



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 2 February 2026

Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)	Angus Jenkinson (Vice Chair)	
Nick Bridges	Lisa Spivey	Ian Watson
David Cunningham	Clare Turner	Jon Wareing
Tony Slater		

Officers present:

Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Tyler Jardine, Trainee Democratic Services Officer	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities
Nickie Mackenzie-Daste, Senior Democratic Services Officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	

Observers:

Councillor Patrick Coleman, Mike Evemy and David Fowles

OS.288 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Joe Harris and Michael Vann.

OS.289 Substitute Members

Councillor Ian Watson substituted for Councillor Joe Harris.

OS.290 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Jenkinson stated that they had been active in support of local community economic development but had no pecuniary interest.

OS.291 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 5 January 2026 were discussed. Councillor David Cunningham proposed accepting the minutes and Councillor Nick Bridges seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2026.

OS.292 **Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

There was a request for confirmation that the statement regarding delays in council tax rebates was up to date, given the importance of this issue for residents. A written confirmation would follow.

OS.293 **Chair's Announcements**

Following the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, the Committee had not been satisfied with the level of detail provided in the case for proceeding with the Ubico waste fleet replacement programme, and as a result had neither supported the recommendations nor proposed alternatives. The Chair attended the Cabinet meeting and noted that the supporting evidence had been expanded to better inform decision-making. The Chair received helpful updates from the Head of Waste and Environment and an apology from the Chief Executive Officer for the lack of detail in the original report.

OS.294 **Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

OS.295 **Member Questions**

There were no Member questions.

OS.296 **Report back on recommendations**

There were no recommendations to Cabinet at the previous meeting.

OS.297 **Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees**

An update had been received from Councillor Neill on the HOSC meeting. Her update was described as informative and useful in keeping Members informed about developments in maternity services and plans to increase community support for people with dementia and other learning difficulties.

There had been no meeting of GESSC prior to the Committee meeting.

OS.298 The Retail and Hospitality Sectors in the Cotswold District

The purpose of the report was to provide an overview of the state of the retail and hospitality sectors within the district.

The report was introduced by Paul James, Economic Development Lead, who highlighted the following points:

- Findings showed multiple combined pressures on the retail and hospitality sector, although district vacancy rates remained comparatively low.
- The report had been shared with County Economic Development colleagues and business groups.
- Town centres initiative work was underway in Lechlade, Moreton-in-Marsh and Tetbury using UK Shared Prosperity Fund support and specialist consultants to analyse vacancies and barriers to occupancy.
- Early findings indicated some vacant units had not been actively marketed.
- The Council's influence over national policy and taxation pressures was limited, but possible actions included lobbying government and reviewing pavement licence fees.
- Concern was noted about the lack of confirmed replacement funding for the Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund after the end of the financial year.

Councillor Lisa Spivey arrived at 16:15.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was suggested that the report gave insufficient attention to long-term community resilience, including the impacts of unsustainable tourism and environmental pressures. There were concerns raised that high tourism levels in some areas affected retail mix, affordability and year-round viability of shops providing essential services for local residents.
- The officer explained that the report was intended as a high-level snapshot of the retail and hospitality sectors, which had been considered important for employment and local services, rather than a detailed resilience assessment.
- The officer advised that detailed analysis of retail mix had only been undertaken in selected towns through targeted studies, and that wider consideration would be more appropriately addressed through the Local Plan process.
- Clarification was provided that the reported 50% increase in shoplifting since 2020 referred to the number of incidents rather than value; Gloucestershire rates remained lower than many areas, and retailer cooperation and shared alert schemes were identified as key measures to help reduce theft.
- Whilst the report focused on town centres, hospitality and retail businesses outside town centres also required support, particularly more isolated

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businesses. The UK Shared Prosperity Funding had enabled the Growth Hub to deliver district-wide outreach support but this service was at risk due to the existing funding ending, with some continued support potentially through recently approved strategic economic development funding.

- It was clarified that the current town centre initiative covering three towns was already planned and funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and whilst it would produce recommendations for follow-up action, no additional consultancy work had yet been commissioned.
- There were currently no plans for fully integrated development plans for town centres, but the Town Centre Studies in the report recommended establishing locally supported, place-based partnerships in each town to agree and lead improvements.
- A draft version of the full report had been circulated to the relevant town councils for comment, and the final version would be published once amendments were made.
- A feasibility study into a Business Improvement District had previously been undertaken for Cirencester, but it had not taken forward due to limited support and the requirement for majority approval by businesses through a formal ballot. It was highlighted that in smaller towns, the cost of administering a Business Improvement District could outweigh the revenue generated, making such schemes less viable.
- Concerns were raised that rising taxes and business costs presented a challenge to local businesses, while event organisation to support the visitor economy required significant resources, though small-scale activities like quizzes or live music could be managed by individual businesses.
- The discussion highlighted concerns that converting hospitality or retail properties to residential use did not always yield the desired outcomes, and that support was needed to encourage landlords to keep premises in commercial use. Local stakeholders may include business groups, authorities, or agencies depending on context. The new power for councils to auction long-vacant commercial properties was available but not widely used. Parking remained a challenge, though the Council's new parking strategy aimed to address these issues.
- A paper would be presented to Cabinet in March regarding the awarding of a contract for the replacement of 31 car park ticket machines. The specification for the new machines would address previous issues with internet connectivity.

Councillor Angus Jenkinson proposed submitting the following recommendations to Cabinet. Councillor Ian Watson seconded the proposal.

Recommendations:

1. That the Council writes to the local Members of Parliament inviting them to lobby on behalf of local businesses in the retail and hospitality sectors faced with the challenges of increased Business Rates and employment costs.

2. That the Council continues to liaise with agents and landlords to encourage them to advertise more prominently their let vacant retail properties.
3. That the Council considers how to minimise the loss of retail space to residential, particularly in the district's smaller towns, through the Local Plan.
4. That the Council considers developing an integrated strategy for town centre economies, building communities not just housing, with a view to enhancing the Cotswolds' unique visitor economy.
5. That the Council writes to the government to advise them of the looming crisis in the retail and hospitality sectors and highlight the vulnerability of high streets and small communities that rely on access to them for essential local retail provision and employment opportunities.

OS.299 Budget 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

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

The report was introduced by Councillor Patrick Coleman, Cabinet Member for Finance, and David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive Officer.

- The position reflected the latest published update but was subject to change due to two factors: the final local government finance settlement and ongoing reconciliation of the Publica contract sum.
- The key message was that the current position was significantly better than anticipated.
- Core spending power, which included council tax, revenue support grant, and transitional funding, was higher for 2026/27 than 2025/26 and remained higher for 2027/28 and 2028/29, with transitional protection amounting to approximately £5.2 million in the final year; 2029/30 fell outside the current spending review period and posed a potential concern for the council and the successor unitary authority.
- The Council Tax referendum level was set at 5 percent.
- The Budget assumed a very cautious estimate for business rates retention (£1.255m), compared with over £5m retained in the current year.
- Extended Producer Responsibilities reduced to 60% of 2026/27 level from 2027/28.
- Treasury management income for next year was forecast at £1.2m.
- The level of Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay (RCCO) was £1.547 million.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Savings included in the MTFs came from existing savings and the transformation programme developed with Cabinet, which focused on measures judged credible and deliverable; further transformation work would continue next year led by Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place, Councillor Mike Evemy, Leader of the Council, and Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for

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Transformation, to ensure continued financial sustainability if local government reorganisation was delayed.

- The three £750k unavoidable growth figures were an estimate of additional charges linked to the new waste fleet contract. Although they appeared as a revenue cost paid out, they were offset by a corresponding deferred capital receipt back to the Council, making them broadly neutral in overall financial impact.
- The £200,000 loan referred to the remaining balance of the Council's Climate Bond borrowing (originally £500,000 taken out a few years earlier), which was the only current borrowing and was scheduled to be fully repaid by the end of the 2027–28 financial year.
- It was noted that the Council had maintained a low level of debt because past capital programmes had largely been funded from internal resources and capital receipts rather than borrowing. Whilst low historic interest rates may have presented limited opportunities, no viable capital schemes requiring borrowing had been in place, and this cautious approach had avoided revenue risk.
- Although the Council had previously funded capital activity through housing stock receipts, moving back into direct social housing ownership was not considered practical in the remaining period before Local Government Reorganisation. Whilst options had been explored, becoming a stock-holding authority or creating a housing company would have required significant scale, time, and financial risk, with partnership working with registered providers such as Bromford preferred.
- The listed savings, including projected car park income increases, would be incorporated into the final MTFS figures, whilst fees and charges remained subject to annual Cabinet decisions, and future car parking income assumptions would be reviewed once new ticket machines were installed and provided more reliable usage data.
- It was clarified that the fuel bunkering estimate had been increased from £60,000 to £100,000 to provide for additional works, particularly due to the environmental sensitivity of the proposed bunker location.
- The Council used around 508,000 litres of fuel per year, and would have a 20,000-litre fuel bunker. A 15p per litre differential was assumed to manage the revenue impact of switching to HVO fuel, with flexibility required depending on fuel prices, availability, and sustainable sourcing. Contingency funds had been included to cover potential fuel price fluctuations.

The Budget consultation received 171 responses, significantly higher than the 42 received the previous year, though lower than a peak year of over 550. The increase was largely attributed to improved social media engagement and public awareness campaigns.

The Chair suggested that the upcoming Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) report, which allocates additional funding for local communities from a levy on future developments, be considered by Overview & Scrutiny in March 2026 ahead of Cabinet.

Councillor Turner queried why the Ecological Emergency update remained "date to be confirmed" on the work plan, noting that related items were scheduled for the Cabinet meeting in March and asking why the update had not been aligned with that. The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services suggested the delay may have been due to staff sickness but indicated a written response would be provided.

Councillor Angus Jenkinson highlighted the importance of the agricultural sector, noting recent DEFRA findings on the ecological crisis linked to farming, and suggested the Council consider how this sector could be supported to address ecological, economic, and climate outcomes.

Councillor Jenkinson suggested that, given the scale of the agricultural sector and the current ecological and economic pressures on farmers, the Council should consider allocating resources or commissioning expert support to examine and address these issues, similar to previous investments made for other non-statutory but important projects.

It was noted that a work plan meeting would be arranged to discuss this issue further and to gather feedback from Cabinet on its usefulness, with the aim of supporting both Cabinet and Full Council.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.06 pm

Chair

(END)