

EXECUTIVE 22nd February 2022

Report Title	Central Area Growth Board Membership
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Lead Member	Councillor David Brackenbury, Executive Member for Growth and Regeneration

Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Central Area Growth Board Terms of Reference

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to join the Central Area Growth Board and agree the associated Terms of Reference.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Executive has to date been an active participant in the Central Area Growth Board demonstrating its commitment to regional working and in so doing bringing together the local authorities located in the middle of the Cambridge - Milton Keynes - Oxford Arc.
- 2.2. The Central Area Growth Board has periodically met. However, in light of an evolving role and changing membership due to local government reorganisation in the last 12 months, it is now being proposed to put the Board on a more formal footing formed of six local authorities.

- 2.3. This report recommends that North Northamptonshire Council becomes a full member of the Central Area Growth Board, based on the document appended at **Appendix A** for the approval of the Executive.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. It is recommended that the Executive:
- a) Agree to North Northamptonshire Council formally being part of the Central Area Growth Board, on the basis of the Terms of Reference document at Appendix A;
 - b) Agree that the Leader will be the representative of the Council on the Central Area Growth Board or a nominated deputy from the Executive;
 - c) Agree to the Council making a final contribution to the operation of the Central Area Growth Board of £5,000 for financial year 2022/23.
- 3.2. Reason for Recommendations:
By becoming a full member of the Central Area Growth Board, the Council will be an active participant in contributing to the strategic agenda on items such as strategic planning, economic development, and infrastructure planning at a sub-regional level.

4. Report Background

- 4.1 The National Infrastructure Commissions (NIC) interim report (2016) on the Cambridge-MK-Oxford growth corridor identified that one factor holding the area back from achieving its full potential as the UK's 'Silicon Valley' is the lack of joined-up planning of housing, jobs, and infrastructure across traditional local authority boundaries.

“Current governance mechanisms are not sufficient to deliver the step- change in strategic leadership and collaboration needed... and will require a fundamental shift in the scale at which local authorities collaborate on planning and infrastructure.”

- 4.2 In its final report on the Cambridge – Milton Keynes - Oxford corridor, 'Partnering for Prosperity: a new deal for the Cambridge – Milton Keynes - Oxford arc' (2017), the NIC encouraged authorities within the central section of the arc to *“strengthen structures for collaborative governance and collective decision making”* and referenced the work ongoing in the central area to establish a Growth Board.
- 4.3 Government, in its initial vision for the Corridor published in the Autumn Budget 2017 stated that *“it will be necessary for authorities to work together much*

more closely going forwards.”

- 4.4 Within the Cambridge – Milton Keynes - Oxford corridor, it formalised stronger regional working arrangements have been established at either ‘end’ of the corridor through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Oxfordshire Growth Board. Establishing a Growth Board for the ‘Central Area’ allows North Northamptonshire Council and its partner authorities to meet the challenge of councils working together more closely in the future.
- 4.5 Previously, the 17 local authorities within the South-East Midlands and Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) footprints that are locally defined as being within the Cambridge - Milton Keynes - Oxford Arc, with the exception of Buckinghamshire County Council, worked together from summer 2017 on closer regional working. Partners agreed in principle to formally establish a growth board, constituted as a joint committee (see further the legal comments below), to coordinate cross-boundary working within the central area. After its establishment, the former districts and boroughs and County Council were members of the Board.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1. Since 2017 the Growth Board have met on several occasions based on 12 constituent members without formally taking the form of a joint committee. Furthermore, the reorganisation of local authorities from April 2021 within Northamptonshire, and the changing priorities of some of the more peripheral local authorities to the corridor, has led to the need for a refresh of the original establishment and its terms of reference.
- 5.2. Accordingly, the Executive is requested to approve on a fresh basis the participation of the Council in the body known as the Central Area Growth Board. Whilst in law this will not be formally constituted as a joint committee, the intention is that the Growth Board will operate and adopt procedures in line with a joint committee
- 5.3. In addition, the document at **Appendix A** contains proposed detailed Terms of Reference and Standing Orders for the Growth Board for approval. This will be considered by the Growth Board at its first meeting once formally constituted and will then be adopted by the membership with or without amendment. It should be noted that the proposed membership is now six authorities (Milton Keynes, Luton, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire). Each constituent authority will nominate one Executive member to sit on the Growth Board. The roles of Chair and Vice-chair will rotate between them. Associate membership is also available to other bodies on a co-opted, non-voting basis.
- 5.4. Joint committees (see further the legal comments below) are required to operate in the same way as a local authority in relation to publication of agendas and minutes according to statutory timescales, access to background papers

and public attendance at meetings. Although the Growth Board is not proposed to be a Joint committee, it is proposed to adopt similar procedures. Accordingly, the local authority providing the Chair for a year will also host the Growth Board and provide the committee management support to publish agendas, minute meetings and publish decision records etc. However, decisions will not be subject to call in.

- 5.5. It is proposed that Milton Keynes Council has the role of accountable body for the Central Area Growth Board. The Growth Board is not legally constituted as a separate entity and as such cannot enter contracts, hold funds, or employ staff. Therefore, it is proposed that Milton Keynes Council will carry out this function. The work of the Growth Board will be funded by a financial contribution from each member, starting from the next financial year (2022/23) at £5,000.
- 5.6. Alternative options are that the Council does not continue to join the Board. This is not the recommended option as establishing joint working at the two ends of the Central Area corridor (i.e.: Oxford and Cambridge) has played a significant role in securing investment, flexibilities, and commitments from government. Doing nothing would mean that the local authorities in the central part of the corridor would not have a voice in such regional discussions.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1. Subject to Executive approval, North Northamptonshire Council will formally become part of the Central Area Growth Board and continue to participate in key strategic growth agenda items. The outcome of this decision will also be formally communicated back to Milton Keynes Council as the accountable body for the Board.

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1. Regional working is a key priority for the Council in accordance with the Corporate Plan approved in October 2021. Collaborating and proactively planning for growth through the forum of a Growth Board will allow regional partners to proactively shape the future growth of their places, rather than having growth imposed from above
- 7.1.2. By joining the Central Area Growth Board, the Council is committing to an ongoing annual £5,000 commitment to support its work and to fund officer roles to support its operation. Further contributions may be sought for specific pieces of work
- 7.1.3. In the years in which the Council is a Host Authority (those in which it chairs the Growth Board), Committee Management services will be provided by it.
- 7.1.4. Milton Keynes Council (MKC) will be acting as the Accountable Body for the Growth Board so will provide Section 151 officer support. MKC's Chief Finance

Officer will therefore be required to provide the Growth Board with a quarterly financial report. Additional remuneration for this role will not be received.

7.2. Legal and Governance

7.2.1. Where local authorities wish to act jointly, then they can either set up formal joint committees, or alternatively groups which have no functions of their own and need to refer decision-making back to the constituent authorities. The legislation governing joint committees is provided for under Section 101 (5), 102 Local Government Act 1972 and extended to executive arrangements by section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000.

7.2.2. Here it is not proposed to set up a formal joint committee, so the Growth Board will have no formal decision-making powers. Nevertheless, it will carry out the tasks set out in the proposed Terms of Reference at Appendix A of this report, referring to the constituent authorities for decision-making as appropriate.

7.2.3. Once the constituent members have agreed to the re-establishment of the Growth Board based on the appended Terms of Reference, the Growth Board will formally approve its detailed Terms of Reference at its first meeting. Major changes to its Terms of Reference will need to be referred back to the constituent authorities.

7.2.4. The work of the Growth Board at the point of formal establishment will be subject to Freedom of Information legislation on the basis that such information is held by each of the constituent authorities.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans

7.3.1. The function of the Central Area Growth Board and its future work programmes support several aims of the Corporate Plan, including Better, Brighter Futures through for example investment in skills projects, Safe and Thriving Communities through our support of local businesses and Green, Sustainable Environment through business support and other initiatives which support the net-zero agenda.

7.4. Risk

7.4.1. There are no significant risks arising from the proposed recommendations in this report.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1. There is not a requirement to consult on the details of this report. Each of the six authorities that will become members of the Growth Board are taking similar reports through their governance process.

7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

7.6.1. This report has not been to the Climate Change, Environment and Growth EAP due to the timing of the meeting. However, the report has been shared with the Chair who is supportive of the recommendations, particularly given the focus that will be put on the environment and sustainability by the Growth Board, which is in-line with the commitments of North Northamptonshire Council in tackling climate change and protecting the environment.

7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny

7.7.1. Scrutiny could undertake a review of any of the tasks or activities of the Growth Board. Similarly, within the Terms of Reference, it states that the Growth Board may submit a request to scrutiny for an investigation or similar task to be carried out, and then reported back to the Growth Board.

7.8. Equality Implications

7.8.1. An Equality Screening Assessment has been completed achieving a positive outcome for equality groups. At this stage no specific decisions are being made that may impact individual protected groups. However, the inclusion of NNC on the Central Growth Board will enable NNC to meet its obligations of General Equality Duty by partaking in the Key Decision making process of the Central Growth Board.

7.8.2. To ensure our legal obligations to the General Equality Duty are met, NNC will ask that the Central Area Growth Board complete an ESA on all key decisions made by the Board that may impact protected groups.

7.9. Climate Impact

7.9.1. There are no specific climate impacts arising from this report; however, the wider focus of the Growth Board and its activities will have a strong focus on improving the environment, reducing carbon emissions and contributing positively to the wider climate agenda across the Central Area.

7.10. Community Impact

7.10.1. There are no community impact elements arising from this report although specific work that may flow from the Growth Board may require community impact assessments to be undertaken.

7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact

7.11.1. No specific implications arising from this report.

8. Background Papers

8.1. None