

# GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee held on Wednesday 9 June 2021 commencing at 10.00 am at the Council Chamber - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

## **PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:**

Cllr Rob Bird	Cllr Bernie O'Neill (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Richard Cook	Cllr Philip Robinson
Cllr Doina Cornell	Dev Chakraborty
Cllr Tony Dale (Chair)	

**Substitutes:** Cllr Victoria Atherstone

**Apologies:** Cllr Rowena Hay

<b>Officers:</b>	Mike Dawson (TBC)	Jon McGinty (GCity)
	Steve Mawson (GCC)	Tracey Crews (CBC)
	Colin Chick (GCC)	Paul James (CDC)
	Simon Excell (GCC)	Peter Williams (FODDC)
	Gillian Parkinson (GCC)	Pete Carr (GFirst)
	Angela Presdee (GCC)	Steve Gardner-Collins (Visit Glos)
	Laura Powick (GCC)	
	Andrew Cummings (SDC)	
	Kathy O'Leary (SDC)	

## **282. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Cllr Rowena Hay, Cheltenham Borough Council. Cllr Victoria Atherstone substituted for Cllr Hay at the meeting.

## **283. ELECTION OF CHAIR**

Cllr Tony Dale, Cotswold District Council, was elected as Chair of the GEGJC for the 2021/22 Civic Year.

## **284. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

Cllr Bernie O'Neill, Forest of Dean District Council, was elected as Vice-Chair of the GEGJC for the 2021/22 Civic Year.

## **285. MINUTES**

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

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

## **286. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

## **287. GEGJC TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Gillian Parkinson, Head of Legal Services, GCC, reminded the Committee of the governance arrangements for the GEGJC and for its scrutiny.

It was understood that the GEGJC was the only joint committee in Gloucestershire which had joint decision-making powers, and that one elected member from each partner authority had a vote on the Committee. The LEP representative on the Committee was non-voting.

It was also understood that the initial five-year term for the GEGJC had been extended in September 2020 for a further 18 months until March 2022.

## **288. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH AGENDA**

Colin Chick, Executive Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, GCC, provided the Committee with an overview of the current economic growth agenda for Gloucestershire, on progress with the GCC Covid-19 recovery plan, and introduced members to the Gloucestershire economic growth dashboard.

The Committee was informed that unemployment in Gloucestershire had increased by just over 2 percent since the Covid-19 pandemic began to 4.5% in April 2021, and over 38,000 individuals were furloughed in March 2021.

It was acknowledged that it was still not fully known as to what the County would be recovering from as the pandemic was still ongoing, however this may become clearer from September.

Members noted that the GCC's action plan for recovery was focused around three themes: people, place and connectivity; skills and employment; and infrastructure, economy and growth.

Progress had been made against the action plan in the following areas:

- Social value - through early work with the Social Value Portal;
- Anchor institutions - working with other organisations within Gloucestershire, such as the NHS, to address health inequalities;
- Adult education - including the development of an employment and skills hub to enable individuals to find support in one place;

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

- Inclusive Employment - including the launch of the 'Work for Me' pilot and Inclusivity Works initiative, as well as the Kickstart Programme which had identified over 400 job opportunities; and
- Innovation Labs - locations had been identified in Tewkesbury, Stroud and Cheltenham for the further rollout of innovation labs and plans were being drawn up to commence refurbishment within the next two months at the Stroud and Tewkesbury locations.

Work was also ongoing to progress wider strategic proposals and developments including M5 Junction 10, the A417 Missing Link, and cycle routes between Cheltenham and Gloucester and beyond.

The Committee was provided with a demonstration of the economic recovery dashboard, which had been developed in order to monitor progress against key indicators, and would be presented at future GEGJC meetings to inform further discussions and decision-making.

One member queried, in relation to social value, whether there were plans to address areas such as food poverty, growing your own food, and cooking skills, particularly as they were linked to issues such as healthy living and the impact this had on the NHS. In response, it was explained that this was an area that needed looking into.

It was requested that data relating to the Kickstart Programme and on businesses, including start-ups and failures, be included in the economic recovery dashboard.

Clarification was sought regarding the data on job postings within the dashboard and whether this included postings from the hospitality sector.

Following a query on cycle ways in the Forest of Dean, it was understood that £1million had been invested into cycle ways at Lydney, and that other leisure schemes were being promoted.

In response to a query on libraries and their use for developing skills and employability, it was explained that creative art programmes were already being run at libraries for young people, and that libraries were being used as centres for all ages.

There was a further request for an update to be provided at a future meeting on the progress of the anchor institution task and finish group.

## **289. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

Mike Dawson, Chair of the GEGJC Senior Officer Group (SOG), introduced the item on Gloucestershire Covid-19 economic recovery, commenting on the strength of partnership between the district and county councils and GFirst LEP. Lead

officers from the district councils were then invited to provide an update on their economic recovery activity:

### **Cheltenham Borough Council**

- The Cheltenham Economic Recovery task force had been established alongside sub groups working alongside specialists to engage with the key issues, including a tourism and visitor economy sub group; a skills sub group; and a sub group for reimagining the town centre.
- The Cyber development was progressing, with the appointment of the preferred developer taking place in July.

### **Cotswold District Council**

- The Cotswold Economic Advisory Group had been established involving key stakeholders, businesses and institutions to oversee the action plan for the economic growth strategy.
- Work was underway on the construction of the new digital skills centre in Cirencester.
- There was a focus on town centres with COVID recovery officers assisting the safe reopening of businesses, and business advisers providing support.
- Webinars had been provided to the hospitality sector and Cotswold Tourism had set up online digital training.
- Welcome Back funding had been received which would be used to help high streets and local businesses reopen safely and successfully.
- ZeroAvia was opening a facility at Cotswold Airport to develop a hydrogen-powered aircraft, which would create 50 jobs and have the potential to grow should the product development be successful.

### **Forest of Dean District Council**

- A Forest Recovery Action Group had been established to address economic wellbeing, community wellbeing, and environment and climate change.
- There was a focus on tourism and hospitality including looking at grants, and work to increase overnight stays in the district.
- A bid was being pursued for the Levelling Up fund for the regeneration of Cinderford town centre.

### **Gloucester City Council**

- The Council's focus was on the repurposing and regeneration of the city centre.

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

- A bid had been submitted to the Levelling Up fund to support this, and would go towards the repurposing of the Debenhams building, which had been purchased by the University of Gloucestershire and would form part of the wider regeneration of the town centre, as well as the development of the Forum and the repurposing of the Fleece building.

### **Stroud District Council**

- The Council was focussing on four overarching themes: economic wellbeing; community; market towns; and housing.
- These would be driven forward by the committee system at the Council.
- The Land Release Fund bid had been successful to support the regeneration of Brimscombe Port.
- Funding from the Zero Carbon Public Estate fund would be used to repurpose and retrofit public buildings and sites.
- Funding from the Welcome Back fund would go towards providing footfall counters and supporting local businesses digitally.
- A strategy to understand economic development for the council, including which sectors had been particularly affected by the pandemic and how resources could be best focussed, was being developed.

### **Tewkesbury Borough Council**

- The Council's recovery plan was focused on tourism and long term essential infrastructure.
- Business grants had been received and were being spent to support businesses across the district.
- The Growth Hub was reopening fully this month.
- A £2million scheme to improve Tewkesbury high street had been developed.
- The Council was working with the local community to bring forward celebrations for Tewkesbury Abbey which was 900 years old this year.
- Tourism businesses were being supported where possible, and a large number of applications for events had been received.
- A large number of planning applications had also been received.

## **290. EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS STRATEGY**

Pete Carr, Director of Employment and Skills, GFirst LEP, updated the Committee on progress with the development of the Employment and Skills Strategy.

Members were informed that, since the last meeting, the focus had been on building up the employment and skills evidence base in order to progress the strategy, which would be evidence-led.

Members were advised that the strategy would be divided into three main parts:

- Skills for businesses: The skills needs of local businesses needed to be highlighted and consideration needed to be given as to how sectors would be supported. The green skills agenda and cyber and digital skills agenda would also need to be incorporated.
- Skills support for individuals: This would require buy-in from businesses to support individuals on initiatives ranging from career talks, through to Kickstart placements.
- Skills intelligence and investment: The Skills Portal and the Employment and Skills Hub would draw together resources to maximise the support and information offer.

It was understood that further funding for the strategy was being pursued. Discussions with LEP business groups and the GEGJC SOG would be the starting point for the development of the strategy.

The Committee noted that the strategy would be presented at its next meeting for its consideration.

One member queried, referring to a shortage in chefs, how a shortage of skills in a range of sectors had been able to develop, and how this would be addressed?

Pete Carr explained that a number of factors could affect a shortage in skills, and consideration needed to be given as to what the training needs were and how businesses could be helped with resources.

It was also suggested that the issues may not be due to a lack of skills, but because of working conditions and pay in certain sectors. It was also commented that any actions to address the issues should be strategic and focused on the long term skills needs.

## **291. COMMUNITY RENEWAL FUND**

Colin Chick advised the Committee on the projects that formed Gloucestershire's formal submission to the UK Community Renewal Fund.

The UK Community Renewal Fund provided £220m of matched grant funding for revenue projects of up to £3m per place to be completed between August 2021 and the end of March 2022. Funding submissions were required to be submitted by 18 June 2021.

The Committee was informed that because the money would be shared across the Country and the Government had already earmarked 100 places for funding, the decision was made to focus on one or two good bids for Gloucestershire's submission.

Following the completion of an assessment process, two projects would form part of Gloucestershire's Community Renewal Fund Submission, as detailed in the report papers attached to the agenda.

In response to a query as to whether GCC could engage with the districts on the projects, it was explained that the projects were county-wide and that the involvement of all partners would be key.

An update on the Community Renewal Fund bid would be provided at the next Committee meeting.

**292. PRESENTATION OF THE VISIT GLOUCESTERSHIRE TOURISM RECOVERY STRATEGY AND VISITOR ECONOMY ACTIVITY PLAN**

Steve Gardner-Collins, Director of the Visit Gloucestershire Partnership, gave a presentation to the Committee on the Visit Gloucestershire strategy and action plan.

The Committee was informed that currently a number of organisations promoted tourism within the County, and that there were currently 35 different websites for people to research tourism activities in Gloucestershire, which could be confusing. The Visit Gloucestershire Partnership aimed to help grow Gloucestershire's offer for tourists, addressing how the County is sold to them at the beginning through to the experience they have when visiting.

It was explained that the strategy was aimed at encouraging visitors to stay longer in the County, across all areas of the Gloucestershire, and was aligned to the Gloucestershire 2050 agenda. Members noted that five outcomes had been identified as part of the strategy.

Over the next few months, consideration would be given as to how the strategy would be delivered, including identifying any funding available for the project.

One member queried whether it was realistic to expect visitors to stay in Gloucestershire longer than 1 or 2 nights. In response, it was explained that it was about creating opportunities for people to stay longer, such as creating itineraries, or promoting different types of holidays, such as activity holidays or wellbeing holidays, and bringing all that information together in one place.

In response to a query about job vacancies in hospitality not being filled, it was explained that there needed to be a change as to how jobs in this sector were viewed, and that young people needed to be encouraged that they could have a successful career in hospitality.

One member asked whether Visit Gloucestershire had enough funding and whether its relationships with the district councils were strong. It was understood that Visit Gloucestershire was working sensitively in partnership with these organisations as they were responsible for tourism within their areas, and it was also noted that if tourism strategies were developed on a county-wide basis, more funding opportunities would be available.

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

Clarification was sought regarding another website with the address visit Gloucestershire. It was noted that this was run by an individual and that the Visit Gloucestershire Partnership visitor website was not yet consumer facing.

It was suggested that the strong existing Cotswold tourism brand could be capitalised on as part of the strategy. In response, it was advised that as this branding was an asset, they needed to be careful not to overuse it and therefore devalue it.

Clarification was also sought on the difference between a Strategic Management Organisation and a Destination Management Organisation.

### **293. GFIRST LEP UPDATE**

Dev Chakraborty, Deputy Chief Executive of GFirst LEP, presented the Committee with an update on the work of the GFirst LEP.

Members were updated on progress with the five projects funded by the LEP's successful bid to the Government's Getting Building Fund. These projects would create over 800 new jobs, and of these projects, the Gloucestershire Applied Digital Skills Centre in Cirencester and the Construction Education Centre at Cinderford had started being built.

The Committee, as informed earlier on in the meeting, was reminded that ZeroAvia was to open a major facility at Cotswold Airport as its base to develop a hydrogen-electric powered aircraft.

The County Section 151 officers were thanked for supporting the pooling together of their Additional Restrictions Grant allocations in order to offer grants to SMEs to help them trade online. The promotional campaign for this would begin in July.

Finally, members were advised that recruitment was currently underway for the LEP Board as 5 private sector board members had reached the end of their terms.

### **294. BUSINESS RATE POOL**

Andrew Cummings, Strategic Director of Resources, Stroud District Council, provided the Committee with an update on the Gloucestershire Business Rate Pool.

Members were informed that 5 out of the 6 district councils had finalised their accounts for the year and that an estimated £800k would be transferred to the SEDF for 2020/21.

The Pool would be continuing into 2021/22, and several major risk factors had been removed, including the challenge by NHS foundation trusts seeking charitable

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

status. Additionally, it was clarified that legislation had been passed to prohibit Covid 'Material Change in Circumstances', which otherwise would have meant reductions in the levels of business rates collected and therefore impacted on the pool position.

Steve Mawson, S151 Officer at Gloucestershire County Council, expressed the view that the business rates pool model was not sustainable, and that it was unlikely the pool would stay long term. The Committee would be advised as soon as any announcements on changes to the system were made.

Mike Dawson presented the request for SEDF funding to support transport modelling costs associated with local plan development and provide additional strategic planning resource at Gloucestershire County Council to support the development of all local plans and the delivery of major county growth projects.

It was explained that the transport modelling costs to the local planning authority were significant and a number of authorities had difficulties meeting these costs, which could impact on plans being delayed. It was also proposed that some of the funding be used by GCC to fund the employment of two planning officers on a fixed term basis.

A provision had been included whereby any money not spent would be given back to the SEDF, and should any further funding be required, a further request would need to be made for consideration by this Committee. It was clarified that the funding would be taken from the SEDF in one lump sum, and would be held by the individual planning authorities and by Tewkesbury for the JCS authorities.

There was a query as to how this project would be funded if there were no pooling arrangements to call upon. In response it was understood that authorities would have to fund themselves, however this could result in delays to the planning process. It was also noted that the LEP match funding would remain in place this year and next year, although nationally there was to be a review of LEPS, at which point this funding may need to be reviewed.

In response to a query, it was recognised that there were different transport models for different areas of the County which needed to be integrated.

In response to a further query, it was clarified that costs had been worked out by GCC and the local planning authorities. Additionally, it was understood that currently, a consultant was paid to build and operate the transport models which was expensive, and a more financially sustainable option may need to be considered going forward.

On being put to a vote, it was

**RESOLVED to**

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

Approve the proposals as set out in section four of the report, and that the associated costs are met from the Strategic Economic Development Fund.

**295. FORWARD (WORK) PLAN**

Requests were made to consider the Employment and Skills Strategy, the outcome of the Government's review of LEPs, and feedback on the Levelling Up bids at the next Committee meeting in September.

**296. FUTURE MEETINGS**

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

**CHAIRPERSON**

Meeting concluded at 12.55 pm