

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Offices, Gloucester Road, Tewkesbury on Tuesday, 13 July 2021 commencing at 4:30 pm

Present:

Chair
Vice Chair

Councillor K J Cromwell
Councillor J W Murphy

and Councillors:

G J Bocking, P A Godwin, J K Smith, R J G Smith, S Thomson, M J Williams and P N Workman

OS.18 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 18.1 The evacuation procedure, as noted on the Agenda, was advised to those present.
- 18.2 The Chair welcomed the Head of Operations and the Director of Operations from Ubico to the meeting and indicated they would be presenting the Ubico Report 2020/21 at Agenda Item 7.

OS.19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

- 19.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C L J Carter, H C McLain, P D McLain, H S Munro and P D Surman. There were no substitutions for the meeting.

OS.20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 20.1 The Committee's attention was drawn to the Tewkesbury Borough Council Code of Conduct which was adopted by the Council on 26 June 2012 and took effect from 1 July 2012.
- 20.2 There were no declarations made on this occasion.

OS.21 MINUTES

- 21.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021, copies of which had been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OS.22 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN

- 22.1 Attention was drawn to the Executive Committee Forward Plan, circulated at Pages No. 18-26. Members were asked to determine whether there were any questions for the relevant Lead Members and what support the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could give to the work contained within the plan.
- 22.2 The Head of Corporate Services pointed out that the plan had been populated with the corporate policies and strategies due for review, as discussed at the last meeting. It was noted that one Member had requested that the Digital Strategy be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration prior to approval

by the Executive Committee so that would be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme; he welcomed suggestions for any other policies/strategies where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could add value. A Member noted that the Sandbag Policy was due to be taken to the Executive Committee on 2 January 2022; however, given the flooding experienced in December 2020, he felt this needed to be brought forward to ensure it was in place as soon as possible so the policy could be communicated to residents before the winter. Another Member pointed out that the policy should also be considered by the Climate Change and Flood Risk Management Group prior to being taken to Executive Committee. In response, the Head of Community Services confirmed that would be the case and he undertook to consider the timescales and bring this item forward to an earlier meeting of the Executive Committee.

22.3 A Member noted that the Parking Strategy was due to be taken to the Executive Committee for approval at its meeting on 30 March 2022; however, he indicated that the Parking Strategy Review Working Group had not met since 30 September 2020 and there were no meetings of the Working Group currently scheduled. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that the intention was to reform the Working Group in September/October with a view to bringing the final strategy to Overview and Scrutiny Committee early in the New Year prior to Executive Committee in March; this would enable the Parking Order to be drawn up ready to take effect from 1 April 2022.

22.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Executive Committee Forward Plan be **NOTED** and the Head of Community Services undertake to consider the timescales for the review of the Sandbag Policy, currently due to be considered by the Executive Committee on 2 January 2022, in order to bring this item forward to an earlier meeting.
2. That the Digital Strategy be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for consideration prior to being taken to the Executive Committee for approval.

OS.23 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

23.1 Attention was drawn to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22, circulated at Pages No. 27-36, which Members were asked to consider.

23.2 The Head of Corporate Services advised that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had presented the Committee's findings on the recent Council Plan Performance Tracker and the COVID-19 Recovery Tracker to the Executive Committee at its meeting on 7 July 2021 and, in light of the discussion that had taken place around the planning services review and in accordance with the resolution of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, he had made a specific request that the action plan arising from that review be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. As no objections had been made by the Executive Committee, this would be added to the Work Programme and the action plan would be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the appropriate time.

23.3 A Member noted that the Housing Strategy 2022 was included in the pending items section of the Work Programme and he noted that the strategy was due to be approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 2 March 2022 so he asked when this was likely to come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Community Services explained that a consultant had been commissioned to undertake this significant piece of work; he would need to look at the timescales but provided assurance that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be consulted prior to the strategy being taken to the Executive Committee.

23.4 Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22 be updated to include the Planning Services Review Action Plan which would be brought to the Committee following consideration by the Executive Committee.

OS.24 UBICO REPORT 2020/21

24.1 The report of the Head of Community Services, circulated at Pages No. 37-64, set out the 2020/21 outturn performance update on the services provided by Ubico. Members were asked to consider the report.

24.2 The Head of Community Services drew attention to Page No. 39, Paragraph 3.0 of the report, which gave financial performance information and Members were advised there was an underspend of £160,455 at the end of the year. The savings could be attributed to a number of factors: the cost of diesel had reduced; an underspend on the tyre budget – which had been set at a high level for the Tewkesbury Borough contract due to being sorely hit by tyre costs in 2019; and an underspend on vehicle repairs, although that was an area of risk as vehicles became older as maintenance costs would increase. In terms of frontline services performance, set out at Pages No. 39-40, Paragraph 4.0 of the report, Members were informed that the overall bin collection rate for the year was 99.93% which was very positive and there was improved performance in terms of repeat missed bin collection and repeat missed assisted collections. Health and safety information was detailed at Page No. 41, Paragraph 5.0 of the report, and it was noted there had been a positive trend in terms of increased reports of near misses; there had been a huge rise during the first six months of the year due to more cars being parked in roads as a result of increased home working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of overweight vehicles remained high and had increased compared to previous years so that was an area of concern which needed to be addressed. The Head of Community Services advised that he had reviewed the number of formal complaints for 2020/21 as 26 complaints with regard to the waste and street cleansing service, as set out at Paragraph 4.6 of the report, seemed quite low. He confirmed that the figures provided in the report related to quarter four and he undertook to update Members on the correct figures for the year following the meeting. The Ubico Director of Operations indicated that the contract had performed well in 2020/21 despite it being a very difficult year and the partnership between Ubico and the Council had paid dividends through those tough months. He would be happy to answer any questions Members may have about the information provided.

24.3 A Member questioned why the report did not include information in respect of grounds maintenance and street cleansing as those services were also provided by Ubico and had Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which were monitored by the authority. The Ubico Director of Operations indicated that the report always followed the same format and it was shared with the Head of Community Services and his team; however, if Members wanted additional information to be included then he would ensure that was provided going forward.

24.4 A Member raised concern with regard to the overweight vehicles and he questioned how that was intended to be addressed. The Ubico Director of Operations explained this was a knock on effect from increased tonnage which was monitored on the rounds. The way it currently worked was that crews knew how many streets they could collect from before they needed to tip; however, when tonnage increased the number of streets reduced. Although there was an overweight procedure in place, a meeting had taken place that week regarding the introduction of a formal policy – it had not been a major concern in the past but it was now felt this was necessary given the number of overweight vehicles. In response to a query, the

Ubico Director of Operations advised that not all vehicles currently had weighing scales; not all vehicles tipped, some had stillages which were taken out. He confirmed that weight information would be available when in-cab technology was introduced – overweight vehicles was a really serious issue for Ubico and he provided assurance that it was being addressed. The Ubico Head of Operations advised that the vehicles tended to be overweight by around 30/40 kilograms rather than half a tonne or more so it was not a huge amount. Sometimes crews had to make a decision as to whether they finished a round to ensure it was complete rather than stopping to go back to the tip.

- 24.5 Another Member congratulated Ubico on the work carried out during the pandemic and indicated he was aware of a lot of positive feedback in respect of bin collections. Notwithstanding this, he had a real concern regarding the overweight vehicles as what may have been a fairly predictable weight per street was likely to have increased with people working from home meaning there would be major changes in terms of the number of streets that could be collected from before reaching capacity and he asked what was being done to ensure that crews complied. The Ubico Director of Operations stressed that Ubico had been working in partnership with the Head of Community Services and his team throughout the pandemic; they tended to be in contact two or three times per day. The issue of overweight vehicles had only recently been highlighted and was now starting to reduce; nevertheless, in-cab technology was essential as the calculations on the number of streets that could be collected from prior to tipping were based on estimates currently. If crews did collect from more streets than they should be, for instance if they were nearing the end of a round, they would be instructed and re-trained; the next stage would be a disciplinary and he confirmed both actions had certainly been taken. In response to a query regarding the timescales for the in-cab technology, the Head of Community Services advised that it was a big project for Ubico across all partners. Tewkesbury Borough Council had allocated money for the project in the 2021/22 budget and the procurement process had been completed. Cotswold District Council had gone through the process last year so the intention had been to utilise that work; however, that was not technically possible so it was a case of Ubico having to start again from scratch with each of the other partners. As such, he was sceptical the project would be achieved within the current financial year and the allocated funding would be carried over into 2022/23 with completion during that year. The Member expressed concern that 18 months of breaking the rules was simply too long and the Ubico Head of Operations acknowledged that and provided assurance that Ubico did not want that to continue so they were re-training the crews and removing streets from rounds where necessary in order to address the issue. He explained that it had been difficult to recruit and retain drivers over the last 12 months – that was a key factor as a regular driver had an understanding of the rounds and knew when to tip. Over the last two to three months there had been more stability in terms of drivers and more settled rounds so vehicles were comfortably underweight when tipping. A Member questioned which of the crew was disciplined for an overweight vehicle and was advised that the driver was ultimately responsible for the load; however, if they were new agency drivers that was taken into consideration as the crew were the full-time members of staff. The Ubico Director of Operations explained that they issued a route risk assessment for every route which set out where to tip and gave any specific instructions, for example, if there was a school on the route, the driver would be directed not to drive down that road at certain times etc. The Chair could not understand why the vehicles did not have weighloaders and expressed concern regarding the efficiency of the rounds. The Ubico Director of Operations agreed and recognised that Ubico and its partners were very behind the times in terms of in-cab technology. This had just been installed in the Cotswold District Council waste fleet and it was hoped that all other partners would soon be at that stage.

- 24.6 A Member noted from the report that fly-tipping requests and dead animal removal requests were both below target and he asked whether that was related to COVID-19 as the timings did not seem to suggest that was the case. The Head of Community Services explained that the amount of fly-tipping had increased significantly so it was not surprising Ubico had been unable to keep up. The Ubico Director of Operations indicated that he was not able to provide an answer but was happy to look into it following the meeting. The Member went on to draw attention to Page No. 63 of the report which set out the Tewkesbury projects and, with regard to the implementation of a sweeper schedule, he noted there was ground work to be done by a sweeper specialist so he asked how the sweeping was being done at the moment and what in-house expertise were lacking. In response, the Ubico Director of Operations advised there had been a delay on the sweeper which was still awaited; that was due to COVID-19 as it had not been possible to obtain the chips which were needed for the electronics in new vehicles. Tewkesbury Borough Council would be getting a different sized sweeper and it was intended to use the one that had been delivered to Cotswold District Council in the interest of efficiency; the downside of that was the increased tonnage which resulted in a disappointing cost increase. Instead of having an expert trained for every contract, it was intended to carry out in-house training so that resource could effectively be borrowed for the day to carry out training on new vehicles. The Member asked for clarification as to what a sweeper schedule actually was and was informed that it was a lot like the mowing schedule whereby a schedule was drawn up for a week, or a number of weeks, based on distance and tonnage that could be achieved, and the same schedule was followed every week or month. The Head of Community Services advised that they were in the process of identifying priority areas, for instance, places with high footfall, such as Tewkesbury High Street, which generated more litter and would therefore be swept more frequently; however, it was difficult to plan until the new sweeper arrived. He pointed out that the current schedule was more efficient than it had been three years ago when the rounds were planned alphabetically. The new sweeper would be to replace one of two sweepers Tewkesbury Borough Council had currently.
- 24.7 A Member drew attention to Page No. 39, Paragraph 3.1 of the report, which stated there had been a contract saving of £160,455 for the year and he asked what would happen to that money. In response the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that it went into the overall surplus and the reserves had been decided to meet various needs – he would pick this up in more detail at Agenda Item 10 – Financial Outturn Report 2020/21. Another Member noted there had been a significant saving on diesel costs but that would not be the case going forward and the Ubico Head of Operations confirmed that the cost had been 0.98p per litre on the forecourt during 2020/21 but that had now increased to £1.32 per litre; although Ubico was able to get this cheaper, it would still be a marked increase from the previous year. A Member indicated that the company he worked for used food waste to generate fuel for lorries which cost 18p per litre and he questioned whether Ubico had considered doing the same. The Head of Community Services advised that more consideration had been given to hydrogen or electric; however, he did not think the technology was quite there yet for such large trucks and the current fleet would need retrofitting.
- 24.8 A Member drew attention to Page No. 40, Paragraph 4.5 of the report, and questioned what improvements had been made in terms of grounds maintenance. The Ubico Head of Operations advised that the previous year had been one of the wettest for decades; that combined with the changes to the team working on the Tewkesbury Borough contract meant it had been difficult to familiarise themselves with the situation so improvement was needed. Whilst not all measures had been put in place as yet, some changes had been made including a dedicated resource for the cemeteries. He stressed it was a new team and they were still learning – a lot of experience had been lost when the previous supervisor had retired from his

role after 28 years and the Operations Manager had been away on maternity leave and had subsequently returned to another role in the company. A Member noted that Page No. 41, Paragraph 7.1 of the report, which related to projects, stated “Implement and review changes to grounds maintenance – in progress” and “Implement changes to street services – ready to be rolled out, we are awaiting confirmation” and he questioned what changes were being made as no detail was included. The Ubico Director of Operations indicated that he did not have that information to hand and he undertook to provide this following the meeting. The Member drew attention to the last bullet point which was around exploring potential for greater service integration with Tewkesbury to deliver operational efficiencies and improvements to collection rounds, trade waste and streets and grounds services and he asked for more clarity on this. In response, the Head of Community Services advised there would be efficiencies in terms of how rounds were structured as a result of the trade waste project which was underway, and a piece of work was being carried out on a countywide basis to see what could be done with other partners. He indicated that he would be happy to provide an overview of the projects which were underway at some point in future.

- 24.9 A Member understood that bulky waste was no longer dealt with by Ubico and he questioned what was being done with the savings. The Head of Community Services explained that was a project being overseen by the Transform Working Group and an update would be provided to the next meeting of that Group. Discussions were taking place with Ubico as to what capacity was available and that needed to be worked through in more detail. He indicated that consideration was being given as to how the vehicles could be used more effectively e.g. for fly-tipping and that information would all be put forward to the Transform Working Group. The Member referred to the table at Page No. 40, Paragraph 4.6 of the report, which the Head of Community had indicated contained the wrong information for 2020/21 in terms of waste and street cleansing service formal complaints. He raised concern that the explanation provided was not correct as the information did not tally at all with that set out at Page No. 56 and he questioned whether the report was checked. In response, the Head of Community Services confirmed this was an anomaly and he explained that the Council received formal complaints which Ubico may never see – the report covered those complaints the Council had dealt with directly whereas the figure provided by Ubico were the complaints which had gone to Ubico for resolution.
- 24.10 With regard to bin requests, set out at Page No. 49 of the report, a Member asked for clarification as to the expected and actual number of days between a request being made and the bin being delivered. He noted that the number of refuse bins requested was 1,255 compared to 975 for recycling despite there being a charge for refuse bins and not recycling and he questioned why these figures were so different given that new houses would receive one of each. The Head of Community Services explained that not all requests were for new houses, some were for replacements where bins had broken etc. so the numbers would always be different. Since Ubico had stopped collecting bulky waste, there had been an improvement in delivery times but he did not have the detailed information. The Ubico Head of Operations believed it was 21 days but he would need to check that. He clarified that the drivers were now going out five days per week rather than 2.5 days per week. Assurance was provided that properties were not left without bins as bags were provided in the interim. A Member noted there was significant residential development within the borough and he questioned whether there was a corresponding increase in bin collections, for instance, was there a certain number of houses which triggered a new collection round or vehicle. The Head of Community Services advised that whilst there was no figure as such, housing numbers were monitored – a new food waste vehicle had recently been purchased as there was no capacity within the current rounds to serve all properties within the borough. In response to a query regarding fleet renewal, the Head of Community

Services advised that the fleet was currently four years old so would be due for replacement in three years' time; however, it would make more sense to profile the replacement over the contract period, rather than replacing them all in one go, so that was being considered. It was noted that certain vehicles had already been replaced, such as the sweeper.

- 24.11 A Member asked for an update on the current situation with regard to the shortage of drivers. The Ubico Director of Operations explained that, in terms of COVID-19, a lot of people had been required to self-isolate as a result of test and trace but that situation had improved over the last couple of weeks. In terms of the national driver shortage, Ubico was promoting from within by offering training to loaders who wanted to drive. There was discussion about a driver supplement across all contracts to make the jobs more attractive; whilst Ubico did not offer as much in terms of hourly rate as other companies, there was a reluctance to increase this but, by offering a supplement, it may help to entice the current drivers to stay at Ubico. An emphasis was placed on promoting other positive aspects of the job such as work-life balance – eight drivers had recently gone to work for another company which operated on the basis of 12 hour shifts and half of those drivers had come back to Ubico because they preferred the work-life balance. There was also more security because the nature of the business made it somewhat recession-proof. In addition, it was intended to arrange an open day at the Swindon Road depot on a Saturday morning to give people an opportunity to see the range of work which Ubico carried out as that was hoped to attract a broader spectrum of people. Adverts had been placed for part-time drivers earlier that week as it may be possible for drivers to share rounds; for instance, the Ubico Director of Operations explained that his neighbour was a retired lorry driver who was looking to get back into work for two or three days per week. The Ubico Head of Operations stressed that, although Ubico was slightly behind the local market rate, it did not want to throw money away and still have vacancies given the current climate. The Head of Community Services advised that the national driver shortage posed a real risk - a local authority in the Midlands used a national contractor which had not been able to deliver its waste service so the authority had suspended its recycling service meaning all waste went to the incinerator. The Ubico Head of Operations also pointed out that Bristol City Council had suspended all garden waste collections for 10 weeks so it was certainly a major risk across the country. A Member welcomed the measures Ubico was putting in place to try to overcome the issues with the national driver shortage, particularly in terms of bringing in retired drivers, and he questioned whether consideration had been given to extended hours contracts for existing drivers. The Ubico Director of Operations advised that some were already working longer hours and that meant overtime costs increased. Local agencies were struggling to get drivers and the quality of agency drivers was often very poor so Ubico was looking at all other options. A Member drew attention to Page No. 61 of the report and asked what the average number of sick days had been for the year – it was shown in months but there was no overall average. The Ubico Director of Operations undertook to find out and advise Members following the meeting.

- 24.12 The Chair thanked the Ubico representatives for their report and it was

RESOLVED

1. That the Ubico outturn performance update on the services provided by Ubico be **NOTED**.
2. That future reports should include performance information on grounds maintenance, street cleansing and any other service provided by Ubico.

OS.25 GLOUCESTERSHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL UPDATE

- 25.1 The Chair indicated that the Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Police and Crime Panel had been due to give an update on the last meeting of the Panel; however, he had been held up in traffic and therefore would be unable to attend the meeting. On that basis, the update would be circulated via email following the meeting on this occasion.

OS.26 GLOUCESTERSHIRE ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE

- 26.1 The Council's representative on the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee presented the report, circulated with the Agenda at Pages No.65-68, which contained a summary of the Committee's last meeting held on 9 June 2021. He indicated that the main purpose of the meeting had been to provide an introduction to new Members of the Committee and he would be happy to answer any questions on the information provided.

- 26.2 It was

RESOLVED That the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee Update be **NOTED**.

OS.27 FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2020/21

- 27.1 Attention was drawn to the report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 69-93, and the updated report and Appendix A circulated separately, which provided financial information for quarter four and the full year 2020/21 which would usually be included in the performance report that had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting. Members were asked to consider the general fund outturn for 2020/21, the reserves position as at 31 March 2021, the financing of the capital programme and the annual treasury management report and performance.
- 27.2 The Head of Community Services advised that he had been unable to include the finance report with the performance management information due to the timing of the completion of the accounts so a separate report had been provided following approval by the Executive Committee. An updated report had been circulated separately following an error by the government. Members were advised that a general fund surplus of over £13m had been generated during the year which was a great overall position and a boost to the Council's reserves; however, it did not resolve the ongoing challenges with the base budget and the concerns over funding reduction and reform remained. In terms of the reserves allocated, a number had been earmarked for specific purposes so there was limited choice over how they could be spent and it was still necessary to act cautiously ahead of an announcement on what the financial future would look like for the Council. The table at Page No. 3, Paragraph 2.3 of the separate papers, gave a breakdown of how the surplus had been generated with the main factors being employee vacancies and turnover and savings in respect of premises and transport as staff had been working mainly from home. There had been an overspend on payments to third parties because several provisions had been raised at year end for planning appeals lodged in the financial year. It should be noted that there had been an underspend on the Ubico contract. During the year, the Council had responded to COVID-19 and a number of costs were directly attributable to that with the main one being support to Tewkesbury Leisure Centre to help with unavoidable costs of closing during the pandemic as well as additional Ubico costs due to extra staff, vehicles, personal and protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning products in order to be COVID-19 secure. With regard to projects funded externally, the vast majority of the £1m saving was due to additional government funding received, particularly

relating to the Garden Town; that money was moved to reserves at year end. Council income was showing additional income levels of £1.29m over the budgeted position; the majority of fees and charges budgets were under target due to the pandemic, with the exception of planning fees, so the large variance was due to substantial external grant income received during the year for a range of activities including homelessness prevention, carbon reduction and supporting the leisure centre which had boosted the surplus. With regard to commercial activity, the Council had acquired two new commercial investment properties in the year which had generated extra rental income. The overall position on the retained business rates scheme showed a surplus for the full year which included that generated by being in the Gloucestershire Business Rates Pool. £4.9m of business rates relief funding had been provided by the government to cover the loss of income from businesses; the impact of this was not realised until the following financial year so £5.1m must be held in a reserve to fund the future deficit that would form part of the outturn next year. In relation to that, the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the surplus of £3.5m generated on the business rates collection fund in 2019/20 had been realised in the 2020/21 outturn. He went on to explain that the Council had received a general grant from central government to relieve expenditure pressures relating to COVID-19 which had totalled £1.25m; this was not ringfenced for specific services. The balance of the £2.178m received related mainly to new burdens funding for administering the numerous grant schemes introduced by the government throughout the pandemic. Tewkesbury Borough Council had also claimed £450,000 compensation for losses incurred in its sales, fees and charges income streams as a result of the pandemic. Overall, this totalled approximately £13m which, together with the planned contribution to the reserves, resulted in £14.4m being transferred to the reserves; that was a significant amount and would be used for things such as the vehicle replacement programme and other Council projects. Appendix A, circulated separately, gave a full explanation of all variances exceeding £40,000 at a group level.

- 27.3 The Head of Finance and Asset Management went on to advise that a breakdown of the reserves of the Council as at 31 March 2021 was shown at Appendix B to the report. When added to the £17m existing reserves, there was over £31m total revenue reserves at year end. A note had been added to explain the reason for the significant movement. Notwithstanding this, the majority of reserves were planned contributions or external funding received for specific purposes – i.e. normal activities, such as Section 106, one-offs, such as vehicle replacement, and COVID-19 recovery. Some of the factors contributing to the increase had been known about, for instance, the business rates surplus, and that had been used to reinstate the Medium Term Financial Strategy reserve which had been used last year to pay a levy to the government for business rates. The resulting reserves balance was £2.7m which put the Council in an excellent position to tackle the financial challenges ahead. The surpluses generated within the general fund had allowed the Corporate Leadership Team to make allocations to fund priority areas which included carbon reduction and further sums for COVID-19 recovery.
- 27.4 Moving to the capital programme, expenditure was dominated by the purchase of the final two investment properties, infrastructure projects such as Ashchurch Bridge, replacement vehicles and equipment which largely related to IT equipment for remote working, and Disabled Facilities Grants. A summarised capital programme was set out at Appendix C to the report together with sources of finance used. A treasury report was set out at Appendix D to the report and that provided a lot of the detail the Council was required to produce. The Council had needed to borrow money to ensure liquidity during the early months of the pandemic but there had been an in-year gain from the capital growth of pooled funds which had recovered much of the loss experienced at the outset. The Head of Finance and

Asset Management reiterated that this was a great position to be in and money had been set aside to deal with a number of priorities; however, it did not deal with the challenges on its own.

- 27.5 A Member noted that the report and Appendix A had been updated following publication of the Agenda, as set out on the separate papers, and asked for clarification on the adjustments that had been made to the figures in terms of business rates reliefs and reserves. The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that an extra £82,000 had gone into the Medium Term Financial Strategy useable reserves; this was due to a very simple, yet complicated, mistake in the calculator the government used to calculate losses due to local government from the business rates impact – this had meant that the spreadsheet had produced the wrong figure to start with. Another Member drew attention to Page No. 73, Paragraph 2.12 of the report, which stated that £14.6m had been transferred to reserves and he asked what percentage of the Council's total income that represented. The Head of Finance and Asset Management indicated that was a very good question and he advised that, removing housing benefit income from the government, the Council's income for the year was approximately £23m which was around 40%. The Member went on to ask why there was a discrepancy between the amount being transferred and the amount being spent and was advised that the unusual amount of reserves was due to the impact of COVID-19 and the amount of grant funding, as well as the situation with business rates; in the 20 years he had worked at the authority, the Head of Finance and Asset Management had never seen a surplus of this level and was unlikely to see it again. It was very difficult to reconcile the ongoing base budget with the amount of Council Tax charged; the fear was that the government would see the reserves and think there was no need to give any grant funding but, hopefully, the reason why the reserves were in place would be recognised. Another Member pointed out that some were earmarked reserves and the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed there was only £2.8m uncommitted funds within the Medium Term Financial Strategy with the remainder allocated to specific projects.
- 27.6 A Member noted that the Corporate Leadership Team had allocated £1.8m of reserves and he questioned how this had been decided and whether this had been taken to Executive Committee or Council. The Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed it had been agreed by the Executive Committee which had a remit to approve reserves. In terms of the items identified, there was an immediate risk around development management for a number of reasons, but particularly due to the amount of applications being received for large developments, so a decision had been made to allocate funding to ensure there was capacity within the team to deal with those. With regard to Ubico vehicle replacement, it had been identified there was likely to be a shortfall during 2024/25 when the fleet was due to be replaced so it was intended to look to extend the useful life of the current vehicles as far as possible. Transform Working Group had received an excellent presentation on the general work being done to transform services, for instance, in areas such as housing benefits and customer services, so money had been allocated to the digital team to continue to make efficiencies. Climate change was a priority area within the Council Plan but there was very little funding associated with it and Officers were keen to support early wins. Looking at the Council as a whole, the money could probably be allocated several times over; however, the Head of Finance and Asset Management believed it had been allocated where it was needed at this time. In terms of the pay award reserve, Members would recall that the base budget had included 0% uplift; however, employers had made an offer of 1.5% which had been rejected by the union so there was now a real danger it would be above that amount, as such, reserves had been allocated to make provision for a 2.3% increase.

27.7 Having considered the information provided, it was

RESOLVED That the general fund outturn for 2020/21, the reserves position as at 31 March 2021, the financing of the capital programme and the annual treasury management report and performance be **NOTED**.

OS.28 CARBON REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

28.1 The report of the Head of Finance and Asset Management, circulated at Pages No. 94-112, provided an update on year one of the Council's carbon reduction action plan and set out the recommended year two action plan. Members were asked to consider the progress made to date and to note the request for a permanent Carbon Reduction Programme Officer post.

28.2 Members were reminded that the baseline audit of the Council's current carbon consumption had been taken to Council in July 2020, along with an action plan designed to achieve carbon neutrality in the Council Offices by 2030, and there was now an opportunity to reflect on the progress that had been made as at the end of year one. A year two action plan had been approved by the Executive Committee and within that report was a recommendation to put in place a permanent officer to support the carbon reduction programme going forward; having been accepted by the Executive Committee, that would now be a recommendation to Council. Members were advised that good progress had been made during year one, particularly within the last six months, and the achievements were detailed in Appendix A to the report with particular reference being made to the completion of energy diaries for all operational Council buildings and survey work at the Roses Theatre and the Council's homeless properties and Horsford Trust properties. In addition, a number of smaller projects had been carried out such as the installation of new lighting within Council-owned car parks and approval of a cycle salary sacrifice scheme for the Council. A significant success had been the number of grants attracted with more than £305,000 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) funding secured which would be used to support the installation of a new heating system within the Council Offices later in the year. Members were informed that 26 tonnes of carbon had been saved within the last financial year which had been partly due to the reduced electricity costs as a result of staff working from home because of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, there had been an increase in gas consumption due to there being fewer people in the offices and no natural heat being generated. Data was currently being collected from other sites and in terms of business travel for Officers and Ubico and the Climate Change and Flood Risk Management Group met regularly to receive updates on a whole range of work being undertaken.

28.3 With regard to year two, a balanced set of actions were proposed including embedding the carbon reduction agenda within the Council and raising awareness; Tewkesbury Borough Council was not very good at flagging up its achievements but a significant amount had actually been delivered during the first year compared to other authorities. It was intended to continue to look for further funding opportunities and to update a number of policies as well as casting an eye to the future and what that might mean - there were some big targets which the Council was looking to achieve internally but, at some point, it would be necessary to look wider than the Council Offices so it was important to have that debate about the role of the Council and the implications for funding etc. The main project for 2021/22 was the heating replacement which would have a significant impact on the carbon footprint and it was hoped to go out to tender by the end of the week.

- 28.4 Despite the financial challenges faced by the authority, Council was being asked to approve a permanent Carbon Reduction Programme Officer post. The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that one-off funding had been used to support the first 12 months of the programme and that had been used to employ a part-time consultant to get the programme up and running and provide support. It was hoped that a full-time Officer would be able to drive the programme and take advantage of the various opportunities out there in terms of funding and working with partners. The Head of Finance and Asset Management and the Asset Manager had both put quite a lot of time into the first 12 months of the programme and that was not sustainable going forward. This had been discussed with the Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment and it was hoped Council would approve the new post.
- 28.5 A Member drew attention to Page No. 97, Paragraph 2.3 of the report, which stated that the data for the Council Offices showed a 25% reduction in electricity consumption which was expected as a result of changes to working patterns during the pandemic; however, he noted that electricity would be used by staff working from home so that was not necessarily a reduction in real terms and he asked whether any provision had been made for the Council to reimburse staff for the additional costs they were incurring through home working. The Head of Finance and Asset Management recognised that any savings were offset by the energy staff consumed whilst working at home; however, as it was not possible to gather data from staff working from home, it could only be acknowledged and presented to be robust. As things moved forward and some home working became the norm, it would be necessary to put in place measures to bring it into scope. A decision had been taken not to support staff financially for working at home partly because some staff would be making savings in terms of commuting. Whilst the general position was that staff would not be compensated for electricity, the Council would support any staff wishing to make a tax claim and that was down to the individual Officers to take up with HMRC. The Member asked whether there had been any feedback from staff about that decision and he was advised that the majority had been understanding of the position but, as expected, there were a few who would prefer to be paid a weekly allowance. The Member suggested a formal questionnaire should be issued to staff in order to obtain some solid evidence and the Head of Finance and Asset Management provided assurance that staff would be supported in terms of a balance of home working and bringing them back into the offices. A number of staff surveys had been undertaken over the last 15/16 months on welfare and wellbeing etc. and the feedback from those surveys had been taken into account. The HR and OD Manager advised that a survey had been carried out during summer 2020 which had shown that 95% of respondents would like a combination of working from home and from the office going forward and that had been taken into consideration when planning for the way ahead; whilst it was still important to ensure continuity in terms of a staff presence at the Council Offices, it was generally up to individual managers to decide how their teams operated provided it met the needs of the service. The Member felt there was a need to be cautious going forward as electricity was a work expense which the employer was obliged to pay whereas it was staff who were obliged to cover travel costs; he pointed out that some companies had given a one-off payment to compensate employees. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management acknowledged there would be a whole spectrum of factors to take into account going forward and he provided assurance that the Council was keen to support its employees. The HR and OD Manager advised that other Councils had been consulted via the South West Councils Network and the course of action taken by Tewkesbury Borough Council was in line with other authorities. As part of the national pay negotiation, the trade unions had proposed a working from home payment which would be mandated but that had been rejected so would not be considered going forward.

28.6 A Member drew attention to Page No. 106 of the report in relation to the Roses Theatre surveys and asked whether Severn Wye Energy Agency had provided indicative costs when it had conducted the survey. The Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that potential costs had been provided and he was happy to circulate those details following the meeting. The Member noted that the final item listed in the additional outputs achieved in 2020, set out at Page No. 110 of the report, was 'electricity bill for Overview and Scrutiny Committee' and he asked whether there had been any successful outcome regarding that bill. The Head of Finance and Asset Management explained that this had been included simply to reflect the time and input from the Carbon Consultant to support the discussion that had taken place.

28.7 A Member noted that a Countywide Climate Change Coordinator had recently been appointed and he asked whether Tewkesbury Borough Council was contributing to that post and how it would ensure there was no overlap with the new full-time Carbon Reduction Programme Officer role being recommended to Council. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that Tewkesbury Borough Council did contribute to the countywide post, which was primarily about coordination, to ensure the district councils were working closely together, sourcing opportunities and drawing on the strengths of the individual councils. The Countywide Climate Change Coordinator had only recently taken up the role and was currently collating information but he provided assurance that Officers would be working closely with them to formalise the role and understand how they would be interacting with the authorities. It was important to bear in mind that Tewkesbury Borough Council was only one of seven partners using the Coordinator so its own work was significant and there would be plenty for the new Officer to do in terms of delivering the action plan and taking opportunities that could not currently be taken due to current capacity. Both roles would help the Councils carbon reduction agenda and it was possible there may be a requirement for more staff going forward as it was potentially such a huge area. The Member queried when the job description and remit for the new Carbon Reduction Programme Officer would be available for Members to view and the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the Executive Committee report offered more explanation but if Members wanted to see the job description he would be happy to circulate it. The action plan gave an idea of the main areas of focus and he stressed the importance of embedding the climate change agenda throughout the Council and ensuring all services were taking this into consideration in their day-to-day activities. Looking at colleagues across the county, the Head of Finance and Asset Management was the only one who was not a climate change officer so it was vital a resource was put in place to power Tewkesbury Borough Council's ambitions in terms of carbon reduction. The Chair advised the report had been well received when considered by the Executive Committee and he agreed that the Section 151 Officer should not be the one driving the climate change agenda for the Council; that agenda was so significant that a dedicated officer was essential. The Member who had raised the initial points about the new role clarified that he agreed that officer was needed but he was keen to understand how they would be used to maximum effect. In his view, it had been helpful for the Head of Finance and Asset Management to play such a key role thus far from a financial perspective as projects could be properly costed etc. and assurance was provided that the Finance team would continue to have oversight of the programme going forward.

28.8 It was

RESOLVED

That the progress achieved in year one of the Council's Carbon Reduction Action Plan, the recommended year two action plan and the request to Council for a permanent Carbon Reduction Programme Officer post be **NOTED**.

OS.29 ANNUAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REVIEW 2020/21

- 29.1 The report of the Head of Corporate Services, circulated at Pages No. 113-130, set out the progress made against delivery of the Workforce Development Strategy during 2020/21 and the actions planned for 2021/22. Members were asked to consider the report.
- 29.2 The HR and OD Manager reminded Members that the Workforce Development Strategy was a five year strategy which covered the period 2019-24. The strategy was accompanied by a five year action plan and the progress made during 2020/21 was presented alongside the key performance measures at Appendix 2 to the report with the proposed action plan for 2021/22 set out at Appendix 1. During the year, a lot of services had adapted their focus in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and Appendix 3 showed the organisational health and wellbeing support for employees which had a specific focus on COVID-19. The HR and OD Team had been responsive to the needs of the Council and its employees with the development and adjustment of policies, new training and new welfare support alongside the normal workload.
- 29.3 A Member drew attention to Page No. 127 of the report, specifically the performance measure in relation to the gender pay gap, and he asked what plans were in place to reduce the gender pay gap to zero and how many years that would take. In response, the HR and OD Manager explained that, whilst it was a useful metric, it must be taken in context. Small organisations such as Tewkesbury Borough Council tended to have fewer “big money” posts so any changes to those positions had a significant impact on the overall figures. Notwithstanding this, it had been identified that those occupying the top positions in the authority tended to be men with a greater number of women in the lower tiers and that skewed the results. In order to try to address this, it was necessary to make clear that careers at lower levels were an option for men and to support female staff wanting to progress; staff were supported with a management development programme and the South West Councils coaching networks were also being utilised. It was noted that this figure would be different in 2021/22 as the Deputy Chief Executive had left the authority and his post had subsequently been deleted.
- 29.4 A Member went on to draw attention to Page No. 121 of the report which talked about performance management and he questioned whether a performance management structure was in place. The HR and OD Manager confirmed there was an existing policy around managing poor performance, known as the capability process, and it was intended to re-look at that to make it slicker and more effective. The Member noted there had been a significant reduction in average sickness rates to 9.7 days per employee compared to 12.4 days per employee in 2019/20 which he assumed did not include absences due to COVID-19. In response, Members were advised that these figures did include COVID-19 absences and an extra way to measure this had been included in the system to enable reporting. The HR and OD Manager pointed out that a decision had been taken to discount absences as a result of staff having a reaction to their COVID-19 vaccinations for the purposes of absence management so this did not deter people from getting vaccinated. Staff were able to work in an agile way so, although some had been self-isolating at various times, they were largely able to continue to work from home which was a real strength of the organisation. A Member questioned how it would work going forward if there was a move towards hybrid working, for instance, would staff be expected to work set days from the office and from home and would there be flexibility to change that if they were unwell, or they had to care for a child that was unwell. The HR and OD Manager advised that one factor which had contributed to the reduction in sickness absence was that staff had not been mixing as much, therefore had not been spreading germs around, with measures such as masks and hand sanitiser reducing transmission even further. It was hoped a sensible

approach would continue as 95% of staff were able to work in an agile way; however, it would be up to individual managers to decide if and when staff needed to be in the office.

29.5 A Member drew attention to Page No. 119 which stated that the 'ATS and website refresh' work would be complete in July 2021 and he questioned whether that had been achieved. He also pointed out there were a number of acronyms within the documentation and he asked for clarification on what ATS stood for. In response, the HR and OD Manager confirmed that the new website for recruitment had gone live on 5 July 2021 which presented the Council in a much more attractive way than before. The website was linked to an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) which enabled applications to be digital. In terms of the ambitions around training, the Member questioned whether consideration had been given to using gap analysis software. The HR and OD Manager advised that it was very early days for the training analysis; however, the team was developing a matrix which would identify essential qualifications for posts which was not currently available - once that had been done, the team would look at a system for training. At the moment, a lot of this was manual and labour intensive which made it very difficult to report and create a gap analysis but some initial scoping conversations had taken place with other local authorities so collaboration may be possible. The Head of Corporate Services reiterated the good work that had been done in terms of creating the recruitment microsite which had involved a fantastic effort from the team to get that in place. This meant that all recruitment would be automated, both at the front end and behind the scenes, and a Member Update would be circulated shortly with a link to the site.

29.6 With regard to Appendix 3 to the report, which set out the standard health and wellbeing offer for staff and the additional support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Member questioned whether there was any way of monitoring its effectiveness. In response, the HR and OD Manager confirmed that a wide range of things were being done including a quarterly health check which asked staff whether they had the right things they needed to be able to carry out their job safely and questions about their mental health around work. There was also an opportunity for staff to leave a comment which the HR and OD Team would pick up and feedback to Heads of Service etc.

29.7 It was

RESOLVED That the progress made against delivery of the Workforce Development Strategy during 2020/21 and the actions planned for 2021/22 be **NOTED**.

OS.30 SEPARATE BUSINESS

30.1 The Chair proposed, and it was

RESOLVED That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

OS.31 TRADE/COMMERCIAL WASTE SERVICE BUSINESS CASE UPDATE

(Exempt – Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information))

- 31.1 Members considered the update on progress of the high-level implementation plan in relation to the trade/commercial waste service business case.

The meeting closed at 6:50 pm