

To: Climate and Environment Panel
Date: 10 September 2024
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy
Title of Report: Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership expansion to Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	This briefing note covers the work of the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) and ambition of its corporate members to expand focus from a City to an Oxfordshire scale. The report covers the strategic opportunities of an anchor network convened at this scale. The report has been produced at the request of the Climate and Environment Panel, while noting decisions around ZCOP expansion and future governance sit with the ZCOP Steering Group and Future Oxfordshire Partnership.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2024-28
Recommendation(s): That the Panel resolves to:	
1. Note and comment on the report and agree any recommendations.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Benefits of ZCOP Membership

Introduction and background

1. Since its formation in 2021, Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership has operated successfully as a collaboration between key private partners and the City and County Councils to advance joint working on climate action focussed on the City area. The partnership includes SSEN, both universities, higher education, both NHS Hospital Trusts, Low Carbon Hub and the private sector BMW Mini, Unipart, LandSec and LucyGroup.

2. Despite being home to many other organisations with strong ambition to address the climate crisis, Oxfordshire has not yet had a defined countywide climate partnership. Early in 2024, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) was presented a paper exploring the role and potential of an 'Anchor Institution' network in delivering strategic priorities – including tackling climate change. It was agreed that to avoid duplication it would be preferable to expand ZCOP's work countywide.
3. On 30 April 2024 – the ZCOP Steering Group unanimously expressed support to expand the partnership. The majority of the existing Steering Group members - Oxford Brookes, Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford University Health Trust, Oxford Health, Oxford University, Lucy Group, OxLEP, SSEN, Low Carbon Hub – operate across the county or have a presence outside of the city.
4. Following FOP's adoption of the Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire (PAZCO) strategy and Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan (NZRMAP), ZCOP has also involved non-members in some of its task and finish projects – including Industrial Decarbonisation and Active Travel. Several organisations with footprints outside of the city have asked how they may become more involved.
5. Over a number of months, officers at Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council and Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have been involved in discussions on how an expanded partnership might meet the collective needs of local authorities to engage the private sector and other key local stakeholders to advance their net zero objectives.

Strategic Benefit

6. All Oxfordshire's local authorities have declared a climate emergency and set targets for emissions reductions, which meet or exceed the national 2050 goal. However, much like in the City of Oxford, Oxfordshire's local authorities are only directly responsible for 1-2% of the county's total emissions. Whereas a third of emissions are directly shaped or influenced by local authorities.
7. Local authorities can have a catalytic role in bringing together the businesses, institutions, public and community and voluntary sectors to tackle emissions reduction and adaptation in their local area. ZCOP aims to unify efforts, leverage collective resources, and significantly accelerate our progress towards achieving climate action. With decreasing resources in local authorities the importance of working with partners will increase.
8. ZCOP has established a record of enabling organisations based in and around the city to collaborate to accelerate climate action. It harnesses collective skills and powers and has provided Oxford with a network, expertise and – increasingly – new sources of funding to accelerate local net zero projects.
9. The partnership operates on membership contributions which funds a small secretariat function, hosted by Oxford City Council to support the activities of the partnership.

Purpose and Benefits of the Expansion

10. An expanded ZCOP will support delivery of the Oxfordshire Net Zero Route Map and Action Plan. The key benefits of an expanded ZCOP are:

- **Agile and Effective Collaboration:** ZCOP is a dynamic partnership of engaged organisations dedicated to place-based net zero projects. By running task and finish (sprint) groups, leveraging local finance and expertise, and securing funding bids, ZCOP accelerates action. This approach tackles climate challenges at a place scale and beyond individual organisational limits.
- **Peer-to-Peer Learning and Networking:** ZCOP facilitates knowledge sharing and best practice through peer-to-peer learning, quarterly meetings, and networking events. These activities connect a broad range of academic, technical experts, and leaders.
- **Streamlined Processes and Resource Optimisation:** The dedicated ZCOP Partnership Secretariat provides administrative resource, enabling partners to maximise their limited resources on progress towards net zero outcomes.
- **Scalability and Impact:** Leveraging the expertise of ZCOP partners allows local authorities to scale-up net zero efforts.
- **Coordinated and Aligned Action:** ZCOP fosters collaboration and alignment across influential and senior leaders in key local organisations. This coordination enhances the ability to deliver place-based and needs-led solutions. This is particularly important in the face of the many systems challenges we face around net zero, with partnership offering the opportunity to bring together the entire value chain.
- **Local and National Advocacy:** Collective lobbying by an aligned partnership amplifies the voice of the local area, gaining greater attention and support than acting alone. This advocacy helps to position the local area as a leader in climate action.

Expansion Planning

11. To maintain the high levels of engagement of existing partners, it is recognised that an interim and phased arrangement may be most effective as the partnership grows. Interim governance can then be reviewed and shaped as the partnership expands, and new members can be involved in these discussions.
12. At the request of the Oxfordshire Chief Executives Group (CEX), officers are exploring structures for local authority representation on an expanded ZCOP Steering Group and considering the potential role of FOP in the partnership's governance.
13. In the interim several changes are in progress:
 - The previous chair, Cllr Susan Brown, has stepped down and Harriet Waters, Head of Environmental Sustainability, Oxford University has been elected Interim Chair by the ZCOP Steering Group.
 - Officers from the County Council, Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils are working with the ZCOP Secretariat to identify the key local strategic partners to be included in the first phase of expansion. This will include:
 - Largest (with highest CO₂ emissions) and most influential local organisations within the Districts and the County.

- Sector specific representatives.
- Restructuring the subscription model to encourage smaller organisations to join.
- Supplementing officer resourcing to drive the expansion work.

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Background Papers: None