

GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee held on Wednesday 17 November 2021 commencing at 10.00 am at the Gloucester City Council Chamber.

PRESENT MEMBERSHIP:

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

Substitutes:

Apologies: Cllr Rob Bird

Officers in attendance:

Mike Dawson (TBC)	Jon McGinty (Glos City)
Sandra Ford (TBC)	Peter Williams (FODDC)
Colin Chick (GCC)	Pete Carr (GFirst LEP)
Simon Excell (GCC)	Paul James (CDC)
Angela Presdee (GCC)	James Brain (CDC)
Gillian Parkinson (GCC)	Gareth Edmundson (CBC)
Katherine Martin (GCC)	Andrew Cummings (SDC)
Laura Powick (GCC)	Kathy O'Leary (SDC)

308. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Rob Bird (Tewkesbury Borough Council).

309. MINUTES

Subject to amending the following, the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record:

- Cllr Victoria Atherstone to be removed from the list of attendees to be replaced by Cllr Catherine Braun; and
- In the second paragraph under the Forward (Work) Plan item, the sentence to be changed to: 'An SEDF funding request to investigate options to better connect Kemble Train Station with Cirencester Town Centre would also be received at the next meeting.'

Mike Dawson, Chair of the GEGJC Senior Officer Group (SOG) provided an update on GEGJC governance review discussions by Leadership Gloucestershire. It was

understood that Leadership Gloucestershire had agreed to await the publication of the devolution white paper by Government, which was expected to be published by the end of 2021, before discussing and making a decision on the future of the GEGJC at its next meeting in January 2022.

The Committee would receive an update on the outcome of these discussions at an additional GEGJC meeting which was being organised for January 2022.

310. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

311. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Matt Babbage, Chair of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (GEGSC), provided the Committee with an update on the activities of the GEGSC.

Members noted that at its meeting in September, the GEGSC had discussed the future of the high street; in October a meeting had been held jointly with the Environment Scrutiny Committee at Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) to consider GCC's Local Transport Plan Review; and at its meeting this afternoon, the GEGSC would be looking into modern methods of construction.

A report detailing the GEGSC's consideration of the future of the high street would be presented to the GEGJC in due course.

312. EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

Pete Carr, Director of Employment and Skills, GFirst LEP, provided the Committee with an update on the skills landscape and emerging policy changes; the Gloucestershire Skills Strategy; the upskilling and employment of local people in Gloucestershire; and on the shortage of delivery/HGV drivers in the County.

Firstly, an overview of the skills landscape and policy changes was presented. Members were advised that the DfE Skills for Jobs White Paper placed employers at the heart of the skills system. Additionally, Gloucestershire had been included as one of the pilot areas for the Local Skills Improvement Plan following a successful bid by Business West, with a focus on health and social care, and advanced engineering and manufacturing. The LEP would be working closely with Business West to learn lessons from this pilot.

Members noted that Education Recovery Funding was still a priority to support the provision of education to those that had missed out as a result of the pandemic. Members also noted the Lifetime Skills Guarantee which offered free qualifications to adults that had not already achieved a Level 3 qualification, as well as the Multiply scheme which aimed to improve numeracy in adults.

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

In an update on green skills, the Committee was advised that training providers were frustrated over a lack of translation for related courses and qualifications. Regarding digital skills, GFirst LEP was working with two consortia of training providers and digital skills boot camps were now available in the County.

Secondly, the Committee was informed of efforts to upskill and employ people locally. In particular, the Skills Portal provided information in one place on careers and local training providers. The Careers Hub was also working with local schools and alternative provision settings to help improve their careers provision. It was also noted that the Careers Coach tool was getting good traction as it was linked to live job vacancies in Gloucestershire, and work was continuing to progress the joint GCC and GFirst LEP Employment and Skills Hub.

Thirdly, members were updated on the shortage of HGV drivers in the County. It was understood that the testing centre in Gloucester had closed, with the nearest testing centres being in Swindon and Bristol, and that a number of training providers had pulled out of the market in the County as their costs were not viable. The LEP was working with existing training providers to bid for additional contracts, and the lack of a testing centre in the County had been flagged with the DVLA.

Finally, members were updated on the Gloucestershire Skills Strategy. Members were advised that a working draft of the strategy and action plan would be reviewed by members of the Gloucestershire Skills Advisory Panel (GSAP) in December for feedback before further editing and its final publication at the end of January 2022.

It was requested that the Gloucestershire Skills Strategy be added to the agenda for the additional GEGJC meeting in January for the Committee's consideration.

Following a further request, a paper detailing additional data relating to the effectiveness of the careers support on offer would be provided to the Committee.

One member queried whether the introduction of mandatory Covid-19 vaccinations for front-line health and social care workers would be an issue for the sector? In response it was noted that this could be an issue.

Another member asked whether the Committee could look into why South Gloucestershire and Stroud College had been unsuccessful in their bid for a Green Skills Centre, as well as into how the County could support such bids going forward. It was suggested that a separate offline meeting be arranged to discuss this issue.

There was a further query as to what could be done to promote and support students, employers and colleges with T Levels in the County. It was agreed that this issue would also be picked up offline.

313. REVIEW OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLANS

Colin Chick, Executive Director for Economy, Environment and Infrastructure, GCC, provided the Committee with an update on GCC's Covid-19 Economic Recovery Plan.

The Committee was informed that there had been three successful bids under the Levelling Up Fund in Gloucestershire which included investment for Gloucester City Centre; the Gloucester Docks Sustainable Travel Improvements; and levelling up the Future of the Forest. It was also understood that Gloucestershire had been shortlisted as one of five sites within the STEP Fusion project at Berkeley and Oldbury.

An update was provided on the role of libraries as outreach areas for the Employment and Skills Hub and in supporting local businesses and education. The Gloucester Innovation Lab was now up and running with a lab technician in place.

Members were informed that the Employment and Skills Hub had supported 24 people in its first month of opening, and 12 people in the first week of November. The Hub was located in the same building as adult education which provided links to training opportunities. The next stage was to explore the development of a coordinator role to work with the Hub on bringing skills and employment opportunities to local people.

Members were advised that social value was being embedded as part of the economic recovery process at GCC, and two workshops had been held in November with officers to gain an understanding of the ambitions and outcomes of social value as well as the starting point for the Council.

Finally members were updated on the Build Back Better Market Towns Fund, noting that 45 bids for funding were supported which resulted in £385,386 of the £500,000 allocated. A second round of bids to allow more projects to apply for the remaining funding would be launched by the end of 2021.

District council representatives were invited to provide the Committee with an update on the work being carried out in their areas to promote and support economic recovery.

Forest of Dean District Council

- Free training sessions had been provided on health and safety, food hygiene and Covid-19 safety to ensure local businesses were resilient throughout winter.
- A new directory had been established for remote workers detailing facilities that could be used for people to work away from home.
- A promotional Christmas campaign was being developed with So Glos.
- The Council had been successful with their Levelling Up Bid which would include developing a satellite campus site in partnership with Hartpury College at Berry Hill.
- The Council had been successfully providing start up grants for small businesses.

Cotswold District Council

- The ZeroAvia project was generating media attention and attracting other companies to the local area.

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- Cirencester College had been successful in receiving funding from the T-Level Capital Fund, and the new Applied Digital Skills Centre would open early in the new year.
- An analysis of footfall in local town centres revealed that the majority were bouncing back above the national average.
- The Council was working with town centres on various projects funded through the Welcome Back Fund and on promoting Christmas activities.
- Farm 491, based at the Royal Agricultural University, was working to support agri-tech and agri-food entrepreneurs to develop successful businesses.

Gloucester City Council

- The Economic Recovery Task Force had been focusing on the city centre to develop jobs and support small businesses.
- £20m of Levelling Up Funding had been received to help fund the redevelopment of the city centre.
- There had been a move to more sustainable placements as part of the housing recovery.
- A climate change manager had been appointed at the Council.
- There had been a number of successful events in Gloucester despite the impact of Covid this year, such as Gloucester Goes Retro.

Stroud District Council

- A new council plan had been adopted last month focusing on supporting a thriving economy, communities and housing and climate change priorities.
- The Council was continuing to work with town councils and small businesses by providing free training and support for safe work places over winter.
- A tourism officer post was being developed to support market towns.
- A consultation with businesses and stakeholders had been completed as part of work to develop a 10 year economic development strategy.
- There had been lots of interest by potential developers for the Brimscombe Port regeneration project.
- A social value portal had been developed to demonstrate what social value had been added by key projects.
- Council offices would now be heated using the river next door rather than gas, in order to reduce carbon emissions.
- The Council had also been successful in its bid to the Restoring Your Railway Fund to develop a new railway station at Stonehouse.

Cheltenham Borough Council

- The Economic Recovery Task Force had been working on a number of activities with a number of sub-groups over the past 18 months, and had been extended but with removal of the word 'recovery' to focus on economic regeneration.
- Work to address the challenges facing the high street was on going.
- The skills group had been working with key stakeholders and the DWP on data, and had launched an apprenticeship survey focused on construction and green skills.
- The hospitality group had been working on 4 main work streams including how hospitality could engage with the sustainability agenda.

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- The Cheltenham Christmas market and ice rink would be opening tomorrow.

Tewkesbury Borough Council

- The recovery plan which had been established earlier this year had been reviewed by scrutiny, and would be rolled into the Council Plan refresh next year.
- Work continued through the Growth Hub to support local businesses.
- The Tewkesbury High Street Heritage Action Zone had been launched to bring in visitors and shoppers.
- Tewkesbury remained in the top 5 local authority areas in the UK for growth.
- The Council was focusing on continuing its growth programme such as with the delivery of major schemes including Tewkesbury Garden Town and major infrastructure projects alongside GCC.

GFirst LEP

- Weekly updates were being provided to BEIS on the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit on sectors in the County.
- 117 grants were given out as part of the Covid Digital Recovery Grant scheme.
- Conversations on a second scheme for sustainability grants had been paused until the new year in light of increasing Covid cases.
- A Christmas advert had been produced as part of the Think Gloucestershire campaign to promote supporting local businesses and shopping and procuring locally.

Katherine Martin, Data and Analysis Manager, GCC, provided the Committee with an update on the Economic Dashboard. The Economic Dashboard was attached to the agenda papers for this meeting.

There was a query as to whether the data showed if those who had been on furlough had been absorbed back into employment?

In response, it was understood that this impact could not yet be seen in the figures. It was therefore requested that once this data reflecting the end of furlough was available that it be included in the Economic Dashboard.

314. FOREST OF DEAN BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Peter Williams, Head of Paid Service, Forest of Dean District Council (FODDC), presented the Committee with an update on proposals for a Forest of Dean Biosphere Reserve.

Members were shown a news video clip as context on the proposals.

It was explained that the Forest Economic Partnership was leading on an exercise, funded by Arts Council England and the FODDC, to gauge public opinion on a Forest of Dean Biosphere Reserve.

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

There had so far been 4.5k views of material providing information on the proposals, and 10 percent of these had translated into responses to the consultation. These figures were expected to increase, and communications colleagues had been asked to promote the information materials in order to encourage a wider audience to participate.

It was noted that the survey results would be analysed in the New Year and if there was demonstrable community support, FODDC would be seeking to move forward with a formal UNESCO designation.

The Committee briefly discussed the benefits and downsides of this designation, including what it could mean for business development in the area. It was understood that should proposals be pursued, further work to assess how businesses would be affected would be undertaken.

315. STRATEGIC PLANNING IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Sandra Ford, Head of Development Services, Tewkesbury Borough Council, presented the annual update on strategic and local plans in Gloucestershire.

It was understood that there had been strong delivery across all districts in the County and the report detailed the key strategic planning projects for Gloucestershire.

Members were advised that work to progress the Gloucestershire Statement of Common Ground was still on going as there were some areas where agreement had not been possible.

It was also noted that further developments on the Planning White Paper were yet to materialise.

Finally, it was noted that a number of changes had been made to the National Planning Policy Framework to improve design across the board and to ensure infrastructure needs were aligned with growth.

316. GFIRST LEP UPDATE

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

In particular, members were updated on progress with the five shovel ready projects in the County that had been funded as a result of the LEP's successful bid for £11.3million from the Government's Getting Building Fund. It was understood that several of these were nearing or had reached completion, and that the LEP was lobbying for a visit from a senior minister in the Spring to visit these projects.

Activities as part of the Inward Investment Project had slowed down as a result of Covid, however the team was starting to work with key stakeholders again as the

big international events would be re-starting in 2022. The project was focused on the four key sectors of Cyber, Agri-Tech, Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing and Renewables, and work to promote the strengths of these sectors in Gloucestershire at the international events was underway.

Members were advised that the LEP was working with GCC to consider launching a Made in Gloucestershire initiative which would enable businesses and traders to advertise to consumers that they supply Gloucestershire sourced products, and that those claims had been thoroughly vetted, checked and certified by Trading Standards Officers. A working group had been set up to consider this, with its first meeting held at the end of September, and the initiative was supported and welcomed by all parties. Next steps included establishing a budget, agreeing a timeline and defining the concept, with the next meeting due to take place at the end of this month.

A request was made for a district council representative with experience of working in the food and drink industry to sit on the working group. It was also understood that the project could require funding and that this would be raised at the next GEGJC SOG meeting.

The Committee was advised that an update on the Government's LEP Review had not yet been received, which was frustrating given the uncertainty of core funding for the LEP and Growth Hubs from April 2022. It was hoped an announcement would be made at the beginning of December.

317. BUSINESS RATE POOL

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

In an update on the anticipated position of the pool and SEDF balance for 2021/22, it was understood that the estimated pool gains were currently expected to be £4.027m, which had reduced slightly from the last estimate, leading to an estimated SEDF allocation of £804k.

Confirmation of last year's gain was still outstanding as audits had taken longer than expected, however this information would be reported back when available.

The spending review in October had provided no clear statement on the future of Business Rates Pooling. More details on this were hoped for in December.

Following a member query, it was suggested that Leadership Gloucestershire consider the options for the Business Rate Pool, should the GEGJC cease to exist.

The Committee also considered a SEDF funding request to enable the investigation of options to better connect Kemble Train Station with Cirencester Town Centre, which was presented to the Committee by James Brain, Forward Planning Manager, Cotswold District Council.

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

Clarification was sought by a member as to how this project was of wider economic benefit to the County and as to whether other transport options in addition to rail were being considered.

In response, it was explained that it was hoped by improving the connection of Kemble Train Station with Cirencester Town Centre it would help reduce the reliance on motor vehicles; help to regenerate the town; improve the night time economy and the vibrancy of the district; provide a better connection to the digital skills centre in Cirencester; and improve transport links with London. It was also confirmed that a number of options to improve the connection would be considered.

It was also clarified that GCC, as the transport and highway authority, had been a critical friend to the bid, and following some revisions, was now happy to support the bid. Additionally the funding should not be used to further an ultra light railway study but instead to pursue a multi-modal study.

On being put to a vote, it was

RESOLVED to

Approve a £65,000 one-off revenue investment to deliver a feasibility study of transport options between Cirencester and Kemble which will improve links between the main railway line and town and area of Cirencester.

318. FORWARD (WORK) PLAN

A request was made for an update on the Gloucestershire Skills Strategy to be included on the agenda for the additional meeting in January.

319. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the meeting dates for 2022.

CHAIRPERSON

Meeting concluded at 12.10 pm

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