



ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 30 November 2022

REPORT TITLE:	WEED CONTROL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee approved the Council's Weed Control Measures Options appraisal in September 2021 for a one-year contract with a further one-year extension. This report seeks approval for the one-year extension to allow time for officers to further investigate and action alternative methods of weed control. It is proposed that the extension to the current weed control contract will run from January 2023 until December 2023.

This updated report provides Committee with an overview of the appraisal exercise undertaken to consider options for future weed control across the borough.

Weed control is carried out across all 22 Wards and this report has been classed as a Key Decision and as such included on the Council's Forward Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Agree to extend the current weed control contract with ManCoed Ltd at a cost of £260,000 for one-year.
- (2) Note the progress and endorse the continued exploration of alternative options for weed control, including the provision of an 'in house' multi-disciplinary service, and agree that a further report including options and costs be presented to a future committee.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Council recognises the importance of reducing the use of Glyphosate and the need to identify alternative methods of weed control to assist with this reduction. There is currently no other identifiable viable method of weed control which is financially sustainable therefore officers will require more time to continue searching for other alternatives that can be used. By extending the weed control contract by one year this offers the opportunity to further explore the marketplace, identify new and innovative approaches to weed control including alternative methods to the use of Glyphosate, and put in place a plan to adopt this alternative approach.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 In March 2021 a working group made up of officers from a range of service areas considered several methods for weed control including Glyphosate, Acetic Acid (Vinegar Based), Foam (Heat) & Community involvement via hand weeding. The outcome of these investigations was reported to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in September 2021. The Committee agreed that a contract for Weed Control, using Glyphosate, be put out to tender for one year with the option to extend for a further year if required. Committee directed that to take up the option of extending this contract for a further year that officers return to the Committee for consideration of this request.
- 2.2 In addition, the Committee asked that officers continue to explore alternative options for weed control. The Committee was particularly interested that officers develop an 'In House' service that could provide the weed control service and address a number of other issues, such as alleyway clearances. The Council has continued to identify alternative weed control measures as part of the objective and commitment to reducing the use of Glyphosate, once a viable and affordable alternative is found.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Wirral Council made a commitment on 15th July 2019 to phase out the use of Glyphosate and reduce the amount used until a viable and affordable alternative is found. Since the resolution of 2019, officers have been exploring alternative weed control methods.
- 3.2 The outcome of these investigations was reported to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in September 2021, at that time the conclusion was that there was currently no available alternative that has both the same effectiveness and comparable cost to Glyphosate.
- 3.3 Officers carried out a competitive tender exercise seeking an external provider for Weed Control based on a 1 year contract with the option to extend for a further year from October 2021. The successful applicant for this contract was ManCoed Ltd, who was awarded the contract in March 2022. Regular contract monitoring has taken place over the past year with ManCoed Ltd who have responded to issues raised and carried out remedial work when required. Based on ManCoed's performance to

date officers believe that a contract extension with this provider is warranted, particularly given that any alternative option would take time to mobilise.

- 3.4 Officers have carried out further investigations which has included using alternative chemicals as a replacement for Glyphosate for weed control and the use of machinery. The results of these investigations and relevant costs are provided below.
- 3.5 Previous trials of weed control methods concluded that Glyphosate remains the most effective and affordable method of treating weeds on the scale required for the delivery of the Weed Control Contract. In considering a chemical alternative the Council has been made aware of 'Nomix Dual'. This has been compared against the current use of Glyphosate provided as an 'In House' option. Nomix Dual is a product that reduces the Glyphosate usage by 53%. Officers visited Chorley Council, where Nomix Dual, is being used as a replacement for Glyphosate. Officers from Chorley Council reported that this had been their first season using Nomix and the results so far have been positive.
- 3.6 The residual element of Nomix Dual has provided longer lasting control and reduced overall weed population in treated areas. The equipment has taken operatives some getting used to but, after a few teething issues, has worked well. Chorley Council stated that in their experience Nomix had been quick to respond when they had experienced any technical issues and have been on hand to provide advice as required. They report that the Nomix system has provided greater weed control when compared to the glyphosate free alternative methods they had in place previously such as hot air kits and manual removal. The option of using this method of spraying in conjunction with Weed Ripper machinery would assist in reducing the use of Glyphosate even further. Officers are keen to explore the effectiveness of this approach before committing to any one option.
- 3.7 The costs of Nomix Dual are compared, the table below, against the cost of using Glyphosate within an 'In-House' provided services.

Options 2023	'In house'	'In House'
Revenue Costs	Glyphosate	Nomix Dual
Staff Costs – Weed Spraying (40 weeks)	£202,070	£202,070
Supplies & Materials - Weed Spraying	£141,330	£138,000
Weed Spraying – Total	£343,400	£340,070
Staff Costs – Alleyway Clearance and other tasks (12 weeks)	£60,600	£60,600
Total Service Cost	£404,000	£400,670

The current contract cost of weed control, spraying Glyphosate, is currently £260,000 therefore both 'in house' options would be between £80,070 to £83,400 more expensive than the current contract. Considerations have not just focused on weed spraying but also additional tasks such as alleyway clearance work and the use of machinery for which a full-time team would be required (eg:52 weeks per year). This increases the difference between the current weed control contract and an 'in-house' service to between £140,670 and £144,000. While this appears more expensive the Council currently pays additional money for alleyway clearance and other work to contractors which might be used to fund this service, due to this being funded by grant further work is required to quantify what contribution could be made towards this difference. It is also the case that if machinery can be used effectively to control weeds this could reduce the cost of material for weed spraying reducing the funding gap further. Further financial breakdowns are provided at Appendix 1 & 2.

- 3.8 There would also be a Capital cost for the equipment required to carry out weed spraying as detailed in the table below.

Options 2023	'In house'	'In House'
Capital Costs	Glyphosate	Nomix Dual
Cost of equipment – Weed Spraying	£146,500	£149,965

- 3.9 Officers have also explored the option of Weed Removal machinery for weed control. This brings the benefit of allowing weed control to be undertaken throughout the year, whereas chemical applications cannot be used in rain or high winds confining chemical weed control to the spring and summer months. Officers from Parks & Countryside along with officers from Waste and Recycling attended a demonstration of a weed machine manufactured by Avant provided by ManCoed, the current weed control contractor, see Appendix 3. This demonstration took place within an open alleyway in Meols. The machine removed the weeds using a steel brush but left the debris in situ, although there was an attachable implement which could be fixed to the machine once weed removal was complete to collect debris which was not demonstrated. The clearance of the debris by hand took some time. The Avant machine worked well in this area, which was a contained alleyway, but there were concerns around its use on or near the public highway due to flying stones and grit which could cause damage to any passing vehicles/pedestrians as no guard was present.
- 3.10 Officers also scheduled and observed a demonstration of a weed machine manufactured by Hako, see Appendix 3, the demonstration was provided by the council's waste contractor Biffa which took place on the open highway in Beechwood and Seacombe Promenade. Although similar in size to the Avant machine this Hako machine carried out the clearance of weeds, brushed, and collected the debris in one pass. This machine was also fitted with a suitable guard to prevent flying stones and grit and is therefore thought more suitable for further trials needed or on the public highway. The costs of the two machines are compared in the table below:

Capital Costs for weed machinery	Avant machine	Hako machine
Per Machine approx.	£60,000	£55,000

3.11 Officers would wish to progress with trialling this type of weed machine further and look in more detail at using Nomix Dual. Officers will also continue to review the marketplace of other potential solutions.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The current cost of the weed control contract is £260,000 per year and this provides for three weed treatments per year across the borough.

4.2 In relation to future options officers are currently reviewing existing revenue contracts to identify if these funds and tasks could be re-assigned to a potential in house service. The intention being to seek to ensure that an 'in house' option is cost neutral to the council.

4.3 In relation to Capital cost for weed spraying vehicles and machinery this is currently estimated to be in the region of £150,000. In addition, at least two weed machines would be required at an estimated cost of £110,000. A Capital Bid would be required for these monies if an 'In House' service was to progress. The estimated useful life of these vehicles is between 7 and 10 years.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Since January 2021 the United Kingdom has taken responsibility for its own regulatory decisions and rules regarding weed removal by departing from the EU. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) remains the national regulator for the UK, via its specialist Chemical Regulation Division (CRD). The Plant Protection Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 states that active substances which were due to expire in the EU within 3 years of the end of the transition period will be granted a 3-year extension under the new regime. This means that glyphosate is approved for 5 more years in Great Britain until at least 15 December 2025.

5.2 The control of weeds on the highway and pedestrian areas is a statutory duty for the council, as detailed in S41 of the Highways Act (1980) which includes the control of weeds and the Weeds Act (1959).

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 ICT: there are no additional ICT implications.

6.2 Staffing: There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report. However, when considering alternative options for weed control including the provision of an in-house service, there will be staffing and resource implications. This will be the subject of a further report next year.

6.3 Assets: There are no asset implications arising directly from this report. However, as with Staffing implications, these will need to be considered as a part of considerations for alternative options for weed control, including the provision of an in-house service. The purchase of specialist spraying equipment would be required along with suitable vehicles and trailers for the weed control provision for an 'in-house' service. This will be the subject of a further report next year.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 There are risks to the Council and residents if weeds are not controlled. Uncontrolled weed growth can lead to damage to the highway infrastructure leading to costly repair and maintenance bills. To reduce the financial risks to the council of these repairs regular weed control is required.

7.2 There is also the risk to public safety if weeds are not controlled as these may cause trip hazards leading to residents being injured and subsequent claims. By controlling weed growth, the Council reduces the risk of these trip hazards from occurring.

7.3 Due to these risks the Council has a statutory duty to control weeds on the highway and pedestrian areas as detailed in S41 of the Highways Act (1980) and the Weeds Act (1959).

7.4 A one-year extension to the current weed control contract would allow for further investigations to be undertaken into alternatives and the development of a project to be put in place mitigating these risks to the highway, pathways, alleyways, and car parks.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The trials conducted to date have not involved public engagement and consultation, but purely a review of the function of the alternative methods trialled.

8.2 It is recognised that elected members and key stakeholders will need to engage and consulted as a part of any future decision-making process on this issue.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was not undertaken as part of this update report. Clearly as trials progress and more information is available to inform a future approach to weed control an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed at the earliest opportunity.

9.2 Any changes to weed control operations would need to be subject of such a review as weed growth can blight communities and reduce the safety of some groups.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Through the Environment and Climate Emergency Declaration of July 2019, the Council resolved to eradicate the use of Glyphosate in Council operations. The Council's Environment & Climate Emergency Policy Statement also sets out the Council's commitment to reducing the use of chemicals and to promoting

biodiversity. The Council has used Glyphosate as part of weed control operations across the authority for many years and continues to do so under licence. However, there is concern about the use of pesticides such as Glyphosate and their detrimental impact on the environment and potentially on people's health. The Council recognises the need to control weeds and the risks involved in not undertaking control measures or such measures being inadequate.

10.2 This report provides an update on the progress of finding alternative methods of weed control to reduce or cease the use of Glyphosate. Some promising alternatives have been identified but further time is required to properly evaluate these alternative methods of weed control.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Wirral is facing stark economic, social and health inequalities. The Wirral Plan is committed to addressing this. With Community Wealth Building at its heart, the Wirral Plan sets out how to tackle this and makes a major contribution to improving the economic, social and health outcomes of the borough.

11.2 This report supports two key Community Wealth Building aims, including:

- Local Employment – creation of local employment and training opportunities through both the Councils existing contract arrangements as well as seeking to explore a directly provided service.
- Green and Sustainable – By investigating alternative methods of weed control to protect the environment, minimising waste and energy consumption and using resources efficiently.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Financial breakdown of in-house provision using Glyphosate

Appendix 2: Financial breakdown of in-house provision using Nomix-Dual

Appendix 3: Avant & Hako Weed ripper machine before & after photographs

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee in accordance with Sections A, B and E of its Terms of Reference;

(a) in co-ordinating the response to cross-cutting sustainability issues such as reducing carbon emissions, air quality issues, climate change response, improving resource efficiency and developing sustainable energy;

(b) in relation to all highways matters and as highway authority, street authority, bridge authority, including but not limited to public open spaces, street furniture on

the highway and open spaces or parts of open spaces immediately adjacent to the highway;

(e) in respect of parks, open spaces, countryside management, allotments, playgrounds, and cemeteries, including arboricultural, gardening and warden services.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Progress report on future alternatives to Glyphosate for Weed Control (28th November 2019)

Update on the exercise to trial alternatives to glyphosate in the use of weed control (3rd December 2020)

Manufacturer's method statements and instructions for the weed control methods trialled.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	7 th September 2021
Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee	3 rd December 2020
Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee	28 th November 2019
Full Council	15 th July 2019