

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee held on Wednesday 20 January 2021 commencing at 10.00 am at the Virtual Meeting - Web ex meeting.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Patrick Molyneux (Chair)	Cllr Tony Dale
Cllr Rob Bird	Cllr Richard Leppington
Cllr Richard Cook	Cllr Rowena Hay
Cllr Doina Cornell	Dev Chakraborty

Substitutes:

Apologies:

Officers:

Mike Dawson (TBC)	Tim Atkins (CBC)
Steve Mawson (GCC)	Reid Derby (CBC)
Colin Chick (GCC)	Nick Sturge (CBC)
Gillian Parkinson (GCC)	Tracey Crews (CBC)
Angela Presdee (GCC)	Gareth Edmundson (CBC)
Rupert Waters (GCC)	Christine Gore (CDC)
Laura Powick (GCC)	Paul James (CDC)
Cllr Kate Haigh (GCC)	Peter Williams (FODDC)
Cllr Kevin Cromwell (GCC)	Jon McGinty (GCity)
Andrew Cummings (SDC)	
Kathy O'Leary (SDC)	

258. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies at the meeting.

259. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

260. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Rowena Hay declared an interest, as Leader of Cheltenham Borough Council, in item 10 of the agenda (Business Rate Pool, including SEDF Funding Requests), in relation to the SEDF funding request from Cheltenham Borough Council for cyber

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and digital growth. She would therefore not participate in the vote on the decision being put before the Committee.

261. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Cllr Rob Bird was elected as Vice-Chair for the Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 Civic Year.

262. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

Cllr Kevin Cromwell, Chair of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC), provided an update on the work of the GEGSC.

At its meeting that afternoon, the GEGSC would be considering the Taxi Licensing Scrutiny Task Group report, as well as an item on social mobility, which would be presented by Jon McGinty, and Dawn Adams from the Power of Three Project.

There would also be an update on the work of the GFirst LEP, and there would be an opportunity for the Committee to consider its procedures for scrutinising it.

263. TAXI LICENSING SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT

Cllr Kate Haigh, Chair of the Taxi Licensing Scrutiny Task Group, presented the report and recommendations of the Taxi Licensing Scrutiny Task Group.

It was explained that taxi licensing was an important area for consideration in terms of the impact it had on issues including the economy, climate change and safeguarding.

The group felt it important to address Gloucestershire as a whole, and to consider how vehicle standards and enforcement could be aligned across the County. One of the group's recommendations was for the district councils and the County Council to sign up to and implement the National Register of Refusals and Revocations, if they had not already done so.

The role of the County Council in enabling fleets to convert to electric vehicles more quickly was also highlighted.

One member commented on the importance of reliable and safe taxi services for rural areas, whilst several members welcomed a consistent countywide approach to taxi licensing, and the fact that the recommendations addressed issues of safeguarding.

Another member suggested that the group could have considered the affordability and availability of taxi services, particularly in rural areas, in more depth, particularly given the impact this had on the economy.

In reference to the consultation process carried out by the scrutiny task group, it was acknowledged that trying to effectively engage with the public was an ongoing issue.

It was noted that the Gloucestershire Licensing Officers Group would work to coordinate the recommendations and would take note of the Committee's comments.

264. CYBER GROWTH

Tim Atkins, Director for Place and Growth, alongside Reid Derby and Nick Sturge, Cheltenham Borough Council, provided the Committee with a presentation on the progress of cyber growth in Gloucestershire.

The Committee was informed that the Golden Valley Development media campaign had been launched, which had included a video, and that an impressive line of developers were interested in the project.

The Committee noted that the project was of benefit to Gloucestershire and nationally, strategically fitting with the Local Industrial Strategy, and the UK Cyber and Industrial Strategy. The development was also of benefit to the UK's mission to be a scientific superpower.

The importance of upskilling and employing the right people was highlighted.

The significant location of Gloucestershire in terms of connectivity was reflected on, and the question was raised as to how to exploit this opportunity. Further questions as to how to attract companies into relocating, how to develop pipelines for the development of skills and learning, and how to work across local stakeholder groups to maximum value, were also contemplated.

The Committee was informed that part of the development included the concept of an attraction for the public, called The Agency, which would provide hands on science for young people, provide a showcase for businesses and academia, and stimulate the talent pipeline.

The need for an underpinning digital strategy for Gloucestershire was highlighted.

It was understood that the aim for the next few months was to continue researching, mobilising and growing the project. The Committee was advised that the request for SEDF funding for cyber and digital growth, which would be considered later in the meeting, would enable this work to continue.

There was a discussion as to which group would be best placed to lead on developing a digital strategy for Gloucestershire, and how this could be taken forward.

265. STRATEGIC PLANNING - STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND

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Tracey Crews, Director of Planning, Cheltenham Borough Council, presented the draft Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground (GSoCG) to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that there was still work to do to finalise the GSoCG, however this was the start of the conversation.

Members understood that the GSoCG had been produced at the request of this Committee, and a consultant had been appointed to develop it. Work on the GSoCG had since been picked up by planning officers, although this had been delayed due to the pandemic.

It was explained that the document served two purposes: to enable the key strategic planning matters facing Gloucestershire to be drawn together and provide agreement on how these should be addressed; and to meet the requirements placed nationally on all local planning authorities through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Committee was advised that, as council leaders had not had the full opportunity to review the GSoCG, given the implications of the pandemic, it was recommended that the Committee accept the report in principle and refer it to the Leaders Board for a more in depth consideration of the document, before it is sent out to the 7 Gloucestershire local authorities for approval.

Mike Dawson, Chair of the GEGJC Senior Officer Group (SOG) explained that the Leaders Board was established by this Committee to allow council leaders to have informal discussions on the GSoCG, and therefore provides a forum for further clarity of detail.

Several members welcomed the opportunity to discuss the GSoCG in more detail at a meeting of the Leaders Board. One member commented that this could be an opportunity to develop a green and sustainable statement of common ground.

The Committee was reminded that further discussions would allow for the document to be refined, rather than it be rewritten from scratch, and that authorities would have the option to opt out of some or all of the proposed agreements listed in the GSoCG.

Following the discussion, the GEGJC agreed in principle to the overall direction of the GSoCG, and referred it to the Leaders Board for an informal discussion.

Subject to further comments and views of the Leaders Board, the final version would be shared with the Committee, alongside a worked up action plan within 6 months, and taken for consideration by the 7 local authorities.

266. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANNING UPDATE

Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, GCC, provided a verbal update on GCC's Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan.

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Members were informed that, since the last meeting, the plan had been refined which had enabled the development of a costing plan. Costs for the recovery plan amounted to around £500k per annum, and the plan would be taken to Cabinet on 27 January 2021 for approval.

It was understood that indicative approval had been given to roll out innovation labs in a further five libraries in addition to the one at Coleford, so that there was one in each of the Gloucestershire districts. These labs provided the opportunity for school pupils to learn about technology, and helped businesses starting up, for example with looking up patents. Consideration was also being given to running adult education courses in these areas to enable courses to be run locally.

Additionally, it was noted that progress was being made with the Kickstart Scheme, which provided work placements for young people aged 16 to 24 years old claiming Universal Credit.

Mike Dawson explained that since November, councils had returned to the response phase of the pandemic, however partnership working had continued. Members were advised that collaboration between partners would increase as focus returned back to recovery, and that a report regarding this would be provided at the next meeting.

The Committee was satisfied with the progress being made so far and understood that plans needed to be flexible given the fast changing nature of the pandemic.

267. GFIRST LEP UPDATE

Dev Chakraborty, Deputy Chief Executive of GFirst LEP, presented the Committee with an update on the work of the GFirst LEP.

The Committee was informed that the County's S151 Officer Group had been considering the idea of pooling some of the Additional Restrictions Grant (discretionary scheme), which had been received by each of the County's local authorities from the Government, as part of its response to Covid, to support local businesses.

GFirst LEP had developed three ideas as to how to use the pooled funding, however the MHCLG had provided feedback that the Discretionary Grants must go direct to businesses, and so only one of the three concepts could use pooled funds and that concept was to help encourage smaller businesses to go online and to trade online.

The Committee was advised that the second idea to set up an Apprenticeship Clearing House remained popular, and therefore funding options were being considered for this.

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An update on the progress of the Visit Gloucestershire campaign was also provided, and it was hoped that the 3 year tourism strategy could be presented at the next meeting.

The Committee discussed the idea of pooling together some of each local authority's discretionary grant allocation. Some members raised concerns that pooling funds may result in some local businesses not receiving money they needed.

The Committee was reminded that it was not required to make a decision regarding this idea, and that the report was for information only. S151 Officers would be raising the proposal with district councils individually.

There was a query as to how many self employed individuals acting as limited companies had fallen through the gaps in terms of receiving grants from the Government.

Another member also raised a concern regarding the limited progress that had been made with setting up the Growth Hub in the Forest of Dean.

The Committee noted the report.

268. BUSINESS RATE POOL, INCLUDING SEDF FUNDING REQUESTS

Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Resources, Stroud District Council, provided the Committee with a verbal update on the Gloucestershire Business Rate Pool.

The Committee was informed that the forecasted position for the pool for this financial year was still broadly in line with the forecast provided at the last meeting of £3.8million. Additionally, there would be no business rates reset this year, and that £2.3million remained unallocated in the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF).

One member queried the impact of the pandemic and business rates holiday on the Business Rate Pool. In response it was explained that the impact would start to become clear over the next few months and that this would be carefully monitored. There was also a comment regarding the unsustainability of business rates in the longer term.

Mike Dawson presented the request for SEDF funding from the City Region Board for £50k to produce a City Region Prospectus for Gloucestershire. It was understood that the funding request was to be drawn down from the City Region Board funding allocation within the SEDF. The prospectus would be developed to promote Gloucestershire, and to set out the offer Gloucestershire had.

Tim Atkins presented the request for £200k of funding from the SEDF to progress a range of work streams to drive forward cyber and digital growth in Gloucestershire.

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There was a discussion as to how the funding for cyber and digital growth would be monitored, and on the development of a digital strategy for Gloucestershire.

Following the discussion, it was agreed that any approval of funding was subject to the development of governance arrangements and detailed scoping of the County digital strategy, which would be overseen by the SOG.

On being put to a vote, it was

RESOLVED to

1. Agree the funding request for £50k to be drawn from the City Region Board funding allocation within the Strategic Economic Development Fund; and
2. Agree an allocation of £200k of funding from the Strategic Economic Development Fund to progress a range of work streams to drive forward cyber and digital employment growth across the County and maximise the wider benefits of the Golden Valley Development.

269. FORWARD (WORK) PLAN

There was a request for an item providing a snap shot as to what is happening in Gloucestershire regarding Brexit to be provided at the next meeting.

270. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the meeting dates for the remainder of 2021.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.30 pm