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***Spatial strategy outlines county's needs for the future***

A glimpse of the future was presented at Gloucestershire First's latest quarterly meeting when economic aspects of a new regional spatial strategy (RSS) were highlighted, showing the need for 20,000 new jobs by 2026.

Currently available in draft form on the South West Regional Assembly's website, the RSS examines what the county will need in terms of transport, housing, employment land and other major requirements to help the economy prosper in the years ahead.

The report examines the future role of 21 'strategically significant' regional towns and cities, including Cheltenham and Gloucester, together with the future development of market towns, smaller towns and villages.

Coupled with the recently-published Regional Economic Strategy, the draft spatial strategy has prompted Gloucestershire First to review Gloucestershire's economic strategy.

The agency is to look to increase the number and quality of jobs in Gloucestershire over the next 10 years and suggest ways to help those people currently unable to contribute to the local economy.

Partner organisations will play a major part in this. Speaking on behalf of Connexions, which plans integrated youth support services, Andrew Webber told the meeting that the drive was now underway to reduce the number of 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

"By 2010 our target is to reduce by four per cent the number of NEETs in Gloucestershire. At the moment there are 254 in Gloucester, 184 in Cheltenham, 121 in Stroud, 107 in the Forest of Dean, 82 in Tewkesbury and 56 in the Cotswolds," said Mr Webber.

And Jackie Longworth, a member of the Learning & Skills Council told the meeting that LSC was working to ensure older people also have the opportunity to develop skills needed by the local economy.

"Information, advice and guidance for adults (IAG) is a new scheme set up to provide work and learning opportunities for adults by offering in-depth help with career decisions.

"We need to know what employers expect and, through work experience and other measures, we must make sure people develop the skills needed by local businesses."

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