

Cabinet
09/January2025



COTSWOLD
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Thursday, 9 January 2025

Members present:

Joe Harris	Mike Evely	
Claire Bloomer	Juliet Layton	Tristan Wilkinson
Paul Hodgkinson	Mike McKeown	

Officers present:

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and	Environmental, Welfare and Revenue
Chief Finance Officer	Service
Frank Wilson, Interim Managing Director	Paula Massey, Customer Enabling Manager
(Publica)	Maria Wheatley, Shared Parking Manager
Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic
Electoral Services	Development and Communities
Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, Counter	Nickie Mackenzie-Daste, Executive
Fraud and Enforcement Unit	Assistant to CEO

Observers:

Councillor David Fowles and Nikki Ind

40 Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

41 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

42 Minutes

The purpose of this item was to consider the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet on 5 September 2024. There were no amendments to the minutes.

The minutes were proposed by Cllr Joe Harris and seconded by Cllr Mike Evely.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 December 2024 be approved as a correct record.

Voting Record:
5 For, 0 Against, 2 Abstentions

43 Leader's Announcements

The Leader made the following announcements:

The Leader acknowledged that the government's proposals for English devolution and local government reorganisation were likely to profoundly shape the future of local government. It was noted that the Council's administration strongly supported the principle of devolution, emphasising that decisions affecting communities were best taken by those who understood and were accountable to them.

The Leader recognised the government's mandate for mayors and the strategic authorities that accompanied them but pointed out that no such mandate existed for reorganisation. The Leader stressed that any changes should be subject to full public consultation and expressed concern that the government's current proposals risked undermining local democracy. It was highlighted that large local authorities risked becoming remote from the people they served. The Chair praised district councils for delivering excellent work across all services and for championing their communities.

The Leader stated that Gloucestershire was not ready for sweeping changes and confirmed that he did not support Gloucestershire County Council's call to postpone elections, which he described as a political manoeuvre. He reported that he had joined other district councils across the county in writing to the government to oppose the proposed delay to local elections.

It was further reported that the government had invited plans to be submitted in May for areas where elections would be delayed. The Leader indicated that, should the government delay elections in this area, they would support a single unitary authority. However, the preferred option would be to create two councils—one for East Gloucestershire and one for West Gloucestershire—an option that had previously been explored and enjoyed significant support.

Regarding the issue of mayors, the Leader expressed a preference to look south towards Swindon and Wiltshire or to the West of England, rather than considering Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

It was confirmed that all proposals would be brought back to Full Council for debate and agreement. The Leader underlined that the priority would be to ensure that any changes made would serve the interests of the people, strengthen democracy, and protect the high quality of services provided by the councils.

44 Public Questions

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There were no public questions.

45 Member Questions

Cllr Chris Twells submitted the following questions:

1. Local Government Reform

What communication, if any, has the Cabinet received from the Government regarding the latest proposals to reform local government in Gloucestershire? Will the County Council elections proceed as scheduled on Thursday 1 May? If not, when will the decision to postpone the elections be communicated to residents?

Additionally, does the Leader or any Cabinet colleagues have ambitions to become the Combined Authority Mayor for Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon? If so, could they advocate for the new Mayoral Offices to be located in Tetbury, which is conveniently situated at the beating heart of these three local authorities.

Councillor Harris thanked Councillor Twells for his question and responded:

A number of formal letters had been received from MHCLG just before Christmas, and Councillor Harris offered to share what was available upon request. Regarding the County Council elections, the Leader referred to his previous statement and confirmed that he did not know whether the local elections would proceed. However, the opinion at the time was that elections in the Cotswolds were not likely to be delayed. As soon as the council becomes aware of the decision, residents will be informed.

It was confirmed that neither the Leader nor any members of the Cabinet had ambitions to become the Combined Authority Mayor for Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, and Swindon.

If there were to be a combined authority, the Leader expressed willingness for Tetbury to be considered among other candidates for the location of the new Mayoral Offices.

2. Old Station Car Park - Lease

Does the Council hold a copy of the lease for the Old Station (Old Railyard) car park in Tetbury? If possible, please provide a copy of this document for inspection.

Councillor Every thanked Councillor Twells for his question and responded:

There is a lease agreement for the public car park at the Former Railway and Goods Yard, Tetbury between Cotswold District Council, as tenant and the landlord Tetbury Town Council. The lease can be shared with Cllr Twells who as a Councillor has a right to information, but any wider disclosure would need to be agreed by the Town Council as leases are not public documents.

A copy of the lease was made available to Councillor Twells.

There was one recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny meeting held on 6 January 2025:

Recommendation: That the Council ensures that it has processes in place for testing and developing the value of the work it is undertaking on the climate and ecological emergency with a view to providing positive ongoing investment in this field.

The recommendation is accepted. The Council has adopted governance and decision-making processes that give significant priority to climate change. All reports prepared for decision-making purposes now include a mandatory section on the implications for the Climate and Ecological Emergencies. Additionally, the council is trialling a Sustainability Impact Assessment Tool, designed to ensure that sustainability considerations are reviewed at key stages of projects including the design stage when beneficial changes can still be made. The tool ensures for example: the carbon implications of building/operating new buildings is assessed; opportunities to mitigate negative impacts by design is identified; facilities and access to sustainable transport is provided; and ecological enhancement in site landscaping is maximised.

47 Business Rates Relief 2025/2026, retail, hospitality and leisure scheme

The purpose of the item was to consider a scheme of rate relief for retail premises as outlined by Government in the Autumn Statement 2024.

The Deputy Leader and Member for Finance and Transformation introduced the item.

It was stated that in response to the pandemic the government had introduced one-off business rate discounts for retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses. An annual decision made by government determines the level of relief offered. The budget announcement declared relief of 40% for 2025/2026.

Cabinet approval was sought in order for the officers to apply the discounts and issue adjusted bills to qualifying businesses. Eligibility criteria were outlined in the report, Annex A gave details of qualifying and non-qualifying businesses.

Councillor Wilkinson expressed concerns about the potential impact of the increased business rates on local businesses. Councillor Evely acknowledged that moving from paying 25% to 60% of their assessed business rates combined with other costs such as the National Insurance increase, would create additional financial pressure on businesses,

Businesses in financial difficulty could seek assistance from the Council's business support officer via a hardship scheme, available to those who could demonstrate financial challenges and had a recovery plan.

It was noted that it was in the Council's interest to ensure engagement as early as possible with businesses experiencing problems.

Councillor Wilkinson stated that councillors should be wary of the effect on smaller businesses in rural villages which are the lifeblood of local communities.

The Leader agreed that the government decision to reduce business rates relief from 75% to 40% would have a huge impact on the economy and small and medium businesses, especially when coupled with the rises in National Insurance contributions

Councillor Bloomer proposed an action for the Economic Development Lead to ensure that the availability of support to businesses be put out on social media.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Mike Every, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, and seconded by Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED that Cabinet :

1. APPROVE the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme as set out in Annex A for 2025/2026
2. DELEGATE authority to the Interim Executive Director for Resident Services to award such reliefs

Voting Record 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

48 Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Collaboration Agreement

The purpose of the item was to seek approval of the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Partnership Collaboration Agreement between Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Borough and Cotswold, Forest of Dean, Stroud and West Oxfordshire District Councils.

The Deputy Leader and Member for Finance and Transformation introduced the item and introduced the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit, a shared service hosted by Cotswold District Council which provided excellent and cost-effective support to both Cotswold District Council and partner councils and a few additional organisations. The partnership, established in 2017, focused on mitigating fraud risks, reducing criminal activity, and preventing financial losses for member councils and other organisations.

Councillor Every emphasised the unit's value, citing the team's work during the COVID-19 pandemic in designing fraud-minimization systems for business grants, which saved significant sums. The Council's annual cost for the service was about £100,000, which was justified by the team's contributions to fraud prevention and assistance across partner councils.

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Thanks were expressed to the CFEU for their continued great work.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Evely, Deputy Leader and Member for Finance and Transformation, and seconded by Councillor Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. Recommend to Council to approve entering into the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Partnership Collaboration Agreement (The revised agreement is for 10 years with an option to extend for up to 3 years at a time. There is no limit on the number of times the agreement can be extended).
2. NOTE that there is an option for Cotswold District Council to cease acting as host on 31 March in any year of the term by giving the other Councils 18 months' notice.
3. NOTE that any Council can leave the agreement on the service of 12 months' notice to expire on the 31 March

Voting Record 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

49 Corinium Museum Collections Development and Human Remains policies

The purpose of the item was to review and approve the Collections and Human Remains Policies of the Corinium Museum, and to agree to a delegation to the Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience.

The Cabinet Member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience introduced the item.

The Corinium Museum in Cirencester was discussed. Cabinet Members highlighted its status as an award-winning institution that showcases over 2,000 years of Romano-British history. The museum's high acclaim and its significance in preserving local heritage were also highlighted.

Approval was sought for updated policies for the museum, specifically concerning collections and human remains, as well as the processes for accessioning (adding items to the collection) and deaccessioning (removing items). The updates were necessary for the museum to maintain its accreditation and adhere to best practices in the sector.

One revised policy related to handling new artifacts and disposing of items, while the other addressed the sensitive treatment of human remains, of which the museum held 1,400 sets.

Delegated authority was sought for handling accession and deaccession requests, clarification was given that such requests were rare but would be handled more efficiently in a portfolio holder meeting rather than the broader forum. Following a

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question from Councillor Layton around report point 6.3, it was also clarified that any decisions for a notional value of £250,000 would be referred to Cabinet for a decision.

The Leader requested that the report author make two amendments:

1. The Council's new logo should be used on the new Collections Development Policy,
2. The Human Remains Policy should incorporate the Council's new logo, and the policy should be referenced as a Cotswold District Council policy to reflect the Council's ownership.

Thanks were given to Emma Stewart and her team at the museum for their excellent work.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience, and seconded by Councillor Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. APPROVE the Collections and Human Remains Policies of the Corinium Museum;
2. DELEGATE authority to the Cabinet member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience to determine accession and deaccession requests and agree to the Museum's Forward Plan

Voting Record 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

50 Disabled Facilities Grants Policy Update

The Purpose of the item was to seek Cabinet approval for the implementation of the updated Disabled Facilities Grant Policy.

The Policy brings all Gloucestershire districts together to ensure equity for people with disabilities and enable a countywide statement of intent, (with local delivery differences where appropriate) and was presented following template guidance from Foundations, the National Body for Disabled Facilities Grants in England.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the item.

The delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) involved collaboration among various organisations, including the six district councils, the occupational therapy service, the integrated commissioning team, and the integrated care board. A new policy, developed through consultation with these stakeholders, aimed to ensure equity of provision across the county while allowing for local variations.

The policy was informed by guidance from Foundations, the National Body for Disabled Facilities Grants in England, and included a Gloucestershire County Statement of Intent.

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It was highlighted that the policy introduced key updates, including a local land charge of up to £10,000 for properties receiving grants over £5,000, applicable for ten years. Discretionary grants might also be subject to land charges, depending on their nature and value. The delegation of authority for approving DFGs was outlined, with different approval levels based on grant amounts, as detailed in the recommendations.

To maintain the relevance of the pooled DFG funding agreement, it was decided that the matter would be added to the Leadership Gloucestershire agenda for periodic review, and the DFG Council forum would continue to meet quarterly.

In summary, Councillor Layton reported that the updated policy was designed to enhance the delivery and management of DFGs, ensuring that disabled individuals in the Cotswold district received the necessary support to live independently and safely in their homes

The Chair recognised the work put into producing the report and thanked officers for their work in supporting vulnerable residents.

Attention was drawn to the growing demographic of young people with disabilities by Councillor Bloomer who emphasised that the grants were invaluable not only in supporting the independence of individuals with disabilities but also in providing peace of mind to their families, ensuring that both young and elderly people could live independently and maintain their sense of self-worth.

Councillor Evemy noted that the funding provided to local authorities for these grants had trebled nationally since 2012, highlighting the growing need for assistance to enable people to remain in their homes. It was acknowledged that demand against the budget was increasing this year, and the importance of the land charge policy was emphasised. Councillor Evemy noted that the land charge allowed for the recovery of funds if recipients moved on quickly after receiving adaptations, ensuring the money could be reused for other grants. Reassurance was given that this process was managed with officer discretion and aimed to support fairness and sustainability.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, and seconded by Councillor Bloomer, Cabinet Member for Communities

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

1. APPROVE the updated Disabled Facilities Grant Policy, subject to availability of Disabled Facilities Grant funding from the Better Care fund annual allocation.
2. CONTINUE TO DELEGATE authority to approve Discretionary Disabled Facility Grant funding as per the Council's Constitution.
 - Up to £2,500 - Service Manager/Lead
 - Up to £10,000 - Head of Service/Business Manager

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- Up to £50,000 – Assistant Director/Director
 - Over £50,000 – Section 151 Officer and CEO
3. APPROVE the key updates to the policy that:
- a) Mandatory Grants - where the applicant is an owner occupier, and the grant value is over £5,000 a local land charge up to £10,000 may apply for 10 years
 - b) Discretionary Grants – a local land charge may apply depending upon the nature and value of the DDFG as outlined in Appendix B – Types of Assistance

Voting Record 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

51 Financial Performance Report - Q2 2024/25 (Update)

The purpose of the item was to set the budget monitoring position for “Planning Services” for the 2024/25 financial year.

Councillor Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, and Transformation introduced the item.

Councillor Evemy reported that at the December meeting, the Q2 update lacked planning information due to staff transferring on November 1st, which did not allow enough time to compile the data. Further work by the Deputy Chief Executive Officer and the finance team was included in the current report, which detailed roles and recruitment efforts for vacant positions.

Positive progress in recruiting permanent planning staff under Cotswold District Council was noted, including successfully filling two full-time planning roles, instead of relying on interim staff as in previous years under Publica. However, the report also revealed that the planning service was exceeding its budget, with an overspend forecast of £128,000, primarily within the development management area.

The revised figures showed that the projected contribution to reserves for the year, initially set at £516,000, had been reduced to £219,000 due to these financial pressures.

There were no questions or comments on this item for noting.

The recommendations were proposed by the Deputy Leader and Member for Finance and Transformation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

REVIEW and NOTE the financial position set out in this report

52 Schedule of Decisions taken by the Leader of the Council and/or Individual Cabinet Members

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No individual Cabinet Member decisions had been taken since the previous meeting of Cabinet, held on 5 December 2024.

53 Contract Award for the Parking ICT system

The purpose of the item was to agree the contract award for the Parking ICT system.

Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience introduced the item.

The Leader stated that the decision could be taken in public provided there were no detailed questions around the exempt annex.

The report sought Cabinet approval to award a contract for a parking system. It was explained that the current system, shared with Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire district councils, supported parking enforcement by managing penalty charge notices and virtual permits.

After following the procurement process the preferred contractor, Chipside Limited, the current contractor, was recommended for a four-year contract with an optional one-year extension.

It was clarified that the contract would include a three-month no-fault termination clause to allow flexibility for potential changes, such as Council restructuring.

The Chair acknowledged the importance of parking enforcement despite its unpopularity. The hard work of the parking officers and their manager was praised.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture, and Visitor Experience, and seconded by Councillor Evely, Deputy Leader and Member for Finance and Transformation

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

APPROVE the recommendation by officers to award the contract for the Parking ICT system to the preferred contractor as outlined in the Exempt Annex B. The contract length is 4 years plus 1

Voting Record 7 For, 0 Against, 0 Abstention

54 Matters exempt from publication

Cabinet did not enter private session.

55 Exempt Annex B for Agenda Item 14

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Cabinet took the exempt minutes as read as part of agenda item 14 and therefore did not discuss them in private session.

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 6.55 pm

Chair

(END)