

CABINET
– 25 March 2025

Citizens' assembly update report

**Report by: Director of public affairs, policy and partnerships and
director of environment and highways**

RECOMMENDATION

1. Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Commit to considering and responding to the key recommendations of the travel and transport citizens' assembly included in Annex A to this report.
- b) Formally request that Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee consider the council's response to the assembly recommendations, prior to consideration by Cabinet in July 2025.
- c) Record its thanks to the residents who participated in the travel and transport citizens' assembly.

Executive summary

2. In February and March 2025, 34 Oxfordshire residents selected by democratic lottery took part in Oxfordshire County Council's first ever citizens' assembly. Participants dedicated 45 hours across nine meetings and 14 separate sessions to answer the following challenge question:

'What steps do we need to take so Oxfordshire's transport system enables our county's health, economy, and environment to thrive in 2050?'

3. The assembly's purpose was to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the council's local transport and connectivity plan (LTCP) can be achieved in ways that best meet the needs and preferences of the people of Oxfordshire and other stakeholders. Part of the scope of the assembly was to consider congestion in central Oxfordshire and the core schemes in the central Oxfordshire travel plan.
4. This initial report published immediately after the conclusion of the assembly describes the process followed, presents the key recommendations from the assembly and sets out how the council intends to respond to them using a structured framework. It is proposed that a full report of the citizens' assembly and the council's response to the assembly's recommendations will be prepared for cabinet in July 2025.

Background

5. In February 2024, Council approved a budget for 2024/25 which included a Labour and Co-operative Party Group amendment for a citizens' assembly on transport in central Oxfordshire. A one-off £150k investment was allocated for this purpose.
6. In autumn 2024, the council commissioned MutualGain to deliver its travel and transport citizens' assembly. The contract was to deliver an assembly of up to 40 participants, who would meet over the course of 30 hours.
7. On 21 January 2025, in response to a motion agreed at Council on 10 December 2024, Cabinet agreed changes to the citizens' assembly. This was to extend the duration of citizens' assembly by 15 hours to allow a dedicated focus to be given to congestion in central Oxfordshire and the council's suite of traffic management measures in central Oxfordshire (including traffic filters trial, the workplace parking levy, and the expanded zero emissions zone).
8. In February 2025, Council approved a budget for 2025/26 which included a Labour and Co-operative Party Group amendment in two areas for follow-up funding related to the citizens' assembly. These were a one-off £50k investment to publicise the findings of the citizens assembly and undertake a follow-up public engagement exercise, and a recurring £50k investment for two financial years to support the recommendations of the citizens' assembly on travel and transport.

About the council's travel and transport citizens' assembly

9. A citizens' assembly is a broadly representative group of residents who are chosen by democratic lottery. Citizens' assemblies follow agreed standards and usually adopt a three-step process whereby participants:
 - learn by hearing evidence from a wide range of experts and questioning these;
 - deliberate with one another, carefully considering what they have heard and weighing up the pros and cons; and
 - reach collective recommendations on what they think should be done, with each recommendation aiming for 80 per cent agreement across all assembly members.
10. Recruitment to the council's travel and transport citizens' assembly was led by the Sortition Foundation. Forty Oxfordshire residents were selected by democratic lottery to take part against broad quotas designed to reflect the population make-up of the county in terms of geography, demographics, driver status and attitudes towards climate change. Of the 40 residents selected, a core group of 34 assembly members attended every meeting, with the assembly's structure remaining broadly representative of the county's population profile.
11. An independent advisory board, convened to provide oversight for the council's travel and transport citizens' assembly and to help to develop the structure of the assembly, comprised 18 members. The advisory board membership included experts on deliberative democracy; transport; behavioural insights; cross-party political representation; and local experts. Full details are listed on the county council's website at oxfordshire.gov.uk/citizensassembly
12. All citizens' assemblies start with a challenge question to be answered, set by the commissioning organisation and refined by an independent advisory board. The challenge question for the council's travel and transport citizens' assembly was:

'What steps do we need to take so Oxfordshire's transport system enables our county's health, economy, and environment to thrive in 2050?'

13. The assembly's purpose was to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the council's local transport and connectivity plan (LTCP) can be achieved in ways that best meet the needs and preferences of the people of Oxfordshire and other stakeholders.

How was the citizens' assembly structured?

14. The assembly was structured into four distinct phases as follows:
 - introductory phase (12 hours)

- learning phase (18 hours)
- trade-off phase (six hours)
- recommendations phase (six hours).

Supported by:

- pre-reading, homework and evaluation activities (three hours).

15. During the introductory and learning phase, assembly members heard from over 40 experts providing wide ranging information and covering different perspectives. These included academics, businesses representatives, community representatives, travel and transport specialists and council officers.
16. In designing the assembly, MutualGain took account of discussions at the assembly's independent advisory board that highlighted the need to enable public deliberation around implementation of travel and transport interventions while ensuring agreed policy is clearly communicated and democratic decisions are respected. An important part of the process was ensuring participants were equipped with a clear understanding of democratic decisions made by the council, including those not yet implemented, while being encouraged to offer future ideas and constructive insights into how initiatives could be effectively delivered.
17. Set out in paragraphs 18 - 29 below is a high level outline for each of the eleven introductory and learning phase sessions from the assembly.
18. **Session 1:** focused on building connections, creative visioning and understanding the role of the citizens' assembly. Input was provided by the deputy director of the Constitution Unit at University College London (UCL).
19. **Session 2:** focused on building an understanding of travel and transport in Oxfordshire. Input was as follows:
 - A historic view of travel and transport policy in Oxfordshire by the director of the Transport Studies Unit at the University of Oxford.
 - The council's responsibilities regarding travel and transport, the financial landscape, the democratic landscape now and into the future by the council's executive director of resources and Section 151 officer.
 - The importance and challenges of partnership working on travel and transport by the council's director of economy and place.
 - An introduction to Oxfordshire's local transport and connectivity plan by the council's strategic transport manager.
20. **Session 3:** focused on fair road budgeting and explored the different groups that use the roads and considered how to ensure fairness in road usage. It was run in workshop format by the executive director, LSE Cities at the London School of Economics and Political Science. As an output, participants created a hierarchy of use.

21. **Session 4:** mainly focused on people and transport. Assembly members were invited to be custodians of different personas created by advisory board members for the duration of the assembly. Input was provided as follows:
- Video summary of Oxfordshire's director of public health annual report 2023-2024, which calls residents to take individual action to tackle climate change for the benefit of their health.
 - Public expectations and desires for transport by a representative from the national user voice organisation, Transport Focus.
 - Young people's views on future transport in Oxfordshire, output from a county council day-long sounding board event with secondary school aged children.
 - Specially commissioned video featuring perspectives from often underrepresented voices.
 - Introduction to the relationship between travel and transport and the county's economy by a representative from Enterprise Oxfordshire (formerly the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership).
22. **Session 5:** focused on active travel including its definition and introducing various walking and cycling schemes; and cycling and walking infrastructure in the county. Input was from representatives from Sustrans and Oxfordshire Cycling Network. Participants also took part in a practical workshop run by the council's technical lead for active travel looking at scheme prioritisation. As an output, participants created a hierarchy for how schemes could be prioritised based on eight criteria.
23. **Session 6:** had a specific focus on the central Oxfordshire travel plan area. It included an overview of core schemes and other travel and transport interventions from council officers. The session was preceded by an introductory session on understanding valued disagreements by a postdoctoral researcher in global health ethics from the Nuffield Department of Medicine at the University of Oxford.
24. Session 6 largely comprised of hearing different perspectives in film and facilitated discussion format, including three representatives from Oxford Business Action Group; and representatives from Oxford Licensed Cab Association, Oxfordshire Liveable Streets, a shop owner in East Oxford and a tradesperson based in Oxford. The director of the Transport Studies Unit at the University of Oxford and the executive director, LSE Cities at the London School of Economics and Political Science joined representatives from the council for a separate facilitated discussion.
25. **Session 7:** continued the focus on the central Oxfordshire travel plan and included input from the council's place planning manager and the director of the Transport Studies Unit at the University of Oxford, who explored comparable schemes nationally and locally. The assembly then spent time in workshop format facilitated by MutualGain considering how any revenue generated from a workplace parking levy in Oxford might best be allocated.
26. **Session 8:** focused on public transport in Oxfordshire. Input was provided on Oxfordshire's bus service challenges by a representative from Oxon4buses; and on upcoming and recent improvements to Oxfordshire's bus services by a

representative from Stagecoach West and Oxford Tube. For rail, the council's rail development lead shared information on the council's emerging rail strategy and representatives from the Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership provided input on engaging local communities in rail planning, including young people.

27. **Session 9:** focused on community transport and local solutions, with input on community transport from the assistant professor in the School of Earth, Environment & Society at McMaster University, Canada and input on volunteer-led solutions to support rural mobility gaps from a representative of First and Last Mile CIC in Witney. Participants then heard again from the director of the Transport Studies Unit at the University of Oxford on aspects of multimodal travel and from a representative from the Campaign for Better Public Transport. They then participated in a workshop exercise led by MutualGain focusing on designing an integrated transport network for different parts of the county.
28. **Session 10:** focused on place shaping. This included input from a representative of The Go-Ahead Group on the role of housing developers; from a research associate in the Transport Studies Unit at the University of Oxford on the role of EV car clubs; and information on how transport fits into place-shaping and long-term planning from the council's head of place shaping and technical lead for movement and place. During this session participants also learned about vision led planning from representatives of Create Streets and took part in a simulated visioning exercise designed by Create Streets.
29. **Session 11:** had two key themes. Firstly, the relationship between travel and transport and health, with input from a community representative giving a patient's perspective; a council public health principal; and through a second specially commissioned video featuring perspectives from often underrepresented voices. The second theme was road safety, and the assembly received input from a representative of UK Road Offender Education and from two members of the county council's vision zero team.

Developing recommendations

30. The recommendations were developed throughout the assembly using the following process:
 - An initial set of assessment criteria that the assembly might use to evaluate recommendations was created and later reviewed after the learning as part of session 4. A draft version of these criteria was then shared with assembly members, who voted on them as part of their homework.
 - The criteria were revised and reviewed by the assembly as part of session 11.
 - Idea collection: Throughout the learning phase, ideas for recommendations were gathered and summarised in an overview document, allowing participants to see the range of perspectives within the group.

Final weekend

- Changes to the assessment criteria were finalised and applied during the final weekend (sessions 12 – 14) to assess both draft and final recommendations.
 - A revised version of the assembly's collective (but not consensus-based) thoughts was provided to each participant in a guidance document as a potential reference when drafting recommendations.
 - Participants engaged in role-play activities to consider different perspectives and trade-offs.
 - Participants developed draft recommendations in groups, which were reviewed and refined by the whole assembly.
 - Final vote: The final recommendations were voted on by each assembly member, with results presented to the council representatives present.
31. Overall, the assembly developed 20 recommendations, 16 of which secured over 80 per cent support from assembly participants. All recommendations were delivered 'live' to senior council representatives, some members of the citizens' assembly advisory board and all of the project team on 16 March 2025 and are included in Annex A to this report. The previous day the assembly had input from a professor in public policy (global public policy) at the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government on framing good recommendations.

Responding to the citizens' assembly recommendations

32. All recommendations arising from the citizens' assembly will be considered carefully by council officers, including by specialists in transport policy, in place planning and in communications and engagement. This is in the context of the adopted local transport and connectivity plan 5 and its underlying policies and supporting strategies; the central Oxfordshire travel plan and existing and planned schemes of work arising from the previous local transport plan 4, 'Connecting Oxfordshire'.
33. To ensure a fair and consistent approach to considering each recommendation, the council will develop a classification system, building on a [similar framework used to respond to the 2022 Street Voice citizens' jury recommendations](#). The final output will be a table categorising each recommendation and clarifying the role of the council in taking it forward, the area of the council responsible and any appropriate details of progress already made.
34. It is proposed that a further update on the citizens' assembly returns to Cabinet in July 2025, which will be part of a new administration following the county council elections in May 2025. This will include the full report of the assembly from MutualGain and the council's response to the assembly recommendations set out in Annex A. It is proposed that the Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee consider the council's response to the assembly

recommendations in June 2025, so that the cabinet can take the committee's views into account.

Next steps

35. During March and April 2025, MutualGain will formally report on the citizens' assembly and prepare a short film on its proceedings.
36. The council will publish more detailed information on what the assembly covered including evidence givers' presentations and films (where consent has been obtained), to coincide with the publication of the final report of the assembly in July 2025.
37. The council will produce a cross-channel communications and engagement plan to publicise the recommendations of the citizens' assembly and the council's agreed response to them.
38. Arrangements will be developed for monitoring progress against each citizens' assembly action which is upheld and where it is identified that the council has a role in taking it forward. Subject to consent, it is hoped that the council can continue to work with assembly participants to co-design this process.

Corporate policies and priorities

39. The citizens' assembly supports the council's strategic priorities of: i) playing our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy; and ii) investing in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
40. The council's adopted consultation and engagement strategy provides a framework to support innovative and new ways to undertake public engagement and consultation – the citizens' assembly falls within the scope of that strategy.

Financial implications

41. There are no new budgetary implications arising from this report. Following the agreement of the council's response to the assembly recommendations, plans will be made to use the funding allocated in the 2025/26 council budget specifically for the citizens' assembly. This includes both the one-off £50k investment to publicise the findings of the citizens assembly and undertake a follow-up public engagement exercise and the recurring £50k investment for two financial years to support the recommendations of the citizens' assembly on travel and transport.

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Legal implications

42. The decision to hold a citizens' assembly is an executive function. Whilst there is no general legal duty to hold a citizens' assembly, the council has wide powers to engage with its residents. Primary amongst these is the general power of competence (section 1 Localism Act 2011) and the 'best value' duty requiring the council to seek improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.
43. The legal implications from recommendations arising out of the citizens assembly will be considered on their individual merits at the point of decision and is therefore not dealt with in this report.

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Staffing implications

44. There are no new or additional staff implications arising from this report.

Equality and inclusion implications

45. There are no specific equality implications arising from this report. Equality and inclusion impacts were core to the design and delivery of the citizens' assembly. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are upheld following assessment by the council, equalities impact assessments will be completed or will already have been completed related to specific planned pieces of work.

Sustainability implications

46. There are no specific sustainability implications arising from this report. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are upheld, sustainability implications will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work.

Risk management

47. This is an update report only. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are upheld, risk assessments will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work

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Annex A: Recommendations from the 2025 travel and transport citizens' assembly

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

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