

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	4 September 2018
Subject:	Grass Cutting Improvement Plan
Report of:	Head of Community Services
Corporate Lead:	Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

Following the Executive Committee meeting on 6 June 2018 where consideration was given to concerns expressed about the level of grass cutting across the Borough, a grass cutting improvement plan was developed. It was agreed that progress on the improvement plan would be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In essence a considerable amount of work incorporated into the improvement plan has been undertaken and also a significant amount of other essential work has been carried out by way of a review as to how the failure of the grounds maintenance service occurred and how to avoid that in future years.

Recommendation:

To CONSIDER the progress made against the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor the improvement plan, and other work being undertaken to manage the service and avoid a recurrence in future years.

Resource Implications:

An additional contingency fund of £10,000 to improve the immediate situation with grass cutting was approved.

Legal Implications:

Gloucestershire County Highways has a duty to maintain verges for safety reasons. The Borough Council, via its contractor Ubico, currently undertakes this work across Tewkesbury Borough. The Borough Council also undertakes this work on behalf of a number of Parish Councils. Whilst no specific duty falls to District Councils to cut grass, this can be done at the discretion of the individual Council. It stands to reason that, if an authority has a responsibility to keep its land free from litter and detritus, it needs to maintain the land to a sensible standard in order to do this effectively.

Risk Management Implications:

The greatest risk to the Council of poorly maintained land and open space is reputational damage.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive regular updates on progress of the improvement plan and ongoing work.

Environmental Implications:

Whilst some environmentalists may argue that a natural environment is better for insects and wildlife, it stands to reason that, if the Council wishes to maintain a safe and attractive environment, a programme of grass cutting has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the population.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Ubico is the Council's contractor for undertaking grounds maintenance across the borough. This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a position statement on the annual grass cutting programme and work to improve the service.
- 1.2** Tewkesbury Borough Council is responsible for cutting the grass on its own land and has a contractual arrangement with Gloucestershire County Highways and Parish Councils to cut other areas of grass.
- 1.3** In total, Ubico cuts approximately 175 hectares of grass on behalf of the Council. This is broken down to 144 hectares of Tewkesbury Borough Council land, 12 hectares for Gloucestershire County Highways land and 19 hectares for Parish Councils. Cuts are generally carried out on a three or four weekly basis during the cutting season.
- 1.4** In addition to grass cutting, Ubico carry out a considerable amount of planned maintenance across the borough. This includes maintaining the borough's cemeteries, trimming of hedges, bushes etc. and essential maintenance work on trees.
- 1.5** The problems that have arisen in relation to grass cutting, and the factors that led to an improvement plan being put in place, have been discussed in detail at the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

2.0 SHORT TERM IMPROVEMENTS

2.1 Following the approval of a contingency fund to ensure that the situation was immediately improved, the following actions were undertaken:

- Responsibility for grounds maintenance was passed back to Community Services.
 - Regular monitoring meetings were held to discuss progress and monitoring visits carried out to ensure that this was the case.
 - Resource levels were increased by using Ubico staff from other contracts as a “hit squad” at weekends and agency staff to bolster the established number of staff.
 - Equipment capable of dealing with the extra length that the grass had reached was brought in from other contracts.
 - An interim supervisor was replaced by a supervisor with knowledge of grounds maintenance who was seconded from another Ubico contract.
- Accuracy of maps was improved with regular updates issued.
- Round sheets were put into cutting order to enable progress monitoring.

3.0 LONGER TERM IMPROVEMENTS

3.1 A project group has been set up consisting of senior officers of the Council and Ubico - this is to ensure that the improvements already in place continue to be embedded and take effect. The group is also working on the longer term improvements listed below and set out within the attached improvement plan:

- All of the grass cutting rounds are being reviewed to ensure efficiency and to minimise “blades up” time.
- A full review of machinery and plant is underway to ensure correct equipment is being used / procured.
- A suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is being developed, similar to waste and recycling, outlining the standards that are expected.
- In order to keep Members fully involved, a further report will be brought forward detailing the costs and the standard of grass cutting that can be expected in a number of scenarios, depending on the number of cuts per year i.e. 8/10 cuts, 12/14 and 16/18 cuts.
- Consideration will be given to prioritising areas where Councillors may want to see a higher standard of cut e.g. zoning the borough into primary, secondary and tertiary areas and agreeing the standard that should be met within those areas.
- A review of where some of the equipment is stored will be carried out to minimise downtime of mowers travelling around the borough.
- Work will be undertaken with Members and the Finance teams at Tewkesbury Borough Council and Ubico to carry out an analysis of the grounds maintenance budget to ensure that Tewkesbury Borough Council’s requirements can be met.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 None

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 None

6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

6.1 None

7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

7.1 None

8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

8.1 None arising directly from this report

9.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

9.1 None arising directly from this report

10.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

10.1 None arising directly from this report

11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

11.1 None arising directly from this report

Background Papers: None

Contact Officer: Head of Community Services.
01684 272259 Peter.tonge@teWKesbury.gov.uk

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Grass Cutting Improvement Plan