

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 21 February 2023

Pan Regional Partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge Area

Report by the Interim Chief Executive

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Agree that the County Council will be a participant in the proposed pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area;
 - b) Delegate to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, agreement to future arrangements with respect to establishing the constitution of the new partnership.

Executive Summary

2. A new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area is being proposed by local authorities and other regional partners and has been supported by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.
3. This report recommends that the County Council participates in the partnership, in furtherance of its greener, fairer and healthier priorities.

Background and Key Information

4. Government policy supports the development of regional partnerships where there is strong interest in collaboration in pursuit of shared economic, infrastructure and environmental aims. While generally non-statutory, sub-regional partnerships can support more efficient and coherent communication with national Government, coordinate local infrastructure programmes into a more effective overall strategy, increase regional 'voice' and influence, improve the use of economic data and evidence in decision making, foster innovation, and promote international trade and investment.
5. From 2016, an Oxford-Cambridge Arc partnership has championed regional collaboration across a similar geography. This has included agreeing shared regional principles for protecting, restoring, and enhancing the environment. (See Background paper, agreed by the County Council's Cabinet in March 2021.) In 2020, government announced its intention to develop a spatial

framework for Oxford-Cambridge and a consultation process was undertaken by government. The conclusions of the consultation have not been published but it is anticipated that a regional spatial framework as originally envisaged will not be taken forward. Funding was withdrawn from the previous Arc partnership and the supporting arrangements and governance structures were dissolved.

6. Following this change in national direction, taking the initiative, local participants have proposed that a more locally led alternative approach should be taken to regional co-operation in the pursuit of delivering sustainable economic growth with a higher quality natural environment.
7. To pursue this shared agenda a new form of streamlined partnership is being proposed by local authorities and other regional partners. A shadow board has been formed to develop the approach (see Annex 1). The proposed new arrangements are intended to be efficient and locally led, bringing together local government, universities and local enterprise partnerships. The partnership would link with the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and with the other member Growth Boards across the region. It would involve partners in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire.
8. A new pan-regional partnership has the potential to provide a range of benefits locally. It can provide an additional vehicle to help deliver local priorities in the short and longer term. It would attract revenue funding support which can increase capability and the capacity to deliver value in areas of common interest. This would include capacity and capability to build future business cases and proposals for investment. It would also provide an open channel into government and help improve cross-departmental engagement within government.
9. A proposal describing the purpose and form of the revised partnership was submitted to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in October 2022. The Secretary of State replied to the chair of the shadow partnership board on 18 January 2023, confirming his support for the partnership and agreed funding of £2.5 million over the remainder of this Spending Review period, subject to annual business cases.
10. The Partnership's initial programme will be to:
 - develop a set of propositions to attract international investment and profile the region on a global stage;
 - continue the work underway to embed shared Environment Principles.

Governance

11. Different pan-regional partnerships adopt partnership governance most suitable for their specific circumstances. However, national expectations are that partnerships receiving government funding will follow common governance principles which are consistent across England including governance that is:
 - Representative of local government and geographically complete;
 - Includes key figures from regional businesses, LEPs and universities;
 - Has an independent chair, agreed with all partners.

12. The shadow board (see Annex 1) has therefore proposed that the new partnership will be overseen by a new board, led by an independent chair, which will oversee its policy development and operations. This Board will consist of:
 - An independent Chair
 - One Chair from each of the member Growth Boards or equivalent, plus one additional co-chair representing the Central Area Growth Board.
 - One Chair representing the Partnership's programme sub-groups: currently Environment and Economy.
 - One Chair from each of the main constituent stakeholder groups, one representing Local Enterprise Partnerships, one representing the Arc Universities Group and, one representing England's Economic Heartland.
 - Two non-executive directors, following recruitment
 - A senior representative from government

13. The Board's prime function will be to oversee the delivery of the partnership's work programme, as agreed by the membership. While the partnership has support from government, it does not have statutory status and will not be a joint committee in local government terms. Formal decisions will be made by the decision-making arrangements of each individual local authority – cabinet, executive and non-executive as relevant. A constitution for the partnership and terms of reference will be developed for the Board recognising the independent, statutory, and legal status of each partner. Subsidiarity will be a key working principle for the new Board in how it carries out its functions.

14. It is anticipated the Board will meet quarterly, with an annual conference where the activity of the region will be promoted, and all partners will meet as a plenary to consider future work priorities and progress.

15. To support programme delivery, two further Sub-Groups will be established (Economy and Environment). These will be comprised of relevant stakeholders and local partner representatives. The Sub-Groups will select their Chair who will also represent the Sub-Group on the Board. The Board will oversee the Communications programme directly as this underpins all activity.

16. A local authority will act as the accountable body to underpin finance and resource management. The accountable body is currently Cherwell District Council.
17. Recruitment for the non-executive director and independent Chair roles is underway with the intention of fully implementing the partnership arrangements from June 2023.
18. The partnership has established a new website: [OxCamPartnership \(oxford-cambridge-partnership.info\)](https://oxcampartnership.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info) where information on governance, programmes and meetings is held.

Operations

19. A Chief Executive/Lead Officer group comprising parallel organisational representation to the main Board will support programme delivery and effective management of the partnership through transition, supported by a lead CEO and a new director role.
20. The partnership and its programme will be supported and delivered by a small operational team agreed by the Chief Executives working group to include the director, programme leads, communications support and appropriate administration. Support functions (HR, finance and legal) will be supplied by the host authority acting as the Accountable Body.
21. It is proposed to have senior responsible officers (SROs) drawn from across the partnership, for each of the major work programmes (Economy, Environment, Communications). This will ensure there is local ownership and commitment to the programme and will assist with the match-funding element which Government requires. The SROs will work closely with their relevant Chair of the Programme Sub-Group as well as be the lead officer representative for the programme supported by a senior programme lead officer from the operational team.

Work Programme

22. An outline work programme has been developed reflecting the level of budget available for 2022/23. A programme for 2023/24 would be developed and agreed by the Board in consultation with the whole partnership for presentation to Government for agreement in Spring 2023. The outline work programme sets out three major programme areas; Economy, Environment and Communications. The programme includes an investment prospectus and atlas, environmental initiatives, and identity and brand development.
23. In March 2021, the County Council Cabinet endorsed the Oxford to Cambridge Arc Environment Principles. These have also been endorsed by a significant number of other stakeholders across the partnership. The establishment of the pan-regional partnership will provide a mechanism to take forward these principles and collaborate on actions.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

24. Working in partnership at regional level enhances the Council's ability to deliver all of its priorities, as set out in the strategic plan 2022-2025.
25. Specifically, it supports the priorities of:
 - Putting action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work; and
 - Working with local business and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

Financial Implications

26. National Government has agreed a first tranche of interim capacity funding support of £250,000 for the current financial year. The planned 2022/23 budget for the partnership does include a small local contribution this year from local partners of £4,000 and this will help unlock a second tranche of Government funding (£250,000). A further contribution of approximately £10,000 is anticipated to be made in 2023/24. The Council's local contribution will be funded from within current budgets.
27. There will also be local contributions of in-kind officer time on project oversight and delivery.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance, lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

28. There are no significant legal implications from involvement in the pan-regional partnership. The new partnership will not have the ability to impose its decisions on the Council and its Cabinet, and local decision making will be respected. Policy and major programmes arising from within the partnership would require independent decision by the Council.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance,
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Equality & Inclusion Implications

29. In itself, agreeing to participate in the pan-regional partnership has no direct implications for equality and inclusion. The County Council, the accountable body and all public sector partners will be bound by the public sector equality

duty and future decisions and programmes of work will need to be supported by appropriate equality impact assessment.

Sustainability Implications

30. The stated aims of the new partnership include enhancing the natural environment. As such, working in partnership at a regional level, with more effective engagement with partners and national government, will improve the Council's ability to deliver necessary development and infrastructure while maintaining and enhancing the natural environment, minimising carbon emissions and adapting to climate change. The County Council has already agreed to a set of shared regional principles for environmental protection (see additional documents).

Stephen Chandler, Interim Chief Executive

Annex 1: Shadow Board membership

Annex 2: Secretary of State letter to Cllr Barry Wood, 18 January 2023

Background papers: [Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#)

Contact Officer: Robin Rogers, Programme Director (Partnerships and Delivery)

February, 2023

Annex 1 - Pan Regional Partnership Shadow Board Members

A Shadow Board is in place for the Oxford-Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership. Its role is 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.

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