



Report to Policy Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report: David Wain,
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Report of: Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services

Report to: Waste & Street Scene Policy Committee

Date of Decision: 27th September 2023

Subject: Glyphosate Reduction Trial Update: Highways

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given? Ref: 2340					
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No		<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes		No		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

As per item 8 of the Decision taken by the Cooperative Executive on 22nd September 2021, the Cooperative Executive resolved to agree that a further report detailing the outcomes of the Council's trials in reducing the usage of Glyphosate be brought to a future meeting for consideration. This Reports brings those outcomes to the Committee's attention.

Recommendations:

That the Waste and Street Scene Policy Committee agrees:

- To the continuation of the city-wide reduction in the use of Glyphosate where viable until December 2025, pending central government guidance and/or legislation on the use of pesticides in the public realm and to bring a further report to committee once that guidance and/or legislation has been published.
- To implement a suite of educational and informational measures as to what citizens can do to help the Council in delivering a weed free environment to be implemented when seasonally relevant, until December 2025.

Background Papers:

Report to Co-operative Executive, September 2021

Reduction in use of Glyphosate pesticide on land managed by Sheffield City Council

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s46368/6%20-%20Form%202%20-%20Executive%20Report%20Glyphosate.pdf>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/community-driven-action-pesticide-free-balerno-edinburgh>

[Item 3 - Appendix A.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28374158/>

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: <i>Adrian Hart</i>
		Legal: <i>Rahana Khalid/Rita Collins</i>
		Equalities: <i>Louise Nunn – EIA Completed</i>
		Climate: <i>Davina Millership (Head of Service)</i>
<i>Legal, financial/commercial, equalities & climate implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	EMT member who approved submission:	<i>Ajman Ali</i>
3	Committee Chair consulted:	<i>Cllr Joe Otten</i>
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Decision Maker by the EMT member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	

Lead Officer Name: <i>David Wain</i>	Job Title: Acting Service Manager (Highways)
Date: 15th September 2023	

1. PROPOSAL

Background

- 1.1 Glyphosate is used to control weed growth as weeds rupture highway surfaces making them unsafe and grow over structures such as signs and benches making them unusable or impede visibility.
- 1.2 The management of the Council's highway network is undertaken by a contractor, Amey, as part of a PFI (Private Finance Initiative) contract (the **Contract**) which runs from 2012 to 2037. The contract includes an initial 5-year intensive construction and repair phase to deliver an uplift in quality of the highway network (known as the Core Investment Period), followed by a 20 year maintenance phase, (known as the Lifecycle Investment Period) where the highway network is required to be maintained in a manner which is it retained at that higher standard before being handed back to the Council in 2037.
- 1.3 Sheffield City Council declared a Nature Emergency in June 2021 part of which concerned the use of Glyphosate. Following this, a petition was presented to Full Council in July 2021 to ask Sheffield City Council to ban the use of Glyphosate on Council land. The petition triggered a debate on the plan to reduce and remove use of Glyphosate where possible and received cross party support.
- 1.4 Despite significant media publications about Glyphosate, the current stance in legislation and guidance from the UK's relevant regulatory bodies is that the product is deemed to be safe and efficacious for use as a herbicide and is licensed in the UK until December 2025 for both food production and treatment of broad-leaved weeds in the public realm.
- 1.5 However, academic studies such as Tarazona et al (2017) suggest that the positive implications of reducing Glyphosate could include benefits such as healthier populations of invertebrates, birds and mammals including bees (and other pollinators) which are fundamental to the health of ecosystems.
- 1.6 Therefore, the Council is recommending a continuing effort to decrease the use of Glyphosate where viable.

2. TRIALS

Use of Glyphosate on hard surfaces/highways

- 2.1 Alternative (non-Glyphosate based) products are available, but critically, none are yet licensed for application on hard surfaces as needed for highways (for footpaths, roads etc). A small-scale trial in Sheffield during COVID lockdowns established that many of these

alternative products do not manage weeds with the same efficacy as Glyphosate. Simply put, they did not achieve the same results in reducing the prevalence of weeds. In addition, they require more product to be used and treatments, both of which mean considerably greater cost for less effective results. The Council therefore intend to continue to use Glyphosate on surfaces where no other alternative is viable and reduce the use of Glyphosate elsewhere.

- 2.2 Further to the Contract, Amey have also undertaken trials of pesticide free treatment options such as hot foam and the heat treatment of weeds. They agreed with the findings of a peer reviewed academic study commissioned by the City of Cardiff Council which found that despite strong public support for interventions of this type, they were costly, resource and carbon intensive, required increased treatment frequency and had health and safety risks. For these reasons it is not proposed to pursue these treatments on hard surfaces currently.

Trials relating to reduction of use of Glyphosate on non-hard surfaces

- 2.3 To further understand the impact of reducing Glyphosate use across the city, a two-phase plan was agreed at the September 2021 Policy Committee for roll out in 2022.
- i) The first phase of the plan was the planned cessation of use of Glyphosate across the city in shrub beds, rose beds, planted areas as well as in the formation of “mowing strips”.

Mowing strips are areas around obstacles such as trees, street signs, street furniture such as benches as well as along the edge of grass verges to reduce the amount of strimming required as part of the grass cutting operation on residential streets.
 - ii) The second phase was to implement a “Weed Killer Free Neighbourhood” which was undertaken in a defined area of Brincliffe for a full year in 2022.

- 2.4 The trials relating to the cessation of the use of Glyphosate in 2022 were also rolled over into 2023.

- 2.5 The outcome of the above phase 1 plans concluded that complete cessation was not economically viable but reduction of the use of Glyphosate was possible. Annual usage figures of Glyphosate decreased from 140,000 litres of diluted product being used across this city in 2020 (pre-trial) to currently less than 50,000 litres of diluted product being used in 2023, representing a huge overall reduction in use of Glyphosate based products in the public realm.

- 2.6 In relation to phase 2 of the plans, unfortunately, the 2022 trial in Brincliffe was inconclusive. It is believed that the area was likely to be

subject to active third-party intervention. Our monitoring would strongly indicate that regular mechanical or chemical removal of weeds was deployed by residents and or business owners given the immaculate aesthetic achieved outside some premises.

3. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Proposal - City wide reduction in use of Glyphosate

3.1 It is proposed to continue to use alternatives for Glyphosate on soft surfaces throughout the city until December 2025. This is likely to result in further sustained reductions in the use of Glyphosate and increased public acceptance over a period of time with regards to weed growth.

3.2 In coming to this recommendation, officers considered the work carried out by the City of Edinburgh Council in their pesticide free Balerno project which has been in place since 2020. The project asked the Council to take a more precautionary approach to weed management and build a higher level of weed acceptance within the community. They found that during the project residents from across the community participated and over 80% of residents reported seeing more bees and butterflies.

3.3 Proposal - Weed Killer Free Neighbourhoods

The Brincliffe trial was unfortunately unsuccessful at evaluating the impact on the highway of not applying any chemical weed killers. In addition, the trial was conducted on a cost neutral basis with our PFI provider however they have indicated that a wider roll out of similar trials would not be possible on these terms. For these reasons it is not proposed to consider any future trials at this time.

3.4 One outcome of the Brincliffe trial was the feedback received during the consultations which indicated that citizens were keen to understand what they could do to assist the Council to reduce the amount of Glyphosate used.

3.5 It is therefore proposed that a suite of educational and informational measures as to what citizens can do to help the Council in delivering a weed free environment is implemented when seasonally relevant until December 2025.

3.6 This is proposed to include:

- i) Communications via key strategic partner volunteer groups such as Sheffield Litter Pickers
- ii) Social media posts and content through the Council's existing Communications Service
- iii) Information via platforms such as GovDelivery (mailing lists)

3.7 Proposal – work with Amey to reduce the use of Glyphosate where viable (i.e. on soft surfaces)

Further to the Contract, the Council are working with Amey to put in place a Contract Change Notice pursuant to the Contract which will enable a relaxation to some of Amey’s contractual obligations to manage weeds across the Council’s land, meaning they can use less effective (non-Glyphosate) products in some areas, without the risk of performance deductions.

4. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

4.1 The declaration of a Nature Emergency (alongside the Climate Change Emergency) is a key priority in the Council’s One Year Plan.

5. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

5.1 Consultation on the reduction of Glyphosate and the Glyphosate free zone was undertaken by Citizenspace throughout all of 2022.

5.2 Consultee feedback indicated that the financial and staffing challenges faced by the Council were understood and there was an appetite for action at a neighbourhood level, on a voluntary basis, to help reduce the amount of Glyphosate the Council uses even further.

6. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

6.1 Equality of Opportunity Implications

6.1.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the overarching ‘Reduction in use of Glyphosate on land managed by Sheffield City Council’ report as approved by the Cooperative Executive in September 2021.

6.1.2 This has been updated in September 2023 under EIA reference 2340.

6.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

6.2.1 Whilst a contract variation will be required for this proposal, it is envisaged at this stage there will be no financial implications as a result of the variation. The variations will have a Performance Requirement relief in order to achieve the cost neutrality. The continuing reduction of the use of Glyphosate city wide has been accommodated within the Contract by offsetting the utilisation of alternative weedkillers and their application and a relaxation of Performance Requirements for weed growth within grass verges. The educational / informational campaign will be carried out by existing officers within existing resources.

6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 Glyphosate was approved for use in the EU until 15 December 2022 (Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2017/2324).

6.3.2 Following the UK leaving the European Union, the Health and Safety Executive now regulate pesticides in the UK and the licence has been extended until December 2025 for both food production and treatment of broad-leaved weeds in the public realm.

6.3.3 A Contract Change notice has been negotiated under the guidance of Commercial Services and has no financial impact. These changes are made in accordance with the terms of the Contract and comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

6.3.4 Under the **Weeds Act 1959**, instances may occur where Amey, on behalf of the Council may legally have to deviate from the above proposals to manage specific dangerous or invasive species or injurious weeds which have the potential to cause harm (for example instances of Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam or Giant Hogweed). The Council will mitigate this risk by agreeing the use of Glyphosate by Amey on a case-by-case basis with appropriately qualified Technical Officers from within the Authority.

6.3.5 As the Highway Authority, the Council have a legal duty under **Section 41(1) of the Highways Act 1980**, to maintain the highway. This requires the Council to keep the fabric of the highway in such good repair as to render its condition safe for ordinary traffic to pass at all seasons of the year. Weeds growing through the surface of the highway or between paving slabs may create highway defects which need to be acted upon in the interests of public safety and fulfilling this duty. Across the rest of the city, the continued use of Glyphosate in “spot treatment” of weeds which have already emerged is deemed to be sufficient to manage this risk.

6.4 Climate Implications

6.4.1 A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed and approved by the Head of Service

6.4.2 A reduction in the total number of treatments using chemical weed killers will in turn yield a net reduction in vehicle travel, water usage, and the amount of herbicide produced and delivered to Amey’s depot in the first place – all of which will achieve an overall reduction in carbon footprint for this element of the operation.

6.4.3 Also refer to sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this report.

7. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 7.1 The option to ‘do nothing’ was considered and discounted considering both the declaration of a Nature Emergency and the support received for the petition against the use of Glyphosate.
- 7.2 The option to cease the use of Glyphosate on *all* land immediately was considered but discounted due to high level of cost/expenditure. Sheffield has 1,064,045.03 square metres of high usage footways and 8,77,757.67 square metres of lower use footways in the city.

Based on a “worst case scenario” of around 10% of the footway network failing between 2023 and 2037 due to weeds and vegetation this is estimated to cover around £116 million pounds in resurfacing.

Additional Street Cleansing Costs have also been modelled based on 42 additional operatives, additional road sweepers, and other vehicles, and plant machinery being brought into the operation to uplift street cleansing service to manually remove weeds has also been costed at around £2.4 million per year – circa £32 million over the remainder of the PFI contract.

Therefore, the total potential cost implication of complete cessation in a worst-case scenario could be as high as £150 million of additional expenditure. This may however be mitigated should there be a legislative change.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Approval of the recommendations will allow:
- A continuous reduction in the use of glyphosate in highway areas across all of Sheffield.
 - The opportunity to work with residents in various areas of the city to promote awareness and encourage action in line with the Nature Emergency outcomes. This will achieve an important step in the city’s response to the declared Nature Emergency.
 - Alignment with the timescales for further central government guidance and/or legislation and future licensing of information on the future licensing of Glyphosate.

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