

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: **Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership**

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 20/06/23
Council – 19/07/23

Executive Portfolio: Cllr Sarah Conboy, Executive Leader

Report by: Oliver Morley, Interim Managing Director

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) is a collaboration amongst willing Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and universities from across the Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire region. The OCP is not a formal committee in Local Government terms but as a condition of gaining Government support and funding, it is required to have the following:

- a constitution which includes clarity on governance, membership, openness and transparency, which sits as part of a wider performance and assurance framework which covers financial and risk management.
- a committed work programme which builds on the OCP's consensus in terms of priorities, objectives and expected outcomes. As part of the governance arrangements there needs to be a representative Board from across the OCP including an Independent Chair.

Recommendation(s):

That Cabinet RECOMMEND to Council

(a) that Huntingdonshire District Council join the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership (OCP) as it becomes formally recognised and funded by Government as a Pan-Regional Partnership (PRP);

(b) that the Executive Leader be appointed as the Council's representative on the OCP; and

(c) that the Executive Leader, in conjunction with the Managing Director/Corporate Director (Place), be provided with powers of appointment and delegation.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Proposals for a locally led partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge region have been formally approved by government. The OCP's role will be to champion the region as a world leader in research and innovation in hi-tech, high-performance technology and manufacturing, acting to achieve environmentally sustainable and inclusive growth. It will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration among its partners to focus on tackling the issues that matter to the people who live and work in the region.

The OCP's initial programme is to:

- a. Develop a set of propositions to attract international investment and profile the region on a global stage; and
- b. Continue the work underway to embed shared Environmental Principles.

The Secretary of State Rt Hon Michael Gove MP has confirmed support following a proposal submitted to government by leaders from local councils, local enterprise partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and the area's transport body, England's Economic Heartland. Backing for the Pan-Regional Partnership unlocks access to up to £2.5m government funding for the partnership, with £500k in-year to support activity to deliver an Investment Prospectus & Atlas, a significant Environment Programme (1. Nature Recovery Strategy Support, 2. Minerals and Waste Restoration Environmental Gain and 3. Regional Energy and Water strategy scoping), and a Data Observatory and Innovation Network.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 18th January 2023, Secretary of State Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP endorsed the proposition to set up a Pan-Regional Partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge geography. Letter attached as Appendix 1.

The overall purpose of the OCP will be to champion the Oxford to Cambridge region as a world leader of innovation and business, acting on shared interests in delivering environmentally sustainable economic growth that brings benefits to communities now and in future.

The OCP will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration so that joint working is locally led and focused on the issues that matter to people who live and work in the region. The OCP will define the outcomes it seeks to achieve but it does not have delegated authority or any formal or legal decision-making powers from any of its partner members.

Currently, the priorities of the partnership are focused on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefit from this growth for our communities now and in the future.

Government endorsement of the partnership unlocks the opportunity of up to £2.5m for the remainder of the current Spending Review period (to 2024/25).

3. GOVERNANCE

- 3.1 A Shadow Board is in place 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 (ie, 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 of 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 Deputy Major, representing the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority.
- Professor Alistair Fitt, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University, representing the Arc Universities Group as current
- Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader of South Cambs District Council sitting as interim Chair of the Environment Sub-Group.
- To be confirmed, representative from England's Economic Heartland.

- 3.2 Once fully operational there will be three main layers to the governance model: an overarching Plenary group which includes all partners which will meet at least annually; a main Board which will oversee governance, work programme delivery and communications; Sub-Groups which are themed groups (currently economy and environment) which focus on specific project delivery. All groups will be supported by a small operational team as well as an Accountable Body.

- 3.3 The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership Board will succeed the Shadow Board to oversee the work and operations of the Partnership, as agreed by its members. Representation on this Board will include:

- An independent Chair.
- One Chair from each of the member Growth Boards or equivalent sub-regional groups (plus an additional Co-Chair from the Central Area Growth Board).
- One Chair representing each of the Board's Programme Sub-Groups.
- One Chair each from the main constituent stakeholder groups: one on behalf of all Local Enterprise Partnerships, one on behalf of the

Arc Universities Group, and one from England's Economic Heartland

- A minimum of two independent stakeholders (NEDs) as selected by the Board.
- Senior Government representatives (whilst the Board is in receipt of core government funding).

3.4 The details regarding representatives and nominations to roles will be addressed over the coming months.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.1 The Panel considered the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership Report at its meeting on 8th June 2023.

4.2 Councillor Kerr enquired on the differences between this proposal and the previous OxCamb Arc, following which, the Panel heard the previous group was no longer in existence. The Panel were reassured that the new proposal was a lot leaner, which a much clearer focus on the environmental benefits for the area.

4.3 In response to a question from Councillor Alban, the Panel heard that whilst the Council did not expect to have representatives on every board, the opportunity for Hunts to have a strong voice would remain. The Panel were assured that recent concerns expressed by Bedfordshire residents were linked to an East-West Rail project, and not linked with this proposal which would seek strong community engagement.

4.4 Councillor Shaw observed a £10,000 commitment for the coming year and enquired what this would look like in the future. The Panel heard that whilst this was still unknown, the Council would be able to monitor the benefits of the Partnership and an exit strategy would be in place without financial penalty should it be required.

4.5 Following a query from Councillor Kerr about what benefits Council involvement in the Partnership would bring, the Panel heard that this would be monitored in relation to the twin priorities of economic growth and environmental benefit, involvement within the Partnership would allow the Council to be part of the conversation, and thus allow for input and influence as part of that.

4.6 In response to an enquiry from Councillor Bywater regarding anticipated timescales, the Panel heard that draft versions were in development with the expectation of being concluded by the Autumn. As part of the action planning and progress forward, the Panel would be kept updated.

4.7 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision on the recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The option of not being part of the OCP has been considered, it would offer a small financial and capacity saving at the expense of the opportunity to positively influence collaboration across this geography and access to additional funding. Given the limited financial outlay and risk associated with membership, alongside the close alignment with priorities, it is therefore recommended that we join the partnership, and seek to maximise the opportunities for the communities of Huntingdonshire.

6. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The OCP currently has transition funding of £250,000 from Government with access to a further £250,000 this year plus local partner contributions. This money is being committed to support the transition programme of delivery, recruitment of the Chair and to support a small transition team until the PRP is formally set up.
- 6.2 There is commitment from Government for access to a further £2,500,00 over the next two financial years, subject to business case being agreed. As part of accessing this funding local contributions are required, both in officer time and in cash contributions. This financial year's contribution was £10,000 (23/24). This contribution has been provided for within the Council's 2023/34 proposed budget.

7. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The priorities of the OCP are focused on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future. The implications of supporting the OCP would be to benefit from a wider strategic approach to delivery of its sustainable climate impact-reducing priorities.

8. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 8.1 Huntingdonshire District Council supports partnership working locally, across Huntingdonshire and beyond where there are real benefits to be achieved through potentially more efficient working, effective delivery at scale as well as access to additional funding and strength in working with and influencing central government.
- 8.2 The objectives of the OCP align closely with those laid out within the Council's Corporate Plan 2023 - 2028, and offer the prospect of significant additional impact, particularly in relation to Priority 2 - Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations and its three outcomes: Improving housing; Forward-thinking economic growth; Lowering carbon emissions. Offering the prospect of reinforcing network activity and additional external money to support this activity.

- 8.3 The Oxford to Cambridge region is an area of economic success and will continue to be so. It has been the consistent view of the Council to try its best to positively influence that growth and seek the greatest benefits for our communities. By working with other sector partners, as well as key stakeholders who directly influence that economic growth but who also seek to gain benefits for our local natural environment, we can benefit from sharing best practice, learning and also engage directly with those who have the most influence on our places and people.

For these reasons it is recommended that the Council continues to not only remain as a local partner, but to actively engage and where beneficial to the district, to lead wider partnership activity. Should priorities change the Council can take a decision to withdraw from the partnership in the future.

9. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – 230118 – SoS to Cllr Barry Wood

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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