



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure

Climate Change and Nature Scrutiny Performance Panel – 10 January 2023

Weed Management

Purpose	To brief/update the Scrutiny Panel on Weed Management
Content	A briefing/update on guidance and practices
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information provided and give views
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1.0 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. A limited number of complaints are received about the use of weed spraying chemicals.

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 use tendered contractors to carry out a spraying regime. Contractors are fully compliant with best practice and are members 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 from tenderers 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.

3.7 Using ERF funding a small “Hot Spot” team has been set up to tackle areas where weed growth is a particular concern. Feedback has been exceptional – managing expectation with the huge demand has been difficult.

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 on other Council owned land.

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. The Council provides 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 obstructs, 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 A Natural Environment Scrutiny Panel Report on 16 December 2019 includes appendices from a Welsh Government Review on the use of glyphosate and from an APSE review of alternative treatments.

5.2 APSE performance networks query GM0851 requested information on frequency of weed spraying by Local Authorities. The feedback from responding Authorities gave examples of between 2 and 4 sprays per season, with the most frequent response being 3 sprays.

5.3 An update from the Amenity Forum detailing the European Chemical Agency's latest risk assessment on the Glyphosate and the risk of its use is included as Appendix A.

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 Council 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 Council 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.

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 reviewed annually but is set to provide only a minimum service to meet legal obligations.

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

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

10. Integrated Assessment Implications

10.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

10.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

10.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

10.4 An Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required as all risks are considered to be low.

Background papers: *None*

Appendices:

Appendix A Amenity Forum Glyphosate Update