



STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MEMBER REPORT

NAME OF ORGANISATION/BODY	Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee
DATE OF LAST MEETING ATTENDED	16 March 2022

BRIEF REPORT:

1. Gloucestershire Economic Growth Committee continuation

With the exception of Gloucester City Council, each council has considered the continuation of the committee and signed the agreement to continue for a further year; Gloucester City Council has sent a letter of commitment ahead of its report and recommendation to Council next week.

2. Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool Update and SEDF bids

Andrew Cummings reported that the current forecast was for a slight increase in pool gain to £4.17m, with £833,000 provisionally to be added to the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) for the next financial year. At present there is £259,000 of unallocated funding in the SEDF. It is usual to wait until there is funding in the SEDF pot before allocating it, as background to the two bids that GEGJC went on to consider:

3. 'Made in Gloucestershire' bid from the LEP

The LEP bid for £150,000 of SEDF funding over 2 years was supported by the committee on a majority vote after some discussion. The funding will facilitate the setting up of a website to promote 'Made in Gloucestershire' goods nationally and internationally, concentrating first on food and drink products but with plans to expand to other goods eg wind turbines. The plan is to start this work around Easter, recruit businesses and launch the brand in the Autumn possibly to coincide with Gloucestershire Day / Tour of Britain men's race in September (women's race in June might be too soon). After 2 years the plan would be to turn this into a membership scheme with businesses being charged £100-200 each to use the branding. This may be revised following comments about this representing a significant cost to many small firms. The LEP was asked to explore connections / duplication with 'Cotswold Taste' and other tourist brandings and to prepare a business plan.

4. Central Gloucestershire Mass Transit bid from GCC

A bid for £850,000 of SEDF funding from GCC for a further two stages of feasibility work on a mass transit scheme to deliver public transport to the most populated areas of the county, with connectivity to outlying areas, was rejected on a majority vote. There was some support for the project itself, although there were comments that it would not do anything to improve rural connectivity and questions about whether this



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scheme was as relevant as improving broadband in a post-pandemic world. The real issue was the source of funding, as many committee members thought that the use of SEDF funding for yet another transport feasibility project was inappropriate (there had not yet been any reporting on the £410k multi-modal transport feasibility study previously funded, within the context of which this project was supposed to sit) and that GCC should look for other funding sources including its own budget, but the bigger issue was that there was not enough in the SEDF pot at present to fund it. This meant that it would need to be underwritten by the £1.59m of SEDF funding remaining in the ring-fenced City Region Board pot, which led to comments that if the project was to be approved, it could be funded from there. Regardless, there would be very little remaining in the SEDF for any further projects that might better support economic recovery than a mass transit scheme. GCC indicated that it would rethink the request and bring it back to the May meeting.

5. Fastershire Update

Simon Excell of GCC updated the committee on progress with Fastershire, the joint project with Herefordshire to deliver superfast broadband in the two counties. This has been very successful in the last 10 years with 96.5% of properties in Gloucestershire now having access to superfast broadband (30Mbps). The remaining 3.5% of premises are difficult, with a community grant scheme assisting some remaining delivery in 11 areas. National aspirations set out in Project Gigabit, to be delivered by centralised BDUK, are for gigabit connectivity (1000Mbps).

The committee acknowledged that the development of digital skills might be an appropriate recipient of future SEDF support.

6. Cyber Project update

Tim Atkins of Cheltenham BC updated the committee on progress with the plans for the National Cyber Innovation Centre, the feasibility studies for which had been an earlier recipient of SEDF funding.

7. Strategic Planning in Gloucestershire

Mike Dawson advised the committee that the Statement of Common Ground would be coming to councils for adoption soon.

8. Economic Dashboard

Kate Martin of GCC gave an update on GCC's Covid-19 Recovery Dashboard. Headlines included:



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- There is a slow reduction in the number of Universal Credit claimants following a peak during the pandemic when UK claimants increased from 6% (February 2020) to 12% of the adult working population
- The proportion of UC claimants in employment peaked 3 months earlier in the pandemic than those UC claimants not in employment
- At December 2021, 70% of UC claimants had been claiming for over a year
- The geographical distribution of UC claimants had changed from urban centric pre-pandemic to more widely distributed in January 2022
- The number of employees on payrolls has recovered in all districts apart from Gloucester City, there has been higher growth in Tewkesbury Borough and Stroud District
- There are more jobs in all districts compared to pre-pandemic
- There has been a spike in company dissolutions coming out of the pandemic.

9. GFirst LEP Update

Dev Chakraborty gave an update, the highlights of which were:

1. The Levelling Up White Paper has been published but there is much detail missing, including the function, form and budget for LEPs in the future.
2. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund – the EU funding replacement – was mentioned in the White Paper but there is no indication of how much districts will receive, and the LEP will be discussing what it would like districts to help fund from it as part of the regular 121s with Leaders and CEs of each council.
3. There have been many overseas investment enquiries, particularly from the manufacturing, aerospace and food, drink and agritech sectors.

Jon McGinty, MD of Gloucester City, who is also on the DCN Board advised that the UKSPF may well be a tapered increase over the 3 year period of funding. The guidance issued so far indicates that of the 3 pillars districts can fund, the third pillar, skills, cannot be invested in until Year 3 which may leave a gap in skills funding.

FUTURE MEETINGS	19 May 2022 7 September 2022 16 November 2022
REPORT SUBMITTED BY	Cllr Doina Cornell, Leader Kathy O'Leary, Chief Executive
DATE	24 March 2022