

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 4th July, 2022

6.00 - 7.30 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	John Payne (Chair), Steve Harvey (Vice-Chair), Graham Beale, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Tabi Joy, Louis Savage, Julian Tooke and Suzanne Williams
Also in attendance:	Bev Thomas, Harry Mayo, Darren Knight, Louis Krog, Bernadette Reed and Karen Watson

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr. Fifield.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the 6th June meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

4. PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS, CALLS FOR ACTIONS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

5. CABINET BRIEFING

The Leader had a number of issues to brief the committee on, but they were not yet in the public domain. The Chair agreed that they would work out how best to do this outside of the meeting.

The Leader added that she had attended the Local Government Association's annual conference last week, and through conversations with other councillors from around the country had learned of a number of good practices that could bring benefits to this council. This could form the basis of a future briefing.

6. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

There were none.

7. SOLACE

Bernadette Reed, Senior Environmental Health Officer, summarised her discussion paper, which sought to explain the structure and objectives of Solace

and gave an overview of its performance across the last year. Solace was a multi-agency team operating across Gloucestershire that primarily aimed to reduce repeat incidents of antisocial behaviour (ASB). CBC had signed up to the partnership in 2018, originally as a three year commitment, which was extended for another year due to Covid. In February 2022, its partners agreed to make it a permanent arrangement and to provide permanent funding.

Each council had a case officer (CBC's being Lisa Jones), a police officer and community support officer seconded from the police. Each team had an overarching team leader, with Cheltenham's having been recently recruited. They worked closely with officers whose portfolios overlapped with antisocial behaviour, including public protection, the neighbourhood team and environmental protection. The partnership was constantly evolving and seeking improvement, focusing on a number of shared priorities, the most important of which was cases that posed a high risk to the victim and had a high impact on people and the community. Part of their current work was building data to back up solid decision-making, and responding to the rise in cases since the end of lockdown, which was to be expected.

The team had various different powers which naturally differed from those afforded to the police and neighbourhood team. These powers were flexible to try and ensure the best possible outcomes, with enforcement only pursued out when there was persistent and continuing ASB, or when people refused to engage. The paper outlined the specific options and sanctions available to officers, though the majority of cases were dealt with through advice and engagement. They were also pursuing a number of civil injunctions and closure orders, and had recourse to use the Community Trigger if necessary.

At the moment, only Cheltenham and Gloucester were incorporated into Solace, but they were involved in positive conversations with other districts like Tewkesbury, the Forest of Dean and Cotswold District Council with regard to joining the partnership. Any further development of the partnership would be subject to the approval of the governance board.

One Member queried the number of unreported incidents. They had recently met with the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss ASB, and noted that only 18 cases of public urination had been reported in Pittville Park in the last year, which was clearly an underestimate. They were also conscious of particular areas like hate crime where many cases were not reported. Which crime figures were being used to underpin their data? Another Member asked how extensive the data collected on perpetrators was. The Senior Environmental Health Officer responded that it was certainly a work in progress tackling a complicated overall picture, and not every incident would be captured, but their figures were based on police data. She would be happy to provide Members with the specific data they wanted captured

One Member asked how long the team leader role had been vacant before the new hire, and who had led the team in their absence. The Senior Environmental Health Officer responded that the previous team leader had left in February for a job at the council, and in the meantime she had led the team herself. The new team leader would be in post in six weeks' time.

One Member asked whether the figures regarding 999 calls encompassed all those made to Gloucestershire Constabulary or just those referred to Solace. The Senior Environmental Health Officer confirmed it was the latter.

One Member asked how Solace reached the repeat offenders in the town that councillors were familiar with. The Senior Environmental Health Officer stressed the importance of engaging and building relationships with them, and if necessary, the pursuit of ASBOs or injunctions to reduce the negative impact they had on the town.

One Member was concerned by the post-lockdown increase in ASB, and asked whether the resources at Solace's disposal were sufficient to deal with the issue. The Senior Environmental Health Officer acknowledged the scale of the issue, and emphasised that Solace sought to bridge the gap between the police and the council. In terms of resources, their dedicated and hard-working officers did well with what they had, though they could always do more with more.

Louis Krog (Head of Public Protection and DEPLO) added that the data in the report only reflected Solace casework, which comprised a small proportion of the total cases – many of which were dealt with through prosecution or not actioned at all. The second phase of Solace's organisational review would cover operational issues and give them a chance to look at how resources were allocated. He also emphasised that Solace did not work in isolation, and it might be helpful for Members to have a broader overview of how everything fed into it.

The Executive Director of Place and Communities stressed the value of joined-up processes like Solace in increasing organisational effectiveness.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and responses to Member questions, and for the work they were doing.

8. UBICO ANNUAL REPORT

Marvin Langston, Ubico Head of Operations, delivered a presentation recapping Ubico's progress over the last year. The key challenges faced had been the effects of self-isolation rules on day-to-day operational planning and a national shortage of drivers. Despite these issues, they had continued to operate as normal, avoiding any drop in kerbside or grounds maintenance and ensuring that CBC met all its waste and recycling statutory obligations.

In order to combat the driver shortage, they had worked to upskill existing staff, such as through the HGV fast-track, which ensured CBC had a high number of internally trained drivers. He credited the supervisory team at the Swindon Road depot in particular for this. They had also reconsidered Ubico's structure to build resilience, tweaking their apprenticeship routes to upskill staff. Retiring staff provided guidance and training to those who would take over their job afterwards, alongside getting formal qualifications.

He acknowledged that the number of missed bins had spiked at the start of the year, largely due to staffing issues caused by self-isolation, and new crews not knowing rounds. This trend had now dropped due to their constant focus. Food waste was the most difficult area, seeing a high turnover of staff. He highlighted that out of 6.7 million kerbside collections, 5,333 had been missed in total – a

success rate of 99.92, well above their target of 99%. They would continue to monitor this, with in-cab technology expected to improve the figure further.

The presentation further covered bin requests, yearly tonnages, household waste, garden waste subscriptions, grounds maintenance and overweight tickets. He was pleased with the work CBC was doing to increase recycling rates, with more containers leading directly to better figures. Annual tonnages had plateaued, but soft plastics collection was coming in which would boost this. Residents were clearly keen to recycle garden waste, while landscaping requests were on the increase. He noted that overweight tickets were a serious issue where they did occur, and were followed up with education for drivers as well as the threat of disciplinary action. Safety issues, such as the 'lasagne effect' where broken glass was covered by paper or other harmless materials, were closely monitored. Any employee could submit safety concerns which the management team investigated, using CCTV where necessary.

One Member thanked the officers for their presentation and Ubico staff for doing unpleasant and vital work. They were pleased with the presentation but noted that recycling rates had plateaued since March 2021, and asked what the strategy was to get this back up to 60% again. Karen Watson, Environmental Partnerships Manager, clarified that CBC was responsible for strategy and policy while Ubico was the service provider. The recycling rate had plateaued nationwide since last year, and they were involved in various projects including a bin audit and broadening public engagement and education in order to boost it. It was tough to increase engagement when their budget was limited, so they were trying to automate processes as much as possible. She stressed that recycling was central to their agenda, with Keep Britain Tidy being a recent example of this.

One Member noted that they had previously raised concerns about workers collecting bins on both sides of the road due to health and safety risks, and was pleased that this had been reduced. They noted that some residents now had three separate days for garden waste, general waste and recycling collection, which could pose difficulties for older residents who were not computer literate or could not access the internet. Was there some kind of central phone number they could call to find out the schedule? The Environmental Partnerships Manager responded that they understood that not all residents had internet access, so they did not rely solely on social media to update people, and instead worked with parish councils to get the key information out. The Member noted some areas of the town were unparished and as such might not have access to that either. Another Member asked about potentially simplifying recycling rotas, warning that complicated scheduled dissuaded recycling. The Environmental Partnerships Manager responded they were doing what they could to make it clear for residents. She would love to have all bins collected on the same day, but that would require significant extra resource.

One Member asked how missing collections were reported. The Environmental Partnerships Manager responded that collections were in something of a transition phase as they implemented new technology as part of their modernisation and green strategies. Crews operated at different times throughout the day, which Ubico tried to balance so the service was as resilient as possible and could respond to emergencies like vehicle breakdowns. They

were trying to minimise changes to the schedule, and only eight roads currently had bins collected on three different days. They were building calendars to make it as clear as possible for residents, and had previously intended to post a calendar to every household explaining the timetable but had to shelve this due to budget constraints. Many authorities changed their collection days week-on-week, but Ubico tried to keep it the same day wherever possible.

One Member asked how they could strengthen the link between capability and behaviour. The Ubico Head of Operations responded that education was key, as it only took one resident putting the wrong thing in their bin to contaminate a whole truck of recycling. Extra resource was always appreciated to help build capacity. The Environmental Partnerships Manager added that waste reduction was another key point, particularly in terms of reducing the amount of residual waste in the first place. Smaller bins helped to encourage this, and they were looking at how varying standards across the county made a difference.

One Member noted that the report did not look at Ubico's financial position or a broader overview of its contribution to the council's climate change goals. It took into account service integration with Tewkesbury, but not the other partner councils – would they lose crews to the other authorities? Was there a Ubico for each district or one centralised body? The Environmental Partnerships Manager clarified that Ubico's business plan, with a focus on those points, had gone before Cabinet recently and was publicly available. The Tewkesbury-centric aspects were due to Cheltenham sharing a depot with them, so they had the closest relationship. Her job as client officer for CBC was to ensure a focus on Cheltenham wherever possible. Rob Heath, Ubico Director of Operations, added that they were seeking to drive efficiencies through in-cab technology and various small projects. The vehicles were owned by CBC, while Ubico advised on availability and capacity.

The Cabinet Member Waste, Recycling and Street Services added that he had established a good working relationship with the relevant GCC strategic lead in order to ensure that when it came to long-term plans, there was proper coordination with the county council. All the partner councils met both at senior officer and Cabinet Member level to ensure a coordinated approach, though not necessarily at the same pace. They generally had the freedom to do things their own way, and could always put Cheltenham first.

The Executive Director of Place and Communities added that they wanted to reach a point where a missed collection reported by a resident could be captured and logged immediately, with the process to fix it beginning automatically. Collaboration was a key part of this, and he was pleased that partner authorities all used the same digital platform. Full co-ordination was a long-term process. There were various benefits from a Cheltenham perspective to this approach, including making better use of vehicles (i.e. fuel, wear and tear), greater efficiency for customers and value for money for the council.

The Chair was pleased with the wide-ranging discussion and officers' focus on environmental concerns. He had a ward-based query regarding the verge cutting in Prestbury, noting that strimmers often left untidy results, while mobile speed cameras had been known to fail to pick up speeding vehicles due to

overly tall grass. The Environmental Partnerships Manager agreed about the strimming issue, but noted that they could only use weed spray once a year before needing to wait for sufficient dieback. The desire to keep grass short also needed to be balanced against the need to preserve biodiversity.

The Chair thanked officers and the Cabinet Member for their time.

9. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

There were none.

10. UPDATES FROM SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS

The task group update was taken as read. The Democracy Officer added that since the note had been circulated, the membership of the group had been confirmed and would consist of Cllrs. Flynn, Payne, Seacome, Williams and Willingham. Members had been contacted about possible dates for the induction meeting, which would ideally take place before the next O&S meeting on 1st August.

11. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The workplan was noted and there were no comments.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

1st August.

13. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

Members resolved to move into exempt session.

14. EXEMPT MINUTES

The exempt minutes of the 6th June meeting were approved and signed as a correct record.

John Payne
Chairman