



Friday, 21 November 2025

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### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held in the Council Chamber - Council Offices, Trinity Road, Cirencester, GL7 1PX on **Monday, 1 December 2025 at 2.00 pm.**

Jane Portman  
Interim Chief Executive

To: Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
(Councillors Gina Blomefield, Angus Jenkinson, Nick Bridges, David Cunningham, Joe Harris, Tony Slater, Lisa Spivey, Clare Turner, Michael Vann and Jon Wareing)

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Cabinet, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Committee Administrator know prior to the date of the meeting.

# AGENDA

1. **Apologies**  
To receive any apologies for absence. The quorum for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is 3 members.
2. **Substitute Members**  
To note details of any substitution arrangements in place for the meeting.
3. **Declarations of Interest**  
To receive any declarations of interest from Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting.
4. **Minutes** (Pages 5 - 20)  
To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 5 November and 17 November 2025.
5. **Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting** (Pages 21 - 22)  
To consider actions outstanding from minutes of 5 November and 17 November 2025 meetings.
6. **Chair's Announcements**  
To receive any announcements from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
7. **Public Questions**  
A maximum of 15 minutes is allocated for an "open forum" of public questions at committee meetings. No person may ask more than two questions (including supplementary questions) and no more than two such questions may be asked on behalf of one organisation. The maximum length of oral questions or supplementary questions by the public will be one minute. Questions must relate to the responsibilities of the Committee but questions in this section cannot relate to applications for determination at the meeting.

The response may take the form of:

- a) A direct oral response (maximum length: 2 minutes);
- b) Where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- c) Where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

8. **Member Questions**

A maximum period of fifteen minutes is allowed for Member questions. Questions must be directed to the Chair and must relate to the remit of the committee.

Questions will be asked in the order notice of them was received, except that the Chair may group together similar questions.

The deadline for submitting questions is 5.00pm on the working day before the day of the meeting unless the Chair agrees that the question relates to an urgent matter, in which case the deadline is 9.30am on the day of the meeting.

A member may submit no more than two questions. At the meeting the member may ask a supplementary question arising directly from the original question or the reply. The maximum length of a supplementary question is one minute.

The response to a question or supplementary question may take the form of:

- a) A direct oral response (maximum length: 2 minutes);
- b) Where the desired information is in a publication of the Council or other published work, a reference to that publication; or
- c) Where the reply cannot conveniently be given orally, a written answer circulated later to the questioner.

9. **Report back on recommendations** (Pages 23 - 26)

For the Committee to note the Cabinet's response to any recommendations arising from the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

10. **Local Government Reorganisation - Reporting and Scrutiny arrangements**  
Purpose

To consider and take advice on future arrangements for receiving information on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme.

The discussion will cover:

Preferred frequency and depth of LGR reporting to the Committee.

The potential creation of a cross-council LGR Scrutiny Committee.

Lead Officer

Jane Portman – Interim Chief Executive Officer

11. **Public Toilet Update** (Pages 27 - 34)

Purpose

To provide and update on the public conveniences managed by Cotswold District Council.

Cabinet Member

Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience

Lead Officer

Maria Wheatley, Parking Manager

12. **Community Safety Partnership Update** (Pages 35 - 48)

Purpose

To update Overview and Scrutiny on Community Safety Activity and provide RAG rating against the 'Cotswold Community Safety Partnership' Plan for the period of November 2024 to November 2025.

Cabinet Member

Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience

Lead Officer

Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities

13. **Long term empty homes/second homes strategy update** (Pages 49 - 72)

Purpose

To provide an update on the Long-Term Empty Property strategy work.

Cabinet Member

Councillor Juliet Layton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Lead Officer

Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues

(END)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
05/November2025



**COTSWOLD**  
District Council

## **Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 5 November 2025**

### Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)	Angus Jenkinson (Vice Chair)	Clare Turner
Tony Slater	Michael Vann	Ian Watson
Lisa Spivey	Ray Brassington	David Fowles

### Officers present:

Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Geraldine LeCointe, Assistant Director - Planning Services	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Matthew Britton, Principal Planning Policy Officer	Tyler Jardine, Trainee Democratic Services Officer

### Observers:

Councillors Mike Evely and Juliet Layton.

### **OS.241 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Jon Wareing, David Cunningham, Joe Harris and Nick Bridges.

### **OS.242 Substitute Members**

Councillor Ray Brassington substituted for Councillor Nick Bridges, Councillor Ian Watson substituted for Councillor Joe Harris and Councillor David Fowles substituted for Councillor David Cunningham.

### **OS.243 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **OS.244 Public Questions**

Mr David Hindle welcomed adherence to the Regulation 18 timeline and supported increasing residential density. They expressed concern about including post-2043 strategic site figures, noting that future allocations would be determined by a successor

authority, and highlighted that the local plan covered 15–20 years, not 30. They also observed that, due to landscape and sustainability constraints, the existing Cotswold District Council (CDC) area would be likely to receive less than its proportionate share of residential growth under the forthcoming Spatial Development Strategy.

The officer replied to the question that while the Council may wish to have a local plan in place in advance, the new authority would take primacy in developing the spatial development strategy, with up to five years after vesting day to do so. They noted that preparing the plan now provided control and a legacy for the transition, ensuring that development would be planned, sustainable, and supported by the necessary infrastructure, rather than allowing piecemeal speculative development.

#### **OS.245      Member Questions**

There were no Member Questions asked.

#### **OS.246      Cotswold District Council Local Plan Review Preferred Options November 2025**

The purpose of the report was to seek approval to include an addition to the consultation document for the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation on Preferred Options for Development, and to amend the consultation dates.

The report was introduced by Councillor Mike Every, Leader of the Council and Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place. They raised the following points:

- Indicative housing numbers beyond 2043 were proposed as planning for larger strategic sites over a longer timeframe provided greater certainty for the delivery of necessary infrastructure.
- The National Planning Policy Framework recommended that larger sites should have a 30-year vision for development.
- Including indicative numbers at this stage promoted transparency and allowed for early engagement and comment from members and communities.
- The figures were purely indicative, not formal site allocations, and did not alter the preferred development scenario.
- These numbers were based on current evidence and would be refined following further assessment of transport, landscape, and other constraints.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Concerns were raised about holding the consultation just before Christmas and whether the timetable could be altered or better explained to residents. The officer advised that, although the consultation had been extended from six to seven weeks, the overall timetable could not change because the plan must be submitted by the end of 2026 and adopted by the end of 2027. Keeping to this

schedule was essential to maintain an up-to-date plan, avoid speculative development, and prevent potential government intervention.

- It was explained that the term "indicative" could be introduced earlier in the document to clarify that the current site figures were preliminary and subject to change. The figures were based on sites considered potentially deliverable, but further evidence, due diligence, and a new call for sites may affect availability. Once all local sites had been assessed, the Council would engage neighbouring authorities under the duty to cooperate, to see if they could assist in delivering homes. The final housing figure in the local plan would reflect what could be delivered locally and by neighbouring authorities. The inspector may approve a different figure supported by evidence.
- The Council was working within government housing targets whilst challenging them and emphasised that communications included exhibitions, information to households, meetings with Town and Parish clerks, and updates via social media to help residents understand how the targets had been set and the Council's position.
- The site described as "near Driffild" referred to a new settlement rather than an extension of the existing village.
- Whilst the aim was to make new homes as environmentally sustainable as possible, delivering nearly 20,000 houses could not be entirely "green,". The principle of "green to the core" applied not only to the developments but also to the policies within the plan.
- Whilst the density level could support sustainable development, the District's character meant that the highest density may not always be appropriate. However, well-located higher-density development could be preferable to dispersed low-density housing.
- Developers would need to demonstrate how required infrastructure could be delivered at the planning application stage. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan would accompany the local plan, setting out the infrastructure needed to support growing communities. Developers would be required, through various mechanisms, to contribute to or deliver this infrastructure as developments proceed.
- To assist residents in responding to the consultation, material considerations were factors of public interest that could be taken into account in planning applications or local plans. These included national and local policy, impacts on amenity (such as noise, privacy, and visual effects), highway safety, heritage and conservation, environmental impacts (including flooding, biodiversity, air quality, and climate change), and potential benefits such as job creation, regeneration, investment, or provision of affordable housing.
- Scenario six was the only one in the document that potentially met the Government housing target but would require extensive development in the national landscape, which was contrary to national policy. Scenario seven included development on all sites that had so far been assessed as unsuitable for development.

- The upcoming consultation would include a further call for sites, encouraging submission of any new sites or updated information on existing sites, including changes in availability or use.
- This consultation was the first stage, with a second consultation planned next summer that will focus on specific sites.

Councillor Tony Slater left the meeting and did not return 15:05

- Inconsistencies in the consultation document, where some figures included existing developments and others did not, could cause confusion when calculating percentages. It was suggested that the total level of growth for each community should be clearly presented at each stage of the plan.
- "Sustainability" referred to a settlement's existing facilities and transport links, which determined its capacity to support growth, and may be reassessed as infrastructure and site allocations were confirmed.
- A Member noted that development was constrained in parishes completely surrounded by the Cotswold National Landscape, while neighbouring wards with fewer restrictions had experienced more growth.
- Consideration of employment opportunities alongside housing was currently limited in the consultation document, as the focus at this stage was on housing. Section 4.3 addressed economic, employment, and commercial development, and the forthcoming housing and employment needs assessment and town centre study would provide the evidence needed to plan for jobs alongside new housing, particularly in areas with limited employment and transport options.
- The Council sought to ensure vital infrastructure was delivered through early engagement with the County Council, including Gloucestershire Highways, and by involving them in both planning applications and the local plan process. Ongoing dialogue continued to address issues experienced on previous developments.
- Clarification was requested on the figures behind the pie charts, as the charts showed proportions but not actual numbers. The officer noted the comment and agreed to consider how to represent the data more clearly.
- A column showing existing planning permissions alongside targets had been considered to clarify the figures for residents, and the wording was noted as potentially reviewable to ensure the information was as clear as possible.
- Early engagement with neighbouring authorities was already taking place, and it was noted that the Council needed to demonstrate where it could not meet its targets as part of the process.
- The current local plan would remain in place until the successor unitary authority produced a spatial plan, which could take up to five years. It was emphasised that maintaining the plan prevented speculative development and ensured essential infrastructure was delivered. Sites without adequate utilities or infrastructure were noted as not being considered deliverable.



## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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- Members expressed concern that while significant housing growth was planned for Cirencester, on top of existing development, the local hospital was actually reducing capacity and services.
- Concerns were raised about the consultation timing. In response, it was explained that the period had to remain as proposed, as the team needed adequate time afterwards to review all representations, report on them, and determine whether any changes were required for the next stage of the plan.
- Work on the strategic flood risk assessment and water cycle study was already underway, and recent discussions with consultants and the Environment Agency confirmed that the timescales were extremely tight. It was emphasised that adding more resources would not speed up this specialist work.

Councillors expressed strong opposition to the level of housing growth that was being imposed by central government, stating that they believed it was fundamentally wrong for the Cotswolds. They argued that the proposed development would cover areas outside of the Cotswolds National Landscape and described the approach as inappropriate at every level.

The Committee considered the wording of a recommendation to Cabinet on the need for clear communication in relation to the Local Plan.

### Recommendation:

That the Council clearly communicates to town and parish councils and the wider public:

- a) The importance of getting a local plan in place at the earliest opportunity in order to manage development appropriately and to prevent piecemeal speculative development (which won't provide supporting infrastructure);
- b) Why the local plan timeline is fixed and the Regulation 18 consultation cannot be extended;
- c) How respondents can make valid contributions and what the material planning considerations are in relation to the Local Plan.

Councillor Ray Brassington proposed supporting the recommendations in the Cotswold District Council Local Plan Review Preferred Options November 2025 and submitting the above recommendation to Cabinet. Councillor Gina Blomefield seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

### Voting Record.

For = 8, Against = 0, Abstain = 0

RESOLVED: to NOTE the Cotswold District Council Local Plan Review Preferred Options November 2025 and submit recommendations to Cabinet.

The Meeting commenced at 2.05 pm and closed at 4.00 pm

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**Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 17 November 2025**

Members present:

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

Officers present:

Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services	Lisa Caton, Leisure and Culture Manager
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Susan Hughes, Business Manager for Support and Advice
Tyler Jardine, Trainee Democratic Services Officer	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	Maria Wheatley, Shared Parking Manager
Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer	

Observers: Councillors Mike Every and Paul Hodgkinson

Guests: Councillor Laura Hall-Wilson. Freedom Leisure – Nick Charlton, Lee Thomas, Jeremy Rowe

**OS.247 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Lisa Spivey and Jon Wareing.

**OS.248 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members.

**OS.249 Declarations of Interest**

No declaration of interests were made.

**OS.250 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 13 October 2025 were discussed. Councillor Michael Vann proposed accepting the minutes and Councillor Angus Jenkinson seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2025.

**OS.251 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The Chair welcomed the confirmation that housing association providers will report annually on key areas including property maintenance, decarbonisation plans, sales of affordable homes (both on the open market and through right to buy), and the delivery of new affordable homes.

Bromford Housing had provided councillors with contact details for the teams working in their neighbourhoods. The breakdown of returns from the Council invested funds was highlighted, which showed a healthy overall return of 4.8%.

**OS.252 Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed representatives from Freedom Leisure to the meeting and looked forward to hearing from the organisation.

The car parking strategy was recognised as clear and detailed.

Members were reminded of the additional Overview & Scrutiny meeting scheduled for 1 December, arranged to ensure that several important matters could be addressed before 2026, and appreciation was expressed to committee members for agreeing to attend.

**OS.253 Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

**OS.254 Member Questions**

Councillor Hall-Wilson had provided a question to Freedom Leisure in advance but confirmed that she was content for it to be deferred and addressed when Freedom Leisure presented their report.

**OS.255 Report back on recommendations**

Councillor Jenkinson reported that the Committee's recommendations had been submitted to Cabinet. He attended the Cabinet meeting as Vice-Chair to represent the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recommendation regarding the Local Plan consultation.

**OS.256 Work Plan and Forward Plan**

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

**OS.257 Leisure Contract - Freedom Leisure**

The Chair welcomed the representatives from Freedom Leisure to the meeting.

Nick Charlton -Area Manager - Cotswold District and Gloucester.

Lee Thomas – Regional Manager - Wales and West region.

Jeremy Rowe – Operations Director - England and Wales.

Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience, introduced Freedom Leisure who assumed responsibility on 1 August 2023 for the three leisure centres at Cirencester, Bourton on the Water and Chipping Campden, as well as the Corinium Museum. He recorded his thanks to Freedom Leisure for their work since taking on the contract, noting that the transition had been challenging due to the condition of services inherited from the previous provider.

The following points were made:

- Freedom Leisure reported strong participation growth since the start of the contract.
- Year one recorded just over 395,000 visits, increasing to 570,000 in year two, a 46% rise (183,000 additional visits).
- Growth was attributed to increased membership, expansion of the Learn to Swim programme, improved session programming, and responding to customer feedback.
- Memberships increased from 3,065 in October 2023 to 4,633 by August of the following year, which represented a 51% growth.
- "Meet the Team" sessions were held, resulting in an increase in compliments and a decrease in complaints.
- Conducted case studies and community outreach.
- Provided staff development and training opportunities.

The Area Manager answered submitted questions from Members:

The reflection on lessons learned included introducing "Meet the Manager" sessions earlier in the partnership to engage customers from the start, particularly during service transitions. The same approach applied to staff teams, ensuring early involvement and smoother adaptation to changes.

Parking at the Cirencester leisure centre could be challenging at times but Freedom Leisure acknowledged that the car park was managed by the Council, and any resolution or improvements would be addressed through meetings.

The Area Manager noted that managerial support for younger team members was in place. Freedom Leisure confirmed that duty managers and general managers provided regular one-to-one meetings and appraisals, ensuring development and support were consistently available across all team members. Internal procedures were followed to address any specific issues that arose.

The small teaching pool was maintained at a higher temperature than the main pool (29 °C) in accordance with the contractual arrangement with the Council.

Freedom Leisure employed their own cleaning staff and had increased the number of cleaners since taking over operations. They reviewed customer feedback internally, adjusting rotas or adding hours where trends indicated a need.

Councillor Hall-Wilson responded to the representatives by asking whether the number of people paying to use the smaller teaching pool could be better controlled by reception staff to prevent overcrowding and long waits leading to babies and toddlers getting cold. Freedom Leisure confirmed that they would try to improve the booking system to control the foot flow.

Freedom Leisure delivered outreach classes in Northleach and Weston-Sub-Edge, for those who may not attend leisure centres. They also collaborated with the NHS on health referral programs.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Difficulties were identified with the Chipping Campden site, as it was owned and maintained by the school. From a maintenance perspective, challenges at the school were noted, with some issues not being rectified, possibly due to the school's financial constraints.
- At the Chipping Campden site, Sunday mornings remained difficult, as two qualified lifeguards were required to open the pool, and last-minute absences caused delays.
- Freedom Leisure were unaware that St James Place car park was available for weekend use and agreed to investigate its availability at the Cirencester Centre.
- Members raised issues around the cleanliness, lack of good customer service and a lack of building repairs at the Cirencester site. Freedom Leisure reported increased cleaning in the gym and greater training in all staff members. The Leisure and Culture Manager explained that routine smaller maintenance items were the responsibility of Freedom Leisure, while larger-scale repairs and maintenance issues were considered by the Council.
- David Stanley, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, explained that when Freedom Leisure took over the contract, the Council invested £1.2 million into the leisure centres. £360,000 had been spent on new equipment around three to four years ago with planned capital investment of £500,000 in 2026–27 and £550,000 in 2029–30.

- The Cabinet Member noted that expanding the service in Moreton-in-Marsh would be extremely challenging at the present time. Significant additional funding would be required, potentially from Section 106 contributions or housing, but such a decision would rest with the future unitary council.
- The Deputy Chief Finance Officer explained that discussions were taking place with the school regarding the funding of energy-efficiency initiatives.
- Opportunities had been offered at both Bourton and Chipping Campden Schools to complete NPQL lifeguard qualifications. Students were supported to gain lifeguard and swim teacher qualifications, and many progressed into employment at the leisure centres.
- The replacement jacuzzi at Bourton-on-the-Water is on site but installation had been delayed due to underlying pipework and balance tank issues, including leaks. Contractors were currently addressing these problems.
- Freedom Leisure stated that they would feed back to the Museum Manager the Committee's interest in developing wider Cotswold-linked displays to reflect the wider history of the Cotswolds rather than just the Roman period.

## **OS.258      Car Parking Strategy**

The purpose of the report was to present Cotswold District Council's Parking Strategy for 2025–2028 which outlined the approach to managing and delivering off-street parking services over the next three years. It was designed to meet user needs while supporting the Council's strategic objectives through to 2028.

The report was introduced by Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience, and Susan Hughes, Business Manager for Support and Advice who made the following points:

- The Car Parking Strategy would guide how the Council would manage its off-street parking estate for the period 2025 to 2028.
- The Cotswold District managed 20 off-street car parks with a total of 2,279 spaces and 24 EV charging points.
- Stay times and parking turnover had been reviewed to ensure that short-stay spaces were available. Long-stay provision had been assessed to ensure that the needs of both workers and tourists were properly accommodated.
- The charging period at Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water car park was being reviewed, with a proposal to move it to 10:00am–8:00pm. This would allow residents free parking earlier in the day before tourists arrived and would capture income from visitors staying later into the evening.
- Parking machine technology would be upgraded across the District, supported by £40,000 of allocated capital funding.
- The tourism levy would be extended to include Stow-on-the-Wold.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

Members raised concerns about the inability to pay for parking with cash if machines failed. The Officer explained that customers could call a number to pay but attempts to allow payment via local shops were unreliable and impractical due to distance and potential queues. There were no plans to reintroduce cash payments.

Analysis of parking in Tetbury and Cirencester showed there was overall capacity across sites, though central car parks were often oversubscribed. The Transport and Connectivity Plan emphasised active travel.

The Whiteway Car Park break clause was set for 2028, coinciding with the abolition of the current Council. Efforts had been made to boost season ticket sales by reducing prices, but feedback indicated that people were unwilling to walk the longer distance.

In discussing the increase of the tourism levy, it was noted that Stow-on-the-Wold had seen a significant increase in tourist numbers. Whilst there was no direct administrative cost for the levy, there was a hidden cost to the Council in that VAT must be accounted for, and fees collected must be reconciled against the amounts available to spend.

Whilst the promotion of bikes, including e-bikes, was welcomed, some bike racks remained unused. This may be due to their locations being outside town centres, often in other car parks, rather than in central areas.

A member raised a question about the Moreton-in-Marsh Transport Hub and car parking proposals, referring to a 2018–2019 Church of England plan to provide 150–250 spaces on a site, funded by the Church with support from the Business Association and GWR. The Member asked whether officers could explore alternative ways to implement the proposal using different land as a cost-effective solution to the town's parking crisis. The Cabinet Member explained that the Council's strategy was based on the fact that it believed that there would be a transport hub that would provide 50 plus parking spaces. The Cabinet Member offered the Member further discussion outside this meeting on different parking options for Moreton-in-the-Marsh.

A full complement of parking enforcement staff (two full-time and one part-time) was in place and operating across all seven days of the week.

The Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of maintaining Council assets. Many sites had already been resurfaced, and a schedule was in place to address those still requiring work.

Break 17:55 – 18:05



Purpose

To note the two proposals for local government reorganisation in Gloucestershire that had been developed collaboratively with all seven Gloucestershire councils.

The Chair suggested that call-in rules be disappplied for this item, as the timeline leading up to the government deadline for submissions did not allow for five clear days between the Cabinet decision being taken and being implemented. The report was however subject to pre-decision scrutiny and would be considered by full Council before Cabinet. It was noted that the decision on whether Gloucestershire would move to one or two unitary authorities ultimately rested with central government, although all local authorities would be able to submit their preferences to government.

Councillor Mike Evemy, The Leader of the Council, and Jane Portman, Interim Chief Executive Officer, introduced the report.

Two options were presented for consideration. The Greater Gloucester proposal promoted by Gloucester City Council was not being considered by the Council, as the necessary information had been submitted too late and officers had collaboratively developed the other two proposals.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

The process of developing the two proposals had been robust, with all seven councils working closely together and sharing a strong, common evidence base.

Population change figures were based on ONS 2023 mid-year population estimates, projected forward to 2047. These projections reflected ONS-predicted population growth only and did not factor future housing delivery or associated population increases.

Gloucestershire had received £266,000 from the Government to support preparatory work, which had covered communications and engagement activity and consultancy services provided by Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC). Additional direct costs to the Council had been minimal, though there was significant officer time involved, representing an "opportunity cost". The Government had indicated that no further funding would be provided to support the cost of transition.

If the Minister opted for two unitary authorities, the demand for services would differ between the two authorities. Current disaggregation of Gloucestershire County Council funding indicated a potential deficit for the West and a surplus for the East. Future funding allocations would be determined by the Government and could be adjusted to reflect these differences.

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The PWC model used data provided by all Chief Finance Officers, with CDC data drawn from the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and considered robust, although the robustness of data from the six other councils could not be confirmed. The Pixel model was employed to interpret the Fair Funding Review 2.0 estimates and their potential impact. Funding estimates were indicative and may change over time.

It was likely that a single authority would hold any transition budget and be accountable for its use. Governance arrangements would involve Chief Executives, Leaders, and Chief Finance Officers to ensure that funds were spent only on essential elements of the transition plan. The budget, estimated at £21–24 million, would be phased over time. Whilst individual councils would not scrutinise each expenditure, there would be a clear reporting mechanism to ensure the Council's contribution was used in line with the transition plan.

It was agreed to include an additional item on the next Overview and Scrutiny agenda to determine the LGR-related information to be reported to O&S, including the potential establishment of a joint committee to scrutinise LGR progress and implementation in Gloucestershire.

The Committee agreed with the approach of disapplying call in rules in respect of the Cabinet decision on which, if any, LGR proposal to support, due to the time pressures involved. This was put to a vote and agreed by the Committee.

Councillor David Cunningham proposed supporting the recommendations in the Local Government Reorganisation Proposal and submitting the below recommendation to the Cabinet meeting on 26 November 2025. Councillor Clare Turner seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

### Recommendation

That progress on the implementation Local Government Reorganisation in Gloucestershire, including decisions on the use of transition funds allocated by the Council, are subject to scrutiny and reported to Full Council, until such a time as the Shadow Authority is established.

### Voting record

For=8, 0=Against, 0=Abstain

RESOLVED: to NOTE the Local Government Reorganisation Proposal and submit one recommendation to Cabinet.

## **OS.260      Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees**

The Chair recommended that the Committee read the report produced by Councillor Dilys Neill from the recent HOSC meeting.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
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The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 7.17 pm

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Action	Officer	Response
<b>13 October 2025 meeting</b>		
Data regarding the amount of Council tax collected on second homes in the district	David Stanley	We have been waiting for CIVICA to release an update to the Revenues system to enable officers to update Second Homes estimates. The patch was released on 20/11/2025 and subject to additional checks from officers, updated information will be available w/c 01/12/2025.
<b>17 November 2025 meeting</b>		
<u>Freedom Leisure</u> Presentation slides to be circulated to all Members.	Lisa Caton	The presentation from Freedom Leisure was emailed to all Committee Members.
<u>Car Parking Strategy</u> Changes to building details and road name.	Maria Wheatly	Building details and street name have been changed in the report.
<u>Car Parking Strategy</u> Breakdown of the income and expenditure that Council's car parks generate.	David Stanley	At a Council-wide level, the Car Parking Account provides this information: <a href="https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/5wsljhwz/cdc-car-park-accounts-2024-25.xlsx">https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/media/5wsljhwz/cdc-car-park-accounts-2024-25.xlsx</a>  <a href="https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/parking-travel-and-visitors/where-to-park/">https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/parking-travel-and-visitors/where-to-park/</a>  A breakdown of what CDC spend the surplus on is being prepared by officers and will be circulated to O&S members in due course.
<u>Car Parking Strategy</u> How many customers who responded to our surveys?	Susan Hughes	<b>15 Jan – 26 Feb (682 Responses) and 18 Sep – 16 Oct (247 Responses)</b> This is the total figure of customers and businesses that responded via online platform. This does not include the walk abouts conducted at the following settlements or the 3 meetings with chambers of commerce to gain further feedback.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cirencester (included Stratton)</li> <li>• Moreton</li> <li>• Lechlade</li> <li>• Stow-on-the-Wold</li> <li>• Chipping Campden</li> <li>• Tetbury</li> <li>• Bourton-on-the-water</li> <li>• Northleach</li> </ul>

Outstanding items		
Link to a paragraph to explain how the number of houses were determined for the Reg 18 Consultation - to support Members in their discussions with residents.	Matthew Britton	

## Proposed Cabinet response to recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny

Recommendation arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 5 November 2025.

The following recommendation arose from a discussion on item 6 on the 6 November 2025 Cabinet agenda: Cotswold District Local Plan Regulation 18 – Preferred Options November 2025

Recommendation	Agree (Y / N)	Comment	Responsible Cabinet Member	Lead Officer
<p>That the Council clearly communicates to town and parish councils and the wider public:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The importance of getting a local plan in place at the earliest opportunity in order to manage development appropriately and to prevent piecemeal speculative development (which won't provide supporting infrastructure);</li> <li>b) Why the local plan timeline is fixed and the Regulation 18 consultation cannot be extended;</li> <li>c) How respondents can make valid contributions and what the</li> </ul>	Y	<p>Information on the importance of getting a local plan in place as soon as possible, why the timelines for consultation cannot be extended and the planning grounds on which objections representations can be made clear to the wider public – indeed this work is well underway.</p> <p>Eight news releases have been issued on or in relation to, the council's Local Plan since July. All of these have been published on the council's website, on social media, in its newsletters and in media outlets – and they all reference the urgency around getting a Local Plan in place and the work being undertaken. As part of a comprehensive communications and engagement plan being executed over the</p>	Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning	<p>Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place</p> <p>Matt Abbott, Head of Communications</p>



material planning considerations are in relation to the Local Plan.		<p>coming weeks – targeting diverse audiences in different ways, through both paid-for (advertisements), owned (council social, newsletters, website) and earned (media, partners) channels, we will reiterate the message in part a of the recommendation, and tie in messaging set out in part b and c (where appropriate and relevant).</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• At presentations to over 160 town and parish councillors at council-run forums. One was hosted last night (Nov 5<sup>th</sup>) and one to be held in Cirencester next Monday (10<sup>th</sup>).</li><li>• At four public exhibitions in locations across the district</li><li>• At parish council-organised public meetings that officers and members have been invited to</li><li>• Regular member briefings (by email)</li><li>• On the webpages via Q&amp;As (we are collating all the questions submitted</li></ul>		
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		<p>to date and/or which have been asked at events – and sharing those for councillors and public to use). We will continue to update as events occur throughout the consultation period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On social media – our content on this topic, designed to engage and inform, is performing well – having reached over 81k people since July. We will be utilising paid and organic posts.</li> <li>• Via our regular email newsletters (Local Plan, business, general) which have more than 8,000 combined subscribers.</li> <li>• Through “Community Comms Packs” which are being shared with town and parish councils for sharing with their residents, encouraging participation in the upcoming consultation – which will provide guidance on ‘material’ feedback for planning consideration.</li> </ul>		
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		<p>This will all be in addition to messaging on the Local Plan, already planned to go out in the coming days/weeks. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A printed newsletter going through the letterbox of every household in the district</li><li>• Advertising on buses</li><li>• Posters and leaflets in all council-owned assets (i.e MAC, leisure centres, car parks)</li></ul>		
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## COTSWOLD District Council

Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 1 DECEMBER 2025</b>
Subject	<b>PUBLIC CONVENIENCE UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience Email: <a href="mailto:paul.hodgkinson@cotswold.gov.uk">paul.hodgkinson@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Claire Locke, Executive Director Email: <a href="mailto:Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk">Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Report author	Maria Wheatley, Parking Manager Email: <a href="mailto:Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk">Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To provide and update on the public conveniences
Annexes	Annex A -Updated actions and progress
Recommendation(s)	That Overview and Scrutiny resolves to: 1. Note actions and progress since 6 May 2025 (Annex A) 2. That the Committee notes the report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to submit to Cabinet
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering Good Services</li> <li>Supporting Communities</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The Leader of the Council, The Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience, The Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive Officer, The Monitoring Officer, Head of Legal, The Finance Business Partner, The Executive Director.



## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The Council provides eleven public convenience facilities which are open to the public for 364 days of the year. The provision of public conveniences remains a discretionary service.
- 1.2** During 2023 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Public Conveniences Review Group. The group reviewed all public convenience sites and reported back to Cabinet 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024. The report included recommendations to provide a balance between continued provision of good quality facilities and reducing the financial burden on the council.
- 1.3** At the Overview and Scrutiny meeting 6 May 2025 the actions to date were reported against the eleven recommendations. Of the eleven recommendations, five had been completed, one was on-going, and one is pending the next budget review. The remaining recommendations related to introducing charges at the four free sites, replacing the paddle gates in Bourton on the Water, placing signs at all sites explaining the reasons for charging and encouraging key partners to make their toilets available to the public.

## **2. INTRODUCING CHARGING AT FOUR FREE LOCATIONS – Annex A recommendation 5.**

- 2.1** The four free sites were West Street in Tetbury, Chipping Campden, Lechlade and Northleach.
- 2.2** The introduction of charging can only be achieved if the door mechanisms are compatible with the charging mechanism and robust enough to prevent forced entry. Therefore, new doors and mechanisms were required to enable card and coin payments.
- 2.3** New doors have been installed at all four sites and charging has been introduced at all sites except Northleach. The Council is in dialogue with Northleach Town Council regarding charging and the future management of public conveniences in the town.



**3. REPLACE PADDLE GATES AT BOURTON ON THE WATER – Annex A recommendation 6.**

- 3.1** To enter and exit the facilities at Church Rooms and Rissington Road users do so via paddle gates. There is a charge for each person to enter the gates with card or coin.
- 3.2** There is a separate free access for the disabled unit at both sites.
- 3.3** The paddle gates were in a very poor state of repair, and it was not possible to extend their life through further repairs. Both sets of paddle gates have now been replaced.

**4. SIGNS EXPLAINING CHARGING - Annex A recommendation 9.**

- 4.1** This recommendation is now complete.
- 4.2** There are signs at all locations explaining that the service is not statutory, and that the contribution from customers helps to offset the cost of provision.

**5. ENCOURAGE KEY PARTNERS TO MAKE THEIR FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC - Annex A recommendation 11.**

- 5.1** This recommendation was for the Council to encourage key partners such as town and parish councils and local businesses to make their toilets available for public use and to register their toilets on popular public toilet apps.
- 5.2** After careful consideration, the Chair of the Task and Finish Group advised officers that this recommendation did not need to be pursued. There are not sufficient staff resources to drive this initiative forward. However, any businesses wishing to sign up to Apps offering their facilities can do so.

**6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1** All recommendations requiring action have now been satisfied.

**7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The Council will consider any changes to net service costs as part of the 2026/27 Revenue Budget when presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2026.

**8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** There are no known legal implications.



## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1** There are no known risks as the recommendations are for Overview and Scrutiny to note actions and progress.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10.1** There are no unacceptable adverse effects on the protected characteristics covered by the Equalities Act that have been identified.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1** None identified.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1** The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100 D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Cabinet report 1 February 2024, (Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Public Conveniences Review Group.
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee 6 May 2025

- 12.2** These documents will be available for inspection online at [www.cotswold.gov.uk](http://www.cotswold.gov.uk) or by contacting democratic services [democratic@cotswold.gov.uk](mailto:democratic@cotswold.gov.uk) for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)



## Annex A

### Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Public Conveniences

Recommendation arising from the [report of the Public Conveniences Review Group](#).

Recommendations from the Review Group	Progress Report as of Dec 2025
1. That the Council seeks to re-tender the cleaning and maintenance contract rather than bring the service in house.	Complete Tender process complete and new contract in place from 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 for a period of 4 years.
2. That the Council seeks to reduce the annual revenue cost of providing public conveniences facilities, given that it would not be realistic to seek full cost recovery through charging, or to provide facilities that are free to use.	On going. Charges reviewed annually as part of the budget cycle. Any proposed changes will be included within the annual Fees and Charges schedule and presented for Cabinet approval in January 2026.
3. That the Council commits to retaining at least one district council provided public conveniences facility in each town and village within the district that currently has one.	Compliant
4. That the Council opens discussions with the relevant Town Councils about the transfer of responsibility for four sites in towns that have more than one district council provided facility, or where town councils are not willing, the Council seeks to close the facilities and	Complete Unable to agree leases with Town Councils for the sites offered. Four sites closed end of September 2024 reducing the overall running costs for the new contract. The closures



repurpose the buildings to generate a commercial opportunity.	have avoided additional operating costs of approximately £67,000. The new contract started after the closures.
5. That the Council allocates £47,200 in the capital programme to introduce charging at the four retained sites that are currently free to use, utilising the existing capital budget (of c. £34,000) for purchasing and installing card readers. This investment will ensure that the Council can charge for usage, with card payment as an option, at all district council run facilities and will have a payback period of c. 1 year.	Three out of four sites complete.  The Council is in dialogue with Northleach Town Council regarding the future management of the site.
6. That the Council allocates capital funding of £27,650 in priority works to remedy condition (the replacement of paddle gates) at the two sites in Bourton on the Water, in order to protect future income, as set out in Annex B of the Review Group's report.	Complete New paddle gates installed at both sites in Bourton on the Water
7. That the Council seeks to maintain the condition of its public convenience facilities through the Council's Asset Management Strategy.	Complete Sites are included in the Asset Management Strategy.
8. That usage charges are set at 70p at all retained district council public conveniences facilities. Based on current usage levels this could reduce the cost of the service by a maximum of £62,425 per annum.	On-going Annual review of charges as part of budget setting. Any proposed changes will be included within the annual Fees and Charges schedule and presented for Cabinet approval in January 2026.





# COTSWOLD

District Council

9. That the Council uses signage at public convenience facilities to explain to users that public conveniences are not a statutory service and the usage charge does not cover the full cost to the Council of running the service.	Complete Signs are at each location.
10. That the Council continues to provide one disabled access unit at each retained site which can be accessed free of charge with a RADAR key (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation).	Compliant All sites have a unit accessible with a RADAR key.
11. That the Council encourages key partners such as town and parish councils and local businesses to make their toilets available for public use and to register their toilets on popular public toilet apps.	Recommendation will not be pursued.

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**COTSWOLD**  
District Council

Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY - 1 DECEMBER 2025</b>
Subject	<b>COTSWOLD COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience Email: <a href="mailto:paul.hodgkinson@cotswold.gov.uk">paul.hodgkinson@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities Email: <a href="mailto:Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk">Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Report author	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities Email: <a href="mailto:Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk">Joseph.Walker@Cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To update Overview and Scrutiny on community safety activity and provide RAG rating against the 'Cotswold Community Safety Partnership' Plan for the period of November 2024 to November 2025
Annexes	Annex A – Action Plan
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note overall progress of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership</li> <li>2. Make any recommendations to Cabinet that the partnership should consider</li> </ol>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering Good Services</li> <li>• Supporting Communities</li> <li>• Supporting the Economy</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO



# COTSWOLD

District Council

Consultees/ Consultation	Cabinet Member, Corporate Leadership Team, Director of Communities and Place
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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This report provides an overview of the 'Cotswold Community Safety Partnership' (CSP) work and achievements against its action plan over the period of November 2024 to November 2025.
- 1.2** The report appends the CSP Plan and priorities which can be found at Annex A.
- 1.3** The CSP priorities are:
- **Engage, involve, connect, empower and inform communities**
  - **Support Victims of Domestic Abuse**
  - **Serious Violence Duty**
  - **Prevent and reduce antisocial behaviours**
  - **Tackle Crimes of Local Concern**
  - **Create Safe Roads for all**
  - **Supporting children and young people**
- 1.4** The committee is asked to review overall progress of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership and to make recommendations the partnership should consider.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The responsibilities of the 'Crime and Disorder Committee' are set out in Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 ("The Act"), which dictates that the responsible authorities (as defined by the Act) must consider the implications on crime and disorder of all their day-to-day activities. In its broadest sense the Act also brought about a duty to cooperate and led to the creation of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in each local authority area.
- 2.2** Terms of reference for the Committee's Crime and Disorder Committee were approved at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 01 December 2020.
- 2.3** It was proposed that an Annual Report be presented to the Crime and Disorder Committee, on the performance of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership ("Cotswold CSP") together with the Action Plan at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in June 2021, to support the role and decision making of the Crime and Disorder Committee.
- 2.4** A first Annual Report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 June 2021. This provided an overview of the Cotswold CSP's action plan and work of the period 2019-2021 as well as its Forward Plan for the year 2021/22. This was



followed by an update at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 04 October 2022, 31 October 2023 and 4 November 2024.

### **3. MAIN POINTS**

- 3.1** The last year has seen significant changes to the operation of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership (CCSP). On the same day that O&S considered the last report on the CCSP operation, the first phase of the Publica review came into effect, where staff and service delivery transferred to the direct employ of Cotswold District Council from Publica. Community Safety was included in this process, coming under the responsibility of the newly established role of Head of Economic Development and Communities.
- 3.2** Also in November, Councillor Lisa Spivey stepped down from Cabinet. Councillor Paul Hodgkinson was appointed as Cabinet for Community Safety, and Chair of the CCSP.
- 3.3** Beyond the district council, the neighbourhood policing inspector, Simon Ellis, has moved on to a new role, and has been succeeded by Philippa Moore, who also holds the role of deputy chair.
- 3.4** Across other partner agencies, we have also seen some movement in terms of representation, both as personnel change roles, and due to the logistical challenge many organisations face in trying to support partnership meetings. The CCSP meetings are alternately virtual and face to face, to try to facilitate attendance, but also to develop the knowledge and relationships which underpin robust partnership working.
- 3.5** Moving on to the capacity and influence of the partnership – beyond the changes in personnel and partnership, we have also seen a reduction in resource. Historically, the partnership has received delegated grant resource or specific grants via the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. During the last year, and up until the early summer, we have benefited from this activity, but there has not been new grant in-year. Delivery in recent years was supported by Safer Streets funding which has concluded, and by ASB hotspot funding, which has been reprioritised to other locations.
- 3.6** While this is a direct consequence of the lower ASB rates, and lower crime incidence in the district, which is of course something to celebrate, it does reduce the capacity



and direct influence of the CCSP. The Partnership must instead seek to lever the capacity of its partners, and influence their service delivery which sits outside its direct purview.

- 3.7** The Council does not have a dedicated post focussed on community safety, with the work currently picked up across the Community Wellbeing team and by the head of service. We are working to address this, to provide capacity to work with partners to drive this area of work forward.
- 3.8** Contextually, in mid-November, the Government announced that the role of Police and Crime Commissioner is to be abolished, to take effect in 2028, at the end of the current term. By itself, this would fundamentally change the operating picture within Gloucestershire, but we anticipate that Local Government Reorganisation will also significantly change the Community Safety Partnership architecture in the County.

#### **4. PROGRESS BY PRIORITY**

- 4.1** Members will recall that an action plan was provided at the last meeting. The priorities of the partnership remains as follows:

##### **4.1.1 ENGAGE, INVOLVE, CONNECT, EMPOWER AND INFORM COMMUNITIES**

- Public information is a mainstay of community safety. A lack of information or misinformation puts residents at risk. Moreover, fear of crime, in a district like ours which enjoys relatively low crime rates, discourages residents from engaging outside the home.
- Through the year, the Council's Community Wellbeing Team has organised a series of 'Strengthening Communities' events across the larger settlements of the district. These events, funded through the Integrated Care Board's Strengthening Local Community Fund, provide an opportunity for a range of partners to access local residents. The events have provided residents with direct access to voluntary sector partners, NHS services, and access to the local neighbourhood policing team. PCSOs have attended, to provide a visible police presence, with the mobile unit attending the event in Cirencester's St Michael's Park in August.



#### **4.1.2 SUPPORT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- Overview and Scrutiny members will have seen that Cabinet considered the Gloucestershire Tackling Domestic Abuse Strategy at its meeting on 20 November. As a housing authority, the Council has a vital role in supporting victims and survivors of abuse in accessing housing. The Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service representative on the partner is a regular attendee and strong contributor to the partnership.
- During quarter 4 of 2024-25, we benefitted from the Rural Domestic Abuse Champions project run by GDASS. This project enabled training of representatives from the Council, from Publica and outside agencies, to increase awareness of domestic abuse and its presentation in rural communities. This project, run across the rural districts of Gloucestershire, concluded in June, as grant funding to continue it could not be secured.
- The GDASS contract with Green Square Accord was renewed by Gloucestershire County Council, providing continuity of service delivery.
- The CCSP has a role engaging in the review of deaths relating to domestic abuse, commissioning work where it relates to our own district, and supporting the partnership processes across Gloucestershire.

#### **4.1.3 SERIOUS VIOLENCE DUTY**

- The Serious Violence Duty is a new specific duty on public authorities, in addition and distinct from existing requirements around Community Safety Partnerships. It places a duty on partners to support endeavours to tackle serious violence. The CCSP was due to receive a detailed briefing on the duty within the year, but this has been rolled forward due to staff changes within the constabulary. The focus of activity within the county has been on specific hotspots, determined by hard data. Work has focused on Cheltenham, and has proved successful. Lessons learnt will be used by the police and partners where possible in responding to serious violence and repeat ASB.

#### **4.1.4 PREVENT AND REDUCE ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOURS**

- Through its Environmental Services Team, the council actively seeks to tackle Antisocial Behaviour (ASB). To this end, it works in partnership with the Police and partner Local Authorities through the 'Solace' partnership. This partnership brought together local authority experts and PCSOs, to use the various powers and





capacity at their disposal to more effectively address ASB. Due to budgetary challenges, the Police have reviewed their staff commitment – since the summer, rather than supporting Operation Solace with dedicated PCSO posts, they have allocated a police officer single point of contact in each area.

- The CCSP is attended by Family Action, who hold the family support contract from Gloucestershire County Council, and by the Door, who provide detached youth work in Cirencester, Fairford and Tetbury. This early-stage engagement with young people and support for families is a critical action in trying to prevent ASB, by working with young people to provide advice and support, and to provide positive diversionary activity.
- The CCSP held its last meeting at SkillZONE, a community safety training venue in Gloucester operated by the Fire Service. It was a great opportunity to showcase this venue, which provides a facility to educate young people on a wide range of different safety scenarios. Chipping Campden School has taken advantage of the funded training the Fire Service offer, and the CCSP has committed to approaching other local schools to promote this opportunity.

#### **4.1.5 TACKLE CRIMES OF LOCAL CONCERN**

- Many of the highest incidence reported crimes in the district tend to be forms of acquisitive crime - shoplifting, burglary, car theft. The Home Office launched a campaign this summer to address crime on the high street, named the 'Safer Streets summer town centre initiative' - to address shoplifting, but also antisocial behaviour in larger centres. Within Gloucestershire, Safer Gloucestershire focused on the largest centres within each district, giving it the name Operation Shield. ASB Hotspot funding was targeted on those areas with the highest incidence to support this operation, but while Cirencester was identified as a location for Operation Shield, the Police were not successful accessing additional funds. The Neighbourhood Policing Team was able to dedicate additional patrols to the town, to respond to this initiative. With a visible deterrent in the town, there was no noticeable spike in targeted crimes or detection, but the Police report the operation provided a positive opportunity to engage with local businesses, helping build relationships to take forward after the operation.
- As noted in section 4.4, the Council has delivered a number of Strengthening Community events through the year. This included an event in Cirencester St Michael's Park on 5 August, which provided diversionary activities for young



people, an opportunity for residents to access police staff so complemented the ambitions of Operation Shield. Similarly, the annual Phoenix Festival provides a fantastic opportunity for people to access free activities within their town centre, and an opportunity for organisations - including the constabulary, to meet local people.

- At the time of writing, planning is underway for Operation Shield Winter, a follow up operation to address high street safety and the night-time economy through the months of December and January. As with operation Shield in the summer, this initiative does not bring with it funding but presents an opportunity to share examples of local practice.

#### **4.1.6 CREATE SAFE ROADS FOR ALL**

- Road safety is of course a key concern within Gloucestershire and given the district's extensive network of fast rural roads, is a particularly resonant issue within Cotswold. Clearly, the enforcement powers of the police are a key component in road safety – the Police have run Operation Spotlight across the County this summer addresses the so called 'fatal four' factors – speeding, drink/drugs, seatbelts and mobile phones.
- However, there is a wider role that partnership can support and deliver. Community Speedwatch is an example of how active citizens can add to the reach of the Police: recording excessive traffic speed prompts written warnings from the Police and also adds to the intelligence picture of where speeding is prevalent. Members may recall that the Council celebrated the contribution of volunteers by recognising a representative of Blockley Community Speedwatch as one of our Unsung Heroes in January 2025. Following partnership discussion, the Police Neighbourhood Team, Road Enforcement Unit and Press team have worked with Kempsford Community Speedwatch to produce a video to promote this area of work. This piece will be promoted via the Council's communications team and amplified by other partners.
- Gloucestershire Public Health has carried out an in-depth needs assessment of road safety. As it is based on sensitive data, the report itself has not been published, but the CCSP had opportunity to consider its recommendations. This work provides a better understanding of the dynamics of road safety incidents, in terms of both victims and other road users, so should inform better targeted interventions moving forward. Gloucestershire County Council is currently recruiting a Road



Safety Coordinator who will lead on this work, and who will be invited along to the CCSP as soon as possible.

#### **4.1.7 SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

- In creating the action plan, the Partnership considered this topic. There is already a Cotswold Youth Network, convened by World Jungle and chaired by Councillor Claire Bloomer. The health and wellbeing of young people is also a key priority for the health sector. With this in mind, the CCSP does not seek to lead activity on this topic but ensures that there is good representation from youth support partners so that issues regarding young people can be communicated at the CCSP.

### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

#### **5.1** Not applicable

### **6. CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1** Community Safety is a shared ambition and duty across a range of organisations. The Council's convening role continues to bring together a partnership of interested parties from across the public and VCSE sectors, including those direct responders such as Police and Fire, and those whose preventative work is vital in decreasing risk, such as youth workers and advocates for our vulnerable residents. During the year the Partnership has hosted successful and well attended meetings and been able to influence the delivery of activities that address local priorities.

### **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** This report provides an overview of activity in the past year, so of itself, does not have financial implications. As noted in the overview, the Council does not automatically receive dedicated funding towards the exercise of its community safety duties. Instead delivery is focussed on influencing the design and coordination of partner activity to deliver positive outcomes and a shared intelligence picture.

### **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** Section 5 of the Act established community safety partnerships in England (then known as 'crime and disorder reduction partnerships'). CSPs are statutorily responsible for reducing crime and disorder, substance misuse and re-offending in each local authority area. CSPs are defined as:



"An alliance of organisations which generate strategies and policies, implement actions and interventions concerning crime and disorder within their partnership area".

- 8.2** The UK Police and Justice Act 2006 requires every local authority to have a committee with power to review or scrutinise decisions made – or other action taken – in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions. The committee can also make reports or recommendations to the local authority with respect to the discharge of those functions. For Cotswold District Council, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee fulfils this function.

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1** Cotswold District Council is committed to support the CCSP in accordance with the duties specified in the Act, which in summary are 'Local authorities must do all that they reasonably can in the prevention of crime and disorder'.
- 9.2** The Cotswold CSP works with partners towards the ambition that residents are safe, well informed and resilient. Given the lack of partnership resources – both direct and through grant funding, there is a risk that partners through lack of funding/capacity/staff could disengage from the CCSP.
- 9.3** The CCSP seeks to mitigate this risk. The partnership structure is proportionate: the CCSP seeks to avoid meeting overload, through quarterly meetings and a hybrid approach. To deliver and plan specific activities, partners will meet outside of the main meeting. Agendas are designed to be informative and participative.
- 9.4** Locally, we have also been successful in recognising the synergy between community safety outcomes and community wellbeing. A stronger community is healthier and safer. We have benefitted from grants towards community health supporting the delivery of our Strengthening Communities events, that have given a range of partners from the NHS, Police and VCSE sectors, access to local residents.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10.1** The CCSP's principles and priorities are aiming to reach all geographical communities and different communities of interest. The partnership's work is inclusive of all the protected characteristics and backgrounds and targets support for vulnerable groups including young people and women and girls.



**10.2** Community Cohesion is a live topic of discussion within Community Safety, in the light of protests, increases in racial tension and racially aggravated events across the Country. Cotswold District has been fortunate not to have seen a significant escalation, but the partnership has taken the time to host a discussion on this matter, to ensure we are alert to the risk, and opportunities to defuse tension.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**11.1** The Partnership is reliant on the coordination of partner activity and information sharing, which by themselves have limited climate impact. By meeting alternately virtually and in person, the partnership structure seeks to balance effectiveness with the reduction of unnecessary travel.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**12.1** None  
(END)

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Actions	Lead Agency	Start date	End date	Status	Progress update
Plan and deliver Engagement events - Strengthening Community Events	CDC	Nov-24	Mar-26	On track	14 events planned with 12 delivered by end of November 2025
Increasing public confidence	Police	Jul-23	Ongoing	On track	Information sharing through the CCSP, to ensure partners are up to speed on priorities and local events. Update in November on Community Safety, Operation Shield and Community Cohesion
Deliver Rural Domestic Abuse Champions Project	GDASS	Aug-23	Jun-25	Complete	Project ended. While it was deemed a success, continuation funding was not available
Offer specific DA training to frontline staff.	CDC/Publica	Sep-23	Ongoing	On track	Staff in frontline roles receive online training. Some staff also benefits from the RDAC project
Information share via the CCSP	Police	Jan-25	Ongoing	On track	The CCSP is updated 6 monthly on the SVD scorecard, which tracks a range of measures related to SVD. Last update in July, so will be scheduled for January 2026
Review Project Solace	CDC/Gloucester City/ Police	Oct-24	Ongoing	On track	Project Solace underwent a review at the end of 2024. However, before this could be implemented, the Police changed their approach to staffing the project. The project design and resourcing is being reviewed by Local Authority partners
Deliver 'Safer Streets Cotswold' improvement projects in partnership with TPC's. (OPCC funded)	CDC/Police/town councils	Jul-23	Complete	Complete	Safer Streets funding has concluded, with the last projects closed down in year.
Operation Shield Summer campaign	Police	Jun-25	Sep-25	Complete	Operation Shield was announced in the early summer, and aligned with some pre-planned activity, so CDC and partners were able to deliver activity complementary to the campaign

Operation Shield Winter	Police	Nov-25	Jan-26	Minor concern	Op Shield winter was launched in November, to take place over December and January. Given the very late notice, there is a very limited opportunity to design partnership activity to support this.
Promote Community Speed Watch schemes	All	Jul-23	Ongoing	On track	Partnership discussion in January to ensure all partners are up to speed on community speed watch and the contribution it can make. Consequently, engagement with community speed watch groups to create a video to promote the scheme.
Stronger engagement with the Countywide Road Safety Partnership, including inviting the coordinator to the CCSP, to ensure messaging and campaigns align	CDC/Police	Jul-25	Ongoing	Minor concern	Awaiting appointment of coordinator. Discussion of the Road Safety Strategic Needs Assessment at the CCSP in October 25.
Engagement with youth and family support agencies	CDC/CYN	Jul-23	Ongoing	On track	World Jungle, who convene the Cotswold Youth Network, are members of the CCSP, as are the Door and Family Action. The expectation is that activity will be directed through the CYN





**COTSWOLD**  
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Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 1 DECEMBER 2025</b>
Subject	<b>REVIEW OF LONG-TERM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Juliet Layton – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning Email: <a href="mailto:Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk">Juliet.Layton@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Jon Dearing – Executive Director Email: <a href="mailto:jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk">jon.dearing@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues Email: <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@cotswold.gov.uk">mandy.fathers@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To provide an update on the Long-Term Empty Property strategy work
Annexes	Annex A – Sample of Long-Term Empty Properties (Exempt) Annex B – Long Term Empty Property Strategy
Recommendation(s)	That the Committee notes the report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to submit to Cabinet
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering Good Services</li> <li>• Supporting Communities</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	YES (Annex A)
Consultees/ Consultation	Leader, Cabinet Member for Environment and Regulatory Services, Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Accountant and Deputy S151 officer, Director of Governance and Development, Director of Communities and Place, Head of Legal Services,



# COTSWOLD

District Council

	Assistant Director, Managing Director (Publica)
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## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This report provides an overview of the empty property work carried out by the Revenues team, including the legal powers available.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** Returning empty homes back into use can have a positive impact on the local community, providing much needed homes, whilst improving the street scene and reducing anti-social behaviour.
- 2.2** Properties left empty are a significant wasted resource, both to their owners and to those in housing need across the Cotswold district.
- 2.3** The most recent government statistics (November 2023) reported that there were 261,189 long-term empty properties in England. That figure represents a rise of 12,556 homes compared to 2022, up 5% annually and 16% since before the pandemic in 2019.
- 2.4** There are many reasons why properties may become empty, such as the owner being in care, the owner having a lack of skills or finances to manage the property, legal issues, such as probate creating delays, sentimental attachments or a fear of renting.

## **3. MAIN POINTS**

- 3.1** The current Long Term Empty Property Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 3 October 2024.
- 3.2** At the end of September 2025 (QTR 2) there was 921 empty properties in the Cotswold District, of which:
- 277 have been empty between 6 – 12 months
  - 207 have been empty between 13 – 24 months
  - 353 have been empty between 25 – 60 months
  - 72 have been empty between 5 – 10 years
  - 12 have been empty for 10 years plus.
- 3.3** Those properties that have been empty between 6 months to 24 months mainly fall under the 'transactional' category. This means they can be for example, pending sale, under construction, pending planning approval or waiting for probate to be granted.



- 3.4** For this category, officers monitor the progression and where applicable apply the necessary levies, exemptions and exceptions. There are currently 484 in this category.
- 3.5** It is those properties that have remained empty for over 24 months that are more problematic. At the end of September 2025 there were 437 in this category which represents less than 1% of all domestic properties within the district.
- 3.6** Of these properties:
- 108 are for over 55-year-olds and/or retirement properties for sale/rent
  - 29 are pending demolition
- 3.7** This represents 31% of all those properties that are empty for 24 months or more.
- 3.8** There is very little the council can do in respect of these properties, but continued monitoring is carried out, and empty property premiums are applied to the council tax accounts where applicable.
- 3.9** Of the 300 properties remaining empty continuous monitoring and engagement with owners is ongoing as per the approach outlined in the Long-Term Empty Property strategy. This includes:
- Monitoring the completion of known works on properties
  - If an owner is planning repairs to an empty home and uses a VAT registered contractor, then the Empty Homes Coordinator can provide the owner with a VAT letter. This confirms that the property has been empty for two or more years. The owner then gives the letter to their contractor and allows them to charge 5% VAT on many repair costs. From April 2025 to the end of September 2025, 20 of these letters have been sent.
  - Referring cases through to Environmental Protection and/or Planning Enforcement
  - Applying discounts/exemptions/levies and exceptions
  - Advising owners on the Valuation Office Agency processes
  - Applying Charging Orders to properties
  - Tracing owners
- 3.10** Many properties are undergoing major improvements, and many of these are undertaken by the owner and not a construction company. These types of renovations can and do take years, sometimes due to the costs involved in such renovations and some purely down to the time required in which to do the works. Property discounts/exemptions would have been exhausted, and most are now experiencing an increase in council tax charged due to the levies applied. Most



owners are maintaining their payments, and for the few who do not, recovery action is taken with many resulting in a charging order being applied to the property.

**3.11** No actual enforcement powers have been implemented on any property so far. Such enforcement could include:

- An Empty Dwelling Order (EDMO)
- Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
- Enforced Sale

**3.12** Such enforcement can be an extremely complex and lengthy process as well as costly to pursue. There would be additional costs to consider following any successful action, such as renovation works of a property that might be required which could carry a significant financial risk to the council.

**3.13** However, notices under the Local Authority (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 have been utilised and works to secure a property and make it safe has been carried out. Where this type of notice has been implemented and works carried out, the property owner is invoiced for the full costs incurred.

**3.14** Engaging with owners of empty properties can bring various challenges. For example, where some owners are reluctant to engage with the council, believing that as the property is privately owned, the council has no right to interfere on what happens with it. These types of properties can remain empty for many years, and although they will attract council tax premiums from either 100%, 200% or 300%; depending on how long they have remained empty, council tax is paid and is up to date on the majority.

**3.15** The Long-Term Empty Property Strategy 2024 details the approach the council will take to tackle the issue of empty properties, and this is backed up four objectives, which are:

- 1) To gather relevant, accurate and current information about empty homes in the district
- 2) To provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owners
- 3) To raise awareness of empty homes in the district and promote the strategy
- 4) To reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back into use, through all available and appropriate means.

**3.16** Since the start of this financial year and up until the end of September 2025, there have been 514 new properties classified as long-term empty enter the list and 404



removed. For comparison, the figures for the same period in previous years are as follows:

Year: April-September	New Properties entering the List	Properties removed from the List
2022	343	336
2023	406	233
2024	250	441

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** The cost of the Empty Homes Officer is included in existing budgets. This is a 0.81 FTE post and is shared across the three partner Publica councils.
- 4.2** Any costs incurred by the council for undertaking works in default following non-compliance with a statutory notice will be recovered in full from the property owner.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1** There are no legal implications associated with this report.

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1** The council already has a Long Term Empty Property Strategy that was approved in 2024. Should the Council decide to alter the measures that the council has in place to incentivise homeowners to bring properties back into use, then a risk assessment will be undertaken at the time.

#### **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 7.1** There are not considered to be any equality implications in relation to this report.

#### **8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1** Creating homes from empty properties saves substantial amounts of material compared to building new homes, minimises the amount of land used for development and avoids wasting embedded carbon, helping to combat climate change.



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**9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

**9.1** None

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**10.1** None.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 2, 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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# **LONG TERM EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY 2024 - 2029**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This strategy describes the council's intentions to reduce the number of empty homes in the district and bring them back into use.
- 1.2 Returning empty homes back into use not only helps to meet housing needs but can also reduce problems associated with vacant properties. Empty homes can adversely affect the lives of people in the vicinity, can be a magnet for anti-social behaviour and an unnecessary drain on public services.
- 1.3 The council is committed to taking action to reduce the number of empty homes in the area by taking a proactive approach in supporting owners to help return their empty properties back into use or to redevelop them. A coordinated and sustainable approach can deliver an increase in housing supply, improve housing standards, and reduce the number of empty homes.

## **2. The National Context**

- 2.1 The Government classes properties that have been empty for longer than 6 months as long-term empty. It is recommended that local authorities have an empty homes strategy for their area, with the aspiration to reduce the number of long-term empty homes.
- 2.2 Government policy to incentivise the reoccupation of long-term empty homes allows local authorities to vary the amount of council tax payable on some empty homes, with the option of imposing an 'empty homes premium.'
- 2.3 Despite this, long term empties are now at their highest level. The most recent Government statistics (November 2023) report 261,189 long term empty homes in England, representing a rise of 12,556 compared to 2022, up by 5% annually and 16% since before the pandemic in 2019.

## **3. The Local Context**

- 3.1 The adopted Cotswold District Council Local Plan 2031 describes housing provision as critically important and sets out ambition to provide 9,671 homes throughout the plan period. The plan describes the importance of protecting the existing stock in meeting the housing needs of our residents.
- 3.2 Any empty property can be a problem, and therefore all owners of long-term empty properties will be contacted to encourage the return to use. Many long-term empty homes will be returned to use without continued council intervention. Therefore the focus of more significant work will generally be on those properties that have been empty for more than two years or have received specific complaints. These longer-term empty homes cause most concern as they are more likely to remain empty for longer without intervention and are also more likely to be an increasing source of blight and complaint.
- 3.3 The Council Tax database is used to determine the number of empty homes in Cotswold district. At the end of July 2024 there was registered 864 long-term empty properties which represents less than 1% of all domestic properties in the district, of which 446 were classed as being empty in excess of 2 years. 53% of these were within the towns of Stow on the

Wold and Cirencester; with 60% of those properties being purpose-built retirement homes..

#### **4. Why Homes are Empty**

- 4.1 For the purposes of this strategy the term 'empty property' is taken to be a dwelling which is unoccupied and without furniture.
- 4.2 There are two main types of empty residential properties:
- 1) Transactional empty properties; and,
  - 2) Long-term empty properties
- 4.3 Homes that have been recorded as empty for more than 6 months are classified as long-term empty by the Council. The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) classes problematic empty properties as those that are inactive in the housing market and have been empty for more than 6 months. Transactional empty properties are generally up to 6 months, usually due to a change in tenant or ownership and are part of the normal cycle of people moving to a new house; although they may be empty for longer should they be subject to major renovations works.
- 4.4 A property does not have to be used all the time to be classed as occupied. For example, if it is:
- A second home or holiday home
  - A property which is part of a wider regeneration programme and could be in the process of being developed or marked for demolition
  - A property which has pending planning permission, could be waiting refurbishments, or could be waiting for new occupant to move in
  - A property where the owner is living elsewhere to provide or receive personal care.
- 4.5 There are many reasons for properties being left empty. Some are easily categorised, and other circumstances are more complex with owners having their own individual reasons for keeping their property empty. Some of the most common barriers that exist for owners of long-term empty properties are preventing them from returning their property back into use include:
- Issues with inheritance and/or delays with probate
  - Lack of finance to carry out necessary repairs and/or refurbishment
  - Perceived problems associated with letting of properties
  - Owner unwilling to bring the property back into use
  - Sentimental attachment to the property
  - Lack of decision as to whether to sell or rent the property
  - The owners are not local and are uncontactable, therefore effectively abandoning the property

- Part of a larger portfolio of properties, where one empty property does not affect their overall income.

## **5. Challenges Presented by Empty Homes.**

- 5.1 Dealing with an empty home is not always straightforward. A property may be used as a second home, and so not occupied on a permanent basis, but is in use. It may be that non-residential space such as that often found above shops is being used for storage or other business-related matters and although not immediately obvious it is in use.
- 5.2 There may be properties awaiting planning permissions and work is unable to commence whilst this is being sought. A number of these may include specialist permissions if they are a Listed Building or located in a Conservation Area.
- 5.3 Ownership Issues: A property may be owned by a number of different people or companies. The property may be subject to legal proceedings such as probate, divorce settlements, proceeds of crime restrictions or other legal restrictions.
- 5.4 Land Registry Issues: Although it is now compulsory in England to register any property which changes ownership or has a mortgage taken out against it for the first time, properties which have not changed ownership since before this requirement may not be registered with the Land Registry and information regarding the property will not be available from this source.
- 5.5 Absentee Owner: It may not be immediately evident who the owner of a property is or where they are, as they may have moved away with little information available to trace them.
- 5.6 Intentionally Vacant: Some properties are deliberately kept empty by the owner for specific reasons such as for their children when they leave home or elderly relatives who are in care. Some are kept empty until the owner feels the housing market is suitable to sell the property at the price they want. Others feel unwilling to sell due to emotional/past family connections with the property. Some owners are reluctant to engage with the Council and believe that as the property is privately owned the Council does not have the right to require action to return it to use. They may be unaware, or have no concern for, the effect the property has on the local area and surrounding properties. These are properties which are likely to be left empty for many years and fall into disrepair.

## **6. Why Empty Homes Matter**

- 6.1 The ambition of the adopted Cotswold District Council Local Plan 2031 to provide 9,671 homes over the plan period is challenging. High numbers of un-occupied homes are damaging when offset against this number. The plan also has a target of achieving 157 homes for the affordable sector annually. In addition to increasing the availability of housing in the district, tackling long term empty homes could also provide benefits for housing affordability.

- 6.1 Empty properties are a wasted resource, both for the community and the owner. The Council receives complaints about empty properties, including those that have been neglected or fallen into disrepair, from local people who rightly object to unsightly disused properties. For properties in this state, there are implications for the Council's Environmental Protection and Planning Enforcement Teams that have to use staff time and other resources to intervene to deal with pests, dilapidation, overgrown gardens, damage to neighbouring properties and other such issues.
- 6.2 For owners leaving a property empty can become costly and be a source of unnecessary anxiety.
- 6.3 There is an increased risk of vandalism and crime, and the property can be difficult to insure, which could result in high repair costs or even mean a complete loss of asset.
- 6.4 Even the general deterioration of an unoccupied property will result in costs, including those due to works necessary to maintain it even in its vacant state, as well as to enable the property to be brought back up to suitable living standards.
- 6.5 For the local community empty homes can have a direct impact on adjoining properties through issues such as damp and structural problems. Alongside this, unsightly empty homes can have a detrimental effect on the neighbourhood, affecting neighbouring house prices and pose an attraction for local crime, including vandalism, breaking into the property for various reasons, and can contribute to a lack of pride in the area.

## **7 Opportunities from Empty Homes**

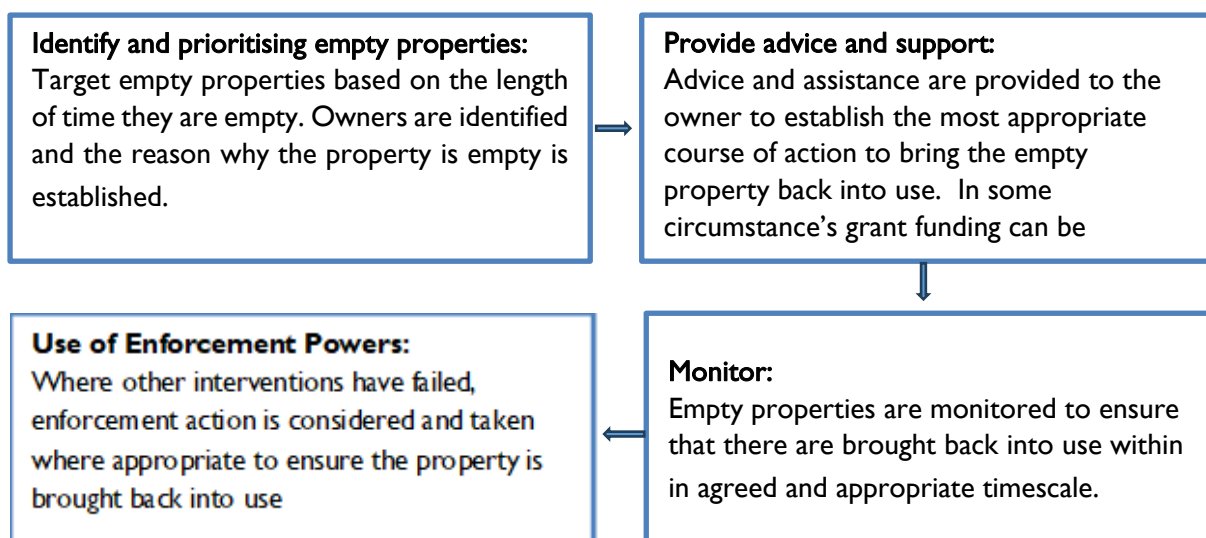
- 7.1 By renting or selling the property to allow occupation not only are the above issues resolved, but whilst not necessarily problem-free, there is the added advantage of gaining regular rental income or the capital from the sale of the property, and a beneficial impact on local housing needs.
- 7.2 Returning empty homes into occupation can help eliminate many of these issues and ensure that house prices in the immediate vicinity are protected from preventable reductions. Improving an area can also encourage investment in the local economy and a return of any lost pride in the community created by empty homes.
- 7.3 Empty homes returned to residential use increase the availability of homes. Instead of being a source of concern these homes can be transformed from a wasted resource into a home for an individual or family in housing need. There are approximately 1444 households on the waiting list for social housing. The utilisation of empty homes could prevent some of these people from facing issues such as homelessness or overcrowding or provide a first home for a local person and/or family.



## 8. Our Approach to Empty Homes

- 8.1 The council will work to prevent properties becoming empty over the long term by responding to enquiries about such properties from the public, undertaking media campaigns in the local press and other social media platforms as well as promotions of its work on the council website.
- 8.2 Where properties do become empty, the council will try and locate owners and starting with an informal approach will work with them cooperatively in an attempt to bring properties back into use. Generally this will take the form of offering advice and guidance. Where this is not successful, the council will move onto enforcement against the owner to require the property be brought back into use.

The Council's approach to tackling empty properties is summarised as follows:



- 8.3 The council follows an investigation process in order to trace owners of empty properties with a view to encouraging them to bring properties back into use. However, in some circumstances it is not always possible to identify or make contact with owners, or owners are reluctant or unable to bring properties back into use.
- 8.4 Under these circumstances, or if there is an imminent risk to health and safety, the council will consider a number of enforcement options. The options available include, but are not limited to: -
- **Enforced Sale** – Allows the council to force the sale of a property to recover debts owed to the council that are registered as a charge on the property.
  - **Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO)** – Enables the council to secure occupation and responsible management of some privately owned houses and flats that have been empty for two or more years.

- **Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO)** – Enables the council to purchase and sell an empty property for the purpose of providing housing accommodation or facilities connected to housing accommodation.

8.5 A summary of the various enforcement powers that are available to the council in respect of property aesthetics. Maintenance and addressing long-term empty concerns are described in Annex A.

## 9. Aims, Objectives and Approach to Tackling Empty Homes

- 9.1 The over-riding aim of this strategy is to bring empty homes back into use and tackle the issues posed by those that are long term vacant, are problematic or could help to meet some of the local housing need.
- 9.2 The starting point for any intervention will be to work with the property owner where possible. Each empty home is different and there are many reasons why they become empty. However, despite these, it is also important to recognise that an empty home is a potential blight on the community and wasted resource.
- 9.3 In order to achieve the aims this strategy focusses on four objectives:
- 1) To gather relevant, accurate and current information about empty homes in the district.
  - 2) To provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owner
  - 3) To raise awareness of empty homes in the district and promote the strategy.
  - 4) To reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back into use, through all available and appropriate means.
- 9.4 Table I below shows the key actions that will be taken to implement the objectives of this strategy.

<b>Objective I: To gather relevant, accurate and current information about empty homes</b>		
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Responsible officer/team</b>
Maintain an empty property database containing information provided by council tax, environmental protection, and development management	Continuous	Revenues Team
Continue to carry out reviews of empty properties using council tax	Annually	Revenues Team

data and information from questionnaires sent to all owners of known empty properties about the occupancy status of the properties.		
Map location of reported empty homes	TBC	Revenues Team/GIS Team
Carry out risk assessments on known empty properties and identify for proactive enforcement	On a case-by case basis	Revenues Team/Environmental Protection Team/Legal Team

**Objective 2: Provide advice, assistance and guidance to landlords and property owner**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Responsible officer/team</b>
Produce an updated empty property guide/information leaflet for owners of empty homes	January 2025 and reviewed annually	Revenues Officer/Revenues Manager and Communications Team
Ensure early engagement with owners of empty homes and that engagement is continuous	Case-by-case	Revenues Officers

**Objective 3: To raise awareness of empty homes in the district and promote the strategy**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Responsible officer/team</b>
Review and update information on the council's website and provide relevant updates via the council's media channels.	As required	Revenues Manager/Communications Team

Run at least one awareness raising campaign to coincide, where possible, with the National Empty Homes week	Annually	Revenues Manager
<b>Objective 4: To reduce the number of empty homes and return empty homes back into use, through all available and appropriate means</b>		
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Responsible officer/team</b>
Seek to identify funding to offer financial assistance	Continuous	Revenues Manager
Actively look for any Government initiatives that assist with finances for bringing properties back to use	Continuous	Revenues Manager
Work in partnership with internal departments to ensure delivery of aims	Continuous	Revenues Team, Environmental Health, Development Management, Legal, CFU, Building Control
Continue to review the use of enforcement options for empty homes on a case-by-case basis	As required	Revenues Team, Environmental Health, Development Management, Legal, CFU, Building Control

## 10. Performance Monitoring and Review

10.1. The purpose of this strategy is to explain the current situation with regard to empty homes both on a national and local basis and to set out the Council's future plans. It is essential that the effectiveness of actions delivered by the implementation of the strategy is closely monitored and reviewed. In order to develop a good system of performance management it is proposed to undertake the following actions: -

- Monitor the number of empty homes brought back into use
- Develop up to date knowledge of best practice through research and liaison

- Monitor and review delivery of actions within the Implementation Plan

## Annex A – Enforcement Powers

Problem/Concern	Legislation	Statutory Powers
Dangerous or dilapidated buildings or structures	Building Act 1984 (s77 & s78)	To require the owner to make the property safe (section 77) or enable the Local Authority to take emergency action to make the building safe (Section 78)
	Building Act 1984 (s79)	To require the owner to repair ruinous or dilapidated buildings seriously detrimental to an area
	Housing Act 2004 (part 1)	Under the Housing health and Safety Rating system local authorities can evaluate the potential risks to health and safety arising from deficiencies within properties and take appropriate enforcement action
Unsecured properties (where it poses the risk that it may be entered or suffer vandalism, arson or similar)	Building Act 1984, s78 Local government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, s29	To allow Local Authority to fence off the property. To require the owner to take steps to secure a property or allow the Local Authority to board it up in an emergency.
Blocked or defective drainage or private sewers	Local Government (Miscellaneous provisions) Act 1976 (s35)	To require the owner to address obstructed private sewers.
	Building Act 1984 (s59)	To require the owner to address blocked or defective drainage.
	Public health Act 1961 (s17)	To require the owner to address defective drainage or private sewers.
Vermin (where it is either present or there is a risk of attracting vermin that may detrimentally affect people's health)	Public Health Act 1961 (s34)	To require the owner to remove waste so that vermin is not attracted to the site, destroy any infestation and remove any accumulations prejudicial to health.
	Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (s4)	
	Public Health Act 1936 (s83)	

	Environmental Protection Act 1990 (s80)	
	Building Act 1984 (s76)	
Unsightly land and property affecting the amenity of an area	Public Health Act 1961 (s34)	To require the owner to remove waste from the property (see above)
	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (s215)	To require the owner to address unsightly land or the external appearance of a property
	Building Act 1984 (s79)	To require the owner to address unsightly land or the external appearance of a property
Recovery of debts against a property	Law of Property Act 1925 (s101 & s103)	To apply for an order of sale of the property to recover council tax debts or debts secured as a legal charge after work in default carried out
Properties empty for over 2 years and causing nuisance in the community	Housing Act 2004 (s133 – 183)	To apply for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) to enable the local authority to take over the management of eligible empty properties, to bring them back into use
Long-term empty properties where no traceable owners, or where all efforts to return the property to use have been exhausted	Housing Act 1985 (s17)	To seek to acquire a property under a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)
Anti-Social Behaviour	Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.  Community Protection Notices	To prevent an owner's persistent, continuing or unreasonable behaviour, having a negative impact on the local community's quality of life.

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