



**Minutes of a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on
Monday, 29 June 2026**

Members present:

Gina Blomefield (Chair)	Angus Jenkinson (Vice Chair)	
Claire Bloomer	Lisa Spivey	Jon Wareing
David Cunningham	Clare Turner	Ian Watson
Tony Slater	Michael Vann	

Officers present:

Simon Harper, Head of Democratic Services and Elections	David Stanley, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer
Angela Claridge, Director of Governance and Development (Monitoring Officer)	Geraldine LeCointe, Assistant Director - Planning Services
Julia Gibson, Democratic Services Officer	Harrison Bowley, Head of Planning Services
Tyler Jardine, Trainee Democratic Services Officer	Gemma Moreing, Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager
Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place	Stuart Rawlinson, Business Manager
Jane Portman, Chief Executive Officer	Resources, Data and Growth

Observers:

Councillor Patrick Coleman, Mike Evemy and Juliet Layton

OS.346 Apologies

There were no apologies received.

OS.347 Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

OS.348 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were made.

OS.349 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2026 were amended to correct the spelling of Councillor Claire Bloomer's name and add Simon Harper to the attendance list. Councillor Ian Watson 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 minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2026.

OS.350 Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Chair thanked officers for providing clear responses on matters arising, including work to encourage car-free travel to the Cotswolds despite transport challenges, and the Council's approach to weed control, noting that glyphosate was applied in line with WHO and EU guidance.

OS.351 Chair's Announcements

The Chair requested advance questions for the September UBICO report so detailed responses could be prepared.

The Chair explained that the O&S meeting on 3 August had the Local Plan as the only item on the agenda and members of the public were encouraged to attend. Any O&S member who was aware they would miss this meeting was requested to organise a substitute. The report papers would be published on 10 days ahead of the meeting. It was recommended that questions could be shared with the Chair and Democratic Services in advance so officers could prepare answers for the meeting.

Future performance reporting would combine service performance, financial performance and the strategic risk register reports into a single, more integrated report, providing a clearer corporate overview while reducing duplication.

OS.352 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

OS.353 Member Questions

There were no Member questions.

OS.354 Report back on recommendations

The Committee's views on Local Government Reorganisation had been considered by Cabinet, and recommendations on the waste service relating to Bring Banks and the collection of soft plastics were noted and actioned.

OS.355 Financial Performance Report - Q4 2025/26

The purpose of the report was to set out the full year budget monitoring position for the 2025/26 financial year.

The report was introduced by Councillor Patrick Coleman the Cabinet Member for Finance, and David Stanley, Chief Finance Officer who highlighted the following points:

- The outturn financial position was positive, increasing the surplus by £206,000 compared to Q3 to a total revenue surplus of £251,000.
- Key drivers included higher-than-expected car park income (with £165,000 earmarked for new ticket machines) and strong planning fee income (£710,000 above budget, with full provision set aside due to appeal risk).
- The Ubico contract, which ended the year £166,000 over budget, prompted further work on improved forecasting and cost mitigation.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Ubico contract budget within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy had been set using inflation assumptions on fuel, pay awards and other costs, and would increase across future years accordingly.
- Work was ongoing with Ubico to improve monthly forecasting and monitoring of fuel usage and costs.
- Vacancy management required all posts to be approved before filling, with senior review of business cases, meaning only essential roles were recruited to while some vacancies were held or removed, generating budget savings and a positive financial variance. Resource allocation remains a political decision. Financial monitoring would identify whether the budget was underspent or overspent, with any available surplus requiring decision by the administration on whether and how it should be allocated in line with their priorities.
- Additional postage costs from the "LIFT" project were not fully covered by the original project budget, as it related to subsequent processing by the revenues and benefits team.
- Under the Ubico partnership arrangement, the Council retained financial risk for Ubico costs, with limited ability to apply financial penalties.
- Increased car parking income was due to both higher usage and sustained visitor numbers, with around a 20% rise in car park activity alongside changes in stay patterns.

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- The Publica Phase 2 had been estimated to cost £300,000 for service transfer plus a similar amount for redundancy. The actual staffing costs following transfer in July 2025 were lower than expected.
- The £2m LGR reserve was acknowledged as a prudent financial measure to manage the costs of Local Government Reorganisation.
- The Council's risk register identified ongoing capacity issues within planning enforcement.
- Planning decisions were based solely on planning policy and not on financial considerations. Adequate resources would be provided to deliver key priorities, including the Local Plan, but only after reviewing whether service improvements or different ways of working could address pressures before committing additional funding.
- Electric vehicle charging points generated a surplus because the Council purchased electricity at a lower cost than it charged users, with minimal maintenance costs incurred to date.
- Occupancy data was available for individual car parks, including usage patterns, ticket sales and space availability.

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. Ubico Contract: To inform the Cabinet of concerns around the Ubico contract and support more rigorous monitoring and forecasting of costs following delayed notification of 2025-26 cost pressures.
2. LGR Reserve Fund: To commend the Council on putting aside reasonable funds into an LGR reserve for future costs relating to local government reorganisation.

OS.356 Service Performance Report - Q4 2025/26

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance.

The report was introduced by Councillor Mike Evemy, Leader of the Council and Gemma Moreing, Business Information, Performance & Improvement Manager.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Council tax collection rules were set nationally. If a Direct Debit was missed, the system currently treats this as a loss of the right to pay by instalments, triggering recovery action. Officers encouraged anyone to contact the council early, before formal recovery letters are issued. Government was consulting on changes to this process and has indicated plans to extend the time before enforcement action was triggered.

- The council did not use a single organisation-wide system for performance improvement; instead, different services use a mix of approaches, with business partnering and dashboards used to monitor performance and support decision-making. Local Government Reorganisation was expected to drive a more unified, service-user-focused approach to performance and improvement.
- Land charges' performance had been affected by staffing changes. The service also depended heavily on other internal teams providing timely responses, and this was contributing to ongoing performance issues.
- The rise in empty properties was recognised but not fully explained. Officers continued to work on incentives and engagement through the relevant teams to reduce the number.
- Empty properties were categorised by broad reasons (eg. probate or contact issues), but detailed reporting was restricted by data protection, with members suggesting a higher-level summary to improve transparency.

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. Processing time for Land Charges: To inform the Cabinet of concerns regarding extended processing times for land charges and the impact on residents and businesses buying and selling properties in the district.
2. Council Tax support applications: To commend officers on the improvement in processing time for council tax support applications.
3. Empty Homes: To express concern regarding the growing number of empty homes in the district and seek information from officers on the actions that the Council is taking to address this problem, recognising that the powers available to the Council are limited.

OS.357 Planning Enforcement Report

The purpose of the report was to provide an update on the performance, staffing, and capacity of the Planning Enforcement Team following the transition of planning services back into the Council in November 2024 and the subsequent PAS Peer Review.

The report was introduced by Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning, and Harrison Bowley, Head of Planning Services.

In questioning and discussion, the following points were noted:

- Members expressed concern about inconsistent enforcement case updates and staff turnover, with officers acknowledging current resource and system limitations but committed to improve and automate reporting so that members could see clearer, ongoing case progress whilst balancing legal constraints.
- A system for improved reporting to members was being developed and was expected to be in place within the lifetime of Cotswold District Council, with an aim of late summer to end of the year. It was being built alongside a new enforcement

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plan and wider back-office improvements, though legacy data issues from older cases might delay full implementation.

- Listed buildings were treated as a top enforcement priority, with a target response time of around 48 hours and site visits to prevent irreversible harm.
- The enforcement team currently had six posts, but one senior enforcement officer position remained unfilled.
- No planning posts were included within the vacancy management savings with planning and enforcement roles being protected and funded.
- Enforcement work required specialist legal and procedural knowledge, so short-term redeployment was not straightforward.
- Cases were not left indefinitely but were triaged and either closed or reactivated depending on harm and priority. A structured backlog clearance strategy was in place with governance oversight, and cases were assessed against age, risk, and planning harm rather than being automatically dropped.
- Officers clarified the legal distinction between types of planning breaches: listed building and tree protection offences could be treated as criminal matters, while most other breaches only became enforceable after formal notices and non-compliance.
- The backlog consisted of a wide mix of cases, but the Council currently did not have reliable data to quantify it precisely by severity or type.
- A full breakdown into "minor" versus "significant" cases was not yet possible until the backlog has been systematically worked through and reclassified under the new triage and reporting process.
- Members suggested that Ward Members could help prioritise backlog cases by providing local context on severity, particularly for less complex or lower-level breaches, subject to confidentiality considerations.
- A resident-facing enforcement guide was proposed, alongside clearer communication for councillors to show where cases sit in the process and what timescales and likely outcomes to expect after reporting.
- Improvements were being explored to make public information more accessible digitally, reducing reliance on lengthy reports and improving clarity for both residents and councillors.

Councillor David Cunningham proposed submitting the following recommendations to Cabinet. Councillor Angus Jenkinson seconded the proposal. The Committee voted to accept the proposal.

Recommendations to Cabinet

1. To note that there is a recognised long-standing issue relating to Planning Enforcement.
2. To welcome the steps currently being taken to employ the services of an individual with particular expertise in this field.
3. To note particular concerns relating to:

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- i) Communication with members, especially when they have submitted a suspected breach of planning – recognising that members are not decision makers but their community links and historic knowledge can be a valuable resource for Enforcement Officers.
 - ii) Lack of a system showing progress against current and backlog cases along with their classification.
 - iii) Clarity on responsibility for individual cases when one officer leaves and another is appointed.
 - iv) Communication with the public – making sure that published guidance is available to residents to provide them with clear information on how to notify the Council of suspected planning breaches and also give details of how this process is managed to enable a better understanding.
- 4. To request an update on progress against the Planning Advisory Service Peer Review action plan.
 - 5. To request an action plan for the backlog clearance strategy, with a particular emphasis on those cases where real harm is being caused.
 - 6. To request that the Cabinet take all reasonable steps to address the issues, including rethinking how the Council tackles planning enforcement and the resources allocated to it.

OS.358 Updates from Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny Committees

Councillor Jenkinson confirmed that Members had received the report and recommendations of the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee.

OS.359 Work Plan and Forward Plan

The August meeting would focus solely on the Local Plan, with the Asset Management Strategy and Climate Emergency Update deferred to September.

The Meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and closed at 7.07 pm

Chair

(END)