

Meeting	Decision Session - Executive Member for Environment and Climate Change
Date	12 January 2022
Present	Councillor Widdowson

1. Declarations of Interest

The Executive Member was asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests or any prejudicial or discloseable pecuniary interest that she might have in respect of the business on the agenda. None were declared.

2. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 10 November 2021 be approved and signed by the Executive Member as a correct record.

3. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been 4 registrations to speak at the session under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Cllr Kallum Taylor spoke on Weed Treatment – Options. He stated that he was disappointed with progress made since he last spoke on the issue in 2019 and criticised the report's recommendations and options. He also stated that members of York Green Party had opposed the report, but he felt they were responsible for its contents as part of the Executive's coalition. Cllr Taylor voiced his opposition to the continued use of glyphosates on the scale proposed and argued that such a policy was not sustainable or environmentally friendly and urged the exploration of more options on how to deal with weeds.

Cllr Christian Vassie spoke on Weed Treatment – Options. He referred to a motion voted on unanimously by Full Council in July 2019 which committed the Council to protecting pollinators, and stated that it had a duty to protect their habitat in the city. He said that he welcomed the introduction of Pollinator Strategy in 2021, but he felt that the administration should follow

c.80 other local authorities in committing to end pesticide use. He stated that he felt that other solutions such as weed brushes, thermal lances and the usage of rubberised asphalt should be used instead of pesticides and that any contract should include clear annual pesticide reduction targets to incentivise innovation.

Robert Gordon spoke on Weed Treatment – Options. He stated that decisions on weed management had the potential to threaten the health of York’s ecosystems and residents, arguing that the continued use of glyphosate would result in damage to habitats in the city. He referred to the 2019 Full Council motion and resulting Pollinator Strategy. He stated that the contract under discussion accounted for half of the total pesticide spraying undertaken in the local authority area, and that the rest was performed by City of York Council staff. Mr Gordon urged the Executive Member to consider alternative methods of controlling weeds in the city, such as those Cllr Vassie had previously outlined.

Cllr Mark Warters spoke on Weed Treatment – Options. He stated that he recognised the need to continue some use of glyphosates, however he urged for its usage to be reduced as much as possible, and for a more controlled method of application than spraying from quad bikes, such as using backpack sprayers. He asked the Executive Member to bring all weed control operations under direct control and to reduce usage of weed-killers to two times each year. He asked for parish councils to have more control in determining what methods were used to combat weeds in their areas.

4. Weed Treatment – Options

This report examined options for weed treatment to inform how the Council’s in house service and external contractors would manage weeds for the next two years. The Head of Parks and Open Spaces and the Head of Environmental Services were in attendance to present the report and respond to questions.

Key points raised during the presentation of the report included:

- Officers confirmed that the contract was to be tendered and taken to the market to ensure that the best possible value for money was achieved.
- Reductions in treatments and areas treated were discussed in the report, as well as trials of methods other than glyphosates.
- The contractor engaged by the Council in 2019 did not meet expected standards, and they ultimately withdrew from that contract, resulting in a new contractor for 2020/21.

- Officers emphasised that they understood environmental concerns and that they had been considering other methods including a number of trials in 2021. They recommended the use of glyphosate for the next two years, but that those years be utilised to explore further options and alternatives.
- Any alternative weed management system would likely require extra funding bids. Strimming, hot lances and pedestrian rather than quad-bike based spraying were all deemed to be more costly and time consuming than the presently used method.
- 2021 trials had found that no other chemicals gave better results in weed control than glyphosates.

The Executive Member commented that:

- She thanked officers for their work on this issue.
- Residents' unhappiness during the period of the unsatisfactory contractor in 2019 and the increased spend on pavements and roads that resulted from that period due to the damage uncontrolled weeds did showed that new methods of weed control needed to be proven successful before they replace glyphosates.

In response to questions from the Executive Member, officers stated that:

- The services of an external expert consultant had been engaged to assist in determining which method was best, which had resulted in the recommendation to continue the use of glyphosates.
- The external advisor had stated that alternative treatments were less successful and these methods had resulted in complaints from residents during trials. These results were visually represented at Annex A to the report.
- Manual weeding of the 450 miles of highways and pavements etc. in York could cost upwards of £100,000 and would take a team of 6 over a month to achieve each time.
- Diamond glyphosate was not permitted for highway use as a weed killer.
- A hot foam method would include boiling around 1,000 litres of water each day and the purchase of equipment for it would cost around £30,000.
- Other organisations, including neighbouring local authorities, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and others could be involved in future trials to pool expertise.

Resolved:

- i. That the Chief Operating Officer be recommended to approve the continued use of glyphosate based treatments as the principle method of weed control.

Reason: To ensure the most effective weed control

- ii. That the Chief Operating Officer be recommended to approve a two year contract, with an option to extend for two years, with that decision being brought back to a future decision session.

Reason: To enable the future treatment option to be reviewed having considered changes in product availability and any trials, whilst allowing the council to obtain value for money

- iii. That the Chief Operating Officer be recommended to request a report for a future decision session, detailing discussions with a range of external organisations to obtain extra information on the feasibility of additional weed control trials.

Reason: To gather information on a new method which will inform future decision making.

5. York 5 Year Flood Plan Update

This report provided the Executive Member with an update on the York Five Year Flood Plan and sought feedback on its content. The Flood Risk Manager and Project Director, Environment Agency were in attendance to present the report and respond to questions.

Key points raised during the presentation of the report included:

- The Environment Agency and City of York Council were working effectively together overall.
- The works on Germany Beck in Fulford, which had been project managed by City of York Council, were ongoing with preparations to present an application to the Planning Committee underway, although these had been delayed by issues around mitigating impact on certain species in the watercourse and concerns around preservation of heritage assets.
- Work on the Innovative Flood Resilience Project, which was funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, was expected to be completed in Spring 2022. The Project Manager for the scheme was expected to begin their role at the end of January 2022.

Key updates from the Environment Agency included:

- Flood Cell B4 was complete, with gate testing due to be undertaken in February 2022, although this was due to be completed in one day.
- Cell B8 at Clementhorpe was due to be completed in August.
- Work at Cell B10 at Clifton was progressing well. It was planned that some trees would be removed to complete these works, but it was emphasised that the Environment Agency was committed to planting many more trees than they remove.
- All glass panels and flood gates were installed at Cell B11 and Cell B12 was nearing completion.
- The compound in Marygate Car Park, which served Cells B11 and B12 was expected to be greatly reduced in size at the end of January 2022.
- Works at Bishopthorpe, and Foss Barrier were on schedule and progressing well.
- The Community Hub had to close due to Covid-19 regulations, but was due to re-open as soon as possible.

The Executive Member commented that she was pleased with the strong partnership between the Environment Agency and City of York Council and the increased communications with residents.

Resolved:

- i. That the Chief Operating Officer be recommended to note the updated report and the evidence presented by the Environment Agency in the session, with feedback provided by the Executive Member.

Reason: To support the delivery of flood resilience interventions in York and across the wider River Ouse catchment.

Cllr P Widdowson, Executive Member

[The meeting started at 3.03 pm and finished at 3.48 pm].