

Report to:	Council	21 February 2023
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bridget Smith	
Lead Officer:	Liz Watts, Chief Executive	

Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership

Executive Summary

1. Proposals for a locally led Partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge region have been formally approved by government. The Partnership's role will be to champion the region as a world leader in research and innovation in hi-tech, high-performance technology and manufacturing, acting to achieve environmentally sustainable and inclusive growth. It will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration among its partners to focus on tackling the issues that matter to the people who live and work in the region.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that Council supports South Cambridgeshire District Council Cabinet's intention to confirm its membership of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership as it becomes formally recognised and funded by Government as a Pan-Regional Partnership (PRP) and the appointment of the Leader as the Council's representative on the PRP.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. South Cambridgeshire District Council supports partnership working locally, across Cambridgeshire, and beyond as there are real benefits to be achieved through potentially more efficient working, effective delivery at scale as well as access to additional funding and strength in working with and influencing central Government.
4. The Oxford to Cambridge region is an area of economic success and will continue to be so. It has been the consistent view of the Council to try its best to positively influence that growth and seek the greatest benefits for our communities. By working with other sector partners, as well as key stakeholders who directly influence that economic growth but who also seek to gain benefits for our local natural environment, we can benefit from sharing best practice, learning and also engage directly with those who have the most influence on our places and people. For these reasons it is recommended the Council continues to not only

remain as a local partner, but to actively engage and where beneficial to the district, to lead wider partnership activity.

Details

5. On 18th January 2023, Secretary of State Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP endorsed the proposition to set up a pan regional partnership for the Oxford to Cambridge geography. Letter attached at [Appendix 1](#).
6. The overall purpose of the Oxford to Cambridge Partnership will be to champion the Oxford to Cambridge region as a world leader of innovation and business, acting on shared interests in delivering environmentally sustainable economic growth that brings benefits to communities now and in future.
7. The Partnership will strengthen cross-boundary collaboration so that joint working is locally-led and focused on the issues that matter to people who live and work in the region. The Partnership will define the outcomes it seeks to achieve but it does not have delegated authority or any formal or legal decision-making powers from any of its partner members.
8. Currently, the priorities of the Partnership are focussed on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future.
9. Government endorsement of the Partnership unlocks the opportunity of up to £2.5million for the remainder of the current Spending Review period (to 2024/25), with £500k *in year* to support activity to deliver:
 - an Investment Prospectus & Atlas
 - a significant Environment Programme, including:
 - Nature Recovery Strategy Support
 - Minerals & Waste Restoration Environmental Gain
 - Regional Energy & Water Strategy Scoping)
 - a Data Observatory & Innovation Network.
10. The Partnership is not a formal committee in Local Government terms but as a condition of gaining Government support and funding, it is required to have the following:
 - a constitution which includes clarity on governance, membership, openness and transparency, which sits as part of a wider performance and assurance framework which covers financial and risk management
 - a committed work programme which builds on the Partnership's consensus in terms of priorities, objectives and expected outcomes
 - a representative Board from across the Partnership including an Independent Chair.
11. A Shadow Board is in place to oversee an initial partnership programme and agree governance and funding arrangements. The Shadow Board will be in place

until the initial conditions and milestones have been met (i.e. constitution in place, Independent Chair selected). It is anticipated the Board will meet outside of shadow form by June 2023.

12. Members of the Shadow Board are:

- Cllr Barry Wood, Leader Cherwell District Council sitting as Interim Chair of the Shadow Board.
- Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of Oxford City Council, representing the Future Oxfordshire Partnership as current Chair
- Cllr Pete Marland, Leader of Milton Keynes City Council, representing the Central Area Growth Board as current Co-Chair
- Cllr Richard Wenham, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council, representing the Central Area Growth Board as current Co-Chair
- Cllr Anna Smith, Leader of Cambridge City Council and currently Acting Mayor, representing the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority
- Professor Alistair Fitt, Pro-Vice Chancellor Oxford Brookes University representing the Arc Universities Group as current Chair
- Peter Horrocks CBE, Chair of SEMLEP, representing Chairs of LEPs and Business Boards and, sitting as interim Chair of the Economy Sub-Group.
- Cllr Bridget Smith, Leader South Cambridgeshire District Council sitting as interim Chair of the Environment Sub-Group
- To be confirmed, Representative from England's Economic Heartland

13. Once fully operational, there will be three main layers to the governance model: an overarching Plenary group, which includes all partners, that will meet at least annually; a main Board which will oversee governance, work programme delivery and communications; Sub-Groups which are themed groups (currently economy and environment) which focus on specific project delivery. All groups will be supported by a small operational team as well as an Accountable Body.

14. The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership Board will succeed the shadow board to oversee the work and operations of the Partnership, as agreed by its members. Representation on this Board will include:

- An Independent Chair;
- One Chair from each of the member Growth Boards or equivalent sub-regional groups (plus an additional Co-Chair from the Central Area Growth Board);
- One Chair representing each of the Board's Programme Sub-Groups;
- One Chair each from the main constituent stakeholder groups: one on behalf of all Local Enterprise Partnerships, one of behalf of the Arc Universities Group, and one from England's Economic Heartland.
- A minimum of two Independent Stakeholders (NEDs) as selected by the Board
- Senior Government representatives (whilst the Board is in receipt of core Government funding).

15. Cherwell District Council is currently the Accountable Body for the Partnership. Such a body is required for the Partnership given direct public funding from partners and Government. This role involves the Council having oversight and responsibility for ensuring proper governance, financial and risk management is in place and operational.

Options

16. Members could decide not to be part of the PRP, which would risk losing the ability to positively influence collaboration across this geography and the access to resulting additional funding, to the detriment to the communities of South Cambridgeshire.

Implications

17. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Financial

18. The Oxford to Cambridge Partnership currently has transition funding of £250,000 from Government with access to a further £250,000 this year plus local partner contributions. This money is being committed to support the transition programme of delivery, recruitment of the Chair and to support a small transition team until the Partnership is formally set up.

19. There is commitment from Government for access to a further £2,500,000 over the next two financial years, subject to business case being agreed. As part of accessing this funding local contributions are required, both in officer time and in cash contributions. This financial year's contribution was £4,000. This contribution has been provided for within the Council's 2023/24 proposed budget.

Legal

20. The PRP constitution is being drafted which will set out the principles and rules governing it. There will also be a formal partnership agreement between the partners.

Risks/Opportunities

21. As stated in 'Options' above, there is a risk that not joining the partnership will result in loss of funding and influence for the Council.

Climate Change

22. The priorities of the Partnership are focussed on supporting delivery of clean, green and inclusive economic growth as well as delivering increased environmental gain and benefits from this growth for our communities now and in the future. The implications of supporting the Partnership would be to benefit from a wider, strategic approach to delivery of its sustainable, climate impact reducing priorities.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

23. This is a key workstream of the PRP.

Being green to our core

24. This is a key workstream of the PRP.

Background Papers

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter from Secretary of State – 18 January 2023

Report Author:

Liz Watts – Chief Executive
Telephone: (01954) 712926