key projects, current programme forecast spend of £21m by the end of the financial year.
- A total of £54m needed to be spent by end of the 2024/2025 financial year in light of the criteria agreed by Oxfordshire County Council and Homes England. At the end of 2024/2025 only £1.5m of any outstanding funding could be retained for safety audits and correction of defects only.
- As of Quarter Three, the Hfi Programme was forecast to be over profiled by £1.6m to ensure maximised use of funding, but it was expected that this indicator would return to balance by the end of the programme in 2024/2025.
- As of Quarter Three 2023/2024, £100,000 had been spent against the Housing and Growth Deal Capacity balance of £1.3m at the end of 2022/2023. It was expected that approximately 50% of the outstanding budget would be committed towards the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, staffing costs and the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan, (NZRMAP). Plans for the remaining balance were to be determined.
- Of the budget originally allocated to the Lodge Hill project in Abingdon, some £4m had been returned into the programme budget and then redistributed across other programme projects including the Tramway project in Banbury and the Banbury Road Roundabout project in Bicester. This was because of the successful bid for Brownfield Infrastructure Funding.
- If any further changes in the Housing from Infrastructure Programme were required these would be consulted upon and discussed with affected district councils in advance.

In discussion, Councillor Andy Cooke expressed concern regarding the ongoing urgent need for funding and the completion of the Milton Enterprise Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge scheme on safety grounds. Officers reiterated that Hfi funding had been withdrawn from the project because it was not considered deliverable by the end of 2024/2025 but responded that alternative funding for the project continued to be sought.

Councillor John Broad referred to the Howes Lane project in Bicester and his frustration that although the Howes Lane tunnel project had been delivered, the project to realign the

Howes Lane/Lords Lane Road had not. As a result, delivery of homes from major developments was being held up.

Members of the Panel were reminded that they could enquire as to the status of any scheme in the Hfl programme via the appropriate officers within their own councils.

The Chair suggested that the Panel could express its concern and feedback to the Partnership that alternative sources of funding should be found for the outstanding unfunded Hfl projects as they continued to be important.

In response to a question, Andrew Down commented that there was not a specific time limit on the use of the remaining Capacity Fund to support projects. Regarding OxIS, a consultancy brief had been agreed and a procurement exercise was due to begin. Of the remaining budget, most of it was committed to the NZRMAP and that a plan for the use of remaining funds would be brought to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership in the summer.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the update to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be noted
- 2) Whilst acknowledging the pressures on the Home from Infrastructure Programme funding because of inflation and need to re-prioritise the schemes within it, Panel members reiterated previously expressed significant concerns around several road improvement schemes across the county where Hfl funding had been withdrawn in 2023 but which were still felt to be valuable and urgently required. Alternative sources of funding were urgently needed for these projects.

64. Local Enterprise Partnership Functions: Transition Arrangements

The Panel considered a report to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership which provided overview of the transition of the functions of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, (OxLEP) to Oxfordshire County Council as an upper tier local authority. Bill Cotton, Corporate Director for Environment and Place and Chloe Taylor, Head of Economy, Oxfordshire County Council introduced the report and they along with Nigel Tipple, Chief Executive of OxLEP addressed member questions.

It was highlighted that:

- HM Government had introduced changes to the funding of local enterprise partnerships and mandated the transfer of statutory responsibilities around strategic economic planning to upper tier authorities.
- Joint work had been undertaken with OxLEP to arrange for control of the independent OxLEP company to transfer to the County Council on 1 April 2024 via the governance model of a Local Authority Trading Company, but to retain the current Board, business plan and staff structure.
- A three phased approach to the transfer was planned with an initial six-month period being set aside for the review of the business plan and discussions with members of Future Oxfordshire Partnership, business community and others. Depending on the outcomes of the review and discussions, potential changes to the business plan, funding, governance arrangements and staffing arrangements would be developed. This was intended to maintain the good work and reputation that OxLEP had.
- The OxLEP Board was to be recommended on 12 March 2024 to approve changes to OxLEP's Articles of Association to enact the changes set out within the report. It was

expected that the transfer of membership of the OxLEP company would be completed by 1 April 2024.

In discussion, members of the Panel queried what engagement had already taken place with district councils about the transition and what was planned for as part of the six-month review period set out in Phase Two of the report, particularly about economic development functions that sat with district councils. This was within the context of the importance of the views of the district councils being heard in the consideration of strategic economic planning and the view that they had not been listened to as well as they might have been in recent consultations, for example the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan and how Oxfordshire's rural character had been considered.

The Panel was informed that the detail of discussions was still to be determined, but the County Council was very aware of and accepted the need to work with the district councils. It was planned to work through the Executive Officer Group of the Future Oxfordshire which comprised senior officers from across all the councils and other stakeholders and OxLEP's own economic development officer group. In addition, it was intended to come back with a more formal programme around how councillors in the councils would be engaged.

Officers were asked for more detail on the review of resources referred to in Phase 3 of the report linked to the completion of a new medium-terms business plan and links and interactions with wider economic development resource within the Oxfordshire system. The meeting was informed that in considering the wider economic development resource and capacity available within the Oxfordshire system it was necessary to reflect upon the range of organisations in the space, including the County Council, OxLEP, district councils, but also the universities, business park and science assets and other significant organisations. It was suggested that it was necessary to determine the nature of economic development wanted and to then maximise the resources available to contribute towards this.

The Chair referred to previous Panel discussions where in the Panel's view there needed to be greater engagement with and consideration of the points made by environmental groups and groups outside of the traditional model in the development of strategic economic planning. This was because economic development could not happen in isolation from social and environmental aspects. Farming was also a key Oxfordshire industry that needed to be fully recognised and included in future.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be noted.
2. That the Panel's feedback to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership regarding the OxLEP transition was that it is important that stakeholders from the environmental groups are included as part of the Phase 2 engagement and consultation to ensure that the opinions of these groups on the social and environmental aspects of economic growth are taken into consideration. Engagement with the farming sector as an important Oxfordshire industry was also important.

65. Future Oxfordshire Partnership response to Scrutiny Panel recommendations

The Panel considered the Future Oxfordshire Partnership's response to the Panel's recommendations from the meeting held on 22 January 2024.
LR – connections.

RESOLVED: That the response of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership be noted.

66. Advisory Group updates

(a) Planning Advisory Group update

The Panel considered the notes of the Planning Advisory Group held on 15 December 2023.

In discussion, a member in referring to the advisory group's consideration of the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, (LTCP) commented that they were disappointed that there did not appear to have been mention of the importance of rail freight in taking freight traffic off major trunk roads such as the A34. Comment was also made that planning of East West Rail appeared to be primarily focussed upon passenger transport in light of the potential housing and economic growth opportunities along the route, but that freight issues also needed to be considered.

RESOLVED:

1. The Panel received the notes of the Planning Advisory Group.
2. That the Panel's feedback to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Infrastructure Advisory Group was that it felt that the opportunity to remove freight from roads and onto rail had not been included in the LTCP update to the advisory group when it was an option to reduce traffic. A point was also raised around the electrification of East West Rail trains and how plans for the line appeared to be overly focused on passenger transport and housing or economic growth opportunities along the routes rather than freight opportunities.

(b) Infrastructure Advisory Group

As the notes of the advisory group had not been included in the agenda, consideration was deferred to the next meeting.

(c) Environment Advisory Group update

The Panel considered the notes of the Infrastructure Advisory Group meeting held on 18 January 2024.

RESOLVED: The Panel received the notes of the Environmental Advisory Group.

67. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel

The Panel considered its work programme as set out in the agenda.

The Chair commented that as it was the last Panel meeting of the current municipal year it would be the for newly constituted Panel after the elections to consider its future

programme for 2024/2025 and reminded the Panel on the action from its previous meeting that the Panel's Terms of Reference be reviewed.

Andrew Down, Future Oxfordshire Partnership Director added that given the transition of OxLEP and current local circumstances, it was expected that there would be changes to the Partnership and as a result, consequential changes to the Panel. It was confirmed that the Partnership was a formal statutory joint committee between the Oxfordshire principal councils as provided for under local government legislation. As such, it could technically make decisions if it were to be delegated to do so by the councils.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

68. Dates of next meetings

RESOLVED: That the proposed meeting dates for June 2024 to June 2025 be noted.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked members of the Panel and officers supporting it for all their contributions over the previous year. Members of the Panel paid tribute to Councillor Miles for her chairmanship.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm