

# GLoucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday 29 November 2022 commencing at 10.00 am at the Cabinet Suite - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

## **PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:**

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Alastair Chambers
Cllr Matt Babbage (Chair)	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Nicky Packer	Cllr Stephen Hirst
Cllr Paul McCloskey	Cllr Vernon Smith
Cllr John Murphy	

## **Substitutes:**

**Apologies:** Cllr Robert Vines, Cllr Gina Blomefield, Cllr Sajid Patel and Cllr Paul Baker

## **Attendance via Video**

**Conference:** Cllr Nicky Packer  
Cllr Tony Dale (Chair of the GEGJC)  
Cllr Philip Robinson (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills and Bus Transport)

**In Attendance:** Simon Excell (GCC)  
David Owen (GCC/GFirst LEP)  
Paul Blacker (GCC)  
Angela Presdee (GCC)  
Laura Powick (GCC)  
Gareth Edmundson (CBC)  
Neil Hopwood (GFirst LEP)  
Benjamin Dent (Glos Food and Farming Partnership)

## **46. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Paul Baker, Gina Blomefield, Sajid Patel and Robert Vines.

## **47. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2022 were approved by the Committee.

An update was provided on progress with the recommendations made at the joint GEGSC and Environment Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2022.

#### **48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Paul McCloskey declared an interest as a Non-Executive Director for Publica.

#### **49. FOOD AND FARMING STRATEGY**

Benjamin Dent, Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership, delivered a presentation on Gloucestershire's Food and Farming sector.

The Committee was informed that Gloucestershire had a competitive advantage for growth in the food and farming sector, given that almost 15% of Gloucestershire's workforce was already employed within the sector; the sector contributed to almost 9% of the local economy in 2017; and the County was home to leading expertise in this sector, including the Royal Agricultural University and Campden BRI.

Members noted that a 10% shift in the food retail market towards more sustainable local food systems could yield up to 200k more jobs nationally.

Members were informed of the potential to increase tourists' spending on food and produce in the County, given that £340m was currently generated annually in Gloucestershire by tourist spending on food.

There was an opportunity to improve Gloucestershire's health through the production and promotion of local healthy food. More than 60% of adults in the County were currently deemed to be overweight, which impacted on public health and finances.

Members were advised that the sector could also have a role in addressing food poverty within Gloucestershire, as well as climate change concerns.

It was explained that by looking at the food and farming sector holistically, shorter supply chains could increase local farm viability, growth and employment in the sector, as well as improving the health of local populations, reducing food poverty and reducing carbon footprints.

Members were informed that the Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership aimed to build on the strengths of the County's food and farming sector. This included supporting businesses which contributed to localised food supply chains; considering opportunities which could be funded through the Rural England Prosperity Fund; building on the opportunities provided through the Environmental Land Management Scheme; promoting the career opportunities of the sector amongst young people; opening up public procurement contracts to local suppliers; and expanding the Food for Life's whole school approach.

Benjamin Dent continued to explain the Partnership's ambition to establish a long-term evidence-based farming and food strategy. To inform the strategy, the

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Partnership hoped to map the organisations and local government departments responsible for food and farming policymaking in Gloucestershire. The Committee was asked to support the development of this mapping exercise.

Several members welcomed the opportunities that could be provided through a holistic approach to food and farming in the County, and also welcomed the proposal that the Committee support the development of the mapping exercise.

One member sought clarification on the purpose of the mapping exercise, whilst another stated that the Committee needed to be mindful of its remit when making any recommendations.

One member asked whether the Partnership could look into low cost healthy food options for those most in need in the most deprived communities, particularly given the current cost of living crisis. In response, Benjamin Dent explained that the Feeding Gloucestershire partnership was exploring opportunities to support communities experiencing food issues. Changes to the planning system in order to promote a greater diversity of shops on local high streets needed to be considered, and education also played a role in teaching families how to cook food.

Following a discussion as to whether it was within the remit of the Committee to make a recommendation on the mapping exercise; as well as where the recommendation would best be directed, the Committee agreed the following recommendation:

***The GEGSC recommends that Leadership Gloucestershire considers working in partnership with the Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership to map the organisations and local government departments responsible for food and farming policymaking and delivery in Gloucestershire.***

## **50. LEP REVIEW**

David Owen, Director of Economy and Environment, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), and Chief Executive of the GFirst LEP, provided an update on the current position of the LEP review, and plans for a refresh of the Local Industrial Strategy.

Members were informed that the national LEP review had been completed.

Members were also informed that the Levelling Up White Paper deemed that every area that wished to receive a devolution deal would do so by 2030, and the aspiration within Gloucestershire was for the area to receive a County Deal under the leadership of GCC.

In areas where there would be a mayor or a combined authority, LEPs would be required to integrate into these functions. Where a devolution deal had not been agreed, the unwritten indication was that LEPs would continue in their current capacity. The White Paper also highlighted the importance of the independent business voice, however it was not yet clear how this would be achieved.

It was understood that once a County Deal was signed, the LEP would have one year to integrate into the agreed democratic structure. However, direct discussions with the Government on a deal for Gloucestershire were likely still a way off.

David Owen continued to explain that the funding settlement received by GFirst LEP in March this year had been cut by 38%, and the LEP was given just one day's notice of this. There had also been a shift in the allocation of other national funding streams, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which were now being received by district authorities as opposed to the LEP.

It was noted that the LEP Board had received a paper in September detailing measures to ensure the LEP could continue until a County Deal was agreed. Preparations for integration following an agreed deal were already in motion, with David Owen now working for both GCC and as Chief Executive of GFirst LEP. Current preparations were also looking to ensure the retention of skilled LEP staff and to address the definition of the independent business voice in Gloucestershire.

Members were advised that in the meantime, it was business as usual for the LEP. The LEP was currently in the process of recruiting for a new LEP Board member, and the Local Industrial Strategy was being reviewed as part of the wider strategic approach in Gloucestershire.

Nationally, the LEP network was working with Government officials to define in more detail sections of the Levelling Up White Paper, such as the expectations for the independent business voice at a local level.

One member summarised that in essence, funding which would previously have been received by the LEP was now being received by district authorities. They suggested that this could cause issues, and queried whether Gloucestershire would lose out in terms of the more strategic projects that would benefit the whole County. David Owen agreed there was a danger that there would be less strategic input across the County, in addition to a potential postcode lottery for businesses in relation to the support they could receive.

In response to a further query, it was clarified that there was no suggestion of Gloucestershire receiving a mayor.

One member asked whether GFirst LEP worked strategically with other local LEPs, such as Worcestershire. In response, it was understood that Gloucestershire was working collaboratively with Worcestershire on cyber connections in the Malverns, however the fact that Worcestershire's LEP boundaries were not co-terminus impacted on any strategic partnership.

Another member commented that whilst they could see some benefits of the LEP integrating with GCC, they had always been previously reassured by the independence of the LEP. They queried how businesses would view the LEP in the context of the Council and what the arguments were for bringing the LEP in house.

In response, it was explained that the White Paper clearly set out the requirement for LEPs to integrate, and that work was ongoing to define the requirement for the independent business voice following devolution. It was noted that in some areas, LEPs already sat within local authorities without a devolution deal.

One member reflected on the innovative projects attributed to GFirst LEP, and queried whether that innovative approach could continue following the LEPs integration with GCC. In response, David Owen commented on the innovation he had witnessed amongst GCC officers, and noted that a number of successful LEP projects had been supported by GCC and district councils. He added that the Growth Hub in Tewkesbury sat within Tewksbury Borough Council and was exemplary.

The Committee thanked David Owen for his update.

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

The Committee received a verbal update from Cllr Tony Dale, Chair of the GEGJC, on the GEGJC meeting held earlier in the month.

Members were informed, in an update on the business rates pool, that there had not been much change in the pool position since the previous GEGJC meeting, with an estimated pool gain for 2022/23 of £3.663million.

The GEGJC had approved two SEDF bids for the Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground Action Plan, and for core match funding for the GFirst LEP.

The GEGJC had received an update on proposals for future GEGJC governance arrangements, as well as a presentation which reviewed the first year of the Employment and Skills Hub's establishment. The GEGJC had also received its regular update on the work of the GFirst LEP.

It was noted that the GEGJC would next meet in February 2023 to consider the GEGJC governance arrangements.

## **52. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

There were several queries from members relating to the content of the report.

One member requested further details regarding changes to the Council's traffic enforcement powers, as well as on the scope and plans for the Public Transport Network Review.

Another member raised their concern regarding cashless parking meters and the impact these could have on those suffering domestic abuse, as well as querying how many trees had already been planted through the tree planting scheme, and how many were still alive.

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A further member asked whether all parking meters would be cashless going forward.

Written responses to these queries would be provided to members outside of the meeting.

Simon Excell, Assistant Director of Planning and Economic Development, GCC, provided an update on the A417 Missing Link Scheme. It was understood that the Secretary of State had given their approval of the scheme on 16 November 2022, and it was hoped the development would commence early in the new year.

### **53. PERFORMANCE DATA - Q2 2022/23**

The Committee noted the Q2 2022/23 Performance Data report.

### **54. WORK PLAN**

It was requested that the following items be added to the work plan for consideration by the Committee:

- An update on rail transport within Gloucestershire;
- A report considering the next steps for the nuclear industry in Gloucestershire;
- An update on plans for major investment sites in Gloucestershire;
- A report considering how to address the issue of empty high street units;
- Economic support as part of prisoner rehabilitation;
- Supporting small businesses; and
- Addressing the labour shortage.

The agendas for the first few meetings in 2023 would be confirmed during a lead member work planning session due to take place in December.

### **55. FUTURE MEETINGS**

The dates of future meetings were noted.

## **CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 11.30 am