

## **Divisions Affected - All**

### **CABINET**

**21 September 2021**

## **England's Economic Heartland: Update on Governance**

### **Report by Corporate Director for Environment and Place**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

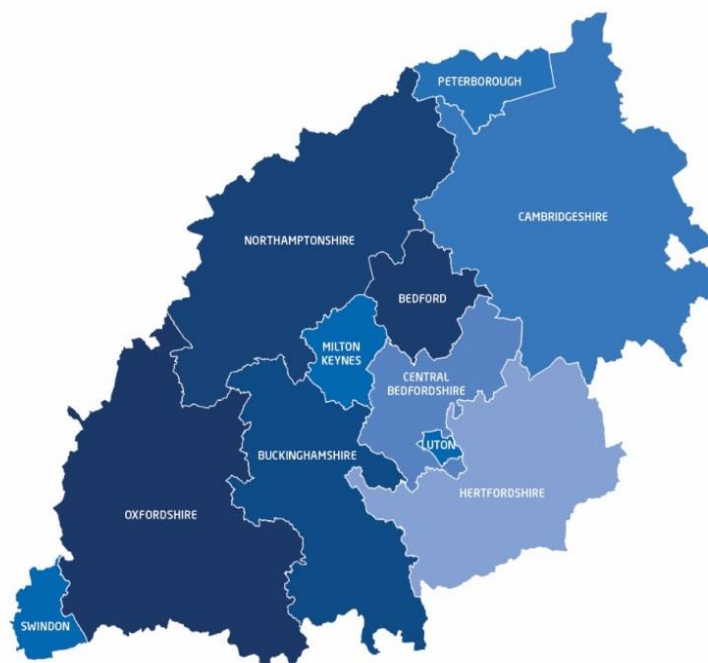
1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
  - a) **Confirm that England's Economic Heartland (EEH), the sub-national transport body encompassing Oxfordshire, should be considered as a 'strategic' outside body as per the definitions set out in Table 1 below;**
  - b) **Endorse the new full EEH governance framework as set out in Annex 1; and**
  - c) **Confirm appointment of the leader of the Council to the new EEH Political Forum, proposed to be called the Strategic Transport Leadership Board.**

#### **Executive Summary**

2. Following discussions with Government and its Members, and in context of the emerging Oxford to Cambridge Arc Governance, England's Economic Heartland (EEH), the sub-national transport body for the area which includes Oxfordshire, has produced a new governance framework, including changes to the political oversight process. This is given in full in Annex 1.
3. The EEH Business Unit has written to the Council outlining the new arrangements and requesting nominations for membership to the new political oversight forum, proposed to be called the Strategic Transport Leadership Board. This report sets out key aspects of the new governance arrangements and asks Cabinet to formally confirm appointment of the Leader to the new political board.

## Background and Context

4. England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is the sub-national transport body for the area from Swindon in the west to Cambridgeshire in the east, as set out on the map below:



5. Oxfordshire was one of the founding members of the partnership in 2014, which was recognised as the sub-national transport body in 2016. EEH remains a partnership organisation, with many of its workstreams funded by Department for Transport (DfT) via annual funding settlements. It does not have statutory transport or highway powers which rest with member partners.
6. EEH remains an important organisation in helping to facilitate cross boundary working, much of which relates to helping deliver the EEH Transport Strategy which was published in February 2021, and endorsed by Oxfordshire County Cabinet in 'broad terms' in March 2021. At this meeting County Cabinet also agreed to, *'continue our representation on the EEH Board and Strategic Transport Forum (STF) to ensure alignment with our emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).'* Since endorsement of the strategy, a number of key related workstreams have commenced, including a number of connectivity studies. These are substantial pieces of work and will help identify cross boundary strategic transport infrastructure priorities across a number of geographies, including Oxford to Milton Keynes, Oxford to Northampton, and Oxford-Didcot-Swindon.
7. The existing terms of reference for EEH were agreed in December 2017, and in February 2021 the EEH leaders group agreed that governance should be reviewed. This review has been undertaken in liaison with DfT as the sponsoring body for sub-national transport bodies and has resulted in a new governance framework. This is shown in Annex 1 to this report.

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8. The main change in governance is the political oversight arrangements, merging the EEH leader board meeting with the existing Strategic Transport Board to have one political oversight meeting only- proposed to be called the Strategic Transport Leadership Board. Other changes in governance include:
  - (a) Being clear in the governance framework who are full members of EEH (Local Transport/ Highway Authorities), who are associate members (Growth Boards and bus operators), and who are observers (DfT, Highways England and Network Rail).
  - (b) The need for each member of EEH to formally nominate their representative to the new Sub-national Transport Body political oversight group (and substitute if needed) at the beginning of each municipal year, which is usually May (but for the first year to nominate members from Sep 2021 to May 2023)
  - (c) The need for any outgoing EEH chair to take a break of at least 2 years before seeking re-election (after serving for up to 2 years in post)
  - (d) Several changes to ways of working, including the need for determining an annual EEH business plan, including scale of local contributions.
9. EEH has recently written to all members with the updated governance framework and to specifically ask them to nominate their first representative for the new political board (**Annex 2**), who would be in place until May 2023 (when a new nomination would be requested).

### Key matters for consideration

10. EEH have made clear that they believe that the new single political board will help ensure that the focus on key outcomes and delivering investment across the region can be maintained, as well as ensuring continued collaboration on key strategy and projects that complements, rather than duplicates powers, responsibility and accountabilities of partners. They've also made clear that the principle of ensuring that any tools and technical work undertaken through EEH should be made freely available to partners is continued, and this is also set out in the new governance framework.
11. OCC as a core member of EEH need to ensure that they are content with the new governance arrangements. In particular, they need to confirm their nomination for the new (Strategic Transport Leadership) Board, with the first meeting of the new group scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> September.
12. The basis of appointments from the County Council for outside bodies is set down based on the categories outlined in the following table. EEH would appear to fall into category A, given the strategic nature of its remit. Based on this, it is recommended that the nomination to the new EEH Board should be agreed formally by Cabinet.

#### Table 1: OCC categories of outside bodies

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<b>Outside Bodies</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Appointed by</b>	<b>Basis of Membership</b>
A Outside bodies listed by the Cabinet (and endorsed by the Council) as “strategic”	The Cabinet	As determined by the Cabinet
B Non-strategic outside bodies useful to the Council’s work	Remuneration Committee, following nominations by political groups	Best person for the role
C Other outside bodies which request Council representation or are of primary value to local councillors/the local community	Chief Executive in the case of local member(s) or group nominations; where there is no agreement Remuneration Committee	To reflect local membership

13. Under the previous EEH governance arrangements, political representation at EEH meetings was split at OCC between the Leader and relevant Cabinet member. Under the new arrangements with 1 political forum only, it is planned that OCC is represented by the Leader only, with the Cabinet Member for Travel and Development Strategy being the substitute should this be required at any time.

### **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

14. The EEH Transport Strategy, published in early 2021, sets out ambitious plans to develop and deliver a sustainable, net zero carbon transport network by 2040. Overall, being an EEH core partner helps ensure that Oxfordshire has influence over future priorities and investment to help deliver this on wider and cross boundary strategic transport networks. This fits in particular with the following Fair Deal Alliance objectives as agreed at Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021:
- Tackle the Climate Emergency through rapid decarbonisation, proper accounting of carbon emissions and ambitious targets, as well as supporting climate resilience;
  - Tackling inequalities and providing opportunities for everyone in Oxfordshire to achieve their full potential and,
  - Increased investment in an inclusive, integrated, county-wide active and sustainable travel network fit for the 21st century to improve choice and reduce car journeys across the county.

### **Financial Implications**

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15. The new governance framework includes specific reference to the Sub-national Transport Body meetings (proposed to be called the Strategic Transport Leadership Board) needing to agree the level of local contribution payable by each Transport/ Highway Authority, as well as an annual Business Plan and 3-year financial plan for the Body. To date, Oxfordshire have provided 'in-kind' contributions to EEH, for example through seconding staff to the EEH team and in particular providing expertise from the County ihub and strategy teams. There are on-going discussions with EEH about this arrangement for the future, but we would like to continue this in principle given the mutual benefits. Any change to this arrangement would need careful consideration against OCC budgets at the appropriate time.

Comments checked by:

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### Legal Implications

16. EEH is an organisation based on partnership, with core members being the local transport authorities from Swindon in the west to Cambridgeshire in the east. It is recognised by central government as the sub-national transport body for the area but does not have statutory powers over the planning and delivery of transport infrastructure, which rests with the separate highway authorities. As set out previously in a report in Cabinet in October 2020, central government has recently made clear that it would not support EEH obtaining statutory powers.

Comments checked by:

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### Staff Implications

17. It is not expected that the new governance arrangements would impact on required OCC staffing arrangements for input to EEH workstreams which are currently covered from within the Strategic Infrastructure and Planning area of the Environment and Place Directorate.

### Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. It is considered that that there are no specific equality and inclusion implications associated with this report.

### Sustainability Implications

