



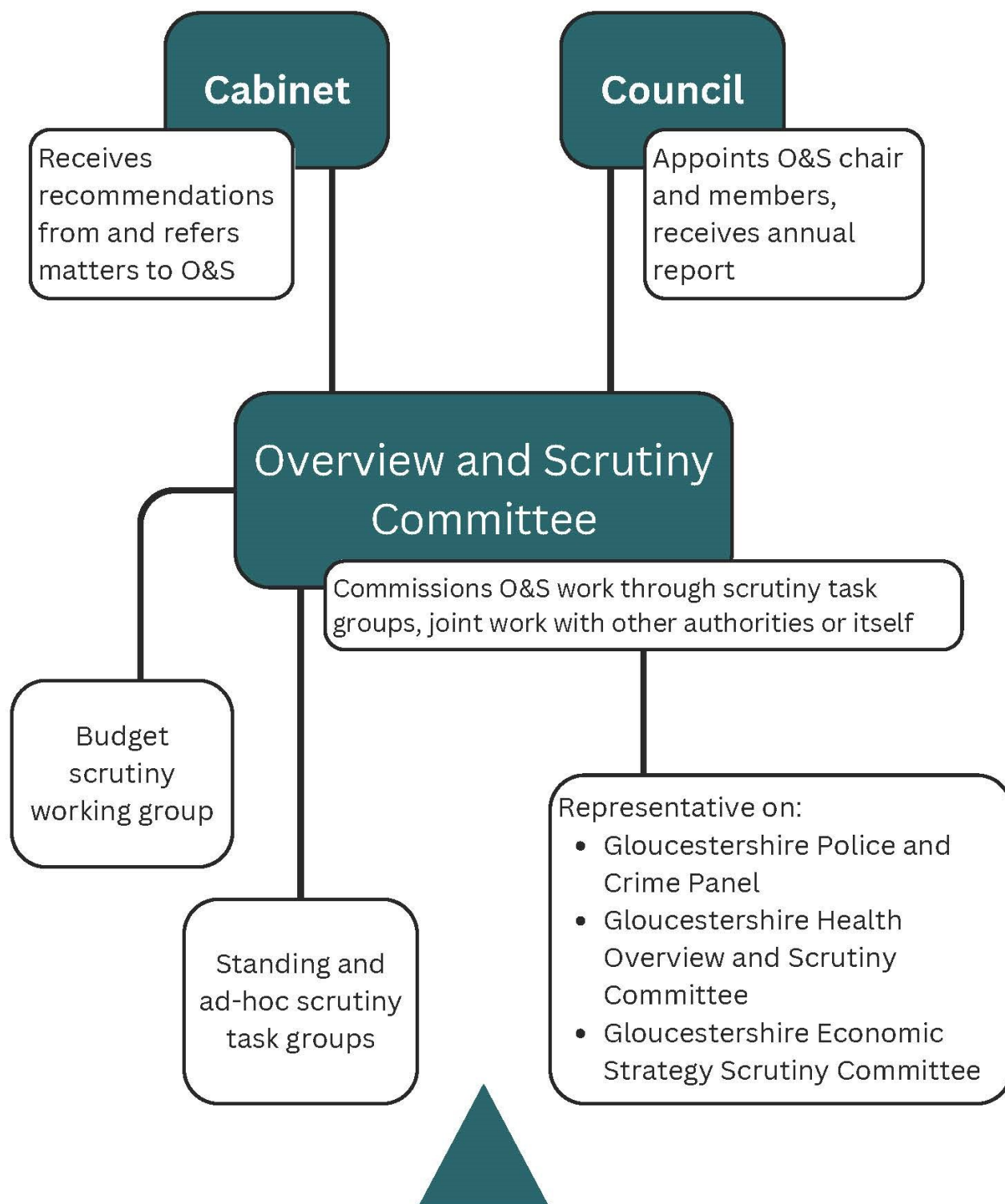
CHELTENHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report

April 2024—March 2025

Overview and Scrutiny Structure Chart



All members are supported by member training, seminars, briefings where appropriate and by Democratic Services Officers

Foreword

Councillor Tabi Joy, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Councillor Jackie Chelin, Vice-Chair

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has had another busy year with an ambitious agenda set by its members at a planning meeting facilitated by the new Governance, Risk and Assurance Manager.

Thanks go to all the officers who have brought their expertise and given their time in preparing and presenting papers for the committee and in answering fully committee members' challenging questions. The committee is also immensely grateful for the work of the Democratic Services team who organise and liaise with all parties to ensure that the items discussed meet the objectives set.

At the committee's request, the cabinet member with responsibility for refuse and recycling has been attending the meetings on a regular basis to answer questions on the closure of the HRC and the measures being put in place to assess the impact.

The committee has also been pleased to receive regular reports from borough councillors who sit on Gloucester County Council's three scrutiny groups for Health, Economic Development, and the Police and Crime Panel. The Borough Council's Budget Scrutiny Group, and the more recently established Scrutiny Task Group for Housing Transition, have also provided timely updates.

During the year, key business of the committee has involved scrutiny of the Ubico environmental services company, the local enforcement plan, the draft grants policy, the biodiversity duty report, the Golden Valley social value strategy and the collections development policy. There have been updates on the Tackling Multiple Deprivation work and the air quality strategy as well as progress on implementation of recommendations from the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review on planning. The committee was briefed on the barriers to affordable housing delivery, the challenges of reconciling heritage protection with sustainability measures, and the evolving situation with local government reorganisation.

This annual report provides an insight into the focus of each meeting. In so doing, it demonstrates clearly the depth and breadth of the council's commitment to its local community combined with a strong desire to ensure accountability and to deliver positive outcomes for all its residents.

The Committee

2024-25

Members

- Councillor Tabi Joy (Chair)
- Councillor Jackie Chelin (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Frank Allen
- Councillor Graham Beale
- Councillor Julia Chandler
- Councillor Chris Day
- Councillor Juan Carlos Garcia Clamp
- Councillor Sandra Holliday
- Councillor Richard Pineger
- Councillor Stan Smith

CBC Officer leads:

- Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities
- Victoria Bishop, Governance, Risk and Assurance Manager

Meetings

The Committee met six times across the municipal year 2024-25:

- 09 September
- 21 October
- 25 November
- 13 January
- 24 February
- 31 March

Budget Scrutiny Working Group

Councillor Adrian Bamford

Chair of Budget Scrutiny Working Group

The aim of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (BSWG) is to monitor council spending throughout the year as well as to examine incoming budget proposals. It is a good opportunity for non-Cabinet members of CBC to provide an independent review and feed in ideas on budgetary measures and responses to external pressures on CBC operations as a whole.

As part of the BSWG's oversight, in the last year the group examined and commented on the 2025-26 Housing Revenue Account budget proposals, on General Fund Revenue and Capital Budget Proposals 2025-26, and the CBC Financial Out-Turn Report 2023-24. They also received a presentation on the Ubico budget and an update on the savings programme.

Despite the unprecedented financial challenges of the last few years, including the rising costs of service delivery and supporting people hit by the cost-of-living crisis, the 2024-25 budget has seen favourable movement with £385k recurring savings achieved through the senior leadership restructure following the transition of Cheltenham Borough Homes to the 'in-house' provision of CBC Housing Services.

The additional budgeted savings are currently being identified. The 2025-26 budget is forecasted to make a £2m contribution to general balances and reserves, marking the first time in five years that required savings will be outstripped by contributions. Whilst the wider financial landscape remains challenging, the council is in a strong position with a clear roadmap for recovery and revitalisation.

Scrutiny Task Group

Cheltenham Borough Homes to Cheltenham Borough Council Transition

The Scrutiny Task Group Housing Transition was established in 2023 and presented its formal final report to O&S in September 2024. The members of the task group were Councillors Paul Baker, Adrian Bamford, Suzanne Williams, former Councillors Wendy Flynn and Emma Nelson, and the co-optee, Ian Mason.

The group had received and commented on the housing integration action plan, actively contributed to the creation of a consultation framework to develop a Tenant Offer and considered the development of the future governance framework. During its time in operation the Task Group regularly updated O&S on its work.

The Leader thanked the task group for its report and proposed a follow-up review in a year and stressed shared responsibility for tackling Anti Social Behaviour which had been highlighted in the report. Emphasis was placed on community-based staff to identify issues early and support local interventions.

The Cabinet Housing Committee held its inaugural meeting in September 2024 as part of the new housing governance arrangements. It is responsible for overseeing the council's housing stock which includes the reviewing of the performance of all housing functions and the engagement of residents in the effective delivery of services. Tenants and a Leaseholder serve as co-optees on the Committee and represent the Committee on Tenant and Leaseholder Panels, to ensure the voices of tenants and leaseholders are strongly heard. The Committee has met seven times in the last year. As an advisory committee it has no decision-making powers of its own but it has made recommendations to the Cabinet on matters relating to the discharge of the housing functions, insofar as those functions relate to the council's housing stock.

Tackling Multiple Deprivation—Progress Report

The Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships presented a report to O&S in October, reflecting on progress on actions since its last review in June 2023. He provided an update on ongoing challenges facing Cheltenham's communities, including persistent cost-of-living pressures, child poverty, and health inequalities. The report highlighted concerns around youth safety, school attendance, and the rise in home schooling. It also showcased strong partnership work, particularly through the No Child Left Behind initiative, and reaffirmed the council's role in coordinating support across sectors. Members stressed the importance of continued collaboration, data-driven evaluation, and addressing misconceptions about the town's affluence. Further school attendance data will be shared to inform future discussions.



Other scrutiny

The committee scrutinised a number of key topics throughout the year, in addition to standard items, briefings from the Leader of the Council on key issues, and regular updates from task groups and representatives on county-wide scrutiny groups [Health Overview and Scrutiny, Police and Crime Panel, and Economic Growth Scrutiny]

Ubico

UBICO, the council's jointly owned environmental services local authority company, presented its annual report to O&S in **September**. It highlighted improvements in safety, reporting, carbon reduction, and operational efficiency. Waste volumes showed a slight drop in general waste and a rise in garden waste and fly-tipping, likely to be due (respectively) to the reduced household recycling hours and better public awareness. Members were able to ask why sickness absence has increased; this is a national trend and Ubico informed that it had appointed a Head of People to support staff and workforce planning. UBICO is refining its workforce strategy to support career development through competency frameworks.

Local Enforcement Plan

O&S reviewed the draft Local Enforcement Plan in **September**, prior to Cabinet consideration, together with Members of Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee. The plan, outlined the council's approach to planning enforcement, including priorities, timescales, and procedures. Members raised concerns about the need for stronger deterrents, proactive monitoring, and clearer responsibilities for listed buildings and derelict land. Officers explained that enforcement is largely reactive due to resource constraints and focused on remedial action. A section on the public interest test was added and further feedback from the O&S committee informed the final version prior to Cabinet consideration.

Progress report: 2023 Planning Peer Review

The Head of Development Management presented a progress update in **September** on the 12 key recommendations from the recent LGA peer review and improvements introduced since his appointment. The service continues to enhance public engagement, to empower communities and reduce pressure on council resources, particularly in responding to planning breaches. Two emerging neighbourhood plans may serve as models for best practice, and greater promotion of the weekly planning list is encouraged to support local involvement. The planning team has worked closely with HR to adopt a flexible and proactive approach to recruitment, and the service is also investing in long-term workforce development through apprenticeships, graduate-focused career pathways, and potential partnerships with educational institutions to strengthen its "grow your own" strategy.

Gloucestershire Airport

In **September** 2024 it was reported to O&S that the Leader and the Chair of O&S had been approached to attend a scrutiny meeting with Gloucester City Council about the sale of Gloucestershire Airport. A joint scrutiny committee was proposed since Gloucester City and Cheltenham Borough are joint shareholders. This work was delayed in 2024/2025 due to various factors, including the local elections.

Grants Policy

Members were given the opportunity to consider the draft grants policy in **October**, prior to Cabinet consideration in November. The Director of Governance and Customer Service explained that the new Grants Policy aimed at strengthening oversight and transparency in the distribution of community funding. Key highlights included a commitment to robust governance and accountability for public funds, introduction of a grant toolkit with operational guidance, templates, and examples, future plans for a panel-based decision-making process to improve fairness and consistency.

Biodiversity Duty First Consideration Report

The report presented to O&S in **October** set the foundation for a full report due by January 2026, highlighting existing biodiversity actions, including partnerships with community groups, annual planting schemes and best practice reviews, with the Gloucestershire Local Nature Recovery Strategy expected in late autumn, and educational materials for staff, volunteers and the public, being developed. Members welcomed the report, and suggested several improvements, including a clearer vision statement, more detail on the 18 volunteer groups, and consideration of food and diet impacts on biodiversity. They also raised questions about Ash dieback and about Local Green Space designation and land leases, which officers committed to follow up.

Air Quality Update

in **November**, senior officers updated Members on CBC's air quality strategy, covering national context, local measurements, current actions, and future plans, with particular emphasis on the impact of the Air Quality Education post and feedback from DEFRA. Members welcomed the report, especially the schools project, and expressed interest in contributing to the new Air Quality Strategy and smoke control zone review. Officers addressed questions on particulate matter (PM2.5), monitoring limitations, pollution sources, and idling vehicles, and said that overall, the strategy prioritises education and awareness over enforcement, with Members and officers aligned on its importance and effectiveness.

Understanding Barriers to Affordable Housing Delivery

In **November**, officers outlined the current challenges and opportunities in Cheltenham's housing, homelessness and rough sleeping strategy. CBC and housing associations remain committed to exceeding market delivery rates, with a current policy requirement of 35–40% affordable housing in new developments, with progress being made on the Strategic and Local Plan, Affordable Housing Guidance, and First Homes Technical Advice Note. Major sites in North and West Cheltenham could significantly boost delivery. CBC aims to acquire 20–25 homes annually, focusing on larger family properties and in terms of town centre regeneration, is working collaboratively to ensure affordable housing is integrated into vibrant urban areas.

Members expressed concern about the frequent failure to meet the 40% affordable housing target due to viability claims, and were reassured that developers' cost claims are independently scrutinised and robustly challenged, and that viability assessments are being updated. Additional concerns about the council purchasing homes at market value while developers profit, and a suggestion about stratifying affordable housing targets based on development size was noted by officers who said that this would require viability testing and regional agreement.

Devolution/ Local Government Reorganisation

The Leader briefed O&S in **January** on the publication of the government's white paper on devolution and local government reorganisation. She informed that a community governance review would take place to reflect the fact that much of Cheltenham is unparished. Members recognised the key projects CBC was undertaking which required significant resource; reorganisation would also require financial and staffing resource.

2025-26 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals

The Chair of Budget Scrutiny Working Group reported in **January** on its scrutiny of the budget proposals, saying that in these difficult times the council's sound budget and relatively healthy position was a great reflection on the Deputy Chief Executive, finance team and council as a whole. Members were reassured by the officer's response to questions regarding employee pensions.

Temporary Closure of Household Recycling Centre (HRC)

At O&S's request, the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Public Realm continued to update Members during the Leader/ Cabinet Member briefing sessions at committee on the temporary closure on 10 **January** 2025 of the HRC. This followed the Cabinet decision in November 2024 which had generated considerable public interest. Detailed data was awaited and the council was working with partners on kerbside collections and disposal options.

Golden Valley Social Value Strategy

In **January**, the Golden Valley Development team outlined key elements of the emerging Social Value Strategy which was currently in draft form. Further to O&S Members' comments, the team acknowledged concerns about public perception and are working with the communications team to ensure residents across Cheltenham understand the town-wide benefits of the development. Lease arrangements for future tenants will balance long-term stability with flexibility for growing businesses, particularly in the cyber sector.

Reconciling the challenges of heritage protection with sustainability measures

The Climate, Flooding and Decarbonisation Manager attended O&S in **February** and highlighted the challenges and barriers faced by owners of listed buildings. Members learned how the council was working to balance heritage preservation with the need for energy-efficient retrofitting, especially in listed buildings. Support is being offered through partnerships, community events, and initiatives like Future Fit Homes. A retrofit engagement officer has been appointed, and planning team capacity has been increased. The Council is considering new approaches such as Local Listed Building Consent Orders and continues to seek funding to improve energy efficiency in its own historic properties. National guidance now provides greater flexibility, helping to address retrofit challenges more consistently.

Interim Collections Development Policy 2025-27

In **March**, the draft interim Collections Policy for The Wilson was brought to committee, ahead of Cabinet consideration and a full review in two years following the completion of the Big Museum Project. Members were briefed on the project which includes extensive community consultation and outreach, aiming to shape the museum's future direction and ensure the collections reflect public input. The interim collections development policy ensures compliance with Arts Council standards and strengthens governance, while laying the groundwork for more ambitious and inclusive collection development.

Gloucestershire Joint Committees

Three members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee regularly attend Gloucestershire-wide joint meetings and report back to the committee. Here are summaries of their work and observations across the year

Summary of meetings of

GCC Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024-25

Items subject to scrutiny by the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were as follows:

1. Maternity Services Update

The update included information on the temporary changes to the provision of post-natal beds at Stroud Maternity Hospital and the closure of the Aveta Birthing Unit at Cheltenham General. It confirmed that the current problematic midwifery staffing position was likely to remain in place until the end of the current calendar year.

2. General Practice in Gloucestershire – An Update on Access

In February 2024 Gloucestershire provided a total of 388,618 appointments to a population of 689,422. It ranked third of all South-West region Integrated Care Boards by providing 2,734 appointments per 100,000 patients, (higher than the national figure of 2,357 appointments). It provided 2,008 appointments per 100,000 patients within 14 days, ranking fourth within the region and above the national average. It provided 68.6% of its appointments face-to-face, ranking it second within the region but it ranked second lowest in the provision of telephone calls.

3. Cancer Briefing

15 years ago GHNHSFT was able to hit most Cancer Waiting Times (CWTs) on a regular basis. The 62-day wait from referral to first definitive treatment was occasionally missed though performance would always be close to the 85% target unlike the current disappointing figure of 62%.

The essential problem is that resources have failed to get close to meeting the increase in demand (i.e. the number of people with cancer that is treatable) and the wider range of treatment options now available (i.e. the number of potential treatments available to any one patient).

4. Update from South West Ambulance Service NHSFT

The biggest challenge for the Ambulance Trust across the South West has been the increased length of time spent at acute hospitals waiting to handover patients. In the month of June, SWAST lost 3,298 hours to handover delays at Gloucester Royal Hospital and Cheltenham General Hospital, severely reducing the remaining resource hours on the road to respond to patients (9,739 hours lost across the last three months in total). Average handover time at Gloucester Royal Hospital in June was 1 hour 24 minutes per patient and 25 minutes per patient at Cheltenham General Hospital compared to the 15-minute handover standard.

Some of the rural response times were well below the mean in terms of call answering. Over the past 18 months performance has consistently been better than the national standard.

5. Gloucestershire Urgent and Emergency Care Winter Assurance Plan

Prevention and early intervention were stated as the main aim of this plan. The report highlights many community based initiatives to prevent this but it is thin on reassurance that capacity at the acute hospitals will have the flexibility to cope adequately with the inevitable substantial increase in demand that it will experience.

6. Update on Gloucestershire CC Motion 935 – Cancer Waiting Times

HOSC members recently visited the Regional Oncology Centre at Cheltenham General Hospital. It was an excellent opportunity not just to see the fantastic treatment facilities but also to discuss with Consultant medical staff, nurses and hospital managers the issues and problems they faced. We learnt that the failure to meet the 62-day wait target was primarily a diagnostic and surgical problem not an Oncology one. In Oncology there are fortunately still no delays for urgent treatment. There are currently no problems with many cancer pathways but significant difficulties are occurring in the Urology pathway and also the Lower GI (colorectal) cancer treatment pathway.

7. Living Well and Ageing Well in Gloucestershire

The Committee was presented with a model for dealing with frailty in Gloucestershire. The focus of the model was on keeping these vulnerable patients out of hospital as much as possible. Whilst the assessment/ diagnostic phase may require a brief hospital stay the aim would be to provide personalised care as close to home as possible with 'complex' care at home teams and virtual wards enabling clinical teams to monitor patients remotely.

8. Review of NHS Winter Assurance Plan 2024-25

This plan was presented to HOSC in October 2024 and the report gave an update on how effective the ICB considered it had been in the early part of the winter. Prevention and early intervention were stated as the main aim of this plan.

9. Major Ongoing Performance issues:

- i. Cancer Waiting Times
- ii. Ambulance Waiting Times
- iii. A&E Waiting Times
- iv. Access to NHS Dental Services
- v. Access to Mental Health Services
- vi. Waiting Times for Elective Surgery
- vii. Waiting times for some diagnostic services
- viii. Availability of medical beds in the acute and community hospital settings

Councillor Adrian Bamford
Up Hatherley ward

Summary of meetings of Gloucestershire Economic Strategy Scrutiny Committee in 2024-25

Here is a summary of the points discussed:

- It was confirmed that this scrutiny committee would only scrutinise the activity of the City Region Board and was not intended to scrutinise the decisions of the individual district councils.
- Currently preparing to produce a Local Growth Plan. This will be based on the County Council's Economic Strategy.
- GCC will align its strategy with government strategy in certain areas eg housing targets.
- GCC is working with businesses to achieve net zero; this will allow GCC to achieve its target of 2045 with an 80% reduction by 2030.
- An overview of the county population, employment sectors and wellbeing scores for residents was shared.
- Population growth for the county is above national average – led by people moving to the county.
- Almost one in ten 16-64 year olds have no qualifications.
- The devolution application is being considered by GCC ; it is looking at options and what this would look like.
- The group will provide monthly updates to the Economic Officers Group Forum
- As requested, updates will also be provided to Climate Change Gloucestershire, District member briefings and a joint Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee
- An Annual Implementation Strategy will be produced each Spring
- There was discussion of the proposed Unitary Authority and will form a new Strategic Authority when this is created
- Aim to finalise a Local Growth Plan in Spring
- Stakeholder engagement events held in Cirencester, Cheltenham and Gloucester to support the creation of the plan

Councillor Ben Orme
Lansdown ward

Summary of meetings of Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel in 2024-25

It's been a very tough year for our Gloucestershire police force with significant financial challenges, redundancies, loss of senior staff, suspensions at the highest level and low staff morale. As such, I've been grateful to sit on this panel at a critical time as a critical friend, to provide support and challenge where appropriate, especially when it affects our town. To help support the financial challenges our constabulary are still facing, the panel agreed to raise precepts across the county, to ensure our neighbourhoods can be as safe and supported as we need them to be.

I have been very vocal about numerous policing issues, including speaking up against the dangerous and antisocial behaviour of users on illegal e-bikes and e-scooters, creating fear and havoc across Cheltenham. That said, I am extremely grateful that action has been taking place to educate those who are committing such offences and where necessary taking these vehicles off the road when it has been safe to do so. On my last briefing, the police had successfully removed 20 illegal e-bikes from our streets. I would like to encourage everyone to report incidents of any illegal e-bikes or e-scooters activity to the police; they will take you seriously—just remember the date, time and location.

Unfortunately, drug dealing in our neighbourhoods continues - I have spotted dealings with my own eyes in St Peters on too many occasions. Thankfully, the commissioner has included the fight against drugs in his latest crime prevention plan. If you spot drug dealing on your street or anywhere else, don't think the police don't care, as they have promised they do—report it.

It is devastating to know Gloucestershire has the highest rates of school exclusions and 100% of children exploited by organised crime gangs would have been excluded from school. This is not right, and more support is required at a national level for schools, families and those in supporting roles. I have vocalised my concerns in panel meetings, and I hope more can be done with collaborative working by the police, schools and the county council. Our constabulary do have great programmes like the police cadets, and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is helping to promote many crime prevention initiatives for children with local schools.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is sadly growing and should not be tolerated by anyone—the constabulary know many cases go unreported. This male crime against women and girls also includes harassment, intimidation and abuse both physical and mental, such as coercive control. If you are a victim, please contact the police; support will be available to you, and it is a priority within the commissioner's latest [Police and Crime Prevention Plan](#). In addition, our new Temporary Chief Constable Maggie Blythe is a national lead on VAWG matters, and is also the national VAWG Coordinator for the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

I know our police force is ready to fight against the hatred and increase of far-right racism impacting the country and although we've not witnessed a full-on riot in Cheltenham or Gloucestershire, sadly these crimes do take place in our lives, both on our streets and online, and our police officers are ready to act. Hate crime is a crime and should not be tolerated—report it to the police.

As critical friend, representing Cheltenham on Gloucestershire's Police and Crime Panel, I stand up whenever I can to vocalise the concerns of residents. I take this role very seriously to ensure my contributions make a positive impact for our town.

There is much more I could share, as so much has happened during my first year on this panel, but I would like to close saying a big thank you to our police officers and staff who work so hard every day to make our streets and lives safer.

If you'd like to be informed real-time when issues are raised, you can watch our meetings online; they're available on [Gloucestershire County Council's](#) website.

Cllr Victoria Atherstone

St Peters ward

Cabinet member for Safety and Communities

To understand the general approach to the planned maintenance of public facilities and the asset management strategy



To understand partnership working to improve flood mitigation in the borough



To consider the emerging CBC procurement strategy



To assess the outcomes of the activities and measuring success against original objectives



To consider the annual update and review implementation of the policy



To update O&S on progress being made by No Child Left behind to deliver a year of youth action



To evaluate data and measures to encourage putting back in use and respective barriers

Contacts

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