

To: Council
Date: 29 November 2021
Report of: Director of Development
Title of Report: Partnership Update – Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide members with an update on the progress and impact of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OXLEP).
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member with responsibility:	Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council and Economic Development Portfolio holder
Corporate Priority:	Fostering an Inclusive Economy
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation(s):	
1. Council is invited to comment and note the report.	

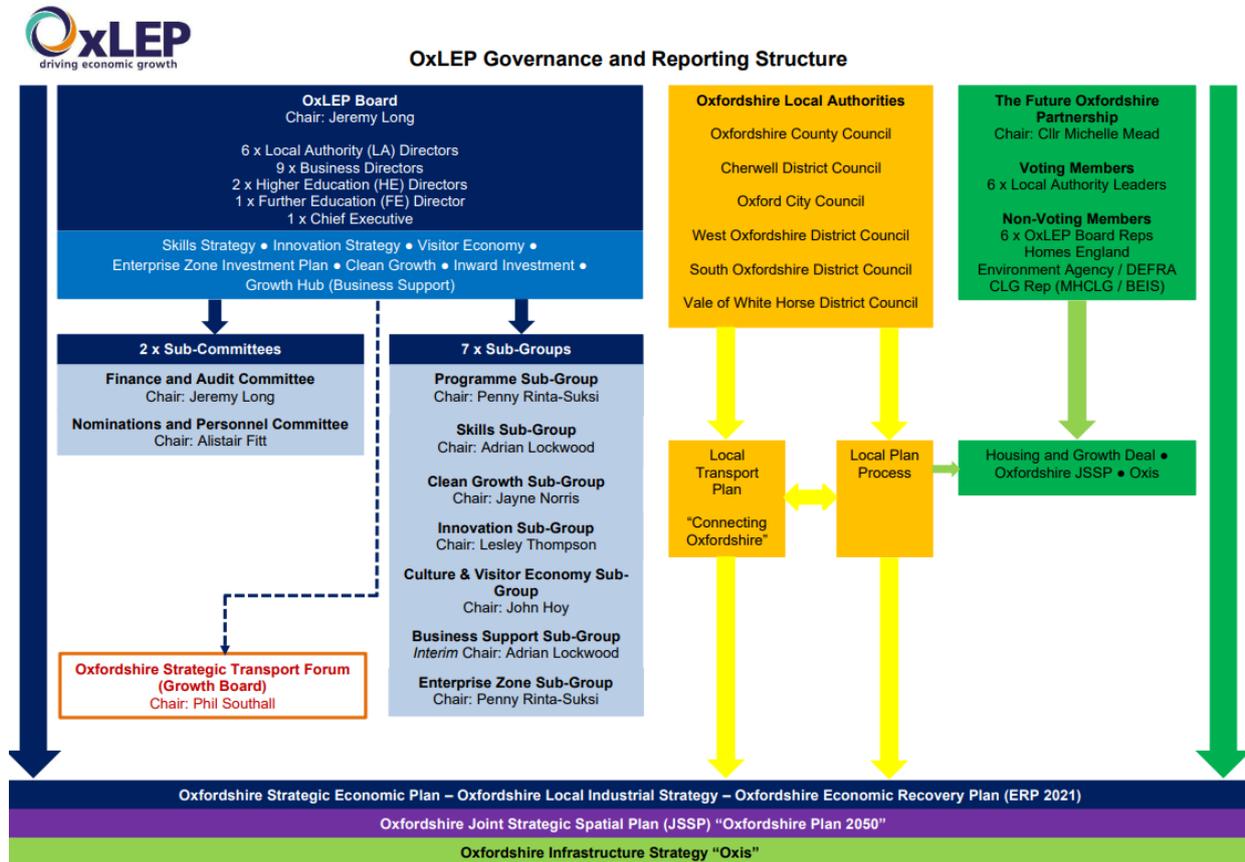
Appendices
None

Introduction and background

1. Now operating for ten years, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Ltd (OxLEP) is the over-arching local partnership promoting economic growth, and shaping the strategic direction of the Oxfordshire economy. Chief Executive, Nigel Tipple leads a team of staff who work closely with a network of business representatives, further and higher education representatives, and Economic Development officers.
2. Jeremy Long was appointed as Board Chair in March 2016. Former Chief Executive for Europe of international railway and property group MTR Corporation, helping position the importance of Oxford Station and the Inclusive Economy agenda alongside the OSP and City Council. Cllr Susan Brown is the City Council’s OXLEP Board member, alongside the other council leaders across the county. Peter Nolan, formerly of Oxford BioMedica sits on the OXLEP Board and chairs the Oxford Economic Growth Board (sub group of Oxford Strategic Partnership, on both of which Cllr Susan Brown also sits), providing a direct link between the city’s interests and the wider OXLEP area. Phil Southall, Managing Director of the Oxford

Bus Company, and Penny Rinta-Suksi, Partner at Blake Morgan are also Oxford based members of the Board (transport and capital programmes).

3. City Council Officers are involved in a range of OXLEP partnerships, and OxLEP colleagues are involved in many city and district partnerships. There is ongoing officer involvement through Directors, Regeneration and Economy, Planning, Sustainability, and Welfare Reform. The overall OxLEP Structure is below:



OxLEP Partnership Impact Highlights 2020-21

4. The OxLEP Annual Report 20-21 highlights some of the notable impacts of its activity;
 - a. £8.4m Getting Building Funds attracted to the county
 - b. 800 businesses supported with Brexit related advice
 - c. 1,275 business action plans through the new LEP business support tool
 - d. 2,000 businesses provided with Covid19 related business support
 - e. 100+ business support webinars delivered
 - f. £5m of funds directed to businesses.
 - g. Foreign Investment Targets met (see below)

Strategy and Funding

5. The Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan (ERP – see background documents) was developed by the LEP, councils, universities and its various groupings in response to the pandemic, as requested by Government. It provides a ‘route map’ for economic recovery, focusing on Oxfordshire’s People, Places and Businesses

running from spring 2021 through to spring 2023. It provides a flexible framework for partners to co-ordinate and target interventions and measures to support recovery at the appropriate geographical level.

6. The ERP was also positioned as a basis for future proposals to Government under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Levelling-Up Fund, innovation investment through the UK R&D Roadmap and funding in support of connectivity projects via DfT and DCMS. The ‘investment ask’ of Oxfordshire partners for this Action Plan is £437m, although the real investment achieved from government is significantly less. It is also notable that the route for Levelling up Funds and the Community renewal Fund in 2021 (pre SPF) was initially through local authorities, which led to some differing proposals coming forward from those in the plan in some cases. Despite this, the ERP has been a catalyst for a range of locally led actions and a number of its projects are underway, regardless of national funds. The ERP is overseen by the Economic Recovery Task Group, with senior city council officer representation.
7. The Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy (LIS – see background documents) was published in July 2019. Whilst the current government has withdrawn direct support for the National Industrial Strategy, OxLEP is actively pursuing the LIS and its Investment Plan. The City Council’s draft economic strategy also builds on the ambitions and projects in the LIS. The ambition for the LIS is to position the county as one of the top-three global innovation ecosystems, highlighting the world-leading science and technology cluster and to be a pioneer for the UK and our emerging transformative technologies and sectors. It also contains a commitment to Inclusive, low carbon growth. Key council projects highlighted in the Investment Plan include
 - a. The West End Innovation Quarter
 - b. The Inclusive Economy Commission (now Partnership)
 - c. Development of an Oxford Creative Industries Hub
 - d. Oxford Station and Cowley Branch Line (Oxfordshire Connect Rail)
8. The LEP have been active in supporting partnership efforts to bring forward Oxford Station and other vital infrastructure to enable developments in Oxford’s West End, contributing to the development of the West End Investment Prospectus. The City Council is now utilising £1.93m LGF funds, awarded via the LEP, for the creation of entrepreneurship and enterprise workspaces at George Street and Cave St, set to open in 2022 and 2024, supporting around 300 jobs.
9. Most recently, the City Council-led *Meanwhile in Oxfordshire* project was supported with £1.875m through the Getting Building Fund, providing capital funds to bring 1,935 sq. m of space back into use in High streets (by June 2022), to support 112 organisations (by early 2025). This project has already secured around 1,700 sq. m of space and supported 15 organisations into meanwhile spaces county-wide.
10. OxLEP has been supportive of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, with Jeremy Long joint chair for this group with Baroness Jan Royall, also chairing its Educational Attainment sub-group, now in its early phases of scoping potential interventions to address inequalities. There are sub-groups leading on social value and local procurement, Inclusive employers, and area based activities and needs. The LEP has also funded this partnership with £10K, alongside the City Council. Funds are also sought from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and other bodies.

11. European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF): OxLEP is also administering this €19.3m programme from 2014-2020, (with final activity ceasing in 2022). The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) is the key fund intended to replace Structural Funds. This SPF is intended to reduce inequality between communities across the four nations and to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth. It will be worth c£2.6bn over the next three years. The initial prioritisation of c100 areas suggests Oxfordshire may have a challenge to access these funds at any scale due to its relative affluence.

Transition to Zero Carbon: OxLEP signposts business to advice and funding on sustainability. They have helped secure investment for low carbon projects. Some of the projects and initiatives supported include £2.5m for Abingdon and Witney College's Green Construction Skills Centre and the University of Oxford's pilot Energy Systems Accelerator, a £600k investment in a co-working and ideas exchange on energy use., OxLEP supported production of 'Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report', led by Bioregional and Environmental Change Institute.

Skills and Employment

12. OxLEP was commissioned by the Department of Education (DfE) to create a Local Skills Report and Plan based on a government defined template and data sets. The completed plan was submitted to the DfE in March 2021 (see background documents). To understand the Skills, Employment and Enterprise needs of Oxfordshire's ethnic minorities groups, OxLEP commissioned Oxfordshire County Council's data team to produce a report. The findings will be incorporated in the revised Local Skills Report and Plan for Oxfordshire 2022-2024.
13. The Skills Board's long term strategic priorities has been to investigate how more graduates can be retained to meet local demand for higher level skills. Working with University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes OxLEP created 'The Keys to Your Future' video to promote Oxfordshire as a place to study and work for the 17+ age group. The film has been used by both universities during their student's induction week and will be shown to Oxfordshire's 6th form students through the Careers and Enterprise Company's Enterprise Advisor Network. See background documents.
14. One of the ERP proposals is to support people impacted by Digital Poverty and/or Digital Literacy. Although, no formal funding has been made available, OxLEP have brought together SOFEA, Oxfordshire Learning Network, Activate Learning and Oxfordshire Community Foundation's 'Getting Oxfordshire Online' to work together on trying to tackle to provide equipment and training to those with barriers to digital literacy. Working with the four organisations, pilot projects will be run in two of SOFEA's larger locations (Rosehill and Didcot) to support food larder clients in informal digital lessons. When over a period of a few weeks, confidence has been built, then refurbished computer equipment can be offered. Accredited Level 3 digital courses can also be signposted at a local community centre/library. The programme will be evaluated by Oxford Brookes and has been supported by City Officers.
15. The Skills for Business programme, which advises businesses on their skills and learning needs, did not receive the necessary assurances of ongoing DWP funding. So a decision was made to close the programme. Since launch in late 2019, OxLEP supported over 360 businesses to evaluate their skills and learning needs, creating practical solutions as well as upskilling hundreds of employees.

16. One of the Local Skills Report and Plan priorities is to provide clear career pathways through the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC). OxLEP and the CEC fund the Enterprise Advisor Network (EAN). There are 49 Oxfordshire schools/colleges in the network. The EAN network focuses on achieving 2 of the *Gatsby Benchmarks* – see background documents; the national framework of good practice for careers delivery in schools. Within the 49 EAN schools, 23 are in the Careers Hub. The Hub enables all 23 schools to focus on all 8 benchmarks. These schools are now meeting an average of 5.1 of the 8 Gatsby Benchmarks, in comparison to 2.9 in July 2020.
17. To help young people understand local career ‘Your Fabulous Future in Oxfordshire’ was created for secondary school students. Following the second lockdown schools engaged more on careers, but needed alternative provision. Available 24/7 this platform allows young people to virtually explore local career options and pathways. The platform has 100 virtual pods showcasing businesses, FE and HE providers in an ‘exhibition hall’ setting. To date there has been over 1700 visits.
18. Earlier in the year, all LEPs were invited by the CEC to bid for their new Hub Incubation Project Funding. OxLEP Skills submitted a funding proposal around the research question: ‘will teacher’s increased knowledge of the Oxfordshire local labour market and engagement with employers, lead to improved outcomes for young people?’ The project is fully funded for 1 year and they are in the process of recruiting 20 STEAM teachers (Maths, Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Computing, Design Technology and Geography) from 20 schools to take part.
19. The National Apprenticeship ‘Build the Future’ Week was 8th-14th February. OxLEP’s Apprentice Ambassadors recorded films on a key messages they felt young people should know about Apprenticeships. Over 6200 views were achieved. The Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards 2021 final was delivered on 16th May. Plans are underway for the 2022 awards which were launched the #OAHour on Thursday 18th November, with the final on 19th May 2022.
20. In order to maximise the benefits of major developments for local communities, OxLEP and partners (including the city council) aim to ensure that local people can better access job opportunities. This is achieved through Community Employment Plans (CEPs). CEPs are employer-led initiatives which can form part of Section 106 planning agreements for significant developments. The outcomes are likely to include: Apprenticeships, Employment/training initiatives for all ages. Officers, OxLEP and Thomas White Oxford had been involved in the creation of the ‘Skills and Employment Plan’ for the Oxford North development and will now collaborate on delivery. This one of the many developments that are in the planning across the county. OxLEP are also supporting officers at Barton Park on their CEP.

Business Support (OXLEP Business)

21. Officers have worked closely with the LEP on business support issues related to COVID-19, through partnerships at senior and operational levels. This covers communication to business on all available support, grants, intelligence gathering on impact, identifying support needs and engagement with business to define the offer.
22. OxLEP Business is the key service to help businesses find the support they need. OxLEP Business delivers Signposting to local and national business support services, schemes and events, providing specialist advice and guidance through

programmes such as eScalate and Peer Mentoring. They run events and workshops on a variety of topics. As the growth hub for Oxfordshire, OxLEP's services are free for small businesses (SMEs). Currently, OxLEP Business receives funding through the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and we have also secured European Regional Development Fund backing to 2022.

23. Invest in Oxfordshire: As the UK adjusts to a new trading environment the Inward Investment Team has developed an Internationalisation Plan adopted by the OxLEP Board in early 2021 alongside a range of new collateral including 'Invest in Oxfordshire: 'the UK's High Growth Innovation Ecosystem' an international prospectus promoting Oxfordshire's global investment successes and opportunities for investment and Oxfordshire's Response to Covid-19, an updated publication on the science and technology impact from local firms. Other information, including the Living in Oxfordshire, professional advisers, is available on the OxLEP website. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) targets have been set in the *Oxfordshire Internationalisation Plan to 2025* as follows;

FDI Success targets	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of FDI projects	25	30	33	36	41
Value of FDI projects (Investment into Oxfordshire in £'s)	£230m	£270m	£300m	£330m	£370m
Jobs supported (safeguarded or created)	500	550	600	650	700

These targets will be reviewed annually.

24. All targets were exceeded and FDI results continue to be strong and illustrate the strength of offer despite the pandemic and EU Exit. Alongside FDI, we have also seen significant investments into spins outs from the University of Oxford through Oxford Science Enterprises (formerly Oxford Sciences Innovation - OSI) who have international investors as shareholders including Google Ventures, Tencent and Fosun. OSE has built a portfolio of more than 100 companies, worth over \$2 billion creating 1500 new jobs since 2015. Oxford and Oxfordshire has also seen capital and real estate investment from Brookfield Asset Management investing into Oxford Business Park, and Kadans and Singapore's GIC investing into Oxford Science Park.

LEP Review and Governance

25. LEP Review - The terms of reference for the review of the role of LEPs were broad, considering the form, functions and geographies of all LEPs, with the objective of enabling these to be amended to better support Central Government policy objectives. The Government plans has sought the views of businesses, local authorities, LEPs and other stakeholders in deciding what changes to make. The review also considers "funding models" (e.g. Shared Prosperity, Levelling up Funds etc.). The stated aim of the review is to ensure local areas are positioned to 'support productivity and growth' most effectively and to complement Central Government policy in the coming years. Nothing clear was announced in the Autumn Statement so we await further information in the 'Levelling up White Paper' to be published in the autumn. Evolution, rather than a demise is the likely outcome.
26. Governance: All LEPs must adhere to a National Assurance Framework, ensuring robust systems and processes are in place. This ensures they are equipped to

develop their Local Assurance Framework. Oversight and scrutiny of this assurance framework is undertaken by the County Council's Section 151 Officer, whose role it is to sign-off and certify each year. This is assessed by annual performance review with central government.

27. During the pandemic, OxLEP vacated its Oxford base at City of Oxford College, moving to work on a hybrid model, with the aim of providing a level of support that exceeds expectations of the business community. They have established an 'operational support hub' at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.

Financial implications

28. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal issues

29. The Council works in partnership with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP). The OxLEP Board is responsible for approving the overall strategy for the LEP and for agreeing overall priorities for investment. OxLEP is entirely independent of the Council and whilst the Leader of the Council is member of its Board any decisions made by its Board do not bind the Council.

Conclusion

30. Oxford City Council has an effective partnership with OxLEP's key staff, teams and Boards. In the last 18 months government has made some notable funds available via Local authorities where in the past they might well have been led by LEPs, such as Coronavirus grants, Levelling Up and Community Renewal Funds. It remains to be seen how the future LEP role will evolve alongside that of local authorities, and managing any change well will be important to our success in strategic economic development in future. The current arrangement is directly supporting local business, shaping policy, and earmarking funds for key initiatives in Oxford, albeit at lower levels due to the Levelling Up agenda. Some of the main highlights and wider statistics on county-wide impact can be found in OxLEP's most recent annual report (linked below), attached as a background paper.

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Links to further information:	
1.	OxLEP Annual Report
2.	Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan
3.	OxLEP Local Skills Report and Plan
4.	Oxfordshire Industrial Strategy

5.	Find your Future Video
6.	Your Fabulous Future Video
7.	Find Your Future Expo
8.	Oxfordshire Internationalisation Plan to 2025
9.	Gatsby Benchmarks