

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy
Title of Report: Partnership Report: Future Oxfordshire Partnership

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	Report to update Council on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member with responsibility:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	Inclusive Economy, Deliver More Affordable Housing, Support Thriving Communities and Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Corporate Strategy 2020/2024
Recommendation: That the Council resolves to:	
1. Note the annual update report on the work of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Future Oxfordshire Partnership Annual Report, November 2023
Appendix 2	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Annual Report, November 2023

Introduction and background

1. This report provides an overview of the:
 - a. Progress across various workstreams overseen by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) up to and including August 2023. The information is derived from the FOP Annual Report, November 2023 (see Appendix 1).

This overview emphasises Oxford and incorporates perspectives from the Oxford City Council. The report also encompasses details of other partnership arrangements and engagements in which the FOP has participated.

- b. The Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP), focusing on the progress highlights as outlined in the OIEP Annual Report of November 2023 (refer to Appendix 2).

Background

2. The FOP operates as a joint committee involving the six councils of Oxfordshire and key strategic partners. Its primary focus is on achieving the ambitious outcomes outlined in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development.
3. The FOP accomplishes this by:
 - a. Coordinating local efforts to manage economic, housing, and infrastructure development inclusively, aiming to maximise local social and environmental benefits.
 - b. Facilitating the collaborative execution of projects by the councils of Oxfordshire in the areas of economic development, strategic planning (including infrastructure and housing), and climate change.
 - c. Actively working to secure funding to support the goals outlined in the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision.
 - d. Representing Oxfordshire on matters of regional and national significance.
4. Since July 2023 Councillor Brown/ Oxford City Council has assumed the Chair and at the Council's bidding a workshop was organised in September 2023 to review the future direction of the FOP.
5. In July 2023, the Cabinet made the decision to approve the revised Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding for the FOP. These revisions took effect after the approval by each of the six Oxfordshire councils.
6. The FOP centres its efforts on four key focus areas: environment, affordable housing delivery, infrastructure delivery, and planning. These areas are guided by four corresponding Advisory Groups consisting of lead cabinet members from each council, alongside four corresponding officer groups. A FOP Scrutiny Panel, comprising 18 members (three from each authority), reviews the Partnership's work. Its chair is Oxford City Councillor Katherine Miles, this scrutiny is complemented by the support of a small team of specialist officers.
7. The [Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for long term sustainable development](#), a non-statutory document, was officially endorsed by the FOP in March 2021. Following this endorsement, it received approval from each of the Oxfordshire councils. This vision outlines the FOP's ambitious long-term goals, envisioning the county's potential state by the year 2050.
8. FOP has agreed the creation of an Oxfordshire narrative to underpin work in delivering outcomes of the Strategic Vision. This [Place Narrative](#) is being commissioned for Oxfordshire for the FOP.
9. Each authority maintains control over both their non-executive and executive functions concerning economic development, housing provision, strategic spatial planning, and strategic transport planning.
10. The FOP convenes six times annually, typically in a non-decision-making role. Together with the Advisory Sub-Groups and Scrutiny Panel it is supported by a small team of officers.

Work programmes

11. Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan:

Oxford City Council is actively involved in all of these other than the work on carbon sequestration, which is currently being led by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership. A £5 million joint bid to the Innovate UK Pioneer Places Fund involving all six councils and other partners was ultimately unsuccessful however, elements of the proposed Future Fit Oxfordshire (FOx) programme will be retained and taken forward - supporting the countywide work on both buildings retrofit and green finance.

Update on the Local Areas Energy Planning work stream:

- a. Given the significant grid capacity constraints in the city Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) is one of the most urgent workstrands - as we need a robust electricity system to be able to accommodate the significant increase in zero carbon technologies. The loss of a single secondary substation in Osney Island earlier in 2023 required all locally installed solar panels to be switched to avoid overloading the network. Officers from all councils are working directly with distribution network operators and the Low Carbon Hub to develop detailed energy plans to accommodate the transition.
- b. An Executive Steering Board and a multi-agency working group have been established. These groups bring together council representatives, Electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs), the gas distributor, and other key strategic partners. They aim to provide strategic direction and practical support to integrate the local area energy planning approach in Oxfordshire.
- c. The FOP has allocated £150,000 to local area energy planning work stream. Oversight and input into the development of the work stream will be provided by the Infrastructure Advisory Group, with updates to the FOP.
- d. Linked to the LAEP work Oxford City Council is providing support to the successor project to Local Energy Oxford (LEO). Project LEO Neighbourhoods (or LEON), is focused on identifying grid edge solutions to balance supply and demand, reducing the need for so much physical network infrastructure. The Alpha phase of LEON work has completed, and a decision is awaited on Government funding following submission of the Beta phase bid by Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks, which is leading the LEON workstream.

Buildings decarbonisation:

- The initiative to "Expand and scale up retrofit delivery" involves the enhancement and broadening of existing retrofit programs in Oxfordshire. Notable examples include:
 - a. Homes Upgrade Grant: This program is dedicated to providing energy efficiency upgrades and introducing low-carbon heating to households experiencing fuel poverty in Oxfordshire, particularly those without gas central heating. The expectation is to upgrade a minimum of 310 properties.
 - b. Heat Pump Ready: This initiative imposes a requirement to incorporate a minimum of 25% heat pumps in specified areas, namely Rose Hill in

Oxford and North-West Bicester in Cherwell.

- c. In addition to these ongoing programs, the Council is leading work through funding under the Government's Pioneer Places programme to develop innovative and cost-effective solutions to facilitate the deployment of decarbonised buildings. This work, involving partners such as the Low Carbon Hub includes testing the concept of a Future Fit One Stop Shop (FOSS) – to provide comprehensive solutions to enhance the efficiency of building retrofitting processes.

Scale up programmes to address the retrofit skills gap:

The initiative involves hosting stakeholder workshops to address skills gaps and explore funding opportunities through the FOSS. Additionally, there is a significant investment of £4 million in capital funding, drawn from the government's Capital Growth Fund and OxLEP, to establish a new training and education centre named Retrofit Academy. This centre will focus on the sustainable construction sector and operate across three sites. Over the next five years, it aims to provide training for 400 apprenticeships and cater to 240 full-time students and 300 part-time students, contributing to the development of a skilled workforce in the field.

Accelerate the roll out of publicly accessible EV (electric vehicles) charge points:

- a. In Oxfordshire, there is already an established joint strategy, the Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (EVI) Strategy, and a collaborative Cross-Authority stakeholder working group known as the Oxfordshire EV Infrastructure Steering Group. Oxford City Council has also adopted a city level strategy and implementation plan for EV infrastructure deployment. Current work at the countywide level, linked to the EAG work programme has included design and preparation for the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) funded EVI deployment in Oxford. Linked to that, there has been discussion with County over the transfer to them of Go Ultra Local Oxford (GULO) funding and responsibilities for the deployment of onstreet EVI. In total LEVI and GULO should see an additional 300 EV charge points installed in the city. Additionally, plans have been agreed at countywide level for the deployment of 500 cable channels to enable onstreet home charging, using part of the LEVI funding, it is hoped the ODS (Oxford Direct Services) GUL-e solution will be selected for use.

Explore opportunities to enhance carbon sequestration through land use change, including targeted habitat restoration and creation:

- Oxfordshire Local Nature is leading on the delivery of this work stream. The progress to date includes:
 - a. *Engagement with Businesses:* Ongoing discussions with businesses positioned to invest in land-based carbon sequestration. Many businesses express interest in diversifying risk across various carbon offsetting projects in Oxfordshire, encompassing nature-based initiatives, solar projects, and retrofit programs.
 - b. *Draft Nature Finance Strategy:* The Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership has developed a draft Nature Finance Strategy. This strategy outlines the creation of a natural capital investment framework that aligns with the evolving Oxfordshire

Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The framework aims to facilitate environmental enhancement projects. Oxford City Council officers are working to ensure clear linkage between the work on nature finance and Local Nature Recovery and work also ongoing to define areas that can be utilised to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), in cases where a developer cannot meet BNG requirements onsite.

Explore new funding mechanisms to support delivery of net zero activity:

- a. *Green Bonds*: Initial discussions within the Environment Advisory Group have centered on the potential use of green bonds to support the deployment of renewable energy technologies.
- b. *Area-Based Insetting Trial*: The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership, in collaboration with Anthesis, has initiated an innovative area-based insetting trial in Oxford. Funding has been awarded through the Government's Pioneer Places programme. The trial seeks to demonstrate the viability of attracting funding to implement local carbon reduction projects. The success of this trial is expected to create opportunities for shared initiatives.

Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy

12. The original Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) was endorsed by the then Oxfordshire Growth Board in November 2017. OxIS has supported to secure significant investment for infrastructure in Oxfordshire, particularly for transport schemes being funded through the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal (i.e. Homes from Infrastructure) and the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF).
13. As part of the Housing and Growth Deal, there was a commitment to update the [OxIS Stage 1 Report](#) produced in March 2022. As a result of the cessation of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050) this update was brought to a halt. Stakeholder engagement sessions have taken place with internal and external partners and have highlighted some common ground around ambitions for the next stage of OxIS, including that it should reflect both the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan and the Strategic Vision, and aim to expand its scope to include energy supply issues, health issues, and green infrastructure.

Homes from Infrastructure Programme (Housing & Growth Deal)

14. This programme to deliver strategic infrastructure to support the acceleration of already planned houses in Oxfordshire was allocated £150m of government funding. The final tranche of funding is subject to a number of government and reporting requirements set out in a letter from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the cessation of work on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 in August 2022.
15. Oxfordshire County Council is now accountable for delivery of the remaining programme; a Memorandum of Understanding sets out commitments to positive partnership working, with particular regard to consulting with partners over any proposed changes to the programme of infrastructure delivery.

Best practice, knowledge transfer and information sharing

16. The partnership working of the FOP is an essential mechanism for sharing knowledge and best practice across the partner organisations. Recent examples include:
- a. A site visit to Graven Hill, Bicester, offered members insight into local activity to accelerate self-build and custom-build properties; the visit follows on from a self-build report the group received from officers in April 2023.
 - b. Members received a report which provides advice to help elected members and officers understand relevant best practice principles and guidance for the deployment of ground mounted solar farms. This report is now being shared across the advisory groups and local authorities.
 - c. The environment officer group supporting EAG has led on the development on an environment strategy map, and a partnerships and environmental programme tracker to support the sharing of best practice and prevent duplication. The strategy map considers national, county wide, and authority level strategy and policy, and in doing so enables an understanding of the different guiding documents and how these might interact.
 - d. The Planning Advisory Group (PAG) is attended by a representative from Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire) ICB). This creates an opportunity to explore how the NHS planning and future needs process works and the relationship between Integrated Care Services and GP practices, to understand how planning colleagues can best support in resolving gaps in care provision.

Existing council programmes of work overseen by FOP advisory groups

17. Several existing pieces of work currently in development have been identified as benefiting from inclusion within the work programmes of the advisory groups and the FOP as a mechanism for increasing broader member input and buy in at an earlier stage.
- a. Infrastructure Advisory Group (IAG)
Strategies and delivery plans emerging from the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan including Local Area Travel Plans, Bus Service Improvement Plan, mobility hub activity, freight strategy, and Vision Zero are now coming forward to IAG for update and broader member input.
 - b. Environment Advisory Group (EAG)
Work on climate adaptation and resilience, the Oxfordshire food strategy, and Climate Action Oxfordshire behaviour change campaign are now coming forward to EAG for update and broader member input.

Supply and sustainability of energy

18. The FOP has identified shared concerns across Oxfordshire that constraints in the development of the electricity grid have the potential to negatively impact upon the pace of delivery of net zero ambitions.

Oxfordshire's District Network Operators (DNOs)

- a. In April 2023, Local Authority Leaders and OxLEP met with SSEN, National Grid Electricity Distribution, and UK Power Networks to understand the causes of infrastructure delays, reinforcement plans, and opportunities to work together to address ongoing challenges in the local energy network.
- b. The meeting highlighted the importance of local area energy planning and need for local authority input into Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES). Local authorities can input into DFES on an annual basis. DFES map out the different growth projections for electricity distribution networks across the UK, through forecasting changing electricity requirements; in doing so DFES support network upgrade planning and direct investment.

Evidence to the government's Environmental Audit Committee

- a. In June of 2023, the FOP responded to the government's Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence on 'The sustainable electrification of the UK economy'.
- b. The full response to the call for evidence from the FOP [has been published online](#).

Updates from longstanding work programmes

19. In addition to those work streams listed above, the FOP has delivered outcomes through established programmes of work including a study undertaken on behalf of FOP on facilitating improvements to Oxfordshire's rail connectivity, supporting the delivery of the Strategic Vision outcomes.

Other partnerships

20. The FOP works closely with other partnerships in the county and nationally to enable FOP members to engage with and influence these forums in support of the outcomes of the Strategic Vision. FOP representatives are given a seat on the following partnerships:

- **England's Economic Heartland** - a sub-national transport body for the region stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire and from Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire which advised the government on the transport infrastructure, services and policy framework which will realise our region's economic potential while supporting the journey to net zero.
- **Oxford to Cambridge Partnership** – A group of leaders from local government, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the Arc Universities Group and England's Economic Heartland, with government, in a new pan-regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge area which collaborates to accelerate economic opportunities and achieve environmental enhancements and to unlock investment for inclusive, high quality sustainable development. <https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/>
- **Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP)** - an organisation of key

partners working together to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire a county where people and nature thrive. While a discrete partnership which does not report into the FOP, the OLNP links in with the FOP on projects and programmes in support of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – for example, the OLNP is leading on the carbon sequestration workstream of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route map and Action Plan. The six Oxfordshire councils contribute funding to the OLNP.

- FOP also works closely with other partnerships in Oxfordshire, including the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) and the Oxfordshire Bus Enhanced Partnership (OBEP), to support delivery of the aims of the strategic vision.
- In addition, the FOP oversees the work of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.

21. The OIEP is a county-wide group that brings together employers, business, education, community groups and local government – to share knowledge, expertise and resources, and create links between different areas of work.

22. The work of the OIEP is aligned to and supports delivery against the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire, by working to enable a local economy which is globally competitive, sustainable, diverse, and inclusive. The six Oxfordshire council's contribute funding to the OIEP.

23. The OIEP contributes to the delivery of the following outcomes of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision:

- *Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved:* The outcomes of the OIEP will contribute to this priority enabling people to have better skills and education attainment to access employment opportunities etc.
- *Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive:* The aim of the OIEP is to create an environment and communities that can adapt to change, a region that is resilient in the face of shocks in the economy and a workforce that responds to different needs and different kinds of work in the future. The education and inclusive employment working groups contribute to this priority.
- *Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced:* The OIEP's aim is to work together to create a more equal region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

24. Four action focused working groups work collectively to deliver the OIEP vision:

- **Educational attainment** – focusing on early years education and support, education attainment and better links between business and education links to shape career choices.
- **Inclusive Employment** - focuses on both employers and employees. Looking at how organisations can create better pathways into work whilst understanding the barriers people face to accessing employment.

- **Social value and procurement** - Looking at how the OIEP can grow the amount of money that is spent within the county, for the county. The OIEP are also looking at how the businesses that benefit from this are investing in our local communities, through jobs, training or improving our environment.
- **Place shaping** – ensuring investment is delivered in places that need it most. Communities need to be part of the OIEP work to ensure that money spent in the county helps address some of our biggest challenges – health, environment, and housing.

25. The OIEP's annual report (Appendix 2) provides an overview and highlights progress to November 2023. Of note is the:

- Development of the OIEP Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan 2023-24.
- Implementation and wide uptake of the [Inclusive Economy Charter](#) – Oxford City Council has signed up to this charter to underscore its commitment to making the local economy fairer for everyone.
- Establishment of the OIEP Human Resource (HR) Network to engage with HR leads in businesses across the county to support its inclusive recruitment and employment goals.
- Creation of four focussed working groups that enable partners to support one another delivering aspects of our aim and purpose.

26. Other noted achievements in the report include:

- Establishing and structuring the governance of the partnership and developing key relationships and programmes of work to ensure the partnership is a robust, wide-reaching, and effective mechanism for delivering its vision.
- For each of the four key areas of focus for the OIEP a working group has been established with a broad range of influential representatives and chaired by a member of the partnership with particular expertise and knowledge in that field.
- A brand, including a logo and suite of branded materials, and a web and social media presence, was developed by the communications co-ordinator to improve the OIEP's ability communicate and promote its work.
- The OIEP's pioneering work has been included as an exemplar measure for tackling inequality in the Oxfordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan.
- In 2023, the partnership supported ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children) in a successful fundraising bid. This funding will allow them to recruit a member of staff who will lead on recruiting new volunteers to the charities pioneering work inspiring a love of reading in Oxfordshire children, enhancing their well-being and improving life chances.
- The inaugural HR network was held in July 2023. It was delivered in partnership with Seetec Plus, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Fedcap, TAP Social Movement, Aspire, DWP and Owen Mumford. Giving practical advice and case studies about supporting ex-offenders into work. The event was attended by over fifty attendees from different sectors across Oxfordshire.
- In September 2023 the OIEP worked with partners to deliver an in-prison open day for employers at HM Bullingdon Prison with a chance for them to see the training centre, workshops and employment hub as well as meet people who are in the last 12 weeks of their sentence.

27. The OIEP's annual report concludes "that the partnership is strong and valuable and has successfully leveraged additional resources from a number of sources, but that it is in need of a continued, diversified and enlarged funding settlement in order to support the development of a more inclusive economy in Oxfordshire."

Oxford City Council Officer Updates

28. The adoption of the Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan by FOP in March 2023, with its 14 workstreams and milestones stretching through 2025, 2030, 2040 and 2050 creates a clear framework for the work of EAG into the future. With so much to do, prioritisation is key and the first suite of programmes cover:

- buildings decarbonisation.
- Local Area Energy Planning.
- Accelerating EV Infrastructure rollout
- Carbon sequestration through land-use.
- Green finance.

29. A significant component of the work associated with the FOP has been the development of the Strategic Economic Plan. This plan is scheduled to be presented to the Cabinet for endorsement in January 2024. Prior to this, it was also submitted to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Board. Given that this initiative was funded through the partnership, it is expected to be reported to the FOP for further discussion and updates.

30. Anticipating the circulation of a report to Housing Advisory Group members in January, the document will outline the new work priorities as agreed upon by the FOP. The report is expected to include a modest amount of capacity funding, with details to be announced soon. The outlined priorities are likely to focus on:

- *Accelerating Affordable Housing Delivery*: Particularly emphasising Social Rent housing. This includes the development of a comprehensive data set covering the entire county.
- *Community Led Housing*: The report is expected to touch upon the sharing of best practices in Community Led Housing. It will likely incorporate rural housing enabling work, which is separately funded and overseen by the Collaborative Housing Hub.
- *Encouraging the USE of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC)*: The emphasis here will be on promoting MMC to enhance sustainability in housing projects.
- *Retrofitting Existing Homes*: The report is likely to highlight efforts and strategies aimed at retrofitting existing homes to improve energy efficiency and sustainability.

31. The Planning Advisory Group focus involves initiating work on Biodiversity Net Gain and Viability work streams, along with Health in Planning. Additionally, there is an upcoming work stream dedicated to Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) that is yet to commence. These efforts reflect a comprehensive approach, addressing biodiversity, economic viability, and public health considerations in planning, and the exploration of innovative construction methods.

Financial implications

32. The FOP budget is made up of a contribution from all six councils of Oxfordshire. The Council makes contribution to the running costs of the FOP of £100k per annum.
33. The Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership Manager works in the Council's Regeneration Team, the post is funded from the FOP budget.
34. There are no other financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

Legal issues

35. There are no legal implications. This report is not seeking Council approval for recommendations, nor asking for a decision to be made. The report is providing an update to Council on the work completed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.

Level of risk

36. This report is not seeking Council approval for recommendations, nor asking for a decision to be made. The report is providing an update to Council on the work completed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership.
37. There are no specific risks arising from the content of this report.

Equalities impact

38. The structure and membership of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and sub-groups is intended to reflect a common commitment among participating organisations to equality. The areas of focus of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership and sub-groups are very much focused on tackling inequality and building inclusivity.
39. There is no specific impact on equalities arising from this report.

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Background Papers: None	
1	Cabinet report: Updates to the memorandum of Understanding and the Terms of Reference of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (12 July 2023, item 29.)
2	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Strategy 2023-26
3	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Delivery Plan 2023-24

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