

OXFORDSHIRE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD - 10 SEPTEMBER 2008

PROPOSED CHANGES TO PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE

Background

The following paper was circulated to Partnerships during the summer seeking reactions to the proposed changes to the governance of partnerships in Oxfordshire. A number of partnerships have responded with risks and issues with the proposals. These comments will be summarised in the presentation at the meeting. Not all partnerships have responded to this initial paper because a longer period of consultation is proposed following discussion at the PSB meeting.

Introduction

The Public Service Board (PSB) commissioned a review of the governance arrangements of the partnerships which contribute to the delivery of current LAA targets and which will spend any reward grant received. The PSB is keen to ensure that the governance arrangements of these partnerships are both fit for the current purpose and sufficiently robust for the foreseeable future. Mary Harpley (Chief Executive, Cherwell District Council) and David Neudegg (Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council) have led the review of partnership governance, supported by Paul James, County Head of Partnerships and officers from district councils.

Over the next few years the expectations placed upon strategic partnerships will change considerably. Already partnerships are expected to deliver on Local Area Agreement targets, but increasingly will become responsible for the distribution of Area Based Grants. Historical allocations of funding "ring fenced" to certain services are being removed to allow local discretion on how resources are allocated. This will require more robust governance arrangements to be in place to ensure that expenditure is allocated to the priorities identified by the Oxfordshire Partnership.

The success of partnerships to deliver on community priorities will be the driving consideration of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment due to commence in 2009.

In addition to the need for change being driven by external forces, there are also a number of benefits that any review of structures and governance arrangements should seek to achieve:

- Strong and effective partnerships to drive on the important strategic issues and deliver outcomes;
- Simplified and strengthened information and reporting lines and clear lines of accountability;
- Membership is effective and fair across partnerships;

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- A consistent approach to partnership working, understood by all;
- Reduced duplication;
- Reduced burden of attendance, particularly recognising the capacity limitations of business, faith and voluntary sector organisations;
- Clear lines of responsibility for officers and board level/Councillors;
- Improved local and county-wide links;
- Increased capacity and efficiency in delivery of outcomes
- Clear timetables for submission of work programmes and budget allocation process

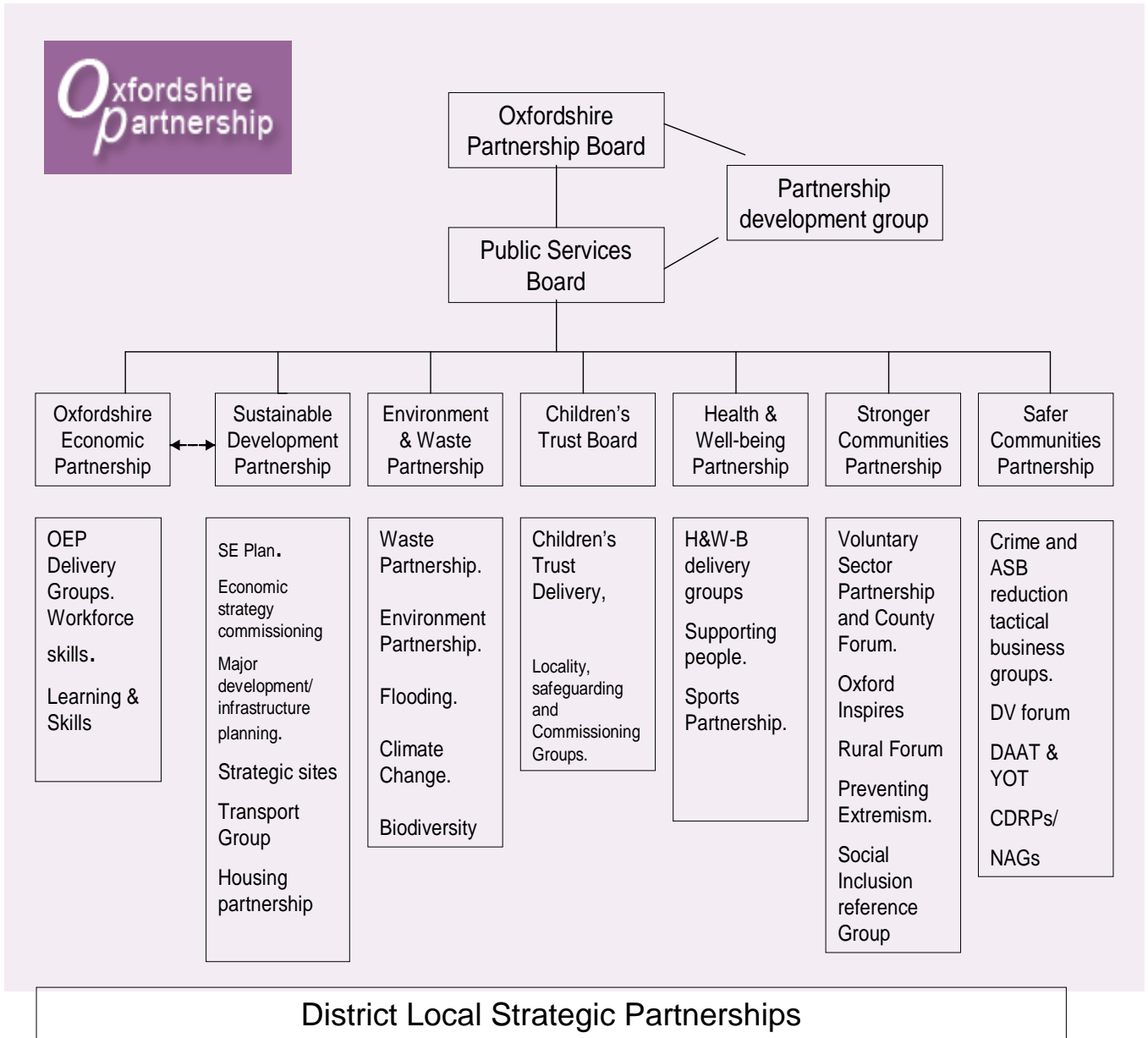
The review recognised that:

- The Oxfordshire Partnership Board needs to continue to be a broad grouping of senior decision makers across all sectors that keeps an overview of strategic issues as well as being a place to broaden our understanding of the challenges facing the county and region.
- Much of our partnership framework is public-sector led and the public sector elements shall continue to respect the independence of the voluntary, community and faith sectors and the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership.

Proposed Changes – Headlines

The partnership structure presented on the following page is being proposed to the PSB in light of the review. It will be presented for discussion and feedback. It sets out the minimum number of partnerships needed to support the strategic objectives and pledges in *Oxfordshire 2030* and to meet statutory requirements.

- The proposal for a new Sustainable Development Partnership is designed to fill a gap in the partnership framework and ensure that there is a place to manage the big spatial / infrastructure planning/economic challenges we face in the next 10 years – housing, transport, economic development.
- The proposal to develop the profile of Stronger Communities within the partnership structure reflects the partnership's commitment to cross cutting actions which improve healthier and thriving communities, reduce inequality and break the cycle of deprivation. It is important to recognise that the voluntary, community and faith sectors play a leading role here and are independent of the elements of this structure that are more public-sector driven. Their feedback on these proposals is crucial to finding an effective solution that adds value.
- The proposed structure also recognises the independence of the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership from the elements of this structure that are more public-sector driven. However, it also recognises that it is important to recognise and strengthen the links and inter-dependencies to deliver outcomes.
- Place / locality working and the role of District Local Strategic Partnerships. There is further debate to be had about the role of “place” and District LSPs in championing important local issues. This could provide some useful balance and inter-action with the county-wide, thematic partnership approach.



As partnership working becomes central to the day job we need to consider how partnerships are supported. It is proposed that, as a general principle, this be accomplished by re-directing existing staff resources to support partnerships as necessary rather than finding new resources. The Partnership Development Group has recently been formed so that officers supporting partnerships can meet and work together on governance frameworks, performance and risk management, data quality, communications, best practice and learning and development. This may provide a useful model for further development in the future.

No proposals have yet been developed around the membership and detailed terms of the proposed partnerships. Each thematic partnership should ensure that appropriate delivery groups are in place for all the LAA and other key targets for which they are responsible.

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Requested Action

The Public Service Board needs your views on the issues and risks which arise from this proposal.

Existing Partnerships are asked to consider the following questions and provide comments. Comments submitted by 3rd September will be incorporated into the presentation to the PSB on the 10th. After the PSB meeting we anticipate issuing a full paper for consultation, with the aim of agreeing changes by the end of 2008 for implementation in 2009.

Please consider the following points:

1. What risks do you think the proposed structure presents and how could these be overcome?
2. How do you think District Local Strategic Partnerships will best link in to these partnerships?
3. What common standards of good governance, reporting and communication do you think we should aim to put in place?

**Please send comment to Claire Evans: Partnership Manager:
Claire.evans@oxfordshire.gov.uk by the 3rd September**

Appendix -- Existing structure

