

Cherwell District Council

Update on Oxford – Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership

Purpose of report

Proposals for a locally led Partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge region have been formally approved by government. The Partnership's role will be to champion the region as a world leader in research and innovation in hi-tech, high-performance technology and manufacturing, acting to achieve environmentally sustainable and inclusive growth. It will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration among its partners to focus on tackling the issues that matter to the people who live and work in the region.

The Partnership's initial programme is to:

- develop a set of propositions to attract international investment and profile the region on a global stage; and
- continue the work underway to embed shared Environment Principles.

The Secretary of State Rt Hon Michael Gove MP has confirmed support following a proposal submitted to government by leaders from local councils, local enterprise partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and the area's transport body, England's Economic Heartland. Backing for the pan-regional partnership unlocks access to up to £2.5million government funding for the Partnership, with £500k in year to support activity to deliver an Investment Prospectus & Atlas, a significant Environment Programme 1. Nature Recovery Strategy Support 2. Minerals & Waste Restoration Environmental Gain 3. Regional Energy & Water Strategy Scoping) and a Data Observatory & Innovation Network

1.0 Recommendations

The meeting is recommended to agree that:

- 1.1 Cherwell District Council to be part of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership as it becomes formally recognised and funded by Government as a Pan-Regional Partnership (PRP);
- 1.2 The Leader is appointed as the Council's representative on the PRP. The Leader was appointed the ARC representative in June 2022.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership is a collaboration amongst willing Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and universities from across the Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire region. The Partnership is not a formal committee in Local Government terms but as a condition of gaining Government support and funding, it is required to have the following:
 - a constitution which includes clarity on governance, membership, openness and transparency, which sits as part of a wider performance and assurance framework which covers financial and risk management
 - a committed work programme which builds on the Partnership's consensus in terms of priorities, objectives and expected outcomes

- as part of the governance arrangements there needs to be a representative Board from across the Partnership including an Independent Chair

3.0 Report Details

- 3.1 On 18th January 2023, Secretary of State Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP endorsed the proposition to set up a pan regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge geography. Letter attached at appendix 1.
- 3.2.1 The overall purpose of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership will be to champion the Oxford to Cambridge region as a world leader of innovation and business, acting on shared interests in delivering environmentally sustainable economic growth that brings benefits to communities now and in future.
- 3.2.2 The Partnership will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration so that joint working is locally-led and focused on the issues that matter to people who live and work in the region. The Partnership will define the outcomes it seeks to achieve but it does not have delegated authority or any formal or legal decision-making powers from any of its partner members.
- 3.2.3 Currently, the priorities of the Partnership are focussed on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future.
- 3.2.4 Government endorsement of the Partnership unlocks the opportunity of up to £2.5million for the remainder of the current Spending Review period (to 2024/25).

Governance

- 3.5 A Shadow Board is in place to oversee an initial partnership programme and agree governance and funding arrangements. The Shadow Board will be in place until the initial conditions and milestones have been met (i.e. constitution in place, Independent Chair selected). It is anticipated the Board will meet outside of shadow form by June 2023.
- 3.6 Members of the Shadow Board are:
- Cllr Barry Wood, Leader Cherwell District Council sitting as Interim Chair of the Shadow Board.
 - Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council, representing the Future Oxfordshire Partnership as current Chair
 - Cllr Pete Marland, Leader of Milton Keynes City Council, representing the Central Area Growth Board as current Co-Chair
 - Cllr Richard Wenham, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, representing the Central Area Growth Board as current Co-Chair
 - Cllr Anna Smith, Leader of Cambridge City Council and currently Acting Mayor, representing the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
 - Professor Alistair Fitt, Pro-Vice Chancellor Oxford Brookes University representing the Arc Universities Group as current Chair

- Peter Horrocks CBE, Chair of SEMLEP, representing Chairs of LEPs and Business Boards and, sitting as interim Chair of the Economy Sub-Group.
- Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader South Cambridgeshire District Council sitting as interim Chair of the Environment Sub-Group
- To be confirmed, Representative from England's Economic Heartland

3.8 Once fully operational, there will be three main layers to the governance model: an overarching Plenary group which includes all partners which will meet at least annually; a main Board which will oversee governance, work programme delivery and communications; Sub-Groups which are themed groups (currently economy and environment) which focus on specific project delivery. All groups will be supported by a small operational team as well as an Accountable Body.

3.9 The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership Board will succeed the shadow board to oversee the work and operations of the Partnership, as agreed by its members. Representation on this Board will include:

- An Independent Chair;
- One Chair from each of the member Growth Boards or equivalent sub-regional groups (plus an additional Co-Chair from the Central Area Growth Board);
- One Chair representing each of the Board's Programme Sub-Groups;
- One Chair each from the main constituent stakeholder groups: one on behalf of all Local Enterprise Partnerships, one on behalf of the Arc Universities Group, and one from England's Economic Heartland.
- A minimum of two Independent Stakeholders (NEDs) as selected by the Board
- Senior Government representatives (whilst the Board is in receipt of core Government funding).

Accountable Body

3.7 Cherwell District Council is currently the Accountable Body for the Partnership. Such a body is required for the Partnership given direct public funding from partners and Government. This role involves the Council having oversight and responsibility for ensuring proper governance, financial and risk management is in place and operational. This will involve officer support principally in the areas of legal, finance, human resources and from the Chief Executive and senior team.

4.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 Cherwell District Council supports partnership working locally, across Oxfordshire and beyond as there are real benefits to be achieved through potentially more efficient working, effective delivery at scale as well as access to additional funding and strength in working with and influencing central Government.

4.2 The Oxford to Cambridge region is an area of economic success and will continue to be so. It has been the consistent view of the Council to try its best to positively influence that growth and seek the greatest benefits for our communities. By working with other sector partners, as well as key stakeholders who directly influence that economic growth but who also seek to gain benefits for our local natural environment, we can benefit from sharing

best practice, learning and also engage directly with those who have the most influence on our places and people. For these reasons it is recommended the Council continues to not only remain as a local partner, but to actively engage and where beneficial to the district, to lead wider partnership activity.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

6.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to be part of the PRP. This was rejected as the ability to positively influence collaboration across this geography and the access to resulting additional funding would be lost, to the detriment to the communities of Cherwell District Council.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

7.1 The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership currently has transition funding of £250,000 from Government with access to a further £250,000 this year plus local partner contributions. This money is being committed to support the transition programme of delivery, recruitment of the Chair and to support a small transition team until the Partnership is formally set up.

7.2 There is commitment from Government for access to a further £2,500,000 over the next two financial years, subject to business case being agreed. As part of accessing this funding local contributions are required, both in officer time and in cash contributions. This financial year's contribution was £4,000. This contribution has been provided for within the Council's 2023/24 proposed budget. The Council also receives a payment in recognition of acting as the Accountable Body.

Comments checked by:

Legal Implications – Mandatory paragraph

7.4 The Council is the Accountable Body and will have specific obligations in connection with the operational management including risk management and governance. The PRP constitution is being drafted which will set out the principles and rules governing it. There will also be a formal partnership agreement between the partners.

Comments checked by:

Risk Implications - Mandatory paragraph

7.5

Equalities and Inclusion Implications

7.6

Sustainability Implications

- 7.5 The priorities of the Partnership are focussed on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future.
The implications of supporting the Partnership would be to benefit from a wider, strategic approach to delivery of its sustainable, climate impact reducing priorities.

Comments checked by: Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities
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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision (Executive reports only; state N/A if not Executive report)

Financial Threshold Met: **No**

Community Impact Threshold Met: **No**

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan and Policy Framework

Lead Councillor

Document Information

Appendix number and title

- Annex 1 Letter from SofS

Report Author and contact details

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