

# TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	26 March 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	Depot Services Working Group Annual Report
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Service: Waste and Recycling
<b>Head of Service/Director:</b>	Director: Communities
<b>Lead Member:</b>	Lead Member for Clean and Green Environment
<b>Number of Appendices:</b>	1

## **Executive Summary:**

In July 2019, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the Depot Services Working Group in order to facilitate a better understanding of the operational, financial and governance aspects of Ubico and its partnership relationship with the Council. The Terms of Reference for the Working Group state that it will continue to meet in line with the Ubico contract extension to March 2027.

Following the Ubico annual report at the 11 July 2023 Overview and Scrutiny meeting, several items were passed to the Depot Services Working Group for a more in depth assessment.

The Working Group has met on three occasions in 2023/24 and considered a wide range of subjects as set out within the report.

## **Recommendation:**

**To CONSIDER the progress made by the Depot Services Working Group during 2023/24.**

## **Financial Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Legal Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Environmental and Sustainability Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Resource Implications (including impact on equalities):**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

## **Safeguarding Implications:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

**Impact on the Customer:**

None arising directly as a result of this report.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND**

**1.1** At its meeting on 23 July 2019, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish the Depot Services Working Group to ensure that Members fully understood the relationship between Ubico and the Council. The primary aim of the Working Group, as set out in the approved Terms of Reference, was to receive reports and information pertinent to the operation and strategic direction of waste and recycling, street cleansing and grounds maintenance services.

**1.2** At its meeting on 5 April 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the continuation of the Depot Services Working Group in line with the Ubico contract extension to March 2027. An annual update report was provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2023.

**2.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN DURING 2023/24**

**2.1** The Working Group has met on three occasions during the year. At the first meeting in October 2023, a Chair and Vice-Chair were appointed and it was agreed no amendments were required to the Terms of Reference.

**2.2** There are a number of standard items on the Agenda for each meeting which are:

- Ubico Quarterly Finance Report
- Ubico Quarterly Performance Report
- Grounds Maintenance Update

**2.3** The Ubico quarterly finance report has been scrutinised to ensure the contract is providing appropriate value for money. This has included detail being requested by members around the bulky waste budget and fly tipping cost forecasts. Suggestions have been made and adopted by Ubico to improve the clarity of the report.

**2.4** The Ubico performance report provides a suite of information and performance data covering all the services managed by Ubico. This allows a diverse range of questioning on topics such as overweight vehicles, round reviews and the impact of the Alloy on missed collection rates. The report also gives members a deeper level of understanding of the day to day Ubico operations and the challenges faced by crews on the ground. Suggestions have been made to improve the benchmarking across Ubico contracts, which have been adopted.

**2.5** The grounds maintenance update gives a regular update on a service which can be heavily impacted by seasonal changes and weather conditions. The impact of longer grass growing seasons and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns have been highlighted, as well as letting certain areas grow wild such as the Stonehills trial area. The transition from grass cutting into Winter works was also discussed.

**2.6** In addition to the regular agenda items, the Working Group receives updates on reviews which have been requested and ongoing projects. This work is summarised below.

## **2.7 Depot Project**

- 2.7.1** Ubico currently operate the Tewkesbury operations from Swindon Road depot in Cheltenham, which is owned and run by Cheltenham Borough Council. Due to capacity restrictions and aging infrastructure, plans are at an early stage to move both authorities' operations to a new depot.
- 2.7.2** While much of the detail is commercially sensitive, Members have been updated on the potential locations and scope of the site, which could include additional operational partners and contain strategic functions such as a transfer station or materials recovery facility.

## **2.8 Gloucestershire County Council Grass Cutting**

- 2.8.1** The recent history and current position of County Council grass cutting was discussed by the Working Group, where Tewkesbury Borough Council acts as a contractor to cut grass on the County Council's behalf. Detail included the significant discrepancy between the two annual cuts being paid for by the County Council and the 10-13 cuts being completed by Tewkesbury Borough Council.
- 2.8.2** The negotiations with the County Council were highlighted including considering fewer cuts and wildflower areas, however Ubico are restricted by the equipment currently available, so investment from the County Council is required.
- 2.8.3** While the County Council are still considering their preferred way forward and Tewkesbury Borough Council Officers continue to negotiate with the County Council, the Working Group discussed how this situation may reach a point where Members may wish to take a decision not to cut County Council owned land and to communicate that to residents as necessary.

## **2.9 Collections Benchmarking**

- 2.9.1** Following questions raised at the July 2023 meeting of the Overview and scrutiny Committee, a piece of work completed by Gloucestershire County Council Officers was circulated and discussed. This benchmarking work set out where Tewkesbury Borough Council and the other Gloucestershire authorities sit in terms of national recycling rates and collections methodology.
- 2.9.2** The document showed Gloucestershire authorities in the top third nationally, while not demonstrating any clear gains linked to potential service changes. This is because the highest performing authorities have a range of recycling collection approaches, while the common links such as weekly food waste collections, have already been adopted in Tewkesbury Borough.
- 2.9.3** The current focus of Gloucestershire authorities is therefore smaller tonnage waste streams and best practice is being shared through regular countywide meetings and by sign up to the Gloucestershire Resources and Waste Partnership interim strategy, which has been adopted by the Executive Committee.

## **2.10 Food Waste Collection Briefing**

- 2.10.1** Following a request at the July 2023 Overview and Scrutiny committee meeting, a briefing was circulated to the Working Group to help address questions around the size of food waste containers and address concerns around high request numbers of containers.

**2.10.2** Analysis of other authorities suggested an industry standard size of containers is currently used, where the size fits with manual handling requirements. The only larger containers are combined garden and food waste collections, where wheelie bins are used.

**2.10.3** Several reasons were identified for higher request numbers within the food waste service. These included more frequent usage as it is a weekly service, requests for internal caddies being logged under the same category, a county wide food waste campaign during 2023 and food waste caddies being generally less robust than a wheelie bin.

## **2.11 Grass Cutting Standards**

**2.11.1** Grass cutting completed by Ubico across the growing season is scored at a rate of 10 sites per month. The scores were presented to the Working Group with comparison to previous years. The scores had dropped from the previous year, with the significant impact of weather conditions highlighted as a key cause.

**2.11.2** Following the continued rapid grass growth into the summer months, grass cutting scores did suffer in the early part of the year, before improving later in the year as grass growth slowed.

## **2.12 In-Cab Technology Project**

**2.12.1** The in-cab system is in place for waste and recycling collections and feedback from Officers and Ubico is positive. A Ubico representative highlighted that early indications suggest missed collections are reducing and that the improved data and speed of sharing data is having a positive impact on the service.

**2.12.2** The Working Group was assured by the Ubico representative that the initial obstacle of training staff to operate in a new way has been largely overcome, with significant training given to staff and support from technical experts. User guides have been created to better manage the change process.

## **2.13 Ubico Business Plan**

**2.13.1** The Working Group considered the Ubico business plan for 2024-25. Ubico presented the four pillars of the plan which are People, Operational Excellence, Climate and Business Development. The Ubico-wide implications of goals were discussed and how this will impact Tewkesbury Borough operations.

## **3.0 CONSULTATION**

**3.1** None

## **4.0 ASSOCIATED RISKS**

**4.1** None

## **5.0 MONITORING**

**5.1** The Working Group reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

**6.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES/COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES**

**6.1** None

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**Background Papers:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report – Depot Services Working Group Report – 28 March 2023

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**Appendices:** Appendix 1 - Depot Services Working Group Terms of Reference