

The European Strategy was approved by the Gloucestershire First Partnership on 24 July 2008. This 8 page document suggests a framework for European engagement outlining the roles of the main players, suggesting a mechanism for prioritising bids and identifying 6 thematic priority areas. The development of a 3 year Delivery Programme will be led by European Manager, Sue Stoner, supported by a European Reference Group with representatives from the 6 priority areas of business support, rural development, international citizenship, community engagement, environmental goals, sustainable transport.

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'Making the most of European engagement'
A European Strategy for Gloucestershire

July 2008

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1. Foreword

- 1.1 Gloucestershire’s European Strategy has been revised to include new strategic goals and to give it both a sharper economic development edge and a more prominent role for sustainable development. In this, it not only reflects some of the County’s priorities, but also the European Union’s overriding aim of bringing forward the Lisbon Agenda to make Europe the ‘most dynamic and knowledge driven economy’ by 2010 and meeting the environmental aspirations outlined in the Gothenburg Agreement of 2001.
- 1.2 Competitiveness, entrepreneurship and, above all, the nurturing of skills appropriate to enable local businesses to compete in increasingly global markets, will take centre stage.
- 1.3 Local concern for the management of resources, the protection of the environment and development of alternative energies within a context of climate change and agricultural reform is mirrored at all levels across Europe.
- 1.4 The European priority of Citizenship finds echoes in the support for communities and the encouragement of independence amongst vulnerable people in Gloucestershire.
- 1.5 The European Strategy will be taken forward by the County’s Gloucestershire First Economic Partnership which has a membership of those actively engaged in attaining these goals, including a leading role for the County Council.

In delivery, the Partnership, in conjunction with Gloucestershire local authorities, will work towards delivering an international agenda which reflects what communities need and want. It will strive to work more effectively with the South West agencies, the South West UK Brussels Office (SWUKBO) and the South West region’s MEPs and MPs. Links with national agencies such as the Local Government Association’s International Team and the European Commission Representation in London will be strengthened. Membership of European organisations will be taken up when it is appropriate.

2. Aim:

To further what Gloucestershire's communities and businesses need and want through proactive engagement in European and regional initiatives and decision making.

3. Objectives:

- **To attract EU funding in support of Gloucestershire priorities**
- **To influence EU decisions and direction by providing a Gloucestershire input to EU policies and programmes**
- **To develop best practice with transnational partners**

3.1. Funding

In the 2007-13 EU funding round, there will be less structural funding available for the richer economies of Western Europe although in the South West, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles still qualify for Objective 1, Convergence funding for job creation, infrastructure and economic regeneration projects.

3.2. Gloucestershire is eligible for the Regional Competitiveness Programme which will focus on Lisbon related goals of innovation, support for SMEs, enterprise, entrepreneurship, job creation and stimulating sustainable growth.

3.3. Gloucestershire is eligible for two strands of the new Co-operation funding: Transnational Co-operation and Inter-regional Co-operation. Access to the former is through two zones: the Atlantic Area and NW Europe. These programmes offer opportunities to work with EU partners on issues such as the management of biodiversity, energy and waste, risk management, climate change and its impacts (e.g. floods), sustainable transport and the enhancement of the economic performance of cities, towns and rural areas. Support is offered through the South West Territorial Co-operation Group of which Gloucestershire is a member.

3.4. Taking guidance on funding opportunities from European sources including the Brussels Office, Gloucestershire will seek funding for priorities through a range of programmes. These include support for educational and youth exchange, Lifelong Learning, vocational training, support for disadvantaged groups, civil protection, nature and conservation and environmental research, energy research, efficiency and renewable energies and sustainable transport.

3.5. Nearly all the new funding programmes offer 'match dating' sessions with potential European partners but also web site lists of proposed projects which can be hooked into during the bid preparation process. Other partnership requests can be posted on the South West UK Brussels Office web site, or distributed through the Europe Direct information networks and the Local Government Association.

- 3.6. Given that EU structural and rural funding is to be distributed through the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and other governmental agencies, the Gloucestershire partners will need to work increasingly within a regional context.
- 3.7. The new programmes are intended to be simpler, less bureaucratic and easier to access. A Gloucestershire wide approach for accessing European as well as other external funding could be developed through the GCC hosted County Bidding Group or through the European Reference Group proposed under the Resources section of this strategy.
- 3.8. One of the early tasks will be to identify which EU funding streams most contribute to the delivery of Gloucestershire's priorities.
- 3.9. **Influencing**
As the second layer of democratically elected government, Gloucestershire is viewed as a region in its own right and can consequently have significant impact upon emerging EU initiatives.
- 3.9. Currently response to consultation is through:
- Events organised by the SWRDA, the LSC and other managing authorities for EU programmes
 - Papers coordinated by SWUKBO
 - Membership of regional bodies
 - Gloucestershire First Advisory Groups and Partnership
 - Service delivery teams.
- 3.10. A mechanism for establishing a specific Gloucestershire response to EU issues will be established, possibly through the European Reference Group.
- 3.11. Influencing the EU on particular issues can be effected through the MEPs and their offices, through SWUKBO or by representations to the European Commission in London or Brussels. There is an opportunity to do this during the Committee of the Regions' Open Days every October when the SWUKBO Board holds one of its two annual meetings or through specific issue delegations e.g. lobbying for a share of the EU Solidarity Fund pot for flooding relief.
- 3.12. **Best practice**
In addition, there is much to be learned through transnational partnership, good practice exchange and joint studies into mutual problems, a growth area in the 2007 –13 EU funding proposals.
- 3.13. Previous project exchanges have examined issues such as the development of the social economy, rural community planning, alternative energy schemes, estuary management, sustainable

transport, vocational skills development and youth and schools exchanges.

3.14. Future partnerships will reflect regions operational in the six priority areas outlined in the delivery section below.

4. Delivery:

To focus European engagement on Gloucestershire's interests

4.1 The key to delivery is a bottom-up focus on some of Gloucestershire's top priorities as articulated through the suite of County strategies and through Local Area Agreement targets. Engagement is to be with Europe in its widest sense, so could include links with developing countries and other global partners. Delivery will be across local authority service directorates and in co-operation with partners, both within the County, across the South West region and within the rest of the EU.

4.2 Delivery will be through the development of a rolling Action Plan with performance managed by the Gloucestershire First Partnership.

4.3 The following six areas will make up the focus of our European work in the future. The bullet points suggest the scope of these priority areas.

4.3.1 To enable Gloucestershire businesses, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to engage more effectively with Europe

- Provide a link between regional and sub regional sources and agencies providing business support
- Promote 'greening' business initiatives
- Seek project funding for specific sectors e.g. tourism, food and drink, creative industries, arts and crafts, IT, environmental technologies
- Support a business focused approach in schools and colleges towards vocational training
- Increase awareness of R&D opportunities.

4.3.2 To raise business productivity and increase economic inclusion in rural Gloucestershire

- Lobby and participate in regional and county consultations on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) especially the emerging rural development strand through membership of regional bodies i.e. the Rural Issues Task Force and the SW Chamber of Rural Enterprise
- Explore potential for promoting local foods and quality marks
- Research European models for broadband and IT coverage in rural areas

- Build on existing networks to facilitate transnational partnerships and information exchanges around specific issues e.g. locality planning, organic farming, Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE)
- Build on Gloucestershire's character and culture to promote tourism
- Participate in Rural Renaissance, LEADER and rural accessibility projects
- Co-ordinate project initiatives arising from the South West Rural Development Programme for England.

4.3.3 To encourage local people (especially young people) to become more active global citizens

- Maintain and enhance the international dimension to mainstream education with especial emphasis on the teaching of foreign languages and cultures
- Promote EU funded job placements and youth exchanges through the International Education Office, FE and HE colleges, Connexions, the County Youth Service and local Business Partnerships
- Improve the information on European opportunities for businesses and individuals in the County Library network, 'one stop shops' in the districts and through the Euro Direct Information Relay based at Hucclecote
- Participate in profile raising events e.g. annual MEP briefing, Schools and University Debates
- Support local communities to take advantage of partnership and twinning opportunities
- Take advantage of EU cultural opportunities to promote 'wellbeing' e.g. Healthy Schools Project

4.3.4 To support communities and vulnerable people

- Research other European models of social and elderly care especially around recruitment, training and retention of specialist staff
- Seek funding for skills issues around special groups e.g. economic migrants, BME groups, 'old and bold', travellers, young offenders, disaffected young people and those with learning and other disabilities
- Foster neighbourhood renewal/social economy initiatives
- Promote lifelong learning and active ageing
- Share good practice on healthy living styles, childhood obesity issues in particular.

4.3.5 To promote environmental goals through EU initiatives in areas such as the following:

- Respond to consultation and raise awareness of emerging EU legislation on waste and climate change/energy

(renewable energies measures and targets, CO2 targets, Carbon Capture and Storage etc.)

- Seek project funding for recycling initiatives (e.g. cluster concept), flood related actions, biodiversity protection and sustainable energy and transport (e.g. IEE, CONCERTO, CIVITAS)
- Track evolving policy on biodiversity and climate change, in particular, initiatives around flood mitigation
- Explore EU technologies and practices which utilise alternative energy sources i.e. waste and biomass, tidal power etc.
- Share good practice on energy efficiency especially in public buildings
- Foster a culture of change through education and awareness raising campaigns.

4.3.6 To seek to provide more sustainable forms of transport, planning and design

- Identify best practice and funding opportunities to help:
 - Provide better traffic management
 - Reduce the harmful impact of transport (especially lorries) on the environment
 - Integrate transport systems to better support regeneration and growth
 - Promote viable alternatives to the car
- Follow EU communications on intermodal transport initiatives and the extension of Trans European Networks.
- Foster a culture of change through education and awareness raising campaigns e.g. join EU Road Safety Network
- Explore increased use of rail/water and other 'green' transport e.g. potential development of Sharpness Docks, canal networks, cycle schemes
- Seek best practice in European town centre design to match developments i.e. Cheltenham Civic Pride, Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company (GHURC).

5. Methods:

- **To provide information and intelligence about Europe**
- **To participate in European and regional networks**
- **To co-ordinate and support Gloucestershire-wide European engagement**

5.1. Information

In addition to the European Service, there are effective established information networks in the County Council Library and Schools International Services. This has been enhanced by the successful bid to deliver a county wide 'Europe Direct' EU information service. There is prompt access to EU intelligence from the South West UK Brussels Office (SWUKBO). For business there are useful sources in Job

Centre Plus, Business Link, UK Trade and Investment and the regional GWE Business West service. There are further hubs for the voluntary sector.

- 5.2. The challenge is to produce more accessible information and to focus it more effectively so Gloucestershire First and its wider Gloucestershire partners can take advantage of the emerging opportunities.

- 5.3. **Networks**

In addition to regional engagement engendered by joint management of the Brussels Office and membership of strategic bodies (e.g. the South West European Local Authority Network, the Transnational Co-operation Group, the South West European Information Network) the European Office will seek to engage with the South West MEPs more effectively. This will be through an annual MEP briefing, single issue meetings and through representations to Brussels.

- 5.4 A more planned approach to EU funded project working can be affected by building on transnational partnerships already established through twinning and the development of joint EU funded projects, and by seeking new partnerships with regions engaged in similar issues. e.g. flooding.

- 5.5 **Co-ordinating and supporting**

Within the County there are well established routes to facilitate working jointly on a European agenda i.e. through the Gloucestershire Conference, through Gloucestershire First, the Gloucestershire Health and Wellbeing partnership, the County Bidding Group, the Gloucestershire Market Towns Forum, third sector organisations and the three tiers of local government. There is scope, in promoting the Lisbon agenda, in developing a special relationship with Gloucestershire University and FE colleges.

- 5.6 It is essential in promoting a more coherent approach to accessing EU funding that a comprehensive mapping exercise of previous successful funding bids is undertaken and a system set in place to keep the record current.

6. **Resources:**

- 6.1. The cornerstone of engagement is the European Service within Gloucestershire First, with its current establishment of one European Officer, and a part-time assistant. They act as a central intelligence, relaying policy, project and partnership opportunities to links within the local authorities and partner bodies. Essential to their role is the forming and consolidating of strategic contacts and partnerships within the County, the South West Region and across Europe.

- 6.2. The European Service also offers some central support for setting up studies and projects, for organising meetings, events and transnational exchanges.
- 6.3. The Service has a modest budget to be used for staffing, travel to meetings, contribution to partnership visits, preparing bids and profile raising events. It is also used to subscribe to the South West UK Brussels Office which is instrumental in keeping the European team up to date with EU policy, funding and other transnational opportunities, in supporting project development and in providing an interface with MEPs, members of the Commission and other European players.
- 6.4. Activity will be constrained by these limited resources and county wide decisions need to be made on which EU projects will be supported. However, added value can be achieved by pooling expertise and budgets across the county.
- 6.5. To capitalise on this, a joint officer/ member/partner European Reference Group, with expertise in the six priority areas, will be established for additional support. An understanding of EU legal and financial procedures needs to be fostered at senior resource management levels. In addition, some centralised pump priming resource needs to be identified for developing EU funding bids.