



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 3 February 2025

Members present:

Gina Blomefield	Gary Selwyn
David Cunningham	Lisa Spivey
David Fowles	Clare Turner
Angus Jenkinson	Michael Vann
Jon Wareing	

Officers present:

Matthew Britton, Interim Forward Planning Lead	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services	Nickie Mackenzie-Daste, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer

Observers:

Councillor Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation - Cllr Mike Evely

OS.137 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Slater.

OS.138 **Substitute Members**

Councillor David Fowles substituted for Councillor Tony Slater.

OS.139 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

OS.140 **Minutes**

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The Chair's amendments to the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2025 had been incorporated into the published version contained in the agenda pack. The Chair invited other Members of the Committee to add their comments on the Minutes but there were none.

Upon being proposed and seconded, the approval of the minutes was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: To APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2025.

OS.141 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting.

OS.142 Chair's Announcements

The Chair stated that due to an over-run of the January meeting the reports from the two Gloucestershire Scrutiny Committees item had not been shared or discussed at that meeting so had been moved to the first part of today's meeting. The Chair encouraged Members and Officers to be succinct with their questions and answers, with timing warnings given by the Vice Chair if it was felt that timings could overrun.

The Chair noted the late supply of the Draft Budget and MTFs report and requested that reports be provided earlier so as to give more time to scrutinise in future.

OS.143 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.144 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

OS.145 Report back on recommendations

The Chair gave feedback that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation on the Climate and Ecological Emergency had been accepted by Cabinet.

OS.146 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

Councillor Jenkinson invited members for any questions on the GESSC report which had been circulated in the agenda pack.

No questions were asked and the Chair expressed their gratitude on the great job Councillor Jenkinson was doing on reporting from Gloucestershire County Council. There was no report from HOSC as Cllr Neill was not present at the meeting.

The Chair explained that a meeting had been held informally earlier in the day to begin the process of formulating a work plan for 2025/2026.

Items for inclusion included:

- Review of Local Plan.
- How to deal with second homes and long-term empty properties.

Members felt that it would be necessary to leave time in the Work Plan to react to changing situations including the impact of devolution and the Phase 2 of the Publica Transition. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted to be able to support Cabinet 'as and when' and noted that the impacts of these changes will filter through as decisions and timetables are made and would come to O&S ahead of the relevant Cabinet Meeting. The Chair was mindful of the pressures on Officers time and capacity during these substantial alterations to the Council and didn't want to add additional items whose relevance might soon be changed.

Councillor Every, Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, asked that the Accountable Member for the Public Conveniences item be changed to Councillor Wilkinson, who now held the brief for this.

OS.148 **Update on Strategic Plan for North Cotswolds**

The purpose of the item was to receive an update on the strategic plan for North Cotswolds.

Matthew Britton, the Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure, introduced the item and explained that in January 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended setting up a Moreton-in-Marsh Working Group to be part of the Local Plan consultation for the Strategic Growth Proposal to consider the required infrastructure to support the additional 1,500 houses expected in the settlement.

The Officer gave the following updates:

- From the local consultations in February - April 2024 and again in October 2024 run by Planning for Real, there were a substantial number of consultation responses which had been used to update the Local Plan policies.
- Further identified development sites were being assessed in the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability update.
- A feasibility study has been commissioned to look at the growth of Moreton-in-Marsh with a focus on the concerns highlighted from the Local Plan consultation on the capacity of the road system and the sewage infrastructure.
- There would be a community event on 12 February to feed back on consultation, brief on the Working Group and the Town council would provide a presentation on the Railway Station redevelopment.

In discussing the report, Members raised the following points:

- Concerns were raised about the slow progress with the first working group meeting happening 15 months after approval. The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure stated that there had been Government changes to National Planning Policy. The Council had bid for £250,000 of government funding as recognition of the delays being caused. The Local Development Scheme would be presented to the 6 March 2025 Cabinet meeting providing an updated timetable for the Local Plan and associated workstreams.
- Members wanted to know what the effect of new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes would be including the emphasis on the prioritisation of places near train stations for development. The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure explained that it was presumed that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in March 2025 would be favourable to development around train stations.
- The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure identified that the NPPF changes meant that the annual housing target has risen from 504 to 1036 homes, significantly increasing planned growth.
- Members shared the uncertainty about the progress of the feasibility study and the Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure reported that whilst the update report was quite minimal, there were about 60 documents that were being updated e.g. Water Cycle Study, Infrastructure Delivery Plan. The consultants tasked with the Feasibility Study had split it into two parts with part 1 looking at whether a development was feasible before looking at key infrastructure to avoid unnecessary expenditure if deemed unsuitable.
- Members asked for details around the timing and publication of the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability documents. The Officer reported that the Feasibility Study was being undertaken by Gloucestershire County Council and would be shared once available.
- Members were keen to know when the Working Group would be scheduled to meet and whether members would receive the necessary training to effectively participate. The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure acknowledged the delays in the programme and regular meeting programme would be set up from March 2025.
- Members asked how close the Council was to providing the annual 1036 homes target but the Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure was unable to give an answer until the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) was complete. The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure acknowledged that the housing supply report was updated annually and included sites from the adopted Local Plan, those with planning permission, and expected windfall sites but data about future local plan site allocations was not yet available.
- The Committee commented on the title of the report as it could confuse residents with the Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure agreeing

that it was a 'hangover' from January last year but confirmed that the proposals for the North Cotswolds were a section of the Local Plan.

- Members asked about whether the Working Group would have a statutory consultation function and the Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure explained that the role was advisory.
- The Committee asked for clarification as to what aspects of the plans are retained in the partial update compared to the original full plan and the housing proposals and concerns raised about the highway impact and the sewage capacity to any further developments. The Interim Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure explained that the Council was undertaking a partial local plan update (2011–2031) and a development strategy & site allocations plan, distinct from a full plan update. The development strategy would likely extend beyond 2041 due to the 15-year planning requirement from the date of adoption with further housing numbers dependent on feasibility studies and the update from strategic housing and land assessments.

RESOLVED: The Committee NOTED the report.

OS.149 Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

This report set out the Revenue Budget for 2025/26, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2028/29

Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation, Councillor Mike Evemy, introduced the item. They raised the following points:

- There was a £3m reduction in funding from Government in 2026/27.
- The Council was not being fully reimbursed for the impact of changes to Employers National Insurance contributions in April 2025 - £267,000 shortfall.
- The Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) provided district councils with a cash flat settlement only after Council Tax increases were included.
- New Homes Bonus would continue for a further year £0.820m of one-off funding.
- Extended Producer Responsibility – funding of £1.5m had been provided.
- The Rural Services Delivery Grant had been abolished with a loss of £0.820m per annum.
- There would be a £0.662m surplus in 2025/26, followed in 2026/27 by a £1.539m deficit/budget gap and in 2027/28 a £4.829m deficit/budget gap
- The Council would be utilising its Financial Resilience Reserve and Business Rates Risk reserve to support the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- There needed to be a focus on savings and cost reductions to address the budget gap in 2026/27 in order to provide services to residents.
- The Budget included a £5 Council Tax increase, a Second Home charge, a freeze on car parking charges for stays up to one hour and inflationary rises for stays of two hours or more.
- Garden waste fees would be increased to maintain a cost recovery position.

The Deputy Chief Executive added information on the risks and uncertainties around Transitional Protection estimates assuming a 'quick' transfer of funding along with potential global economy/trade wars.

Members discussed the report, raising the following points:

- Members asked about the Capital Waste Project in light of the future of the Council and the costs involved. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that it would not be unreasonable to review the vehicle replacement programme and see how the life of the vehicles could be extended. Ideas were suggested around increasing the life of the fleet beyond the planned seven-year lifespan of the vehicles, hiring fleet vehicles, opportunities with UBICO providing services across the whole of Gloucestershire or the purchase 'nearly new' vehicles from other local authorities. There was a responsibility to maintain services to residents bearing in mind the impact of devolution changes in the future.
- A Member asked whether circumstances created by the Devolution White Paper would allow for discretionary options with respect to the strategic use of reserves to fund off one-off costs for service improvements e.g. upgrades to critical infrastructure, visible community projects, clearing backlogs of planning enforcement cases. The view of the Chief Financial Officer was that the Section 25 statement would assess the robustness of budget estimates and adequacy of reserves, highlighting that without significant cost reductions in the next few years, continued reliance on reserves would threaten the Council's financial sustainability and the ability to provide the quality of statutory services for residents. Unless there are significant cost reductions in the next two years then the Council would need to apply for Exceptional Financial Support from the Government and so the advice was to retain reserves to support future budgets.
- Members questioned some of the spending included in the budget and whether these costs were necessary – spending on roles that may not have longer term value and Phase 2 of the Publica transition. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation explained that if services were not transformed and run differently, they would cost more money and so felt that the Phase 2 transition of Publica should continue for the lifespan of this Council. The new roles would be funded using reserves to allow for the smooth transformation of staff to Cotswold District Council (CDC) from Publica.
- Members asked for clarification on the CDC pay inflation. The Chief Financial Officer agreed to provide an explanation following the meeting but assured the Committee that the figures were correct.
- Members asked for clarification into the funding provided to Cirencester Town Council for the Cirencester Master Plan. The Chief Financial Officer explained that these were costs associated with the CDC activities.
- Members expressed the difficulties of managing finances with reduced Government funding and asked about the relevance of applying for Exceptional Financial Support. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation

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reassured the Committee that representations were being made to Government and to the Local Government Association that the financial settlement for District Councils was completely inadequate. Applying for EFS would mean massively raising council tax or having to sell off assets to support revenue spending and would take choice away from members. It would provide the Council with a financial lifeline for only a very defined period.

- The Chair wanted to know if there were costs associated with the unoccupied space not let in the Trinity Road offices. The Chief Financial Officer agreed that there would be costs and there was a discussion about the difficulties with renting various parts of the building. Watermoor Point had reported more interest recently and it was hoped that more tenants would be confirmed shortly.

RESOLVED: The Committee NOTED the report.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.18 pm