

Report to Growth Board Scrutiny Panel

Communications and engagement with the Oxfordshire Growth Board

Report Purpose

- 1) To advise the Scrutiny panel of the current arrangements for communication and engaging with the public and other stakeholders and to provide a summary of the work taking place to engage the public in the work of the Growth Deal

Recommendation

The Scrutiny panel note and comment upon the report

Background- public engagement with the Growth Board

- 2) Since its inception in 2014 the Oxfordshire Growth Board has been mindful of the need for it to develop meaningful channels of communication and engagement with a range of stakeholders, including Government, residents and other interested parties.
- 3) The original Public Participation Protocol (The Protocol) for the Board was based upon a similar statutory joint committee that had been successfully operating in Northamptonshire for some years. This protocol was reviewed in November 2015 after a short consultation exercise with those who regularly attended Growth Board meetings.
- 4) A copy of the Protocol is attached at Appendix One to this report
- 5) The Board decided that, as a meeting in public as opposed to a public meeting, it would make the space for questions and addresses in much the same way as other local authority public meetings.
- 6) Accordingly, the Board asked that the agenda and accompanying reports be published in advance to allow for interested parties to read and consider them prior to making any representations to the Board.
- 7) The Protocol then allows the public to submit questions to the Board and to ask a supplementary question on the day.
- 8) Finally, the Protocol also allows for addresses to be made to the Board which the chairman may or may not respond to.

- 9) The only restrictions on these activities are time, to allow the business of the Board to continue to timetable and for the questions or addresses to be relevant to an item on the Board agenda at that meeting.

Wider Engagement and Communication

- 10) The Board are aware that engagement with the public at Board meetings is but one element of communication and engagement with its public.
- 11) In recent times resources have been put towards the development of the Oxfordshire growth Board website. www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org
- 12) Although further work required is required to bring historic data onto the website, once complete, the website will bring together the historic and current Growth Board work in one place to make it more easily accessible.
- 13) The website also has a comments section where questions, statements or messages can be conveyed to the Board electronically.

The Growth Board Communications Strategy

- 14) The Growth Board adopted a Communications Strategy (the Strategy), or Protocol in 2015.
- 15) At the time the Board was fully engaged in a major project to identify, agree and then apportion the unmet housing need of Oxford to the other districts. Accordingly, the Strategy is framed in that context.
- 16) The Strategy, attached at Appendix Two to this report requires updating and will be a priority for the Growth Board Lead Authority, South Oxfordshire over the next few months.
- 17) The Protocol places the lead role for communication of the work of the Board with the lead authority. Its role is to ensure that the work of the Board is communicated through a range of mediums including the website, press releases and staff and stakeholder briefings. There should be communications to each of these audiences bi-monthly (as a minimum), coinciding with the Growth Board meetings.

Communication and the Housing and Growth Deal

- 18) Officers recognise that now the Housing and Growth Deal Delivery Plans are agreed with Government it is important we increase the level of communication and engagement of media, stakeholders, and the public on the different aspects of Deal delivery.

- 19) Officers recognise that the Board wants to build public understanding and support for how the investment is being spent, where the new transport and community infrastructure and affordable housing projects are, and what benefits these will bring. Public engagement will also be key around the Productivity workstream following adoption of the Local Industrial Strategy - as we implement programmes to boost skills and enable Living Lab projects.
- 20) Finally, the board also need to build public awareness and involvement in the development of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, this is discussed further in the relevant section below.
- 21) Communications plans are being developed at strategic and tactical levels to provide opportunities for regular communication about different Deal workstreams. For example, we have published outline details of the 43 infrastructure projects that will be supported with Deal funding. Similarly, the Board will publish headline details of the Affordable Homes projects once contractual start on site is confirmed.
- 22) Work is also underway to include interactive maps on the Growth Board website, thus enabling residents to see where the various projects are located.
- 23) There will also be case studies of community investment are planned – for example in Berinsfield, where additional housing is creating the critical mass needed to enable investment in new social infrastructure; or in Great West Park where a residents' association was born out of a Facebook page created by new residents.

Engaging the public on the Oxfordshire 2050 plan process

- 24) In common with all Statutory Development Plan Documents the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 requires a formal Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that sets out our commitment for engaging with the people of Oxfordshire. This document has been the subject of consultation and will now be presented to the individual Oxfordshire district planning authorities for approval.
- 25) The SCI commits the Board to early, proportionate and meaningful engagement with communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and statutory bodies.
- 26) The early stages of the plan preparation have involved engagement with specific stakeholders, prescribed bodies, partners and consultees to inform the identification of issues and options. The Boards hosted an event in December with more than 80 delegates giving their views on the vision for Oxfordshire, addressing challenges and suggesting solutions.

- 27) Public consultation will continue in 2019 in three phases. The initial public consultation in February/March will consider the context and issues facing the county, and prompt discussion over the aspirations for Oxfordshire for 2050. Comments from this consultation will then feed into the second stage of consultation due to take place this summer, which will look at the various options available to achieve the agreed aspirations and consider which of these options are best for the county and to improve quality of life for all.
- 28) The final stage of consultation, due in October 2019, will present a draft Oxfordshire Plan incorporating the issues and options discussed and asking for feedback before seeking approval from Oxfordshire's planning authorities and submitting to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination

Website

- 29) As stated in the SCI, officers are encouraging electronic engagement as the primary portal for consultation. An easily-navigable, user-friendly, and informative website has been produced to give visitors a brief overview of the project, answer frequently asked questions, provide details of governance, allow downloading of documents and direct them to register to comment on current consultations. The website also contains a video that summarises the key points of the Oxfordshire Plan and how to get involved. The website can be found using this link <https://oxfordshireplan.org/>
- 30) The website is promoted and supported by Oxfordshire Growth Board social media platforms. It is intended that key messages, news updates, event/consultation reminders, discussion points and landmark achievements will be promoted via the Oxfordshire Growth Board social media accounts across all platforms using specially curated content designed to maximise engagement on that platform. Promoted posts will target key audiences and increase the profile of the Oxfordshire Plan to help stimulate debate and participation. Twitter polls will be used to help inform us of public opinion, while its limitations noted.

Consultation sessions

- 31) The SCI commits us to hold a series of drop-in consultation sessions in each of the five districts during the Plan consultation periods. Information, questionnaires and flyers will be available. Additional events and/or displays across the county are being explored.
- 32) Options will be explored to form a discussion forum made up of representative groups of Oxfordshire residents, similar to a Citizens Jury, to better gauge and reflect community opinion especially among harder to reach groups. Finally, market research companies are also being explored to carry out a survey with

a representative number of residents reflecting demographic makeup of Oxfordshire to again better canvass opinion.

Newsletters and publications

- 33) Officers intend that regular updates on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 will be published in all authorities' newsletters, with a link to the website for the latest news and further information.
- 34) News updates and landmark achievements will be announced through district/city to town/parish councils and to residents/businesses/organisations signed up to relevant mailing lists.
- 35) Regional media will be the main avenue for press coverage about the Plan, to communicate with residents. Main titles to target include BBC South, BBC Oxford, Jack FM, the Oxford Mail, the Oxford Times, The Witney Gazette, the Herald series, the Bicester Advertiser, the Banbury Cake, the Henley Standard, the Thame Gazette.
- 36) Finally, very locally focussed newsletters- hyperlocals- such as Rose Hill News in East Oxford will be considered to provide information to highly localised groups.

Conclusions

- 37) This report summarises the work officers current undertake to engage with and communicate to our stakeholders and public. Scrutiny will note that considerable resource is put into effective communication and that innovative solutions to ensure effective communication are being actively pursued, particularly through the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.
- 38) Scrutiny are asked to note and comment upon the communication and engagement work to date

Appendix One

Oxfordshire Growth Board: Public Participation Protocol

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members of the public may ask questions of the Chairman of the Growth Board, or address the Growth Board on any substantive item at a meeting subject to the restrictions set out below. There shall be a specific agenda item near the start of each meeting of the Growth Board to permit such public participation to take place.
- 1.2 Questions shall be directly relevant to some matter in which the Growth Board has powers and duties and which directly affects the area of Oxfordshire.

2. Questions

- 2.1 Any member of the public wishing to ask a question may do so at a meeting of the Growth Board, and must give notice of the question in writing or by email to the Chief Executive or the Secretariat of the host authority, at least three clear days before the meeting (i.e. not counting the day of the meeting or the day of receipt).
- 2.2 The Chairman will answer submitted questions.
- 2.3 The questioner may read his/her question, but the Chairman will do so if the questioner wishes for that, or is not present at the meeting. One supplementary question is then also allowed relevant to the first question to allow for clarification.
- 2.4 The answer given by the Chairman may take the form of an oral statement, or may be given subsequently in writing to the questioner. A written copy of the response will be circulated to all Growth Board Members. It is intended the written response will be given within ten working days of the meeting.
- 2.5 No discussion shall take place on the question or the answer.
- 2.6 The Chief Executive of the host authority may, in consultation with the Chairman of the Growth Board, refuse to accept a submitted question if s/he considers it to be offensive, defamatory, frivolous, or vexatious, or if in his or her opinion it does not meet the requirements of paragraph 1.2 above.

3. Addresses

- 3.1 Any member of the public may address the Growth Board on any substantive agenda item. Such address shall be for up to three minutes.

- 3.2 The speaker shall give notice of their wish to address the Growth Board by email or in writing no later than 12 noon on the day before the meeting to the Chief Executive or the Secretariat of the host authority.
- 3.3 Once a member of the public has spoken and, with the leave of the Chairman, any questions of clarification asked of the speaker by Growth Board members duly answered, the Growth Board shall hear any further addresses, and after public participation shall proceed onto the next item of business. There will be no debate on any representations made except to the extent that they are considered when the relevant agenda item is considered later in the meeting.

4. Restrictions

- 4.1 Submitted questions shall be dealt with in the order of receipt by the host authority.
- 4.2 The total amount of time allowed for public participation at a meeting shall not exceed 30 minutes unless the Chairman consents to that in the interests of the proper conduct of the business of the Board.
- 4.3 In addition to the point in the preceding paragraph, the Chairman may vary the provisions of this scheme for a particular meeting should s/he believe, on taking advice, that to be appropriate.

Appendix Two

Oxfordshire Growth Board – Post SHMA Strategic Work Programme Communications Strategy

The Strategic Housing Market Assessment undertaken in Oxfordshire during 2013/14 identified a need for a significant increase in housing provision in the area particularly in Oxford where the City Council has concluded that there is a shortfall of suitable land within the City to meet its needs.

As required by the Duty to Cooperate, each of the Oxfordshire authorities is now working jointly, through the Oxfordshire Growth Board, to agree a process for considering the extent and most sustainable ways of addressing Oxford's 'unmet' housing need.

Our aim is to provide information at appropriate stages to the media, interest groups and the public to keep them informed of the progress of the work being undertaken on behalf of the Board. This has two aspects.

- Developing a commonly agreed process for media interface,
- Developing a system for ensuring that all Growth Board partners provide common messages about the work of the Growth Board, particularly to ensure that agreed key messages are consistently highlighted by all partners.

Developing a Commonly Agreed Process

1 Produce and maintain informative web pages

Each Council to publish a dedicated web page, or section, with details of the Growth Board's work. To include:

- The post SHMA Strategic Work Programme which will be updated periodically to indicate progress being made against the programme set out and an indication of any revisions to projected timescales.
- Publish any agreed explanatory statements by way of supplementary information at key stages.

Some of the above processes and procedures will be complex, but the aim is to present them as clearly and fairly as possible, without over-simplifying facts.

Each of the Council's web pages will link to:

- Oxfordshire County Council's Growth Board web pages, which contain meeting and agenda papers and Terms of Reference for the Board
- The Lead Administration authority's website. This will contain additional information as the Growth Board Programme Manager will more regularly update it.

Action: Oxfordshire Growth Board Manager to draft website text for approval by the Growth Board Executive.

2 Dealing with media issues and enquiries

Press enquiries should be directed, in the first instance, to the Growth Board Manager / Communications Officer of the Lead Authority

The Communications Officer will:

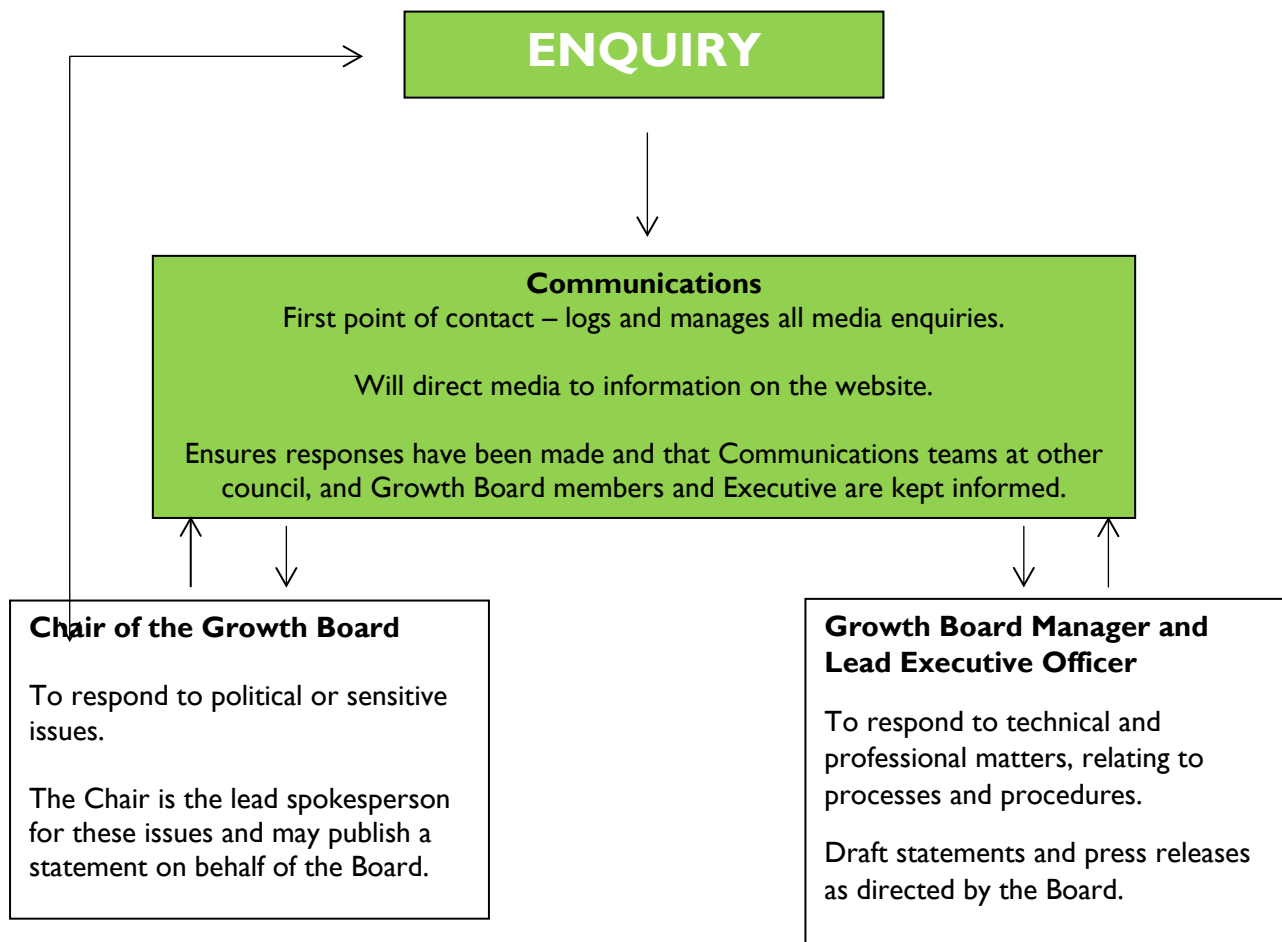
- record enquiries and ensure they are responded to
- liaise with the Growth Board Manager and Leading Chief Executive / Lead Executive Officer to provide a response for technical or operational queries (liaison may need to be expanded to a wider group, depending on the nature of the query)
- keep communications officers and relevant officers and board members at other authorities informed and issue copies of responses or statements to them, as appropriate
- direct enquiries of a political or sensitive nature to the Chair of the Growth Board.

The Growth Board agree that the Council acting as lead authority coordinates and deals with media requests in the first instance.

3 Non-routine enquiries

Speculation regarding issues such as any potential strategic sites is unavoidable and Board Members are likely to be contacted directly for this type of enquiry.

Statements on behalf of the Board would be made by the Chairman, in consultation with other Board Members.



Press releases

Press releases requested by the Board would be drafted by a Communications Officer, with the assistance of the Growth Board Manager.

Before release, the content must be approved by:

- The Chair of the Board
- Relevant Board Members
- Lead Executive Officers for each Council.

Press releases would appear on each authority's website.