

# Joint Scrutiny Committee



Report of Acting Deputy Chief Executive – Partnership and Planning

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## Governance of the Oxfordshire Growth Board

### Recommendation

That the committee notes the contents of this report.

### Purpose of Report

1. Officers have been asked to report to the committee on a number of matters regarding the organisation and governance of the Oxfordshire Growth Board (OGB), and this document is the result.
2. Committee members are referred to the background paper which was considered and agreed by the OGB at its meeting on 24 September 2019, and which can be found on line via the OGB's website [www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org](http://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org). This paper provides a good introduction to the OGB, and a description of the process by which a review is currently being conducted.

### Scope and purpose of the OGB

3. The OGB was established in 2014 as a joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire ('the partner authorities'), together with key strategic partners. It was set up to facilitate and enable joint working on matters concerning economic development, strategic planning and growth. The OGB's establishment was

premised on strengthening partnership arrangements across Oxfordshire for pragmatic working on key strategic issues. It does this by overseeing the delivery of cross-county projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver in a collaborative way – between local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership and wider partners and stakeholders. Generally, however, the Board does not have many decisions it does, or can, take.

4. The OGB replaced the former Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership, the Local Transport Board, and incorporated oversight of the 2014 City Deal with Government. The OGB's operation has sought to align these strategic meetings under a single terms of reference and governing body. The work of the OGB also tangibly demonstrates the partner authorities' willingness to cooperate on strategic planning matters as required under the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework.
5. The OGB has been a route through which Oxfordshire has engaged with opportunities to secure additional investment, such as through the Local Growth Fund, the Housing Infrastructure Fund and the £215m Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The work of the Board has included sponsorship of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and joint leadership on the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study. There are, however, other emerging areas of common interest among the Board's membership: the environment and climate change, healthy place-shaping, inclusive growth, One Public Estate and the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.
6. The OGB operates to terms of reference which were updated in 2018 following the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, though not formally and finally confirmed at South and Vale. Officers anticipate that the terms of reference will be further amended during 2020 to reflect the outcome of the review of the OGB, and that the new revised terms of reference will need to be agreed individually by each partner authority.

### **Attendance at OGB meetings**

7. Meetings of the OGB are open to the public. The chairmanship rotates, usually on an annual basis from July to June, and is currently held by South Oxfordshire.
8. Councillor representation is provided by the leaders or their nominated substitutes, and they are advised by one or both of the chief executive and the acting deputy chief executive – partnership and planning.
9. There is a scrutiny panel with three members from each of the six partner authorities. Although it does not have the powers of a formal overview and scrutiny committee, the panel meets a few days in advance of OGB meetings and is able to scrutinise OGB reports and the work programme. The chair of the panel attends meetings of the OGB in order to report on the panel's work and to make recommendations to the OGB.

### **OGB resources**

10. The accountable body for the OGB is Oxfordshire County Council.

11. The OGB does not employ any staff directly. It has a director (part time), a manager and a democratic services officer who are employed by individual partner authorities and whose costs are shared.
12. Separately, the OGB holds a modest budget made up from contributions made by the partner authorities and used primarily to cover the costs of meetings. This budget is held by the OGB manager.
13. A number of staff have been employed to work on the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. They are employed by individual partner authorities and their costs are met from the capacity funding in the growth deal.

## **Decision-making by the OGB**

14. Although the OGB is constituted as a joint committee, it can only make decisions on matters where it has delegated authority.
15. The only function currently delegated to the OGB by South and Vale (as noted in our constitution) is “to oversee the delivery and implementation of the Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal bid.” The City Deal dates from January 2014 and its projects are largely complete.
16. Aside from the City Deal, no functions are currently explicitly delegated to the OGB, though the unapproved 2018 terms of reference would also include oversight of matters relating to the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. The OGB therefore cannot (and does not) make formal decisions. Instead, the focus is on finding consensus on matters which are then subject to formal decision making within each of the partner authorities.
17. Specifically, the OGB does not have the power to bind any member authority to a decision. The terms of reference (both the 2014 and 2018 versions) make this clear.

## **Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal**

18. The OGB has a role to monitor and oversee the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, which was agreed by all of the partner authorities through the council decisions taken in February 2018.
19. The growth deal has a number of work streams. The productivity stream is led by OxLEP (the local enterprise partnership) and is currently focussed on the local industrial strategy for Oxfordshire. The other three work streams (infrastructure, affordable housing, Oxfordshire Plan 2050) each have a member subgroup of the OGB with councillor representatives from each of the partner authorities meeting on a regular basis.
20. The deal includes £30 million a year for five years to help accelerate infrastructure projects including road, rail, cycle routes and footpaths, as well as social infrastructure such as schools. More than 40 projects have now been allocated funding for the five-year period. The infrastructure programme is led by the county council.
21. There is a total of £60 million in the growth deal which is intended to bring forward more affordable housing. Officers currently anticipate that a substantial scheme is likely to come forward soon in the Vale, subject to cabinet decision.

22. The joint statutory spatial plan, Oxfordshire Plan 2050, will set out a high-level strategic plan for Oxfordshire. As a joint plan it will be subject to adoption within the five local planning authorities by vote of each full council.

### **Review of the OGB**

23. The background paper describes the parameters for the review of the OGB which is currently in progress. Among other outcomes, officers anticipate that the review should lead to improvements in:

- clarity of the purpose of the OGB (and potentially a new name)
- transparency of its operations
- opportunities for genuine public participation.

24. The initial findings from the review are due to be presented to the OGB at its meeting on 28 January 2020.

### **Background Papers**

- “Growth Board Review Scope”, OGB 24 September 2019