

GESSC Report Meeting of 26.3.26

Cllr Angus Jenkinson. 9.4.26

ACTIONS Update from February meeting:

- Supporting the Growth of the Cyber Eco System: We agreed the Sidekick recommendation wording at March's meeting — see below
- To include an update on the Forest of Dean Cabinet Panel in March's meeting
- To send to GESSC the Growth Hub SEDF Bid application
- To discuss with the Chair indicative timings for items at the next GESSC meeting.

All have now happened.

1. A recommendation from the previous meeting (as previously reported) was approved:

That the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee encourage the City Region Board and its partners to maintain a constructive dialogue with Sidekick, and to explore how they might help foster a supportive environment in which the venture can succeed in the county, recognising its potential contribution to the cyber ecosystem and to wider economic growth.

It was agreed that the Districts and County are the partners along with any other relevant bodies.

2. Together Gloucestershire, a project funded from the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) as approved the City Region Board (CRB)

SEDF is a financial resource allocated through a bidding process, to support projects that drive economic growth activity across Gloucestershire (see below). It is a financial resource managed by the Gloucestershire City Region Board, with operational support by GCC and Stroud District Council Officers. The fund is generated through the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool, which allows local authorities to retain a portion of business rates for reinvestment in the local economy.

This was an update to the CRB and us as required following funding.

The project Vision is to create a joined-up solution for large private and public sector organisations in Gloucestershire to source ethical and reliable suppliers. It includes a database for relevant bodies to sign up for procurement and as providers. The project is on course to generate an additional £551 million for the local economy by increasing local spend by 5%. It was launched in June 2025 and initially communicated benefits to diverse stakeholders and managed the launch. The database is now live and has successfully onboarded 162 active businesses with a

further 52 pending. The project has received some external recognition from local authorities and has been acknowledged by the Prime Minister and local MPs.

49 sectors are represented and 970 searches have been conducted in the last three months. Popular categories include street and roadworks, architectural engineering and planning services, heat pumps, electric vehicles and office furniture.

Six active large organisations have joined including Hartpury University, the University of Gloucestershire, WSP and Barnwood. All councils are on the platform, and some town councils, except Tewkesbury, so far. Councils are expected to integrate the platform into their procurement processes.

The project has received £41,350 of SEDF funding and gained £17,000 of membership revenue. The total expenditure is c£21,000.

The project faces challenges including improving awareness with limited resources, inconsistent follow-up with large organisations and difficulties in direct communication.

An interesting complex strategy frame is attached for your reference.

Their 2026 plans and roadmap include further upskilling and education, events and campaigns. They are seeking support in the form of communication and introductions, funding and training, inclusion in local business and economic growth plans, involvement in large infrastructure projects such as Golden Valley and for local authorities to promote usage internally. We have a free account and are encouraged to use it.

We were generally supportive while acknowledging this is still a modest and early initiative.

Strategy

- Local Authority activity on database (£10k per month)
- 441 members to join this year
- £250k additional spend within county

<p>TG have engaged with min 10 Boards (Large Co's) to get at least 10 sign ups by end 2026</p> <p>Local Government - all districts signed up and active on the database by end Mar, and procuring at least (£10k/month) from database suppliers</p> <p>Large Orgs commission marketing plan in place and active, by end Feb (Darren)</p> <p>Post-20-corp docs wesc, ccs and other responses to increase in a sign up rate of 50 per month by end Apr, 100 month by end Oct</p> <p>Target to achieve membership of 20 Large/Med and 500 Small/ST by end Jan 26</p> <p>Target £45k+ of revenue per annum to support sustaining the Project</p> <p>Target £20k of additional revenue kept within the county/annum</p>	<p>Database Enhancements - more functionality - need a roadmap, and communicate benefits to the membership</p> <p>Reform the Working Group and weekly meetings - ultimately to get to a place where we have TG sub Leadership - interim, work out what role each person has and how we grow value to the Project</p> <p>Develop and deliver user Education for added value of membership - how to navigate Public sector procurement etc.</p> <p>Create event at hotel or similar by end June to engage with 10+ C suite (CEO, FD) Leaders - drive support and engagement</p> <p>Need a plan to approach each key county membership organisation and present and agree the approach, mutual benefits etc</p> <p>Continue plan to communicate with, and get councils to commit to TG</p> <p>Internal plan for Large Orgs developed and agreed (rough process - deliverables), Darren engaged and onboarded</p> <p>Retain current membership min 95% and onboarding min 60 new members/month</p> <p>Drive Engagement on the database - increase login and clicks etc.</p>
<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 10px; background-color: #e0f0ff;"> <p>Strategic Priorities</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">1 year Objectives 2026</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">3 year Objectives 2029</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Targets to Improve</p> <p style="font-size: 1.2em; font-weight: bold;">Create a joined up solution for large private and public sector organisations to source ethical and reliable local suppliers</p> </div>	
<p>Measure, and report weekly - total logins, Percentage members signed in, New reg per Member Org (Disc code)</p> <p>Member sign up/week and retention %</p> <p>Plan avail and reviewed end Feb, resources and fund allocated</p> <p>Weekly report out on progress - closed by end March</p> <p>Fortnightly report out on progress - track number of sign ups/ing</p> <p>Review monthly</p> <p>Review monthly</p> <p>Review monthly</p> <p>Review monthly</p>	
<p>Target 5% of additional revenue kept within the county (run rate at end)</p> <p>TG to be generating revenue of >£140,000/annum to fund the project</p> <p>'Management' structure in place to run TG</p> <p>Achieving membership of 50+ Large/Med orgs, 2000+ Small/ST at engagement level of 300+ hits/wk</p>	

Read from the bottom, clockwise.

3. Gloucestershire’s Business Support Offer (aka The Growth Hub Gloucestershire)

There is a growth hub in the main city of each district. This is part of a national government brand and was originally funded by capital and EU support, but since reduced and reducing. Gloucestershire claims to be the most successful nationally in implementing this, and is Cluster Lead for Gloucestershire, WECA, and Swindon and Wiltshire, but because it has been less successful elsewhere, governments have been progressively withdrawing funds, which threatens the future of this programme. It has “supported 16,000 businesses” with 1,600 training events since 2014.

There are 7 FTEs, funded by DBT, SEDF & Partners.

Performance is monitored by funders Department of Business & Trade (DBT) and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in collaboration with 5 Local Authorities. Special Cluster Lead responsibilities also apply.

The results: Outputs

Businesses supported under UKSPF, from April 2023 to date

District	Support Requests via Website	Growth Hub Visitors (Footfall)	Training Events (121, Online, Workshops)	Event Attendees	Growth Plans (inc. Event Only)
Cheltenham	427	941	71	512	463
Cirencester	261	5,677	136	790	504
Forest of Dean	235	2,236	73	337	268
Gloucester (2024 – 2025)	346	4,870	50	517	228
Stroud	406	1,607	103	561	366
Tewkesbury	407	2,377	158	618	497
Totals	2,082	17,708	591	3,335	2,326

They depend on strategic partnerships with leading media agencies (Punchline and Reach plc), website, and quote various testimonials Claims:

- Strategic partnerships with leading media agencies SoGlos,
- Punchline and Reach plc are key to our Marketing Strategy.
- Highlights include:
 - - Proud to sponsor SoGlos annual Business Awards and Top
 - 100 Businesses Listing recognising and celebrating local business success across a variety of award categories.
 - - Case studies with SoGlos demonstrating our capability to accelerate growth potential - read rate well above average.
 - - Contributor/sponsor of Punchline’s Business Magazine
 - - Digital campaigns with call-to-action content on SoGlos,

- Punchline and Reach media websites - driving engagement.

The report went on to discuss future plans, innovations, use of digital, collaborations, and mentoring. It is naturally hard to assess the full scope of effects because, apart from anything else, most significant business developments depend on a complex of input factors.

AJ proposed and Cllr Mark Harris (vice chair) seconded a motion that a letter should go to government on the issue of supporting local business.

4. City Region Board Update

Paul James joined Councillor Tooke, the chair, in discussing the **hospitality industry**. He drew on the report that he'd done for O&S and CDC Cabinet. You will be familiar with the main lines, therefore.

CRB RESOLVED:

1) That the City Region Board would send a letter lobbying the Government on the challenges faced by the retail and hospitality sector. It was agreed that the draft letter would be circulated to the Board for comment prior to being sent.

2) That the City Region Board ask the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee to add an item to their work plan about the challenges faced by the retail and hospitality sector and actions that could be taken by the 7 local authorities using knowledge provided by the Retail and Hospitality Business Group, the Local Authorities and anyone else as applicable.

There is a continued focus on **spatial development**. The Government had written to each local authority inviting views on 'sensible geographies' for SDS's. Partners and Shadow Unitary Authority(ies) could review the SDS prior to submission to the planning inspectorate. It was suggested, at CRB, that two rounds of public consultation should take place. The draft policy consultation was planned to commence in late autumn 2026 and the pre-submission publication public consultation would commence in early autumn 2027.

On March 4, 2026, Gloucestershire officers met in a Workshop to begin shaping the vision, strategic objectives and key strategic policy areas for the tSDS. A report update will follow in June. The tSDS will be based on existing local plans geographies and created in partnership with the Districts so that it did not undermine existing local plans that were in creation.

CRB was informed about the current position of the **Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool** (GBRP), which was originally set up to maximise the business rates income retained within the county by implementing a 50% rates retention system forming the resulting *Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF)* discussed

above. SEDF as of 2025–26 had a £1.59 million pot with £0.58 million in growth funds. There are always problems with money. There are no further contributions expected to be made into this pool.

5. WORK PLAN

- 21st May 2026 > Forest of Dean focus – comparing FOD data with the Local Growth Plan actions (whole session) / SEDF Bid Performance Framework
- 16th July 2026 > LGP Mission 4: Environment, housing and infrastructure
- 25th September 2026 > LGP Mission 3: Thriving communities and culture / Local Government Reorganisation update
- 27th November 2026 > SEDF Project Feedback session (whole session)

Suggested items

1. Local Growth Plan focus comparison to highest economic growth district/ urban deprivation
2. Growth Hub's Carbon Net Zero team
3. Local Growth Plan (LGP) Mission 5: Innovation, investment and enterprise
4. LGP Mission 1: Talent and Future Skills
5. LGP Mission 2: Employment and health for people and places (to include Connect to Work Scheme)

Your Cllr suggested we include **mass transportation** as an agenda item for the future. Transport is not “officially on the City Region Board/GESSC list of objectives” and therefore was cause for challenge. Following counterchallenge, an update confirms: *Although the CRB does have the objective to 'lobby and carry out other activities that help achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic wellbeing of the area of Gloucestershire.*

We also have the objective to 'To identify future areas of economic growth for inclusion in the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy'.

Good transport planning is a key area to achieving economic growth and is one of the reasons why cities on mainland Europe generally have better growth rates than UK cities.

It should therefore appear in due course and is of course relevant to SDS.

6. APPENDIX: Planned schedule for a study of the economic needs of Forest of Dean

Introduction

- Multiple deprivation/IMD

Mission 1 – Talent and future skills

- Adult population
- Skills
- Employment sectors – linked to growth sectors
- Travel to work data

Mission 2 - Supporting Employment Opportunities for All

- Job postings
- Young people/NEETs
- Digital Inclusion / DigiHubs

Mission 3 - Thriving Communities and Culture

- FOD Economic plans/activities

Mission 4 - Environment, Housing and Infrastructure

- Housing – affordability, and supply
- Transport accessibility
- Digital Infrastructure

Mission 5 - Innovation, Investment and Enterprise

- GVA
- Businesses and survival rates
- Growth Hub and business activity inc. issues facing FOD businesses