

OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP LTD

Assurance Framework
February 2017

*“Our vision -
Oxfordshire as a
vibrant,
sustainable,
inclusive, world
leading economy,
driven by
innovation,
enterprise and
research
excellence”*

Background to the LEP

Formally launched by the Business Minister, Mark Prisk MP, in March 2011, Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) is a business led strategic body with members and stakeholders from the business community, further/higher education, local authorities, and other sectors. By working with these partners, OxLEP plays a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertakes activities to drive forward sustainable economic growth and create new jobs across the county.

Executive Summary

OxLEP has secured £198m through the Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal and Local Growth funds which is focused upon driving economic growth through innovation. Our strategy defines four thematic priorities, People, Place, Enterprise and Connectivity focused on meeting the needs of the area's science and knowledge-rich economy, in so doing place Oxfordshire at the forefront of the UK's global innovation ambitions.

Aligned to our Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), the growth deal package and any future funds, including European Funds, will support investment in the following four thematic areas:

People delivering and attracting specialist skills at all levels and across sectors to meet business need.

Place providing the quality environment needed to support growth.

Enterprise building on the strength of Oxfordshire's university, industry research, development capacity to develop business collaboration and supply chain potential.

Connectivity allowing people and knowledge to move freely along the 'Knowledge Spine' and around the county by improving physical (transport) and service (broadband) connectivity

Purpose of the Assurance Framework

This document sets out our Assurance Framework for the management of risks and explains the governance framework in place to support our operations and decision making. It is important that stakeholders are clear as to how decisions are made, projects are planned and resources are controlled and that is the purpose of an assurance framework. OxLEP is committed to developing and implementing an assurance Framework that will provide a systematic and consistent delivery approach and this document will be used by the Board, Corporate Management Team, our accountable body and partners to identify, monitor and evaluate strategic risks to funded projects.

An assurance framework is a structured means of identifying and mapping the main sources of assurance in an organisation, and co-ordinating them to best effect. It also allows our accountable body, Oxfordshire County Council, to ensure we have adequate controls in place over the use of public funds and are complying with them.

The purpose of this document is to provide assurance to all involved in programme, project delivery and the management of strategic and operational issues, as well as all our stakeholders, that:

- governance is in place for delivering growth deal programme through the OxLEP and Growth Board structures;
- effective programme and project management tools are being used to improve decision making;
- approved Financial Regulations and Schemes of Delegation are in place and are complied with;
- risks are captured according to agreed processes, are regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure the mitigation is effective;
- resources are appropriate which will allow the Local Enterprise Partnership to carry out its obligations effectively; and will
- all members and partners are informed of all decisions and updates accordingly.

1 Details of OxLEP

- 1.1 Initially established as a partnership with the local authorities in the area, OxLEP was incorporated as a not for profit company limited by guarantee on 31st March 2015. The decision to incorporate OxLEP was taken to improve the governance arrangements of the organisation by formalising roles and responsibilities and establishing a clear, decision making structure. As a company OxLEP is bound by the requirements of private sector accounting and accountability and its Board members are directors as per the definition in the Companies Act. This places additional governance requirements on them as individuals and as part of the wider Board.
- 1.2 OxLEP covers the geographical area of the county of Oxfordshire, which includes Oxfordshire County Council and the five district councils of Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and Oxford City Council.

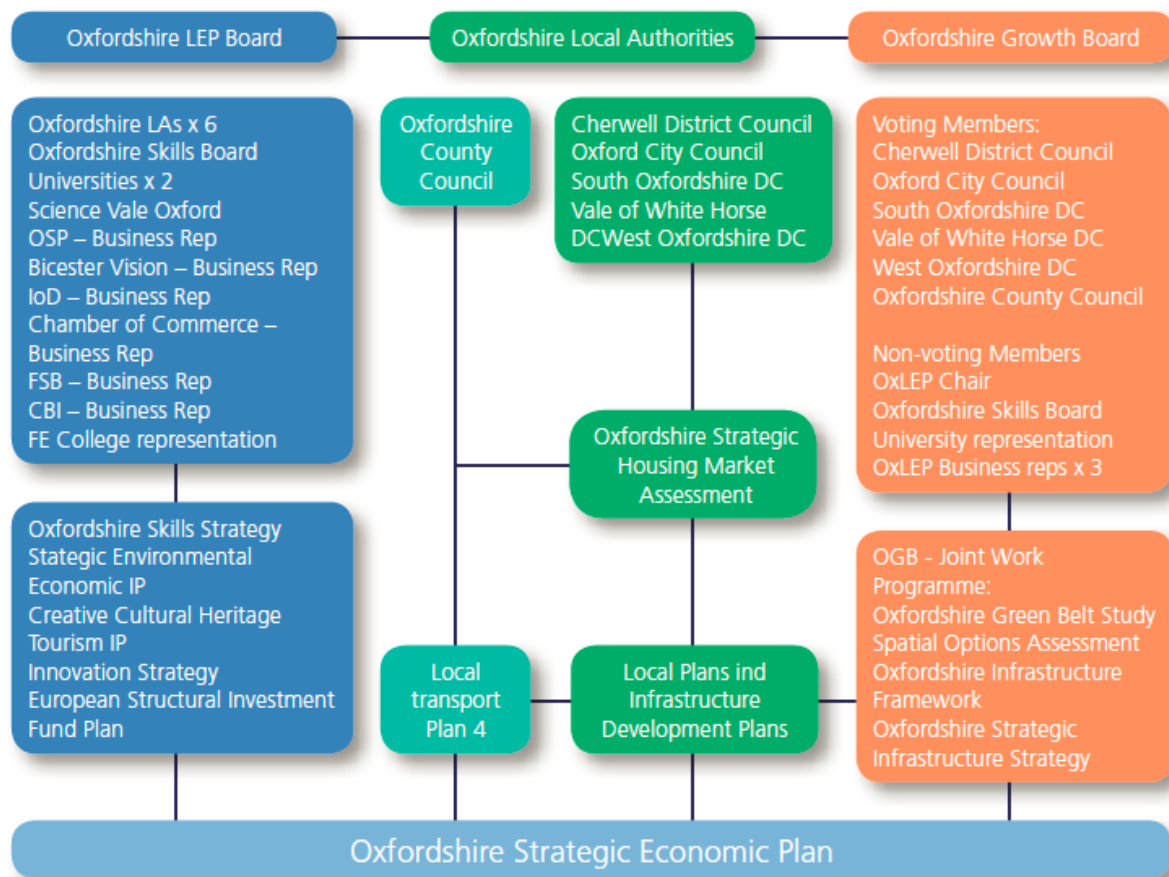


- 1.3 Oxfordshire is notable for the excellence and scale of innovation, enterprise and research within the county, and for the dynamism of its economy: both employment and GVA (Gross Value Added) are growing strongly, activity and employment rates are high, and there is very low unemployment. The scale of recent investment in some of its most successful firms bodes well for the future. In addition, significant progress has been made over the last two years in delivering against most of the objectives set out in the 2014 SEP.
- 1.4 We aim, with partners, to harness Oxfordshire's unique combination of assets to ensure that by 2030, the county's economy is recognised to be:

- **Vibrant:** a place where ambitious businesses and people thrive; and where young people choose to build their careers and their lives
- **Sustainable:** environmentally (taking into account patterns of resource use, climate change, carbon emissions, heritage assets), socially (reflecting the needs and character of communities) and economically (with businesses and others choosing to re-invest)
- **Inclusive:** where all residents and businesses have a real stake and voice in determining the county's future economic narrative and contributing fully to it
- **World-leading:** recognised globally for its dynamic innovation ecosystem, founded on world class research and fuelled by enterprise, all within an environment of the highest quality.

1.5 These outcomes will be achieved through four wide-ranging programmes, each with priorities to 2020, and a number of key action areas. The programmes are:

- **People** – delivering and attracting specialist and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, filling skills gaps, and seeking to ensure full, inclusive, employment and fulfilling jobs
- **Place** – ensuring a strong link between jobs and housing growth, and providing a quality environment that supports and sustains growth; and offering the choice of business premises and homes (including more homes that are genuinely affordable) needed to support sustainable growth whilst capitalising on and valuing our exceptional quality of life, vibrant economy and urban and rural communities
- **Enterprise** – emphasising innovation-led growth, underpinned by the strength of Oxfordshire's research, business collaboration and supply chain potential; recognising and reinforcing the significant contribution made by all sectors, all parts of Oxfordshire and all types of business
- **Connectivity** – enabling people, goods and services to move more freely, connect more easily; improving broadband and mobile coverage and capacity; and providing the services, environment and facilities needed by a dynamic, growing and dispersed economy.



2 Governance

2.1 The diagram above shows the key organisations and groups that feed into the activities of OxLEP, which support the overall Strategic Economic Plan for the County.

2.2 Ultimately accountable for our strategic direction is the Board of Directors. This Board reflects the geographic and sectorial interests of Oxfordshire and consists of:

2.3 Chair

2.3.1 Always a Private sector representative, the Chair is appointed following an open and transparent recruitment against a person specification set out by the Board and Nominations and Personnel Committee. The Chair serves for an initial period of three years, and their responsibilities are set out in the By-Laws of the Company. These are principally to lead the strategic direction of the organisation through the Board of Directors and to support the CEO in the day to day operations of the Company.

2.4 Deputy Chair

2.4.1 The Company also has an appointed Deputy Chair, who is also a private sector representative. As well as supporting and deputising for the Chair, this individual also chairs the Nominations and Personnel Committee.

2.5 Representatives of County Council and all District Councils

2.5.1 Since the formation of OxLEP the local authorities have all chosen to nominate their Leaders to sit on our Board, demonstrating the political importance of economic development in the region.

2.6 Representatives from both Universities and one for all Colleges

2.6.1 Higher and further education is vital to the development of Oxfordshire's economy and representation from Oxford and Oxford Brookes universities as well as Activate Learning representing the FE sector ensuring we can reflect the skills and education priorities at the Board.

2.7 Private sector representatives

2.7.1 The By-Laws of the Company allow for the eight main Business Representative Organisations in Oxfordshire to nominate someone to represent business interests on the Board. These are:

- Federation of Small Businesses
- Oxfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Institute of Directors
- Confederation of British Industry
- Bicester Vision
- Science Vale Oxford UK
- Oxford Strategic Partnership
- Oxfordshire Skills Board

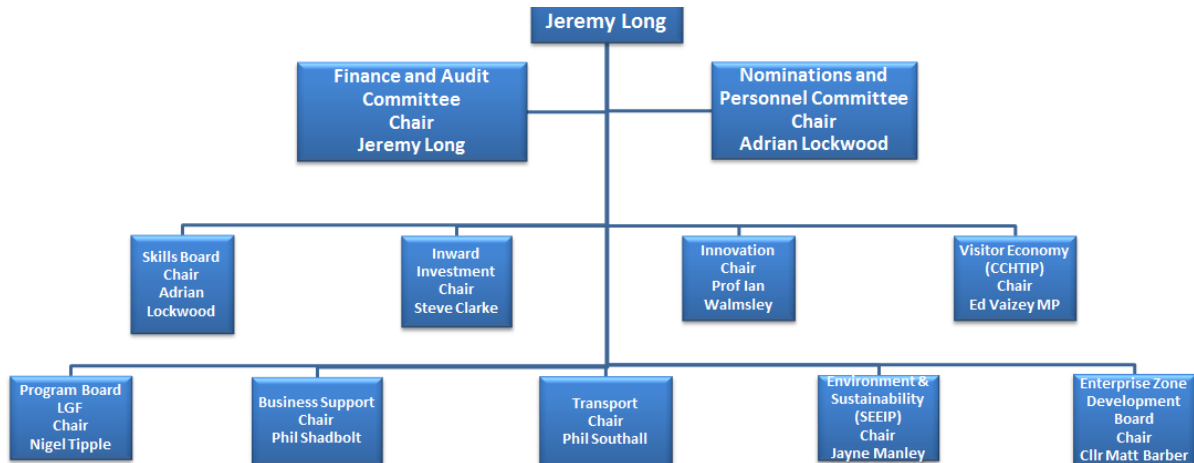
2.7.2 Where a body chooses not to nominate someone then we will fill the vacancy by following an open, transparent recruitment process to attract a suitably qualified and experienced individual to take the place on the Board. The current membership of the Board covers all of the eight organisations, even where not formally nominated to represent them. Three of the eight organisations above are dedicated to Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), and the Bicester Vision representative also Chairs the Business Support Sub-Group, and acts as the SME Champion on the Board.

2.7.3 All Board Members are provided with the key governance documents for the organisation and are expected to embody the 7 principles of public life, also known as the Nolan principles. These are:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

2.7.4 The Board meets quarterly and considers direct agenda items as well as referrals from its sub-groups and Committees. The OxLEP Executive Board is

the decision making body for the organisation, considering recommendations from its sub-committees and sub-groups. At present meetings are not open to the public, though agendas and minutes are made available after meetings. An exercise is underway to review the way we conduct our meetings and what information is made available to ensure stakeholders can be confident in the robustness of the decision making process.



2.8 Finance and Audit Committee

2.8.1 The Board has created a Finance and Audit Committee to provide internal challenge and scrutiny to the financial processes and procedures within the organisation. The Committee is chaired by the Board Chairman and includes three other non-executive directors. The Committee reviews financial regulations and procedures to ensure a sound control environment is in place and also receives and considers the reports from both internal and external audit on their independent assessments of that control environment. The Director of Finance from the accountable body is invited to attend all meetings along with OxLEP staff involved in relevant processes. Due to the nature of the items discussed it is not possible to make the papers from these meetings public, however the key findings and all recommendations are reported to the Board and so are available in the minutes of the main OxLEP Board.

2.9 Nominations and Personnel Committee

2.9.1 The Board has also established a Nominations and Personnel Committee to review and report on key issues dealing with the recruitment and retention of Board directors and OxLEP staff. The Committee is Chaired by our Deputy Chairman and includes three other non-executive directors. The Committee is responsible for overseeing the recruitment and performance of the Board of directors and reports back to the Board on that subject. The Committee also reviews the policies and procedures for recruiting, managing and remunerating our staff, including the Chief Executive, and makes recommendations to the Board. As many of the matters dealt with at this Committee impact on individuals' terms and conditions of employment it is not possible to make the papers from these meetings public, however the key

findings are reported to the Board and so are available in the minutes of the main OxLEP Board.

2.10 Growth Board

2.10.1 The Growth Board is a joint committee of the six councils of Oxfordshire together with key strategic partners. It has been set up to facilitate and enable joint working on economic development, strategic planning and growth. It does this by overseeing the delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver collaboratively in the fields of economic development and strategic planning.

2.10.2 It also oversees all the projects agreed in the City Deal and Local Growth Deals that fall to the councils, working collaboratively, to deliver and has an overall responsibility to manage these programmes of work alongside OxLEP. Finally it also exists to advise on matters of collective interest, seek agreement on local priorities and influence relevant local, regional and national bodies.

2.10.3 Growth Board meetings are open to the public, who are encouraged to participate and all agendas and minutes publicly available via the web site.

2.11 Skills Board

2.11.1 The Oxfordshire Skills Board brings together a wide range of public and private employers, secondary, further and higher education skills providers and stakeholder groups. Working closely with the OxLEP, the Board is driven to achieve improvements in the skills available to Oxfordshire's employers and the learning opportunities available to students, residents and workforce.

2.11.2 They are committed to brokering:

- better understanding of skills needs and priorities across Oxfordshire
- strengthened links between business and providers of learning
- improved skills and business support provision to employers
- stronger links with county and regional employment and skills bodies
- raised aspirations and economic wellbeing.

2.11.3 Skills Board minutes are not currently available to the public, but this situation is currently under review.

2.12 Sub Groups

2.12.1 A number of working groups exist to inform the work of the Board and Committees. These include key stakeholders and are Chaired by individuals nominated for their experience in the field, and provide us with a means of engaging with key stakeholders. The Terms of Reference and membership of these groups are kept under regular review and are refreshed as required.

2.13 Diversity

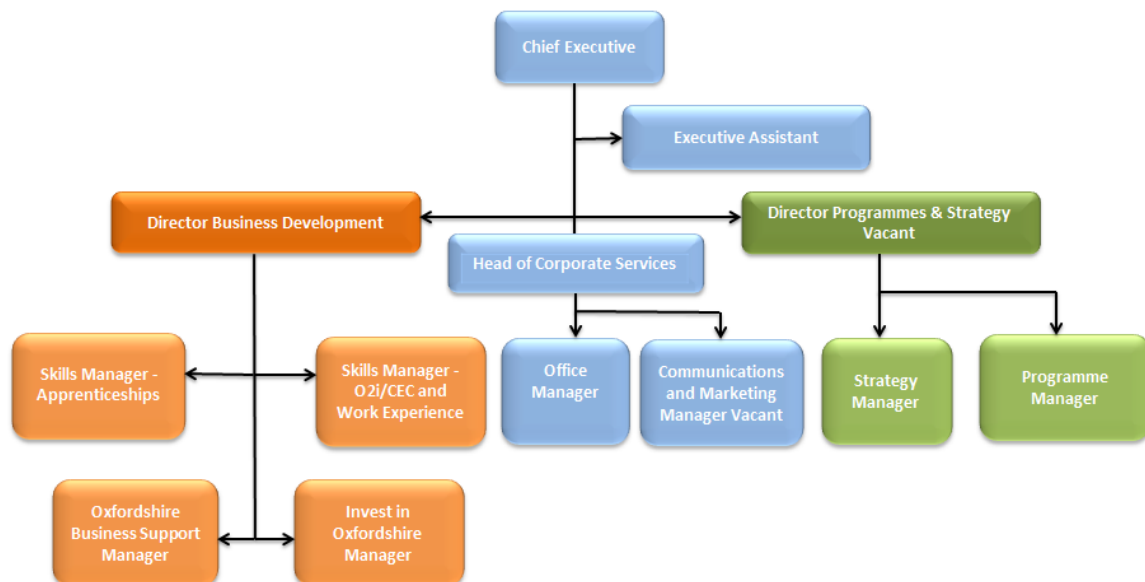
2.13.1 When recruiting to the Board, its committees and sub-groups consideration is given to ensuring that members bring the best mix of skills and experience for delivering on our priorities and objectives. Where not filled by *ex officio* or nominated individuals, membership is based on open and transparent recruitment and the composition of the Board is reviewed by the Nominations and Personnel Committee to ensure it is representative of the local business community.

2.14 Overview and scrutiny

2.14.1 As well as the internal scrutiny provided by the Board, various Committees and working groups, the activities of OxLEP are subject to external scrutiny through the accountable bodies and local authority stakeholders. For example the recently refreshed SEP was reviewed by all the district councils, the city council and the county council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees to ensure there was adequate, robust challenge. In addition the Performance Scrutiny Committee of the accountable body receives an annual report from OxLEP for information and challenge.

2.14.2 Our Board will keep the Overview and Scrutiny arrangements under review, and should it determine a dedicated resource would be beneficial then steps will be taken to establish an OxLEP Overview and Scrutiny resource.

2.15 Management Team



2.15.1 The day to day operations of OxLEP are managed by the Corporate Management Team, led by the Chief Executive. Employed directly by the company the Chief Executive enjoys certain delegated powers and his main function is to act as the bridge between the strategy and policy steer from the

Board and Committees and the front line staff tasked with delivering. In this the Chief Executive is supported by two Directors and the Head of Corporate Services. Regular meetings of these senior officers allow for timely sharing of information and development of programmes to maximise our contribution and effectiveness.

2.15.2 The Corporate Management Team also leads on communication both within the organisation to the Senior Management Team and beyond, as well as outside the organisation. Regular, content rich communication with stakeholders is vital to ensure the wider community is aware of the work we are undertaking and how it impacts on them.

3 The role of the accountable bodies

3.1 Fundamental to the delivery of our programmes of work is the relationship we have with our accountable bodies. The legislation for the funding of LEPs requires funds to be paid to an accountable body, which in the case of Local Growth Funding (LGF) Growing Places Fund (GPF) City Deal and Core Funding in Oxfordshire is the County Council. The Vale of White Horse District Council acts as the accountable body for the two enterprise zones OxLEP is involved with and works closely with OCC to provide information for financial monitoring and reporting purposes.

3.2 As well as providing invaluable support and advice, the accountable bodies perform a number of operational functions on our behalf, such as financial and legal advice, procurement services and so on, which are set out in signed Memoranda of Understanding OCC MoU, SV01 MoU and SV02 MoU.

3.3 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is our accountable body supporting delivery of all funding that comes from Central Government currently the GPF, City Deal and Growth Deal programmes. All expenditure incurred on our behalf by OCC is subject to their policies, procedures and regulations to ensure the highest levels of financial probity.

3.4 An effective working relationship has been established between OxLEP and OCC, in order to deliver on the shared goals and ambitions for infrastructure development in Oxfordshire. OCC staff contribute to strategic and operation decision making and implementation as well as helping us engage with our stakeholders and the wider Oxfordshire population.

3.5 The use of resources are subject to the usual local authority checks and balances – including the financial duties and rules which require councils to act prudently in spending, which are overseen and checked by the Chief Finance Officer – the Section 151 Officer.

3.6 The responsibilities of the accountable body cover the following:

- ensuring decisions and activities of OxLEP conform with all relevant law (including State Aid and public procurement) and ensuring that records are maintained so this can be evidenced;

- ensuring that the funds are used in accordance with the conditions placed on each grant;
- ensuring that OxLEP's local assurance framework is adhered to;
- maintaining the official record of OxLEP proceedings and holding copies of all relevant Local Enterprise Partnership documents relating to Local Growth Fund and other funding sources received from Government funding;
- responsibility for the decisions of OxLEP in approving projects (for example if subjected to legal challenge);
- ensuring that there are arrangements for local audit of funding allocated by OxLEP at least equivalent to those in place for local authority spend.

3.7 Representatives from the accountable body sit on most sub groups, including the LGF steering group and actively contribute to recommendations. The leader of the accountable body is a voting member of the Board, and its Director of Finance, who is the Section 151 officer¹, also attends. They are therefore fully involved in the decision making process and can be confident we are acting in accordance with relevant laws and regulations. Supporting this, OxLEP and OCC agree financial monitoring on a regular basis and financial and operational monitoring is discussed at each Board meeting.

3.8 Whilst highly unlikely, should OCC as the accountable body feel that it was being asked to undertake a course of action that fell outside Financial Regulations or the agreed steer of the Board, there are dispute resolution procedures outlined in the MoU to resolve the matter. As accountable body, OCC is ultimately responsible for the expenditure relating to the funding for the LEP received under Section 31 of the Local Government and Finance Act and would be in position to prevent what it considered to be inappropriate or unapproved commitment or expenditure. Any dispute would be resolved between the Council's Section 151 officer and the OxLEP Chief Executive initially, with escalation to Councillors and the LEP Board if the issue could not be resolved.

3.9 Funds related to the Enterprise Zones 1 and 2 are collected and administered by our other accountable body, Vale of White Horse District Council. They act as the collection agency for business rates and deploy/transfer these funds under direction from our Board. This relationship is also governed by an MoU, to which OCC as our accountable body is also a signatory, which sets out the obligations and responsibilities of each party. In practice the relationship between OxLEP and Vale is one of revenue collection, which is monitored by OCC and OxLEP, however this relationship

¹ S151 of the 1972 Local Government Act requires local authorities to secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of its financial affairs.

will mature as OxLEP explores its options in respect of the business rates raised and held on our behalf.

4 Conflicts of Interest

- 4.1 OxLEP actively recruits people to its Boards and Committees who have an interest in developing the Oxfordshire economy. The skills and experience these individuals bring is invaluable in helping shape decision making and developing the projects and schemes that will help us achieve our stated vision.
- 4.2 Individual Non-Executive Director and senior staff interests are declared, annually with declarations and conflicts managed at each board meeting that ensures no inappropriate influence is exercised inappropriately to benefit individuals or organisations. In line with Best Practice all Board Members on appointment are required to declare any interests they have. This information is used to make sure those individuals are not placed in compromising situations. At the same time all decision makers are made aware of the need to declare interests when they arise, and remove themselves from situations where they could be deemed to have a conflict of interest.
- 4.3 Registers of interests for all Board members are held, reviewed and updated. Moving forwards it is our plan to include the Corporate Management Team in the disclosure requirements and to publish the declarations of interests on our website to demonstrate the controls in place within OxLEP.

5 Gifts and Hospitality

- 5.1 We maintain a policy on the accepting and offering of gifts and hospitality which covers our staff and Board members, and OCC as the accountable body has similar arrangements to cover their staff and those OCC staff seconded to OxLEP. All offers of gifts and hospitality are recorded and are available for scrutiny by our internal and external auditors should they wish. Guidance is given to all staff on the appropriateness of accepting or declining gifts and the need to do so in a transparent manner.

6 Freedom of Information

- 6.1 As a Company Ltd by Guarantee we are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2005 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. However, we would always seek to make information available wherever possible. In addition, as the accountable body OCC records most transactions on behalf of the LEP. These are subject to FOI rules and regulations and are covered through the Memorandum of Understanding.

7 Complaints

- 7.1 OxLEP takes all complaints very seriously and we have a published procedure on our website for dealing with complaints from stakeholders or other interested parties. Depending on the nature of the complaint we may

either involve the accountable body in addressing the complaint or inform them of the outcome to ensure they are aware of the issue and any learning points we have taken on board.

8 Anti-fraud and corruption/anti-bribery

- 8.1 Dealing with public money requires the highest levels of financial probity and accountability. OxLEP maintains a robust system of financial control, monitoring and reporting to ensure transactions are transparent and scrutinised.
- 8.2 However, we would always encourage staff who have concerns over our financial arrangements to raise those concerns so we can be sure those systems are working effectively.
- 8.3 As OxLEP is a small, close knit team we felt it more appropriate that where employees had suspicions about the financial propriety of our work we call on the expertise of our accountable body to investigate. All suspected frauds, irregularities or financial improprieties can be reported to our Chair, who also Chairs our Finance and Audit Committee. He will then request OCC undertake an initial investigation. On conclusion of their work the findings will be reported back to the Finance and Audit Committee who will take a judgement on what action to take.

9 Audit and accounts

- 9.1 Due to the nature of the work we undertake, the majority of the transactions relating to project work are carried out by OCC as our accountable body. Spend incurred by OCC and funds drawn down are included in their annual statement of accounts, which for 2016/17 are required to be published by 31 May 2017, and key financial systems are subject to annual internal audit by the Council. Any findings which are relevant to OxLEP transactions will be reported back to the Finance and Audit Committee of OxLEP. The financial statements are audited by the Council's external auditors, currently Ernst and Young LLP, and are publicly available through the OCC website.
- 9.2 Those transactions passing through OxLEP directly are set out in the company's annual accounts which are examined by our external auditors, Critchleys LLP, and filed with Companies House as well as being available on our website.
- 9.3 It is recognised that neither set of accounts shows the entire picture for the LEP's activities in one place and so additional voluntary disclosures will be made going forward to consolidate the income and expenditure to fully reflect the activities of the Company.
- 9.4 In addition to the audits of financial information and governance arrangements, many of the projects we manage are subject to external scrutiny by the funding bodies themselves. These project audits are an

invaluable tool for designing future projects, to ensure lessons learned are taken on board by the organisation.

10 Risk Management

- 10.1 All the activities of OxLEP are affected by risk to a greater or lesser degree, and it is the responsibility of the Board to ensure those risks are managed effectively.
- 10.2 The organisation has drawn up a risk management policy, and captures the risks at a strategic and operational level in risk registers.
- 10.3 Whilst ultimately the Board is responsible for the management of risk, the Head of Corporate Services is responsible for ensuring the risk management process operates effectively. They make sure operational risks are reviewed on a regular basis by the Senior Management Team and the strategic risks are reviewed by the Finance and Audit Committee. Any significant operational or strategic risks would be highlighted to the Board to ensure they remain fully informed.

11 Joint Working

- 11.1 Wherever possible we seek to work with other LEPs to reduce duplication while maximising impact and use of resources. As well as being active contributors to the LEP network sharing of Best Practice, we are part of the England's Economic Heartland strategic alliance, with Buckinghamshire Thames Valley and South East Midlands. ([EEH](#))
- 11.2 Similarly, we work closely with our neighbouring LEPs in the Greater Thames Valley area, which comprise the Thames Valley Berkshire, Enterprise M3, Buckinghamshire Thames Valley and Solent LEPs to advance an agenda of mutual interest and develop the area in terms of economic contribution to the UK.
- 11.3 OxLEP is also involved in Motorsport Valley UK along with the Buckinghamshire Thames Valley, Coventry and Warwickshire, Leicester and Leicestershire and the South East Midlands LEPs to promote investment and development of the automotive industry in the regions.

12 Social Value

12.1 Defining Social Value

- 12.1.1 The Social Value Guide defines Social Value as *“the additional benefit to the community from a commissioning/procurement process over and above the direct purchasing of goods, services and outcomes”*. Much of this is being driven by the Public Services (Social Value) Act, which came into force on 31st January 2013 and requires those who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits.

12.1.2 We embrace opportunities that arise under the Social Value Act, and through procurement processes, and will work with partners and key stakeholders to promote and develop this across the county. However, OxLEP has developed strategies that go far beyond its compliance obligations to maximise its investment funding and activities to create Social Value. It takes a leading role across the county, working innovatively with key partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries to open up and create additional Social Value, through environmental, employment, health and wellbeing benefits and improvements.

12.2 Strategic approach

12.2.1 Our Vision, set out in our Strategic Economic Plan is Oxfordshire as a vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world leading economy, driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence. Threaded through each of these elements are opportunities to create and add Social Value. As an example, one of the ten themes within the Innovation Strategy is *Innovation for Social Good*. This focuses on building strength in social enterprise by linking social innovators and encouraging sustainable businesses for social good. Our Strategic Environmental Economic Investment Plan includes innovative and collaborative initiatives such as FEW4allOX, which will help put environmental innovation at the heart of economic growth.

12.3 Leading and collaborating with local partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries

12.3.1 OxLEP is a strong partnership of leaders and organisations from all sectors in Oxfordshire driving innovation and growth. It is well-positioned and well connected to lead and influence adding Social Value for improved social impact and environmental conditions. As an example, we work closely with Oxfordshire Social Entrepreneurship Partnership www.osep.org.uk, which supports and promotes Social Enterprise across the county. Working with OSEP and other key stakeholders OxLEP help establish Oxfordshire as the first Social Enterprise County under the Social Enterprise UK “Place” programme.

12.4 Collaboration outside the county

12.4.1 Through the Social Enterprise Place programme, strong national networks and relationships with central government, OxLEP and its key partners will continue to work with people, organisations and regions pioneering this theme elsewhere around the country and even internationally. For example, local support of national campaigns like Social Enterprise UK’s Buy Social campaign

12.5 Maximising Social Value to address key priorities

12.5.1 OxLEP has strategies to address key priorities in relation to:

People



Deliver and attract specialist and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, with full, inclusive employment and fulfilling jobs.

Social Value being added in this area include:

- Community Employment Plans (CEPs) - Supporting people to access job opportunities arising from new development.
- O2i – www.O2i.org - Facilitating the brokerage of expertise and experience from business into education across Oxfordshire.
- Oxfordshire Apprenticeships programme - Wide-ranging engagement with Oxfordshire schools and employers across all sectors.
- Oxfordshire Skills Board – A wide range of stakeholders working together to improve the skills available to Oxfordshire’s employers and learning opportunities

Place



Provide the quality environment and choice of homes needed to support growth and capitalise upon the exceptional quality of life, vibrant economy and the dynamic urban and rural communities of our county.

Enterprise



Encourage innovation led growth, underpinned by Oxfordshire’s strengths in University research and development, business collaboration and supply chain potential.

- Oxfordshire Business Support has a dedicated “Network Navigator” to support and encourage setting up and growth of Social Enterprise and opportunities for Social Innovation amongst mainstream business, which fits with central government initiatives including the review of mission-led businesses

Connectivity



Allow people to move freely, connect easily and provide the services, environment and facilities needed by a dynamic, growing and dispersed economy.

13 Transparent Decision Making and Local Growth Fund Steering Group (LGFSG)

13.1 For the oversight and management of Oxfordshire’s Growth Deal programmes, OxLEP has established a Local Growth Fund Steering Group (LGFSG) which operates to a high level of transparency, ensuring the active involvement of the regional representatives and key stakeholders in influencing the decisions.

13.2 The LGFSG is chaired by our Chief Executive and consists of senior members from the local authority, universities and the business community.

The Area Lead for Oxfordshire from the Cities and Local Growth Unit of Central Government is also a member.

- 13.3 The LGFSG, through fortnightly meetings, manage the growth deal application and assessment process. To do this the LGFSG assesses projects using a system based upon the Early Assessment and Sifting Tool (EAST) prioritisation framework and makes recommendations to our Board for approval. The OxLEP Board are then responsible for approving the Growth Deal Programme. We would always work to ensure that anyone involved in designing or promoting a project or programme was not involved in the groups with responsibility for assessing or recommending those projects for approval.
- 13.4 OxLEP advertises funding opportunities through its website. Initially this will be in the form of an expression of interest, then those assessed to meet the call criteria will be invited to produce a more formal business base. All projects will be subject to an agreed assessment framework developed with government, based upon the Department for Transport (DfT) Assurance Framework and key stakeholder input to ensure rigorous strategic and operational fit along with delivery capacity.
- 13.5 Where necessary we will make published material accessible to stakeholders via our website to help inform debate (including technical material such as the supported projects) however this will only be where not subject to commercial confidentiality.
- 13.6 We will also cooperate with the government departments on any national benchmarking, advice or guidance to disseminate Best Practice, learning and development programmes.

14 Project Prioritisation

- 14.1 Our LGFSG has established a robust project assessment process for all projects funded through the growth deal programme based upon the DfT agreed EAST Toolkit.
- 14.2 The group adopted the EAST prioritisation framework to assess a range of project types, reflecting the breadth of Oxfordshire ambition aligned to the Strategic Economic Plan themes. The adopted framework has been aligned to HM Treasury Green Book and allows us to prioritise projects on the basis of the strategic fit, deliverability, value for money, and impact.
- 14.3 These criteria have been developed with reference to recommended Best Practice in economic appraisal outlined in the Department for Communities and Local Government appraisal guide. The framework provides a transparent peer review process for assessing projects, and interrogating projected outputs, viability and deliverability. LGFSG will ensure that, as a minimum, value for money, deliverability, environmental and social/distributional impact should always be among the factors taken into consideration.

- 14.4 For transport projects we utilise the DfT's Transport Analysis Guidance (WebTAG) which is regarded as Best Practice and the DfT's definitive guidance of modelling, appraisal and social and distributional impacts of projects as well as determining their value for money.
- 14.5 Value for money is key to all the actions of OxLEP, both in its day to day operations and procurement and in the projects it delivers. As Chief Executive and Chair of the LGFSG, responsibility for ensuring VfM sits with this individual. Value for money from projects will be assessed based on the contribution the project makes to strategic priorities for business growth, job creation and housing development.
- 14.6 In all cases the assessment of the business case will be undertaken by appropriately skilled personnel within the LGFSG, drawing on external expertise as required. As Chair of the LGFSG, the OxLEP Chief Executive Officer is ultimately responsible for ensuring all business cases have been subject to adequate scrutiny before recommendations are made to the Board.
- 14.7 As part of its work the LGFSG will require the project sponsor to secure match funding from other sources to contribute to the overall investment in the project. This is to ensure that the burden of economic development does not fall solely on the public purse and that all beneficiaries contribute towards Oxfordshire's economic growth.

15 Project Management and Delivery

- 15.1 OxLEP follows Best Practice programme and project management guidance. Stakeholders, professional advice and the requirements for each project will differ project by project but the principle structure remains consistent.
- 15.2 Our project and programme team will;
- ensure that due diligence is completed and any recommendations are actioned prior to completing the funding agreement;
 - ensure a signed funding agreement is in place with each delivery partner;
 - ensure an agreement is in place where the delivery partner is the accountable body;
 - ensure the information we require for monitoring and reporting is communicated to, and agreed by, project promoters and delivery agents;
 - ensure changes to projects are properly managed and reported to the OxLEP Board;
 - ensure growth deal beneficiaries have correct systems and capability to deliver the project;
 - ensure all procedures and controls are followed and are up-to-date;
 - monitor the contract delivery on an on-going regular basis;
 - work with the delivery partner on any arising issues that may hinder progress;
 - ensure the correct levels of controls and governance are apparent throughout the project;

- make sure the delivery organisation deliver against contract, enforcing defaults on contracts;
- ensure the arrangements in the event of non-delivery or mismanagement set out in the MoU and funding agreements are complied with;
- ensure regular monitoring and updates on all growth deal and public funded projects for their lifetime; covering risks and issues and ensure compliance with the Financial Regulations of the Accountable Body;
- Continue to identify the best ways to publish project progress on the OxLEP website;
- Provide regular reports on the ongoing delivery of regional projects highlighting any risks and outputs achieved through its “RAG²” rated operating plan reporting procedure;
- Ensure a robust audit trail to demonstrate compliance.

15.3 At regular stages we report back to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), who are our funding body, on the progress we are making. We do this by reporting to the DCLG Oxfordshire Area Lead on a monthly basis. In addition, all Growth Deal projects are reported to Central Government quarterly through their LOGASnet system. We also meet yearly with Central Government through the Annual Conversation process which gives them a chance to get more detail on our progress and raise any areas of development.

15.4 We will seek to minimise programme risk in all our working arrangements. All funded projects are required to maintain a Risk Register specific to the project. Programme risk will receive more intensive management by the Programme Manager where larger budgets and a greater number of or complexity of schemes exist.

15.5 We will not release funding until a claim is made in accordance with the funding agreement requirements, signed off by the OxLEP Programme Manager and accountable body and paid in arrears.

15.6 All projects are reported through the operating plan to the OxLEP Board on a quarterly basis. The Programme Manager acts as the key point of contact for any queries by the Board Members between meetings and will be made available to all funded projects and will be publicised on the website.

16 Output and Outcome evaluation

16.1 All our projects deliver outputs and outcomes. Whilst these terms are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Outputs are what we do in the project. These would typically be things like jobs created, houses completed, and match funding secured. Outcomes are the difference those outputs have made, and these often take longer to quantify.

² Red, Amber, Green. OxLEP also uses Blue to distinguish those projects fully complete.

- 16.2 Expected outputs and outcomes are included in the funding agreement for each project, as are the monitoring requirements for project managers and delivery partners.
- 16.3 Quarterly returns are completed by each project manager and sent to the OxLEP Programme Manager for review and inclusion in relevant reporting, such as LEP Operating Plan for the Board and LOGASnet reporting for Central Government. This allows us to capture outputs and track against the targets we have set.
- 16.4 For Growth Deal and City Deal projects following completion of a project the Growth Deal Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will be followed to identify, track and report outcomes. This document is currently under review, which is timely as some of the projects funded through the Growth Deal and City deal are now complete with others reaching completion and the monitoring of outcomes is becoming possible.

17 Website

- 17.1 Our website is the key vehicle for communicating the progress and delivery of our Growth Deal and other programmes. Details of all the projects approved under the first two LGF schemes, their budgets and intended outcomes are there for stakeholders to review along with the Board minutes setting out the decision making process. An exercise is currently underway to expand the detail contained on the website to include other key documents along with a version of the Operating Plan showing progress to date against existing projects. Given that some of this information is commercially sensitive we are exploring ways of making as much information available to the public while protecting the integrity of the projects.
- 17.2 The website also links through to our partner organisations who hold their own information on the work they are doing with OxLEP.
- 17.3 We are currently in the process of strengthening our communications resources, which will allow for more proactive communication of our activities to help stakeholders stay informed.

18 Engagement

- 18.1 Engagement with stakeholders is fundamental to the work we undertake. OxLEP has previously used a variety of channels, such as the work of the Growth Board, sub-groups, public consultations and regular engagement with local authority colleagues and Business Representative Organisations. There is always more we can do and we will be making more effective use of social media channels to better engage with those who have meaningful contributions.

19 Further developments

- 19.1 As outlined above there are a number of priorities for us as we move through 2017/2018.
- 19.2 The redesign of our website is a key priority to ensure we can communicate our activities and progress with our stakeholders. We will be working hard to make sure the content on this platform is appropriate, timely and helps us engage with everyone in Oxfordshire.
- 19.3 We will also be working to identify how we can better communicate the business carried out in our committees and sub-groups. This is a delicate balancing act of making sure decision makers have all the information they need while ensuring commercially sensitive or confidential information is treated in an appropriate manner.
- 19.4 Whilst we keep our MoU with the accountable body under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose, this is not a formal process. Going forwards we will implement a formal review and approval process to make sure the document continues to cover all relevant issues and accurately reflects the relationship, rights and responsibilities of all parties.