

PROPOSED CHANGES TO PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE TO BE OUTLINED TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD (PSB) ON 10TH SEPTEMBER

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON ISSUES AND RISKS WHICH NEED TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE PSB ON THE 10th SEPTEMBER

Introduction

The Public Service Board (PSB) has 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;
- 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

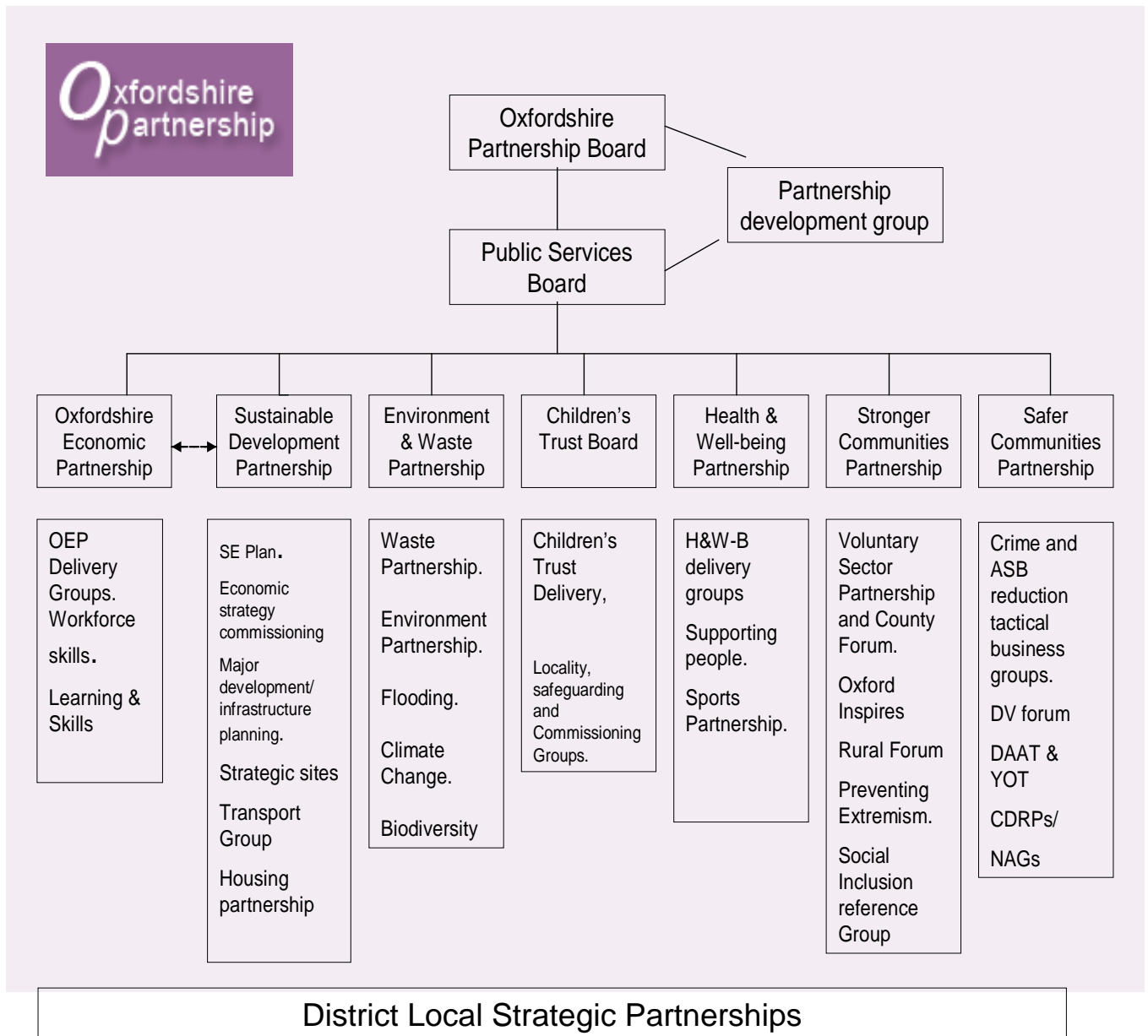
The review recognised that:

- 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.

Requested Action

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

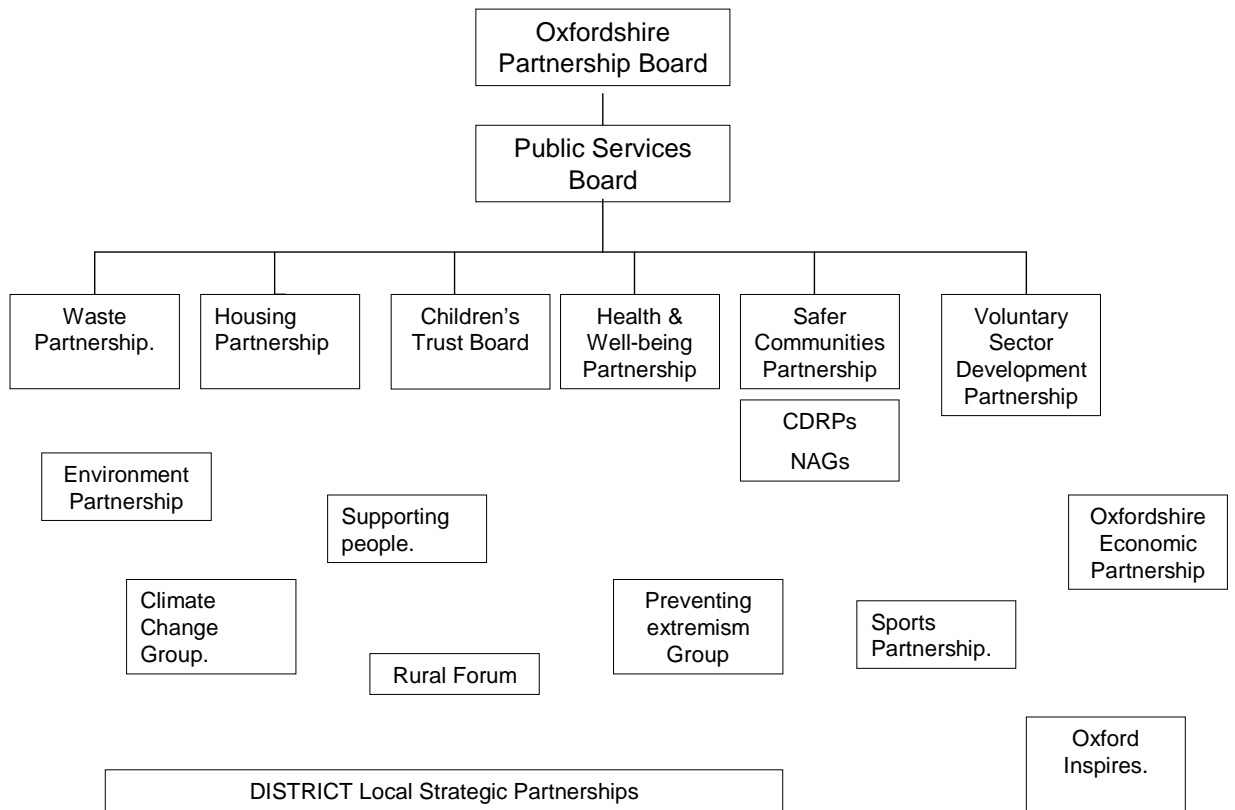
Existing Partnerships are asked to consider the following questions and provide comments. Comments submitted by 3rd September will be incorporated into the presentation to the PSB on the 10th. After the PSB meeting we anticipate issuing a full paper for consultation, with the aim of agreeing changes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



Responses from Health & Well-Being Partnership

Comments from the HWBP Officer Group:

The consultation paper was discussed at a meeting of the HWBP Officers Group and the following points were made by those present:

- In terms of relationships with district LSPs, the question ought to be how the thematic partnerships are encouraged to relate to the LSPs rather than the other way around. LAA targets can be delivered at local level and thematic partnerships need to work with LSPs to achieve this.
- Supporting People should stay linked to the Housing Partnership, not move to link with H&W-B.
- The role of the Public Service Board (PSB) is not clear.
- The role of the Partnership Development group is not clear.
- Those officers present welcomed the inclusion of the Sports Partnership under Health and Well-Being
- What is the Social Inclusion Reference Group?
- Will all the groups listed under a particular column continue to function as separate groups? If so, how will the groups be coordinated under a “partnership” and how will they be represented at PSB? What is the status of all the groups?
- One issue that is illustrated through partnership working is the sheer diversity of the county in terms of the problems it faces – this has always been the Oxfordshire challenge but it does mean that the work around place needs to be more explicit.

The structures don't show how links need to be made between groups – stronger, safer and more healthy, for example. From experience, there needs to be clearly defined protocols for how these partnerships interact especially if funding ever has to cross silos in the future

Comments from members of the HWBP Board:

The Board were not able to meet to discuss the consultation paper in time for the given deadline but two or three members responded to an email inviting comments. These have been amalgamated into this one section rather than being attributed to specific individuals. It should be noted that they do not necessarily represent the views of all members:

- Overall I like this proposal and generally speaking think it is doing a good job – doing something that needs to be done.
- I am concerned at the omission of any reference to the Overview and Scrutiny of our decisions. It does not seem to have a place in the consultation document.
- Most of this area is highly STRATEGIC and local issues have still to be discussed as to how they fit into this paper. Therefore I cannot see how we can move forward unless all the issues are resolved. Districts MUST

have one representative from each Council on all boards and committees otherwise it will not be a true partnership.

- Time should be given from any decision being made for that decision to be taken back to each local authority within Oxfordshire and be subject to 'call-in' – as is the case for Supporting People. It rarely happens that there is 'call-in' but the safety catch is there should it be needed.
- I worry about duplication, as I see many of our papers at other committees. I am concerned that the proposals do not adequately address this. More clarification is needed as to what must go where.
- With regard to the first point posed on p.4 of the document (about risks), the biggest risk I can foresee lies in the lack of training to district and county councillors to ensure they fully understand the new system of Area Based Grants. They need to be trained to appreciate that they are part of a joint decision making endeavour and not the whole or sole decision makers. All councillors need to clearly understand the ABG and be able to explain it or even sell it to their constituents. There is a risk that if they are not adequately trained that they will go off-message and fuel dissatisfaction with ABG based decision making.
- With regard to the second point posed on p.4 of the document (about linkages to district LSPs), it is crucial that the Oxfordshire Partnership must be formally authorised to hold the authority for accountability by the county and district councils. In other words, each council must agree to authorise the Oxfordshire Partnership to make decisions and carry them out to which they must then be bound, so that there is a single decision maker and not a situation in which different councils can veto certain decisions or opt out of them. It is only if, at the end of the day, a single decision can be taken that all the governance requirements for probity and equity and so forth can be guaranteed. Everyone must sign up to this and come on board.
- With regard to the third point posed on p.4 (about communication), I would like to see a well designed, professionally laid out, linguistically accessible newsletter or magazine (like those that each council currently distributes to residents) explaining what the Oxfordshire Partnership and the thematic partnerships are doing.

Grammatical/ stylistic comments from a HWBP Board member:

One member of the HWBP Board felt there were a few ambiguities and difficulties with the wording of the document and argued strongly that if such a proposal is put out for consultation after the PSB meeting, it needs to be written so that it is clearer and less confusing. Their main points of concern have been forwarded to the authors of the document.