

Minutes of a meeting of the OXFORDSHIRE GROWTH BOARD SCRUTINY PANEL on Thursday 22 November 2018

Voting members of the Committee present:

Councillor Sean Gaul	Cherwell District Council
Councillor Neil Prestidge	
Councillor Sean Woodcock	
Councillor Andrew Gant	Oxford City Council
Councillor Craig Simmons	
Councillor John Sanders	Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Emily Smith	
Councillor Elaine Hornsby	South Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor David Turner	
Councillor Judy Roberts (as substitute for Councillor Debby Hallett)	Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor Ben Mabbett	
Councillor Chris Palmer	
Councillor Derek Cotterill	West Oxfordshire District Council

Officers contributing to and supporting the Panel:

Caroline Green	Interim Deal Director
Paul Staines	Oxfordshire Growth Board Partnership Programme Manager
Sue Halliwell	Director for Planning and Place, Oxfordshire County Council
Giles Hughes	Head of Planning and Strategic Housing, West Oxfordshire District Council
Dawn Pettis	Strategic Planning Team Leader, Oxfordshire County Council (for the Energy Strategy item)
Stefan Robinson	Scrutiny Officer, Oxford City Council (supporting the Panel)
Jennifer Thompson	Committee and Members Services Officer, Oxford City Council (supporting the Panel)

10. Apologies for absence and substitutes; declarations of interest; Chair's announcements

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Nick Carter	Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Debby Hallett	Vale of White Horse District Council
Councillor Julian Cooper	West Oxfordshire District Council
Councillor David Harvey	West Oxfordshire District Council

There were no declarations of interest.
There were no announcements.

11. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting of 18 September were agreed as a correct record.

12. Work programme for the Scrutiny Panel - November 2018

The Panel took this item after the public speakers.

The Panel discussed considering one of the Deal strands in detail at each meeting. They asked for a report on Affordable Housing at the January meeting.

Attendance and appropriate contributions by at least one member of the Growth Board at each Scrutiny Panel meeting would help communication between the Panel and the Board.

It is also important that the Panel equally holds local leaders to account, as it has until now only scrutinised officer's that support the Growth Deal.

The Panel also discussed improving communication between the Growth Board and its Scrutiny Panel and the Board's Sub groups

The Panel noted that communications between the Growth Board's Sub-groups and Scrutiny Panel were still being established, as was communication between these groups and the Board.

The Panel noted that there was considerable overlap and interdependence between the different Deal strands and also with the Board's other work. Good communications between the groups and project planning was needed to avoid duplication of work between groups, and to ensure that all the groups and the Panel understood the terms of reference of each other's' work.

The Panel asked for clear information and a briefing on the remit and work of each Sub-Group to better understand how these contributed to the delivery of the Deal and the work of the Growth Board, starting with a presentation from the Chair and officers of the Housing Sub-Group.

The Panel noted that each Leader should be encouraged to put in place a clear structure for communications between the Growth Board and each council's members.

The Panel agreed recommendations to the Growth Board:

1. At least one member of the Growth Board should attend each Scrutiny Panel meeting to answer questions about the Board's work. The Chair of one of the Sub-Groups should attend in rotation to discuss the work of their Sub-Group.
2. Officers working on the Deal's strands as part of the Deal team and the Lead officer for the councils should attend the Scrutiny Panel as appropriate to answer questions and discuss their work.

The Panel agreed:

1. To take at the January meeting:
 - a. A report on public engagement at the Growth Board
 - b. A report on the Affordable Housing strand of the Deal (inviting the Chair of that group and relevant officers)
2. To ask for the work plan for each advisory sub-groups.

13. Public Participation

The Panel heard one address and two questions from members of the public.

Adrian Townsend, in summary, spoke about the lack of accountability, transparency and engagement of the Growth Board. He considered that most parish councils and communities were unaware of the Board's existence. He asked for a directly elected Board solely comprising one member from each district, plus parish council co-optees from each district's area. He also asked that the Growth Board be asked to formally retract their statement on the Expressway.

Sue Haywood, representing Need Not Greed Oxfordshire, sent a written question, asking the Panel:

- what further impact they feel that the recent NIC statement will now have on the governance structures and local accountability,
- what opportunity is there to protect local accountability,
- whether the key documents in which any mandate and process for the JSSP is currently defined - including the Statement of Common Ground and Terms of Reference for the Growth Board, and the LDS, Scoping Document and Statement of Community Involvement - will require revision in light of any "new governance structures" that might be introduced, and
- by what process (and with what opportunity for local consultation) will this be done if this is to happen?

Peter Collins, representing CPRE, asked the Scrutiny Panel to:

- Confirm that this draft document (outline version of the JSSP Regulation 18 consultation document) exists and was considered at last week's Advisory Sub-panel.
- If so, to consider how this sits alongside the Growth Board's commitment in the draft Statement of Community Involvement to 'early, proportionate and meaningful engagement between plan makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and statutory consultees' and the 'initial scoping of key issues and options with stakeholders'.

The Panel asked that the Chair convey the substantive points to the Board.

In discussion about the issues raised the Panel commented:

1. They would not recommend disbanding or reconstituting the Growth Board: however the Panel would like to be consulted on any changes to terms of reference of the Board or sub-groups.
2. The Panel noted its own and all three public speakers' concerns over what appeared to be a lack of transparency around decision making, remoteness of the Growth Board from grass-roots bodies and representatives, and a lack of ability to influence and understand the rationale for major decisions. This is a perennial issue for the Growth Board and has been raised by the speakers in different forums. These concerns covered lack of transparency at the Board meetings; being unable to contribute to or see development of the high-level strategies prepared by OxLEP and the Board.
3. There was also concern about the lack of information-sharing and consultation around the Expressway (including some parish councils not receiving an invite from Highways England to information events for all parish councils). While acknowledging that the Growth Board was not responsible for arranging those information events, the Panel asks that officers involved in arranging events ensure or request that first and second tier councillors be invited to events run for parish and town councils. The discussions there would inform their own positions and allow them to better represent their residents.
4. The Panel noted that although information was available on the Growth Board's website this was not always the most obvious site for either elected members or the public to view frequently and so key information could easily be overlooked.
5. The Panel discussed, from their position as newcomers to the Board's processes, improving the Board's transparency and engagement.

The Panel agreed recommendations to the Growth Board:

1. That the Growth Board establishes a clear pro-active process for informing district, county and parish councillors about their work and future consultations and decisions.
This may take the form of a circulated newsletter or bulletin sent out by the Board's programme officer, and should not rely solely on the information posted on the Board's website.
2. That the Growth Board takes formal votes on all items for decision, and records in the minutes each Leader's individual vote, to increase transparency. about decisions and each Council's stance.
3. That the Growth Board remains fully committed to encouraging public engagement in the Board's work.

14. Energy Strategy

The Panel considered the Oxfordshire Energy Strategy and covering report, and a presentation from Dawn Pettis (Oxfordshire County Council) on the key elements of the strategy.

They noted a number of places in the Strategy where targets were defined or presented differently, particularly in relation to carbon and energy reduction.

They noted the very ambitious targets of reducing emissions substantially while also increasing housing and employment, and of retrofitting 4000 homes. Officers themselves acknowledged these were extremely ambitious targets. The Panel were concerned that the contribution made by vehicle emissions remained high in recent years, and would continue to do so.

They noted that more information on grid capacity and management would be useful for planning authorities seeking to encourage the use of electric vehicles.

The Panel agreed one recommendation to the Growth Board:

That the Energy Strategy Action Plan is revised to ensure it contains SMART targets and clear and measurable objectives.

The Panel agreed:

- to consider the action/delivery plan before it was presented to the Growth Board;
- to scrutinise delivery of the action plan.

15. Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

The Interim Deal Director Caroline Green and the Director for Planning & Place (Oxfordshire County Council) Sue Halliwell gave an update on proposals for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

The Panel noted in the update and their discussion:

- One of the biggest challenges identified as part of the Growth Deal process, as already highlighted by the JSSP Advisory Sub-Group, is the misalignment of Highways England's timescale for the Expressway and the development of the JSSP.

The Growth Deal requires that each of the Oxfordshire Council's submit their Local Plans no later than 1 April 2019. However, Central Government Planning Inspectors have not accepted two neighbouring Local Plans (Aylesbury Vale and Vale of White Horse district councils) at least partially on the basis that they do not take account of the Oxford / Cambridge expressway in their housing forecasts; an expressway which does not yet have an assigned route, nor detail of its precise function. Public consultation on the route options is not due to take place until autumn 2019, with a preferred route being announced in 2020.

This conflict between deadlines suggests that the planning process for these significant projects is not well aligned.

- If the Local Plan submission deadline of 1 April 2019 is recognised as a first draft stage, and open to review beyond this deadline, then there is less concern about needing to take account of the JSSP and the Expressway in the plans before further material details are announced.
- Officers and Leaders had already raised these concerns with government departments and Highways England (HE) and discussions about aligning timetables and deadlines were ongoing.
- The Panel expressed disquiet about the statement in minute 24 of the Growth Board minutes of 25 September 2018 which could be read as conveying rather more support for the expressway than may have been intended, given the level of uncertainty around the proposals from HE.
- The Panel commented that expressway did not fit well with sustainability strategies, and the experience of HS2 suggested that there may be more disruption than benefit for communities along the route.
- Highways England was running events for district and parish councils, by invitation, and all invitees were encouraged to attend. However, Panel members noted instances where parish councils had not received an invitation and asked that officers impress on HE the need to use up to date contact information held by Oxfordshire County Council.

The Panel agreed recommendations to the Growth Board:

1. That the Growth Board takes further steps to raise concerns with Central Government about the timing of the JSSP submission deadline, and individual Local Plan submission deadlines, in April 2019 as required by the Growth Deal, without first understanding more details about the impact of the proposed Oxford Cambridge Expressway.
2. That in light of the continuing uncertainty about the route choice and its impact on the communities affected and the wider county, the Growth Board clarifies its rationale and evidence base for endorsing the expressway.

16. Oxfordshire Growth Board papers 27 November - for discussion

The Panel discussed the reports published for the Oxfordshire Growth Board meeting on 27 November.

They discussed and asked questions on the reports, and noted points and raised matters summarised as but not limited to:

JSSP Sub-Group

1. The Joint Statutory Spatial Plan was very high-level and long-term: the Panel commented that communications had to be managed to make it relevant, manage expectations, and get proper public engagement in the process. The difficulties with

matching major projects' timetables and public involvement had been discussed earlier

2. Planned consultation events would involve around 100 stakeholder groups plus parish councils: the Panel asked that relevant district and county councillors were invited to events involving parish councils so the parishes' concerns could be understood and fed back to the district councils.
3. In late January all district councils would be asked to agree the initial JSSP 'Regulation 18' Preferred Options Document for consultation through February and March, but this document was still at an early stage.

Infrastructure Sub-Group

4. Officers were working on a methodology to properly attribute without double-counting additional affordable housing (to that already being provided through other means) to the correct funding stream (infrastructure funds, Deal funding, and HIF grants).
5. Government's decisions on bids to the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) would be announced in summer 2019 and funding would be available in 2019 or 2020.
6. The Panel noted that information on delivery of the Year 1 infrastructure projects, as well the list of projects in the years 2-5 programme would be agreed and published.

Housing Sub-Group

7. Officers would work to try and speed up housing delivery after planning permission was granted to avoid long delays. A house counted as 'delivered' when a contracted start date on site was agreed.
8. Affordable housing under the Deal counted only those additional homes attributed to Deal funding, so did not show all the affordable housing which would be provided in the county.
9. The Panel asked for clear information about the delivery targets and additional affordable housing when this was available; and asked that the work of Housing Sub-Group and the affordable housing strand be considered at their next meeting.

Healthy Place shaping report

10. The Panel noted this was the result of work on Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health report. They noted the role Local Plans could play in promoting public health.

The Panel noted the reports and suggested that a chart showing the timelines of key projects for each strand of the Deal delivery would be helpful.

17. Growth Deal - matters not contained in Board papers

No matters were raised under this item.

18. Recruitment and staffing for the Growth Deal

The Interim Deal Director gave an update on recruitment and staffing for the Growth Deal delivery team and management of the Growth Board:

1. All posts for work on the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan had been filled and the new officers were starting work over the next few weeks. This included an office

manager, project manager, and planning policy officers. Recruitment to key senior posts for the other Deal strands was underway. These would help councils co-ordinate and manage the delivery of the programmes.

2. The Growth Board and its scrutiny panel and sub-groups would be supported by a dedicated programme manager and committee secretary, and the scrutiny function supported by a part-time post from the Growth Board host authority (currently SODC). These posts were currently advertised.

The Scrutiny Panel noted the update.

19. Dates of meetings

The Panel agreed the dates of meetings as:

Scrutiny Panel
Thurs 24 January 6.30pm
Thurs 21 March 6.30pm
Thurs 30 May 6.30pm

All meetings to be held in Oxford Town Hall

The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 8.30 pm

Chair

Date: