

## **Divisions Affected - All**

### **PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**– 25 June 2025**

## **Proposed response to the 2025 Oxfordshire Travel and Transport Citizens' Assembly**

**Report by: Director of Environment and Highways and Director of  
Public affairs, Policy and Partnerships**

### **1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

- a) Provide comments on the council's proposed response to the Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly on travel and transport's recommendations prior to consideration by Cabinet in July 2025.

## **Executive summary**

- 2. In February and March 2025, a citizens' assembly to explore how Oxfordshire's transport system could support people's health, the local economy, and the environment by 2050 was conducted. The council commissioned MutualGain to design and deliver the assembly.
- 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.
- 4. On 23 March 2025, Cabinet received the travel and transport citizen's assembly's recommendations and committed to considering and responding to these at a future meeting in July 2025. Cabinet requested the council officers' response be considered by Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in advance of Cabinet's meeting in July.
- 5. This covering report provides the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background information about the citizens' assembly on travel and transport, its 20 recommendations and the council's proposed initial response to these. It is supported by: Annex A - the full report of the Citizens' Assembly prepared by MutualGain; and Annex B - a table setting out the council's proposed initial response to the citizens' assembly's 20 recommendations.

### **Background**

- 6. 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.
7. 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?'**
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 the 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).
12. 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 £50k investment for two financial years to support the recommendations of the citizens' assembly on travel and transport.

13. On 23 March 2025, Cabinet received the travel and transport citizen's assembly's recommendations and committed to considering and responding to these at its meeting in July 2025. Cabinet requested the council officers' response be considered by Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in advance of Cabinet's July meeting.

### **About the 2025 Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly on travel and transport**

14. Section one of MutualGain Citizens' Assembly report (pages 5 - 10 in Annex A) sets out information on the design of the 2025 Oxfordshire Citizens' Assembly on travel and transport, demonstrating how it follows agreed standards for citizens' assemblies.
15. Overall, the citizens' assembly was designed and delivered by MutualGain working with a cross-council project team involving officers working in transport planning and communications and engagement service areas and a research associate from the University of Oxford with expert knowledge of citizens' assemblies who participated in a personal capacity.
16. Recruitment to the 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 nearly every meeting, with the assembly's structure remaining broadly representative of the county's population profile.
17. An independent advisory board was convened to provide oversight for the council's travel and transport citizens' assembly and to help to develop the structure of the assembly. 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](https://oxfordshire.gov.uk/citizensassembly)
18. As MutualGain state in their report, the board played a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the process by ensuring the assembly was fair, balanced, and methodologically robust.

The advisory board's core responsibilities included:

- Ensuring the assembly question was fair, neutral, and accessible.
  - Reviewing the structure and evidence base to ensure diversity of perspectives.
  - Acting as a critical friend to the project team, identifying gaps, testing ideas, and
  - Strengthening credibility.
19. Section two of the Citizens' Assembly report (Annex A, pages 11 - 21) sets out a detailed description of how the assembly was delivered by MutualGain and what it covered.

20. The assembly was structured into four distinct phases:

- 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).

21. 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.

22. 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.

23. Appendix III to the Citizens' Assembly report (Annex A, pages 49 - 51) provides links to all the video evidence shown throughout the learning phase of the assembly.

### **Proposed response to the citizens' assembly recommendations**

24. Overall, the assembly developed 20 recommendations based on their deliberations. These are set out in section 3 of the Citizens' Assembly report (Annex A, pages 22 - 27) and analysed in more depth in section 4 of the same (pages 28 - 37).

25. Sixteen of the recommendations secured over 80 per cent support from assembly participants. MutualGain uses this threshold to suggest that the council can feel confident these recommendations would likely receive similar support from a wider population, given the same information and time to deliberate.

26. In the concluding section of their report on page 38, MutualGain state the following specifically about the recommendations:

“Over 45 hours of structured learning and deliberation, 34 residents from across the county worked together to grapple with some of the most pressing and complex transport challenges Oxfordshire faces.

Their recommendations were not only ambitious but deeply considered, rooted in a commitment to fairness, feasibility, and forward-thinking solutions.

Participants showed a strong collective desire to move away from car dependency (even among frequent drivers) provided that alternatives are convenient, affordable, and well-communicated. From buses and bike lanes to workplace engagement and new community design, the Assembly's proposals form a coherent, interconnected roadmap for change.

Support for these recommendations cut across demographic lines. Rural residents and urban dwellers, younger and older participants, regular drivers and non-drivers alike, found common ground around the need for a more sustainable and inclusive transport system. What distinguished the Assembly's work was not just what was proposed, but how those proposals were reached: through dialogue, challenge, empathy, and a genuine attempt to balance trade-offs.

Policymakers now have in front of them a unique and valuable asset: a set of recommendations shaped by residents who were given the time, tools, and trust to engage meaningfully. As the Council responds to these proposals, the test will not be whether each is implemented in full, but whether the spirit of the Assembly - strategic, participatory, and just - is embedded in the decisions ahead.

If Oxfordshire is to thrive by 2050, as the Assembly's challenge question asked, then the insights gathered here must not only inform this moment but shape the culture of future policy design. The Assembly has shown that the public is ready to be part of the solution. The next step is to show they've been heard."

## **Responding to the citizens' assembly recommendations**

27. All recommendations arising from the citizens' assembly are being considered carefully by council officers, including by specialists in transport policy, in place planning, and in communications and engagement. Consideration will be in the context of the council's priorities, the adopted local transport and connectivity plan and its underlying policies and supporting strategies - such as the central Oxfordshire travel plan, and existing and planned schemes of work arising from the previous local transport plan 4, 'Connecting Oxfordshire'.
28. The citizens' assembly recommendations offer a valuable insight and an initial officer response has been provided. However, this response is subject to further technical development and engagement work to properly assess whether or not the recommendation can be progressed; this includes policy, legal and financial considerations.
29. To ensure a fair and consistent approach to considering each recommendation, the council developed a classification system, building on a

similar framework used by the council to respond to the 2022 Street Voice citizens' jury recommendations. The council's proposed response to the recommendations is set out in table format in Annex B to this report. This presents a high-level view with further detail to be included in the report to Cabinet in July taking account of the views of this committee of the initial assessment.

30. Council officers scored each recommendation in workshop format independently facilitated by MutualGain. They used a standard scoring system where:
  - 1 = Work is planned or ongoing – Oxfordshire County Council is already conducting the work proposed by the recommendation or has plans to conduct the work recommended.
  - 2 = Will be considered – Oxfordshire County Council will consider the work proposed by the recommendation.
  - 3 = Not proposed to progress – The work proposed by the recommendation is not feasible for the county council to conduct at this time.
31. Officers have also considered who the lead organisation is, and specifically the role of Oxfordshire County Council. This was included to clarify where the county council could directly lead the work proposed by the recommendations and where partner organisations would be required to lead the work, with support from the county council.
32. Subject to approval of the council's proposed response to the citizens' assembly, the council will actively seek to continue to involve assembly participants in different workstreams where appropriate to do so and where they are willing to be involved.
33. As shown in the table in Annex B, the council has been able to respond positively to many of the recommendations. These are initial responses, and it is planned to use the funding allocated to support this work, as referenced in paragraph 12, to consider and assess in greater depth.
34. Overall, it is considered that the citizens' assembly recommendations align well with ongoing or planned county council work. For example, the work on a proposed temporary congestion charge, traffic filters, expanded zero emission zone and workplace parking levy already directly responds to a number of the recommendations.
35. In addition, consideration can be given to the recommendations as part of existing workstreams for travel behaviour change and public transport. For example, through the Future Bus Regulation Options Report which will report to Cabinet in autumn 2025.

36. Unfortunately, one of the recommendations from the assembly (recommendation 19) is not feasible for the council to progress. This is primarily because the significant level of funding required is not available, and alternative solutions, that would deliver similar benefits, are considered more beneficial and practical.
37. Some of the recommendations overlap and some contain several activities/ideas in one. As such, consideration is also being given as to how best to present the recommendations. It is considered that presenting by theme/activity might be clearer and easier to provide a response to and monitor against.

### **Monitoring progress against citizens' assembly actions**

38. Arrangements will be developed later in the summer to monitor progress against each citizens' assembly recommendation which is upheld by Cabinet and where it is identified that the council has a role in taking it forward. As a minimum it is expected that these are reported annually in the autumn alongside progress made with delivering against the LTCP.

### **Publicising the citizens' assembly recommendations**

39. We are committed to publicising the value of the citizens' assembly to the council. This will be a phased approach firstly focusing on launching the citizens' assembly report outside of the council's committee cycle followed by communications on individual workstreams post Cabinet consideration of the council's response to the citizens' assembly. This will be multi-channel using paid for and organic promotion and targeted stakeholder communications. Each year we will do a roundup of communications focusing on 'you said, we did'. This will coincide with the publication of the monitoring report mentioned in paragraph 35 above.

### **Corporate policies and priorities**

40. The citizens' assembly supports the council's current 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.
41. 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**

42. There are no new budgetary implications arising from this report. Following the agreement of the council's response to the assembly recommendations, proposals will be made to use the funding allocated in the 2025/26 budget 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 £50k investment for two financial years to support the recommendations of the citizens' assembly on travel and transport.

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## **Legal implications**

43. 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.
44. The legal implications of each of the recommendations, arising out of the citizens' assembly, will need to be considered as part of the further technical development and engagement work referred to in this report. This work will properly assess whether or not each upheld recommendation can be progressed. Accordingly the legal implications of the recommendations are not dealt with in this report.

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## **Staffing implications**

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

## **Equality and inclusion implications**

46. 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**

47. 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

48. 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.
49. Reputation risks associated with the council's response to the citizens' assembly recommendations and the release of citizens' assembly report and associated evidence have been carefully considered and will be mitigated by communications, marketing and engagement service working closely with colleagues as appropriate.

Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways  
Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

Annex A: Final OCC Citizens' Assembly Report (prepared by MutualGain)  
Annex B: Council's response to citizens' assembly recommendations

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

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June 2025