

# **GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC STRATEGY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 20 September 2024 commencing at 10.00 am at the Committee Room - Shire Hall, Gloucester.**

## **PRESENT**

Cllr Matt Babbage (Chair)	Cllr Chris McFarling
Cllr Paul Baker	Cllr Ben Orme
Cllr John Bloxsom	Cllr Terry Pullen
Cllr Matt Dimond-Brown	Cllr Trevor Roach
Cllr Bernard Fisher	Cllr Chloe Turner
Cllr Angus Jenkinson	Cllr Robert Vines

**Apologies:** Cllr Vernon Smith

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION**

3.1 The Chair welcomed members to the first Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee (GESSC). He reminded the committee that they were scrutinising the newly established City Region Board, and the work included in Gloucestershire County Council's Economic Strategy.

## **4. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS**

4.1 The Chair invited Rob Ayliffe, Gloucestershire County Council (GCC)'s Director of Policy, Performance and Governance/Monitoring Officer, to confirm the committee's governance arrangements and terms of reference.

4.2 The Officer emphasised that whilst GESSC was a Gloucestershire County Council scrutiny committee, it also included a member from each of Gloucestershire's six district councils and encouraged partnership working.

4.3 The call-in procedure for GESSC would be referred to each individual council's call-in procedure. However, if there was more than one call-in, there would be a discussion on the next steps.

4.4 A Member raised that GCC's Economic Strategy was not listed in the GESSC Terms of Reference as an item that could be scrutinised. The Officer confirmed that the Economic Strategy was included in the committee's remit, but he would review the terms of reference to make sure this was clear.

### **Action – Rob Ayliffe**

4.5A Member queried about whether it was a conflict of interest that one of the GCC members was also a Cabinet Member at the Forest of Dean District Council. Officers agreed to take this away and would report back.

4.6 Responding to a Member's question, the Officer confirmed that GESSC could only scrutinise the activity and decisions made in the joint Economic Strategy and the City Region Board. Neither the City Region Board nor GESSC could scrutinise decisions made by any of the seven individual councils.

4.7 It was clarified that any items discussed at the City Region Board would be able to be scrutinised by GESSC.

## **5. UPDATE FROM THE CITY REGION BOARD CHAIR**

5.1 Cllr David Gray, GCC Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Planning and Chair of the City Region Board was invited to give an update on the City Region Board's first two meetings. He was supported by David Owen, GCC Director of Economy and Environment, and Ben Watts, GCC Team Manager for Economy and Spatial Planning. He explained that the City Region Board was made up of a member from each of Gloucestershire's seven council's Executives and their Directors. The Board was created to provide a more streamlined governance structure, to reduce duplication and to provide a platform where potential devolution deals could be considered. The Board was also responsible for discharging the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF).

5.2 It was explained that in September's City Region Board meeting, the Board had agreed to endorse the expression of interest in a devolution deal from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG). They had also agreed to note the GCC Economic Strategy and approved its use to inform the priorities of the City Region Board.

5.3 A Member questioned whether the target to achieve an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 still held, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the target was still in place.

5.4 Answering a Member's question, the City Region Board Chair emphasised that the term 'city region' was used in central government to identify areas larger than individual cities or towns. Whilst there had been no specific legislation for the use of the term, there had been a stream of funding announcements over the last decade where identified city regions benefitted over and above other parts of the country. Gloucestershire's largest urban areas were in the geographic centre of the county with important market towns in the outer area of the county, therefore 'city region' fitted well with the landscape of Gloucestershire.

5.5 Responding to a question about how SEDF bids were decided, it was explained that the City Region Board's Senior Officer Group would receive the SEDF bids, and they would decide which bids to bring to the City Region Board. The City Region Board would decide which bids they agreed to fund.

5.6 There was a suggestion that it might be more beneficial for GESSC to have quarterly meetings rather than the six annual meetings. This was agreed by some members, but one member voiced that he did not agree with the reduction in meetings. It was decided that the meeting schedule would be agreed as the work plan became more populated.

**Action – Democratic Services to review the meeting schedule and make changes as necessary**

5.7A Member requested if a chart could be put together to explain how the City Region Board and GESSC related to each other and other committees.

**Action – Officers/Democratic Services**

5.8A Member requested that the City Region Board work plan was shared with GESSC.

**Action – Democratic Services**

5.9A Member raised a recommendation for the City Region Board to review GCC's Economic Strategy to identify key priorities. It was explained that the Economic Strategy had just been discussed by the City Region Board and would need time to be actioned before it could be reviewed. Furthermore, the officers were waiting for more information about what would be required in the Local Growth Plan which could supersede GCC's countywide economic strategy. The recommendation was not agreed.

5.10 It was clarified that the City Region Board was the executive authority for decisions and actions relating to joint economic development in Gloucestershire. GESSC would only be able to scrutinise actions and decisions that had already been made by the City Region Board.

## **6. GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC EVIDENCE BASE**

6.1 The Chair invited Katherine Martin, GCC Data and Insights Manager for Communities and Place, to give an overview of the Economic Evidence Base.

6.2 The presentation gave members an insight into Gloucestershire's data and had been collated from a much more extensive Economic Strategy Evidence Base document. The presentation included information about:

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- Population
  - Employment and Skills
  - Business and Enterprise
  - Personal wellbeing
  - Productivity
- 6.3 Responding to a member's question about 'Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing' being a declining sector, it was explained that Gloucestershire employed more people than the national average in these sectors. However, projections suggested that there would be a decline in employment in these sectors in the future. Although it was projected that there would be an increase in economic output due to a greater use of technology.
- 6.4 When asked about Gloucestershire's imports, the Officer confirmed that they did not have the data to be able to properly analyse imports.
- 6.5 Responding to a question about the cause of net internal migration, the Officer stated that the data did not explain people's motivation for moving to Gloucestershire but anecdotally from surveys, it was believed Gloucestershire's residents were seen as having a high quality of life.
- 6.6 Answering a question about business deaths, the Officer confirmed that the data team were undertaking a deeper analysis of this to find out whether it was just a temporary reduction or whether more recent data continued the trend.
- 6.7 The Officer explained that they were unsure why the Forest of Dean's anxiety level was higher than the other districts. The Officer explained that she was going to bring outputs from the school age children's wellbeing survey to the City Region Board, so she would include this in GESSC's next data presentation.

#### **Action – Katherine Martin**

- 6.8 Responding to a Member's question, the Officer confirmed that the Economic Evidence Base did not include carbon emissions statistics as the data was not robust enough to draw insightful information from. However, she explained that the team were looking at other ways to include this data including whether they could buy additional data.
- 6.9 A Member questioned how the City Region Board were using the Economic Evidence Database, it was explained that the City Region Board had not set firm targets for the data, but the Chair confirmed that he would take this away.

#### **Action – Cllr David Gray/ David Owen**

- 6.10 Responding about the well-being data's sample size, it was stated that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) carried out the survey and therefore they set the sample size at 1800 people across the county. The Officer emphasised that GCC were constantly asking ONS to expand their sample size.
- 6.11 A Member asked whether the county was on track to meet the target to reduce 80% of carbon emissions by 2030. The Officer explained that this wasn't in the remit of her team but that they worked closely with the Climate Change Officer who was responsible for tracking this data. It was clarified that Climate Leadership Gloucestershire would be a better committee to direct the question to.
- 6.12 Responding to a Member's question, it was explained that the data team were seeing a change in the nature of the education sector due to the increase in apprenticeships and levels of qualifications.

## **7. GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY OVERVIEW**

- 7.1 The Chair invited Ben Watts to give an update on GCC's Economic Strategy. It was explained that the Strategy had been adopted by GCC on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2024. The strategic priorities outlined in the document were sustainable growth, inward investment, employment and skills and business innovation and support. The two cross-cutting themes for these strategic priorities were creating a greener Gloucestershire and an inclusive Gloucestershire.
- 7.2 In addition, the Officer explained that emerging Government advice was for the need to produce a Local Growth Plan. It was believed that GCC's Economic Strategy could be used as a basis for the Local Growth Plan. Consultation events with each of the districts would be held over the coming months to outline 3-5 economic priorities. Once identified, a draft set of local priorities would be shared with the districts for review and then the City Region Board for a broader discussion and agreement on countywide priorities. However, it was confirmed that they were still waiting for more government guidance on Local Growth Plans which was expected in the autumn.
- 7.3 Responding to a question about biodiversity, the Officer confirmed that GCC had invested in the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund which guaranteed development based net gain credits for Gloucestershire, so that if the fund was used for any development in Gloucestershire, it would allow for biodiversity net gain.
- 7.4 When questioned about measuring outcomes, the Officers stated that there were a set of metrics in the Economic Strategy's Action Plan to monitor outcomes. However, these metrics would be reviewed to check that they

were the correct metrics to monitor activity. GESSC would receive an annual performance report as well as updates as appropriate.

- 7.5 It was suggested that an aspect of the annual performance report could focus on the importance of agricultural technique as well as agricultural technology in supporting food yields and environmental improvements using the work being undertaken in the Cotswolds as a case study.

**Action – Katherine Martin/ Ben Watts**

- 7.6 Responding to a Member, the Officer explained that he defined a green economy as helping as many businesses as possible reach carbon net zero. Although he felt that the definition of a green economy shouldn't become too rigid as to not discourage businesses.

**8. UPDATE ON DEVOLUTION**

- 8.1 The Chair invited David Owen to give an update on devolution. It was explained that MHCLG had asked all counties to fill out a devolution expression of interest form, this was endorsed at September's City Region Board. It was expected that the devolution options would be released by the government in the next few weeks.
- 8.2 Responding to members' questions, the Officer confirmed that no information had yet been shared on the levels of funding or on the types of devolution available.

**9. WORK PLAN**

- 9.1 A Member agreed to share a list of suggested work plan items with Democratic Services.

**Action – Democratic Services**

- 9.2 A Member suggested items on garden towns, cyber developments and tourism.

**Action – Democratic Services**

- 9.3 A Member requested a governance arrangement update and an item on GCC's Economic Strategy's outcome metrics.

**Action – Democratic Services**

- 9.4 A Member requested an item about the process of stakeholder engagement in the creation of GCC's Economic Strategy.

**Action – Democratic Services**

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

**CHAIR**

Meeting concluded at 13:05pm.

For a full overview of this meeting, please use the following link to access the recording <https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>