

**To:** Oxfordshire Growth Board  
**Title of Report:** Growth Board Review Scope  
**Date:** 24 September 2019  
**Report of:** Growth Board Director  
**Status:** Public

**Executive Summary and Purpose:**

This report sets out a proposed scope for the Growth Board Review. It considers what the key themes of the review will be, and what will not be included in the review. It also provides an overview of who will be involved in the review and how. The Growth Board is asked to approve the review scope, subject to any agreed alterations.

**Recommendation:**

That the Growth Board approves the scope and approach to the review of its role and functions as set out in this report.

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Themes and questions to guide the review

## Introduction

1. The Oxfordshire Growth Board ('the Board') was established in 2014 as a Joint Committee<sup>1</sup> 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 Board'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.<sup>2</sup> Generally however, the Board does not have many decisions it does, or can, take.
2. The Board replaced the former Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership, the Local Transport Board, and incorporated oversight of the 2014 City Deal with

<sup>1</sup> under s101 (5), 102 Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) and s9EB Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000) and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.

<sup>2</sup> As a Joint Committee, the Board may discharge executive functions, but each constituent authority retains the ability to exercise all executive and non-executive functions generally and specifically in relation to economic development including where applicable provision of housing, strategic spatial planning and strategic transport planning.

Government. The Board's operation has sought to align these strategic meetings under a single Terms of Reference and governing body.<sup>3</sup> The work of the Board 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.

3. The Board 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. More recently, 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.
4. The Board considers that it is now timely to review its role and function to ensure that the most pragmatic and effective arrangements are in place to enable collaboration and delivery on Oxfordshire wide priorities. This means reflecting on how the Board has operated to date and whether its structures and processes remain appropriate and fit for the future.

### **Scope of the Review**

5. Officers supporting the Growth Board have devised a scope for the review based on engagement with the Growth Board's membership and having regard to feedback received from various stakeholders, including the public, to date. The final draft of the review scope is presented within this report for the Growth Board's consideration.
6. In the lead up to this review, some stakeholders have requested greater clarity about the role and purpose of the Board, and there are some common misunderstandings about the Board's functions and the roles of its membership. Some have called for increased public access to, and transparency of, the Board's work. Administrative challenges have also arisen as a result the current meetings schedule, reporting process and the availability of resources. These are all issues that will be considered within the review.
7. Many of these challenges are not unique to the Board however, and the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)<sup>4</sup> both note that matters of public engagement, logistics, joint resourcing and agreeing cross-county objectives are challenging in other similar joint committee arrangements.<sup>5</sup>

It is important that the role of local partnerships is considered in the long term and the role the Growth Board could play in that context. Accordingly, membership, format and function of the Board should be revisited to consider

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<sup>3</sup> Oxfordshire Growth Board. 2014. Terms of Reference.

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Public Scrutiny. 2014. Growth through good governance. Available at: <https://www.cfps.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Growth-through-Good-Governance.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> LGA. 2017. A Councillors Workbook on Scrutiny. Available at: [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2064\\_Scrutiny%20for%20councillors\\_03\\_1.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/11%2064_Scrutiny%20for%20councillors_03_1.pdf)

how the Board's work might better engage with non-local authority partners who also have a key role in shaping places within Oxfordshire.

8. Any pre-existing commitment made as part of the agreement with Central Government regarding the Housing and Growth Deal or other formal programmes of work will not form part of this review. The review will be resigned to the high-level purpose and processes of the Board only and this will not be a review of the Housing and Growth Deal itself. The governance arrangements associated with the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, agreement to participate in the formation of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, and individual councils' own governance arrangements, for example, will be excluded from this review.

### **Approach to the Review**

9. The Review will be managed by the Growth Board Director and Growth Board Manager in line with the agreed scope. Subject to approval by the Board on 24 September 2019, the review will be divided into three distinct themes; role and function, capability and resources, and process and structures.
10. Within these themes are a sub-set of questions which will help guide the review (appendix 1). These questions provide a thematic framework for; assessing how effective the Board is in its role, a structure for inviting contributions to the review and presenting conclusions. This framework is based in part on existing public sector guidance on well-led governance reviews. A summary of the three themes for the review is set out below:

#### Role and Function

11. The role of the Board is not well understood, and the starting point for this work should be a fundamental review of the Board's role and how it might change. Consideration should also be given to what the Board's role could be going forward, and how its status as a cross-county forum of leaders from key institutions could benefit Oxfordshire and its residents. This will require the Board to reflect on its objectives, how it communicates those objectives, and how aligned or otherwise they are with existing workstreams and commitments.
12. The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, which was agreed in April 2018, has brought new responsibilities agreed with Central Government. Beyond a recent focus on this work however, the Board has increasingly sought to utilise its current remit to seek consensus on other cross-county issues. The Board has limited decision-making powers, but it can facilitate local debate and collaboration on issues for which each member may exercise their local influence over. Whichever role the Board undertakes, there needs to be greater clarity about the Board's its decision-making powers. Any revised role will require the Board's Terms of Reference to be updated and agreed, which also provides an opportunity to consider changing the Board's name if required.

#### Capability and Resources

13. The review should consider what capacity the Board has available to deliver its objectives and fulfil its current role, and what capacity it might need in the future

to address any new functions it undertakes. The Board's staffing arrangements have until recently relied on good will partnership arrangements between the Oxfordshire Councils, drawing on existing resources within those authorities. There has however been a recent focus to secure more stable fixed-term staffing arrangements to support the development of the Growth Deal and the functioning of the Board. Consideration needs to be given to whether the current workforce enables the Board to fulfil its role and function now and into the future.

14. The Board's membership has evolved over time and so has its areas of focus. A fresh look should be taken as to the role of Board members, voting and non-voting, and whether the membership could be different or more fluid to meet the demands of its current role, or any new direction.

### Process and Structures

15. Finally, the Board's governance structure should be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and allows for swift but transparent decision-making at the right levels. This includes reviewing what function each of the bodies supporting the Board serves and the value they add.
16. There is a need for transparency and clarity as to what decisions are needed, and where decisions are taken, so that the role of the Board as a 'decision maker' is properly understood. A critical challenge for the review is to identify how councillors and members of the public and stakeholders can engage with the Board's work where appropriate. This includes reviewing public participation procedures, the use of social media and the style of meetings that are held, for example.
17. The production of reports and the schedule of meetings requires review to ensure that information is produced in a timely manner, with enough time made available for the public, councillors and officers to prepare for those meetings. The relationship between the scheduling of the Board, Advisory Sub-groups and the Scrutiny Panel require review to reduce delays and bottlenecks in the reporting process.

### **Review Engagement**

18. Subject to agreement, the review will commence on 24 September 2019. Its conclusions and process will be public facing and recommendations for improvement will be presented to the Board on 28 January 2020 for consideration. The following engagement activities are expected to be undertaken during the review period:
  - a) A public survey will be issued online asking broad questions in line with those included at appendix 1. These will allow free text to be entered. Questions will be broad enough to allow responses from officers, councillors and members of the public. Data will also be gathered to help understand any demographic weighting in the responses. The survey will be available via the Growth Board's webpage from 25 September 2019.

- b) A workshop with the membership of the Growth Board. This will also be supported by the offer of direct interviews with each member of the Board.
- c) A workshop will be held on 18 November 2019 to enlist views from local stakeholder group leads and the public. Sign up for this event will be coordinated through the online survey on a first come first served basis. Requests to participate in the workshop can also be received by contacting [Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk).
- d) A workshop will be held on 4 November 2019 to enlist views from district and county councillors within Oxfordshire. Requests to participate can be submitted through the online survey or through direct requests to [Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk)
- e) Interviews will be offered to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel, Growth Board Executive Officers (the senior responsible officers from each local authority) and existing staff supporting the Board. The Scrutiny Panel may wish to agree a formal response to the review as a collective at their meeting on 21 November 2019.
- f) A desktop review of similar governance structures that exist elsewhere in the UK (e.g. Combined Authorities / Joint Committees / Other Growth Deals) will be undertaken to reflect on governance and engagement practices elsewhere.

### **Review Analysis**

- 19. The review will conclude with a report to the Board on 28 January 2020, which may also be reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel on 23 January 2020. The report will provide a thematic analysis of the responses given to the review and will be supported by recommendations and options for making changes and improvements to the Board's ways of working.

### **Role of the Scrutiny Panel**

- 20. The Board's Terms of Reference stipulate the establishment of a Scrutiny Panel to review decisions and make recommendations to the Board. This review will gather feedback on the role and function of the Scrutiny Panel and present findings. However, it is considered a matter for the Scrutiny Panel to decide how it wishes to exercise its functions within the resources available and within the role set out in the Board's Terms of Reference. Officers will work with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Panel to develop reports and recommendations for the Panel to consider as appropriate.

### **Improvements already underway**

- 21. Whilst some of the more fundamental issues around the Board's role and ambitions require wider engagement and analysis, there are some improvements that are already underway where there is a clear consensus on the issues. These are summarised below:

- The report approval process is under review, with officers considering how to streamline the process and improve the frequency of reports being made available on time for meetings held in public.
- The Board has indicated that it would be preferable to reduce the frequency and length of presentations at its meetings given the limited time available. Reports in advance of the meeting should be expected as standard. If presentations are considered necessary, they should be limited to ten minutes.
- A forward plan of meetings will be published with each Growth Board agenda and separately on the Growth Board's webpage. This document will set out what items will be considered at which meetings and will list issues as far in advance as possible. This will in turn support the Scrutiny Panel in developing their own work plan.
- A new stakeholder mapping exercise is underway for the Board, Growth Deal and its workstreams, and this will take account of any new ways of operating following the conclusion of the Board's review.
- A role profile is being developed for the host authority to set clearer guidelines as to their remit in supporting the Board.

## Timeline

22. The timeline for the review process is set out below:

Scrutiny Panel meeting	19 September 2019
Growth Board meeting and formal start of the review	24 September 2019
Workshop with Councillors	4 November 2019
Workshop with Local Stakeholder Groups	18 November 2019
Closure of the review	6 December 2019
Concluding report and recommendations published	17 January 2020
Scrutiny Panel considers final report	23 January 2020
Growth Board considers final report	28 January 2020

## Financial Implications

23. There are no financial implications arising from this report and the review will be carried out within existing resources. There may however be financial implications arising from the recommendations made as a result of the review, which will be detailed in the concluding report to the Board on 28 January 2020.

## Legal Implications

24. There are no legal implications arising from this report. This is a non-statutory review, however there may be governance implications arising from the

recommendations made as a result of the review, which will be detailed in the concluding report to the Board on 28 January 2020.

### **Conclusion**

25. This report sets out a high-level approach and scope for undertaking a review of the Board's role and working arrangements. The Board is asked to approve the scope and approach to the review as set out in the report.

### **Background papers**

26. Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference 26 April 2018.

Report Author:	Bev Hindle, Growth Board Director
Contact information:	<a href="mailto:Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk">Oxfordshire.growthboard@southandvale.gov.uk</a>

## **Appendix 1: Key questions and themes for the review**

### **Role and function**

1. What should be the Growth Board's strategy, purpose and objectives? Is an alternative name required to better reflect its role?
2. Are the challenges to delivering on the Board's current objectives well understood and is an appropriate plan to meet those challenges in place?
3. Is there suitable communication infrastructure in place to ensure that partner councils, stakeholders and the public remain informed, and where appropriate, involved in the Growth Board's work?

### **Capability and Resources**

4. Does the Growth Board and its governance arrangements have the appropriate officer resources and skills, now and into the future, to carry out its role and meet its objectives?
5. Is the membership, (both voting and non-voting) of the Growth Board appropriate for its role and purpose? Does the Growth Board's membership receive appropriate support to be effective in its role?
6. To what extent is it appropriate that the Growth Board's support is dependent on informal or temporary staffing arrangements, and what mitigation measures should be put in place to maintain continuity?

### **Process and structures**

7. Does the current governance structure in its entirety support the effective functioning and management of the Growth Board's work?
8. Is there clear milestones and performance monitoring information to support the effective management and scrutiny of the Growth Board's work?
9. Does the Growth Board conduct its business with the right level of transparency and engage with stakeholders and the public meaningfully in the right way at the right time?
10. Is there sufficient transparency and clarity as to what decisions are needed and where decisions are taken so that the role of the Growth Board as a 'decision maker' (as opposed to the role of the constituent individual Authorities) is properly understood and functioning as it should?