

Vale Partnership Board

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 3 MARCH 2011,
9.30 AM AT GUILDHALL, ABINGDON**

Present

John Robertson (Diocese of Oxford) **Chair**
Cllr Richard Webber (Vale of White Horse District Council)
Cllr Judith Heathcoat (Oxfordshire County Council)
Jenny Hutt (Oxfordshire NHS)
Mike Gaston (Abingdon & Witney College)
Ian Charlton (Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils)
Steve Russell (Sovereign Vale)
Stephen Dexter (Oxfordshire Economic Partnership)
Liz Morgan (Extended Schools Coordinator- Abingdon)
Lois Muddiman (Vale & South Oxfordshire Partnerships)
Toby Warren (Vale of White Horse District Council)
Emma Morris (Vale of White Horse District Council)

1 Apologies

Cllr Tony de Vere (Cllr Richard Webber substituting)
Natasha Bateman (Environment Agency)
Meryl Smith (Oxfordshire Rural Community Council)
Nigel Wakely (Crown Technology)
Huw Thomas (Thames Water)
Clare Kingston (Vale of White Horse District Council)
Matt Prosser (Vale of White Horse District Council)

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2010

2.1 Emma would correct a typing error in paragraph six before publishing the minutes on the district council website.

Action:EM

3 Matters arising from the minutes

3.1 There was nothing to report on the water resources management plan.

3.2 The communications sub-group meeting planned for December had been cancelled. No future meetings of the group would be arranged until the Board had completed its review of the future role of the Partnership.

3.3 Emma would work with ORCC to contact those communities which had been identified as nearing the time to refresh their existing community led plans, or which had expressed interest in community-led planning but had not proceeded.

Action:EM

3.4 Jenny Hutt reported that the primary care trust was undergoing significant restructure in the lead up to the transfer of commissioning to GP consortia and of public health responsibilities to the county council. It was not yet possible to provide a report on these changes, however, general information about changes in the NHS were available on a government website as follows:

Public Health White Paper

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthyliveshealthypeople/index.htm>

Liberating Health White paper

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/LiberatingtheNHS/index.htm>

4 Local Development Framework update

4.1 Toby reported that officers were progressing with the finalisation of the core strategy, which would be considered by the council in the summer. Following this the council would submit the strategy for the Examination in Public (EIP). This process should be completed by spring 2012.

5 Economy report

5.1 The standard economy report had been circulated. Toby reported that the loyalty card scheme introduced in Abingdon by *Choose Abingdon* was proving to be successful and there were currently around 1,000 loyalty card holders.

5.2 In Wantage the shop front improvement scheme was also popular with retailers. Vacancy rates were quite low in Wantage and occupancy levels in Faringdon continued to be quite high.

5.3 Stephen Dexter advised that pay levels in the private sector would probably increase due to a shortage of skills, particularly skills 'in the middle'.

5.4 The Board discussed whether the economy report could be improved, for example, by including information about the market towns and providing forecasts rather than historical data only. It would be useful to consider the likely future impact of current public sector cuts on the economy and to have a sense of the number of redundancies likely to take place, where these would fall and, therefore, when and where social problems and issues may arise. It was agreed that while some forecasting was possible, accuracy was a problem and it was also noted that historic information can reveal patterns that may be useful in forecasting future economic activity, and planning action.

5.5 Partners all reported indirect and anecdotal evidence of the pressure that the economy, and people, were experiencing.

5.6 Judith suggested that some of the information provided in the economy report to informal cabinet meetings at Oxfordshire County Council may be useful to include in the economy report to the Partnership. Toby would look into the possibility of including any relevant information in future reports.

5.7 In terms of action the partnership could take, it was agreed that its views should be fed into the other delivery partnerships in Oxfordshire. The Citizens Advice Bureaux, and the Independent Advice Centre in Wantage should also be kept up to date with information about partners' projects that would help their clients. Mike Gaston would look into what links there were from the college website to the CAB.

Action: TW/MG/All

6 Community Places project update

Status Report

6.1 Lois reported that good progress was being made in South Abingdon and effective partnership working was taking place. A group of about 15 residents from the Caldecott and Ock Meadow wards had formed a steering group and elected a chairman, Neil Boston. The steering group also included representatives from the district, county and town councils. An all day drop in event would be held on 19 March 2011 at Preston Road Community Centre when residents would have the opportunity to record their views on what they liked about their community and what they would like to see changed. A further four consultation events would be held over the year, plus a household questionnaire.

6.2 The group anticipated costs of £14k for undertaking the consultations and undertaking a feasibility study into the use of a piece of land for a skate park. Soha Housing and Sovereign Vale had each agreed to contribute around £3,000, which would be used for the feasibility study and grant applications were being submitted to both district and town councils. In kind contributions were also being made by the fire service, which had agreed to deliver leaflets publicising the drop in event..

6.3 The group already had many ideas that they wanted to consult on, including: working with Tesco to improve footpaths between South Abingdon and the store, providing a dedicated dog walking area, a community notice board and newsletter and an extension to the Preston Road Community Centre and raising educational attainment.

6.4 In Didcot, Lois was in discussion with a number of partners, including Churches Together, housing associations and Didcot Town Council about the establishment of a partnership management group to take on the running of the temporary community facility at Great Western Park.

6.5 Judith commented that she had not yet had any contact from Shrivenham in her role as community-led planning champion for them Lois would look into this. Toby commented that the village projects committee in

Shrivenham was very active and the aim was that the South Abingdon Group would also evolve into an autonomous and sustainable community group that would continue to work with the community for its benefit in the future.

6.6 Mike Gaston expressed interest in talking with the community about educational attainment. Lois agreed that a number of agencies needed to come together to look at this issue and would work on this.

6.7 The Partnership thanked Lois for the excellent work she had done with these communities. Emma and Toby would arrange a date for a mini-conference to review the achievements and outcomes of the community places project and to plan for taking these forward.

Action:LM

7 Broadband Update

7.1 Communities served by the Blewbury exchange had been successful in their campaign to secure an upgrade to the exchange through BT's 'Race to Infinity.'

7.2 The district council was working with Oxfordshire County Council and others on a bid to the government agency Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) for funding to increase internet speeds. The county council was working on a digital strategy, setting out the importance of improving internet speeds and the effect this would have on the economy, learning, and social inclusion. The bid would be submitted by the end of June and a decision was expected quite quickly after that. As lead partner, OCC would contribute its existing fibre network, the Oxfordshire Community Network (OCN), which would be used to connect rural communities. The timescales involved meant that this could happen at around the same time that Blewbury received its upgrade in 2012.

8 Future Role of the Partnership

8.3 The sub group had submitted a report on the future role of the partnership for its consideration. There was no support for disbanding the partnership; it was felt that the role of the partnership would become more important. Partners also felt that the number of meetings should remain the same and that separate partnerships should be maintained for the South and Vale. However, it was agreed that there could be value in holding a joint meeting between the partnerships once a year to discuss issues of shared interest.

8.4 It was noted that the role of the project worker had been very valuable in moving forward the discussions and aims of the Partnership Board and that a mechanism for doing this in future would be needed. There was support for the principle of a project group to take forward board decisions. The group would probably comprise officer or representatives from partner organisations, depending on the issue being addressed. This would be considered in relation to individual board decisions and projects. Jenny Hutt advised the board that it would be difficult for the PCT to provide consistent representation in the

context of the current large scale changes taking place but every effort would be made to participate where appropriate.

8.5 The terms of reference were agreed subject to:

- removing reference to the chairman being elected for a limited term
- Toby to review the section on resourcing the partnership to clarify this
- change to the last sentence under the 'structural form' section to read 'success of partnership initiatives'.

8.6 The partnership plan set out on page 9 – 12 was agreed.

8.7 The Partnership felt that the existing membership of the Partnership was appropriate and should remain unchanged.

8.8 The Chair suggested holding an event attended by the Big Society Network, to guide us and the other Oxfordshire Partnerships in considering the opportunities and challenges presented by Localism. The community places mini-conference may provide an opportunity to do this or another separate event could be held later in the year. Emma would advise partners of the date for the mini-conference

Action: TW/EM

9 Partners Update

9.1 **Jenny Newton** advised of her change of surname to Hutt and that she would be on maternity leave from the summer. Due to the changes taking place within the health service over the coming months it was not possible at this stage to say how her involvement in the partnership would be covered during her absence and beyond.

9.2 **Liz Morgan** advised that schools were currently awaiting their final budgets and were looking at federation opportunities.

9.3 **Stephen Dexter** reported that the new destination management organisation (DMO) for Oxfordshire would begin operations on 1 April 2011 from the Broad Street tourist information office. Its aim was to generate an extra 15% income (£150m) over the next three years.

9.4 **Steve Russell** reported that rent increases of 7-8% were coming through and the social impact of this would need to be observed.

9.5 **Mike Gaston** reported that 500 young people were being taught enterprise skills at Unipart.

9.6 **Toby Warren** advised the partnership that from the beginning of April 2011 Superintendent Rob Povey would be the new local police area commander for Southern Oxfordshire (South and Vale). Chief Inspector Andy Boyd would be second in command. He also advised that the Oxfordshire GP consortium would be producing a newsletter and that he would provide details of this when available.

9.7 **Judith Heathcoat** advised that the county council were consulting on children, young people and family services. Further information was available by following the link from the county council's web site home page at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

9.8 **John Robertson** reported that the Building Better Neighbourhoods research project had been taken to the General Synod and national research was now being undertaken.

Date of next meeting

Emma would circulate proposed meeting dates for 2011/12