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**Decision Session – Executive Member for  
Environment and Climate Change**

**7 October 2019**

Report of the Director of Economy and Place

**Highway Weed Control**

**Summary**

1. This report provides an update of the service performance in relation to highway weed control and options for improvements to that service which will need to be developed and costed and considered by Executive and Council as part of the budget setting process.

**Recommendations -**

- 2 It is recommended that all the reviews are undertaken as outlined in the options:
  - Option 1 – Review the following areas of the street cleansing service
  - Option 2 – Review and amend the contract
  - Option 3 – Use of third party resources
  - Option 4 – Alternatives to Glyphosate

Reason: Because this will respond to residents and member concerns.

**Background**

- 3 Highway weed control is undertaken as part of a two year contract (we are currently in year one) by a private company, which has been the case since the early nineties, as it is financially and operationally more efficient than using in house resources.
- 4 The contract includes for three applications a year, the timing of which is dependent on the weather, but generally these take place in May/June, July/August and September/October.
- 5 The area treated includes kerb lines, footpaths, wall bottoms, traffic islands and back lanes.

- 6 The type of weed killer used is Glyphosate which is a contact weed killer, with no residual effect, so it only kills weeds present at the time of application, this for environmental reasons is industry practice.
- 7 The chemical is applied via a quad bike in most cases, but is followed up by using hand held equipment if areas are not accessible due to parked cars or narrow access.
- 8 It is not immediately obvious when weed killer has been applied as it takes a week for the weed killer to take effect. Council officers do undertake monitoring, but also rely on reports from ward councillors and the public to report areas that have not been treated which the contractor then needs to retreat.
- 9 This year has been very problematic due to the weather, the chemical is washed off if it rains within half an hour of application. This not only delayed the start of the first application, but also interrupted the programme on many occasions, leading to a delay in application, poor take up of the weed killer and therefore weeds have been very visible in parts of the city.
- 10 Climate Change the UK is predicted to expect warmer and wetter summers we can expect this year's issues and more vigorous weed growth to increase.
- 11 The acceptability of chemical, mechanical sweeping and burning of weeds which will all have negative environmental and carbon impacts needs to be considered by the Executive Member.
- 12 Performance and contract management meetings have been held with the contractor. Communication from our contractor has not been as timely as we expect in line with the contract, with delays in us receiving the daily list of streets treated, this has led to two formal notices of non-compliance to the contract being issued.
- 13 In response the contractor has deployed additional supervision and resource to the contract, at their own cost.
- 14 The final application of weed killer commenced on 16<sup>th</sup> September. Given the first two applications have not been as effective as the contract mandates the council has formally requested a plan from the contractor to remove the weeds, from locations to be agreed, once they are dead after the final application.

- 15 The council will consider next year's contract based upon the effectiveness of the final application of weed killer.
- 16 The Council has also deployed additional resource to focus on removing detritus which collects in kerb lines, particularly on the offside of traffic islands where sweeping is more difficult and less effective. The detritus build up is greater when weeds are present.
- 17 As part of preparing this report consideration of further reviews of the service has taken place which has identified that a number of streets were not included within the contract, nor were rural locations such as bus stops.

### **Options for Consideration**

- 18 In response to this year's experiences the following options can be considered and proposals developed for consideration into next year's budget.
- 19 Option 1 – Review the following areas of the street cleansing service:
  - The frequency of mechanical sweeping in order to ensure less detritus in which the weeds can grow.
  - Adding an annual manual clean of all traffic islands by mechanical and manual means to our planned work each spring.
- 20 Option 2 – Review and amend the contract following:
  - A review of the locations treated, including the current list of streets and the addition of areas in rural locations, where kerb lines may not be present generally, but there are areas of kerb line near bus stops.
  - A change to the contract to allow for different and specific products to be used for specific weeds, this would still entail the use of a contact weed killer and a Glyphosate based product.
  - Re-let the contract in light of any changes made to the specification.
  - Some councils only undertake 2 applications of glyphosate per year. The normal application rate is 3 applications a year. A fourth application could be considered.
- 21 Option 3 – Use of third party resources

- Consider encouraging the use of volunteers to remove weeds from designated areas, as an extension to the current volunteering programme which includes tasks such as snow clearing and litter collection.
- Seek the use of resources from the Community Payback team and other similar groups.

## 22 Option 4 – Alternatives to Glyphosate

- Glyphosate is licensed for use by the European Union and the UK Government. But glyphosate has been the subject of legal challenges around the world and the amenity landscape industry is starting to look at alternatives to glyphosate usage. Trials of foam, heat and steam have taken place.
- The council could trial an alternative treatment process in a specific ward.

## Consultation

23 Should a review of the contract take place in terms of those locations treated and the selection of a trial Elected members will be consulted on the list of streets to be treated in their particular wards

24 Volunteers groups will be consulted with regards to what and where they are able to assist with.

## Council Plan

25 The above proposal contributes to the City Council's draft Council Plan of:

- Of a greener and cleaner city

## 26 Implications

27 This report has the following implications:

**Financial** – The weed control contract is part of the overall budget for Public Realm of £2.8m. The costs associated within the report for 2019/20 will be able to be contained within the current budget. Any changes to the weed control contract or associated works that have an increase in overall costs for future years will need to be approved by Executive and Council through the 2020/21 budget processes.

**Legal** - Any changes to the current weed control contract will be recorded in accordance with the terms of the contract. Any re-procurement of the

contract will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

**Land** – None

**Other** – None

### **Risk Management**

28 . No known risks are identified at this time.

### **Contact Details**

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**Date:**

**04/09/19**

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**Wards Affected:**

All  Yes

**For further information please contact the author of the report.**

**Background Papers:** None.

**Annexes:**

None