



Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Tuesday, 8 July 2025

Members present:

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

Officers present:

Jane Portman, Interim CEO	Harrison Bowley, Head of Planning Services
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Matt Abbott, Head of Communications
Jo Symons, Head of Planning Policy and Infrastructure	Matthew Britton, Principal Planning Policy Officer

Observers:

Councillor Juliet Layton

OS.205 Apologies

Apologies for late attendance were received from Councillor Lisa Spivey. Apologies for absence were received for Councillor Jon Waring.

OS.206 Substitute Members

Councillor Ian Watson substituted for Councillor Jon Waring.

OS.207 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

OS.208 Chair's Announcements

The Chair thanked Members for attending the second meeting of the week. It was noted that Geraldine LeConte, Assistant Director of Planning Services, had been substituted by Harrison Bowley, Head of Planning Services.

OS.209 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.210 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

OS.211 Local Plan Update

The purpose of the report was to confirm the way forward for the Local Plan Update. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning highlighted the following:

- It was proposed to merge the Partial Update of the Local Plan, which was nearly complete, with the Development Strategy and Site Allocation Plan to progress towards Regulation 19.
- It was noted that the plan was due for submission in December 2026 and adoption in 2027. Without an up-to-date Local Plan and housing land supply during this period, the Council would be vulnerable to speculative development, delayed building of affordable homes, S106 agreements and strategic housing.

In questioning and discussion, it was noted that:

- The merger of the existing Local Plan work with the new development strategy was not expected to require additional budget. Planned work, including evidence gathering, consultation, and examination (e.g. Inspector fees, legal advice, and staffing), was expected to be funded from the existing £1 million Local Plan reserve and a £300,000 MHCLG grant.
- In response to queries about the £215,000 allocated for Stage 2 of the Moreton-in-Marsh Feasibility Study, it was confirmed that Stage 1 was underway, and the need for Stage 2 would be based on its findings.
- The Local Plan Oversight Board remained within Cabinet. Whilst broader representation was acknowledged, it was considered that existing Cabinet Members provided a wide range of relevant skills and experience.
- The Oversight Board would provide regular updates to Overview & Scrutiny.
- Confidence remained that the Local Plan timescale could be met, as significant work had been completed. A full-time project manager was being appointed, with regular coordination meetings planned with the County Council and National Highways. The Planning Advisory Service was ensuring sufficient inspector capacity for the examination.
- The Council would work with the Cotswold District Council communication team to ensure resident engagement was meaningful and well-timed. Holding public meetings before site viability was confirmed had led to unnecessary costs and staff pressure. Communications regarding the Regulation 19 document would be available for public viewing.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

08/July2025

- A communications strategy was being developed with the communications team to support the Regulation 18 consultation. The strategy would ensure meaningful engagement was adequately resourced.
- The commitment to delivering affordable homes was reflected in the Regulation 18 policies, which included a 40% affordable housing target. Until the Local Plan was adopted, final decisions on green initiatives and the volume, location, and delivery of affordable housing may be subject to factors beyond the Council's control.
- The creation of a Cotswold National Park had been rejected to retain local control over development, housing, and planning. Protection continued under the Cotswold National Landscape as per the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- Concerns were noted about development in 16% of the district. Evidence to meet the target of 1,036 homes per year was currently insufficient and would be examined by a planning inspector. Discussions with neighbouring authorities continued on unmet housing needs, and future Gloucestershire-wide strategies would aim to address regional requirements and development sites.
- The Moreton-in-Marsh Working Group would only meet if the area was deemed viable for major development.
- The number of strategic sites identified was currently unknown and would be confirmed once the assessment study was completed.
- The option of a garden town or village remained under consideration but was unlikely due to timeline constraints.
- Concerns were raised about workload and potential delays from consultant reports, with suggestions that current staffing may be insufficient. Assessments continued as planned, supported by a project manager. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer proposed Cabinet prioritised contingency funding in the upcoming budget. The importance of balancing resource requests without impacting routine planning services was emphasised.
- Engagement with water and electricity providers was ongoing and would be actively maintained to support the Local Plan's progress.
- Despite national challenges for housing associations, the Council worked with reliable local providers. The £39 billion government affordable homes programme was expected whilst the housing team monitored local funding options.

The following recommendations were made to Cabinet:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive timely updates as the Local Plan develops.
2. That the Council commits to a publicly available communications and engagement strategy for both Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 consultations, specifying:
 - What methods will be used (digital, in-person, targeted)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

08/July2025

- Clear stakeholder mapping with consideration of how hard-to-reach groups will be involved
 - How it will be resourced
 - How Artificial Intelligence (AI) summaries will be verified and validated
 - How the Council will lobby the government on the unrealistic housing targets
3. That the Local Plan is disseminated to Town and Parish Councils to ensure two-way dialogue on proposed site allocations and development priorities commencing June 2026 as part of the Regulation 19 consultation on the draft plan.
 4. That the Council considers the establishment of a Local Plan (Contingency) reserve to support the delivery and completion of the Local Plan. Cabinet are encouraged to consider this request as part of the 2026/27 Budget Strategy and MTFS Update due in October 2025 to ensure adequate resources are made available at the start of the Local Plan delivery timetable.
 5. That consideration is given to whether the proposed resources are sufficient to meet the anticipated risks set out in the report.
 6. That the Council ensures that sufficient resources are in place to deliver the business-as-usual planning activity such as the management of planning applications and enforcement activity and this is considered as part of the 2026/27 Budget Strategy and MTFS Update due in October 2025.

Councillor Joe Harris proposed supporting the recommendations in the Local Plan Update report and submitting the six Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations to Cabinet and Councillor Angus Jenkinson seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the Local Plan Update.

Break: 15:53 – 16:08

OS.212 PAS Peer Review and Action Plan

The purpose of the report was to seek the Council's endorsement of the findings of the PAS (Planning Advisory Service) Planning Service Peer Challenge report (May 2025) and the proposed Action Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and the Head of Planning made the following points:

- The Planning Advisory Service conducted a peer challenge to assess strengths and identified areas for improvement.
- Challenges included COVID and interim agency directors, but the appointment of the Assistant Director of Planning Services and Director of Communities and Place had been welcomed.

In questioning and discussion, it was noted that:

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

08/July2025

- Responsibility for plan actions would be shared among several heads of service. Development management and enforcement functions would be directly led, with senior leadership providing overall oversight. Some proposed timescales were acknowledged as ambitious.
- The action plan was a living document, reviewed periodically to track progress. Updates were to be reported to the portfolio holder. Positive outcomes would be shared publicly. The process would align with the corporate plan, feeding into service plans, KPIs, team plans, and individual objectives, all regularly reviewed to ensure continuous improvement and accountability.
- Planning enforcement remained challenging, but improvements were underway. Priorities included updating the Local Enforcement Plan to set expectations, clarifying case prioritisation, and improving public communication. Team processes would be overhauled to reduce admin burdens, enhance IT use, and introduce a triage system. Recruitment to permanent posts was expected by the end of November, as current agency contracts were unsustainable beyond then.
- A Developer Forum was planned, with the first session anticipated in 2026. Sessions would be structured and themed to ensure focused discussion and manageable officer involvement.
- Officers were exploring AI tools to improve efficiency in reporting and correspondence. Senior leadership and communications were committed to the responsible adoption of new technology.
- Members requested clearer updates on enforcement cases in their wards, including triage details where confidentiality permits. The enforcement team valued member engagement and aimed to reinstate regular updates, though resources currently limited this.
- Concerns were raised about past validation processes allowing incomplete applications, causing delays and decision risks. Pre-application advice was encouraged but extensions remained necessary to ensure full consultee input and avoid rushed decisions. A flexible negotiation protocol existed but required more consistent use. Clear service level agreements with consultees would help manage expectations and support decision-making.
- The review highlighted that the planning and enforcement team was positive and engaged but required improved processes, IT systems, and tools, such as AI and enhanced performance management, to boost efficiency and effectiveness.
- The team planned to better utilise the Enterprise case management system to automate key stages, notifications, and feedback. Performance management improvements, using tools like Power BI and Idox Insights were underway and expected soon.
- Service level agreements were developed to formalise collaboration between planning teams, with set expectations and deadlines. Regular reviews and meetings were planned to improve cohesion and efficiency. Tools like Idox supported this process.

16:47 – Councillor Harris left the chamber.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

08/July2025

The following recommendations were made to Cabinet:

1. That ward members are key local contacts for officers to engage and interface with in terms of planning enforcement activities.
2. That the Council encourages the use of existing functionality that is available but not utilised to its full capacity.
3. That the Council prioritises recruitment to vacant posts within Planning Enforcement, notwithstanding the recruitment challenges faced by local government.

Councillor David Cunningham proposed supporting the recommendations of the PAS Review and submitting 3 recommendations to Cabinet and Councillor Tony Slater seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the PAS Review.

The Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 5.15 pm