

Agenda

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Scrutiny Committee

Date: **Thursday 12 January 2017**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Place: **St Aldate's Room, Town Hall**

For any further information please contact:

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Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Chair Councillor Andrew Gant

Vice Chair Councillor Tom Hayes
Councillor Jamila Begum Azad
Councillor Nigel Chapman
Councillor Van Coulter
Councillor James Fry
Councillor David Henwood
Councillor Jennifer Pegg
Councillor Craig Simmons
Councillor Sian Taylor
Councillor Marie Tidball
Councillor Ruth Wilkinson

The quorum for this Committee is four, substitutes are permitted.

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AGENDA

Pages

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3 **REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS**

7 - 8

Contact Officer: Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer,
Tel 01865 252230, abrown2@oxford.gov.uk

Background Information
The Committee makes a number of recommendations to officers and decision makers, who are obliged to respond in writing.
Why is it on the agenda?
<p>This item allows Committee to see the results of recommendations since the last meeting.</p> <p>Since the last meeting the following items have resulted in recommendations to the City Executive Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air quality• Quarterly Integrated Performance 2016/17 Quarter 2• Treasury Management performance for the 6 months ending 30 September 2016
Who has been invited to comment?
Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer will present the report.

4 **REPORT OF THE DEVOLUTION REVIEW GROUP**

9 - 46

Background Information
The Scrutiny Committee commissioned the Devolution Review Group to review devolution proposals in Autumn 2016.
Why is it on the agenda?
For the Scrutiny Committee to comment on the report of the Devolution Review Group and approve it for submission to the City Executive Board on 19 January 2017
Who has been invited to comment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Councillor Bob Price, Leader and Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development;• Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive.

5 MINUTES

47 - 54

Minutes from 6 December 2016

Recommendation: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2016 be APPROVED as a true and accurate record.

6 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

Scrutiny Committee

30 January 2017
28 February 2017
27 March 2017
2 May 2017

All meetings start at 6.00 pm.

Standing Panels

Housing Standing Panel – 1 March 2017, 5pm
Finance Standing Panel – 1 February 2017, 5.30pm

DECLARING INTERESTS

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licences for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". What this means is that the matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those of the member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

a)

b)

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Scrutiny recommendation tracker 2016/17 – January 2017

Total recommendations:	72	
Agreed	54	75%
Agreed in part	7	10%
Not agreed	11	15%

15 DECEMBER 2016 CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD

Air Quality

Recommendation	Agreed?	Draft CEB minutes
1. That the City Council continues to seek to comply with the current EU air quality targets in the event that the UK Government chooses to introduce less-stringent targets after leaving the EU.	Y	
2. That the City Council should promote and raise public awareness of initiatives to improve air quality in Oxford such as the Low Emissions Zone.	Y	
3. That the City Council gathers empirical evidence of the impacts of boat emissions on air quality and works in partnership with partners to identify solutions.	Y	Cllr Tanner said he planned to review the issue further
4. That further consideration is given to whether tree planting should form part of the City Council's approach to improving air quality in Oxford.	Y	
5. That the City Council works with the Transport Authority in order to achieve air quality objective levels in the worst areas (e.g. St. Clements).	Y	
6. That the City and County Council encourage shoppers to utilise sustainable methods of transport when the Westgate Shopping Centre reopens in autumn 2017.	Y	<p>Cllr Tanner said he felt the recommendation needed to be more assertive about lobbying the County Council to explain how they are going to manage the expected increase of cars in and out of Oxford when Westgate opens.</p> <p>Cllr Price said the City Council was planning to install signs which told driver whether the Westgate car-park was full on the outskirts of the park and rides.</p>

7

Quarterly Integrated Performance 2016/17 Quarter 2

Recommendation	Agreed?	Comment
1. That consideration is given to spending some of the £1.5m released from unused corporate contingencies on one-off revenue projects.	Y	The recommended spend on the Councils General Fund capital programme is around £123 million over the next four years. Much of the spend will produce ongoing revenue savings to assist in supporting the Medium Term Financial Plan as Government grant is reduced. All capital expenditure needs to be funded either by capital receipts, (through sale of assets), external grants, borrowing or revenue. However provided the capital programme is fully funded we can look at one- off revenue schemes closer to the year end.
2. That the expected and potential financial impacts of Brexit on the City Council and the wider economy should be included as a risk in the Corporate Risk Register.	Y	We agree to refer to the Brexit risk within the main risks included in the corporate risk register specifically around 'implications on the delivery of the financial plan' and 'adverse impact on Oxford's local economy'. We will monitor this risk and ensure that the impact where possible is mitigated.

Treasury Management performance for the 6 months ending 30 September 2016

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Recommendation	Agreed?	Comment
That consideration is given to how the remaining £3m of cash resources available for non-specified investments in 2016/17 can best be utilised and whether there is a case for maximising unspecified investments given the relatively low interest rates available on external borrowing as an alternative to internal borrowing.	Y	The £3million referred to is the amount of non-specified investments 'headroom' that is remaining based on a self imposed ceiling of 25% of the previous year's average investments, in accordance with the Treasury Management Strategy. The Council will shortly be reviewing its Treasury Management Strategy and in doing so the funding of the significant increase in borrowing included in the MTFP, from internal or external resources. At this point in time we will consider the placement of further funds with non- specified funds as is suggested, taking cash flow into consideration.

Devolution plans for Oxfordshire

Report of the Devolution Review Group

Commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny
Committee

January 2017

Foreword by the Chair of the Devolution Review Group

Our city and the wider county have international significance as a result of our high concentration of human capital, knowledge and innovation. These factors drive growth in our region and mean we have an important role to play in the country's knowledge-economy – attracting investment in new industry and facilitating trade. However, this growth must be matched by services, housing and infrastructure which meet our population's needs and aspirations. Devolution provides the opportunity to bring governance closer to the people and ensure high-quality services better reflect the local needs of the places where our constituents live and work. Achieving a devolution deal would release substantial financial benefits of greater Business Rates retention and extended New Homes Bonus payments, as well as presenting an important opportunity to match skills training to local needs and reducing poverty.

We were tasked by the Scrutiny Committee to examine what governance structures can provide the strong, accountable governance to deliver a devolution deal while balancing transformational savings and stable, high quality long-term service delivery. At the same time, the fast-paced national context meant there was an imperative to scrutinise the process of securing an agreement and taking the findings of the consultants' reports forwards.

In the context of the narrow window of opportunity, to achieve consensus between councils, and obtain a devolution deal from government, the Review Group found that the structure of the combined authority plus elected mayor balanced the objectives of strong, accountable governance, with high quality service delivery with securing an agreement expeditiously. As such, there is much for the city, district and county councils to learn from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Devolution Deal, which utilises this model. For example, they have already received £70m for new social housing and £100m for new affordable housing over 5 years. Releasing such funds would augment the important work our City Council has already undertaken with regards to social housing.

The consultants' reports were significant in highlighting the opportunity for service transformation. We urge both the City and County Councils to recognise the need for high quality service transformation – not just because of funding pressures but because shifting demographics require sensitive preventative service delivery. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are already ahead of the curve on this front. Working with Health Economists from Public Health England and the National Audit Office, they are building an economic case for pooled budgets to deliver place-based health interventions that overcome silo working. The combined authority governance structure supports such sensitive locality focussed allocation of resources. It also mitigates the risk of losing the city's critical revenue generating activities, which enable re-investment in and improvement of our public services.

I would like to thank councillors who were part of the Review Group developing the lines of enquiry, gathering evidence and shaping this final report and recommendations. I would also like to thank all the officers who supported this review, in particular, Andrew Brown for his diligence and Caroline Green for being an astute sounding board for the Review Group.

Our Review Group benefitted enormously from the contributions made by those who provided evidence, especially those who travelled significant distance to do so. The group is grateful to all contributors for their generosity of time and expertise.

It is our hope that this review receives support from Scrutiny Committee and that the City Executive Board takes forward our recommendations in its work to secure a devolution deal which unlocks the potential of the people in our region.

Councillor Marie Tidball
Chair of the Devolution Review Group

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Scope of Devolution Review

Appendix 2: Assessment of Proposed Governance Models for Oxfordshire

Introduction

1. The role of Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee is similar to the role of select committees at the UK parliament. Scrutiny is led by councillors who are not on the City Executive Board (the main council decision making body) and is empowered to question council decision makers and make recommendations to them. Scrutiny can also investigate any issue that affects the local area or its inhabitants, whether or not it is the direct responsibility of the City Executive Board.

2. The Scrutiny Committee established the Devolution Review Group in autumn 2016 on the basis that devolution was one of the biggest issues facing the City Council and local government in Oxfordshire. The Committee tasked the Review Group with examining devolution proposals for Oxfordshire over a series of meetings before reporting back with findings and suggested recommendations. The Review Group has cross-party membership comprising of the following councillors:
 - Councillor Marie Tidball (Chair)
 - Councillor Van Coulter
 - Councillor Andrew Gant
 - Councillor Tom Hayes
 - Councillor Craig Simmons
3. This report aims to provide helpful-evidence based recommendations and constructive commentary on what an offer to government for devolved powers and the associated governance arrangements should look like and how local councils and strategic partners can continue to work together on shared priorities for the greater good of Oxfordshire.
4. During the course of this scrutiny review a number of national and local developments took place and significant progress was made in moving the devolution debate in Oxfordshire forwards. The Review Group have attempted to capture these developments in this report to ensure it is up to date at the time of publication. It is impossible to know to what degree if any the meetings and work of the Review Group have helped to contribute to the progress made to date but the Review Group hope that any influence they have been able to exercise has been positive and beneficial.

Background

5. The government has actively offered areas in England the chance to have additional funding and devolved powers, indicating that priority will be given to cities and regions where strong governance arrangements have been implemented. All Councils in Oxfordshire agreed a joint proposal to put to government in February 2016 aimed at unlocking £1.4bn of funding for infrastructure, housing and employment to realise Oxfordshire's economic growth potential. Government advised that a deal hinged on strengthening the governance arrangements.
6. Following discussions with the Secretary of State at the time, Greg Clark MP, the city and district councils in Oxfordshire commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an independent study into the options for unitary government to inform their thinking. The County Council separately commissioned Grant Thornton to consider options for future models of local government across Oxfordshire. Both reports were published in summer 2016. Subsequently the County Council has declared its intention to develop proposals for a unitary council covering all of Oxfordshire. This proposal has not been supported by the District Leaders who support an alternative proposal for three new unitary

authorities and a combined authority as the preferred option for any potential reorganisation.

7. This work has taken place against a backdrop of considerable political uncertainty and significant changes at national level. A new Prime Minister and cabinet reshuffle followed the public referendum held on 23rd June, which resulted in a decision for the UK to leave the European Union.
8. As a consequence of these national changes, officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) met with representatives of the city, district and county councils. The Review Group heard that officials' advice made clear that government would not act as referee between different proposals and would only agree proposals for devolution or local government reorganisation where the parties involved had an agreed approach. The Review Group was also advised that government remains open to discussions on locally supported devolution proposals that include strong, accountable governance and clear accountability.
9. In the absence of agreement between the Oxfordshire councils on a future unitary model and no government-led process to resolve the matter, the District Leaders' view was that the focus should be on working collectively to deliver the savings that the PwC and Grant Thornton reports identified; and the potential for a revised devolution deal based on current councils and a combined authority led by a directly elected mayor. Such a deal was also being considered for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and that deal has since been approved.
10. At a meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board on 26 September 2016 a recommendation was agreed that a working group should be established including chief executives and leaders of local authorities, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to explore how transformational changes can be progressed in areas including, but not limited to: infrastructure, skills, economic development, strategic spatial planning, public assets, business rates, health and social care. The working group would also review the future function of the Oxfordshire Growth Board and consider the feasibility of establishing a combined authority for Oxfordshire¹.
11. At a meeting on 6 December 2016 the LEP Board confirmed that it wished to prioritise securing a devolution deal with government at the earliest opportunity. It confirmed LEP support for a revised submission to government for a devolution deal based on combined authority and elected mayor model and the current county, city and district councils. The leaders of the county, district and city councils were asked to seek a commitment from each of the councils to support this approach and enable rapid and collective progress on a serious proposal to government².
12. The Review Group understand that government will be producing guidance on its policies on both devolution and local government reorganisation early in 2017

¹ [Minutes of Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting held on 26 September 2016, page 3 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

² [Devolution update to 15 December 2016 City Executive Board, Oxford City Council, paragraph 10 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

and that councils have been advised to wait until the advice is published before submitting proposals either for a devolution deal or a unitary bid. The Review Group also understands that government's view is that proposals for unitary government would not be a requirement of devolution deals in two tier areas and that the two strands of devolution and reorganisation could be considered independently of each other³.

Principal objective

13. The Review Group's first task was to agree what the focus and methodology of their review should be. The first meeting took place on 19 September 2016 and the Review Group was grateful to have the opportunity to speak to the leaders and chief executives of the County Council and the City Council. The Review Group agreed a scoping document (attached as Appendix 1), which was endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee in October. This scoping document articulated that the purpose of the review would be:

To examine what governance structures can provide the strong, accountable governance to deliver a devolution deal while balancing cost savings and stable, high quality long-term service delivery, and the process of securing an agreement and taking the findings of the consultants' reports forwards.

Methods of investigation

14. The Review Group's findings and recommendations have been informed by evidence provided by a number of stakeholders and witnesses over five meetings (see acknowledgements), as well as document reviews and desk research. The Review Group has:

- Considered verbal and written evidence provided by key stakeholders and expert witnesses;
- Reviewed the PwC and Grant Thornton reports on unitary options;
- Reviewed the original proposals for devolution to Oxfordshire that were agreed by the Leaders of all Oxfordshire councils in February 2016;
- Assessed the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models through the lenses of:
 - the original proposals for devolution to Oxfordshire,
 - the government's criteria for evaluating proposals, and
 - the delivery of key services such as spatial planning, health and adult social care services;
- Considered the process of securing an agreement and how progress can be made in building a consensus and taking the consultants' findings forward to improve outcomes;
- Considered examples from other areas including lessons from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution deal;
- Conducted desk research and a literature review.

³ [Devolution update to 15 December 2016 City Executive Board, Oxford City Council, paragraph 7 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

Acknowledgments

15. The Review Group would like to thank the following people for providing evidence and advice to inform their findings and recommendations. Particular thanks go to those who gave up their own time and travelled from other parts of the country to attend meetings. The leaders of other Oxfordshire district councils were also invited to meetings but were unable to attend on the dates offered.

From Bluemarle:

- Martin Whiteley, Programme and Transformation Director.

From Oxford City Council:

- Councillor Bob Price, Leader and Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development;
- Peter Sloman, Chief Executive;
- Tim Sadler, Executive Director for Community Services;
- Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive;
- Patsy Dell, Head of Planning and Regulatory Services;
- Pat Jones, Committee and Member Services Manager.

From Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group:

- Catherine Mountford, Director of Governance.

From Oxfordshire County Council:

- Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader;
- Peter Clark, County Director;
- Kate Terroni, Deputy Director – Joint Commissioning (Adults and Children);
- Lucy Butler, Deputy Director for Children’s Social Care.

From Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP):

- Jeremy Long, Chair.

From PricewaterhouseCoopers:

- Paul Brewer, Corporate Finance Partner;
- Tahir Rabani, Director of Infrastructure and Government;
- Tim Pope, Senior Manager.

Findings and recommendations

The case for devolution

16. Devolution is about bringing powers and funding down to the lowest appropriate level. The UK is widely recognised as being one of the most centralised developed countries in the world, with powers concentrated in London, and all major parties went into the last general election promising to transfer powers from central government to cities and regions across the UK.

17. It is clear that the economic case for devolution to Oxfordshire is very strong. Oxfordshire is an economic success story that has very low unemployment and is home to global leaders in a number of sectors. Oxfordshire's growth is endogenous, meaning that growth is driven by internal factors such as the concentration of highly skilled people, knowledge and innovation within the region. However, continued economic growth is putting significant strain on infrastructure, housing and skills in the local area, with housing costs among the least affordable in the UK. These underlying challenges are increasingly holding the region back from achieving its full growth potential. This case is articulated in the original proposals for devolution to Oxfordshire agreed by the leaders of all Oxfordshire councils in February 2016.
18. Devolution could bring very substantial financial benefits to Oxfordshire, for example from greater local retention of Business Rates income and extended New Homes Bonus payments, as set out in the February 2016 Oxfordshire devolution proposals. This would facilitate significant investments in housing, transport infrastructure and skills to provide a catalyst for continued growth. A lack of investment over the coming years could have considerable long term consequences. Devolution presents opportunities to increase the delivery of new homes and to match skills training to local needs, which can help to reduce poverty. Skills, transport and housing are the key issues in Oxfordshire and improvements in these areas would have wider advantages including benefits for children, older people and health services. Ultimately, maximising economic growth results in more people being better off and more resources being available which can be invested in local services.

A potential window of opportunity

19. The case for devolution to Oxfordshire remains strong and is arguably even stronger now than in February 2016 due to the impacts of the UK's decision to leave the European Union on the UK economy and on government policy, including the emerging industrial strategy. Oxfordshire has international significance and is a net contributor to the Treasury so it is well placed to play a key role in supporting post-Brexit government priorities such as increasing trade links around the world, attracting inward investment and realising the potential of the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor as a single knowledge-intensive cluster. There is a compelling case to be made for Oxfordshire to be given the tools it needs to unlock the growth potential in the local economy.
20. It is unclear whether any new devolution deals agreed by government will be similar to those already agreed and there are some concerns about government's capacity to pursue multiple priorities in addition to delivering Brexit. However, the Review Group were encouraged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement in November 2016. This included the line that 'devolution remains at the heart of government's approach to supporting local growth'⁴, as well as an announcement that new mayoral combined authorities would be supported with new borrowing powers. The Chancellor has also announced funding for a feasibility study into a new Oxford to Cambridge 'expressway', which would

⁴ [Autumn Statement 2016 Phillip Hammond's Speech, Gov.uk \(accessed 1 December 2016\)](#)

include a new highway linking Oxford and Milton Keynes. This indicates that the city and wider region remain at the forefront of government thinking.

21. The Review Group was advised that progress could be achieved relatively quickly in formulating an updated devolution proposal that takes account of changes since February 2016.

Strong, accountable governance

22. It is widely recognised by key stakeholders that the current governance structures in Oxfordshire are not optimal for overcoming these challenges. Collaborative working through the Oxfordshire Growth Board has gone some way to overcoming deadlocks in strategic decision making but there are no mechanisms for enabling a collaborative planning process that is sufficiently fast and effective to meet the local challenges around infrastructure and housing delivery. The original proposals for devolution to Oxfordshire included provisions for a combined authority based on a strengthened Growth Board. This was rejected by government on the basis that new powers should come with stronger leadership and clearer accountability for decision making.
23. The PwC and Grant Thornton reports provide financial and non-financial assessments of different proposed models of unitary governance for Oxfordshire. The Review Group has sought to supplement these assessments by providing its own assessment of different governance models (including a two-tier model with a combined authority and mayor) in terms of whether they would deliver a devolution deal, their responsiveness to communities and the degree of local support for these models. The Review Group's assessment of the different governance models draws on findings of the two consultant reports and other evidence considered by the Review Group and is included as Appendix 2.
24. Any move to unitary authorities would require parliamentary approval and involve the abolition of the county and district councils (including the City Council) and the establishment of one or more new authorities responsible for the delivery of all local government services within their area. There is currently a lack of consensus about which model of unitary government would be best for Oxfordshire, and the Review Group heard that government has indicated unwillingness to use powers it has to impose local government reorganisation.
25. In the context of the significant potential benefits that a devolution deal could deliver and in light of what was known about government policy on devolution, the Review Group did find an emerging consensus on the option of a directly elected mayor for Oxfordshire. The only areas to have negotiated a devolution deal without a directly elected mayor are Cornwall and West Yorkshire. It appears from government announcements and the devolution deals agreed to date that devolution proposals based on 'alternative governance arrangements', such as the creation of unitary authorities, district council mergers or reductions

in the number of councillors, are less likely to result in the devolution of substantial powers than proposals with a directly elected mayor⁵.

26. The Review Group sought views from witnesses on whether they thought the addition of a directly elected mayor to the February 2016 devolution proposal would provide the strong, accountable governance that would be acceptable to government. The Review Group heard different opinions about this but agreed that a mayoral combined authority represents the best basis for moving forwards with an updated and refocused devolution proposal in the absence of a consensus around a preferred model of unitary government. An example of the real value of the combined authority model is in transport, where it could simplify budgets and responsibilities with strong leadership and clear, accountable decision making. A mayoral combined authority for Oxfordshire is discussed further in paragraphs 39-58.

Recommendation 1 - That the City Council, in partnership with the Oxfordshire County and District Councils and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, prioritises securing a devolution deal with government as soon as practicably possible within the current potential window of opportunity, based on an updated and refocused version of the proposal that was agreed by the leaders of all Oxfordshire councils in February 2016, with the addition of a directly elected mayor as a key line of accountability to a combined authority structure.

A refreshed devolution proposal focused on economic growth

27. The Review Group found a high degree of consensus on the need to make a strong case to government for devolved powers that can enable Oxfordshire to maximise its growth potential. Oxfordshire LEP's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) sets the strategic economic vision that 'by 2030 Oxfordshire will be recognised as a vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world leading economy, driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence'⁶. Any devolution deal should support the delivery of this long term plan for our region. There was widespread agreement that the priorities of infrastructure, planning and housing delivery and skills and employment (work streams one and two) in the February 2017 devolution proposal were broadly the right ones. These should be reviewed to take account of changes and government announcements since February 2016.
28. The Review Group heard that Cambridge City Council has been able to secure £70m for new social housing and £100m for new affordable housing over 5 years through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution deal. This can potentially resolve 25% of the homelessness problem in Cambridge but securing the funding is just a start and there is a need to develop new relationships with builders and providers. Given that Oxford faces comparable challenges to Cambridge in terms of homelessness and the availability and affordability of housing, the Review Group would like to see a similarly ambitious approach taken to social and affordable housing through an updated devolution proposal.

⁵ [Combined Authorities, House of Commons Library, 23 November 2016, p. 7-8 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

⁶ [Strategic Economic Plan, Oxfordshire LEP, page 10 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

Recommendation 2 - That a refreshed devolution proposal is refocused on making the strongest possible case for unlocking the Oxfordshire's economic growth potential through devolved powers and budgets for transport infrastructure, housing (including the delivery of significant new social and affordable housing), planning for sustainable development and skills.

29. The Review Group suggest that a refreshed devolution proposal should articulate how a devolution deal could help to make the proposed Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge 'growth corridor' a reality and maximise the economic benefits the corridor could bring to the regional and national economies. Government recognises that these cities are currently better connected to London than they are to each other and is investing significant resources to improving connectivity between them through investments in road and rail infrastructure. If fully realised, the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor could eventually become 'a single knowledge intensive functional economic area to support the continued growth of the region'⁷. A devolution deal could help to ensure that this national strategic infrastructure project will be optimally supported through well-focused investments in local infrastructure, housing and skills, with decisions taken by strong local leaders who are responsible and accountable for their delivery.

Recommendation 3 - That a refreshed devolution proposal is aligned to and strongly supports the delivery of the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge 'growth corridor', including the proposed Oxford to Cambridge expressway, and reflects the high priority government attaches to local and regional sustainability, infrastructure and housing growth.

30. A devolution deal could enable local decision makers to work with the leaders of neighbouring regions with devolved powers, such as the West Midlands. Combined authorities provide a mechanism for enabling effective collaboration between Oxfordshire and other areas on strategic issues such as transport, infrastructure and skills. For example, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution proposal included a Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Peterborough and Suffolk Joint Committee, recognising the strategic economic importance of transport, infrastructure, higher education and skills to the wider East Anglia region and the need for a joined up approach to tackling these issues. The Review Group suggest that a devolution deal for an Oxfordshire combined authority should be enabling of collaborative working with other strategic bodies on solving shared strategic problems, such as transport connectivity. This would also enable the projection of Oxfordshire's influence on strategic decision making over a wider area.

Recommendation 4 - That a refreshed devolution proposal supports the delivery of improved sustainable transport corridors and connectivity with neighbouring combined authority areas, such as the West Midlands, with an Oxfordshire Combined Authority providing a vehicle for joint working with other regional strategic bodies.

⁷ [Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stage 3 Report, p. 3 \(accessed 30 November 2016\)](#)

31. The Review Group heard that a priority of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was to secure control over all the skills funding for their area and shift to an employer-led model of workplace skills training. The current supply-led model is seen as resulting in over and under-supplies of labour and unfounded aspirations, while an employer-led model would better match skills training to the needs of the local economy. The Review Group was told that the Secretary of State had been very supportive of this approach and had pushed for more radical proposals aimed at tackling this national problem.
32. Oxfordshire is similarly well-placed to lead in developing local solutions to national problems, for example productivity and housing delivery. The Review Group was advised by a consultant that increasing economic productivity would be a central theme if he was starting a devolution proposal now given that UK productivity lags behind that of most other developed Western economies and addressing this is a government priority. Oxfordshire has a knowledge rich economy and is a centre of excellence for science, innovation and learning. Within the UK, Oxfordshire has relatively high productivity at 6.7% above the UK average⁸ but it is below a number of neighbouring areas such as Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Swindon, as well as Cambridgeshire. There are differences in the local economies of these areas but this data suggests that productivity in Oxfordshire could be higher still. The Review Group suggest that a refreshed devolution proposal could have a strong focus on the benefits of investments in transport, infrastructure, housing and skills in terms of increased productivity, and the national as well as local benefits that would bring.

Recommendation 5 - That consideration is given to how a refreshed devolution proposal could facilitate the development of local solutions to macro-economic government priorities, such as productivity and housing delivery. As a potentially highly productive part of the UK, Oxfordshire is in a unique position to be an exemplar for sharing the benefits of enhanced productivity, knowledge and innovation across the country.

33. A refreshed devolution proposal would provide opportunities for local leaders to engage in discussions with government about the economic potential of Oxfordshire. The Review Group suggest that this could lead to a strengthened relationship with government and new conversations about different types of trade and inward investment opportunities. This could be particularly beneficial in a post-Brexit environment given the city has a high percentage of residents who are EU nationals and local institutions such as the two universities have strong links with Europe and the rest of the world. Advocacy for Oxfordshire at a national and international level would be part of the role of a mayor if a devolution deal was agreed and in the meantime the Review Group feel it is important to maintain dialogue and ensure that Oxfordshire remains forefront in government thinking.

Recommendation 6 - That devolution to an Oxfordshire Combined Authority is treated as an opportunity to forge a new relationship with government (as well as other national and international actors) that ensures Oxfordshire

⁸ [Subregional Productivity - February 2015, Office for National Statistics \(accessed 1 December 2016\)](#)

is forefront in government thinking in terms of trade and inward investment post-Brexit.

Developing a new long term model for health and social care services

34. The Review Group carefully considered whether the Health and Wellbeing work stream set out in the February 2016 devolution proposal (work stream four) should be included in a refreshed proposal. This articulated an aim which is also in the County Council's Corporate Plan of creating 'a single approach for health and social care in Oxfordshire, bringing together organisations and budgets to create a system that will deliver the care that residents and service users need, as well as better value for money for tax payers'⁹.
35. The Review Group heard that social care services in Oxfordshire remain safe, robust and high performing against national benchmarks despite increases in demand and funding pressures. Significant pooled budgeting arrangements are in place between health and social care and collaborative working has led to reductions in delayed transfers of care in Oxfordshire, which had been the worst in the country. It was widely recognised that more could be done to build on these joint working arrangements, particularly given the government's ambition for health and social care services to be fully integrated by 2020¹⁰.
36. The Review Group heard that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had recognised that the economic case for place-based health interventions had not been strong enough. Public Health England had agreed and lent two health economists to help them to understand the impacts of different health interventions in areas of deprivation and develop solutions that could tackle wider public spending issues, with benefits for the justice system and worklessness budgets for example. Pooled budgets focused on specific places had the potential to overcome silo working and deliver big gains.
37. The NHS Strategic Transformation Plans (STPs) have added further complexity and uncertainty to the governance and delivery of health services. The STP for Oxfordshire also covers Buckinghamshire and West Berkshire, so coterminous boundaries between local government and health service provision over a county-footprint has been lost. The emerging STP will set out plans for how a potential funding deficit of £587m by 2020/21¹¹ across the Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and West Berkshire region will be closed. It is expected to have profound implications for the delivery of health services in Oxfordshire but at this stage it is not possible to fully understand what these implications will be.
38. The Review Group note that the current system of health and social care is increasingly being viewed as failing at a national level and support efforts to develop local joint working arrangements, with the aim of eventually reaching a point where a single set of decision makers are accountable for these services. However, given that the health and wellbeing agenda has moved on somewhat since February 2016, it is suggested that a refreshed devolution proposal should

⁹ [Corporate Plan 2016-2020, Oxfordshire County Council, p. 7 \(accessed 22 December 2016\)](#)

¹⁰ [Public health and social care, Public Sector Executive, 25 November 2015 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

¹¹ [Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West \(BOB\) Sustainability and Transformation Plan \(STP\), NHS, 26 July 2016 \(accessed 13 December 2016\)](#)

not seek new local powers to facilitate this ambition at this stage. The Review Group see devolution as being an iterative process and it may be appropriate to revisit this in future, once the implications of the STP are known. In the meantime, it is suggested that the City Council monitors the emerging STP and seeks to be fully involved with partners in shaping the new model of health and social care.

Recommendation 7 - That given the challenges to the sustainability of health and social care services, the ambition to create a more integrated approach to health and social care should not be lost and the City Council should seek to play a full and active role in the consideration of what a new model for health and social care in Oxfordshire should look like, once the fundamental implications of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) become clearer.

A mayoral combined authority for Oxfordshire

39. The primary purpose of a mayoral combined authority for Oxfordshire would be to exercise devolved powers and manage budgets over transport, infrastructure, strategic planning, housing delivery and skills to drive strategic economic growth in Oxfordshire. The combined authority would manage a programme of investment and seek to align strategic investments with local priorities.
40. Prior to the establishment of a combined authority the local authorities would be required to conduct a governance review and may prepare a scheme setting out how they think the combined authority could operate including its proposed area, functions and constitution.
41. The City and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 makes provisions for the general functions of mayoral combined authorities but its precise functions would be detailed in an Order made by the Secretary of State to establish the combined authority, at the request of the local authorities who must all consent to this. The Order could confer functions solely on the mayor or on the combined authority collectively¹². Membership of the combined authority would include a representative from each of the six constituent councils (the five districts plus the county), normally the council leaders.

The role and powers of an elected mayor

42. The 2016 Act requires that an elected mayor is a member and chair of a combined authority. They are required to appoint a deputy mayor and can allocate portfolio responsibilities to other members of the combined authority but have no powers over who those members are. Mayors can also delegate functions to cabinet members (i.e. council leaders and other members of the combined authority), committees or officers of the combined authority.
43. Elected mayors have powers to raise revenues, including the power to levy a precept on constituent authorities' council tax bills. They can also levy an additional 2% on Business Rates to pay for infrastructure investments, subject to

¹² [Combined Authorities, House of Commons Library, 23 November 2016, p. 6 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

the agreement of the LEP¹³. The membership of the LEP Board includes all Oxfordshire council leaders but a majority of the board members including the Chair must be from the private sector¹⁴. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement in December 2016 included an announcement that mayoral combined authorities would be granted new borrowing powers to reflect their new responsibilities¹⁵.

44. A directly elected mayor could have a powerful advocacy role for Oxfordshire at national and international levels. However, to provide the strong, accountable governance required by government and to improve on the status quo, a mayor would also need to have the ability to unblock strategic decision making, such as high-level decisions about the delivery of new housing outside the city to cater for Oxford's unmet housing need. It is important to strike the right balance between overcoming deadlocks in strategic decision making and paying due regard to the wishes of local areas. As a minimum an elected mayor for Oxfordshire would need to have powers to propose budgets for devolved funding for strategic investments and county-wide economic, transport and non-statutory spatial strategies. However, the mayor should be required to seek support on the combined authority for the adoption and implementation of their plans.
45. The Review Group note that a mayoral combined authority would need to work closely with the LEP on shared agendas linked to economic growth and the mayor would need the LEP's agreement to raise an additional levy on Business Rates. To ensure effective joined up working between the public and private sectors in these areas the Review Group suggest that the mayor should be a member of the LEP, and that a representative of the LEP (e.g. the Chair) should be a full voting member of the combined authority. This would help to ensure that the voice of business could be heard at the top table and have an equal say in strategic decision making.

Recommendation 8 - That the role and powers of an elected mayor for Oxfordshire, together with associated checks and balances, should be carefully considered by the City Council, other Oxfordshire councils and the LEP, with reference to existing models such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. An elected mayor would Chair the Combined Authority and as a minimum should:

- a) Assign clear cabinet portfolio responsibilities to members of the combined authority;***
- b) Propose annual spending plans for devolved funding, economic strategies, transport plans and non-statutory spatial plans;***
- c) Be a member of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.***

Governance of a combined authority for Oxfordshire

46. A mayoral combined authority for Oxfordshire would be governed by the law and by a written constitution which would need to be formally agreed by all of the constituent councils. Combined authority meetings and decision making processes would be governed by the same legislation as local councils, so meetings would be held in public and decision notices would have to be

¹³ [Combined Authorities, House of Commons Library, 23 November 2016, p. 8-9 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

¹⁴ [LEP assurance framework, HM Government, December 2014, p. 5 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

¹⁵ [Autumn Statement 2016: Philip Hammond's speech, HM Government, 23 November 2016 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

published 28 days in advance of decisions being taken. The constitution for the combined authority would need to stipulate the powers of the elected mayor and combined authority members and include effective mechanisms for transparency, scrutiny and holding to account. The Review Group considered what the governance arrangements for a mayoral combined authority for Oxfordshire may need to look like, drawing on examples such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, which the Review Group suggest provides a useful starting point for consideration in Oxfordshire.

47. The Review Group heard that the early design of a constitution for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority had been very helpful in building confidence in the new arrangements. The Review Group suggest that a similar approach is taken in Oxfordshire, with a robust constitution for a mayoral combined authority being designed and agreed by the constituent councils prior to the election of a mayor. The development of a constitution would require detailed and careful consideration. Once adopted, the combined authority Monitoring Officer would be responsible for the operation of the constitution and changes to the constitution should need the approval of all constituent councils.
48. The constitution of the combined authority would need to include details of how decision making and voting would operate, including the circumstances in which a combined authority could over-rule the mayor. On the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority a 2/3 majority of members present and voting can reject mayoral proposals. For transport plans the majority must include the votes of the two upper tier-authorities who are responsible for transport and highways in their areas¹⁶. The Dorset Combined Authority uses a simple majority system for all decisions apart from certain 'reserved matters' that require unanimity, including budgets and transport plans¹⁷. The Review Group suggest that the provisions for overturning mayoral proposals on some form of majority basis (e.g. a 2/3 majority) should be subject to careful consideration and discussion between the councils at appropriate levels.
49. There may be decisions where the votes of particular combined authority members should be required e.g. for transport plans. In the Norfolk and Suffolk devolution agreement decisions are taken by a simple majority of members present and voting, subject to that majority including the vote of the Mayor (with some qualifications)¹⁸. The Review Group suggest that in principle the votes of all voting members of the combined authority should count equally and prefer the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough approach, where combined authority members each have one vote and the mayor has no casting vote.
50. The Review Group recognise that devolution should be about bringing powers and responsibilities down to the lowest possible level and heard that in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough the only powers elevated to the combined authority are transport powers that resided with upper-tier authorities. There may be instances where new powers and responsibilities devolved from government could be exercised at district-council or county-council level rather

¹⁶ [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough East Anglia Devolution Proposal, 17 June 2016 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

¹⁷ [Dorset Combined Authority scheme, Dorset councils online, p. 1 \(accessed 21 December 2016\)](#)

¹⁸ [The Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Agreement, June 2016 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

than combined authority level. The Review Group suggest that the principle of subsidiarity should apply to devolved functions and be reflected in the governance of a combined authority, as with the Norfolk and Suffolk Combined Authority¹⁹.

51. Combined authorities are required to have at least one overview and scrutiny committee with the equivalent powers to local authority scrutiny committees, including powers to call in and suspend decisions and to require members and officers to attend meetings to provide evidence. The majority of members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must be members of constituent councils and can't hold executive positions in those councils. There is no requirement that the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reflects the political balance across the constituent councils but other combined authority areas have chosen to do this and government has recognised that good governance practice is for scrutiny committees to be 'politically balanced, enabling appropriate representation of councils' minority parties'²⁰. The proposal for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Overview and Scrutiny Committee is that the Committee will have 'at least 1 member from each of the [nine] constituent councils, with the size of the committee being appropriate to reflect political balance across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough'²¹. It is suggested that this committee will have at least 11 members but the details of how the political balance will be calculated and how seats will be allocated has not been seen.
52. Options for some form of overall calculation of political proportionality across the combined authority area could be considered to ensure that smaller political parties are appropriately represented. However, the overall political proportionality could be impacted by every council by-election and a process would need to be created for allocating seats to the constituent councils based on overall proportionality. There is also an issue in that the numbers of elected members vary across the different Oxfordshire councils and are not necessarily proportionate to population size. Another approach could be for each constituent council to allocate two seats (as is the case in Dorset) based on their own political proportionality. This is likely to result in lower representation of smaller parties. A possible middle-option could be for each council to allocate a first seat based on its own political proportionality (i.e. to its largest party) and for a second seat to be allocated to each council based on a calculation of overall proportionality. This would require a mechanism for determining which councils would allocate members from which political parties. The Review Group suggest that proper consideration is given to how the membership of the combined authority overview and scrutiny committee would be geographically and politically-balanced.
53. It is also a requirement that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is from a different political party from the combined authority mayor. This helps to provide assurance that the combined authority is subject to robust independent scrutiny. The Review Group suggest that in the event that the mayor is

¹⁹ [The Norfolk and Suffolk Devolution Agreement, June 2016, p. 8 \(accessed 21 December 2016\)](#)

²⁰ [Combined Authorities, House of Commons Library, 23 November 2016, p. 7 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

²¹ [Guidance note scrutiny arrangements for combined authority, Huntingdonshire Council \(accessed 21 December 2016\)](#)

independent, the Chair of Scrutiny should not be from the largest party on the combined authority.

54. The combined authority would be required to meet in public and have similar arrangements for openness, transparency and the accessibility of documents as meetings of local authorities. Unlike the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which is a joint executive committee and does not have an overview and scrutiny function, combined authority decisions should be subject to scrutiny in public before they are taken as this is likely to provide for more effective scrutiny than suspending decisions that have already been taken. Specific arrangements for scrutiny and public participation would need to be developed and agreed before being designed-in to the constitution of the combined authority.
55. A number of partner organisations including local universities, Highways England and the Environment Agency are represented on the Growth Board by non-voting members. A similar arrangement for bringing different stakeholders into decision making is likely to be useful in a combined authority model. The February 2016 devolution proposal stated that representatives of partner organisations could sit on the combined authority as non-constituent members. The constitution of a combined authority would need to include provisions for governing non-constituent members, including how they would be appointed and any circumstances in which they could vote. The Review Group note that the West Midlands Combined Authority also includes non-constituent members from neighbouring local authorities and LEPs, who are empowered to vote in certain circumstances such as matters to do with economic development²². This has not been proposed in Oxfordshire but could potentially be considered in future.
56. The Review Group suggest that the combined authority should be required to report back to constituent authorities at appropriate intervals (e.g. annually) to ensure that all elected members are kept informed about the work of the combined authority.

Recommendation 9 - That the constitution of a combined authority, including provisions for ensuring transparency and effective accountability, should be agreed prior to the election of a mayor following careful consideration by the City Council, other Oxfordshire councils and the LEP, with reference to existing models such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough combined authority. We suggest that the constitution of a combined authority would include:

- a) Tight controls around how the constitution could be amended once adopted, for example requiring unanimous agreement amongst the constituent authorities;***
- b) Powers to reject proposals put forward by the mayor on some form of majority basis (e.g. a 2/3 majority);***
- c) Equal votes for all members, including the representative of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and the elected mayor;***

²² [FAQs, West Midlands Combined Authority \(accessed 21 December 2016\)](#)

- d) A principle of subsidiarity so that powers and responsibilities devolved from government are discharged at the lowest appropriate level, bringing governance closer to the people;**
- e) An overview and scrutiny committee that includes at least one (preferably two) non-executive members from each constituent council, taking proportionality across the county into account;**
- f) A rule that if the Mayor is independent, the Chair of Scrutiny can't be from the majority party on the combined authority;**
- g) Provisions for promoting openness and transparency including scrutiny of decisions in public before they are taken;**
- h) Provisions for non-constituent members, including specifying any circumstances in which constituent members could give voting rights to non-constituent members;**
- i) Mechanisms for reporting back to constituent authorities.**

57. A combined authority for Oxfordshire would be a separate legal entity from its constituent councils and would require its own secretariat including a Head of the Paid Service (Chief Executive), Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, as well as scrutiny and audit functions. The additional costs associated with a mayoral combined authority would support the delivery of potentially very significant new investments in Oxfordshire, so it is likely that the additional costs would be dwarfed by the overall gains from a devolution deal. Meeting these costs should therefore not be a barrier to achieving a deal.

58. Combined authorities can raise a levy on their members to fund costs attributable to their functions. In Dorset, these costs will be met by the constituent councils and apportioned based on population²³. In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough work is underway to establish what resources their combined authority will need but there is an aspiration to look at using existing resources where possible²⁴. Another option could be for efficiency savings that are jointly delivered in partnership by the constituent councils to be reinvested in to contributing to the running costs of the combined authority. The Review Group suggest that consideration should be given to options for covering the running costs of the combined authority in a way that does not result in an overall increase in the cost of democracy in Oxfordshire or a shift of funding away from existing councils services. Other, project-specific costs could be factored into project plans and paid for from devolved budgets.

Recommendation 10 - That consideration is given by the City Council, other Oxfordshire councils and the LEP as to how the administrative running costs associated with a mayoral combined authority (which would come with significant new investments and additional responsibilities for local government) could be met without increasing the overall running costs of local government in Oxfordshire.

59. The Review Group found that another key lesson from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution deal was the need for open engagement with all

²³ [Dorset Combined Authority scheme, Dorset councils online, p. 13 \(accessed 21 December 2016\)](#)

²⁴ [Devolution - what it means locally, Cambridge City Council \(accessed 3 January 2017\)](#)

elected members about the role and powers of a mayor and the statements from government that devolved powers required new models of local leadership and governance. The Review Group suggest that elected members and the public should be engaged with before a new devolution proposal for Oxfordshire is put to government.

Recommendation 11 - That elected members and the public should be engaged with about what a mayoral combined authority model for Oxfordshire would look like, as well as the various benefits that securing a devolution deal would bring, before a proposal is submitted to government.

Joint working

60. The Review Group considered how the findings of the PwC and Grant Thornton reports were being taken forwards by the Oxfordshire councils, noting the commonality between the findings of the two reports. Both reports highlighted Oxfordshire's economic growth potential, significant levels of savings that could be achieved from reorganising local government and transforming services and the need for councils to work together for the greater good of Oxfordshire.
61. The Chief Executives of Oxfordshire councils have agreed to work together to achieve efficiencies in three areas; infrastructure and planning, making better use of council assets and exploring how district functions such as housing could help to reduce pressure on adult social care services. The Review Group strongly support these efforts to release efficiencies through joint working.

Recommendation 12 - That the City Council continues to work with the other Oxfordshire councils to unlock efficiencies through joint working between infrastructure and planning functions, making better use of council assets and exploring how district functions such as housing could help to reduce pressure on adult social care services.

62. The Review Group note that substantial savings could be achieved from transforming the way public services are delivered and heard that much could be achieved without the reorganisation of local government structures. It was suggested to the Review Group that government may be unwilling to devolve funding and powers in the absence of a plan to achieve the potential savings identified locally. Delivering savings has not been a requirement of devolution deals granted to other areas.
63. The Review Group hope that the councils can build on this collaborative working and look at other areas where joint working could release efficiencies. It was suggested that closer working between trading standards and environmental health teams and between the different customer services functions could release relatively non-contentious efficiency savings. The Review Group would encourage this collaborative working resulting in the development of a shared plan for delivering efficiency savings and service transformation. This could help to provide assurance to the public that savings identified in the two consultant reports are being delivered, and may help to give confidence to government that the councils are working together effectively and efficiency.

Recommendation 13 - That ideally collaborative working between councils aimed at releasing efficiency savings should result in a jointly developed and agreed plan for efficiencies and service transformation that can be delivered without local government reorganisation.

64. The Review Group hope that closer engagement between the Oxfordshire councils at leader and senior officer level on an updated devolution proposal and identifying efficiency savings from joint working, as well as through the Growth Board, will lead to increased dialogue and an emerging consensus between the Councils, the LEP and other partners about the key priorities for Oxfordshire and what high-level outcomes they should be seeking to achieve in partnership.

Recommendation 14 - That collaborative working on devolution and identifying efficiencies are treated as opportunities to build a consensus among the Oxfordshire councils and strategic partners around what the shared strategic priorities and outcomes for Oxfordshire should be.

Local government reorganisation

65. The Review Group concluded that reorganising local government structures is not the best route to securing a devolution deal at this time. The Review Group recognise that the PwC and Grant Thornton reports show that significant savings could be achieved from reorganising local government in Oxfordshire, replacing the existing two-tier system of County, City and District Councils with one or more unitary authorities. Reorganisation would release savings from reduced duplication of back office functions, management structures, lower democratic costs, better use of assets and contracting at a larger scale. The debate about unitary structures is highly politicised, with a lack of consensus between the county and district councils about what the best model of unitary government for Oxfordshire is, and government indicating that it is unwilling to impose a solution.
66. All Oxfordshire councils are expected to remain financially viable over the medium term but the Grant Thornton report states that ‘in common with many county councils across England, rising demand for adult and children’s social care combined with reducing settlement funding presents a significant challenge to Oxfordshire County Council’s longer term financial stability’²⁵. The Review Group believe that if local government continues on its current financial trajectory and pressure on services continues to mount then the issue of reorganisation will need to be addressed at some point in the future. However, the Review Group suggest that financial savings should not be the main driver of local government reorganisation and that it is more important to consider how any proposed governance model would support the delivery of high quality services based on shared priorities and outcomes.

Recommendation 15 - That any future governance model for local government in Oxfordshire should be designed to facilitate the achievement of shared priorities and outcomes, not simply to deliver cash savings or to engineer political outcomes.

²⁵ [Review of future options for local government in Oxfordshire, Grant Thornton, August 2016, p. 38 \(accessed 6 December 2016\)](#)

67. The Review Group recognise that all proposed unitary models are untested in terms of local accountability and all have benefits and dis-benefits. The strengths and weaknesses of different models are listed in Appendix 2 but no weighting has been applied to these. It is widely accepted that any model would need to have strategic and operation layers and the Review Group heard that there is potentially a lot of similarity between, for example, a single unitary council with executive area boards and a county-wide combined authority with three or more unitary councils. It comes down to a judgement about which model is the most sensible for Oxfordshire and would be best placed to deliver the desired outcomes. The Review Group suggest that their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of different models of unitary government should help to inform any future City Council decisions on local government reorganisation.

Recommendation 16 - That the work the Review Group has undertaken in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models (see Appendix 2) should be used as part of an evidence base to inform any future consideration of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.

68. The Review Group have not been able to make an economic assessment of the different proposed governance models in terms of how different local government structures could help to unlock economic growth and potentially release external sources of funding for investment. The Review Group suggest that such modelling should form part of an evidence base that informs any future decisions on local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire. The City Council in partnership with other Oxfordshire councils and the LEP could look to commission an economic assessment of governance structures from local universities for other local or national bodies.

Recommendation 17 – That the evidence base that informs any future decisions about local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire includes an economic assessment of different governance models.

69. The Review Group considered the financial modelling used by PwC and Grant Thornton in assessing different unitary options, and had an opportunity to question PwC about their financial analysis. The PwC analysis was based on publically-available information contained in the Medium Term Financial Plans of the six Oxfordshire councils and involved dividing up total local government resources and expenditure by service at ward level and using this data as building blocks.

70. The potential savings PwC identified were based on removing duplication and benchmarks of savings that have been delivered in other parts of the country. In addition, PwC projected savings that could be achieved from transforming the way that local government services are delivered although they stress that the level of savings achieved 'would depend heavily on the level of ambition and the scale of transformation successfully delivered'²⁶. Significant discrepancies between the financial analyses of PwC and Grant Thornton can be almost

²⁶ [Oxfordshire Unitary Government Study, PwC, July 2016, p. 9 \(accessed 6 December 2016\)](#)

entirely explained by the assumed levels of service transformation facilitated by closer working resulting from local government reorganisation.

71. Both reports predict that a city unitary authority on the current City Council boundaries would have a baseline (pre-transformation) financial deficit of a similar order of magnitude, ranging from -£11.5m to -£16.8m depending on the total number of unitary authorities in the model. In both cases it is the concentration of demand for adult and children's social care services in the city that is the main cause of this deficit. Post-transformation, these figures are reduced by an amount based on the assumed level of net savings. PwC assumed no changes to local government financing beyond those already accounted for in the councils' financial plans and recognised that planned changes to Business Rates, which were expected to be of relative benefit the city, would redress some of the variations in deficits and surpluses predicted in their financial analysis²⁷.
72. The Review Group found that the PwC analysis does not take account of the geographical distribution of potential revenue opportunities (e.g. from trading services) and think that there are likely to be greater opportunities to grow local government revenues within the city economy than in other parts of the county due to the concentration of economic activity in the city. The Review Group think that local government reorganisation could represent a risk to this critical and growing source of non-government income and suggest that revenue generation should be taken in to account in any future decisions on local government reorganisation.
73. The Review Group explored whether in a model with two or more unitary authorities social care services could continue to be delivered on a county-wide basis through a contracted agreement as an alternative to breaking up these services. The Review Group found that there is currently no track record of services being delivered in this way and few precedents are emerging elsewhere in the country. A tri-borough arrangement in South-West London is one such example but that operates over a much smaller geographical area. If this option was pursued in future it would require the development of a bespoke solution for Oxfordshire. The Review Group suggest that the impacts of the STP and any changes to the delivery of health and social care services would also need to be factored in to any future financial analysis of unitary options for Oxfordshire.

Recommendation 18 - That the net savings estimates from any future reorganisation of local government in Oxfordshire, together with projections for the long term sustainability of unitary authorities, would need to be re-considered in light of changes to local government finance settlements (i.e. Business Rates retention), any changes to local government responsibilities and any new models for delivering social care and health services. Any future decisions on local government reorganisation should also take into account the revenue generation potential of the different unitary authorities and the potential for achieving efficiencies to deliver service transformation.

²⁷ [Oxfordshire Unitary Government Study, PwC, July 2016, p. 34 \(accessed 22 December 2016\)](#)

74. The Review Group have refrained from stating a preference for a particular model of unitary government. Instead, the Review Group have sought to take an evidence-based approach to identifying the things that any future model of unitary government would need to provide for, including the good things that are already happening that should be preserved and improvements that are needed.
75. A key issue that any form of local government reorganisation would need to resolve as far as possible is the potential for logjams in strategic decision making caused by a lack of consensus between sovereign authorities with differing priorities. There is lots of consensus in the PwC and Grant Thornton reports and amongst people the Review Group spoke to about the need for a mechanism to unblock decision making. A well governed mayoral combined authority or single county-wide unitary authority could do this but careful consideration would need to be given to balancing strategic and local decision making.
76. The city is an economic hub for the region which has a number of distinctive assets and a global brand. The Review Group would want to ensure that any future reorganisation of local government structures would support the sustainable growth of the city-region economy and build on any devolution deal in a way that capitalises on the unique assets of the city.
77. Allied to this is the need for the city (and other district areas) to be appropriately represented in democratic decision making. Oxford is an urban environment, which presents a different set of opportunities and challenges compared with other areas. For example, the city has 10 small local areas that are among the 10% most deprived area in the country. The city also has a very different demographic make-up from other parts of the county, with a population profile that is significantly younger (and more diverse) than that of Oxfordshire (excl. Oxford)²⁸. As a group of City Councillors elected by people living in Oxford, the Review Group strongly believe that the population and demographics of the city need to be reflected in decision making and the lines of accountability for decisions that affect local services in the city.
78. The Review Group note that different service delivery models are in place across Oxfordshire due to different choices made by District Councils in response to the particular needs of their areas. For example, the City Council is the only district in Oxfordshire that has chosen to retain its social housing stock and has made difficult decisions in the past about insourcing services and growing revenues through trading. The Review Group suggest that any future unitary model of local government in Oxfordshire would need to preserve the diversity of choices and preferences of different parts of the county and enable future decisions to be similarly responsive to local areas, rather than imposing a one-size fits all solution on a large and diverse geography.
79. It is clear that there is potential for closer working between county and district council functions to unlock efficiencies and it is hoped that much can be achieved in the absence of reorganisation. The Review Group note that

²⁸ [Age profile, Oxford City Council \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

structural changes would not necessarily accelerate progress in collaborative working because silos can exist within a single organisation and much depends on people and relationships. Consideration would need to be given to how any future model of unitary government could facilitate joint working and potentially the pooling of budgets where synergies exist.

80. The Review Group found a widespread consensus that any future model of local government reorganisation would need to provide for more coherent leadership and advocacy for Oxfordshire focused on inward investment, together with effective engagement with key stakeholders including business, health partners, local universities, central government and other regional, national and international bodies to project Oxfordshire's interests.
81. The Review Group considered how spatial planning could operate more effectively in future. The Review Group was advised that the development of a single local plan for an area the size of Oxfordshire would take many years and would risk becoming mired in process and examination. The main improvement identified was the need for an aligned overview of housing, jobs and growth that could be planned and delivered at a strategic level. The Review Group heard that achieving this in Cambridgeshire had not been easy but there had been an alignment of interests across the local councils, resulting in the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2012/13. This was a strategic document that was light-touch but robust and local councils had to take account of it in their local plans. The new mayor's spatial plan will be non-statutory and built up from local plans at district level. The Review Group recognise that active progress has been made in Oxfordshire in seeking to resolve the issues of land supply in the city which mean that the City Council is reliant on the co-operation of neighbouring authorities to cater for Oxford's unmet housing need, which is key to achieving sustained economic growth.
82. The PwC report highlights the various pressures on adult services in Oxfordshire and the need for a more joined up approach to health, social care and other services that impact on health and wellbeing such as housing, transport and community services. The Review Group support these aims and, as discussed in paragraphs 34-38, believe there is a need to move towards creating a new system for health and social care with aligned planning for these services at a high level. Such a model would need to be sensitive to the particular needs of different places because, as the PwC report states, the needs of the city are very different from those of rural areas²⁹. Any future reorganisation of local government structures should be consistent with and enabling of this direction of travel.
83. The Review Group heard evidence that children's services delivered by the County Council are safe and resilient despite significant increases in assessments and caseloads. In 2014 Oxfordshire's children's social care services received were rated 'good' by Ofsted³⁰. Having a single body responsible for children's services (with local area delivery teams) has a number

²⁹ [Oxfordshire Unitary Government Study, PwC, July 2016, p. 75 \(accessed 7 December 2016\)](#)

³⁰ [Oxfordshire's children's social care services rated "Good" by Ofsted, Oxfordshire County Council, July 2014 \(accessed 20 December 2016\)](#)

of benefits. For example, resources can be mobilised across Oxfordshire in response to emergency situations or major police operations with very little notice. In contrast, smaller authorities tend to struggle to recruit staff and remain viable. The Review Group note that some strong partnership arrangements are in place and joint working on issues such as child sexual exploitation and asylum seeking children is good.

84. The Review Group agree with the PwC analysis that these foundations should be seen as a platform for further improvement. In particular, there is a need for a greater focus on preventative interventions that can build resilience and aspiration within families on the edge of care and communities with the greatest need. This approach would cost more in the short term but save money over the longer term by preventing more acute cases in future, particularly in the city where need is concentrated. The Review Group note concern that the current direction of travel for children's services, which is to withdraw universal provision and focus on statutory requirements, is not consistent with a preventative-led approach³¹. There are also opportunities to increase the integration of children's services with related local government services such as housing and leisure.
85. The Review Group suggest that any future model of local government reorganisation would need to be flexible enough to ensure that all local government services can be of high quality and delivered at the right scale, be that over a county-wide or more localised (e.g. district) footprint. Breaking up county-wide services such as libraries, trading standards etc. is likely to be detrimental to the economies of scale and resilience of these services. Alternative delivery models, such as trust models, may be options for retaining some County Council services over a county-wide footprint in a model with two or more unitary councils but ensuring the best outcomes should be the first priority and form should follow function. Equally, merging district-level functions such as housing and community services over a larger geography could result in these services being less tailored and responsive to local communities, diluting democratic accountability for their delivery.
86. Finally, the Review Group suggest that any reorganisation of local government in Oxfordshire would need to deliver efficiencies from reducing duplication of effort, reductions in management posts, reductions in the number and cost of elections and councillors, and contracting at scale. Decisions could be made in future about how such efficiencies would be utilised i.e. whether resources would be redeployed in priority areas, invested in services or projects or taken out as cash savings. The Review Group would not support targeting specific levels of financial savings from the outset because any reorganisation would be highly disruptive and should be designed to enable local government to fulfil its purpose of delivering efficient high quality services to residents and tax payers.

Recommendation 19 - That any future governance model for local government in Oxfordshire that impacts the city and the wider city-region should have strategic and operational layers and facilitate the following things over the longer term:

³¹ [Oxfordshire Unitary Government Study, PwC, July 2016, p. 65-66 \(accessed 13 December 2016\)](#)

- a) ***Strong, democratically accountable decision making at strategic and local levels that minimises logjams in decision making;***
- b) ***The sustainable economic growth of the city and wider city-region that capitalises on the unique assets of the city;***
- c) ***Accountable representation that reflects the urban geography and demographics of the city;***
- d) ***The continuation and enhancement of historical preferences and decision-making legacies in the city and other parts of the county, such as different approaches to social housing, trading, outsourcing, etc.***
- e) ***The protection and growth of local government revenues from non-government sources (e.g. traded services, commercial property rents, etc.)***
- f) ***Closer working that overcomes silos and unlocks efficiencies in areas where synergies exist, such as housing and social care, trading standards and environmental health, customer services, etc.***
- g) ***Effective engagement and strong relationships between local government, strategic partners and key stakeholders, including government and business, together with powerful, coherent advocacy for Oxfordshire on the international stage to attract inward investment;***
- h) ***Aligned strategic planning for economic growth, transport, infrastructure, housing, skills and jobs at county-level that joins up local plan making over district-area footprints;***
- i) ***Aligned strategic planning for a better integrated approach to health and social care services that is sensitive to the particular needs of place, especially areas with high levels of health inequality and deprivation;***
- j) ***The safe and resilient delivery of children's services over a county-footprint that reflects the socio-economic benefits of preventative-led delivery and is sensitive to localities with concentrated demographic need;***
- k) ***The delivery of quality council services at the most appropriate scales;***
- l) ***Savings from reductions in duplication of back office functions, management costs, democratic costs, contracting at scale, etc.***

Conclusion

87. The Review Group found that there is a compelling case for devolution to Oxfordshire and urge the local councils and partners to get together and make the strongest possible case to government at the earliest opportunity. This proposal should be based on unlocking the region's growth potential by devolving powers over transport infrastructure, housing and skills to a mayoral combined authority. Government recognises Oxfordshire's growth potential, as demonstrated by investments in the Oxford-MK-Cambridge corridor, and is likely to be receptive to a detailed and robust proposal with strong, accountable governance.
88. The Review Group hope Oxfordshire councils continue to demonstrate that they can work effectively together on a shared agenda for the region and joint working on the delivery of efficiency savings is a very welcome development. The Review Group hope that this is the beginning of a period of closer collaboration

and consensus about the key outcomes that local government and other public services need to deliver because structures should be secondary to outcomes.

Appendix 1 – Scope of Devolution Review

Review Topic	'Devolution plans for Oxfordshire'
Lead Member	Councillor Marie Tidball
Other Review Group Members	Councillors Van Coulter, Andrew Gant, Tom Hayes & Craig Simmons
Officer support	Scrutiny Officer support approx. 1-2 days per week for up to 4 months between August and December 2016. Additional support from the Assistant Chief Executive and other Council Officers.
Background	<p>The Government has actively offered areas in England the chance to have additional funding and devolved powers in exchange for elected mayors or streamlined governance structures. All Councils in Oxfordshire agreed a joint proposal to put to Government in February 2016 aimed at unlocking £1bn funding for infrastructure to realise the County's growth potential. Government advised that a deal hinged on strengthening the governance arrangements.</p> <p>Following discussions with the Secretary of State at the time, Greg Clark MP, the District Councils commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an independent study into the options for unitary government to inform their thinking. The County Council separately commissioned Grant Thornton to consider options for future models of local government across Oxfordshire. Both reports were published in the Summer. Subsequently the County Council has declared its intention to develop proposals for a unitary council covering all of Oxfordshire. This proposal is not supported by the District Leaders who support an alternative proposal for three new unitary authorities and a combined authority as the best option for any potential reorganisation.</p> <p>This work has taken place against a backdrop of considerable political uncertainty and significant changes at national level. A new Prime Minister and cabinet reshuffle followed the public referendum held on 23rd June, which resulted in a decision for the UK to leave the European Union.</p> <p>As a consequence of these national changes, officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) met with representatives of the city, district and county councils. Their advice made clear that the Government would only agree proposals for devolution or local government reorganisation if the parties involved came to government with an agreed approach and that will not act as referee between different proposals. They</p>

	<p>have advised that they remain open to discussion on locally supported devolution proposals that include strong, accountable governance and clear accountability.</p> <p>In the absence of agreement between the County and the Districts on a future unitary model and no government led process to resolve the matter, the District Leaders view is that the focus should now be on working collectively to deliver the savings that reports from PwC and Grant Thornton have identified are available; and potential for a revised devolution deal based on current councils and a combined authority. Such a deal is currently being considered for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.</p>
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>Devolution is one of the biggest issues facing the City Council and local government in Oxfordshire. The public would expect the development of devolution proposals to be subject to independent oversight and challenge from elected members. Due to the complexity of the issues this detailed work would need to be undertaken by a review group over a series of meetings.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee prioritised a review of ‘devolution proposals for Oxfordshire’ when agreeing its 2016-17 work plan.</p>
<p>Purpose of Review / Objective</p>	<p>To examine what governance structures can provide the strong, accountable governance to deliver a devolution deal while balancing cost savings and stable, high quality long-term service delivery, and the process of securing an agreement and taking the findings of the consultants’ reports forwards.</p>
<p>Methodology/ Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite verbal or written evidence from key stakeholders on their experiences of the issues, challenges and key things that need to be delivered to address these. • Review both consultant reports and any available engagement feedback. • Review and critique the original devolution proposal. • Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models (e.g. 1 Unitary Authority (UA), 2UAs, 3UAs with a combined authority (CA) and mayor, 4UAs with a CA and mayor, existing structures with a CA and mayor) through the lenses of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the original devolution proposal, ○ the Governments’ criteria, and ○ the delivery of two or three key services (e.g. spatial planning, adult social care). • Seek to reach a consensus view on one or more preferred governance models for Oxfordshire. • Consider the process of securing an agreement and how progress can be made in building a consensus and taking the consultants’ findings forward to improve outcomes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider case study examples from other areas (e.g. Cambs, Wiltshire, Berkshire). • Desk research / literature review. 		
Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust independent scrutiny of devolution proposals. • High quality engagement with key stakeholders. • Detailed consideration of different governance models and the development of a matrix setting out their strengths and weaknesses. • Broad agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models and the identification of one or more preferred options. • Recommendations that add value to devolution proposals. • The majority of recommendations are agreed. • The production of an evidence based report. 		
Specify Witnesses/ Experts	<p>External witnesses could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremy Long – Chairman, OxLEP • Councillor Ian Hudspeth – Leader, Oxfordshire County Council • Peter Clark – County Director, Oxfordshire County Council • Other Oxfordshire District Council Leaders • A representative of the County Council for adult social care • A representative of the Clinical Commissioning Group • PwC report author(s) • Grant Thornton report author(s) <p>City Council witnesses to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Bob Price – Leader, Oxford City Council • Peter Sloman – Chief Executive • Caroline Green – Assistant Chief Executive • Patsy Dell – Head of Planning and Regulatory Services 		
Specify Evidence Sources for Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PwC report. • Grant Thornton report. • Original devolution proposal. • Summary of PwC study and District Proposition. • Any engagement feedback. • Relevant academic / policy papers. 		
Site Visits	N/A		
Projected start date	September 2016	Draft Report Deadline	25 Nov 2016
Meeting Frequency	5 meetings in 3 months	Projected completion date	15 Dec 2016 CEB

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Appendix 2 - Assessment of Proposed Governance Models for Oxfordshire

Model	Strong, accountable governance	High quality service delivery	Assessment
<p>Two-tier status quo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current model with county and 5 district councils. • Growth Board provides a forum for joint working on growth, infrastructure & planning. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils are accountable for decisions they take that affect their area. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility & accountability can be confusing to the public in two-tier areas. • Elected representatives aren't accountable for all council services. • Deadlocks in strategic decision making. • Growth & progress have been constrained. • Joint working needs strengthening. • Growth Board has no mechanisms for enabling a fast and effective collaborative planning process that meets the housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Growth Board is not directly accountable to the public. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and county-wide services provided at appropriate scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services or merge district services. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of responsiveness to significant challenges from rising demands, reducing budgets, etc. • Related services are provided by different bodies e.g. housing/social care. • Synergies & efficiencies have not being maximised. • Need to manage multiple relationships. • Concerns about cuts to homelessness, bus subsidies & children's centres. • Structure not best placed to deliver against current & future needs of Oxfordshire. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: No likelihood</p> <p>Degree of local support: Wide recognition that this model is not optimal for meeting current challenges</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: High</p>
<p>Two-tier with mayoral combined authority (CA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current model with county and 5 district councils with the addition of a directly elected mayor and CA. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet. • County Council cedes 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing structures. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an ambassador nationally & internationally. • Strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Precedents elsewhere. • Model preferred by government. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlikely to be much public appetite for additional layers of decision makers, administration & complexity unless there are clear and significant benefits. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic, county-wide & local services provided at the appropriate scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services or merge district services. • Provides for collaborative county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address issues around the long term sustainability of current structures. • Related services still provided by different councils. • Synergies & efficiency savings may not be maximised. • Additional relationships to manage. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High</p> <p>Degree of local support: High</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: High</p>

<p>some transport powers to CA.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility & accountability likely to be made more confusing than status quo. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils. • No precedents for combined authorities operating over a single upper-tier council area. • Adds democratic costs. 		
<p>1 Unitary Authority (UA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council responsible for delivering all local government services in Oxfordshire. • Could be led by a council leader or a directly elected mayor. • Enhancements to the roles of parish & town councils. <p>42</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing county structure. • Simplifies accountability with one body responsible for delivering all local government services. • Removes scope for friction and deadlock between competing sovereign bodies. • One paid service. • Elected representatives responsible for all local government services. • Provides a single voice for Oxfordshire. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No precedent for a very large UA including a medium sized city & rural areas. • Does not recognise City and Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • Potential for a 'democratic deficit' and lack of responsiveness to local needs. • Risk to legitimacy & accountability if democratic mandate of urban areas (where need is concentrated) is diluted. • Not all areas have parish councils. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working and pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows transformation of council services within a single body. • Efficiencies from economies of scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Fewest relationships to manage. • Shared boundaries with some strategic partners. • Resilient & able to absorb unexpected pressures. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralisation of district services. • Risks remoteness from communities & a lack of responsiveness. • Services may not be tailored to different needs of urban & rural areas over a large geography. • Historical preferences of different areas may not be reflected in decision making & service delivery. • Local Plan making likely to be problematic. • Large bureaucracy may be less flexible & agile than alternatives. • Potential lack of capacity in town & parish councils to take on more responsibilities. • Disruptive period of reorganisation. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor</p> <p>Degree of local support: Low</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: Low</p>
<p>1 UA with area boards (Grant Thornton's 'Option 6').</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifies accountability with one body responsible for delivering all local government services. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows transformation of council services within a single body. • Efficiencies from economies of scale. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal:</p>

<p>43</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council responsible for delivering all local government services in Oxfordshire. • Could be led by a council leader or a directly elected mayor. • Powers & funding delegated to district area boards. • Enhancements to the roles of parish & town councils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removes scope for friction & deadlock between competing sovereign bodies. • One paid service. • Elected representatives accountable for all local government services. • Provides a single voice for Oxfordshire. • Could balance local & strategic decision making. • Could recognise City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No precedent for a very large UA including a medium sized city & rural areas. • Risk that area boards become a poor imitation of the status quo. • Need to carefully design appropriate level of autonomy for area boards. • Need to design & implement new & complex governance arrangements. • Lack of precedents elsewhere for area boards. • Added complexity in decision making. • Area boards add democratic costs. • Strategic decisions may not be supported by area boards and vice versa. • Not all areas have parish councils. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working with strategic partners e.g. health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No need to disaggregate county-wide services. • Allows for better tailoring of services to local areas than 1UA. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Could provide for Local Plan making at district area level. • Shared boundaries with some strategic partners. • Resilient & able to absorb unexpected pressures. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large bureaucracy may be less flexible & agile than alternatives. • Lack of clarity about what services would be controlled by area boards & how responsible & flexible they would be. • Potential lack of capacity in town & parish councils to take on more responsibilities. 	<p>High with a mayor, low without a mayor</p> <p>Degree of local support: Supported by the County Council but not the District leaders</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: Low.</p>
<p>2 UA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two unitary councils, one for the city on existing boundaries & a 'donut' authority covering the remainder of the county. • Services could continue to be delivered on a county-wide basis through a CA or a contracted agreement. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifies responsibility & accountability. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & concentration of need. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure creates the 9th largest single tier authority in England, but also one of the smallest. • Does not recognise Districts as democratically distinct bodies. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services could be tailored to urban & rural geographies. • CA or contracted agreement could negate need to disaggregate county-wide services. • Considerable scope for service transformation & efficiencies. • Fewer relationships to manage. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of local services over a very large & diverse geography in donut UA risks lack of 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor</p> <p>Degree of local support: Low</p> <p>Responsiveness</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could involve greater devolution of funding & powers to town & parish councils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large donut authority does not reflect diversity of district areas, diluting accountability & risking 'democratic deficit' - may require sub-structures. • Geographic, population & financial imbalance between urban & rural UAs. • Risks entrenching urban - rural divide. • Does not provide for a single point of accountability & voice for Oxfordshire without a mayor & CA. • Continued scope for friction & deadlock between sovereign authorities. • Contracted agreement dilutes accountability. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health without a CA. 	<p>responsiveness to local needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Contracted agreement would limit responsiveness of City UA. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care services disaggregated. • Does not provide for county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Local Plan making at across an area the size of four districts likely to be problematic. • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services and centralisation of some district services. 	<p>to communities: High for the city, lower for other areas</p>
<p>2UA+</p> <p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two unitary councils, one City UA with an expanded boundary & one for the remainder of the county. • Services could continue to be delivered on a county-wide basis through a CA or contracted agreement. • Could involve greater devolution of funding & powers to town & parish councils. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplifies responsibility & accountability. • Largely addresses financial and geographical imbalances of 2UA. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. • Reduced need for county-wide services to be delivered through a contracted agreements. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not build on existing structures or recognise City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • Complexity of resolving the boundary issue - rural areas may not want to be subsumed into a 'Greater Oxford' UA. • 'Greater Oxford' & residual 'donut' authority may lack a coherent sense of place – risk to legitimacy. • Does not provide for a single point of accountability & voice for Oxfordshire without a mayor & CA. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working with strategic partners e.g. health. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable scope for service transformation & efficiencies. • 'Greater Oxford' UA could viably deliver social care services (although a county-wide solution may be preferable). • No need for an agreed mechanism for equalising funding & need across the two UAs. • Resolves issues around the constraints of a tight city boundary. • Fewer relationships to manage. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Greater Oxford' UA would need to tailor services to rural & urban areas. • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services & the merging / reorganisation or district services. • Does not provide for county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Local Plan making across large areas may be problematic. • Boundaries not coterminous with partners. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor</p> <p>Degree of local support: Some support among elected members</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: Fairly high</p>

<p>3 UA with mayor & CA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three unitary councils, one for the city, one for South & Vale, one for West & Cherwell. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet. <p>45</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing district structures and relationship in southern Oxfordshire. • More balanced & responsive to local needs than 1UA or 2UA. • Recognises city & districts as democratically distinct bodies. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & need. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an ambassador nationally & internationally. • Could provide for strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Simplification of responsibility & accountability. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds & resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for Children's Services at CA level is technically possible but unprecedented. • Contracted agreements for delivery of county-wide services could dilute accountability, as would elevating services to a CA. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils. 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for tailoring of services to urban & rural geographies. • District-level services provided at an appropriate scale. • Scope for transformation & efficiencies. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Elevating social care to CA level or a needs-based contracted agreement would negate need to disaggregate services. • Reduced number of relationships to manage. • Local Plan making over three manageable geographic areas. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care services disaggregated - need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Lower efficiency savings than 1UA or 2UA. • Some duplication of functions is inevitable. • City boundaries remain constrained. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High</p> <p>Degree of local support: Supported by district leaders but not county council.</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities: High</p>
<p>4 UA with mayor & CA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four unitary authorities covering South & Vale, Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds on existing district structures and relationship in southern Oxfordshire. • More balanced & responsive to local needs than 1UA or 2UA. • Recognises City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & need. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an 	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for tailoring of services to urban & rural geographies. • District-level services provided at an appropriate scale. • Scope for transformation & efficiencies. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Elevating social care to CA level or a needs-based contracted agreement would negate need to disaggregate services. 	<p>Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High</p> <p>Degree of local support: Low</p> <p>Responsiveness to communities:</p>

<p>with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet.</p>	<p>ambassador nationally & internationally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could provide for strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Simplification of responsibility & accountability. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds & resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three small UAs would be unequal to Southern Oxfordshire. • Contracted agreements for delivery of county-wide services could dilute accountability, as would elevating services to a CA. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Plan making over four manageable geographic areas. <p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care disaggregated - Need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Need to manage multiple relationships. • Lower efficiency savings than 1, 2 or 3UA. • Most duplication of back office functions. • City boundaries remain constrained. • Small authorities less resilient to unexpected pressures. 	<p>High</p>
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Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Tuesday 6 December 2016

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor Hayes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Coulter	Councillor Fry
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Pegg
Councillor Simmons	Councillor Tidball
Councillor Wilkinson	

Officers:

Paul Wilding, Programme Manager Revenue & Benefits
Ben Smith, Anti-Social Behaviour Prevention Officer
Mairi Brookes, OxFutures Programme Manager
Sophie Hearn, Contracts Manager
Shaun Hatton, Highways and Engineering Manager
Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer
Sarah Claridge, Committee Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services
Councillor Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety
Councillor John Tanner, Board Member for a Clean and Green Oxford

Apologies:

Councillor Taylor sent apologies.

62. Declarations of interest

Cllr Pegg declared she was a trustee of the Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre

63. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Chair presented the report.

Work Plan

The Committee reviewed and noted the following changes in its work plan for the 2016/17 council year.

The Scrutiny Officer said that a special meeting has been called on 12 January 2017 for the Committee to consider the report of the Devolution Review Group. Cllr Simmons asked if leaving the report to the new year was too late, and asked whether we should circulate it to CEB earlier. However the government is not going to be making any announcements on devolution until February so the current schedule is fine.

The Scrutiny Officer made the following announcements:

- A County Council officer has agreed to attend the meeting on 28 February 2016 to discuss air quality and the proposed workplace parking levy. The Committee is asked to agree lines of inquiry in advance of this session.
- A group of Scrutiny members visited the Recycling Team on 29 November and a report will come to the next normal Committee meeting. It has been suggested that a similar visit to Street Scene / Direct Services would be useful in 2017.

The Committee agreed to appoint a one-meeting panel to consider the Health and Wellbeing Board report on Health Inequalities in February/March 2017. Chaired by Cllr Coulter (lead member for inequality), a 4-member panel will be agreed at the 30 January meeting.

Cllr Simmons requested that the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Plan for Oxfordshire (STP) be added to the work plan for consideration. Consultation of the plan is taking place in March/April 2017.

Standing Panels

Cllr Henwood updated the Committee on the work of the Housing Panel. The Panel met with Oxford Brookes and the University of Oxford to review the council's limit of students living outside of student accommodation. Both universities put forward proposals to exclude specific students from the 3,000 limit.

These included excluding:

- nursing and teaching students (Brookes)
- postdoctoral researcher (university of Oxford)

The Panel are meeting informally on 20 December to review the suggestions.

Cllr Simmons updated the Committee on the work of the Finance Panel. They are meeting this week to discuss the budget.

Cllr Tidball updated the Committee on the work of the Devolution Review Panel. The group has finished collecting evidence and is now drafting recommendations which they will share with Cllr Bob Price and County Cllr Ian Hudspeth before the report is published on 4 January. She thanked the Scrutiny Officer for all his hard work.

Forward Plan

The Committee wishes to pre-scrutinise the following CEB reports prioritised in the order listed.

1. City Centre Strategy
2. East Oxford Community Centre – Improvement Scheme
3. Refresh of Carbon Management Plan

The Committee asked that a representative from the East Oxford Community Association be invited to speak on the report.

64. Report back on recommendations

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

CEB responses to recommendations on the Planning Annual Monitoring Report and Digital Strategy. During the discussion at CEB the response to recommendation 4 on the Digital Strategy was changed from a No to a Yes.

The Committee noted the report.

65. Commissioned Advice Strategy 2018-2021

Cllr Brown, Board member for Customer and Corporate Services presented the report. She explained that the Council provides funding to four advice centres in the city for 3 years at a time. We are currently in the second year of the funding programme and are reviewing how we improve the way we commission advice in the future to make best use of taxpayers money and to meet the objectives of the financial inclusion strategy

It will take time to understand what the right services are for the city however we are discussing options with advice centres. No future structure has been agreed but we need to have consideration for.

1. Making use of scarce public funds
2. Improving the geographical equality of advice provision in the city

The current advice centres provide an excellent service and are located in areas of greatest need however there are other areas in the city that also requires assistance.

Geoffrey Ferres, trustee for the Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre spoke. He made the following points:

- That the report before the committee suggests that the Council won't give any more money after March 2018. Will there be funding for advice centre in 2018?
- The Council plans to tender for a single city- wide provider.
- Accepted there were geographical issues with the current set up as people aren't likely to access a centre that is more than a mile away but believed these could be fixed within the current structure.
- The sentence in the report that said "Advice centres were consulted and are broadly supportive of the proposal" is false

Cllr Brown regretted that Rose Hill and Donnington Advice Centre were not able to make the October meeting. She doesn't expect advice centres to welcome this report but the Council spends £500,000 a year on advice centres and it is important to work with them to find ways we can provide an equitable service to people across the city. She said the Council sees commissioning services as the best way we can achieve this. There is plenty of work to do with advice centres to make services fit for purpose and sustainable.

She said that the report did not give her the impression that the Council was fixated on a single contract. She doesn't have a clear vision of the future structure and needs to talk and discuss all the options.

The Committee voiced support in principle for the general approach taken and the aim of reducing geographical gaps in provision but expressed concerns about the language and tone of the report and the perception this gave. They suggested the report should be reworked before going to CEB.

Specific points included:

- The need to remove any room for perceptions that we already have a specific model in mind at this stage.
- The statement in para. 7 that current funding arrangements provide no incentives to reduce overheads – the committee felt that grant funding can be linked to outcomes.
- The Committee felt there was a 'false conflict' between services and overheads (which all organisations have).
- The Committee felt that there was 'pejorative language' in places that did not provide a fair representation of the advice agencies.
- The need for recognition that advice services are qualitative as well quantitative so the benefits they provide can't all be reduced to measureable outcomes.
- The need for more recognition in the report that this is the start of an exercise – mentioning the future CEB decision(s) would be helpful.

Cllr Brown agreed the points raised by the Committee about some of the language not being quite right and would seek to address this.

66. Safeguarding Language School Students

Councillor Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety presented the report. She explained that the law only requires language schools to notify local authorities if a student is staying with a homestay for longer than 28 days, but many language students only stay for one to three weeks. Thousands of language students visit Oxford every year and there's a growing concern that students are being put at risk without authorities knowing about it. The Police Crime Commissioner is worried about the issue but the government feels the current arrangements are adequate.

The ASB Prevention Project Co-ordinator spoke on the work of the language school forum which has a strong partnership with the Police. The Forum works with language schools on monitoring their safeguarding responsibilities and promoting the welfare of

the students while they are in Oxford. The forum has been running for 4 years and most of the larger language schools attend.

Cllr Hayes asked what a scrutiny review group could do to add value to the work already being done. Cllr Sinclair felt it would be useful for a review group to be set up and suggested it could look at other practices in other cities – ie Brighton. She didn't want a review to add extra work to council officers.

Cllr Sinclair said she would ideally like to have a certification scheme which required language schools to meet certain criteria before they could operate under the Oxford name. However such a scheme would require officer time to implement and enforce.

The Committee decided not to form a review group as the responsibility lies with the County Council and they could see no areas where they could add value to the good work already being done.

The Committee felt there was scope for the Council (through CEB) to lobby for a strengthening of the legislation so that local authorities were informed when minors were staying temporarily in a private home for more than a few days.

Cllr Coulter agreed to approach the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the South East England Councils (SEEC) about forming a task and finish group to review the issue.

Cllr Hayes suggested asking Nicola Blackwood or Andrew Smith, the local MPs to convene a Westminster debate on the issue. They would have the resources to commission research into the best way forward. Cllr Sinclair agreed to contact the MPs and ask if they will invest effort in this.

The Committee recommended that:

1. Cllr Sinclair contact the MP(s) regarding convening a Westminster debate on the issue.
2. Cllr Coulter contact APSE and SEEC about setting up a task and finish group to review the issue.
3. CEB be asked to lobby for a strengthening of the legislation so that local authorities are informed by language schools when minors are staying temporarily in a private home for more than a few days.

67. Scrutiny Committee report on Air Quality

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved to send the report to CEB.

68. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2016 as a true and accurate record.

69. Performance Monitoring- Quarter 2

Cllr Fry, as Committee lead presented the report. He outlined his list of concerns with the way some of the indicators are measured, and the analysis of why some of the indicators had not met their target.

He made the following comments:

- BI002a & BI002b – queried why the target was zero is this an error?
- CS001& CS003 –breaking the information down into smaller sections would make it more useful. eg phone, email, face to face. The comments were difficult to understand and the target seemed contrary to the aim of encouraging customers to self-serve.
- LG002 – No results were presented by some initial reporting was already available.
- CE002 – target would be more useful if timed better with finance payments
- NI157c – reason for not meeting the target doesn't make sense as performance is being monitored using backlog cases as well as current ones.
- PC027 the result figure is in the thousands but the target for the year is only 400 is this an error in the figures?.
- Bi001 The target is zero but the result is 40% is this an error in the figures?

The Committee commented that the presentation and content of the report was not adequately accessible given that this document was in the public domain and expressed concerns about the extent of tracking and accountability.

The Committee agreed to take account of performance reports when considering items for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Plan.

The Committee asked for confirmation that red indicators are highlighted to Board members.

The Committee agreed that the Scrutiny Officer and Cllr Fry should write to the Assistant Chief Executive outlining their concerns.

The response to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee.

70. Sustainable Energy Action Plan (SEAP) for Oxford

Councillor Tanner, Board member for a Clean, Green Oxford presented the report. He explained that the Council was a member of the Covenant of Mayors, which is a climate change mitigation initiative. Signatory cities have all pledged to reduce their emissions by at least 20% by 2020. The Council has pledged to reduce its emissions by 40% in total by 2020, which was equivalent to a 25% reduction in the Covenant of Mayors framework. The SEAP sets out how Council plans to reach this target.

The Committee discussed the difference between the Covenant of Mayors and the Compact of Mayors and the different reporting requirements for each. The two programmes are merging in January 2017 and the methodology for the SEAP might change.

The Scrutiny Committee made the following suggestions:

That the recommendations are made clearer to say that the Council is only just signing up to the Compact of Mayors.

That recommendation 3 is split into two to make it clearer to understand

That Council revisits the SEAP's methodology in the new year to see that we still comply.

71. Cycling Progress Report

The Contracts Manager presented the report. She explained that they had followed the wish list sent by the review group and done the achievable items. There are a couple of projects still to complete in the financial year; to amend the entrance signs to the city to say 'a cycling city' and install bike pumps around town.

The Committee discussed the need to promote the spending of CIL money to ward councillors and the possibility of pooling money to pay for cycling schemes.

The Committee asked why cycle sign on the Cowley road had not been done. Officers said that the County Council was planning on resurfacing the road and so it made sense to wait for this work to be completed before re-signing it. However the County had recently announced that they didn't plan to resurface the road until 2018. The Committee asked whether it was possible to re-sign the road anyway because they had already waited 2 years for the County to resurface it and 2 more years was unacceptable.

72. Dates of future meetings

The next meeting will be held on 12 January 2017.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.17 pm

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