

Annex 1

Oxfordshire Growth Board Review **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES RECEIVED**

December 2019

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SUMMARY

1. This report provides a summary of the responses received to the Growth Board Review which commenced on 24 September 2019 and ended on 6 December 2019. The purpose of the engagement activities carried out through this review was to gather the views of members of the public, councillors and stakeholders about the current functioning of the Oxfordshire Growth Board, and how it might improve its processes and administration going forward.
2. In total, 247 responses were received to an online public survey, together with feedback from 42 people across three workshops. Seven written submissions were also received via the Growth Board's email inbox. All responses have been considered in producing this report.

BACKGROUND

3. The Oxfordshire Growth Board was established in 2014 as a Joint Committee¹ of the six councils of Oxfordshire, together with key strategic partners. It was set up to facilitate and enable joint working on matters concerning economic development, strategic planning and growth. The Board's establishment was premised on strengthening partnership arrangements across Oxfordshire for pragmatic working on key strategic issues. It has done this by overseeing the delivery of cross-county projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver in a collaborative way – between local authorities, the Local Enterprise Partnership and wider partners and stakeholders.²
4. The Board replaced the former Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership, the Local Transport Board, and incorporated oversight of the 2014 City Deal with Government. The Board's operation has sought to align these strategic meetings under a single Terms of Reference and governing body³. The work of the Board also tangibly demonstrates the partner authorities' willingness to cooperate on strategic planning matters as required under the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework.
5. The Board considered at its meeting on 24 September 2019 that it was timely to review its role and function to ensure that the most effective arrangements are in place to enable collaboration and delivery on Oxfordshire wide priorities.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

6. An online public survey was developed and issued as part of the review. The survey asked a series of questions concerning how respondents viewed the Board in its current form, and if, why and how it should change. The survey was open between 24 September 2019 and 26 November 2019; one meeting cycle of the Growth Board. To draw attention to the survey, invitations to complete were sent to all District and County Councillors and promoted through a staff and councillor newsletter, and invitations sent to all those signed up to the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 mailing list. Local press releases and follow up releases were issued drawing attention to the Survey, which were also promoted through the Growth Board's website, and the survey was highlighted via the Growth Board's social media pages.

¹ under s101 (5), 102 Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) and s9EB Local Government Act 2000 (LGA 2000) and pursuant to the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.

² As a Joint Committee, the Board may discharge executive functions, but each constituent authority retains the ability to exercise all executive and non-executive functions generally and specifically in relation to economic development including where applicable provision of housing, strategic spatial planning and strategic transport planning.

³ Oxfordshire Growth Board. 2014. Terms of Reference.

7. Three feedback sessions were held; two for district and county councillors (19 attendees) and one for members of the public (23 attendees). These sessions were set up in a semi-structured way to enable broad discussion about the Board, lasting approximately two hours. Respondents' comments from across the engagement exercises have been collated into key themes, with the strongest themes discussed within this report.
8. Responses to the review were not significant enough in number to be considered a representative sample of Oxfordshire's residents. However, the results do provide a valuable insight into the views that some people hold about the Growth Board. Appendix 1 sets out demographic data of respondents compared to the Oxfordshire Population. The two data sets show that the survey received:
 - A significant underrepresentation of people aged 16 - 34
 - An overrepresentation of people aged 55-64
 - An underrepresentation of Asian or Asian British respondents
9. Whilst a total of 247 responses were received to the survey, not all questions were mandatory, and therefore some statistics presented in this report may not total with the overall number of respondents.

Figure 1: Survey Respondent type	Number
An individual*	171
A parish, district or county councillor, or officer	54
A business or organisation	22

**NB - it is evident that some councillors identified as responding as an individual, rather than as a councillor.*

10. This report summarises responses to the Growth Board review, and it is not intended to make conclusions about the actions which should be taken as a result of the review. Example responses are presented as standard or indicative of wider themes within the overall responses to the review. Recommendations will be presented separately to the Board on 28 January 2019, alongside this paper.

Part 1: Perceptions of the Growth Board

11. The survey set out to ask how respondents perceived the Growth Board in its current form, and how it should be perceived in the future, if it is to change. Whilst terminology differed between respondents, the most frequently mentioned comments about the current Board was that it was viewed as undemocratic and unaccountable. Key suggestions for improvement concerned being more environmentally focussed, transparent and accountable. The survey asked respondents to set out in three words how they perceived the Growth Board, and how they would ideally see the Growth Board operating in a further three words. The figures below set out the most frequently used words in each case:

Figure 2: Perceptions of the <u>current</u> Growth Board	Frequency
Undemocratic	36
Unaccountable	15
Unknown	15
Opaque	13

Figure 3: Perceptions of an <u>ideal</u> Growth Board	Frequency
Sustainability / environmentally focussed	45
Democratic	26
Transparent	26
Accountable	22

12. Respondents were then asked to explain what changes, if any, they would like implemented by the Growth Board to move them from the first set of words to the second. Example standard responses are listed below:
- *The Growth Board needs to listen to the views of residents and take them into consideration when making future plans. It also needs to recognise that growth is not always good. The impact of growth on climate change and on quality of life of the county's residents should be central to any decisions made by the Board.*
 - *An important group like this should be known to the electorate they represent including members, recommendations, reports, decisions and achievements. The electorate should have the means of engaging with the group more easily via their councillors.*
 - *The Growth Board has evolved into a vital strategic voice for Oxfordshire. Nowhere else does local government, NHS, Universities, business, Environment Agency and transport providers come together to consider how best to plan for the county's future success. If it didn't exist, everyone would demand we had it.*
 - *The Growth Board seems unaccountable for its actions.*
 - *The work of the growth board is relatively unknown to the majority of council staff and residents. Aside from the aim of supporting the growth deal, I would not be able to explain further than that what its aims are.*

Part 2: Priorities and purpose

13. There were mixed views regarding the Growth Board's future role and function. Many contributors suggested that the Board should expand or refocus its work on wider issues affecting Oxfordshire, such as health, active and public transport, social inclusion and more frequently, environmental preservation and climate change. Several said that it should be entirely environmentally focussed, and some that its structure should be bolstered with environmental experts or representatives. There was general support for the county having a strategic forum where local priorities could be discussed, and work apportioned. Example standard responses are listed below:
- *The aim should be for a joined-up approach to supporting and improving well-being and quality of life in the region and its natural environment.*
 - *We are convinced across the county that there has to be something around collaboration. Terminology is very important. Rethink the title.*
 - *I would like sustainability and the reduction of carbon emissions to be at the heart of all discussions and decisions. What does the county actually need to make it a better place to live? Consider what needs people have within the context which we are currently living. We need to be helped to make more sustainable choices. Better public transport, better cycling links into to Oxford and the towns. Growth should have a positive impact on the environment and peoples' wellbeing.*
 - *The focus should be on creating a sustainable future that protects our local and global environment.*
 - *The key strategic function should be ensuring the co-location of jobs, homes and appropriate services and facilities in a sustainable pattern of development.*

Part 3: Consensus, influence and decision-making

14. Feedback showed general support for having a joint forum of council and system leaders for the purposes of pooling knowledge and building consensus on key strategic issues across Oxfordshire. However, there were different views on how that structure should operate and the means by which any objectives are set. Consensus building and information sharing are key elements of the Growth Board’s existing role, but feedback suggested that this is not clear, or that it could be demonstrated more effectively.
15. A significant number of responses inferred that the Growth Board has planning powers, or other powers which are usually reserved for local authorities. This is a misunderstanding which often related to the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, for which local planning authorities hold the sole responsibility for adoption through their own democratic processes. The Growth Board provides a monitoring and oversight role in this process, but this was expressed as unclear.
16. Feedback suggested that the formal processes surrounding the Growth Board gave an impression of regularised decision-making. For example, the formal structure of meetings, its name, the use of a scrutiny function, and voting and non-voting terminology typifies decision-making structures seen elsewhere in local government. Respondents also highlighted how the endorsement and support given to formal reports can be confused with decision-making. The sometimes brief discussion of an issue was also highlighted as implying decision-making. Example standard responses are listed below:
- *The perception is widespread that it is a decision-making body – embed that or make clear it is not.*
 - *The Board needs to get bigger and take decisions or become smaller but communicate clearly that it is nothing more than that. It can’t be somewhere in between.*
 - *There is clearly some confusion as to what the Growth Board does and what powers it holds. There is a need to be clear about what, if any, powers are held by the Board and what impact it has. Ongoing issues with the Growth Deal and Growth Board cause confusion. How are these linked?*
 - *The purpose should include continuing to act as the vehicle for cooperation between councils in order to secure, for example, regional infrastructure funding. Purpose should not include receiving and noting reports not for decision... A new item should be clearly added to Purpose and Objectives, which is to act as and take responsibility for public engagement with regional-level decision-making.*

Part 4: Communication

17. 92% of respondents said they did not receive enough information about the Growth Board, and social media, print media and e-newsletters were the recommended routes of communication. Just under half of the respondents were unaware that they could attend a meeting of the Growth Board. 39 respondents said they had attended a meeting of the Growth Board. There was a strong message throughout the responses that the Board should improve its communication with the public and councillors. This was couched in terms of making clear its role, its vision and / or priorities, and how the public could be involved. An updated structure and staff chart was also requested.
18. There were frequent requests for the Board to undertake engagement activities with local communities, such as with parish councils, schools and community groups. Many

respondents were unaware of when and where Growth Board meetings were held, or that it had a website.

19. The responses showed that the Growth Board was understood by different people in different ways, by the public, councillors and council officers. Several responses asked that the Board develop a clear vision for its work and for Oxfordshire, whilst others said the Board was not the right forum for this to be achieved; or perhaps it could be with a new structure and approach. Example standard responses are listed below:

- *There should be better, simpler and clearer communication, proactively engaging and reaching out to all of Oxon's diverse residents and all ages.*
- *There is clear confusion between the Growth Board and the Growth Deal.*
- *It is evident that the Growth Board administration is significantly under-resourced. To improve communications and public awareness requires an ongoing proactive and properly funded communications programme. Principally newspapers, newsletters, council websites and social media.*
- *More input from people of Oxfordshire of how they would like the county to develop. Oxfordshire 2050 consultation provides an excellent basis for this.*
- *I think that it works fine, but a better publicity job needs to be done*
- *More publicity about what it is, what it does, who it is responsible to, what it is expected to achieve.*
- *Greater clarity should be given around the growth boards long term aims and directions. This could be a simple communications exercise.*

Part 5: Name Change

20. There were a number of suggestions for renaming the Growth Board to better reflect its current or possible future role and function. To those who saw the Board as a wide-ranging forum considering a cross-section of issues, the Oxfordshire Partnership or Vision Oxfordshire were considered appropriate titles. Others suggested that sustainability should be in the title, alongside planning, infrastructure and / or development. Alongside numerous requests to remove *Growth* from the title (on the basis it implies that 'growth' takes priority over other interests), the *Board* element of the title was also highlighted as inappropriate, given that it rarely takes decisions. Some respondents felt that the Board's name was right for its purpose however and should not change.

Figure 4: New names proposed for the Oxfordshire Growth Board	
The Oxfordshire	Group Board Partnership Forum Assembly Conference Panel
The Oxfordshire Prosperity	
The Oxfordshire Sustainability	
The Oxfordshire Future <i>or</i> Vision	
The Oxfordshire Sustainable Planning / Development / Infrastructure	
The Oxfordshire Strategic Planning / Development / Infrastructure	
The Oxfordshire Wellbeing	
Vision Oxfordshire	
Leadership Oxfordshire	

21. Example standard responses are listed below:

- *The name needs to change to reflect the nature of growth which is desired: achievable, sustainable, green, etc, rather than just Growth.*
- *In name and nature, it should be rising to the challenge of the climate emergency.*

- *There should be a new name. Maybe wellbeing forum or Oxon Futures Group*
- *There is a fantastic opportunity here to make the Growth Board truly inclusive and representative and turn it into a deliberative democracy process that could transform decision making and serve as a model for amazing localism in a true sense. It needs a change of name of course; Growth is hardly the key issue.*
- *You should be trying to increase peoples' overall happiness, but we appreciate you can't call it the 'Happiness Board.' Perhaps 'Prosperity or 'Well-being'.*

Part 6: Membership

22. A principal request from respondents was for additional environmental representation within the Growth Board's Structure. Some suggested that this should involve a seat on the Board for an environmental group, and others asked for expert environmental officers to be employed to support specific projects. There were equally regular requests for community representatives to have a seat on the Board, though there was no uniformity in where that person should be recruited from. The majority of responses on the issue of membership called for an increased membership to include ecological, parish, community, business, voluntary and youth representation, for example.
23. On the question of whether the membership was appropriate for each group, the following answers were given:
- Growth Board: Yes (56) No (121)
 - Growth Board Scrutiny Panel: Yes (74) No (91)
 - Growth Deal Advisory Sub Groups: Yes (50) No (112)
24. Example standard responses are set out below:
- *It should either only contain elected representatives or it should widen its base to encompass, at the very least, environmental and citizens groups.*
 - *The Growth Board and its sub-bodies (including officer/executive committees) must have representatives with meaningful environmental knowledge and skills as voting members, able to input to strategic debate and decision making.*
 - *The Board should be more democratic - including democratically elected people who are experts in ecology, sustainability and climate change.*
 - *I would like to see 2 additional board members - one from a community perspective, the other representing the environment.*
 - *You should promote community representatives on to the board for real local feedback.*
 - *Young people need representation.*

Part 7: Citizen Involvement

25. Underpinning a significant number of responses was a request for establishing a platform for citizen involvement in planning for the future of Oxfordshire. This was often linked back to the development of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (Joint Statutory Spatial Plan) which the Growth Board currently monitors, but for which formal decision-making powers lay with each local planning authority. Integral to many responses were suggestions of developing a wider forum for local residents, businesses and stakeholders to engage with and influence future planning for the county.
26. Some said this could be achieved through an expansion of the membership of the Growth Board, whilst others championed the establishment of a new form of citizen assembly, or

through more consultations and workshop opportunities. This also extended to informing a possible vision for the county as a whole. Example responses are listed below:

- *For practicality, perhaps there should be a 'Citizens Assembly' or some other panel rather than consultations.*
- *I would like the Growth Board to set up a People's Assembly to discuss the Climate Emergency and what measures can be taken to reduce carbon emissions and protect habitats, wildlife and diversity.*
- *Growth boards could be turned into citizens assemblies*
- *Get normal people involved, a bit like the citizens assemblies, where we can input into what happens in our communities... People are engaging right now... Cogs are turning too slowly... This board has an opportunity to capture the moment... And it's so very important.*
- *Work with citizens, citizens groups, employers and campaign groups to find solutions that meet the need of Oxfordshire based on data and facts.*

CONCLUSION

This report provides a summary of the feedback received to the Growth Board Review. Responses will be used to help inform any changes to the operation of the Board's work. A report will be presented to the Board on 28 January 2020 setting out recommendations for change and improvement.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For information about the results presented in this report, please contact:

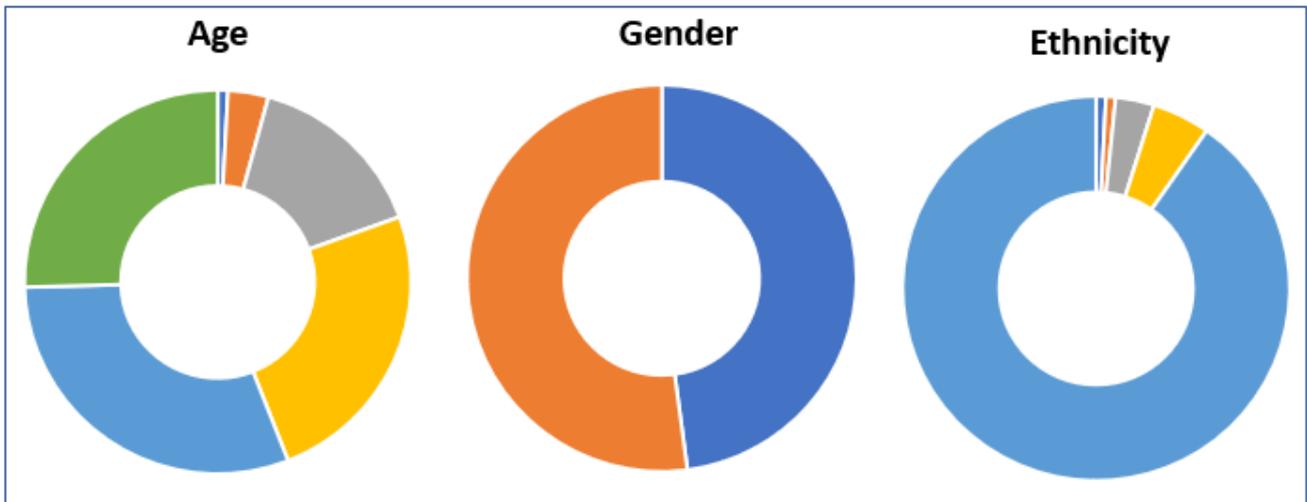
democratic.services@oxfordshiregrowthboard.org

For information about the Growth Board, please visit:

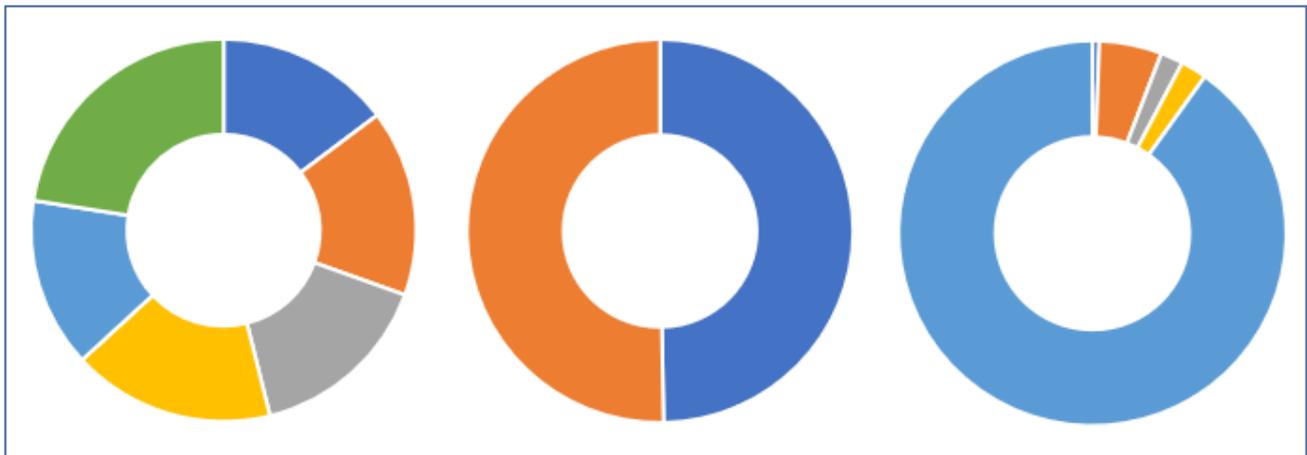
<https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/>

Appendix 1

Survey Demographic



Oxfordshire Demographic



- 16 - 24 ■ 25 - 34 ■ 35 - 44
- 45 - 54 ■ 55 - 64 ■ 65+

- Male ■ Female

- Other
- Asian or Asian British
- Black or Black British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White

**Age and gender statistics are based on ONS Mid-year estimates 2018/19*

**Ethnicity statistics are based on the 2011 Census.*

**Graphs on survey respondents do not account for those who did not answer.*