



REPORT TITLE: GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Scrutiny meeting	Joint Meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee and Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee
Chair	Cllr Chloe Turner & Cllr Matt Babbage
Presenting Officer	Ben Watts – Team Manager Economy and Strategic Planning
Item Type	For information
Purpose of Report	<p>To provide an update on the emerging Gloucestershire Economic Strategy.</p> <p>This report is provided as an information item so members of the Environment and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committees can be informed of the progress to date regarding the production of the emerging new strategy, including a summary of the feedback received during the recent engagement process. The report will also outline the next steps in finalising the strategy ahead of seeking formal approval of the final strategy in early 2024.</p>
Recommendations/ Action sought	There are no recommendations sought from this report.
Forthcoming Decisions	<p>At this stage of the strategy production process there is no item on the Forward Plan covering the approval of the final strategy. This is expected to take place in early 2024. Once an appropriate date for approval is identified, the item will be added to the Forward Plan.</p> <p>On the 19 July 2023 Cabinet approved a seven-week public engagement on the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy.</p> <p>https://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=2076</p>
Background Documents	None
Appendices	None
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1. Background

- 1.1 Gloucestershire needs a new county-wide economic strategy to address the existing gap in the county's thematic strategy suite. This gap results from the Government not formally approving the GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) draft Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) in 2020.
- 1.2 Production of the LIS was halted by the COVID-19 Pandemic and, since then, by the changes in Government priorities regarding economic growth. The new Gloucestershire Economic Strategy will be a joint LEP / GCC strategy that builds on the priorities set out in the draft LIS and the 2018 Strategic Economic Plan.
- 1.3 It will provide a strategic overview of the county's economy and develop a set of county-wide priorities and delivery actions. It will provide a clear narrative through both a short-term lens, considering the priorities of the next 5-years, and a long-term perspective by including an updated 2050 vision for the county.
- 1.4 Once the strategy is completed it will include an action plan that will clearly articulate delivery priorities of the strategy and thereby enable a method to monitor progress of implementing it. The aim is to have the strategy substantially completed by December 2023 and seek formal adoption in early 2024.

2. Project Governance

- 2.1 A robust project governance structure has been implemented to oversee the production of the strategy.
- 2.2 This includes a project Task Group consisting of GCC officers, project consultants and two officers from the district authorities. This group is responsible for the production of the strategy. A Steering Group consisting of senior GCC officers with Senior Responsible Officer responsibility for overseeing the project delivery, the project lead officers from the Task Group and the Director of Strategic Growth from the GFirst LEP. This group is responsible for strategic oversight of the strategy production process.
- 2.3 In addition, throughout the life of the project there will be regular member briefing sessions, updates provided to the GFirst LEP Board, updates at the county Chief Executives group and monthly updates through the county-wide Economic Development Officers group.

3. Engagement

- 3.1 To inform the production of the strategy three distinct stages of stakeholder engagement were undertaken to raise awareness of the strategy production process with the aim to maximise stakeholder engagement and buy-in.
- 3.2 Stage 1 consisted of a series of stakeholder interviews and a comprehensive review of relevant policy documents. This took place between April and June

2023. Approximately 100 stakeholders were interviewed either on an individual basis or as part of a group discussion including officers from all district authorities. The views expressed during this stage of the process informed the emerging strategy themes of the strategy. This included Net zero carbon, Inclusive growth, Skills and employment, Supporting sustainable growth, Business support, Inward Investment and Digital.

- 3.3 Stage 2 consisted of a seven-week public engagement process. An engagement document was specifically created for this purpose with the aim of maximising accessibility and engagement. The document was available digitally from the County Council's website and printed copies could be provided upon request. Stakeholders wishing to provide their views were encouraged to do so using the County Council's online consultation tool.
- 3.4 The public engagement document presented a draft long-term vision for the county which focussed on creating improved employment opportunities within the context of achieving the county's climate change commitments as it transitions to a low carbon economy. It also presented the themes outlined within Stage 1 of the engagement process under two strategic headings 'Place and People'.
- 3.5 To ensure that there was a high-level of awareness of the engagement document, GCC and GFirst officers directly contacted various stakeholders identified during Stage 1 of the process and requested that they use their own stakeholder distribution lists to help publicise the engagement process. The County Council also used a variety of communications methods to target stakeholders including media releases, stakeholder newsletters, social media, and prominent web content.
- 3.6 Stage 3 consisted of five stakeholder workshop events which enabled more detailed discussions on the emerging themes, the expected strategy outcomes and proposed delivery priorities. The workshops were designed to focus on a specific sector of stakeholders. This approach was intended to highlight the importance of partnership working across public, private, and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors to successfully deliver the strategy and sought commitments from each sector to help support the delivery of the strategy.

4. Summary of Feedback from Stages 2 and 3 Engagement Process

- 4.1 Stage 2 of the planned public engagement closed on Friday 15 September 2023. Feedback was provided by 119 individuals and organisations using the County Council's online consultation portal. Additional information has since been provided by several other organisations following the formal engagement period ending including the District Councils. This feedback is currently being reviewed and a summary report will be produced outlining the trend information captured through the process as part of the strategy production process.

4.2 Feedback received from the public engagement process was largely in support of the vision, focus and actions of the strategy. Those who provided written responses mainly commented on four areas:

- **Workforce, education, and training**, including support for businesses to employ students and provide more apprenticeships, to encourage people to remain in the county.
- **Climate change and environmental sustainability**, through supporting businesses to achieve net zero and be more environmentally responsible - including the opportunity to utilise the rural economy to deliver green energy, food security and safeguard biodiversity.
- **Inward investment and business development** to represent businesses post-LEP integration. Feedback highlighted the need for enhanced and ongoing general support for businesses, with the Growth Hubs providing business advisors, coaches, and mentors.
- **Infrastructure and public services** to provide reliable and affordable bus networks. Infrastructure developments could utilise more eco-friendly and locally sourced materials.

4.3 In terms of the high-level feedback received by groups: Businesses wanted more clarity over LEP integration and consideration of other employment sectors such as logistics, health and tourism. The public sector wanted more ambition within the document with greater use of data to provide a more robust narrative. They also wanted more information on the expected partnership approach within the strategy. The VCSE sector wanted closer links to health and wellbeing, stronger links to an inclusive economy, as well as more focus on the environment. Figure 1 provides a summary of the key information considered missing from the engagement document.

Figure 1 – High-level summary of feedback received through the Stage 2 public engagement process on the emerging Economic Strategy



- 4.4 The Stage 3 workshops were undertaken between the 27 September and 3 October 2023. Five events took place. Three were in person and two online. In total, over 100 people attended the events. The workshops reviewed the emerging county economic strategy with each audience (public, private and VCSE) encouraged to discuss their role in supporting its delivery.
- 4.5 Each of the three audiences suggested the strategy could be more ambitious and be 'more Gloucestershire'. The strategy presents the opportunity to define the county's USP and consider a county-wide approach to culture and placemaking, through collaborating with districts and partners. The feedback received through the workshops highlighted how this approach could attract inward investment and retain young people, talent and skills.
- 4.6 A priority throughout the workshops was collaboration and coordination between businesses, training/education providers, the public sector and VCSE to deliver the economic strategy. This includes the delivery of a county-wide skills and employment offer as well as business support.
- 4.7 Several attendees also suggested the strategy should include green issues, including net zero, to a greater extent throughout the themes. There were similar discussions around health and wellbeing, and cyber and digital.
- 4.8 There were also recurring discussions points within each of the emerging strategy themes:
- There was extensive discussion across all workshops around **sustainable growth**, advocating for an agreement across all local planning authorities, to futureproof the county through long-term planning. Attendees believed this would deliver greater affordable housing options. Discussions around this theme also highlighted the need for improving the access and availability of transport, particularly bus routes within the county, to alleviate pressures of rural living, social isolation, and access to services/employment.
 - Attendees argued that the strategy must outline the type of **inward investment** Gloucestershire wishes to attract. A sector-based approach to inward investment, whilst allowing all sectors the opportunity to engage with the offer, was also supported in the workshops.
 - **Skills and employment** focused on upskilling, reskilling, and promoting transferable skills to ensure the Gloucestershire workforce is resilient and agile, whilst supporting economically inactive people into work. There was also a focus on retaining skills and talent, especially of vocational skills and young people. This could be achieved through clear pathways from training into employment, locally relevant work experience and an effective careers advice service.
 - The **supporting business** theme considered the importance of a clear and comprehensive integrated LEP business support offer, which supports businesses throughout their life course. The integrated offer should also take an additional role of coordinating and signposting to wider support.

4.9 Analysis of the feedback received through Stages 2 and 3 of the process is still ongoing and will further inform the content of the emerging strategy.

5. Emerging strategy propositions

5.1 The engagement process has been very successful in helping to refine the key themes the Economic Strategy should focus on. Within the Stage 2 Public Engagement Document officers tried to create a narrative around two distinct areas 'Place and People'. This approach was not supported and will be removed from the final strategy. In addition, it is recognised that the commitments to achieving Carbon Net Zero targets must have a greater prominence throughout each of the strategy themes. As more clarity over the integration of the LEP into the County Council emerges, this will also be reflected in the final strategy.

5.2 At the time of writing this report it is proposed that the strategy is focussed on four key propositions intended to support the long-term vision for the county which focusses on creating improved employment opportunities within the context of achieving the county's climate change commitments. These include:

- **Sustainable Growth** which supports a strategic approach to planning and delivery of new housing and employment sites to ensure that new growth proposals are sufficient enough in scale to support carbon net-zero targets while ensuring that all supporting infrastructure is financially viable, so it is delivered in the right place and at the right time.
- **Inward Investment** which builds on supporting Gloucestershire's reputation as a welcoming and supportive environment for businesses from the UK and abroad to invest, fostering innovation, creating jobs and promoting prosperity across the county.
- **Skills and Employment** which seeks to ensure that every resident has the opportunity to grow their skills and make the most of job opportunities in a diverse and flourishing economy.
- **Business Support** which provides an offer to enable businesses of all sizes and types to innovate, create jobs, and positively contribute to the transition to a low carbon economy.

6. Next Steps

6.1 A first draft of the Economic Strategy will be shared with peers for review during November 2023 with the aim of producing a final draft by the end of December 2023. It will then be considered for approval by the LEP Board and the County Council early in 2024.

6.2 The Economic Strategy will consist of three components:

- An Executive Summary document of approximately 16 pages.
- A more detailed Strategy document which considers the four propositions in more detail and includes the strategy Action Plan.
- A comprehensive update of the county's Economic Evidence base.