



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.

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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 disapplied 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.

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The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 7.17 pm