

REPORT TO COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Summary of Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee Meeting

Friday, 28th November 2025

Prepared for: Cotswold District Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Meeting date: Monday, 1st December 2025

Reports are available on the GCC website.

1. INTRODUCTION

The meeting was chaired by Cllr Mark Harris and the lead Cabinet member was Cllr Tooke. The latter referred to changes since the County elections. The Committee met to scrutinise the decisions, plans, and policies of the Gloucestershire City Region Board, with particular focus on the Local Growth Plan, the Spatial Development Strategy, Strategic Economic Development Fund allocations, and an emerging Green Skills Strategy.

It is clear that LGR issues are playing an important practical role in pushing for county wide coherence. My impression is that this supports a single unitary.

As noted in conclusion, GEESC is a shadow of the old GEGSC body.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

We were reminded of this again.

To review the decisions, plans and policies of the Gloucestershire City Region Board and

1. To scrutinise the impact and delivery outcomes of successful Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) bids;
2. To identify future areas of economic growth for inclusion in the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy*;
3. To provide a scrutiny function for any potential devolution deal in so far as it relates to the Gloucestershire City Region Board or the Gloucestershire Economic Strategy*.
4. The Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee may not exercise any function other than those outlined above.

Note: The Gloucestershire's Economic Strategy (2024-2034) outlines the county's existing strengths, opportunities and challenges and provides a clear statement of intent for Gloucestershire – to achieve greener and inclusive economic growth that delivers a stronger, more sustainable, economy; and sets us on the journey to achieving a new Gloucestershire 2050 Vision

Your councillor had interchange with the chair on this: he interprets this to mean that GEESC scrutinises how decisions are getting on, not such as whether they should be made. It is post hoc. Minutes following October 24 need consideration and so does point 2. It is notable how this is different from CDC.

3. LOCAL GROWTH PLAN (2025-2035)

The Local Growth Plan was unanimously agreed at the City Region Board (CRB) on 14th November 2025. Over summer 2025, Cllr Julian Tooke and David Owen (Director of Economy and Environment) consulted with each of the six local authority district leaders to understand their economic priorities and address concerns raised, particularly by Forest of Dean District Council and Stroud District Council.

The LGP is structured around five key missions, which will form the basis of scrutiny over the coming year:

Mission 1: Talent and Future Skills – Focus on developing workforce capabilities

Mission 2: Employment and Health for People and Places – Including the Connect to Work scheme for economically inactive residents

Mission 3: Thriving Communities and Culture – Supporting vibrant local places

Mission 4: Environment, Housing and Infrastructure – Supporting sustainable development

Mission 5: Innovation, Investment and Enterprise – Including the Growth Hub's Carbon Net Zero Team and business support functions

CRB wished the plan to reflect countywide priorities rather than focusing solely on high-growth areas. An action plan enabling monitoring of progress is needed but the CRB Members were satisfied that the LGP demonstrates collaborative engagement. Cllr Wilkinson represented CDC.

The GESSC committee noted these priorities.

4. 2. CITY REGION BOARD: STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND (SEDF) BID DECISIONS

Preliminary work led to 7 projects being presented to the CRB. All 7 have received funding. The process had two parts, a “dragons den” style set of pitches and a decision meeting. Discussion by The GESSC committee suggested that Moore needs to be done to encourage proposals. The total awarded exceeded £2.5 million, which had accumulated through the absence of projects in the past. These were therefore considered to be the most effective available strategic investment options. They reflect green skills, energy planning, business support, and sectoral development.

Awarded Projects: <https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>

Project	Amount Awarded	Key Outcome
1. Gloucestershire Local Area Energy Plan & Energy Officer	£325,000	County-wide energy planning and officer capacity; supports Regional Energy Strategic Planning submission [get more money]
2 Gloucestershire Careers Hub	£392,000 (2-year period) [Requested: £596,299]	Enhanced careers education in 62 schools/colleges; focus on green skills, cyber, digital sectors
3 Invest in Gloucestershire Support	£350,000 [Requested: £380,000]	Expanded investment attraction team; strengthens national/international marketing; university partnership links [Get more money]
4 Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing (AEM) Sector Growth	£400,000	AEM advisors through Growth Hub; industry board established; targets 150+ businesses supported, 170 jobs created, £3.5m GVA uplift goal
5 “Future-Proofing” Visitor Economy [my “”]	£300,000	County data platform; Strategic Visitor Economy Growth Plan; targets 5-10% visitor growth over three years
6 Resilient Futures Lab (Hartpury University)	£133,000 (of £395,000 requested)	Energy management testing; “green skills” training for 1,000 students; climate resilience modelling
7 SIDEKICK Venture Studio [Loan]	£300,000 (investment loan of £400,000 requested)	Cyber, national security, defence-focused venture studio; targets 30 high-growth start-ups; projected 300+ jobs and £31.5m GVA

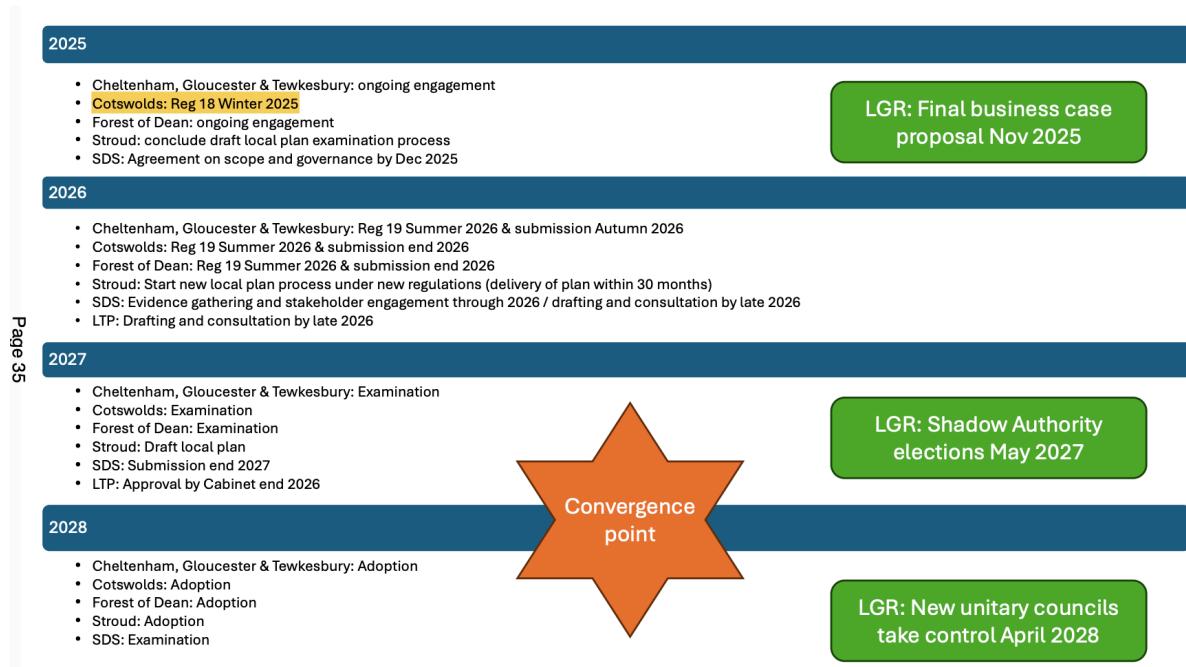
The GEESC Committee had questions, especially about whether enough had been done to stimulate the best proposal options for consideration. There are projects that are not yet ripe for funding. Members emphasized the need to develop a monitoring process. Funds will be released at appropriate milestones for each project. This protects against waste.

5. 3. SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: GOVERNANCE AND SCOPE

The City Region Board endorsed a revised governance structure and scope for a transitional Spatial Development Strategy (tSDS), recognising the urgency of coordinated spatial planning across Gloucestershire in response to Government planning reforms. This is seen as a key aspect of dealing with the difficult situation the Government has thrust upon us.

The report listed the various project across the county – there is no part of the county that has a five-year land supply, so every district is working at Pace to develop a new area plan. These plans will be completed before the SPS process completes and produces the SPD (i.e. development plan). Nevertheless the intention is to work in consort given that the effect of the SPD will be that all area plans must be in conformity with it and in due course of course it will be managed for the relevant unitary. How this will happen is not clear but the intention to collaborate is valued.

The following chart illustrates critical activity timelines:



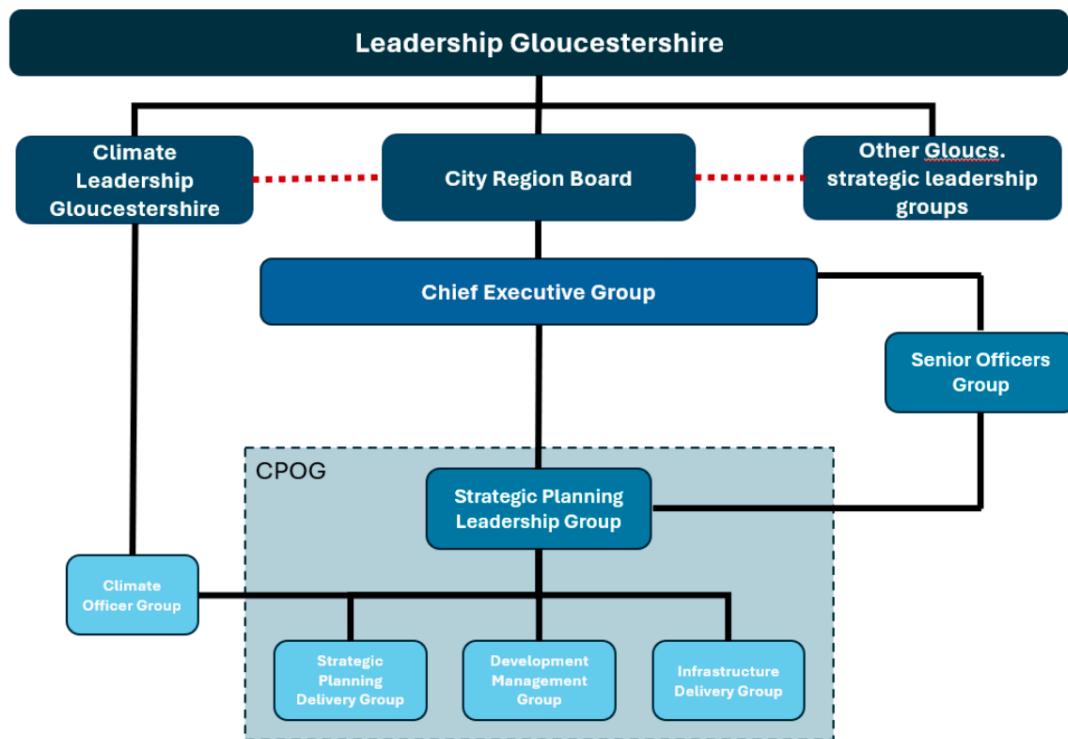
The Vision

A unified, resilient, and forward-looking Gloucestershire, where strategic planning is delivered in partnership, is creative, inclusive, and adaptive to the evolving governance landscape—delivering sustainable growth, infrastructure, and quality of life for all communities

Enhanced Governance Structure:

A County Planning Officers Group (CPOG) was established with four functional officer groups. A new Strategic Planning Leadership Group was also created, comprising director-level representatives from each council. This group will:

1. Ensure corporate priorities inform spatial planning outcomes
2. Provide leadership to the Strategic Planning Delivery Group
3. Develop planning teams and future leaders in planning
4. Embed resilient partnership working across Gloucestershire



Transitional Spatial Development Strategy (tSDS):

The tSDS represents a "light-touch" approach aligned with existing district Local Plan processes. It will:

- Cover a 15–20 year horizon
- Ensure local plans remain in general conformity with the county-wide strategy
- Minimise preparation time whilst managing political sensitivities during Local Government Reorganisation
- Be reviewed every five years

Proposed Delivery Timeline:

Milestone	Timeframe
Agreement on scope & governance	December 2025
Evidence gathering & stakeholder engagement	2026

<i>Milestone</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Draft consultation	December 2026
Examination submission	December 2027
Adoption & monitoring	April 2028

The tSDS will address key spatial challenges: meeting housing needs across functional geographies, delivering strategic infrastructure, ensuring financial viability, and advancing climate resilience and nature recovery.

Discussion

Members valued the SPS project, but were concerned about or commented as follows:

1. *Co-ordination between 7 bodies* — Yes but there is a very good spirit of cooperation and authorities are pooling resources
2. *Taking resources needed for the Area Plans, planning (dealing with speculative proposals), compliance etc to work on this project* — Yes this is an issue; efforts to get funds, but needs to be done and to be managed
3. Dealing with urgent current needs — yes, they know about this too, needs to be done and to be managed
4. *SPS and Area Plan timelines not in accord but conformity required* — yes, but as progress happens this gives more weight to the plans in development, also relevant to point 2 above
5. *Spatial planning importance noted.*

Interesting to note that two Cheltenham officers (including the CEO) were leading on this.

6. 4. GREEN SKILLS STRATEGY: FRAMEWORK AND ACTIONS

The emerging Green Skills Strategy, developed by GCC officers Jon Hickman and Pete Carr, seeks to align workforce supply with demand from green technologies. It addresses the intersection between Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and the Employment and Skills Hub. Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf

Strategic Context:

The three sectors driving carbon emissions reduction are the energy supply grid, surface transport, and home energy use—collectively responsible for over 50% of emissions. By 2040, 50% of homes must be heated by heat pumps (up from 1% in 2023), requiring a seven-fold increase in annual installation capacity from 60,000 (2023) to 450,000 by 2030. Gloucestershire alone will need an additional 1,000–1,500

heat pump installers by 2030. Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf

Three-Pillar Strategy:

Pillar 1: Promote All Green Skills

Develop Green Skills Pathways across construction, retrofit, energy, nature recovery, agriculture, circular economy, surface transport, and climate resilience

Establish a Gloucestershire Green Skills Pledge for businesses, councils, and colleges to demonstrate commitment to upskilling and training

Launch a Green Skills Summit on 24th June 2026 at Gloucester City Campus to publicise pathways and the pledge

Pillar 2: Retrofit and Home Energy Efficiency

Create a low-cost (0–2% APR) loan scheme for home energy efficiency, linking loan conditions to quality outcomes and PAS 2035 compliance

Leverage Gloucestershire Housing and Community Partnership's £30m retrofit spend over five years to embed green skills apprenticeships within supplier networks

Establish a Centre of Excellence for energy efficiency and innovation, teaching holistic house-physics across construction trades

Sustained marketing campaigns building on District Retrofit Engagement Officers' excellent work; normalise low-carbon heating through demonstrations and community champions

Skills interventions address three interconnected problems: limited contractor availability, low customer demand, and poor contractor training. The strategy aims to break the "retrofit doom-loop" via targeted demand, supply, and quality interventions. Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf

Pillar 3: Energy Production, Distribution, and Storage

Build a regional consortium of colleges and universities to ensure skills align with the Regional Energy Strategic Planning exercise

Engage with Local Area Energy Planning, Severn Edge Small Modular Reactor development, and community microgrid initiatives

Conduct gap analysis to match existing training capacity against projected demand for renewables, storage, nuclear, and emerging technologies

Establish the Gloucestershire Green Skills Advisory Panel to bring together business leaders, sharing best practice and economic indicators

This pillar is least developed pending clarification of the Regional Energy Strategic Plan timetable and revised Small Modular Reactor deployment plans. [Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf](#)

Green Skills Categorisation:

Skills are classified by urgency:

Existing: Increased demand for current roles (insulation, solar installers, retrofit assessors)

Enhanced: Altered roles requiring upskilling (gas boiler installers transitioning to heat pump engineers; mechanics to EV maintenance)

Emerging: New green jobs (Small Modular Reactor technicians, heat network engineers, hydrogen specialists)

Enabling: Supporting roles (digital, smart technology, innovation management) [Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf](#)

Budget and Implementation:

SEDF funding has been approved for research and development of Green Skills Pathways. Additional budget is required for:

Website hosting and promotion of pathways (Pillar 1)

Green Skills Pledge infrastructure and promotional PR (Pillar 1)

Householder green technology marketing and District Retrofit Engagement Officer support (Pillar 1)

Low-cost loan scheme capital and administration (Pillar 2)

Partnership development and surveys with the Green Construction Advisory Panel (Pillar 2)

Centre of Excellence planning, curriculum development, and facilities (Pillar 2)

The Strategy undergoes Cabinet approval in May 2026 and will be launched publicly at the June Green Skills Summit. Supplement-Green-Skills-Strategy-28112025-1000-Gloucestershire-Economic-Strategy-Scrutiny-Commi.pdf

Discussion

Generally, the GESSC members were supportive of the plan.

One member queried the cost-effectiveness of heat pumps. The interrelationship between availability of skills and demand was discussed.

There was agreement that the necessary agritechnique green skills for the farming sector had not been recognised and officers agreed to take advice and guidance on this recognising that it was not their field of expertise. Your councillor has been asked to meet and brief.

It was noted that there was no money at present to implement this and a lack of officer resource. This therefore represents an aspiration.

7. 5. COMMITTEE WORKPLAN AND FUTURE SCRUTINY ITEMS

The Committee agreed a structured workplan focusing on the five LGP missions and SEDF project performance monitoring:

Date	Scrutiny Focus
30 Jan 2026	LGP Mission 5: Innovation, investment & enterprise (Growth Hub Carbon Net Zero)
26 Mar 2026	SEDF reporting: Together Gloucestershire project; Missions 1 & 2 (Talent & Employment/Health)
21 May 2026	Forest of Dean economic development case study vs. LGP actions
16 Jul 2026	LGP Mission 4: Environment, housing & infrastructure
25 Sep 2026	LGP Mission 3: Thriving communities & culture; Local Government Reorganisation update
27 Nov 2026	SEDF Project feedback session (full agenda)

The Committee also proposed examining the district with highest economic growth as a comparative case study and flagged Connect to Work scheme scrutiny as an agenda item.

Accepted.

8. CONCLUSIONS (AJ)

The GESSC meeting noted intent for coordinated governance across Gloucestershire's seven councils in response to Government planning reform, Local Government Reorganisation, and the transition to net zero. The approved Local Growth Plan provides a shared economic framework. The SEDF allocations target strategic investment in energy planning, skills, business support, and sectoral growth. The Green Skills Strategy might translate these economic priorities into a practical workforce development agenda, recognising that meeting net zero and national heat pump targets depends on significant, coordinated upskilling and uncertain economics in a rapidly changing world.

For Cotswold District Council, the outcomes are particularly relevant to retrofit and energy transition initiatives, visitor economy development, and the alignment of planning and economic development through the tSDS governance structures.

Once again, there was discussion about the Terms of Reference of the committee and further discussion about how seriously this committee has taken.

It was noted that once again, there were empty seats as councillor had not attended and had neither attended nor provided substitutes. Several members had to leave early as a result of which the chair did his best to proceed at pace and restrict questions and comments. Senior officers came and went and sometimes worked emails during the meeting. Some of this commentary took place in informal post meeting conversation and the chair agreed that there should be encouragement to change this. A note will be sent.

It was noted that this is the most difficult committee anyone has attended. It takes learning on the job. How the committee works and the processes it follows have been a constant source of mutual learning. Only 3 members have continuity from GEGSC and there are fewer members than there were.