



COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL - 16 JULY 2025
Subject	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Gina Blomefield, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Email: gina.blomefield@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrew Brown, Business Manager for Democratic Services Email: Democratic@Cotswold.gov.uk
Report author	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer Email: julia.gibson@Cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To receive the annual report of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Annexes	Annex A – Executive Scrutiny Protocol (Part E10 of the Constitution) Annex B – Recommendations to Cabinet 2024/25 Annex C – O&S Work Programme – July 2025
Recommendation(s)	That the Committee resolves to: 1. Approve the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2024/25 for submission to full Council.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering Good Services• Responding to the Climate Emergency• Delivering Housing• Supporting Communities• Supporting the Economy
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO



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District Council

Consultees/ Consultation	Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Director of Governance, Interim Executive Director (Publica), Cotswold Management Team
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** An annual report may be submitted to Full Council to demonstrate the impact of Overview and Scrutiny and the effectiveness of the Executive Scrutiny Protocol under Part E10 (point 10.3) of the Constitution.
- 1.2** The Council therefore is asked to note the report for the previous civic year and the future work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** A Corporate Peer Challenge Report from October 2022 noted that there were different views about the effectiveness of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. The report welcomed the requirement for the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be an opposition member as a mature constitutional change that provided a good foundation. The report also noted that the Leader and Cabinet were clear that they wished to be held to account by Overview and Scrutiny.
- 2.2** Following the Peer Challenge report, the Council has refocused the role of Overview and Scrutiny on to holding Cabinet to account and contributing to policy development on behalf of the local community.
- 2.3** The Council under the Cabinet and Leader model now operates an effective Overview and Scrutiny Committee which provides pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet decisions and contributes to the development of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework. The Committee is also empowered to consider other issues that affect the district or its people.
- 2.4** Decisions to be taken by Cabinet are (subject to urgency rules) notified on the Forward Plan for a minimum of 28 days in line with the statutory provisions of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. These decisions will also include Key Officer Decisions which are delegated by Cabinet. For completeness, Council decisions are also included on the Forward Plan.
- 2.5** The Committee of 10 Members, chaired by an opposition Member, provides oversight of the work of the Cabinet and will question Cabinet Members about proposals within their portfolio responsibilities.



- 2.6** Council in November 2022 adopted the Executive Scrutiny Protocol which sets out the relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive (Cabinet).
- 2.7** The protocol describes how important good relations between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet will enable strong decision-making.
- 2.8** Paragraph 10.1 of the protocol sets out the following requirements to demonstrate the success of the protocol. These are:
- Recognition of the value of scrutiny;
 - A clear record of constructive challenge;
 - Valuable scrutiny reviews that achieve impactful outcomes;
 - An open and accountable decision-making process
- 2.9** Officers have also taken into account the guidance from the work of external bodies such as the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to help guide the Committee in using best practice to achieve the aims of the Protocol.

3. THE VALUE OF SCRUTINY AND CONSTRUCTIVE CHALLENGE

- 3.1** For Overview and Scrutiny to be successful, it must be able to demonstrate its ability to scrutinise and provide a 'critical friend' analysis of the work of Cabinet and proposals that are set to come before Cabinet.
- 3.2** Under the Executive Leader and Cabinet Model operated by the Council, Overview and Scrutiny has a key role in providing democratic checks and balances on the role of the Cabinet.
- 3.3** In the 2024/25 civic year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to undertake effective pre-decision scrutiny of selected Cabinet reports.
- 3.4** Annex C provides the current Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. This work programme is agreed annually but reviewed at each meeting and adjusted to take account of emerging priorities and any adjustments to the Cabinet Forward Plan.
- 3.5** Overview and Scrutiny at each meeting will hear from the Leader/Cabinet Member responsible for each report for pre-decision scrutiny. There is then the opportunity for the Committee to discuss various aspects of reports and ask the Cabinet Member detailed questions. On occasions, other Members or public speakers have made representations to the Committee which have informed its deliberations.



- 3.6** Annex B provides the list of recommendations that have been presented to Cabinet in the 2024/25 civic year. Any recommendations are agreed by the Committee at the conclusion of each item, with the Chair and Vice-Chair confirming with officers the final wording of the recommendations after the meeting if necessary.
- 3.7** Cabinet Members are then given the opportunity to consider the recommendations and the responses are agreed to by Cabinet collectively, before being reported back to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.8** In total, 9 recommendations have been made to Cabinet by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/25, with all 9 recommendations being accepted by Cabinet. This compares to 10 recommendations in 2023/24, all of which were accepted, in whole or in part, by Cabinet.
- There are several recommendations which made a noticeable contribution to the quality of decisions made by Cabinet, notably on the Publica Transition (a major insourcing programme).

4. VALUABLE SCRUTINY REVIEWS THAT ACHIEVE IMPACTFUL OUTCOMES

- 4.1** Scrutiny Reviews conducted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee play an important role in enabling Members to have input into the policy-development process.
- 4.2** Under Article 7.3 of the Constitution, Task and Finish Groups can be set up by the Committee to provide critical oversight of areas of policy within the Council and oversee external policy too.
- 4.3** These groups are made up of a select number of Members on a cross-party basis. The membership of Task and Finish Groups may include non-Executive Members who are not Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. BRITISH FARMING TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 5.1** The British Farming Task and Finish Group was established during the 2024/2025 civic year on 16 April 2025.
- 5.2** The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to engage with interested parties to understand the local impacts of Inheritance Tax changes in the district and to report back to Council on the key messages.



- 5.3** The membership of the Task and Finish Group comprised Councillors David Cunningham (sub: Councillor Gina Blomefield), Angus Jenkinson, Clare Turner, Jeremy Theyer and Michael Vann.
- 5.4** The Group engaged with relevant experts including representatives from National Farmers Union, Monahans Chartered Accountants, Taylor and Fletcher's land agency office and local farmers,
- 5.5** The Task and Finish Group's findings will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Council in July 2025.

6. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS MADE TO CABINET

- 6.1** Overview and Scrutiny has the authority to make recommendations to Cabinet on any issue that it sees fit regardless of whether it is a Cabinet decision. Whilst the majority of recommendations made to Cabinet were on pre-decision scrutiny items, there were other topical recommendations made.
- 6.2** Overview and Scrutiny also made some important recommendations to Cabinet on other community and Council priority items. These were in relation to Council communication channels and accessibility for Cotswold residents.
- 6.3** The Committee discussed these topics with the relevant Cabinet Members and officers to gain background knowledge and understanding of the issues involved.
- 6.4** Key areas of public concern received focused scrutiny this year, particularly in relation to neighbourhood planning, waste round rezoning, and the climate and ecological emergency.

7. AN OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

- 7.1** Overview and Scrutiny through all of the methods described in the previous sections, promotes the overall objective of open and accountable decision-making processes which is a fundamental part of the decision structures of the Council.
- 7.2** Cabinet is expected within the Protocol to be open and honest with the Committee and to assist in allowing the Committee to scrutinise decisions before them.
- 7.3** Cabinet Members for items are invited to meetings of Overview and Scrutiny and are substituted by the Leader or another Cabinet Member where possible if they are not able to attend.



- 7.4** Whilst senior officers in the room may assist in providing specialist details to the Committee, the focus of the Committee has been to engage with Cabinet Members.
- 7.5** In addition to the pre-decision scrutiny approach outlined above, all Cabinet decisions, Cabinet Member decisions and key decisions taken by officers are subject to call-in by any three members of the Committee (who must be from at least two political groups) within 5 working days of the decision being taken. Call-in is intended to be used in exceptional circumstances where a decision is believed to be contrary to the authority's decision-making principles.
- 7.6** If a valid call-in is made, the decision will be referred to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (which may be a specially convened meeting). The Committee will hear why the decision was taken and why it was called in before deciding whether the decision can stand and be implemented immediately, or whether the decision is referred back to the decision maker with comments, or in some circumstances, referred to Council.
- 7.7** No decisions were called in during the 2024/25 civic year.

8. GLOUCESTERSHIRE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

- 8.1** At the start of each civic year the Council is invited to appoint one member as district representative on the Gloucestershire Economy Strategy Overview and Scrutiny Committee and one member as a district representative on the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 8.2** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a standing item on its agenda for those two members to report back to the Council on the work of the external overview and scrutiny committees, and to receive any feedback to take to future meetings of those external committees.
- 8.3** This system worked well in 2025/26, with Councillors Jenkinson and Neill providing regular detailed written and verbal reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, facilitating discussion of key economic and health issues affecting the district.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1** The relationship between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet is important to the overall governance arrangements of the Council.
- 9.2** Overview and Scrutiny performs an important role of checking the authority of Cabinet and providing an accountability mechanism for community issues.



- 9.3** The Executive Scrutiny Protocol (Part E.10) agreed by full Council sets out the requirements for the relationship to operate in order to provide good policy development and effective pre-decision scrutiny.
- 9.4** The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the 2024/25 Civic Year can be clearly seen in scrutinising the decisions of Cabinet and contributing to overall policies, for example through the work of Task and Finish Groups.
- 9.5** In doing so, the Committee demonstrates its ability within the Council to provide constructive and insightful work within the decision-making processes.

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1** Council is being asked to note the effectiveness of the Protocol and the scrutiny processes. It can ask officers to bring a future report in a different format if it wishes to do so.
- 10.2** Council can refer any Constitutional matters regarding scrutiny processes to the Constitution Working Group if any such concerns arise.

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** There are no specific financial implications associated with this report.

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1** There are none arising from the report.

13. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 13.1** None.

14. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 14.1** Not applicable to this report.

15. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1** Members are required to travel to Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings in-person as required by statutory provisions which may have a climate impact. Meetings of Task and Finish Groups as they are not decision-makers are usually held remotely as allowed for the convenience of Members and other participants.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS



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District Council

16.1 None.

(END)