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Overview and Scrutiny Committee
01/December2025



COTSWOLD
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 1 December 2025

Members present:

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

Officers present:

Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services	Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer
Nickie Mackenzie-Daste, Senior Democratic Services Officer	Maria Wheatley, Shared Parking Manager
David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenue Service

Observers:

Councillor Patrick Coleman, Mike Evemy, Paul Hodgkinson and David Fowles

OS.261 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Jon Wareing and Lisa Spivey.

OS.262 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

OS.263 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were made.

OS.264 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings on 5 November were discussed.
Councillor Tony Slater was incorrectly stated as leaving the meeting which was altered to show his attendance.

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Councillor Clare Turner proposed accepting the amended minutes and Councillor Michael Vann seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the updated minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2025.

The minutes of the meetings on 17 November were discussed.

A spelling mistake on Councillor's Hodgkinson's name was identified and corrected along with additional points for inclusion regarding the jacuzzi update at Bourton on the Water and the point made during Member's Questions by Councillor Laura Hall-Wilson about the small pool at Cirencester Leisure Centre.

Councillor Jenkinson suggested using bullet points for ease of clarity.

Councillor Jenkinson proposed accepting the updated minutes and Councillor Vann seconded the proposal which was put to the vote and agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED: to APPROVE the updated minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2025.

OS.265 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that detailed figures on parking surplus spend would be circulated to Members by email. Updated second-homes data was being finalised following delays, but the tax-base would also be circulated to members by the end of the week.

In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that second homes data was taken from the council tax system and relied on owners self-declaring. This meant some second homes may not be being captured, as the legislation did not require mandatory disclosure.

OS.266 Chair's Announcements

An additional item was noted for the January agenda regarding the procurement of waste trucks for Ubico. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer explained that a significant allocation had been included in the capital programme for the following year, partly funded through potential borrowing.

OS.267 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.268 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

OS.269 Report back on recommendations

The Chair thanked Cabinet for its response to the Committee's recommendations on the Council's engagement with town and parish councils and residents regarding the Cotswold Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation. The Chair reported attending the town and parish event on 10 November and the public exhibition in Mickleton on 28 November and encouraged residents to participate. It was noted that following the Committee on 17 November 2025 the Chief Executive Officer, had agreed to review the LGR process quarterly with the Committee and explore opportunities for joint scrutiny across the county.

OS.270 Local Government Reorganisation - Reporting and Scrutiny arrangements

The purpose of the item was to consider how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could best scrutinise the progress of Local Government Reorganisation plans.

The Chief Executive Officer, Jane Portman, suggested:

- Providing quarterly reports on the progress of local government reorganisation (LGR) in Gloucestershire, covering the planning phase until the government's anticipated decision in June or July next year. Reports would update on emerging plans and, following the decision, the implementation phase and progress against the agreed plan. Alternative suggestions for frequency or format of reporting were welcomed.
- Whilst joint scrutiny committees were typically established when a shadow authority is formed, there may be opportunities to undertake joint scrutiny work in advance. This would be discussed with other councils and reported back to the Committee.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- It was confirmed that each future report would include a financial update detailing spending and sources of funding.
- There was an acknowledgement on the amount of work at this crucial staging point, with recognition given to the significant work already undertaken, particularly by senior officers.

Democratic Services would look to include regular updates in upcoming work plans.

OS.271 Public Toilet Update

The purpose of the report was to provide and update the Committee on the public conveniences in the district.

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The report was introduced by Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience and Maria Wheatley, Parking Manager. The report was introduced and the following points made:

- Of the 11 recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group, all but one had been addressed.
- Of the four free public toilet sites, Tetbury, Chipping Campden, Lechlade, and Northleach, charging had been considered and was introduced at three sites in August. Northleach Town Council had chosen to assume ownership and management of the service from 1 April 2026.
- Replacement paddle gates had been installed at Bourton on the Water.
- Signs had been installed that explained the charges, indicating that the service was discretionary rather than statutory.
- The one outstanding recommendation, to encourage local businesses to make their toilets available to the public and register them on public toilet apps, was considered but deemed impractical due to challenges in persuading businesses to participate.
- Plans were in place to increase the frequency of cleaning at Stow-on-the-Wold and Bourton on the Water, as these sites experienced the highest levels of usage due to tourism.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- The contract was reviewed and some cleaning frequencies were reduced or tailored to individual sites to manage costs. Savings were sought during re-tendering, but overall contract costs were not reduced as hoped. Efforts to encourage town and parish councils to take on toilet management were also largely unsuccessful and had been discontinued.
- An agreement had been reached with Northleach Town Council, who would assume ownership and management of facilities from 1 April 2026. No other councils had expressed interest to date. In the context of forthcoming local government reorganisation, during recent forums, Parish and Town Councils were encouraged to initiate conversations should they wish to explore taking on such discretionary services in future.
- Usage trends, cost pressures and any planned increases in cleaning frequency would all be considered as part of the budget-setting process. It was noted that current charges did not cover the full cost of the service, and that any proposed changes would need to balance cost recovery with wider cost-of-living considerations. Cabinet would review all relevant data before agreeing future fees.
- Seasonal increases in cleaning were identified as a possible approach to reflect higher usage, and this would be explored further with the contractor. The concept of dynamic pricing between summer and winter was a potential option, though no commitment was made and further consideration would be required.

- As the facilities' charges did not cover their operating costs they required subsidies, so any council taking them on would need to determine whether to continue subsidising the service or increase charges to meet full costs.
- The possibility of funding accessible toilets through a health-related budget was raised, given the clear links to wellbeing. Whilst no suitable budget existed within the Council, it was agreed that officers would explore whether NHS or health-partner funding streams existed, and whether other councils had adopted similar approaches.
- The surplus from the Council's car park account could be used to support certain services, including public conveniences. The financial breakdown showed that last year the cost of providing public conveniences exceeded £100,000 beyond what the car park surplus could cover. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer confirmed that the full surplus was already allocated to eligible services.
- The uncertainty around local government reorganisation details made future service planning difficult. All services would need transition plans, and it was confirmed that any contracts in place on 1 April 2028 would be novated to the new unitary authority.

The Committee noted the actions and progress since May 2025 as outlined in the report.

OS.272 Community Safety Partnership Update

The purpose of the report was to update Overview and Scrutiny on community safety activity and the 'Cotswold Community Safety Partnership Plan for the period of November 2024 to November 2025.

The report was introduced by Councillor Paul Hodgkinson, Cabinet Member for Health, Culture and Visitor Experience, and Joseph Walker, Head of Economic Development and Communities, and the following points were made:

- The Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy had been ratified, with a reminder that domestic abuse now represented around 20% of crime in the county.
- Antisocial behaviour, particularly in Cirencester had since reduced.
- Rural crime remained a concern, including hare-coursing and theft, whilst road safety was a priority with increased use of Community Speed Watch.
- Work to support children and young people was highlighted, and the statutory requirement for the Community Safety Partnership to meet quarterly was noted.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Door, a charitable youth organisation, played a key role in the Community Safety Partnership by working directly with young people to reduce issues before they required police involvement.
- There was a reduction in external funding due to national policing budget pressures and the end of national schemes. Some targeted funding, such as

anti-social behaviour (ASB) hotspot funding, still existed although opportunities were now limited.

- Perceptions of crime could be skewed by small fluctuations in reported incidents. Sharing up-to-date statistics could help to address misconceptions.
- Police attendance at parish meetings was limited, highlighting the important role PCSOs played in maintaining visible engagement. Police updates could be provided virtually.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner's Office held six-monthly online sessions for town and parish councils, which offered direct access to staff and an opportunity for local issues to be raised.
- Funding decisions for schemes like Safer Streets and ASB Hotspot funding were driven by strict Home Office criteria. The partnership did not receive justification for the funding decisions, but officers agreed to speak with Cllr Brassington (police and crime panel representative) to monitor the reasoning behind funding allocations.
- The Council had a statutory responsibility to convene the Community Safety Partnership, with its role reflected in the Council's breadth of service delivery related to community safety. Additional activities beyond that were discretionary.
- Regular, smaller-scale community activities were needed to complement one-off events, with ongoing support from initiatives like The Door, though staffing and resourcing constraints remained a challenge.
- The Chipping Campden Youth Club was being restarted, with the Cotswold Youth Network providing coverage across the whole district. World Jungle helped support the Cotswold Youth Network.
- Operation Solace was a joint project between environmental health officers and the police addressing ASB. Previously staffed by PCSOs in each district, it was now covered by a single police officer.
- The Road Safety Partnership, a joint initiative between the Police and Crime Commissioner's office and Gloucestershire County Council, monitored accident "hot spots" across the county and directed interventions to locations with the highest incidence of accidents and fatalities.
- The 20mph speed limit rollout involved town and parish councils submitting expressions of interest, which were being reviewed and grouped into areas to implement through Traffic Regulation Orders.

The Committee noted the overall progress of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership.

OS.273 Long term empty homes/second homes strategy update

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the Long-Term Empty Property Strategy work.

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The report was introduced by Councillor Juliet Layton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, and Mandy Fathers, Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues, and the following points were made:

- Empty or derelict properties could be squatted in, attract youth trespass, negatively affect neighbouring property values, and create safety and antisocial behaviour issues.
- Some empty properties were not visible or known, including unsold or hard-to-resell retirement homes.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Empty properties were generally self-declared, often when owners applied for a six-month council tax discount. After that, the Empty Homes Coordinator monitored the property, offering support to bring it back into use, and applied premiums if it remained unoccupied.
- Improvement notices were served on empty or neglected properties, and in some cases, works in default had been carried out.
- Action on unsafe or derelict properties was limited by cost and complexity. Any significant intervention would require Cabinet and potentially full Council approval, as recovery of expenses depended on eventual sale or charging orders. The Empty Homes Premium was widely used across the country to encourage bringing properties back into use.
- Some retirement properties remained unused because planning conditions restricted occupancy to over-55s, and owners were not willing to allow short-term or alternative use despite demand for social housing.
- Councils could refer specific properties either via Cotswold revenues or directly to the Business Manager for Environmental, Welfare and Revenues.
- Properties on a private estate were treated the same as any other property. If they were assessed for council tax, they fell under the same monitoring and empty homes processes.
- The database of empty properties and second homes was not publicly accessible due to data protection considerations.
- A general mailing could be sent to parish and town councils advising them of potentially empty properties or wish to establish how long a property has been vacant.
- Income from empty homes and second-home premiums formed part of the council tax base. Whilst £130,000 of second-home premium funding was allocated to support affordable housing in 2024, any proposal to direct such income to specific purposes, such as creating more social housing, would need to go through the standard budget-setting process.
- Analysis of empty properties could include the number of years a property had been empty, the causes for it remaining unoccupied, and whether any action had been taken. Information would be reorganised and categorised to help develop targeted strategies, with a breakdown to be reported showing what actions had been taken.

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- The Council collected property data solely under its powers to administer council tax. It did not have the power to act as an intermediary or to advertise potential opportunities to property developers.

The Committee resolved to exclude the press and public from the meeting on the basis that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraph 2 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, with the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighing the public interest in disclosure.

The meeting continued in private session and a public minute of the private discussion is below.

- Some empty properties had required formal enforcement steps. Where owners could not be contacted, the Council could place a charging order on the property. Unpaid council tax debts followed the normal recovery cycle: referral to enforcement agents, return to the Council, and then a charging order. Any debt secured against the property was recovered when the property was sold. If Council tax was paid, it became harder to justify stronger enforcement action.
- Any debts accrued by a property would be passed to the unitary authority.

After 12 months the Council Tax premium was 100%, after 5 years it increased to 200%, and after 10 years it rose to 300%. These were statutory periods.

The Meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and closed at 4.14 pm