

COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANNING IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Meeting	GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE (GEGJC)
Report Author	Mike Dawson Chair of GEGJC Senior Officer Group Email: mike.dawson@teWKesbury.gov.uk
Background documents	N/A
Location/Contact for inspection of background documents	Recovery plans previously presented can be found in the 28 th July and 16 th September 2020 Committee papers.
Main Consultees	This paper has been produced in consultation with the lead officers represented at the Gloucestershire Senior Officer Group. It has also been shared with GFirst LEP and the lead officer for the Local Resilience Forum.
Planned Dates	Not applicable
Purpose of report	To update the Committee in respect of collaboration across Covid-19 economic recovery planning in Gloucestershire and consider the next steps.
Recommendations	This paper is for noting.
Reason for recommendations	To support effective collaboration across Covid-19 economic recovery planning in Gloucestershire and agree action to progress priority areas.
Resource Implications	The resource implications required are yet to be defined. As more business and employment data and intelligence become available, a programme of recovery will be developed. There may need to be some internal as well as external resources required to support this.

1.0	Background
1.1	<p>At the previous two GEGJC meetings in July and September, the Committee reviewed the emerging Covid-19 Recovery Plans produced by the districts, county council and LEP. This meeting identified the importance of collaboration across Gloucestershire, respecting the individual and collective roles of the organisations involved and setting the scene for future activity.</p> <p>The Committee also highlighted to need to work closely together to build business and consumer confidence in Gloucestershire and beyond as part of a coordinated communications plan.</p>
2.0	Collaboration
2.3	<p>Having agreed the principles of collaboration at the September Committee and respecting the finite resource available across Gloucestershire, SOG has continued to progress this agenda, supporting businesses and residents across the county. A second formal lockdown will likely bring forward further challenges to the business and resident community which will need to be addressed.</p> <p>In considering where resources can be best directed at this time, skills, visitor economy and joint lobbying have been identified.</p> <p>The below section sets out progress in these three areas.</p>
2.4	<p>Skills</p> <p>A presentation on progress of skills activity is scheduled for the Joint Committee agenda in November.</p> <p>This presentation will highlight investment in skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - £4.48 million to support The Gloucestershire Applied Digital Skills Centre with Cirencester College – building a new landmark building, modelled on digital industries delivering the skills needed in the Cyber and Digital sectors. - £1.956 million towards a Construction Education Centre’ with the KW Bell Group Ltd in Cinderford - a brand new multipurpose conference and training facility to be based in the heart of the Forest of Dean. <p>Both of these projects are funded through the Get Britain Building Fund.</p> <p>In addition to this investment, the LEP in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council, has commissioned a new ‘Skills Portal’ to go onto its website, GCC’s website and the Growth Hub’s website.</p> <p>A Skills Portal is designed to bring together, and simplify, all the national skills support available and local skills support available and direct people to the support that best meets their needs.</p> <p>It will specifically be a tool to help the unemployed, those who have recently been made redundant, individuals looking to learn new skills, 16 to 24 year olds looking for support, individuals looking to set up a new business and more.</p> <p>The Skills Portal can be found here www.skillsportalglos.com</p>

2.5	<p>Visitor Economy</p> <p>Coordinated through the LEP, county-wide partners across the public and private sector including Destination Marketing Organisations have been collaborating to develop the messaging to promote Gloucestershire as a destination for leisure purposes. Partners have agreed to work together to produce a 3-year Tourism Strategy for the county to be funded by Gloucestershire County Council and co-ordinated by the Visit Gloucestershire Partnership.</p> <p>An update will be provided by GFirst LEP at the Joint Committee meeting.</p>
2.6	<p>Lobbying</p> <p>Lobbying for freedoms and flexibilities is the core premise of this priority. This will require careful consideration of the “ask” of government to ensure that it will bring forward legitimate outcomes and impact for Gloucestershire. This lobbying power will also be a key vehicle for building confidence in the future recovery and ambitions of the future to support business and place-based outcomes.</p> <p>The agenda considered by Senior Officer Group to be of significance</p> <p>Managing vacant units in retail centres has historically been a challenge. Evidence nationally is that vacancy rates are sharply increasing. Whist footfall data increased, stimulated by the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, this has not contributed to vacant units being brought back into use. Given the number of independent retailers and Food and Beverage operators across Gloucestershire, work is underway to assess the opportunities for any flexibilities that could be brought forward to stimulate activity. It is clear that footfall has only been marginally boosted by the government support initiatives, and the ONS have reported that non-food spending remains lower than in February 2020, reflective of consumers nervousness around stability of employment.</p> <p>Across the last quarter shop vacancies nationally reached the highest level since 2014. Whilst this trajectory is more modest in Gloucestershire, it is an area of economic recovery we need to keep a close eye on which may require lobbying to Government to help achieve flexibilities. While smaller high streets will benefit from home working and local shopping, our larger centres that play a more regional role and have a wider Gloucestershire catchment will continue to be impacted.</p>
2.7	<p>Next steps</p> <p>The officers across the Senior Officer Group will continue to progress the actions as set out in this report and will provide feedback on progress at the next GEGJC.</p>