



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Name and date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE - 12 MARCH 2025</b>
Subject	<b>OXFORDSHIRE LEADERS' JOINT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer Email: <a href="mailto:giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Astrid Harvey, Corporate Strategy Manager Email: <a href="mailto:astrid.harvey@westoxon.gov.uk">astrid.harvey@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	The new focus on devolution and the winding down of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal have prompted a reset and change of name for the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, and this report proposes corresponding amendments to the Terms of Reference.
Annexes	Annex A – Future Oxfordshire Partnership Report 26 November 2024 Annex B – Revised FOP Terms of Reference Annex C – Revised FOP Memorandum of Understanding
Recommendation	That Executive approves the revised FOP Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. These will take effect following approval by each of the six Oxfordshire Authorities.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li><li>• Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>• Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>• - Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees / Consultation	West Oxfordshire District Council has been a longstanding member of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership, represented by the Chief Executive Officer and Leader, and through this participation has been consulted on the proposed amendments to the FOP Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding. The Council's Monitoring Officer has also been consulted.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1.** The Council has been a longstanding member of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) alongside the other Principal Councils in Oxfordshire and other key partners. The purpose of the FOP is to build collaboration across the County to deliver the bold aims of the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development, which all six Principal Councils have adopted. A key responsibility of the Partnership has been oversight of several programmes, including the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, City Deal and Strategic Economic Plan.
- 1.2.** A number of factors have come together to cause members of the FOP to take stock and consider a significant reset. These are set out in a report to the FOP meeting of 26 November 2024 (Annex I) when members asked officers to draft some proposed revised FOP Terms of Reference (Annex II).
- 1.3.** The Terms of Reference were originally drafted in 2014 at the formation of what was then known as the Oxfordshire Growth Board, and have been subsequently updated on a number of occasions. The amendments now proposed for the Terms of Reference are described in this report.
- 1.4.** The Memorandum of Understanding was introduced in 2018 as a requirement of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, and sets out operational aspects of decisions making and responsibilities in relation to the deal. Although the Housing and Growth Deal is now largely complete, there are still projects in train which have received growth deal funding, and officers therefore recommend that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)(Annex III) should be retained for the time being. No substantive changes are proposed to the MoU, though it will be updated to reflect the new name of the Oxfordshire Leaders' Joint Committee.

## **2. NAME AND MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1.** Members agreed at the FOP meeting on 26 November 2024 to refocus the identity and purpose of the partnership. The revised FOP Terms of Reference therefore propose a new name – the Oxfordshire Leaders' Joint Committee – and membership limited to the six constituent authorities.
- 2.2.** Although in practice the committee seldom takes formal decisions, there is still some residual capacity funding from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal which requires a collective process for decision making as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding. It is therefore proposed that this aspect of the joint committee should be left unchanged.
- 2.3.** A further benefit of retaining the formal status of the joint committee may be felt in future, depending on the progress of discussions relating to devolution and local government reorganisation. It is possible that a formal joint committee might be required, and it is therefore prudent to retain the existing framework rather than risk the possibility of putting additional time and resource into recreating it at a future date.

- 2.4.** It is recognised that this position may change as the government's programme becomes clearer. The Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding can be revisited at a future date if further amendments are required.

### **3. END OF THE OXFORDSHIRE HOUSING AND GROWTH DEAL**

- 3.1.** The Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal is now in its final quarter for expenditure on the infrastructure programme, and the other programmes are complete. As members agreed in November 2024, the revised Terms of Reference have therefore removed the advisory groups and scrutiny panel that were associated with the requirements of the deal.

- 3.2.** As noted in paragraph 2.2, there remains a small quantity of uncommitted capacity funding which still requires joint decision making. It is appropriate that projects which have been jointly funded from the capacity fund and which are still in progress should be reported to the joint committee on a regular basis. Examples including local area energy planning are identified in the proposed Terms of Reference.

### **4. DECISION MAKING POWERS**

- 4.1.** No new decision-making powers are proposed for the joint committee at this time.
- 4.2.** While there is uncertainty surrounding Oxfordshire's timetable and government requirements for devolution and local government reorganisation, it makes sense to retain the joint committee structure and the possibility of decision-making powers being delegated should they be needed at a future date, subject to constituent authorities at the time.

### **5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1.** The Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding are matters reserved for decision by each Oxfordshire authority's agreed decision-making body.
- 5.2.** The proposed changes to the governance documents were endorsed by the FOP meeting on 28 January 2025 and are now coming for decision by each of the Oxfordshire authority's agreed decision-making body through March 2025.

### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1.** There are no legal implications arising directly from the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference. The joint committee structure is unaltered and there is no change to decision-making powers.

### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1.** There are no financial implications arising directly from the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference.

**8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1.** Should one of the Oxfordshire authority's not agree to the revised FOP Terms of Reference it would risk the effective functioning of the Oxfordshire Leaders' Joint Committee as a forum for the joint interests of the Oxfordshire authorities.

**9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 9.1.** The Oxfordshire Leaders' Joint Committee will not affect service delivery or levels of access to Council services and so there will be no equalities impact arising from the decision to agree to the revised FOP Terms of Reference.

**10. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1.** None arising directly from this report.

**11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 11.1.** Executive could choose not to approve the revised FOP Terms of Reference however this would be out of step with the Council's decision to approve these in its capacity as a member of the FOP at its meeting on 28 January 2025.

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1.** None.