

# **GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 31 March 2022 at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

## **PRESENT:**

Cllr Rebecca Halifax	Cllr John Murphy
Cllr Dominic Morris	Cllr Gina Blomefield
Cllr Robert Vines	Cllr Sajid Patel
Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Matt Babbage (Chair)	

Officers in attendance: Pete Carr, Simon Excell, Colin Chick, Julian Atkins, Lisa McCance, Rachel Brain, Simon Pickering, Sarah Poultney, Vicky Walters, Steve Mawson, Cllr Tony Dale and Angela Presdee

Apologies: Neil Hopwood, Cllr Nicky Packer, Cllr Paul McCloskey, Mike Dawson, David Owen, Cllr Stephen Hirst and Cllr Alastair Chambers

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Matt Babbage declared, in relation to item 5, that they worked for an energy company.

## **3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 November 2021 and 19 January 2022 were approved.

## **4. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE UPDATE**

4.1 The Chair invited Cllr Tony Dale, Chair of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC), to update the Committee on the previous GEGJC meeting. Members noted the following points:

- There was an update report on the progress of the Fastershire Strategy in Gloucestershire. It was recognised that since the pandemic, demand for high quality digital infrastructure had grown, and the Government had since raised its aspirations to deliver improved infrastructure networks capable of supporting far greater digital download speeds.
- 96.49% of homes in the county now had access to superfast broadband connectivity, however the remaining houses were the most challenging to connect.
- The Cyber Project in Cheltenham had now appointed a developer, and it was hoped the innovation centre would be ready on site in 2025. Cheltenham had been mentioned in the National Cyber Strategy 2022

from Government, and there would be an opportunity to pitch the project to the Prime Minister at a meeting in May.

- Work on the Statement of Common Ground had not progressed due to capacity issues.
- The LEP update advised that they were still waiting to hear from Government as to their function and form moving forward. The recently published Levelling Up white paper provided the first details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund which replace the European funds previously used by the LEP for projects in Gloucestershire.
- The expected Business Rate Pool gain for 2021/22 was £4.17million, which would lead to an allocation of £833k to the SEDF. The final settlement for local government for 2022/23 had confirmed that pooling would continue, and business rates growth would not currently be reset.
- The Committee considered two requests for funding from the SEDF:
  - £150,000 to launch the 'Made in Gloucestershire' Initiative (approved).
  - £850,000 for development funding for the Central Gloucestershire Mass Transit Scheme (refused).
- Whilst the Committee was supportive of the Mass Transit System in principle, concerns were raised about the amount of funding being requested, whether this funding should come from the SEDF or elsewhere, and whether the focus should be on other projects that would have a more immediate impact for Gloucestershire.
- The next GEGJC meeting will take place on 19 May 2022 at 10am and will include items on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, including opportunities for Gloucestershire, and a sector profile on agritech and farming in the county.

4.2 On the Broadband rollout, it was highlighted that there still remained significant pockets of connectivity issues within the towns, it was not just in remote areas. It was advised that there had been delays recently due to an ongoing dispute with Building Digital UK but now that had been resolved, issues in accessible areas should be addressed quickly. GEGJC were much more concerned about the remote, harder to reach areas.

## **5. ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**

5.1 Lisa McCance (Director at Shared Intelligence) introduced the item, followed by a presentation from Rachel Brain (2030 Strategy Manager at Stroud District Council), Julian Atkins (Interim Countywide Climate Change Coordinator) and Simon Pickering (Co-Chair LEP Energy Sector Group). Members noted the following points:

- The item today was in two parts, the written report reflected a summary of work that was being done across the county on a broader climate change agenda and the data which had been remodelled to give an indication of

green job growth as defined by the Low Carbon Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE). Recent establishment of Climate Leadership Gloucestershire (CLG) had enabled the county to agree four key objectives, as listed in the report. Below this, there were 10 core themes, one of which was for the economy.

- The data presented in the report had followed a methodology created by the Local Government Association's work on LCREE to understand where the green job demand was coming from by sector.
- Gloucestershire had a higher baseline for these jobs than its neighbours (shown in Fig4) but its growth in percentage terms was not anticipated to be as high.
- In absolute growth terms, this growth was expected to come from low-carbon electricity, and in percentage terms, from low-carbon services, infrastructure, and low-emission sectors. This clearly showed potential sectors that it could be worth Gloucestershire engaging more or investing more in to make the most of that growth (Fig2).
- At a district level, Gloucester was expected to have the highest proportionate of jobs, which equated to some 9,000 job opportunities, and Tewkesbury the highest proportion of growth (Fig3).

## **5.2 Presentation – What does 'Green' mean?**

- There were numerous national and international groupings of businesses with a target of becoming carbon neutral by a particular date. One of the largest being 'Race to Zero' who collectively now cover nearly 25% global CO2 emissions and over 50% GDP. Slide 6 outlined what a business committed to when declaring a Climate Emergency, with reconfiguration being one of the most important things they can change.
- Numerous of like businesses looking to go carbon zero were coming together and working out the actions they can take collectively such as, Net-Zero Insurance Alliance, for example which would then have a larger impact on other sectors and society.
- Slide 10 showed which organisation from within CLG was leading on which core theme.
- Slides 11 showed the regional context for Gloucestershire, its strengths, and challenges in respect of climate change. LEP research in terms of the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities for decarbonising Gloucestershire's economy was shown on slides 12-13.
- The move towards a greener county had brought some 'big ticket' projects to date such as Eco Park, the Energy Park and the proposed STEP Fusion reactor. The Western Gateway has also signalled its intention to review tidal energy production in the Severn. However the county needs to consider how best to support the many small-medium businesses that exist in making the transition to net zero as well.
- Looking at Gloucestershire in a more local context, its challenges were around connectivity due to its mixed economic landscape and having a majority of SME businesses who may find that their scope 1 and 2 emissions (direct emissions from owned or controlled sources and

indirect emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating and cooling consumed by the reporting company) were largely out of their control due to renting business space etc.

- On the flip side however, there were opportunities and potential in this rich and varied economy through locally established supply chains which made Gloucestershire's businesses more resilient, building local wealth, fulfilling local needs, spreading the county's assets through aspiration and reducing transport impacts.
- In Gloucestershire, the carbon challenges were therefore more likely to be addressed when we start to look at local economy, as this would lead to local wealth which then led to more investment.
- A green economy required us to think big but also think very small and local at the same time, because it is founded on how people live, work, consume and move around.
- Covid thought us a great deal about how local communities can quickly mobilise to address challenges of local delivery, lessons that need to remain as we move to tackle the carbon challenge.
- Council's in Gloucestershire played a key role, not only in addressing the emissions they were directly responsible for, but also being outward looking, the way we work with businesses and shape the economy were equally important and the impact they could have on the county's challenges.

### **Questions**

- 5.3 It was queried where the biggest carbon reduction areas were within the presented themes, and therefore the priority areas to focus the county's resource.
- 5.4 Members noted that Gloucestershire's biggest emissions by far were from transport, followed by buildings (primarily domestic due to insulation and energy use), then agriculture and particularly cattle farming. The Committee noted that they had been invited to join Environment Scrutiny on 24 May 2022 to consider a presentation on transport decarbonisation for the county.
- 5.5 A member was surprised that at Figure 1 of the report, it was showing a minimal 5% increase in energy efficiency jobs, given that retrofitting homes was one of the biggest challenges. It was advised that the data presented at Figure 1 was a 2030-2050 timeframe, and the theory being that the energy efficiency elements would already be built into the regular day job of that sector by 2030.
- 5.6 A member questioned what could be done to try and promote and make Gloucestershire the place businesses wanted to come, to avoid being outperformed by larger towns and retain as much benefit of the green transition as possible.
- 5.7 It was noted that there were a number of things that would need to be considered, including how to best utilise inward investment into the county.

Gloucestershire had to identify its strengths, be more aware of what its assets were, and start on the local changes, rather than just focusing on big projects. Businesses had begun to make decisions about who they brought from and sold to, based on green credentials. It was therefore the local council's role to make it easy for green jobs to come to Gloucestershire and stay here, as well as attract individuals who were making these changes, resulting in the county being an all-round greener place to live and work.

- 5.8 The Committee noted that Gloucestershire was made up of predominantly smaller businesses who may suffer from not having enough time or resource to explore opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint, with some feeling very lost and overwhelmed on where to start. For local authorities and councillors, it was more a role of facilitating and enabling, peer to peer learning was much more effective in this space.
- 5.9 It was advised that there were a number of initiatives already in existence to help businesses learn from their peers in the same sector. There was the [Target 2030](#) project which offered technical, practical, and funding support, plus case study tools to learn from. There were a number of programmes available nationally, which provided online tools and national events etc. GFirst LEP and Business West ran various local events to bring businesses together in discussions. They also supported through the local Growth Hub network by providing general business support plus specialist advisers available on sustainability and behaviour change.
- 5.10 In addition, it was hoped that work streams resulting from the CLG discussions would act as path finders in this area, helping to connect businesses and residents to the help and resources available.
- 5.11 A member added that many small businesses in the county were simply trying to keep their business going and make ends meet, many did not have the finance to consider changes.
- 5.12 It was explained that the LEP tried to work closely with business network associations, but completely acknowledged that some businesses did not have these on their radar to begin with. The LEP would continue to try multiple channels but were considering more outreach work by the Growth Hub teams to work within the local communities as well.
- 5.13 GCC also had a small community engagement team within its sustainability department who had put together an engagement strategy for campaigns being published this year, primarily looking at reducing SUP etc.

**ACTION      Julian Atkins (share campaign details)**

## **6. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT**

- 6.1 Pete Carr (Director of Employment and Skills GFirst LEP), Sarah Poultney (Head of Transformation, GCC) and Vikki Walters (Strategic Lead for

Inclusive Employment, GCC) shared the following presentation and noted the following key points:

- Slide 3 highlighted key figures and trends within youth unemployment data.
- Slide 4-10 illustrated graphs that supported the figures and trends in slide 3.
- Slide 11 highlighted the main challenges for young people who were unemployed, which included anxiety, lack of confidence, social isolation, wider mental health impacts and financial pressures.
- Slide 12 included a spoken account from a young person's experience of unemployment who was working at GCC through the Kickstart scheme.
- Slide 13-15 highlighted various support and programmes available to young people.
- Slide 16 explained further developments that GCC were working on which would require member support. The officer explained that funding had been secured for some of the work streams, but other projects were on a temporarily funded basis. Therefore, they would need to prioritise projects due to funding gaps, unless more funding was secured.
- Slide 17 highlighted that they would be taking discussions forward with the Child Friendly Gloucestershire Coalition and encouraged members to let them know if there were any areas they would like a 'deep dive' into in future Scrutiny meetings.

**Action** Pete Carr to share video with members of young people explaining their experience of unemployment

### **Questions**

- 6.2 A member asked that when looking at NEET (young people Not in Education, Employment, or Training) data, whether it was analysed through protected characteristics and were there any initiatives that focused on supporting those with protected characteristics.
- 6.3 The officer explained that the data was not specifically broken-down in this way, however within some current projects there was data that did enable some analysis of protected characteristics. However, it was more targeted at whether a young person was at risk of becoming NEET.
- 6.4 It was further questioned how GCC was encouraging and supporting employers to not put unnecessary barriers in the way of NEET and whether there was good engagement with employers across the different sectors.
- 6.5 The question was welcomed, and the officer agreed this type of engagement was fundamental. There were several businesses they were already working with as part of the employment charter, but there needed to be many more.

The engagement would cover matching work experience, practice interviews, career events etc. between schools and local employers. It also tied in with the inclusive employment agenda, which included an 'inclusive employer award' specific to Gloucestershire, which involved employers making a commitment to improve and open up recruitment practices to becoming fully inclusive to encourage people from all protected characteristics. It was added that this would be taken forward by the Employment and Skills Hubs and employers would be audited annually to ensure compliance.

6.6 A member raised that the statistics for employee groups other than NEETS, such as the 25-34 and 35-44, were actually experiencing the slowest return to pre-pandemic levels and potentially needed focused intervention as well.

6.7 It was suggested that this could form part of a future discussion as it would involve a more in-depth look at the data and available resource.

**ACTION** Add item to Committee work plan (DSU)

6.8 Members noted that there was no government or nationally led replacement for the Kickstarter Scheme, which had now come to an end. Any solution or replacement scheme would come down to local authority resources. The officer suggested that work with local partners and the Skills and Employment Hubs would be key.

**ACTION** To confirm figures for the number of young people who are NEET (page 32 of presentation pack), the 25-34- and 35-44-year-olds. To provide comparison data from previous years (Pete Carr)

6.9 It was advised that there was an ongoing project called 'Works for Me' running in Gloucester which aimed to understand the challenges around young people identified as NEET, and how to help rearrange them into education or work placements. It was hoped that over the next few years this project would help to identify barriers to help prevention work in schools. Officers hoped to replicate the programme around the county and advised that over 90% of the young people who came through were reengaging with post 16 education and sustaining it.

6.10 A member asked about the support that would be provided to young Ukrainian and Afghan refugees who may need extra support and help.

6.11 An officer stated that they were looking at developing provision with the Adult Education team because one of the issues was that the population is quite transient, therefore it was tricky for an education provider to put a programme in place plus there was no funding allocated to do it.

## **7. WORK PLAN**

- 7.1 A member suggested an item on transport decarbonisation and the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The cabinet member advised that timescales for the BSIP had been tight, had changed multiple times and therefore it was tricky to accommodate discussions at scrutiny within the current timescales. The cabinet member suggested that instead, there would be value in a discussion at a later stage. The partnership agreement and plan were reviewed annually and therefore it would be best to see what emerges in line with annual reviews.
- 7.2 In terms of the transport decarbonisation issue, it was advised that this Committee had been invited to join the Environment Committee on 24 May 2022 to consider this as a joint item.
- 7.3 There was a discussion about the Scrutiny Committees link with the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee. It was advised that Scrutiny members were encouraged to review papers and attend/view the Joint Committee meetings. There would always be an overview update from the Chair to Scrutiny on the previous meetings discussions and outcomes. During work planning, members can suggest items linked to the Joint Committee for Scrutiny to look into in more detail.
- 7.4 It was agreed that Democratic Services would explore ways to make this clearer on the agenda for Scrutiny, and also look at the possibility of including a work plan for the Joint Committee meetings.

## **CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 12:40