

1. Growth Board.

I am Chairman of the Growth Board and Councillor Roger Cox is Vice-Chairman. Relationships between all partners remain positive and there is a high level of consensus on the major strategic issues such as: JSSP, the developing terms of reference; Scrutiny of the Board; commitment to the Growth Deal housing numbers and affordable housing opportunities.

As Chair, and on behalf our all partners, I have written to Chris Grayling, Secretary of State for Transport, on 1 October 18 seeking greater certainty around the Expressway Route. This is essential if we are to secure Oxfordshire's spatial planning commitments and the associated infrastructure and investment in our area that is long overdue.

2. OxLEP.

I am stepping down as a Director of OxLep and will be replaced by Councillor Bill Service, as this important responsibility is a better fit with his portfolio.

3. Unitary Proposal.

Councillor Cox and I wrote jointly to James Brokenshire, Secretary of State for MHCLG, asking about our proposal, made jointly with the Oxfordshire County Council and Vale of White Horse, for a single county unitary for Oxfordshire. Minister Rishi Sunak replied that as we are all working well together in Oxfordshire, at present, he sees no need to proceed with a unitary decision. [His response](#) is on our website.

4. Five Councils.

We continue to work to deliver maximum benefit from the councils' contract with Capita. Capita's new CEO John Lewis is modernising the business quickly and his local government board director, Jonathan Prew, is now working closely with us as part of this. Our CEO Mark Stone is leading on behalf of the wider group of Five Council CEOs in this engagement and ongoing contractual redesign. We have made significant steps forward, which are acknowledged across the partnership. I welcome and endorse the positive response from the scrutiny committee to recent updates on our approach and progress and I am grateful for the feedback provided by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet on this and other important matters.

5. Accounts.

Audit and Governance Committee met at the end of September to consider feedback from our External Auditor. I am pleased to report to Council that the audit concluded with a clean audit opinion on both the financial statements and the Value For Money statement. This improvement from the prior year reflects a significant level of engagement and support from officers and I would like to thank them for their professionalism, perseverance and diligence in achieving this.

6. Staff Structure.

As previously approved by full Council, I confirm that following liaison with myself and the Cabinet Member for finance, the CEO is now working with the Heads of Service to complete the process of implementing and recruiting to the operational layers of the structure. Please therefore be aware that over the next 12 weeks or so, many of our staff will be having a change of line manager and some will be applying for alternative roles as we complete the operational layers of the officer structure and reduce the number of agency staff within the organisation.

7. Crowmarsh.

The old council buildings have been demolished. We will therefore shortly enter the design and build phase of the programme and an update will be provided at a future meeting of full council.

8. Affordable Housing.

I wrote to the Secretary of State in line with the motion previously passed by full Council. Whilst I have received a reply, which is on our website, it is my intention to write again and provide a further explanation that emphasises that South Oxfordshire has delivered large numbers of affordable homes, nearly 1000 homes in the past five years, but even with this, local house prices do not reflect local incomes.

9. Local Plan.

Officers advise that we remain on target to meet the deadlines within the Growth Deal around submission of the local plan, which I recognise remain challenging. There will be a further round table session for all councillors on progress with the local plan in November, prior to the publication version going to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council in December of this year. Public consultation on the publication version will be undertaken early next year, before we submit our local plan by the end of March 2019.