



GFirst LEP Business Groups Update: February 2020

The following Business groups met in February 2020:

Agri-Food & Rural Economy

Banking & Finance

Construction & Infrastructure

Visitor Economy & Tourism

- The **Chairs of the Business Groups** met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Monday 9th December 2019. Dev Chakraborty, Deputy Chief Executive, gave a brief summary of business activity within the LEP.
- Elizabeth Weaver, Business Group Manager, mentioned that a skills audit is being undertaken for all groups, and Chairs are encouraged to look at what skills are required and missing from their sector group and to take this into consideration when recruiting for new members.
- Terms of Reference have been drafted for the Business Groups, as a written guide to defining the purpose and structure of the meetings as well as confirmation on longevity of service of Chairpersons and members, conflicts of interest, etc. This will be sent round to the Chairs for amends/approval before being sent to all of the business group members.
- The Chairs of the following groups gave an update:
 - Banking & Finance:** Up to 50% of the week is taken up with dealing with internal and external company fraud. Some industries banks are reluctant to get involved in it due to the risk.
 - Business & Professional Services:** Recruitment is a challenge as office space, especially in Cheltenham, is in short supply. There are big changes occurring in legal profession in relation to AI and digital. Graduates into law profession are not necessarily coming from a University graduate route.
 - Retail & Visitor Economy:** companies who have good combined e-commerce and physical platform did better over Black Friday than those without.
 - Cyber-tech:** the cyber industry are reluctant to recruit people with no previous experience despite them having the skills – a culture of innovation & entrepreneurship is lacking. Cyber-tech needs to be seen as an enabler – giving companies the highest level security rather than a reactive solution to a problem.

*The date of the next Business Group Chairs Meeting will be **Monday 9th March 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub.***



Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing

- The Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Business Group met on Monday 2nd December 2019 at the Gloucester Growth Hub.
- An update was given on the timeline of the planned Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean is due to open in Spring 2020. Stroud have decided to complete the work in stages, they plan to open officially in February 2020. Cheltenham is planned to open in Summer 2020. A breakdown of visitor stats for each Growth Hub will be sent to all Business Group members.
- The group were asked to consider the future of advanced engineering and manufacturing in advance of an exercise to be undertaken at the next meeting. With key stats on the industry, the group, with the assistance of a consultant, will discuss what the current landscape looks like, where it needs to be and what actions need to be taken in order to get there. This will help to identify the challenges and opportunities for growth.
- Guest speakers included **Tony Gee**: providing innovative engineering designs for both temporary and permanent works in all construction industry sectors, and Operations Director Martin Clegg from **Severn**: the UK's most progressive and ethical print supplier. Peter Doyle from **The Growth Company** updated the group on his work mentoring with several Advanced Engineering companies – seeing productivity improvements in excess of 15% within a 12-month period of starting the programme. Dr Polly Pick from the University of Gloucestershire updated the group on the Senior Leadership and Management Programmes with 2020 seeing the development of a Project Management and Professional Engineer Level 7 Masters.
- The Engineering industry is looking at diversification, with sustainability becoming a hot topic within the Aviation sector in particular, with significant changes needed rather than just a reduction in current activities. Export is on the increase with some companies experiencing a 17% increase year on year. Staff retention within the sector is good, but steady.

*The date of the next Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing meeting will be **Monday 2nd March 2020 at the University of Gloucestershire's new Engineering Department, Park Campus, Cheltenham.***

For questions about the group, or if you would like to be considered to become a member, please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Agri-Food & Rural Economy

- The Agri Food & Rural group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Thursday 6th February 2020. Representatives from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Countryside Land Agency (CLA) are stepping down from the group, and have been replaced with suitable colleagues to ensure representation on the group. Jo Price, Chair of the group is looking to step down this year, so asked the group to suggest alternative Chairs for consideration.
- This group were chosen to continue the work from the Local Industrial Strategy; using a logic chain approach the group were asked to identify where they see the agri industry now, where they want it to be in the future, and what steps are required to get there. Key discussion points from this were the development of a robust food economy, helping farmers to diversify and maintaining sustainable productivity. Consultant Nick Holyoake managed the session and will feedback on the results before the end of March 2020.
- Katharine Cripps, Barclays Bank mentioned that bringing farmers together had been a very positive idea-sharing exercise in the past, and the idea of holding an event in one of the Growth Hubs to showcase farmers who have diversified was discussed with the group. Katharine has had a conversation with Will Frazer (NFU Mutual) to move this forward.
- The Tech to Plate project at Hartpury will be launched in February 2020 – Claire Whitworth gave a presentation on the project, it's partners and what it plans to achieve. More information can be found here: <https://www.hartpury.ac.uk/commercial/hartpury-agri-tech-centre/>
- The Food policy sub group gave an update on developments – the food agenda is of high importance to the County Council. Food is mentioned in the Cyber Central Planning document, with companies considering food productivity, so the group are keen to have an influence on this development.
- RAU is celebrating it's 175th Anniversary this year, with a series of events taking place, as well as the Three Counties show being hosted by Gloucestershire this year.

*The date of the next meeting is on **Wednesday 3rd June 2020 at RAU, Stroud Road, Cirencester.***

For questions about the group, or if you would like to be considered to become a member, please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Banking & Finance

- The group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Tuesday 11th February 2020, this was preceded by a banking and finance clinic.
- Sarah Danson gave an update on the Growth Hub Network. Gloucester Growth Hub now have a 'Better Business for All' champion – this mentoring service is now fully established and bridges the gap between business navigators and guides.
Forest of Dean Growth Hub is due to open in Spring 2020, Stroud plan to open officially in February 2020 and Cheltenham is planned to open in Summer 2020. Funding for the Growth Hub (revenue) has been extended for a further 2 years until 2022. More workshops are taking place to find new clients, and several Director Strategy workshops are being held, to de-mystify business jargon.
- Sue McIntosh-Gibbs from UK Agricultural Finance gave a presentation to the group. Their aim is to provide the agricultural sector with finance options that help it develop and grow. They offer financial guidance and advice in relation to the purchase of land, livestock finance, recovery and restructure. The group welcomes Sue back into the group with her new role.

*The next Banking & Finance meeting is at the **Gloucester Growth Hub on Tuesday 19th May 2020** and will be preceded by a Banking & Finance clinic.*

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Business & Professional Services

- The group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Wednesday 2nd October 2019. An update was given on the timeline of the planned Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean is due to open in Spring 2020. Stroud have decided to complete the work in stages. They plan to open officially in February 2020. Cheltenham is planned to open in Summer 2020. [Hub8](#) an incubation space for cyber-tech startups has now opened in the Brewery Quarter, providing Cheltenham with a co-working space. Tewkesbury, Cirencester and Gloucester are going from strength to strength, with Gloucester considering reaching out to businesses with a view to sponsorship, enabling start-ups to use the office space for free.
- Members were also advised to inform businesses about the Growth Hubs, to continue to spread the word about the services that they offer for free. It was mooted that current networks and larger private digital companies could be encouraged to use the Growth Hub spaces for their events which would raise the Growth Hub profile, as a solid digital infrastructure is important.
- Katie Jenkins, Director of Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) gave an overview of where we are with feedback following the launch of the draft LIS. To summarise, the members thought that the draft LIS was a good synthesis of the strengths and of the opportunities in the county. A key theme that emerged was that we need to be able to offer easy access to upskilling, to ensure businesses of all sizes are equipped for challenges and changes for an increasingly digital economy with cyber-tech protection capabilities. The group's feedback has been sent to the GFirst LEP LIS team.

*The next Business & Professional Services meeting will take place on **Wednesday 4th March 2020 at Gloucester Growth Hub.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Business Membership Groups

- The Business Membership Group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Wednesday 27th November 2019. Peter Doyle from the Growth Company talked to the group about his work with SMEs to encourage mentoring, with an increasing amount of “reverse mentoring” taking place, where the smaller SME mentees mentoring Corporate Mentors (such as John Lewis Partnership, BAe Systems, Rolls-Royce, Amazon, GSK) - about how SME’s can be agile, creative and innovative. Peter compliments the work that Rod Horrocks is undertaking for GFirst LEP.
- Dr Polly Pick, Director of Business Engagement at the University of Gloucestershire gave an update on the latest Business degrees, degree apprenticeships and work-based training programmes, which can be part funded through the Apprenticeship Levy for larger companies. The group were especially keen to develop the relationships between businesses and schools/Higher education establishments, to get students more interested in business at an earlier age.
- An update was given on the timeline of the other Growth Hubs: Forest of Dean and Stroud due to open in Spring 2020. Cheltenham is planned to open in Summer 2020. Funding for the Growth Hub (revenue) has been extended for a further 3 years until 2022. More workshops are taking place to find new clients, and several Director Strategy workshops are being held, to de-mystify business jargon.
- The group fed back on the draft Local Industrial Strategy, and comments have been given to the LIS team for inclusion. They reiterated the importance of the voice of young people and the need for a good public transport system throughout the county, and the group welcomed the rail strategy as part of this. A good transport infrastructure will be imperative to support the development of Cyber Central. Housing affordability and availability will be another key factor in retaining young people and this needs to be addressed.

*The next meeting will take place on **Thursday 5th March 2020 at the Tewkesbury Growth Hub.**
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com*



Cyber-tech

- The Cyber Security Business group met on Monday 20th January 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub. Prof Kamal Bechkoum gave an update on the Cyber related degree courses at the University, which are helping the growth of Gloucestershire's intellectual capital. 100% of graduates are in full time employment, with 46% of them staying within the county.
- This group were chosen to continue the work from the Local Industrial Strategy; using a logic chain approach the Cyber-tech group were asked to identify where they see the industry now, where they want it to be in the future, and what steps are required to get there. Key discussion points from this were the requirement for engagement of Senior Leaders in business to identify the need for cyber-tech, and to invest in digital training for all staff users and not just the IT team. Cyber-tech awareness needs to come from the 'top' and be a proactive tool in the business toolkit, not just something that is a reaction to a security breach. Consultant Nick Holyoake managed the session and will feedback on the results before the end of March 2020.
- The topic of Neuro diversity was discussed within the group, as potential recruits for the cyber industry. An advisory group would develop good employment opportunities for neuro-diverse students. Dr Polly Pick will organize a presentation on this subject at the next meeting.
- The idea of a 2-day 'CyberFest' style event was mooted. With the development of Cyber Central, it's even more important to blend together business and education streams. A Task Force group will be set up and will meet separately to move these ideas forward, and will report back to the group at the next meeting.
- The masterplan for Cyber Central will be available on Cheltenham Borough Council's webpage shortly.
- Dev Chakraborty mentioned to the group that Diane Savory will be stepping down from her position as GFirst LEP Board Chair, so if anyone would like to nominate someone for the role, head to the GFirst website where there is an application form to complete.

*The next meeting of the Cyber Security Business Group is on **Monday 20th April 2020 at Eagle Tower, Cheltenham.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Construction and Infrastructure

- The group met on Wednesday 12th February 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub. All responses to local plans have been submitted and Steve thanks ed the group for their contributions towards these.
- The group discussed what would be involved in the Masterplanning session, and the main points raised were: lack of employment sites, building to carbon neutrality, rail network, re-classification of the green belt. These topics will be discussed in more detail at the Masterplanning session at the meeting next month.
- A call for speakers that have experience in 'futuristic' building and new site development was put out to the group for consideration.
- Paul Fong is managing a 'Planning Matters' Forum at the end of April as well as another at the end of October looking at planning policies sixth months after Brexit. These forums support the work of the sub-group: Breaking down barriers to development.
- The GFirst LEP Board has approved Phases 1 and 2 of the West Cheltenham Highways scheme: Arle Court roundabout (phase 1) and M5 Junction 11 (phase 2).

*The next meeting of the C&I group is on **Tuesday 3rd March 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub.**
For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com*



Energy

- The Energy Business group met on Tuesday 21st January at C11, Berkeley. This group were chosen to continue the work from the Local Industrial Strategy; using a logic chain approach the Energy Group were asked to identify where they see the industry now, where they want to be in the future, and what steps are required to get there. Key discussion points from this were the Energy Strategy implementation, future-proofing the infrastructure of Cyber Central, and the application of green solutions into new housing. There needs to be a cross-sector approach to the greening of the county. Consultant Nick Holyoake managed the session and will feedback on the results before the end of March 2020.
- Following the successful launch of Gloucestershire County Council's Climate Strategy on 13th December, Pete Wiggins gave the group a presentation on the key themes.
- Felix Ritchie from Energy Catapult Birmingham also gave a presentation on how they offer tailored incubation and acceleration support for innovators to help address systemic barriers, de-risk innovation, help businesses scale and secure investment.
- It was mentioned that there seems to be a lack of guidance for businesses who want to become greener. Official Government-led advice on areas where companies need to reduce energy consumption, waste, carbon emissions etc. as well as 'green financing' to guide businesses on initial outlay versus ROI.
- A South West Energy Hub meeting was held the following day at West of England Combined Authority, Bristol. Monthly activity reports will be sent to Board members and LEP Chief Execs. It has been agreed at the meeting that projects submitted through the Hub requiring more than £25,000 investment will go to LEP Chief Execs for final approval. Those under £25,000 investment will be approved by a LEP representative. The South West Hub received 43 project proposals in the quarter Sept to Dec 2019 making a total of 92 project proposals received.

The objectives of the Energy Hubs are to:

- Increase number, quality and scale of local energy projects being delivered
- Raise local awareness of opportunity for and benefits of local energy investment
- Enable local areas to attract private and/or public finance for energy projects
- Identify working model for teams to be financially self-sustaining after first two years

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 21st April 2020 – venue to be confirmed.

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@qfirstlep.com



Retail and High Street

- The Retail and High Street Business Group met at the Gloucester Growth Hub on Wednesday 15th January 2020. The group will no longer be combined with the Visitor Economy and Tourism group. Chair, Nigel Jobson mentioned the current audit of the Business Groups and the Terms of Reference which have been approved by the Chairs and will be sent round to all members.
- Nigel opened the floor to suggestions for a focus for the group over the next 12 months. Gathering best practices and sharing knowledge from each area will avoid repetition as there is a lot of crossover. The Retail environment needs to change in line with customers more holistic retail 'experience' habits. The High Street needs to attract smaller independent businesses to provide this level of interest to the consumer.
- Town centre buildings need to be re-purposed – a lot of the spaces above shops are empty so Cheltenham BID have formed a landlord group to encourage landlords (who often do not live in the area or the country) to consider change of use from business to residential for their properties.
- A few updates from the group included:
 - Cheltenham: Newer shops have done well over Christmas but the already established shops not so well. Shop owners with an online presence do much better than those without – Maybe* and StreetPin are online tools that can help with this.
 - Cirencester: parking continues to be an issue. Council are considering a future-thinking resolution of a 'car free' centre, or an incentive to shop by getting a discount on parking when using the shops. A multi-function flexible space is also being considered.
- Sam Hoad, the LEP's Growth Hub Development Manager, gave an update on the Growth Hub Network: Forest of Dean Growth Hub opening April 2020, Stroud Growth Hub opening March 2020, Cheltenham Growth Hub opening September 2020.
- John Lewis are trialling pop-up shops for gifting, food & fashion from end February. More details are available by contacting Martin Bundy, General Manager John Lewis Cheltenham. Martin is contactable via GFirst LEP.

*The date of the next meeting is on **Wednesday 29th April 2020** - venue to be confirmed.*

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com



Tourism and Visitor Economy

- The group met on Thursday 27th February 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub. This group has not met individually for a while, as it had been combined with the Retail group.
- Dev Chakraborty initially Chaired the meeting, with the suggestion of Steve Collins taking over moving forward. It was suggested that the focus of the group is concentrated on bringing fragmented work within DMOs together. Steve presented his idea of a 'Visit Gloucestershire' concept, acting as an umbrella organization to promote the different DMOs within the county and offer some cohesion moving forward. Funding initially is to be considered via the Business Rates Pool, and Steve is working towards an Expression of Interest to be put to Joint Committee to support the bid.
The group is very keen on the concept and all DMOs are meeting again in March to develop the idea further.
- The group shared how Coronavirus is having an impact on the visitor Economy in the county. A much higher than normal volume of people cancelling group bookings, especially overseas tourists. Bicester Village and other destination areas such as Bourton-on-the-Water have seen up to a 60% drop off in sales / footfall.
- Steve will take the work forward and put together a business case and complete the EOI for the visit Gloucestershire proposal.

*The date of next meeting is **Thursday 16th April 2020 at the Gloucester Growth Hub.***

For questions about the group please contact Karen Campbell karen.campbell@gfirstlep.com