



**Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on
Monday, 13 April 2026**

Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)	Angus Jenkinson (Vice Chair)	
David Cunningham	Tony Slater	Michael Vann
Paul Evans	Lisa Spivey	Clare Turner
Joe Harris		

Officers present:

Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Danielle Berry, Natural, Built and Historic Environment Manager
Tyler Jardine, Trainee Democratic Services Officer	Michelle Burge, Chief Accountant and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Nickie Mackenzie-Daste, Senior Democratic Services Officer	Gemma Moreing, Business Information Lead
Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer	Frank Wilson, Managing Director (Publica)

Observers:

Councillor Patrick Coleman, Mike Evemy and Juliet Layton

OS.315 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Jon Wareing. The Committee was notified of a delay from Councillor Lisa Spivey.

OS.316 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

OS.317 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Angus Jenkinson declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to their role as Councillor for Regenerative Agriculture and Ecology but had contributed to the Ecological Emergency Update report.

OS.318 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 2 March 2026 were discussed.

Councillor Joe Harris apologised that he had not submitted formal apologies ahead of the meeting on 2 March 2026.

Councillors Jenkinson and Turner requested that the minutes be amended to reflect that the statement on equal political representation in the LGR scrutiny process was proposed by a Member, rather than representing the view of the committee.

Councillor Angus Jenkinson proposed accepting the amended minutes and Councillor Tony Slater seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the amended minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2026.

OS.319 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

It was noted that Members welcomed the follow-up provided on 'matters arising', including the responses to the compost question, and considered the update process useful. It was also noted that revised Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) bidding criteria would be brought back to Overview and Scrutiny once finalised, given its importance to the planning process and local communities.

A public question regarding enforcement, raised at the previous meeting, would be addressed in a report to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny in June. It was noted that the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) scrutiny proposals remained a 'work in progress', with presentations still to be made to Tewkesbury Council with no final decisions taken.

OS.320 Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Councillor Paul Evans to the Committee.

The Chair thanked Councillor Jenkinson for chairing the previous meeting in the Chair's absence, supported by Councillor Turner as Deputy Chair.

Thanks were recorded to Andrew Brown for his support to the Chair. It was noted that he had left Cotswold District Council and was now employed solely by West Oxfordshire District Council.

The Chair welcomed a new officer post being recruited to support and advise local businesses in managing rising costs including employment, energy, inputs and business rates.

OS.321 Public Questions

A question was raised by the Chair of Kempford Parish Council in the context of the committee's responsibilities for crime and disorder matters, referring to antisocial behaviour associated with a recent deployment of aircraft to RAF Fairford by the US Air Force. It was noted that the influx of visitors led to parking and highway issues, which were addressed through enforcement action by Gloucestershire Highways, parking enforcement, and the police.

Concerns were raised about instances of environmental antisocial behaviour, including human waste in the surrounding fields, hedges, and drainage areas.

The request was made for consideration for clearer procedures for future similar events, including preventative measures such as signage and the potential use of community protection tools to deter such behaviour.

The Chair requested a written response to the question from the relevant officer.

OS.322 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

OS.323 Report back on recommendations

There had been no recommendations to Cabinet at the previous meeting.

OS.324 Financial Performance Report - Q3 2025-26

The purpose of the report was to set out the third quarterly budget monitoring position for the 2025/26 financial year.

The report was introduced by Councillor Patrick Coleman, Cabinet Member for Finance, and Michelle Burge, Chief Accountant. The report was introduced and the following points made:

- This quarter report showed little change from the previous quarter.
- At Q3, a positive variance of £45k was reported, representing a slight improvement from the £16k position previously reported at Q2.
- 100% of planning income above budget was being transferred into a planning appeals reserve, which now stood at £674k.
- Car parking income had a £256k positive variance at Q3 compared to the budget. £165k was set aside to fund new pay and display machines as part of the 2026/27 capital programme.
- £700k of savings from vacancies, recruitment and public affairs impacts were transferred into a capacity building reserve to support organisational capacity in preparation for LGR.

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- Current diesel prices were above the budgeted level of around £1.44/litre and could create a budget pressure of approximately £150k.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- The council was considered financially resilient at present, although there were acknowledged risks over the medium term. While it was not anticipated that these risks would lead to immediate service disruption or emergency measures, they were being closely monitored, particularly in relation to inflation and energy prices, which remained the main financial pressures over the next two years.
- An estimated saving of around £600k in street services had been revised downwards following work arising from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) review. Further details of the savings would be provided.
- It was clarified that a £16,000 forecast overspend related to building control audit fees associated with the Building Safety Regulator, rather than external audit fees. Further details on the audit costs would be provided.
- Whilst vacancy management provided financial benefits, it carried risks around recruitment and retention. The main concern was uncertainty linked to LGR, which might impact staff stability. A retention strategy was being developed to support recruitment and retention during this period of organisational change.
- Short-term investment returns of around 3.5%–3.75% were currently being achieved, which reflected the need to maintain liquidity for council funds. In addition, there were longer-term pooled investment funds which delivered higher returns, averaging approximately 4.5% to 5%.
- Further details regarding the adequate funding of planning enforcement were requested.
- The budget for Chipping Campden dual use sports facilities which had been around £70,000, was now forecast as £80,000.
- The £31,000 underspend in legal services related to a vacant contract solicitor post. A paralegal was being brought into the service to provide support.
- Ubico's fuel costs were regularly reviewed. Fuel prices had moved adversely, with an estimated impact of around £12k for the month. It was noted that a proportion of energy was purchased in advance through a consortium arrangement with Cheltenham and Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire Councils to help reduce exposure to price volatility.
- It was confirmed that the cost for the fuel bunkering had increased to £100k.
- Waste receptacle replacements were provided at a low cost, as it could be difficult to determine whether damage or loss was due to collection operations, accidental loss, or other causes. In cases where bins were damaged during collection, replacements were replaced free of charge.

16:37 – Councillor Lisa Spivey arrived at the Committee meeting.

OS.325 Service Performance Report - Q3 2025-26

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 Mike Evely, Leader of the Council, and Gemma Moreing, Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Concerns were raised regarding affordable housing delivery
- Concerns were also noted around recycling performance. It was noted that Gloucestershire-wide communications and public education campaigns were being used to encourage participation and address misinformation about the value and process of recycling.
- Cotswold District Council was within the top 25 recycling authorities nationally. National recycling rates had declined but the Council already met the requirements of the Government's Simpler Recycling scheme.
- Further breakdown of recycling types was requested to identify non-green waste recycling rates.
- Concerns were raised around the performance of statutory services. Freedom of Information requests had recently improved to 90% in Q4, although subject access requests had placed additional pressure on the same teams. Land charges performance was subject to an ongoing improvement programme.
- Customer satisfaction was at nearly 99%, and it was clarified that this figure related primarily to interactions with customer service advisors rather than a full assessment of all council services.
- Further information regarding the status of the Cotswold Safety Partnership and road safety was requested.
- Service teams relied on internal dashboards and live data rather than the quarterly report. The quarterly report provided a retrospective overview, whilst day-to-day monitoring was carried out in real time.
- The off-target position on charging in council-owned toilets was primarily linked to pending discussions at Northleach. Charging had otherwise been implemented across the district, with increased charges and wider payment arrangements in place.
- Land searches remained an area to monitor given the impact of delays on property transactions, with improvement work ongoing.

OS.326 Publica Business Plan 2026-28

The purpose of the report was to consider the Draft Publica Business Plan 2026-28, produced by the Publica Board in consultation with Directors and Shareholders.

The report was introduced by Councillor Mike Evely, Leader of the Council, and Frank Wilson, Managing Director, Publica. The report was introduced and highlighted the

Publica Business plan which covered the two-year period to 2028 providing clear direction as the council moved towards local government reorganisation.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- There was a risk that LGR might be delayed, but this had been factored into longer-term planning. If delayed, services would continue as currently delivered, with contingency work limited to considering potential future service changes if required.
- The Publica business plan maintained a strong focus on core service delivery alongside preparation for LGR. It was noted that whilst some teams were involved in transition planning, the plan prioritised "business as usual" to ensure residents' services were not affected.
- Relationships between councils within the Publica partnership were positive. Whilst there had been detailed discussions around financial reallocations, these were broadly accepted as fair. Contract arrangements had been aligned and extended to provide stability through to 2030, allowing time for future decisions under LGR.
- It was clarified that Publica was not being actively wound down, but was operating in an unusual context due to LGR, with future decisions resting with successor councils. It was noted that Publica may have a future role after LGR, but this remained uncertain until formal decisions were made. It was noted that the company's role was to provide analysis and options through service "deep dive" reviews, assessing the impacts of disaggregation versus continued shared delivery, to inform future decisions on service design under LGR.
- Whilst Publica's direction was shaped by its shareholder councils, there was discussion about how the company should set out its future role in light of LGR. It was emphasised that strategy was developed collaboratively with shareholders, with a focus on delivering agreed services and adapting to future decisions by successor authorities. It was also suggested that future joint scrutiny could consider the governance and future options for Publica.
- Continuity of services, skills and local knowledge within Publica was important. It was also acknowledged that both staff and services were operating under uncertainty due to LGR and appreciation was expressed for the ongoing work of Publica staff.

OS.327 Ecological Emergency Update

The purpose of the report was to update the Committee on progress in implementing the Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

The report was introduced by Councillor Juliet Layton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning. The report was introduced and the following points made:

- The key priorities of the Ecological Emergency Action Plan included strengthening planning policy (e.g. biodiversity net gain and green

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infrastructure); partnership working with environmental bodies and landowners; improved management of council-owned land; and targeted work at key ecological sites such as the Cotswold Water Park.

- Community engagement was included, supporting parishes and neighbourhood groups to integrate biodiversity into local plans and initiatives.
- Progress included strengthening the ecological evidence base, delivering priority actions in planning and land management, and securing a strategic contract for the Cotswold Beechwood Special Area of Conservation.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Ecological Emergency Declaration had influenced funding and prioritisation, including the allocation of 10 per cent of CIL to climate and ecological projects. A new assessment matrix was being developed to support future funding decisions
- Actions reflected ongoing policy development and partnership discussions. Tangible outcomes were also being delivered, including Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) improvements at Sherborne Estate to reduce recreational pressure on sensitive ecological sites; the establishment of Strategic Access Management and Monitoring officer posts to support and educate visitors, and ongoing tree planting and land management improvements on council-owned land.
- There was a need for clearer measurement of the 'on-the-ground' impact. Further details on "other initiatives" would be clarified at a later date as this was not immediately available.
- Biodiversity support for communities was delivered through officer involvement in meetings and partnerships. Engagement was largely reactive due to resource constraints, with external partners often helping to connect communities with council support.
- Details of the use of weed killers by CDC was requested and would be communicated to the Committee.
- The National Trust was selected as a partner for SANG delivery because it could provide the long-term land management security, required by Natural England. There had been limited external interest in bringing forward alternative sites, and that constraints on other organisations can limit their ability to take on such projects, meaning bids came from a small number of eligible partners.
- The Council's contribution to the 30x30 nature recovery target was being delivered in partnership with wider authorities and stakeholders, particularly through the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. This strategy was intended to guide landowners and farmers in supporting ecological improvement across the county.
- Concerns were raised regarding potential PFAS contamination and land safety in the Moreton-in-Marsh area, particularly in relation to existing and future development. It was indicated that while some testing had been undertaken,

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further clarification or investigation might be required to provide assurance to residents about land safety.

- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy was intended to guide and shape planning decisions rather than be used as a reason to refuse applications. The Strategy helped inform site allocation and identify appropriate areas for development or habitat protection. It was also used within biodiversity net gain requirements to encourage developers to deliver the right habitats in the right locations.
- Limited information was available at the meeting regarding funding and actions related to the "car-free Cotswolds" initiative, and that further details would be obtained and provided at a later date.

Specific locations for infill tree planting were not available at the meeting, and that this information would be made available at a later date.

OS.328 **Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees**

The Chair thanked Councillors Angus Jenkinson and Dilys Neill for their updates.

OS.329 **Work Plan and Forward Plan**

The Cabinet Forward Plan and Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan were considered by the committee.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 6.35 pm

Chair