

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 5th July, 2021

6.00 - 8.20 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Chris Mason (Chair), Alex Hegenbarth (Vice-Chair), Dilys Barrell, Nigel Britter, Wendy Flynn, Alisha Lewis, Emma Nelson, John Payne, Julie Sankey and Jo Stafford
Also in attendance:	Councillor Atherstone (Cabinet Member Culture, Wellbeing & Business), Jo Atkins (Thinktravel co-ordinator – GCC), Beth Boughton (MD - Ubico), Councillor Dobie (Cabinet Member Waste & Recycling & Street Services), Richard Gibson (Strategy & Engagement Manager), Councillor Hay (Leader), Rob Heath (Operations Director – Ubico), Gareth Jones (Senior Environmental Health Officer), Darren Knight (Executive Director People & Change) and Karen Watson (Client Officer)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies had been received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 7 June 2021, be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

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

None had been received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters had been referred to the committee.

6. UBICO ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Beth Boughton (MD – Ubico), Rob Heath (Operations Director – Ubico), Karen Watson (Client Officer – CBC) and Councillor Dobie (Cabinet Member Waste & Recycling & Street Services). He thanked them for the report that had been circulated with the agenda and reminded members that this was an opportunity to review performance, understand any risks or

opportunities currently facing Ubico, as well as consider how Gloucester City Council would be integrated.

Rob talked through some key performance data as shown in the Executive Summary of their performance report and along with Karen Watson, Client Officer, gave the following responses to member questions:

- Last year the council decided to make every effort to reduce the amount of glyphosate it used and members had supported this move for environmental reasons. As a result of covid and the vast reduction in footfall, paired with weather conditions, there had been more germination of seeds than would have usually been seen, which had resulted in prolific weed growth. The council avoided the use of glyphosates and instead undertook manual weed control with a weed ripper and a hired small pavement sweeper that came complete with a weed ripper arm. Members were assured that with the help the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, and input from many other authorities, all of whom were dealing with the same issues, all manner of alternatives had been explored, however, due to the scale of the task at hand, the plan for addressing weeds now included one glyphosate spray. This started in June, a month later than planned due to covid and would take 4-6 weeks to complete, with the weeds then being removed manually. Weed spraying was cheap but not good for the environment and manual weed removal was great for the environment but not cheap and therefore it was hoped that through a combination of as minimal as possible glyphosate usage and manual weed pulling, the 50% reduction that had been committed to, would be met this year. Ubico staff were to be commended for their hard work and the innovative ways in which they were approaching this job and people were urged to bear with them as they worked their way across the town, tackling the worst hit areas first. Members were advised that a further update would be circulated this week and next, and would include a map which outlined where spraying had taken place. It wasn't possible to give any firm dates for completion of this work, but members were invited to identify any areas that perhaps had not been spotted.
- Ubico had a robust process in place for dealing with overweight vehicles, monitoring and identifying where and when a vehicle should tip a street or two earlier on a particular route in order to avoid further instances and another process for crews that failed to act on this instruction. It was noted that with fortnightly collections, it would take the crew two weeks to get back to a particular street and members were assured that overweight vehicles did not invalidate the insurance; there was a tolerance of between 3% and 5% to allow for a certain scenarios including wet cardboard which weighed more, though it was also noted that Ubico worked to a zero tolerance.
- All domestic residual waste from the green wheelie bins went via a bulking station to Javelin Park, nothing at all went to landfill.
- Ubico had recently undertaken an audit of all communal waste, but policies were set by CBC rather than Ubico and the Client Officer, along with the Cabinet Member Waste & Recycling & Street Services and the

Chief Executive, had met with CBH to talk about the issue of communal waste. Cllr Dobie and Gareth Edmundson met with CBH recently to talk about communal waste and would be arranging a date for a walk around of St Pauls; looking particularly at 48 St Georges Street where this was a particular issue. Members' may have seen that Ubico were using pink stickers in an effort to reduce waste and guidance had been given to landlords, though this was now some years old and needed to be updated, but any solution would require buy-in from the community and member input into this would be very welcome.

- Every route had a risk assessment and part of this assessment was whether the particular road was suitable for loading from both sides, which some were and if members provided the details to Ubico, they could check and verify whether this was indeed the case for that particular road.
- The 'reported safety concerns' figures within the report, is near misses. Ubico had recently opened their own in-house training centre, and the training team worked closely with the health & safety team, so that they could respond quickly to emerging safety concerns and deliver appropriate training. Although the number of safety concerns were rising, this was driving down accidents, as it was highlighting issues that staff were coming up against and enabling Ubico to resolve them.

Beth went on to confirm that Gloucester City Council were set to join Ubico as a shareholder imminently, with the process well underway and that Ubico would then start delivering services very similar to what it does for Cheltenham from April 2022. She confirmed that there was a separate project team to deliver that mobilisation, which would continue beyond the April date to ensure a smooth integration and that core services to other partners were not impacted. She felt that the addition of Gloucester unlocked the whole of Gloucestershire, which opened up the possibility of synergies and efficiencies within the county, as well as cross-boundary working and shared services.

In terms of risks, Beth flagged diesel prices. When the budget for this year was set, prices were quite depressed, though an assumption was made that they would increase and indeed they were now increasing and there was a risk that prices may exceed the assumptions made within the budget; so this was something they were monitoring closely. An emerging risk, as of last week, was numbers being told to self-isolate or look after children who were having to. Whilst these numbers were nothing like the level of absence seen at the start of the pandemic, it was something that Ubico were keeping an eye on, though reported lockdown changes from July could resolve this issue. Another risk was the flu, with forecasts that the flu could be more impactful this year, and mitigate this risk and protect staff welfare, Ubico would be offering flu jabs to all staff were exploring how to offer this to the most remote of workers so that they too can easily access it.

People would be aware, given the press coverage, that there was a shortage of HGV drivers and that this was not unique to Ubico, but rather a national problem; with a shortage of around 70,000 drivers. It was suggested that the situation had been further impacted as a result of covid, with a backlog of 30,000 drivers waiting to be tested and compounded by the fact that following

brexit, a large number of HGV drivers had returned to their home countries. Rob explained that whilst this was a national issue, Ubico were starting to suffer slightly and were looking at ways of mitigating the risk. They had previously put people through an apprenticeship to get their HGV license, however they were no longer doing this as it changed, but were offering to train existing staff, loaders for example, to get them their LGV and move them to driving positions. They were also, along with the Client Officer, looking at pay for drivers, to see how they could be more competitive. There were some private companies currently advertising a better package, though he stressed that there were a range of other benefits to working for Ubico and that half of those that left, subsequently returned.

A number of members commended Ubico for the quality of their report and the quality of service they delivered and for their all their efforts throughout the pandemic.

No decision was required, but the committee looked forward to the 2022 performance report.

7. AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE AND SCHOOLS MONITORING PROJECT RESULTS

The Chairman welcomed Gareth Jones (Senior Environmental Health Officer – CBC) and a short time later, Jo Atkins (Thinktravel co-ordinator – GCC). He reminded members that as well as receiving an update on the revised Air Quality Action Plan, they would also be considering the results of the schools air quality monitoring and could discuss next steps.

Gareth Jones had circulated an update with the agenda, but summarised that the revised action plan was a statutory document that needed to be submitted to DEFRA by September and progress on this was reasonable. He had hoped to have received an update from the consultants today, which he would have shared with the committee, but unfortunately he hadn't received anything, but he did confirm that the plan would include ideas for addressing the air quality issue in the specific AQMA at the bottom of the high street. Given that a significant amount of pollution was caused by LGVs and Royal Mail operated a large fleet of LGVs from that area and were on record as having committed to improving their environmental performance, he was pleased to announce that he was due to meet with Royal Mail the following day. Members' may have seen media coverage that in Bristol, Royal Mail had, or were about to go entirely electric and it would be great if they could be persuaded to do the same in Cheltenham, and tomorrow would be the first step.

He referred members to the other report which was circulated with the agenda, which summarised the results from some survey work around three schools and highlighted that the results were actually quite confusing. They certainly didn't show the clear differences between holidays and term time, but it was important to note that there were a lot of other things going on at the time, particularly road works, which would have affected the result. It had however, been a very interesting piece of work and he felt demonstrated that the team could do more of it in the future.

Gareth gave the following responses to member questions:

- The period of monitoring was during the Easter half term and the period immediately after, when schools were open and levels of covid/self-isolation were relatively low, meaning there were no widespread closures of schools or parts of schools that we were seeing at the moment; so in his view covid had not impacted the data in the results. In terms of next steps on this, he felt anything was possible, longer periods of monitoring, at more schools, but there would be a cost associated which would exceed the remarkably low £3k that they had managed to deliver this project for; in no short part down to the fact that they had managed to find a very cost effective intern to write the report, which he felt was of outstanding quality and consultants would be far less cost effective.
- CBC already monitored pm 10 and 2.5 more than they had done in the past and the mesh pods were located across the town and were generating interesting results, which would be shared on the website. A recommendation from the recent inquest into a young girl in Croydon whose death was linked to air pollution, was that local authorities should not only monitor more, and CBC already did way above the minimum which was required, but that they should report that more so that the public could change their behaviour based on the monitoring that was being done. The problem was that whilst there was a lot of data, it was also incredibly detailed and not necessarily in an easy to digest format, which would take time and resource to rectify, or prove unhelpful to the public. It was also noted here that short term events could make data look alarming, particularly particulates if someone lit a bonfire just downwind of a monitoring point it would look dreadful but it wasn't long term, much like gritters in the winter.
- The Air Quality Action Plan was due to be published by September and progress was reasonable, but he felt that DEFRA would prefer a good quality plan, rather than one that was simply finalised by September.
- The national limit for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) is 40 micrograms per meter cubed (ug/m³) and a very, very small number of authorities had set a more ambitious target of 30, though he suggested that it was highly likely that they already met a lower limit for the vast majority of their area. Actually most of Cheltenham would be below 30, so there was potential to set a self-imposed lower limit but as he had never tried to quantify the number or proportion of homes that would meet that limit, he suggested that getting areas that exceeded 40 would be a big enough job and that to have that as a longer term aspiration would be more sensible.
- In response to a question about air quality relating to new commercial developments he confirmed that the Air Quality Action Plan would touch on planning policy, but this was unlikely to be prominent given that the area that the AQMA covered wasn't likely to get a supermarket any time soon. He also noted that the problem in the AQMA wasn't caused by HGVs because the low bridge prevented them from accessing the area.

- The source of peak levels of fine particulates often includes distant sources, including the Sahara. That fine orangey dust from Europe and beyond on warm southern air that dropped here. This probably occurred 3-4 times a year and our mesh pods were brilliant in detecting it across the town, showing a rapid increase over the course of a few hours and then drop off again. This did also occur surprising often near quarries or building sites, for a short term.

Jo Atkins introduced herself, as heading up the Thinktravel team at GCC and her team had been working closely with Gareth during the Schools Streets trial, which was agreed by GCC last year in association with climate change targets.

Jo gave a short background to School Streets. The initiative originated in London Boroughs where an increasing percentage of streets around schools were experiencing poor air quality and road safety issues associated with the school drop-off.

A School Street provided a safer and cleaner physical environment by controlling the volume of traffic at school run times, whilst combining school led behaviour change and education initiatives to promote and encourage active travel (cycling, walking and scooting) as being not only great for your health but also great for the environment. Best practise had shown, people were influenced by their immediate environment and were more inclined to make a change from the car, if the right circumstances are created; a liveable healthy street for everybody.

Locations for the original London School Streets were located in high density urban environments, with higher volumes of traffic and poor air quality as a baseline. However, measuring air quality around the school run had proven challenging outside of London and across the UK, due to the peaks not being long enough or extreme enough to be picked up by normal monitoring processes which would be affordable as part of a project of this nature.

GCC liaised with CBC on air quality monitoring and what best suited the School Streets trial. Diffusion tubes were chosen to measure Nox at each trial site linked to the local borough's monitoring data collection systems and analysis to provide a baseline indicator for the trial. The current monitoring, would be reviewed at 12 months and 18 months. As a consequence, the current measurement of Air Quality around the school gates, was therefore not expected to yield much variation. Additionally, it was felt the locality of the trial sites on quieter residential roads did not warrant investing in high quality equipment.

Alongside the monitoring, GCC Thinktravel focussed on developing an air quality education package and how our daily travel choices affect our carbon footprint whilst creating a safer environment to influence behaviour changes. This had been challenging during COVID, due to lockdown and transition restrictions but some key events have been delivered (like Sustrans Big Pedal) and the programme would be picked up again next academic year hopefully.

As an important part of the School Streets trial, a stakeholder group for each site was set up. In Cheltenham, it comprised of Warden Hill Primary School, County, Borough and Parish Councillors, Governors and residents. The School

Streets survey and other feedback suggested the biggest impact so far at 6 months, had been how safe it now felt for those arriving on the school run. However, the stakeholder group were also focussed on finding solutions to minimise any displacement of traffic and encouraging long term modal shift away from the car. However, a further consultation was currently taking place and a full assessment of the scheme would occur at the end of the 18 month trial.

However, many planned initiatives, as already mentioned, were challenging due to COVID including a Walking Bus from a Park and Stride scheme. However, progress had been made in other areas including, GCC renewing its membership for Modeshift Stars, a nationally accredited travel planning framework. The online platform is free and accessible to all schools to record their baseline evidence, current travel patterns whilst assessing barriers to active travel and how they could overcome them.

GCC Thinktravel were also launching a new project with Liftshare, to trial a 'new Mobility ways' platform (due to launch in September), which would capture peoples school run and onward journeys to work and set relevant carbon saving targets on our goal to net zero. GCC would look first to develop a school community car sharing group from the Park and Stride site aiming to significantly reduce onward journeys, If the trial was successful, it could potentially be rolled out further in the long term.

The Chairman asked, as he did with all external guests, if there was anything they needed from CBC. Jo was keen to understand how GCC could realistically support CBC in the increased monitoring they were undertaking near schools especially around poor air quality areas such as West Cheltenham.

GCC were aware that in some circumstances, schools situated in poor air quality, were not the instigators of the pollution necessarily, it was their locality and proximity to a popular commuting and through-routes, so careful solutions to addressing the air quality at these sites needed to be applied.

GCC were starting to look at 'the healthy streets approach and Lucy Saunders 10 Indicators' detailing 'what makes a healthy street?'

Jo also noted that GCC would be interested to have further discussions with the new Air Quality Officer at CBC. GCC would like to undertake some joint school initiatives, as Jo was aware that schools were inundated by surveys currently and due consideration on how data can be effectively collected and analysed would be very beneficial going forward contributing to a dynamic 'active' Modeshift STARS School Travel Plan.

8. FEEDBACK FROM OTHER SCRUTINY MEETINGS ATTENDED

The Chairman referred members to the Health (HOSC) and the Gloucestershire Economic Overview and Scrutiny committees and in the absence of Councillor McCloskey, asked that any questions on his update be forwarded to him directly.

Further to her HOSC update, Councillor Barrell commented upon how useful she had found the training session, which had taught her a lot about how the health system works and a lot of things that she didn't know and suggested that

anyone interested in knowing more, should watch the recording which was available on the GCC website. She did want to make members aware of Healthwatch, an official group that actually scrutinises what's going on in the health system in this area and people can approach them with concerns they have and they very much wanted to hear from members of the public and she noted that they were much more free in terms of what they could look at and do, compared to the council scrutiny committee.

In addition, she reminded members that at the last meeting the committee resolved that Cabinet should be asked to consider the suggestion that they reach out to relevant districts on the Fit for Future issue. She was tasked with taking this to Cabinet, but unfortunately it had been left off the agenda and she was therefore prevented from doing so, however, she was aware that the Leader had asked Officers to look at progressing this issue, and it had been included on the agenda for the next Cabinet meeting.

Fit for Future had been scheduled on the agenda for next HOSC meeting and she looked forward to hearing more about their plans for implementing changes. They had also mentioned that a lot of concerns had now been addressed and she very much looked forward to hearing more on that.

The Leader apologised for the confusion, but the referral had not been included on the Cabinet agenda, so despite Dilys being at the meeting, Cabinet were not aware of the background to the issue. She had ensured that it was included on the agenda for the upcoming meeting but in the meantime, there had been dialogue between the relevant people and she proposed that she may be able to send a letter as Leader and simply report this back at the upcoming meeting. Democratic Services had also reached out to the relevant districts and having not heard back yet, intended to approach them again.

9. CABINET BRIEFING

In addition to the briefing that had been circulated, the Leader confirmed that we had responded positively to the Afghanistan nationals Relocation scheme. Gloucestershire had been asked to take 35 based on population so Cheltenham would take up to 7, depending on what accommodation we had available. This was fully funded for 4 months only but we were working with partners, as we did with the Syrian refugees and they would be using the PRS to find homes, which would help to create a community which would be incredibly important for people settling here. She was reassured to note that GCC were acutely that not all family members would be able to speak English and would therefore be providing educational support in terms of language.

The Executive Director People & Change explained that Cheltenham had been a finalist in the Room151 Impact. along with 5 others and the winners were announced last Friday and unfortunately it was won by Manchester City Council, one of the biggest authorities in the UK. He felt that to be finalist at that level was an amazing achievement, as well as the reason for our nomination; rapid way in which we had managed to get cash to businesses during the pandemic, being one of the first, if not the first to get business grants out. This in addition to the fact our discretionary grants scheme had allowed us to broaden the categories and pay more money to more businesses in the borough. He congratulated the Revenues and Benefits Team for this national recognition.

He also took the opportunity to note that the Planning Team had been nominated for a Rural Town Award, for the support provided to businesses in the borough over the last year. The winner would be announced in September. The Licensing Team were also recognised. Having retained the Purple Flag status for the fifth year running and the work that went into that. They had also been contacted by the LGA and Kings Chambers about the way in which they had supported businesses by making regulations easier during the pandemic.

10. REVIEW OF SCRUTINY WORKPLAN

The work plan had been circulated with the agenda and would be updated to include an update on Air Quality in 12 months' time.

The Chairman advised members that the meeting scheduled for the 2 August would be a training session, run by Campbell Tickell who had undertaken the review in 2019.

The September agenda was yet to be finalised, but on the Housing and Regeneration item, the Chairman explained that this had been scheduled to come to an earlier meeting, but that the responsible Officer, David Oakhill had assured the Chair that any comments from this committee would be considered and built in, if appropriate.

Councillor Flynn gave her apologies for the August meeting.

11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXEMPT INFORMATION

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraph 3, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3; Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

12. CHELTENHAM TRUST UPDATE

The committee considered an update on the Cheltenham Trust.

(A) Capital Grant Award to support the redevelopment of The Wilson Art Gallery and Museum

The committee discussed the proposed Capital Grant Award to support the redevelopment of the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum.

13. EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The exempt minutes of the last meeting were circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the exempt minutes of the meeting held on the 7 June, be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for the 2 August and members were reminded that this would be a training session, rather than a public meeting.

Chris Mason
Chairman