



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management

Natural Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel – 16 December 2019

### Weed Management

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| <b>Purpose:</b>                          | To brief/update the Scrutiny Panel on Weed Management                                |
| <b>Content:</b>                          | A briefing/update on guidance and practices  |
| <b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>   | Consider the information provided and give views                                     |
| <b>Lead Councillor:</b>                  | Councillor Mark Thomas, Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure Management   |
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#### 1. Background

1.1 The Council is responsible for the public highway and large areas of public spaces and council owned land.

#### 2. Why we do this

2.1 It is important that these spaces are maintained free of obstruction and that weed growth is maintained to acceptable levels. The appearance of an area is an integral factor in the quality and character of a place.

2.2 Spraying is undertaken to remove Weed, moss, algae on hard surfaces including tarmac, concrete, block & paved surfaces. This operation is carried out to reduce the likelihood of residents/visitors having slips, trips or falls.

2.3 Each year numerous complaints are received in relation to weed growth and the appearance and perceived damage to reputation particularly in tourist areas.

2.4 Weed Growth also needs to be limited to prevent established weeds causing damage to the public realm.

### **3. Highway Weed Treatment**

3.1 Highway weed spraying is managed by the Highways Maintenance group, in Clydach.

3.2 The Highways service used tendered contractors to carry out a spraying regime. Contractors are fully compliant with best practice and member of the amenity forum. Operational practices are considered during the tender and have to be compliant with current industry best practice.

3.3 During the tendering process alternative methods are requested with costs to give options other than the use of weed spraying chemicals. To date nothing available or reviewed during this process has been viable in terms of outcome and cost. This includes but is not limited to, steam treatments, mechanical removal and foam.

3.4 The weed spraying programme is intended to limit weeds to a reasonable level not to provide a weed free highway. The current programme is limited to three sprays per season with the exception of the primary gateway routes which receive 4 sprays. Weeds are not removed following sweeping other than by routine mechanical sweeping.

3.5 Central car parks are included within the regime.

3.6 A treatment chart showing progress to date is published on the council Web pages together with a number of frequently asked questions.

### **4. Other Public Areas and Council Land Treatment**

4.1 Weed spraying of other areas is managed by the Parks Service.

4.2 Spraying undertaken to remove moss, algae is undertaken in housing areas and Sheltered Housing Complexes and Estates Land sites. High importance in locations predominantly occupied by elderly residents).

4.3 Glyphosate based herbicides are used to spray off areas prior to sowing wildflower sites, if this was not carried out, the seed would compete with established greenery for nutrients and subsequently there would be a poor or no showing of wildflowers.

4.4 Treatment of Japanese knotweed, as a paid service to the private sector for specific areas with knotweeds problems. Increasingly in demand due to lenders/estate agents refusing/reluctant to provide mortgages on any property that has knotweed in the vicinity. We provide single treatments plus 3 year treatment programs for private customers.

4.5 Treatment of knotweed on the majority of council owned land on as required basis.

4.6 Treatment of knotweed on the Highway, only undertaken where obstruction is or vision splays are an issue.

4.7 The majority of knotweed treatments are with the use of foliar spray equipment using glyphosate based herbicides (Round-up Pro Active).

4.8 Weed spraying using glyphosate based herbicides is used to reduce strimming/cutting around obstructions, mowing margins, trees etc. this operation has been curtailed within the last 18 months and limited to where safety implications have been identified.

4.9 The majority of pesticide application is carried out via our dedicated in-house "Weed Spraying Team" who all possess all the necessary relevant qualifications/ and training.

4.10 Glyphosate based herbicides are used for the treatment of weeds/bramble etc. on hard surfaces in schools. This is done as part of the grounds maintenance contract with each school. The majority of weed control is carried out when the pupils are not in present via foliar spraying control using glyphosate based formulations.

## **5. Performance and Benchmarking**

5.1 Following concerns in the media over the safety of the Chemicals used the WLGA carried out a review and sought advice from Welsh Government. The response from Welsh Government is included in Appendix A.

5.2 APSE performance networks briefing note 19-32 (Appendix B)

## **6. Future Challenges & Opportunities**

6.1 The main challenges for the service in relation to this report are:-

- The need to ensure continuity of service against a backdrop of resource pressures.
- Increasing demand and expectations from stakeholders in terms of a weed free environment.
- Increasing concern over the safety of the chemicals used.

The Authority will continue to review other options as they become commercially available.

## **7. Conclusions / Key Points Summary**

7.1 All current practices follow the best practice guidance available and follow the advice note issued by Welsh Government. The use of Glyphosate needs to be balanced between cost, public demand both on concerns over safety and the effect on the public realm. Currently it is believed there is no other cost effective treatment to meet public demand.

## **8. Legal implications**

8.1 The primary legislation for this process are: The Highways Act 1980 and the Weeds Act 1959.

These Acts, only refer to obstruction in the case of Highways or specific species of weeds in the case of the Weeds Act. All other weeds issues are non-statutory.

8.2 In terms of Glyphosate use the Authority cannot be criminally prosecuted as the chemical is an approved substance on the EU Pesticides database providing all regulations relating to its use are complied with. (Refer to APSE briefing note Appendix B).

## **9. Finance Implications**

9.1 Dealing with weeds on the public highway is part of the Highway Maintenance function for which revenue budget is provided. The budget is minimal and covers only a limited service.

9.2 Dealing with weeds within other area is revenue funded through service maintenance budgets.

9.3 Treatment of weeds in private areas is an income source.

## **10. Equality & Engagement Implications**

10.1 Engagement with the wider public sector, Welsh government and the WLGA is required to monitor any changes in legislation or best practice guidance.

**Background papers:** *None*

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Welsh government Glyphosate Information note August 2018

Appendix B APSE Briefing note 19/32