

Economic Growth Overview and Scrutiny Committee (16 March)

Briefing from Councillor Clucas

The Scrutiny Committee met following the meeting of the Leadership Committee for the County. Scrutiny Committee raised a number of issues which may be summarised as:

Devolution and Coxit - Budget Impact particularly on Business Rates and Taxes Mobile phone and broadband coverage in the County

Growth Deal - This is likely to be more competitive in future. The policy detail would be after the Budget, but would include Housing, Skills Funding and Major Transport Projects. The Growth Hub could be in Cheltenham, but several areas needed to be examined first. A mapping project is under way.

Skills - A presentation on Skills Policy was given. There is a reshaping of provision. There will be devolution of funding from BIS in the long term. Costs of training in professional skills were likely to be funded in the same way as university degrees. Quantum funding was likely to be some £10-15m for the County. Nationally LAs have been given £600m for apprenticeship. It was noted that liaising with districts in the county has not been thought through yet.

Infrastructure Investment Plan - A general update was given. For Cheltenham, issues revolved around GCHQ, public realm development and employment land.

The LGA overview study was outlined by David Marlow and was an excellent piece of work, that compared the productivity of County with similar areas in Europe. It presented a challenge for the County as government was focussed on Cities, Metropolitan areas and Leadership through elected Mayors.

At Scrutiny, questions were asked about the impact of Coxit on the rest of the County, economic growth and future funding. Changed boundaries would have a significant impact on the rest of the County. The LEP is in discussion with other LEPs about the future, given devolution. I asked for a briefing note on the potential effect that Coxit would have.

A report was requested from the County officials on the budget changes to business rates and how the new system might affect the County. I was concerned that the changes, given the loss of direct government support would mean greater cuts in services and in our ability to promote growth. The request was agreed.

I also asked for the skills audit that was being done by the LEP include high level skills deficit, such as medical skills. Research on why the County found it difficult to attract practitioners could be given to HOSC, so that CCG could look at possible solutions,

Mobile network meeting was not going ahead as there was no one from a company to attend. It was hoped that it would take place in June.