

**CABINET**  
**21 January 2025**

**Citizens' Assembly Update**

**Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships**

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
  - a) Note progress being made on the citizens' assembly, which is being held in February and March 2025;
  - b) Note that the actions set out in this report respond to the motion agreed by Council on 10 December 2024.

**Executive Summary**

2. Oxfordshire County Council has commissioned external agency MutualGain to deliver a citizens' assembly on future travel, transport and connectivity in Oxfordshire in February and March 2025.
3. Following the motion agreed at Full Council on 10 December 2024 (the wording of which is in Annex 1), the assembly will be extended from 30 to 45 hours to enable a dedicated focus to be given, within the wider assembly, to the council's suite of traffic management measures in central Oxfordshire (including the traffic filters trial, the workplace parking levy, and the expanded zero emissions zone).

**Background**

4. The 2024/25 Council budget 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.
5. An independent external agency, MutualGain, has been commissioned by the council to deliver a citizens' assembly on future travel, transport and connectivity in Oxfordshire.
6. The assembly is a deliberative participatory project that brings together 40 members of the public, who are broadly representative of the county's population. Its purpose is to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the 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.

7. An independent advisory board has been convened to provide oversight for the citizens' assembly to help it best achieve its objectives. The advisory board comprises national opinion leaders on deliberative democracy, transport and behavioural insights; cross-party political representation; and local experts.
8. The overarching challenge question for the assembly to consider, which has been shaped and agreed by the advisory board, is as follows: "What steps do we need to take so Oxfordshire's transport system enables our county's health, economy, and environment to thrive in 2050?"
9. Before and during the assembly, a wide range of evidence will be provided and presented to assembly participants to consider.
10. As specified in the motion agreed by Council on 10 December 2024, elected members, businesspeople, public sector leaders, and civil society and faith groups will be involved in the assembly process.
11. The assembly is designed to provide meaningful input into the implementation of the local transport and connectivity plan (LTCP). Discussions within the advisory board have highlighted the need to enable public deliberation around implementation whilst ensuring agreed policy is clearly communicated and democratic decisions are respected. This is being carefully managed by MutualGain to ensure the assembly strikes the right balance. Participants will be equipped with a clear understanding of decisions made, including those not yet implemented, while being encouraged to offer future ideas about travel, transport and connectivity in Oxfordshire and constructive insights into how planned initiatives could be effectively delivered.
12. The assembly will run over a series of weekends and evenings during February and March 2025.
13. Assembly participants are being selected by democratic lottery. The process is being managed by the Sortition Foundation, a not-for-profit company dedicated to promoting fair, transparent, inclusive and effective deliberative citizens' assemblies.

### **Extending the assembly**

14. Following the motion agreed at Council on 10 December 2024, the assembly will be extended from 30 to 45 hours to enable a dedicated focus to be given, within the wider assembly, to the council's suite of traffic management measures in central Oxfordshire (including the traffic filters trial, the workplace parking levy, and the expanded zero emissions zone).
15. The additional 15 hours will be dedicated to exploring in depth the key challenges of travelling into, out of, and around central Oxfordshire, including

the three core schemes. Assembly participants will engage with relevant evidence, thinking and policy from Oxfordshire, from other parts of the UK, and potentially from across the globe in the context of the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP).

16. The overarching challenge question, which has been agreed by the advisory board, will remain the same. However, specific interim recommendations will be produced for this dedicated part of the assembly. These will be revisited during the final assembly deliberations for review alongside the recommendations relating to the wider county.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

17. 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

## **Financial Implications**

18. There are no new budgetary implications arising from this report. The cost of the assembly will be funded from the one-off £150k allocated for this purpose in the 2024/25 budget approved by Council in February 2024.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

## **Legal Implications**

19. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

## **Staff Implications**

20. The assembly is being delivered by an external agency, MutualGain, who was appointed following a tender process. The collation of evidence for the assembly is being supported by council teams in the transport planning and communications and engagement service areas, using existing resources.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

21. The assembly will comprise a broadly representative group of participants selected by democratic lottery. Recruitment is being managed by the Sortition

Foundation, a not-for-profit company dedicated to promoting fair, transparent, inclusive and effective deliberative assemblies.

22. The citizens' assembly will be inclusive by design. An independent advisory board has been established to provide oversight for the citizens' assembly. Advisory board members provide an important additional check and balance to the assembly's structure, content and procedure to help it best achieve its objectives and to ensure that equality and inclusion implications are considered throughout.

## **Sustainability Implications**

23. There are no sustainability implications arising from this report.

Susannah Wintersgill  
Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

Annex: Motion agreed by Full Council on 10 December 2024

Background papers: Nil

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January 2025

**Annex 1: Motion by Councillor Charlie Hicks, seconded by Councillor Duncan Enright; with amendment by Councillor Eddie Reeves, seconded by Councillor David Bartholomew**

This Council considered setting up a Congestion Commission and agreed to set up a Citizens' Assembly as part of its last budget. This Council considers that it is time to establish a Citizens' Assembly of local residents or a Congestion Commission including businesspeople, public sector leaders, civil society and faith group leaders, and academics with relevant expertise, to ensure a greater democratic say in key decision-making.

This Council notes that its ambitious suite of traffic management measures is due to be rolled out in the very near future. These include Oxford's traffic filters and workplace parking levy, which are now largely enshrined in the Council's budget and will take place unless there is a change of administration next year.

If all such measures go ahead, Oxfordshire motorists could be hit by £57million in fines in fines and charges, broken down as follows:

- Expanded Zero Emissions Zone £25m;
- Traffic Filters £11m;
- Workplace Parking Tax £21m.

For clarity, the purpose of a Citizens' Assembly or Congestion Commission would be to assess the effectiveness of such measures, provide recommendations on existing proposals and advise as to whether other measures might be given effect after next year's local elections as supplements or substitutes for such policies, putting residents', businesses' and civil society groups' voices at the heart of local decision-making.

Council requests Cabinet to establish a Congestion Commission or Citizens' Assembly ensuring in so doing that the voices of elected members, businesspeople, public sector leaders and civil society and faith groups are properly heard.