MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee meeting Wednesday 29 November 2017 at Shire Hall, Gloucester.

Present:

Cllr Paul McCloskey  Cllr Colin Hay
Cllr Kevin Cromwell  Cllr David Norman MBE
Cllr Stephen Hirst   Cllr Dawn Melvin
Cllr Stephen Davies  Cllr Phil Awford
Cllr Kate Haigh      Cllr Joe Harris
Cllr Bruce Hogan     Cllr Jim Dewey

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Matt Babbage, (Gloucestershire County Council), and from Cllr Martin Whiteside (Stroud District Council). Cllr Whiteside was represented at the meeting by Cllr Jim Dewey.

2. MINUTES

The actions from the meeting held on 6 September 2017 were noted and updated.

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2017 were confirmed as an accurate record of that meeting.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

4. GLOUCESTERSHIRE CONNECTS STUDY

The Chairman welcomed Martin Revill, Market Director for SYSTRA and Project Director for Gloucestershire Connects Study to the meeting.

Introducing the item, the Chairman explained Martin had been invited to deliver a presentation to the Economic Growth Joint Committee earlier that day, advising members of a Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) Commissioned Study of transport connections for the future, (item 4 of the Joint Committee agenda).

Martin confirmed that the purpose of the study was to consider the ‘future role of road and rail in supporting strategic connectivity in Gloucestershire by 2050’, and to generate committee discussion on some of the initial themes and challenges emerging from the first phase of the project.
Martin informed members that the initial phase of the study had involved SYSTRA consulting with a wide range of stakeholders in Gloucestershire, including transport operators and agencies and with emerging sub-national transport bodies from neighbouring areas. The consultation had been supplemented with a review of important policy and planning documents, the key findings of which had been presented at the Joint Committee meeting to consider any concerns about Gloucestershire’s future connectivity.

The outcome of the presentation to the Joint Committee and the subsequent discussion at the Scrutiny Committee meeting, would help shape the later stages of the study, for which work was ongoing. Scrutiny members had been invited to the Joint Committee meeting to consider the presentation made earlier that day.

Questions to be considered as part of the study, to include:

- i. What transport corridors are most important to Gloucestershire’s future?
- ii. Is Gloucestershire marginalised by its geography?
- iii. What is the likely impact of the toll removal from the M4 Severn Bridge?
- iv. What impact will investment in the county’s traditional infrastructure, (road and rail links), have?
- v. How important is connectivity to new infrastructure, including HS2, to Gloucestershire?
- vi. How will technology change the way we travel, for example, electric vehicles?
- vii. How will future lifestyles change the way we travel, for example; ageing population; lifestyles of younger people; the rise of global cities and increasing urbanisation.

The scrutiny committee welcomed the opportunity to ask questions and highlighted a number of key issues for SYSTRA to incorporate into the study.

These included; Access to and from the Forest of Dean; improvement works on the A417 Missing Link between the Brockworth Bypass and Cowley roundabout; rail links; junctions on the M5 Motorway at Stroud and Tewkesbury.

Referencing the potential impact of housing needs and commercial development on the county, it was suggested the use of Gloucestershire’s river network be considered as part of the study.

The information was noted.

5. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

a) ESF Skills and Employability Update Report

The committee noted the Employment and Skills Update Report that had been presented to the Economic Growth Joint Committee earlier that day and invited to submit any questions to Pete Carr: Lead Commissioner – Skills and Employment.
The report provided an update on several aspects of employment and skills in Gloucestershire, including an overview of the five skills projects in Gloucestershire receiving funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and contracted through the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The report also provided an update on the Gloucestershire Employment and Skills Board (GESB), which had met for the first time in October 2017. Chairman of the Economic Growth Joint Committee, Cllr Lynden Stowe is a member of the board.

b) LEP European ESF (European Social Fund) Funded Project Presentations

To assist member’s understanding of the progress of some of the LEP European ESF (European Social Fund) Funded Projects currently underway in Gloucestershire, the committee received detailed presentations on the Learn Direct ‘Work Start Gloucestershire’ Project and the South Gloucestershire and Stroud College EDGE (work experience) and (apprenticeship support) Projects.

i. Learn Direct ‘Work Start Gloucestershire’ Project

Natasha Panchbhaya: Business Manager at Learn Direct and Naomi Lavender: Manager, presented information on the Gloucestershire Work Start Project. Clarifying that the project, (at the request of the LEP), prioritised people with disabilities; carers; people living in rural areas; young people not in employment, and people with mild to moderate mental health and learning issues, as priority groups, the presenters outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses of the project, plus an overview of anticipated threats and opportunities. Launched in November 2016, it was reported that the 3-year project had only just completed its first year of operation and that better understanding of the return from the investment was anticipated over the course of the next two years.

ii. Education Developing Gloucestershire’s Employability (EDGE) Project

Sara-Jane Watkins, Principal of the South Gloucestershire and Stroud College presented information on the Edge and Goal Partnerships. Sara-Jane outlined the aims of each of the projects and gave examples of some of the work experience placements that had been undertaken at the Coronium Museum, Cirencester and Berkeley Castle.

iii. Growing Opportunities for Apprenticeships (GOAL)

Sara-Jane informed members that the GOAL project was assisting in raising the awareness of apprenticeships, including what apprenticeships were available to local businesses. Outlining the support being provided to employees during the early phases of the apprenticeship, Sara-Jane explained that more understanding was being offered on how apprenticeships could support the future growth and sustainability of local businesses.

The presentations received mixed responses, with members asking a wide range of robust questions on some of the more financial and operational aspects of the projects.
After the meeting, the committee has received open invitations to visit both organisations to observe some of the work being carried out on each of the projects.

6. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE/GFIRST LEP UPDATE

Having noted the information reports considered at the Economic Growth Joint Committee meeting held earlier that day, the committee made specific reference to concerns about the impact of Brexit on the economic growth for Gloucestershire, and the award of European Funding.

Requesting information on the consequences of leaving the European Union, and having considered a proposal that the committee write to Gloucestershire MP’s to lobby the government on promoting continued funding, post EU departure, the committee was advised that, until a comprehensive assessment of the financial position could be made in March 2019, it was difficult to consider the likely outcomes.

David Owen, Chief Executive of Gloucestershire GFirst LEP and Nigel Riglar, Commissioning Director: Communities and Infrastructure, noted the committee’s concerns and agreed to produce a briefing note on suggested key lines of enquiry for consideration at the committee meeting on 14 March 2018.

At the GCC Group Leader meeting on 1 December 2017, it was suggested the Economic Growth Joint Committee lead on this aspect of work, with input from the Scrutiny Committee. It is proposed a briefing note will presented at the Joint Committee meeting on 14 March 2018, with input from the Scrutiny Committee later that day. .

Committee members were notified of the launch of the ‘Vision 2050 Big Conversation’ at Cheltenham Racecourse on Thursday 1 February 2018.

To find out more on the launch of Vision 2050, members are encouraged to visit: https://glos2050.com

7. WORK PLAN

Copies of the updated committee work plan were circulated with the agenda.

The following updates were noted at the meeting: -

Committee Meeting - 22 February 2018

The meeting to be held at the Cotswold District Council Offices to consider Cotswold District Issues and Priorities.

Following a request from Cotswold County Councillor, Paul Hodgkinson, the issue of ‘Mobile Phone Coverage in Rural Areas’ to form part of the discussion. A position
statement to be included in the agenda pack for members to consider before the meeting.

Committee Meeting - 14 March 2018

At the scrutiny committee meeting on 29 November 2017, members requested a briefing on ‘what issues/aspects of the impact of Brexit the committee/GCC might need to consider in preparation for leaving the EU. Nigel (Riglar) and David (Owen) suggested a paper on ‘key lines of enquiry’ be considered at the 14 March 2018 meeting. Members were advised no proper analysis could be done ahead of the March 2019 deal.

Subsequent to this, at a Gloucestershire Leader’s Group Meeting on 1 December 2017, Cotswold County Councillor, Cllr Paul Hodgkinson mentioned that ‘Cornwall Council had set up work streams to look at specific aspects of Brexit and noted that a recent presentation to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee had indicated that Gloucestershire could lose significant sums currently available through the European Social Fund. Cllr Hodgkinson suggested the Council should be doing more to analyse the potential impact of Brexit with regular updates provided to members’. At the same meeting, Cllr Mark Hawthorne referred to a study the LGA was due to launch in February 2018 and highlighted the difficulties in considering the impact of Brexit on Gloucestershire prior to March 2019. After further discussion, it was agreed the Joint Economic Growth Committee, on which the six district councils and GFirst LEP are represented, was the appropriate place for the matter to be raised.

Based on this information, it was agreed the matter would be considered at the next Joint Committee meeting on 14 March 2018 and a position statement considered later the same day under the LEP/Joint Committee update item at the scrutiny committee meeting. A course of action to be agreed under the committee work plan item.

Vision 2050 Update

Members requested an update on Vision 2050 and were notified of the Vision 2050 Launch taking place on 1 February 2018. It was agreed that an update would be provided at the scrutiny committee meeting on 14 March 2018.

Committee Meeting - 31 October 2018 - Cheltenham Borough Council Issues and Priorities. (The meeting to be held at the Cheltenham Borough Council Offices).

8. FUTURE MEETINGS

22 February 2018
14 March 2018
20 June 2018
5 September 2018
31 October 2018
21 November 2018
Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 4.15 pm