

Notes

OF A MEETING OF THE



The Future Oxfordshire Partnership Infrastructure Advisory Group

HELD ON THURSDAY 6 JUNE 2024 AT 2.00 PM

Present:

Members : Councillor Liz Leffman (Chair), Councillor Andrew Crawford, Councillor Andy Graham, Councillor Sam James-Lawrie, Councillor Lesley McLean, Councillor Judy Roberts and Councillor Louise Upton

Officers: Andrew Down, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Susan Harbour (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Kim Hudson, (West Oxfordshire District Council), Kevin Jacob, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Jo Miskin, (Cherwell District Council), Babatunde Ogundele, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership), Vikki Robins, (Oxford City Council), Mark Saunders, (Oxfordshire County Council), Paul Staines, (Future Oxfordshire Partnership).

124 Apologies for absence and notification of substitutes; declaration of interests; Chair's announcements

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Charlie Maynard, West Oxfordshire District Council (substituted by Councillor Andy Graham), and Councillor Pieter-Paul Barker, South Oxfordshire District Council (substituted by Councillor Sam James-Lawrie).

Councillor Liz Leffman highlighted that the primary purpose of the meeting was to deliberate on the Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) business case and reach a consensus on whether Councillors advocate for the paper to go to the next Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) meeting.

Councillor Liz Leffman highlighted that the meeting is taking place because the FOP meeting that was originally scheduled for the 25 June 2024 but was rescheduled due to the general elections. She also reminded Councillors and Officers that the LAEP was also discussed at the last meeting on the 12 March 2024.

Councillor Andy Crawford expressed his concern that there has been insufficient notice and time to properly evaluate the papers and the potential repercussions and risks associated with the joint South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils'

Local Plan and that there was no longer an urgent need to consider the proposals with the cancellation of the June FOP meeting. He proposed that discussion on the LAEP proposals should be deferred to a rescheduled meeting.

Andrew Down, as FOP Director acknowledged the short notice of the circulated papers. He verified that thorough officer-based procedures and discussions had been undertaken, with two groups dedicated to the LAEPs: a Working Group and an Executive Steering Board. Andrew Down commented that Vale of White Horse District Council Officers had been actively engaged in both groups.

Andrew Down verified that the Vale of White Horse representative on the Steering Board explicitly approved moving forward with this initiative. The paper was then presented at the Executive Officer Group (EOG) meeting, supporting the FOP, where it had been supported by representatives from all the councils. Officers from all councils have actively contributed to the development of the project and had had ample opportunities to provide feedback.

Councillor Andy Crawford queried the potential implications of the LAEP proposal for the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire joint local plan and whether the resource requirements have been adequately assessed. In response, Andrew Down stated that he could not provide that assessment as he was present at the meeting in his capacity as the FOP Director. Andrew Down indicated the need for Councillor Crawford to consult the South and Vale officers for this information.

At this point, the Chair confirmed with the other council representatives that they did not want to adjourn, and the meeting proceeded.

125 Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) Business Case

The Advisory Group was provided with a presentation by Mark Saunders, Energy Systems and Investment Manager, Oxfordshire County Council on the Local Area Energy Planning Business Case.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- That it was recommended that the advisory group support the agreement by the FOP of Option 4
- That in agreeing Option 4 there will be a resourcing requirement on the District Councils equal to an estimated 138 days over 24 months.

The presentation also highlighted the following benefits of the LAEP:

- Planned decarbonisation to meet net zero targets.
- Responsive / proactive grid management. Reducing overdependence on increasing grid capacity.
- Reduced network impacts
- Increased / planned investment and economic activity.
- Effective Planning System integration
- Regional Energy System Planning engagement
- Governance and local mandate
- Community / stakeholder engagement

The presentation highlighted that resourcing risk to the districts could be reduced by the following:

- Introducing stage gates to enable Districts to move at different paces and potentially opt out.
- OCC could support District client activity at phase 2
- There was the potential for additional resources to support Districts if a bid for LEO-N funding was successful.
- Delegation of some aspects to third parties
- Reduced involvement in co-creation of LAEP Function

Councillor Andy Crawford emphasised the necessity for the budget approval at the district level and expressed uncertainty about how the FOP could reach a decision in that regard. Additionally, he mentioned receiving officer advice from the S151 South and Vale officer, which indicated that the cost might exceed what was suggested in the document for Vale of White Horse District Council. Mark Saunders verified that this amount has been deliberated at the district level with all officers from councils throughout the county. This figure represented the agreed average across the County for district participation. For South and Vale District Councils, it might be marginally lower due to the shared administrative functions between the two councils.

Andrew Down added that the £600,000 funding originated from the Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Fund, managed by the FOP on behalf of all partners. This allocation does not affect the budget of individual councils.

Councillor Andy Graham enquired whether the County Council could help in addressing the capacity challenge over the specified duration or if the districts must allocate funds equivalent to the £26,000 during the outlined period.

Councillor Judy Roberts enquired whether the additional £450,000 had been assigned from the Housing and Growth Deal Capacity Fund, as she was under the impression that there wasn't that much surplus available.

Andrew Down emphasised that there is approximately £1.15m remaining in that fund. The main purpose of presenting this proposal to the FOP is to secure approval for allocating the extra £450,000. He also clarified that this funding comes from the capacity fund, not the Homes from Infrastructure (HFI) fund.

Councillor Louise Upton pointed out that comparatively, Oxford City Council had a larger sustainability team, making it potentially more manageable for the City to handle this workstream compared to other districts. She raised concerns about the potential implications if other districts withdraw and questioned whether it would have a detrimental impact on the strategic initiatives county-wide if some districts opted out. Mark Saunders emphasised that the initial strategic work did not demand extensive involvement from the districts. Districts will contribute more significantly during Phase 2 when they formulate individual LAEPs. It was acknowledged that district councils may progress at varying speeds due to the project's duration, but ultimately, all districts will converge at the same point in having an individual LAEP.

Councillor Louise Upton expressed her hope for the Local Energy Oxfordshire Network (LEO-N) funding to be secured.

Mark Saunders highlighted that Oxfordshire County Council had allocated resources to collaborate with district councils, providing support to the districts with contract client, project management, and other tasks to alleviate the burden on the districts. Nevertheless, the County's resources were limited.

Councillor Andy Graham stated that following internal briefings and discussions, West Oxfordshire District Council was in favour of supporting Option 4 moving forward, with considerations such as providing support for districts.

Councillor Judy Roberts commented that an energy strategy had been previously presented to the FOP and enquired about the potential increased influence of the LAEP in planning matters. Mark Saunders confirmed that this would be a key part of the policy picture and LAEPs would provide an extra level of granular detail.

Councillor Louise Upton affirmed that Oxford City Council supported the initiative, and that Option 4 appeared to be the most favourable choice in terms of both effectiveness and cost-efficiency.

Councillor Liz Leffman highlighted that one of the advantages of having the LAEP plan is that it gave the County and Districts more leverage with the Distribution Network Operators (DNOs).

Councillor Andy Crawford pointed out that while he did not specifically oppose Option 4, he did continue to have reservations regarding the potential impact of the LAEP on the joint local plan. As a result, he could not support progressing the proposals at the current time and abstained.

Councillor Liz Leffman indicated that there would be sufficient opportunity to address any unresolved matters or concerns with the different district councils. Additionally, there was an extended period to engage with officers before the FOP meeting scheduled for the 30 July 2024, where a final formal decision could be reached.

Councillor Judy Roberts supported Option 4 going forward on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

Councillor Liz Leffman proposed that the document be presented at the FOP meeting in July, with the endorsement by the advisory group of Option 4 as the preferred course of action. This was supported by the representatives present, with the abstention of Vale of White Horse District Council.

It was agreed that:

1. That IAG recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it note the OxLAEP Programme Scope Report as approved by the Local Area Energy Planning Executive Steering Board.
2. That IAG recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it agree Option 4 of the Outline Business Case.
3. That IAG recommended to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership that it asks district council partners to note and agree the resource requirements of endorsing option 4, including the mitigations proposed.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair thanked Mark Saunders for his presentation to the Advisory Group and the clarifications given in the meeting.

The meeting closed at 2.50 pm