

## ENVIRONMENTAL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JANUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Owen Jones(Chairperson)  
Councillors Derbyshire, Lancaster, Lewis, Lloyd Jones and Jackie Parry

### 53 : APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Gibson, Green and Wood

### 54 : DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest.

### 55 : WEED CONTROL TRIAL

The Committee receive a report on the outcome of the weed control trial that was undertaken in response to a recommendation to Cabinet from the Environmental Scrutiny Committee's Inquiry into 'Managing Biodiversity and Natural Environment in Cardiff', prior to the report's consideration by Cabinet on 23 January 2023.

The inquiry report was presented to Cabinet in January 2020 and it made a number of key recommendations, including one on the use of herbicides and pesticides. The Cabinet partially accepted the recommendation and committed to undertaking a review of weed control products available as an alternative to the glyphosate-based herbicide that is currently used to control weeds in the public realm.

During 2021 a trial to investigate the viability of two alternative weed control applications which are currently licenced for use to control weeds on hard surfaces was undertaken in partnership with a Specialist Weed Control Contractor. A number of data sets were collected throughout the year which were made available to an independent consultant to allow them to undertake an independent assessment of each application against key factors.

The key findings of the weed control trial were summarised in the report. Members were asked to note the criteria used to assess each weed control application method - cost, environmental impact, customer satisfaction and quality. The trial concluded that glyphosate is the most effective and sustainable method of weed control.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Jennifer Burke Davies, Cabinet Member for Culture, Parks and Events; Councillor Dan De'Ath, Cabinet Member for Transport and Strategic Planning; Jon Maidment, Operational Manager, Parks, Sports and Harbour Authority, Gary Brown, Head of Highways and Dr Dan Jones of Advanced Invasives to the meeting.

Dr Jones delivered a presentation on the key findings of the weed control trial after which the Chairperson opened the debate on this item. Members were invited to comment, ask questions or seek clarification on the information received. Those discussions are summarised as follows:

- Members asked what type of complaints were received during the trial and what lessons had been learned. Officers advised that complaint related mainly to levels of overgrowth and requests for repeat applications within the Riverside ward where the use of acetic acid was being tested. However, it was important for the trial to run its course.
- Officers confirmed that the total area where glyphosate is being applied in parks had been reduced by approximately 28%, mainly around obstacles (e.g. trees and lampposts) and along hedge bases. Manual weeding methods were applied instead. A review of hard surfaces also resulted in a further 10% reduction in the amount glyphosate being used.
- Members asked whether the 3 times-per-year applications of glyphosate could be reduced to 2 applications. Dr Dan Jones stated that more regular treatments mean that smaller plants are being treated and the application is therefore more effective. This means that less herbicide needs to be applied. Once plants reach a certain threshold weeds become very difficult to treat using low doses of herbicide. The Operational Manager for Park advised that customer dissatisfaction would also increase.
- Members noted that glyphosate is licenced for use in the UK until 2025 and asked what the options were being considered should the product not be licenced beyond that. Dr Jones stated that studies are ongoing to determine alternative effective treatments and these need to be evaluated in terms of their carbon emissions. Any decisions taken on alternative treatments will need to be evidence based.
- Members asked whether an integrated pest management approach combining 2 glyphosate treatments per year with a third round of weed ripping/deep cleaning treatment, as used by Exeter Council, would be feasible and effective. Officers advised that that approach has been tested in Cardiff in previous seasons. The method was not favourable and it resulted in substantial growth and a high number of complaints. Larger weeds were more problematic to clear and this necessitated the use of more herbicide. Rear lanes were particularly problematic as these needed to be cleared manually which was labour intensive.
- Dr Jones advised that minimising the build up of silt and growth medium for weeds was an effective method of reducing the amount of herbicide used in the long term. An evaluation of manual methods was included in the report. Members were asked to note that weed ripping can result in damage to infrastructure and repairs to infrastructure are carbon intensive, as is the manufacture of the steel brushes used.

- Members asked whether checks were made to ensure that herbicides are only applied when the weather conditions were favourable – on dry days. Officers confirmed that this is the case as the application of herbicides in wet weather is ineffective. A monthly monitoring forum is in place to assess the quality of the applications.
- Members asked whether there were any design specifications for new roads that would help reduce the amount of detritus that builds up. Officers advised that there were no specific design specifications, however modern road surfaces should allow for surface water to flow into drainage channels and this would result in a degree of cleansing of the highway surface. Modern developments primarily use tarmac type surfaces for highways and footways and these are far less prone to weeds establishing themselves as there are no joints, as in paved areas.
- Members noted that Exeter Council has trialled an 'opt out' scheme whereby residents could ask for no herbicides to be applied in their areas. Officers agreed to contact colleagues in Exeter in order to investigate the results of the Exeter trial and report further.
- Members also noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic less herbicide was applied in Cardiff. Members asked what complaints were received and how the resulting weeds were controlled. Officers stated that at this time the first application of herbicide was delayed by approximately 1 month. Dr Dan Jones advised that the processes required to control weed overgrowth has an environmental burden in terms of carbon emissions and there is a cost associated with that.
- Officers indicated that using plants and ground cover will reduce the prevalence of weeds. However, those areas will need to be maintained and this will impact on the resources available. Dr Dan Jones stated that augmenting biodiversity will result in net biodiversity gain. However, hard landscaped areas are not meaningful habitats in terms of their biodiversity and, therefore, such augmentation would need to be done in an inter-connected way elsewhere in the city.

RESOLVED: That the Chairperson writes to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee to convey any comments, observations and recommendations made during the way forward.

## 56 : SHARED REGULATORY SERVICES

The Committee received a report providing an update from meetings of the Shared Regulatory Services Joint Committee on the issues that impact on service delivery in Cardiff and its residents.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

57 : URGENT ITEMS (IF ANY)

No urgent items.

58 : DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Environment Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for 27 February 2023.

The meeting terminated at 5.40 pm