



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 6 May 2025

Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)

Clare Turner (Vice Chair)

David Fowles

David Cunningham

Dilys Neill

Jon Wareing

Angus Jenkinson

Officers present:

Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services

Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer

Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)

Thomas See, Homeseeker Plus Lead

David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer

Maria Wheatley, Shared Parking Manager

Robert Weaver, Chief Executive

Observers:

Councillor Juliet Layton and Tristan Wilkinson

OS.176 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Slater and Councillor Michael Vann.

OS.177 Substitute Members

Councillor David Fowles substituted for Councillor Tony Slater.

OS.178 Declarations of Interest

There were no declaration on interests.

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2025 were discussed.

Councillor Jon Waring proposed accepting the minutes and Councillor Angus Jenkinson seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 31 March 2025

OS.180 **Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Chair asked whether a point raised at the previous Committee meeting regarding remote access and a summary briefing for the 4 June Town and Parish Summit had been organised.

The Director of Governance and Development explained that invites had been sent to all Town and Parish Councils with invites to District Councillors to follow. There was encouragement for District Councillors to encourage Town and Parish Councils to engage with the event.

The Chair requested that remote access to the event and a briefing be supplied. Concern was also raised about the lack of representatives from smaller parishes at the Summit to support parishes with under 1000 residents.

OS.181 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Councillors Laura Hill-Wilson and Nicholas Bridges who were elected as Councillors to the Cotswold District Council in the recent by-elections.

In the absence of former councillor Gary Selwyn, Councillor Clare Turner acted as Vice-Chair at the Committee meeting.

The Chair stated that a dedicated officer to support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been recommended by the Peer Review and should be considered.

The Chair also reported that Bromford Housing had been invited to attend a future meeting to provide an update on how they are managing their properties, improving energy efficiency, and supporting their tenants. Additionally, a forthcoming report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would examine the economic impact of recent Government tax policy changes on businesses within the Cotswold District.

OS.182 **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

OS.183 Member Questions

There were two Member questions.

Question 1

Councillor David Cunningham asked the Chief Executive to report on how the complaints procedure was being implemented, the frequency of complaints received, and the typical timeframes for their resolution. The Director of Governance and Development explained that the complaints process had recently undergone changes, and it might be too early to fully assess the impact of these revisions. A briefing email outlining the complaints policy, standard response times, and the types of complaints received would be circulated in due course.

Question 2

Councillor David Cunningham asked for a status update from Ubico regarding the maintenance and replacement of street signs across the District.

The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that there was currently a backlog in street sign replacements. He agreed to provide an overview of the existing system along with an update on the current status of the replacement programme.

OS.184 Report back on recommendations

There were no recommendations to Cabinet arising from the previous Committee meeting.

OS.185 Public Toilets

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment introduced the Public Toilets update. They raised the following points:

- Progress on previous decisions regarding the public toilets project had not met expectations.
- Some toilets had been closed where there had previously been multiple Council-operated facilities within the same town.
- Changes resulting from Local Government Devolution had affected the anticipated timelines for return on investment and capital expenditure.
- There was a shared desire to avoid imposing additional costs on Town and Parish Councils to adopt these facilities.
- Concerns were raised over the initial failure to identify that certain assets were in poor physical condition and in need of significant upgrades.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the level of support for the action plan had fallen short of the expectations of both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Task-and-Finish Group. He reiterated the need for careful consideration of future

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actions by Cotswold District Council in the context of ongoing Local Government Reform

Members discussed the report raising the following points:

- Members expressed disappointment that the charge for using public toilets had not been increased towards a level that would cover the cost of providing the service. It was noted that the February Budget meeting had recommended that the charges for most discretionary services should be cost neutral . A question was raised as to why the charge had not been adjusted accordingly. The installation of digital card readers had been intended to facilitate easier payments by the public. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment agreed that the service should operate on a cost-neutral basis and confirmed that the introduction of card readers would support the implementation of this approach.
- Members inquired about the costs associated with reopening the public toilets at Mangersbury Road Car Park for the Horse Fair, as well as the implications for future facilities if such assets are disposed of. The Parking Manager confirmed that there would be a cost incurred for reopening the Mangersbury Road toilets for the five days of the fair. The Deputy Chief Executive stated that it was Council policy to recover costs for discretionary services through appropriate fees, including for public conveniences. Before implementing wider adjustments to the standard fee structure—particularly introducing charges at previously free locations—data on the impacts of such changes should be collected and assessed.
- Members reflected on a key finding from the Task and Finish Group, noting that many residents were unaware that the provision of public conveniences is a discretionary service offered by the Council. A Member emphasised the importance of clearly communicating this to the public.
- Members reflected on a key finding from of the Task-and-Finish Group to improve the toilet facilities. It was emphasised that, in order for the payment system to operate effectively, access points must first be secured and made fit for purpose. This should then be followed by the introduction of a user-friendly payment system.
- Members noted that several hospitality venues within the District had expressed frustration over visitors using their toilet facilities without making a purchase. It was highlighted that this placed a financial burden on businesses.
- Members observed that, with the potential transition to a unitary authority model, the future management of public convenience assets would likely fall to local councils. They stressed the importance of providing adequate time and

detailed financial information to enable Town and Parish Councils to assess their capacity to assume such responsibilities.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment agreed that a clear business case should be developed and presented to Town and Parish Councils. He also emphasised the need for transparency regarding the consequences of non-adoption, noting that facilities could be at risk of closure if local councils chose not to take them on.

- A Member queried whether there was any fundamental reason why necessary maintenance work could not be commissioned and carried out by an external contractor. It was suggested that outsourcing the work or bringing in additional expertise incurred significant expense, it would be necessary to assess whether the cost could be recouped through a return on investment.
- Members inquired about resident feedback regarding the closure of public toilets. The Parking Manager explained that seven complaints had been received concerning the closure of toilets for the 2024/25 period.
- The Member also raised concerns about usage data following the increase in charges, suggesting that higher fees may have led to misuse of nearby areas, break-ins, or attempts to bypass the payment systems. The Parking Manager confirmed that usage had increased compared to the previous year.

The Committee commended the open approach of the Cabinet Member and officers and expressed their thanks for the comprehensive report.

The Committee RESOLVED to submit the following recommendation to Cabinet:

That the Council gives a higher priority to implementing the recommendations from the Public Conveniences Working Group that were agreed by Cabinet on 1 February 2024.

Proposer by Councillor David Cunningham and seconded by Councillor Angus Jenkinson.

OS.186 District Homelessness Update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the District Homelessness Update and reported that, as of April, approximately 30 individuals—including both adults and children—were in temporary accommodation within the district. The Cabinet Member also presented the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy, which aimed to shift the Council's approach from reactive responses to a focus on prevention.

Key challenges identified included delays in returning empty properties to use and a lack of sufficient enforcement mechanisms within the current system.

The Strategy's key themes included enhanced data monitoring and integration, tackling long-term empty homes, and promoting collaborative working with other councils, health services, the police, training providers, and voluntary sector organisations. Briefings and training sessions for Town and Parish Councils were planned as part of this initiative.

Members discussed the report raising the following points:

- Members raised concerns about the challenges involved in securing support for identified rough sleepers. The Officer explained that members of the public were encouraged to report sightings through StreetLink, which served as the initial point of contact. The aim was for outreach teams to visit the reported location within 24 hours to assess and engage with the individual concerned.
- Members acknowledged the Strategy's recognition of the need to reduce bureaucracy and to identify barriers within service delivery that hinder support for individuals at risk of homelessness.
- Members questioned how the reported number of homelessness cases was determined. The Officer explained that the data was based on the number of rough sleepers reported to the County's rough sleeper outreach contact.
- Members enquired about how the grant of £365,327 would be allocated to support the delivery of service priorities. The Deputy Chief Executive and the confirmed that a breakdown of how the funding for 2025/26 would be utilised would be provided.
- A Member raised concerns about the disconnect between housing affordability and local income levels. The Member questioned whether the current proportion of affordable housing was sufficient to meaningfully address the widening gap between average earnings and house prices.
- A Member questioned the extent to which less visible forms of homelessness were prevalent within the district and how these cases were being addressed. They also highlighted that many individuals experiencing homelessness faced complex challenges, including mental health issues, and requested further details on how the Council collaborated with other agencies to support those with more complex needs.

The Homeseeker Plus Lead explained that the Council worked with a range of partner organisations across Gloucestershire to provide support for individuals experiencing homelessness. The Council aimed to offer flexible and appropriate housing solutions where possible. The discussion also covered the various pathways into homelessness and the different approaches required to address them effectively.

- Members discussed the operation of the StreetLink system in identifying individuals experiencing homelessness. The discussion also covered the training provided to support effective engagement and assistance for rough sleepers.

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- Members discussed the need to improve public understanding of how housing is allocated through the HomeSeeker Plus system. The discussion highlighted the importance of clear communication to ensure transparency and manage expectations around the housing allocation process.
- Members discussed the relationship between the funding received and the costs associated with delivering homelessness services. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Council's approach to valuing outcomes was guided by its Corporate Business Plan. The Homelessness Reduction Grant was intended to be used for preventative measures and emergency placements.
- The Chair inquired whether organisations that build homes specifically for rental would be a partnership worth exploring. Additionally, a request was made for a breakdown of the waiting list numbers across the three categories of housing need.

The Committee commended the team for the important work they carry out and the positive impact they have on people's lives. The Committee also expressed thanks to the HomeSeeker Plus Lead who had stepped in and responded to questions at short notice.

OS.187 **Progress Review - Task & Finish Group IHT Farming**

The Chair of the Task and Finish Group provided an update on the working group's progress regarding the impact of proposed inheritance tax changes on farms. The group had held one online and one in-person meeting where the terms of reference had been agreed. A strong set of questions for an online questionnaire were to be refined.

The Stakeholder invitation list was still being developed due to the breadth of the topic.

The aim was still to produce a constructive, solution-focused response to government, not simply for or against. A report was expected by July for Council consideration.

The Chair thanked the Members of the Task-and-Finish Group for their time and effort in the production of a response.

Councillor David Cunningham left at 17:45

OS.188 **Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees**

There had been no meetings of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) or the Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committee (GCCSC) since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting.

The Chair updated the Committee on changes to the Work Plan.

It was noted that the item on the ecological emergency was deferred to September due to the busy schedule in July.

The July discussion on the Local Plan was noted to be an update rather than the final version however, the Committee anticipated close scrutiny and questions. The importance of the Local Plan was strongly emphasised.

Members expressed concern that the number of July reports would be difficult to fully scrutinise and questioned if the Publica Transition would be brought before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services discussed the reports proposed for the July meeting. There was further discussion about the challenges in moving reports to earlier in the year but suggested considering the possibility of holding two meetings in July, depending on the scale and substance of the forthcoming Local Plan report. Due to the lack of performance reports, it was suggested to cancel the June Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.05 pm

Chair

(END)