



# STROUD DISTRICT LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

<http://lsp.stroud.gov.uk>

Meeting held on Friday 7 June 2024

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill

Theme: Digital equity and inclusion

## Present:

|                           |                                                           |                    |                                                      |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Russell Warner (Chair)    | Gloucestershire Area Lead, Federation of Small Businesses | Chris Pockett      | Head of Communications, Renishaw                     |
| Will Mansell (Vice Chair) | The Grace Network                                         | Elizabeth Hall     | Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswolds  |
| Adrian Oldman             | Director, Transition Stroud                               | Geoffrey Beckerleg | Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Stroud & District     |
| Alyssa Pearce             | Chair, Stroud District Youth Council                      | Cllr Lindsey Green | Conservative Group Leader, Stroud District Council   |
| Barbara Piranty           | Chief Executive, GRCC                                     | Margaret Greaves   | Interim Chair, Stroud League of Friends              |
| Beth Whittaker            | Third sector / community involvement                      | Mark McShane       | Head, Stroud High School                             |
| Cllr Catherine Braun      | Leader, Stroud District Council                           | Max Comfort        | Director, Stroud Commonwealth                        |
| Chloe Warden              | Senior Economic Officer, Gloucestershire County Council   | Steve Olczak       | Partnership Manager, Department of Work and Pensions |

## Apologies received:

|                |                                                              |                     |                                                                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alison Truphet | Amberley Shop & Café                                         | Hannah Ellis        | Stroud and Nailsworth Station Manager, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service |
| Anna Bonallack | Chief Executive Officer, Creative Sustainability             | Helen Edwards       | NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group                               |
| Anna Herbert   | Chief Executive Officer, OPENhouse                           | Indigo Redfern      | Chief Executive, GL11 Community Hub                                            |
| Carole Stubbs  | Job Centre Plus, Avon, Somerset and Gloucestershire District | Kathy O'Leary       | Chief Executive, Stroud District Council                                       |
| Clare Davis    | CEO, Longfield                                               | Sarah Scott         | Executive Director Adult Social Care, Gloucestershire County Council           |
| Dan Morris     | Deputy Chairman, Howard Tenens                               | Tanya de Leersnyder | Chair, Stroud Businesswomen's Network                                          |

## Absent and apologies not received:

|             |            |                       |                                                        |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Chris Haine | CEO, GAPTC | Lisa Ferneyhough-Moss | Deputy Director Care Operations, Lilian Faithfull Care |
|-------------|------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|

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|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| Kevin Hamblin | Group Chief Executive Principal, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College |  |  |
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### **Guests and Support Officers**

|                     |                                                                            |                |                                                                      |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Helen Elliott-Boult | Digital Inclusion Manager, Creative Sustainability                         | Dan Gale       | Digital Equity Manager, GRCC                                         |
| Nick                | Digital Inclusion Officer and Community Hubs team, Creative Sustainability | Angela Presdee | Economy and Strategic Planning Team, Gloucestershire County Council  |
| Hannah Barton       | LSP Coordinator                                                            | Kim Brierley   | Internal and Project Communications Officer, Stroud District Council |

#### **1. Welcome, introductions, apologies.**

The Chair welcomed everyone and noted the apologies.

#### **2. DAISI – increasing digital equity across Gloucestershire. Barbara Piranty and Dan Gale, GRCC (presentation attached)**

GRCC presented the county-wide work they are doing on reducing the digital divide and helping people become more digitally able. Their digital equity programme is called DAISI: Digital, Accessibility, Inclusion, Support & Innovation. One of the initiatives they have developed is a databank, where with the help of partners they have distributed over 15,000 SIM cards to some of the most vulnerable residents. There is also a technology bank that ensures pieces of hardware donated in the county stay in the county. GRCC also share best practice, making sure Gloucestershire is on the map in terms of digital inclusion nationally.

Accessibility is one of the key principles for digital inclusion. GRCC have prepared resources to support accessibility, including a glossary of digital terms, and they also do work around reasonable adjustments, they conduct website accessibility audits alongside disability groups in the county, and they can provide assistive technology support and advice such as screen readers and digital pens, all of which enable digital empowerment.

DAISI is an ambassador for the National Good Things Foundation, presenting at national events for the network. GRCC also work in partnership to support people discharged from hospital through a new innovative inclusion project called Virtual Wards. They are also one of seven partners delivering Digi Hubs across Cheltenham and Cotswolds.

GRCC provide support in different forms across the county, including working with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) using bottom-up data to provide appropriate support and embedding digital technology in a clinical framework that has enabled individuals to have greater independence at home.

There is a county network of DAISI volunteers, including support at a community level and strategic level influencers. GRCC would welcome anyone who might be interested in volunteering for one of these roles.

In 2023, GRCC conducted surveys on the topic of digital equity throughout the county. These surveys asked over 1,200 individuals to identify different digital barriers, and the results showed that financial constraints are the key main barrier for people being digitally included.

They have also created roles, such as a Digital & Technology Inclusion Social Prescribing Link Worker for North Cotswolds PCN and a Digital & Technology Navigator for Tewkesbury Borough. These roles can help with health and wellbeing from a clinical point of view, but also with loneliness and isolation. Alongside GP surgeries they can identify patients who need 1-2-1 support.

GRCC participate in the RUSTIK (Rural Sustainability Transitions through Integration of Knowledge) project which looks at the sustainability and futureproofing of rural communities. RUSTIK runs across 10 countries and GRCC is the only VCS-led example in Europe. They have presented their work to the European Commission as it has been so successful. GRCC lead on a Living Lab across the county, where multiple pilot projects are run. One example is using drones to livestream nature to individuals to enable them to reduce their anxiety at a much higher rate than previously. They work closely with the University of Gloucestershire and other partners to understand the challenges and opportunities that exist in rural areas. If anyone is interested in becoming involved, this is still an open project.

The DAISI partnership is a cross-sector partnership built over the last two years and it is evolving quickly with 160 members. They have brought in funding for many partners, working with organisations like Digital Vision in the Forest of Dean. Some recent partnership projects include paying people to test websites meaning they can also upskill to become website auditors, managing and supporting multiple repair cafes, and designing delivery software for foodbanks.

A question was asked about whether GRCC are doing anything around young people and digital inclusion. GRCC confirmed they work with multiple VCS organisations that have a youth speciality, and they also design sources of information to appeal to younger people including Larry the Llama. If anyone believes there is a gap regarding youth provision, please let GRCC know.

Another question was asked about whether GRCC work with neighbouring authorities such as South Gloucestershire, as some border areas use their services including youth provision. GRCC noted that there is a challenge with many borders to Gloucestershire and this is something they will be looking to do more of.

A question was asked about how broadband provision affects residents across the county. GRCC noted that high-speed broadband is localised in urban centres and in rural areas high-speed broadband is less concentrated. Promotion of information is a key part of GRCC's work so residents know what options are available to them, and they do not have to rely on older infrastructure such as 3G, as this is being switched off and other digital options are becoming obsolete.

A further question was asked about how GRCC connect with people who do not want to engage digitally at all and who feel excluded from many services. GRCC noted that there is also a growing group of younger people who are choosing to disengage digitally, and the needs of these disengaged groups must be embedded, to ensure they are engaged and their voices are uplifted. These cohorts must initially be engaged with in a way that they are happy to engage.

### **3. Digital inclusion in Stroud District and DIGI Partnership. Helen Elliott-Boult, Digital Inclusion Project Manager, Creative Sustainability (presentation attached)**

Creative Sustainability gave a presentation on their work on digital inclusion in the Stroud District and the DIGI Partnership. They are also in the DAISI Partnership however are more Stroud-focussed.

Creative Sustainability introduced several of the initiatives under their Digital Inclusion Programme including digital drop-in sessions, Digital Champions, access to digital aids and devices, and digital repair skills workshops. Creative Sustainability take a people-first approach to digital inclusion and believe digital should be a tool to enable connection and live lives better.

Digital-first is being pushed a lot by organisations including GP surgeries, but this excludes many and there are huge barriers to access. Creative Sustainability work on identifying these barriers and will work with organisations as well as individuals on how to overcome barriers.

In November 2023, Creative Sustainability ran five digital pop-up stalls, including one in a GP surgery, to improve their understanding of digital exclusion and current skills levels and gaps. In the GP surgery, 28% of the support provided was help downloading the NHS app and 20% was help accessing health records. These pilots have helped people take control of their digital future.

Creative Sustainability organise drop-in sessions at community spaces such as Community Hubs and Independent Living Hubs, and they are also a partner in the Gloucestershire Digital Hubs project which includes setting up spaces where the community can use a computer and get online. They currently have 10 active Digital Champion volunteers who support participants with digital skills, and this model works particularly well as it is sometimes better to learn from a peer or friend. Creative Sustainability noted that lots of people have unused digital devices because they lack the skills to use them, so the drop-in sessions support with this.

Typically, there are three groups that are most digitally disengaged: older people, families with a lower socioeconomic status, and people with low amounts of disposable income to be able to purchase technology.

A question was asked about the age range of people who participate in Creative Sustainability's digital initiatives and whether Creative Sustainability have linked in with the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership. Creative Sustainability confirmed they work with people of all ages, and they will look into this partnership.

As Creative Sustainability's work is focussed around Stroud, a question was asked about support for those who live in the south of the district. GL11 support those living in the south of the Stroud district, and they work with Creative Sustainability and share resources.

A further question was asked about the impact of closures of banks in local communities and how this impacts people who now have to travel to go to their bank and often don't have transport to get there. Since Barclays shut their Stroud branch in January 2023, the bank has set up a site once a week in The Sub Rooms, however customers are limited in what they can do there. It was noted there is some lobbying happening through the FSB, and the Post Office are taking on a lot of banks' work, therefore it is important that communities support local Post Offices as there is pressure on these closing too.

An additional question was asked about the digital switchover and the switching off of landlines. GRCC have some flyers about the 3G switchover which contain some additional information that they can circulate.

**4. Fastershire. Angela Presdee, Gloucestershire County Council** (briefing note circulated prior to meeting)

Gloucestershire County Council's Economy and Strategic Planning team support with the Fastershire project which has been working to transform broadband and improve connectivity across Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. This began as a pilot project which became a

broadband project in collaboration with Herefordshire Council. Gloucestershire County Council have invested lots of money over the last 12 years to attract suppliers to work on this project, and bespoke contracts have meant they have been able to deliver in lots of areas. 98% of the county now has superfast connectivity.

They are now coming towards the end of the Fastershire project with the last contract due to end in August with Gigaclear. This will extend the full fibre network to around 4,400 additional premises in hard-to-reach rural areas. The Government's new £5billion Project Gigabit programme will continue work in this area and replace local authority-led projects like Fastershire.

To support those properties that still can't access a superfast connection, Gloucestershire County Council has launched the Digital Household Grant. The grant will fund the installation and hardware cost of a 4G solution and aims to provide an interim solution until Project Gigabit is delivered. They are also taking in resource in the form of a "champion" who will have the expertise to be able to continue conversations with suppliers in terms of fixed broadband and mobile connectivity.

Gloucestershire County Council has been involved in work with the voluntary and charity sectors, including the Good Things Foundation, the UK's leading digital inclusion charity. They have held many internal and external workshops, and their Libraries and Adult Education teams also play a role here. In May 2024, Gloucestershire County Council's new Economic Strategy was approved by their Cabinet, and this includes elements of digital work. They have also engaged consultants to carry out work to understand where the county is in terms of digital readiness, and this will feed into an emerging Digital Strategy.

A question was asked about whether the 98% of superfast connectivity is to houses or to cabinets. Gloucestershire County Council confirmed that this is the capability, and they are now trying to push this to premises.

The County Council were asked if they could share information of how the LSP can engage in the consultation on the emerging Digital Strategy.

The County Council are also part of the [River Severn Partnership](#), and they are looking at the potential use of 5G and futureproofing the county with new technology.

## **5. Future LSP meeting themes**

The theme of the next LSP meeting will be emergency response. If anyone has any suggestions for future LSP themes, please let Hannah know on [hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk).

## **6. Partners' Updates**

### **Will Mansell, Founder, The Grace Network:**

- Earlier this year, The Grace Network were informed that their site at Brimscombe Mill was being sold and the community enterprise ventures located there, including The Long Table and Stroud Furniture Bank, would have to find a new home. They are currently negotiating with the landlord and are optimistic about these conversations.

### **Alyssa Pearce, Leader, Stroud District Youth Council:**

- The Youth Council recently had elections for the roles of Chair and Vice Chair.
- They are working on a draft Manifesto Statement which will be circulated on their social media platforms.

**Catherine Braun, Leader, Stroud District Council:**

- The Council has signed the Local Digital Declaration which is a joint initiative from GDS and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and a collection of local authorities and other bodies across the UK.
- The Council has been doing work to develop a new digital platform to allow easier access to Council services, whilst recognising that there are some people for whom this platform won't work.
- They are mindful of cyber-attacks and have invested into protecting against the possibility of these.
- The Council are currently piloting a web assistant that has some chatbot functionality, and this will provide the opportunity to live chat with Customer Contact officers during office hours.
- There were elections in May to elect all 51 district councillors, and the AGM was held recently to appoint councillors to different roles. The next stage is to look at the Council's priorities for the coming year, and it would be good for the LSP to be involved in this.

**Geoffrey Beckerleg, Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Stroud & District:**

- The Chamber are working with Berkeley and Wotton-under-Edge to promote tourism locally and understand local needs.
- They are supporting businesses in Nailsworth with their upcoming fair.
- The Chamber is launching a new scheme called [Windows of Opportunity](#), and if this is successful they will roll it out across the district.

**Margaret Greaves, Interim Chair, Stroud League of Friends:**

- Margaret will be temporarily standing in for Dr Roma Walker as Chair of Stroud League of Friends.
- They are currently working through this year's applications for community funding grants and will be making decisions before the end of June.
- There have been several upgrades at the main Stroud hospital over the last few years, but there are currently no major projects there.
- They are hoping to hear shortly about the breast screening hub at Stroud.
- There are national issues of recruitment and retention in maternity services, but Stroud Maternity Hospital are continuing to support parents and their babies.

**Adrian Oldman, Director, Transition Stroud:**

- Transition Stroud are hoping to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Gloucestershire County Council to take delivery of 20 ebikes.
- 10 of these ebikes will be assigned for people to help them get back to work, and these can be assigned through the Job Centre or other referrers.
- Medium to long-term loans of the bikes will be £10 pcm.

**Angela Presdee and Chloe Warden, Economy and Strategic Planning team, Gloucestershire County Council:**

- The LEP has now transitioned into Gloucestershire County Council and David Owen is the new Director. Nine staff have transitioned to the County Council as a result of this.
- They are starting recruitment for the new Business Board to replace the LEP Board.
- Due to the recent expansion of the team, David Owen is stepping down from the LSP and the team will be represented at the LSP by Chloe Warden.

**Elizabeth Hall, Chief Executive, Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswolds:**

- Citizens Advice have identified that debt is increasing, with council tax arrears and energy debt, including fuel, being two of the most common debt issues they are seeing.

- They are carrying out a joint piece of work with North and West Gloucestershire about the state of housing in Gloucestershire. There is a multi-agency meeting looking at the findings of this, and a final report will be ready by early Autumn and this can be shared with the LSP.

**Steve Olczak, Partnership Manager, Department of Work and Pensions:**

- There is progress with the Job Centre returning in Stroud. Repair work has been taking place and they are hoping to reopen in the next couple of months.
- They have been conducting outreach work at GL11 and there are also three desks in the reception area at Stroud District Council so there is support at this location too. They are hoping this colocation and collaboration will continue.
- Extra support is available for vulnerable people who need face-to-face appointments.
- Jobs Fairs have also been held at the Council offices.
- Into-work figures are still one of the highest.

**Barbara Piranty, Chief Executive, GRCC:**

- GRCC have recruited a Flood and Community Resilience Officer.
- There are growing numbers of people with an autism diagnosis and GRCC are working with employers on reasonable adjustments to navigate this.
- They have received national funding from DEFRA around affordable housing.
- GRCC are looking into research about mental health amongst farmers and agriculture workers, as the suicide rate is currently 2 people per week.

**Chris Pockett, Head of Communications, Renishaw:**

- Renishaw continue to grow and they have over 200 new positions starting over Summer 2024, with most of these being in the district.
- The strength of the pound means Renishaw are earning less for overseas work and profitability is going down.
- Renishaw's Charities Committee are always open to applications:  
<https://www.renishaw.com/en/renishaw-charities-committee--18003>

**Max Comfort, Director, Stroud Commonwealth:**

- Stroud Commonwealth are looking to buy the building that [Stroud Exchange](#) is in. They have less than three years to do so and they are beginning negotiations with the current owner. They have a big ambition to demolish the building and replace it with a bigger version of the Exchange including a workshop, an increased number of meeting rooms, and two genuinely affordable homes on top.

**Beth Whittaker, Third sector/community involvement:**

- Beth noted that people used to rely on newspapers to get their information, however now there is a greater reliance on technology, a lot of people who are digitally excluded are not aware of issues.

Please send any requests for future agenda items or suggestions for future meeting themes to Hannah Barton, [hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk)

**Next meeting**  
Friday 13 September

The meetings are 9:00am for a 9:15am start, with meeting end by 11:30am.