

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Executive Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	6 March 2019
<b>Subject:</b>	Grass Cutting Improvement Plan
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Community Services
<b>Corporate Lead:</b>	Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	One

## **Executive Summary:**

At its meeting on 27 November 2018, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved to establish a Member Working Group to consider the improvements that had been made through the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan and to identify further actions that needed to be taken to ensure that suitable arrangements were in place for the 2019 growing season.

The Working Group met three times to hear from officers and partners and to consider the grass cutting operations currently carried out by Ubico Ltd.

The report and its recommendations were discussed and adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12 February 2019.

The report of the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan Working Group, as adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, is attached at Appendix A for consideration by the Executive Committee.

## **Recommendation:**

**That the Grass Cutting Scrutiny Review Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, attached at Appendix A - including recommendations 1-6 as set out at Paragraph 3.1 of this covering report - be APPROVED.**

## **Reasons for Recommendation:**

To ensure that arrangements are in place for the 2019 grass growing season to prevent a recurrence of the problems that occurred in 2018.

**Resource Implications:**

There are no direct resource implications arising from the report at this time, although future aspects of consideration could have resource implications. Should resource needs arise - either revenue or capital - these will be subject to a further report and consideration in the wider context of the Council's financial operating environment.

It should also be noted that the Borough Council continues to subsidise the cutting of County Highways-owned land in 2019/20 at an estimated cost of £44,000. The sustainability of maintaining this position in the longer term will need to be considered in light of pressures on the grounds maintenance service and the significant deficit within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

**Legal Implications:**

The Highways authority 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, the level of which is 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, then it needs to maintain the land to a sensible level in order to do this effectively.

**Risk Management Implications:**

Grass cutting is a high profile service and any service failings impact on the reputation of the Council.

**Performance Management Follow-up:**

Performance of the Key Performance Indicators identified in the report at Appendix A will be reported regularly to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the Ubico performance reports.

**Environmental Implications:**

Whilst some environmentalists would 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 then a programme of grass cutting has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the population.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Following an unacceptable level of complaints being received about grass cutting from members of the public in the early part of 2018, the Executive Committee expressed concern about the level and quality of grass cutting across the borough. In response, a Grass Cutting Improvement Plan was adopted by the Executive Committee with responsibility for monitoring given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**1.2** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had detailed discussions about the grass cutting service, and the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan, at its meetings on 17 July and 4 September 2018. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for a further report on the plan monitoring and implementation to be submitted to its meeting in February 2019.

**1.3** It was, however, apparent from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee discussions on the Improvement Plan that additional work needed to be done, particularly in relation to the future standard of the service, number of cuts, level of cut in different areas, resources etc. Member involvement in this work was considered important and therefore the Committee established a small Working Group.

## **2.0 GRASS CUTTING IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP REVIEW**

**2.1** The Working Group met on three occasions and considered the improvements that had already been implemented as a result of the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan including:

- grass cutting maps were now up to date and broadly accurate;
- grass cutting rounds were in the process of being put into a logical order to ensure the best use of the crews time, therefore minimising travelling time;
- all equipment was now included on a maintenance programme; and
- increased and effective supervision is in place.

**2.2** The Working Group also heard from partners at Ubico representing the Tewkesbury Borough contract and the West Oxfordshire contract; this allowed Members to compare the level of resource afforded to these two contracts and to contrast the outcomes that were achieved.

## **3.0 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3.1** The Working Group presented its findings to the Overview and Scutiny Committee on 12 February 2019 which included the following recommendations:

1. That Ubico be required to:
  - undertake an audit of all equipment to ensure it is fit for purpose prior to commencement of the grass cutting season; and
  - make better use of resources/staffing to ensure the workforce is being used to full capacity together with giving consideration to introducing apprenticeships in order to provide succession planning and resilience.
2. That electronic mapping be made a corporate priority to enable IT to complete this work by February 2019.
3. That a small piece of land currently maintained by Tewkesbury Borough Council on behalf of Gloucestershire County Council be identified for cutting twice yearly, as opposed to the current 8-10 times per year, and monitored to understand the likely impact of reducing the number of cuts in other parts of the borough in the future.
4. That, in view of the improvements that have been made in terms of round efficiency, mapping and supervision/management, to continue to provide the grounds maintenance service for 2019/20 on the same basis as the current year and to closely monitor delivery throughout.
5. That a Member Group be established with effect from the new Council with Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 4 of the Grass Cutting Scrutiny Review Report.

6. That the level of additional land that the Council has adopted should be reviewed periodically and, where appropriate, considered be given to increasing the grounds maintenance budget.

**3.2** The Working Group had also developed a suite of Key Performance Indicators for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as detailed below:

- 100% of grass cutting rounds will be completed in line with round schedules;
- any deviation from grass cutting rounds must be reported to Tewkesbury Borough Council in advance, or reported by the Operational Manager on same day with reason i.e. 100% deviations reported within 24 hours);
- all areas must be litter picked prior to grass being cut;
- grass cutting must be quality checked and 10 areas inspected at least once per month to check it is being cut to the appropriate standard i.e. % measure of A or B grade (Appendix 3);
- where an area cannot be cut, or cannot be cut to a suitable standard, the council must be notified by the following day along with a suggestion for remedial action;
- all equipment must be suitably maintained in line with the maintenance schedule and, where needed, any new equipment should be available with 48 hours of breakdown - any significant purchases (over £5,000) must be approved by the council.

**3.3** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee debated the Working Group report in detail before resolving:

That the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan Working Group Report be adopted and recommended to the Executive Committee for approval, subject to an amendment to correct a typographical error at Page No. 42 as follows: Meeting 1 – 6 December ~~2019~~ **2018**.

#### **4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1 Not applicable.

#### **5.0 CONSULTATION**

5.1 The Working Group consulted with various partners whilst undertaking its work.

#### **6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

6.1 Not applicable.

#### **7.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

7.1 Not applicable.

#### **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)**

8.1 Not applicable.

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

9.1 Considered as part of the work of the Working Group.

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

**10.1** Considered as part of the work of the Working Group.

**11.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS**

**11.1** Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27 November 2018.

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**Background Papers:** None.

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**Appendices:** A – Report of the Grass Cutting Improvement Plan Working Group