

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee held on Wednesday 16 September 2020 commencing at 10.00 am at the Virtual Meeting - Web ex meeting.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

Cllr Patrick Molyneux (Chair)	Cllr Doina Cornell
Cllr Steve Jordan (Vice- Chair)	Cllr Tony Dale
Cllr Rob Bird	Cllr Richard Leppington
Cllr Richard Cook	Dev Chakraborty (Gfirst)

Substitutes:

Apologies:

Officers:	Steve Mawson (GCC)	Lisa McCance (Shared Intelligence)
	Gillian Parkinson (GCC)	Phillippa Lowe (CDC/ FODDC)
	Mike Dawson (TBC)	Peter Williams (FODDC)
	Colin Chick (GCC)	Andrew Cummings (SDC)
	Jo Moore (GCC)	Tim Atkins (CBC)
	Laura Powick (GCC)	Reid Derby (CBC)
	Angela Presdee (GCC)	Jon McGinty (GCity)
	Rupert Waters (GCC)	

236. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies at the meeting.

237. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

Gillian Parkinson, Head of Legal Services, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), confirmed that legal formalities to extend the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee (GEGJC) for a further 18 months had been completed.

It was also noted that GCC had issued a press release on 17 August 2020 highlighting that COVID-19 economic recovery plans had been considered at the GEGJC meeting on 28 July 2020.

238. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

239. GOLDEN VALLEY (CYBER CENTRAL) DEVELOPMENT

Tim Atkins, Director for Place and Growth, and Reid Derby, Cheltenham Borough Council, gave a presentation to the Committee on progress with the Golden Valley (Cyber Central) Development.

The Committee was informed that Cheltenham Borough Council had engaged with Hatch Regeneris on a Gloucestershire Cyber and Digital Sector Impact Study, which had produced a strong evidence base for the development. In particular, it revealed that outside of London, Gloucestershire had 6 times the concentration of Cyber businesses than the rest of the UK, and Cheltenham had 11 times the concentration. There had also been significant high value employment growth within the digital sector across Gloucestershire over a five year period, with a 48 percent increase in digital sector jobs in Cheltenham.

The Committee was advised that the Golden Valley (Cyber Central) Development could be a catalyst for growth, resulting in the creation of 3,700 new homes, and the employment of 11,700 individuals on site.

It was explained that the proximity of the project to GCHQ in Cheltenham was strategically important, and that this had been recognised by the Digital Minister. With the Government's ambition to establish the UK as a science and innovation superpower, as well as a global cyber leader, Cheltenham and Gloucestershire had a leading role to play in the accomplishment of this mission. Additionally, Gloucestershire and Cyber Central UK had a leading role to play in the Western Gateway Powerhouse Applied Digital Accelerator proposals being put to the Government.

Members noted that a high quality marketing campaign had been launched for the Golden Valley (Cyber Central) Development, which included a video and magazine.

The Committee was informed that 'the 5Vs' formed the layers of the proposition that Cheltenham was taking to the market. These included GCHQ; extensive cyber ecosystem; heart of innovation and academia; location and accessibility; strong leadership and investment; and scale.

An overview was provided of sector growth within the County over the last 6 months, where it was noted that 4 out of 5 schemes funded through the Build Better Fund had been cyber-based schemes, and how this aligned with national policy.

It was noted that next steps included consideration of the November 2020 spending review, through to delivery, with the aim for the site to become operational in 2023/24.

Clarification was sought as to which digital sectors would be the focus for the development and how the development in Cheltenham fitted with other centres of

digital sector concentration across the County. There was also a query as to whether the University of Gloucestershire had aspirations to become a Centre of Excellence.

One member highlighted the need to ensure the delivery of housing in the County in order to facilitate the development of the project. It was noted that part of the project would include an employment-led housing scheme, and that 50 percent of the land purchased would be for housing.

The importance of young people in the County having the skills to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the project was highlighted, as well as the need to ensure schools, colleges and universities in the local area could provide young people with these skills. The need for digital sector businesses in the community to offer apprenticeships was acknowledged.

It was explained to the Committee that the project was about delivering the whole package including housing, employment, and transport, which made the development a unique offer that would draw people, businesses and money into Gloucestershire.

Following the discussion, it was agreed that officers from Cheltenham Borough Council would liaise with the GEGJC Senior Officer Group (SOG) to bring forward a further report on next steps for the project. This would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting on 18 November 2020.

240. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH RECOVERY PLANNING UPDATE

Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, GCC, provided the Committee with an update on GCC's COVID-19 economic recovery planning.

It was noted that GCC had engaged with the district councils, the LEP and officers at GCC when developing the Council's COVID-19 recovery plans to gain an understanding of the role of GCC in recovery planning and the core activity for focus.

The Committee was advised that a number of specific roles had been identified for GCC, which included delivering key county-wide and sub-regional priorities across growth and infrastructure; coordinating activity at a county-wide level; bringing additional capacity and weight through leadership, such as through lobbying Government for investment; and ensuring a strong voice across the economic landscape, such as by promoting key sectors through coordinated campaigns.

Members were also advised that three themes had been identified for the focus of recovery planning by GCC. These themes were as follows: hardwiring infrastructure with the economy; connected people and places; and thriving communities, such as ensuring that reskilling and upskilling is central to the County's recovery.

Minutes subject to their acceptance as a correct record at the next meeting

Consideration was given to the role of the digital and cyber sector as part of the COVID-19 economic recovery plans, and it was noted that upskilling was a key part of the recovery and a long term ambition.

Clarification was sought on the role of GCC in the recovery planning, alongside the district councils and the LEP, due to concerns about the duplication of work. It was recognised that GCC would sometimes play a supporting role, and sometimes a leading role, but that collaboration was important.

It was agreed that a report outlining proposals for the County Council's Economic Recovery Plan, in response to COVID-19 would be brought back to the Committee at its meeting in November.

Mike Dawson, Chair of the GEGJC SOG, and Lisa McCance, Shared Intelligence, updated the Committee on COVID-19 economic recovery planning in Gloucestershire.

It was recognised that COVID-19 economic recovery planning should reflect the longer term ambitions for Gloucestershire. It was agreed that this suggestion would be taken away and considered. It was also noted that plans were flexible and could be amended going forward.

Members were advised that a number of broad areas for collaboration had been identified through reviewing individual recovery plans and the priorities for the Committee. These included skills and employment; digital; cyber sector; tourism; high streets; and funding and funding opportunities. A number of cross-cutting issues had also been identified which required wider strategic consideration, including joint lobbying; the low carbon economy; and using data to inform decision making.

The Committee was informed that the SOG had agreed to focus on three priorities in the short to medium term. These were skills, the visitor economy, and lobbying. A number of actions for collaborative activity had been identified for each of these priorities.

It was suggested that the narrative from Government, such as on ambitions for the UK to become a scientific powerhouse, should be taken into account in the development of the economic recovery plans. It was also suggested that a strength-based approach be undertaken.

The Committee was advised by Steve Mawson, S151 Officer, GCC, that operational recovery work was being undertaken across the County, and that a report on this could be brought back to the Committee at a future meeting.

One member raised their concerns regarding a lack of confidence amongst the community to return to places of work, which would be fundamental to economic recovery, and queried how confidence could be rebuilt.

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It was recognised that communication was important to increasing confidence, however that this was a difficult task presently given the current Government guidance relating to COVID-19. The Committee was reminded of the dual role of local authorities in protecting public health, whilst also promoting economic improvement and confidence. There was a further discussion on the benefits of working at home in the current situation, as well as the benefits of flexible working in the longer term.

It was agreed that a further update on COVID-19 economic recovery planning in Gloucestershire, taking into account the feedback provided at this meeting, would be provided to the Committee at its meeting in November.

241. GFIRST LEP UPDATE

Dev Chakraborty, Deputy Chief Executive of GFirst LEP, presented an update from GFirst LEP on the status of the Growth Deal Projects for Gloucestershire and the EU Inward Investment Programme.

In particular, members received an update on Growth Deal projects, and on the Growth Hubs. It was noted that the Gloucestershire Growth Hub network was starting to re-open following lockdown at the end of March, and that the Hubs had received £0.5million to provide business grants to SMEs. It was also noted that additional funding had been received from the Department for Transport for the Gloucester Railway Station project.

The Committee was provided with an update on the timescale for the Getting Building Fund, and was informed that five projects would be funded. All five projects had been signed off by the LEP Board.

Members were advised that some of the Inward Investment team had been redeployed to focus on COVID-19 recovery and response. Additionally, in order to maintain some stability in light of the pandemic, Diane Savory would not be stepping down as Chair of GFirst LEP until March 2021. The recruitment campaign for the role would begin towards the end of October 2020.

242. BUSINESS RATE POOL FUNDING UPDATE AND SEDF FUNDING PROPOSALS

Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Resources, Stroud District Council, provided the Committee with an update on the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and on the outturn of the 2019/20 Business Rates Pool and the estimated balance of the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF). It was noted that there were no SEDF funding proposals for the Committee to consider.

Members were informed that the outturn of the 2019/20 Business Rates Pool was stronger than expected, with total pool growth at £19.4million. There was therefore a pool gain of £4.85 million, of which £970k would be received by the SEDF.

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The Committee understood that the forecast for 2020/21 was more complicated due to the impact of COVID-19. It was noted that the biggest impact upon business rates was the extended retail discount for 2020/21; however the impact on the pool would be minimal as local authorities were being reimbursed this lost income through a grant from central government. It was recognised that the pool would be affected where businesses closed as a result of the pandemic as the grant would no longer be received. It was estimated that there could still be a pool gain of £4.5million for 2020/21.

Members were informed that the position for the Business Rates Pool in future years was unclear, as the Government's plans for resetting the baselines for business rates collections for 2021/22 were unknown. However the Committee was advised that the impact of this, when balancing the risk, could mean that it was not worth proceeding with the pool. It was agreed that a report would be brought back to the Committee on recommendations for pooling in future years.

243. 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.

Members noted that the GEGSC was due to meet this afternoon. Cllr Cromwell commented on today's GEGJC meeting, and highlighted the importance of keeping scrutiny members informed in a timely manner of the work of the GEGJC.

244. FORWARD (WORK) PLAN

The Committee agreed that a report on the next steps for the Golden Valley Development project would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee, in addition to an update on the Gloucester Kings Quarter Regeneration project. A standing item on COVID-19 Gloucestershire Economic Growth Recovery Planning would be added to the forward plan. It was noted that the Committee would consider a request for core funding from GFirst LEP at the meeting in November.

245. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The Committee noted the meeting dates for the remainder of 2020 and for 2021.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.15 pm