



**Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 7 July 2025**

Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)	Angus Jenkinson(Vice-Chair)	Clare Turner
David Cunningham	Michael Vann	Ian Watson
Tony Slater	Joe Harris	Nick Bridges

Officers present:

Jane Portman, Interim CEO	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services	Paul James, Economic Development Lead
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	Gemma Moreing, Business Information and Performance Lead
Matt Abbott, Head of Communications	

Observers:

Councillors Patrick Coleman and Mike Every

**OS.190      Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Jon Waring and Councillor Lisa Spivey.

**OS.191      Substitute Members**

Councillor Ian Watson substituted for Councillor Jon Waring.

**OS.192      Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**OS.193      Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2025 were discussed.

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Councillor Clare Turner proposed accepting the minutes and Councillor David Cunningham seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2025.

### **OS.194**      **Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Chair acknowledged receipt of information on three key areas discussed at the previous meeting: the customer complaints procedure, street sign repairs, and an update on homelessness. The homelessness update included details on grant expenditure and current waiting list figures, broken down by category.

A further enquiry was made regarding the information circulated to Town and Parish Councils following the 5 Year Land Policy briefing. The Monitoring Officer advised that a Town and Parish Council newsletter would be issued by the end of the week, which would include feedback from the recent summit and updates on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

### **OS.195**      **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed Councillor Angus Jenkinson into the role of Vice Chair and looked forward to his support in the smooth running of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Councillors Joe Harris and Nick Bridges were welcomed as new Members of the Committee.

Members were encouraged to read the additional paper on the Executive Scrutiny Protocol as a useful reminder of the Committee's role and focus.

An apology was given for holding two meetings on consecutive days, due to reports not being ready in June. As a result, scrutiny of key items for the July Cabinet meeting had to take place this week. Appreciation was expressed to Democratic Services for the timely circulation of reports and to the report authors for their efforts.

### **OS.196**      **Public Questions**

Mr Andy Farmer, secretary of the South Cotswolds Labour Party asked the following questions:

Question 1 - Farming Motion Working Group update.

A request was made to amend paragraph 3.2 to state that *"representations against the motion were received from the South Cotswolds Labour Party"* replacing the current wording.

Members expressed the following views regarding the request:

- There was no objection to clarifying the Labour Party's position on the motion, however, as the positions of other contributors were not clearly presented in the report, Members were unsure of the benefit of this clarification.

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### Question 2

A request was made to amend the report to improve transparency regarding the independence of the analysis and the interests of the Working Group Members involved. It was noted that the Council-funded report appeared to present only negative findings, without acknowledging any positives, and that transparency would allow the public to make an informed judgment.

Members responded as follows:

- Declarations of interest were the responsibility of the individual and were being kept up to date on the Cotswold District Council website.
- It was noted that party political positions did not influence any discussions held during the working group meetings.

It was agreed that the current version of the report had been published with the committee papers, but an updated version would be issued for the Full Council meeting. Any points agreed by the Committee would be incorporated into the next iteration of the report.

### **OS.197      Member Questions**

A follow-up was requested on usage of CDC electric vehicle charging points, including Trinity Road. While more time might be needed to establish patterns, a report was requested showing when chargers were used, duration, and users. A member also noted a positive experience with the Connected Kerb app.

### **OS.198      Report back on recommendations**

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

### **OS.199      Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2024/25**

The annual report detailing the role and work of the Committee was discussed prior to consideration by Full Council on 16 July 2025.

It was noted that the report omitted reference to the involvement of two Members in the County Council's scrutiny committees.

Councillor David Cunningham proposed accepting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report and Councillor Michael Vann seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report.

The purpose of the report was to set out of the outturn position for the 2024/25 financial year.

The report was introduced and the follow points made:

- The final outturn showed a surplus of £778,000, £262,000 above the budgeted surplus of £516,000. This exceeded earlier projections of £250,000 at Q2 and £435,000 at Q3.
- There was significant movement in housing benefit overpayment figures, with an additional £236,000 income recorded. This was mainly due to adjustments ensuring overpayments were accurately identified and recovered via the financial and Civica housing benefit systems.
- There was also an improvement in Trinity Road service charges, with some energy generated from the solar panels and core costs recovered
- Treasury management showed a £60,000 adverse movement between Q3 and outturn.
- It was reported that the total in-year cost of Phase 1 of the Publica transition was below the £182,000 provision included in the budget.

In both 2023-24 and 2022-23, the Council drew £1.852 million from the Financial Resilience Reserve to support its revenue budget. Following a November 2023 motion, the Council committed to replenishing this reserve. With the current £778,000 surplus, £516,000 of which would be returned, and the planned budget for the current year, it was anticipated that £1.874 million would be restored to the reserve.

The expected outcome of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 was that the Council was likely to face reduced funding in future years. This aligned with the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which forecasted a "cliff edge" funding cut around 2026-27. The current outturn position was more favourable, enabling the Council to retain more in earmarked reserves to help mitigate these challenges.

Of the overall surplus, £516,000 was transferred to the Financial Resilience Reserve. The remaining £262,000 was recommended for transfer to the Transformation Reserve, which currently held £200,000, to support broader transformation activities.

The capital outturn showed slippage and underspend totalling £428,000, slightly above the Q3 forecast. This was mainly due to lower spending on Disabled Facilities Grants and delays in the ORC-funded off-street residential parking scheme for electric vehicle chargers.

In questioning and discussion it was noted that:

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- The £170,000 adverse variance relating to commercial property income was mainly due to the former Wilko store in Tipton being vacant for the financial year, causing lost rent and additional costs. A new lease with Worley Stores Ltd commenced in July, including a six-month rent-free period; however, the tenant was responsible for business rates, with annual rent around £80,000 as reflected in the 2024/25 budget. Additional variance resulted from reduced rental income after lease renewals in Seaford (Tesco) and Hereford (Superdrug), reflecting market conditions.
- A £33,000 shortfall in income from public conveniences was reported. A review was planned for September, that would provide an update of the rolling out of charging to all facilities or a review of the fee to ensure cost recovery along with the review of cash-less charging provision.
- Overall car park fee income remained on budget. However, shortfalls were noted in income from permits and penalty charge notices. Enforcement was strengthened by recruiting 2.6 full-time equivalent officers following earlier staff resignations. No specific localised issues with car park income were identified.
- The Deputy CEO confirmed that car parking enforcement did not cover all seven chargeable days. Recruitment was underway to ensure adequate staff coverage across all district car parks and chargeable days.
- Card payment issues had occurred due to connectivity problems with car park ticket machines and a temporary lapse in the Council's payment processing contract. These issues had been resolved, with the Pay by Phone app remaining available. A project to replace all 31 machines was underway, funded through the capital programme. The new machines would improve usability and address connectivity issues. An automatic refund process for duplicate payments had been in place since April.
- In regard to the accuracy of budget forecasting over time and whether any trends of improvement or decline had been identified, it was confirmed that significant variances in outturn reports would inform future budget planning. With the transfer of services from Publica to Cotswold District Council, the current reliance on agency staff in planning services was acknowledged as unsustainable and a contributor to significant overspend. The Director for Communities and Place was actively reviewing resource needs.
- It was noted that the Council used an incremental budgeting approach rather than zero-based budgeting. With a projected funding gap of £1.6 million in 2026/27, rising to £4.9 million, transformation in service delivery and funding was necessary.

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- It was confirmed that the Government's current timetable for Local Government Reorganisation set Vesting Day as 1 April 2028. If implementation was delayed causing financial detriment, it was noted that representations would likely be made to Government to seek mitigation. The more immediate financial risk identified was from the Fair Funding Review 2.0, expected to redistribute resources away from lower-tier authorities like Cotswold to areas with higher need. The Government had provided three-year funding allocations to support future financial planning.
- There were concerns that EV bays in Moreton-in-Marsh had been unused for months, leading to lost income and underutilised space. The reputational risk and impact on EV adoption were highlighted, with a request for review and resolution, which the Cabinet Member agreed to.
- Officers were seeking to better align financial outcomes and delivery against the Council's priorities and objectives.
- Responsibility for addressing underperformance lay with Budget Holders, Heads of Service, and Directors. Issues with expenditure or income were reported in quarterly financial performance reports, which underwent pre-scrutiny before Cabinet consideration. The reports included proposed actions, with Cabinet determining their sufficiency and authority to request alternative measures.
- Planning fees were increased by 10% two years ago, with provisions for annual inflationary rises, leading to a 1.7% increase in statutory fees this year. The Committee would review the Planning Advisory Service outcome to assess cost recovery of discretionary services and consider potential fee changes or use of Planning Performance Agreements.
- Given that there were no scheduled elections within the next 12 months, the continuation of the use of tablets would depend on the Returning Officer and Election Services Manager assessing their value if elections were called.
- It was confirmed that Gloucestershire County Council's plans to install on-street EV charging points in Chipping Campden were entirely separate from the Council's ORC funded scheme.
- A significant rise in printing and postage costs was noted and opportunities to reduce these costs (e.g. paper-light committee meetings) were being explored.

The Council needed to borrow to support its 2026-27 capital programme. With borrowing costs at 5.99%, a review was underway to identify capital receipts from asset sales and reassess expenditure timing. Approximately £4 million in capital receipts was held, which was insufficient to cover the programme.

## **OS.201      Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter 4**

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance.

The Leader of the Council and Senior Performance Analyst made the following points:

- The overall performance of the Council was mixed.
- The highlights were: Publica phase 2 transitions, Cotswold Home Solar had 27 household completed and 18 with deposits, 'Strengthening Communities' events.
- Areas performing above target: customer satisfaction, planning applications determined within time targets, high-risk food premises inspections, gym membership and Leisure Centre visits.
- Areas performing below targets were: Affordable homes, missed bin collections.

In questioning and discussion the following points were noted:

- UBICO had been fitting the replacement of street signs work around other commitments, indicating a lack of a clear, dedicated process. A written response to Members was offered as a follow up.
- Delivery of the District Council's cultural strategy, now reconfigured as a plan, was off target due to a timing issue; the cultural strategy was scheduled for Cabinet consideration on Thursday.
- It was confirmed that future reports would aim to include specific dates to ensure clarity about the timeframes being referenced.
- The Director of Communities and Place would consider using temporary staff to address the backlog of 561 planning enforcement cases, subject to budget and suitability.
- Shared Prosperity Funds must be spent within the year. Future schemes, including potential collaborations with GCC such as the safe crossing project, would be considered on an annual basis to ensure funding was not tied up in undeliverable projects.
- The waste collection service relied on a single narrow access vehicle, highlighting the need for a backup to prevent future service disruptions.
- A Member sought clarification on the leisure centres' monthly site inspection ratings scale and requested separate feedback on user satisfaction and usage specifically for Chipping Camden Leisure Centre. It was confirmed that the service breaks down data by site, and a written response with this information would be provided to the committee.
- Concerns were raised about cleanliness at leisure sites and a request made for more detailed KPI information on cleanliness in future reports for constructive review. Councillor Hodgkinson, as portfolio holder, was actively engaged with

the contractor and monitoring efforts to improve the cleanliness standards of the leisure centres.

- Freedom of Information requests performance was below target and statutory requirements had been missed. Data would be circulated to update Members on the details.
- Missed bin collections had increased. Following last year's round changes, waste collection has mostly stabilised, though missed collections remained above target (101 vs. 80). The Council was working closely with Ubico to address recurring issues and improve customer communication. It was recognised that standards needed to improve, and work was ongoing to achieve this.
- The new Interim Chief Executive would be reviewing the delivery of the Corporate Plan with officers to ensure expected progress was being made. Where there were delays or blockages, these would be discussed and shared with the Leader and relevant portfolio holders.
- Some targets were statutory, while the remaining 60-70% were set internally. A recommendation was made to enhance performance monitoring by introducing control chart analysis to better understand system variations and trends.
- Retrofit community events and free home visits were only planned until September 2025. A question was asked about why more events could not be held to continue informing Cotswolds residents about improving home energy efficiency. Further details will be circulated as an answer to the question.

There was a break from 17:55 – 18:08

## **OS.202      Farming Motion Working Group Update**

In discussing the report, Members made the following points:

- The government's proposed changes were well-intentioned and aimed to address inheritance tax avoidance.
- The main concern highlighted was farmers' difficulty in paying potentially large inheritance tax bills.
- Broader potential impacts, included: Food security issues, changes to land values and possible disruption to farming practices.
- It was emphasised that this process was not driven by any political group nor prejudged before it began.
- Various reports were received and investigated by task and finish group members: Treasury and Lords briefings, additional reports from DEFRA.
- Five proposed key messages to the government with six alternative policy approaches and seven alternative options included in the report.
- Succession planning must be carefully developed over time, with agreement from all involved.
- Farmers earned their income through active farming, whereas wealthy landowners may use farmland primarily as a means to avoid tax. A 20% tax rate



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did not effectively deter this kind of tax avoidance whereas a 40% Inheritance Tax (IHT) would serve as a stronger deterrent.

- A review was being requested to consider implementing a system of rollover reliefs.

Clarification was sought whether the Task and Finish Group would be proposing a formal recommendation (a specific form of words) or simply presenting the findings for the Council to note.

The actions agreed involved putting forward a form of words which was up to the full Council to review, accept or change. The first stages would be to agree the wording of the letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer with the Leader of the Council.

The Committee agreed that an updated version of the report would be included in the full Council agenda, allowing councillors to see the outcome of the Task and Finish Group's work. If the Council agreed that the Leader should write a letter, it could then be drafted based on the contents of that report.

Councillor Cunningham proposed accepting the Farming Motion Update and Councillor Harris seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to RECOMMEND to Council to request that the Leader writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer expressing concerns that the proposed changes to Inheritance Tax rules as they relate to farms will have unintended consequences that could have far reaching implications for the viability of the farming sector of the Cotswolds.

### **OS.203      Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees**

HOSC – No meetings had been held since the last Committee meeting.

GEGSC – a short report was submitted and Members were invited to comment.

### **OS.204      Work Plan and Forward Plan**

In discussion of the Work Plan and Forward Plan, the following points were raised:

- Section 5.2 of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol recommended regular meetings between the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Leader and Cabinet members to discuss work and forward plans. The first meeting was scheduled for September.
- A suggestion was made to explore the current state of the hospitality and retail sectors in the Cotswolds, particularly considering recent tax changes that may impact early-career individuals.

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- It was suggested that, two years into the leisure contract, the Committee should hear directly from Freedom Leisure to review contract progress, identify improvements, and discuss the provision at Chipping Campden School.
- A request was made for an overview of the current parking situation and progress on the emerging parking strategy, current developments and future aspirations for parking.
- It was suggested that a follow-up discussion regarding Local Government Reorganisation take place sometime after November and that the item be included on a regular basis.
- It was suggested that a dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting may be necessary to specifically scrutinise the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) processes.

The Deputy CEO confirmed governance structures were in place for LGR and leaders informed, but staff and members lacked clarity on the process. A briefing note from the Interim Chief Executive was suggested to ensure consistency. Staff updates would be shared via the Council website and with members. Scrutiny may have a role in this process.

It was noted that there were useful work streams the local authority could consider to support the county's process regarding potential scrutiny involvement. Overall, scrutiny was seen as having a potentially valuable role, subject to clear guidance from council leadership on its scope.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 7.01 pm

Chair

(END)