

Division(s): N/A

**STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 26 MAY 2011**

OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP: UPDATE

Report by Deputy Director (Growth & Infrastructure)

1. The Executive Board of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership has been meeting on a monthly basis since the beginning of the year. This has enabled good progress to be made with getting the Partnership up and running, using the framework set out in the original proposal to Government as the template. This in turn enabled the Government to formally approve the Partnership at the beginning of March.
2. The focus of the Partnership lies in supporting and encouraging the development of the drivers for innovation and wealth creation in the key economic sectors for the future.
3. The approach of the Partnership is to draw on the strengths of existing working arrangements wherever possible, encouraging simplification and clarification to reduce duplication and make it easier for businesses to gain access to the support they need in a timely manner.
4. The philosophy of the Partnership is that it 'cheers' those initiatives that are well established and making good progress; helps 'steer' with others those initiatives that need some co-ordinated action to make them happen; and 'rows' where there is currently no clear leader for a particular initiative.
5. The key issues on which the Enterprise Partnership is providing leadership come from the outcome of the Local Economic Assessment. The remainder of this update provides a summary of the progress made to date on these issues.

Addressing Skills Deficiencies

6. A review of the existing working arrangements in the skills area will be concluded shortly. Out of this a new model of governance is emerging a proposal to form a new overarching strategic group of representative local stakeholders – the Oxfordshire Skills Board.
7. The role of the Oxfordshire Skills Board will be to support all learners, employers and providers to identify and understand the collective skills needs of Oxfordshire. The Skills Board will be supported and facilitated by the County Council's Business and Skills team.

8. The Enterprise Partnership is providing leadership in the preparation of the Oxfordshire Skills Needs Analysis. This will form the 'script' against which skills providers across the County will be encouraged to deliver. The Enterprise Partnership, working with the Skills Funding Agency, will monitor progress in delivering the script using information collated by the Agency. The ambition is to have the first skills needs analysis published in the autumn.
9. The Enterprise Partnership will seek to ensure that the Skills Needs Analysis accurately reflects the needs of the business community. To that end it is currently looking at how it might build upon the fact that the County Council currently visits 3,000 businesses a year and is in contact with 8,000 businesses a year regarding work experience placements. The Partnership has quickly identified that this represents an opportunity to improve its knowledge of the needs of the SME community.
10. The Partnership is helping to bring together the business community and education providers with a view to exploring the potential to develop a collaborative approach to the training of apprentices.

Securing Investment for Infrastructure Priorities

11. The Enterprise Partnership looks to the Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (SPIP) to provide advice and guide the work on infrastructure.
12. The shared ambition of the SPIP is to deliver sustainable communities. This requires the alignment of investment in infrastructure and services at a number of levels, including but by no means limited to the investment required to support new development.
13. An initial 'infrastructure framework for Oxfordshire' is now being prepared and will be considered by the SPIP in the autumn. The framework will build upon the work that fed into the Local Investment Plan that was prepared in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency. However the infrastructure framework needs to be extended to cover a much broader range of investments.
14. Improvement to the access to Broadband services is a specific priority for the Enterprise Partnership. Building on the back of work by the County Council to develop a digital strategy for Oxfordshire, the Partnership is providing leadership with the submission of a funding bid to the Government backed Broadband Delivery UK.
15. The Enterprise Partnership actively supported a bid to the first round of Regional Growth Fund – in conjunction with other enterprise partnerships – to secure development funding for the East-West Rail project. Whilst the bid was unsuccessful, feedback from Government departments indicates that the strategic significance of the project is recognised. Government departments are continuing to work closely

with the local authority led consortium that is promoting the project to identify a way forward.

Business Support, including Inward Investment

16. There is a wide range of agencies and organisations providing support to businesses, reflecting the fact that the needs of businesses themselves vary considerably depending on their size and stage in their development.
17. The Enterprise Partnership is developing an overview of the current range of business support opportunities in Oxfordshire. This will serve two purposes: firstly it will enable a route map to be prepared that will provide much needed clarity to businesses. Secondly it will enable gaps in the current support arrangements to be identified. The Enterprise Partnership will then work with partners to see how those gaps might be addressed.
18. Related to this is the role of the Enterprise Partnership with regard to inward investment. The Government has appointed PA Consulting to support its work – channelled through UKTI – on inward investment. All the initial indications to date re-emphasise the importance given by Government to establishing a strong link between its consultants and enterprise partnerships.
19. PA Consulting took on their role at the beginning of May and hence it is still early days. However, the Enterprise Partnership is already working to define the inward investment 'offer' that it will seek to offer at the local level. This will provide the basis for a further discussion with PA Consulting. It will also provide the basis of promotional material that will, in due course, be available via the Enterprise Partnership.

Enterprise Zones

20. In the 2011 Budget the Government announced its proposal to establish 21 Enterprise Zones across the country. The location of the first 11 Enterprise Zones was included as part of the Budget announcement. At the same time the Government invited those Enterprise Partnerships that did not already have an Enterprise Zone announced to date to come forward if they were interested in the potential.
21. The Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership has expressed its interest in the concept. At this stage the criteria for an Enterprise Zone remains unclear. The Partnership is seeking clarity from Government as to how the mechanisms potentially on offer within an Enterprise Zone might address the barriers to sustainable economic growth.
22. The Executive Board of the Enterprise Partnership is working with potential candidates for an Enterprise Zone to ensure that there is a clear and transparent process for considering, and potentially selecting a candidate to go forward to Government.

