

REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 5 OCTOBER 2017

FOOTWAY WEED CONTROL - MEMBER PROMOTED ISSUE

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

1.1 Consider the Member Promoted Issue attached as Appendix 1;

1.2 Consider and comment on the emerging options for future footway weed control operations.

2 Background / Discussion

2.1 In accordance with the Scheme of Governance, a Member Promoted Issue has been raised in relation to the current footway weed treatment operation and programme. The full text of the Member Promoted Issue (MPI) is included in Appendix 1.

2.2 In essence, the MPI asks that the details of the current operation, contract and contractor performance be reviewed and alternatives considered.

2.3 The remainder of this report is structured to provide background information and comment relative to a review of the current operation, challenges and potential future options that will require consideration.

2.4 Current Footway Weed Treatment Operation

2.4.1 As per the current procedure for footway weed control, Landscape Services carry out annual treatment to weed growth. This generally consists of two treatments to all visible growth on:-

- footways;
- kerbs;
- road channels;
- roadside paved areas and other pedestrian ways, including around street furniture, road signs, traffic islands, central reservations etc.

2.4.2 The first treatment normally takes place between 15 May and 30 June with a second application between 15 July and 31 August. The contract allows the option for a third spray if it is deemed necessary.

2.4.3 Treatment is carried out with an amenity approved Glyphosate herbicide which is non-hazardous and non-irritant. It should be noted that while the target during a treatment cycle is to kill 100% of visible weeds, there must be weed growth present to allow glyphosate based herbicide to be effective. This product has no residual properties, i.e., it does not remain active in the soil, and indeed the potential allowable use for residual herbicides has significantly reduced over the last 5 years.

2.5 Current Footway Weed Treatment Method & Delivery

- 2.5.1 Following the approved Landscape Services Modernisation Review in 2009, it was agreed that some tasks were best provided externally. Footway weed control was one of these tasks, due mainly to the short period (seasonality) of the operation, and the need for specialised equipment and qualified operatives.
- 2.5.2 Since the 2009 review, the footway weed control work has been awarded to various contractors over past years, following appropriate tendering process. The contract is normally let over a 4 – 5 year period.
- 2.5.3 The current contractor was the successful bidder from an Invitation to Tender published on 1 March 2013. The contract commenced on 15 May 2013 with a duration of 3 years plus an extension of a further 2 years. The contract will end on completion of all works in 2017.
- 2.5.4 Prior to commencing, the contractor is required to supply Landscape Services with a programme of works showing the schedule for visits to every settlement. Once commencing the programme, the contractor is required, on a daily (Monday to Friday) basis, to advise the appropriate area Officer where works are to take place and of any alterations to the schedule. Weekly reports are required to be submitted giving full details of where treatment was, or was not, carried out compared against the original programmed works. Due to the dependency on an appropriate weather window the original programme is always likely to vary.
- 2.5.5 The current contract specification allows for the application of the herbicide to be carried out from a moving vehicle. The vehicles used by the current contractor for application of herbicide, are 14 horse power mini tractors. These vehicles are fitted with Global Positioning System (GPS), 360 degree flashing beacons and audible warning systems.
- 2.5.6 These vehicles carry two operatives, both with control over spray devices. The driver has control of a nozzle fitted to the tractor and controls the application of herbicide via a foot pedal. The second operative, seated at the rear, applies herbicide via a hand lance.
- 2.5.7 If there are areas which cannot be accessed appropriately by the vehicle, herbicide is applied by operatives on foot using knapsack sprayers.
- 2.5.8 In settlement centres, or built up areas that are being sprayed, the vehicle carries out spraying works in second gear. This will limit the speed of the vehicles to around 3mph. If areas are deemed to be too busy with pedestrians the works will be carried out after 18.00.
- 2.5.9 At locations where house front doors lead directly on to the pavement, the vehicle will proceed more slowly.
- 2.5.10 In areas of low footfall, such as residential streets or more rural locations, the risk of vehicle/pedestrian conflicts reduces considerably. In such areas the vehicle is permitted to carry out spraying operations at a maximum speed of 6 mph.

- 2.5.11 Irrespective of the category of the location, at any time where the public are in the vicinity, the unit will slow down to a crawl, and where necessary stop completely to allow the public to pass. If necessary the unit may be required to exit the footway for wheelchairs, prams etc. Particular attention will be paid to areas at or near to schools, spraying of these areas would be attempted outwith school arriving and leaving times.
- 2.5.12 All staff employed in the application of herbicides must hold the appropriate pesticide certification and must carry identification, safety data sheets, spraying certification relevant to the method of application and the appropriate driving licence.
- 2.5.13 This method of treatment has been used by Aberdeenshire Council, and a number of other local authorities, for around 18 years. It can provide good and effective control of footway weeds if programmes are adhered to and appropriately resourced.
- 2.5.14 Despite complaints this year regarding the equipment/vehicles used, it has proved to be a safe operation. While there are other methods for applying herbicide to public spaces, it is generally recognised that this is the most efficient and economic operation.

2.6 Review of Footway Weed Treatment Operation and Method

- 2.6.1 Over the last two seasons concerns have been raised over a number of operational issues with the current provider. In particular these concerns have centred around poor communication regarding information on settlements programmed for treatment, settlements completed, delays due to weather, revised programmes and response to missed areas. These have been highlighted in pre and post treatment period meetings, and although the importance of providing up to date and accurate information has been focussed on, little improvement has resulted.
- 2.6.2 Due to the current contract ending in 2017 and the fact that it is likely that over time the use of chemical treatments will continue to be reduced, a review has been ongoing for the past 6 months to consider some of the other methods, outlined in Appendix 2, which have varying positive and negative attributes and costs:-
1. Mechanical (brushing – steel weed rippers).
 2. Flame lances.
 3. Steam.
 4. Foam.
 5. High pressure washing.
 6. Hot Water.
 7. Chemical – Glyphosate.
- 2.6.3 The ongoing review has not yet concluded and to date this has included discussions with other local authorities and internal services. In particular discussion with Waste Services in relation to footway sweeping. Further discussions are scheduled to explore improved joint working. The review has identified 3 emerging options that will require further investigation and more

detailed analysis of potential staff and financial implications. The emerging options are:-

Option 1 - Re-tender the footway weed control programme.

Option 2 - Bring the work in-house utilising internal resources and alternative methods.

Option 3 - Develop a hybrid of part external, part internal.

2.6.4 The main points to note for each option are outlined as follows:-

2.6.5 **Option 1 - Re-Tender the footway weed control programme**

- a) There are a limited number of providers/contractors that offer this service. The majority operate using glyphosate as the weed control chemical and a mini tractor/quad as the equipment to apply the chemical to the surface.
- b) The costs for this method have remained fairly static at around £40 – £45k per annum for Aberdeenshire.
- c) This method is very dependent on climatic conditions. Wind and rain conditions can and do cause severe disruption.
- d) The chemical is very safe and effective on any growth present. It is systemic so will kill to the root and leaves little or no residual chemical in/on the ground, (on cropped ground planting can take place a day after treatment).

Cost: Similar to present

2.6.6 **Option 2 - Bring the work in-house utilising internal resources and alternative methods**

- a) Landscape Services could acquire the necessary equipment and skills required to carry out this operation using a similar method as present, internally.
- b) Alternative methods could be trialled over the next few seasons to consider/review the most appropriate and suitable operation.
- c) Increased sweeping of footways/roads will remove the build-up of detritus, which removes the potential seed bed for weeds to germinate. Landscape and Waste Services could work in conjunction to co-ordinate sweeping and spraying operations to minimise the resulting weed growth.
- d) Improved use of staff resources (Street Orderlies, Landscape Operatives) to remove/treat weed growth on each operational site visit in larger settlements could reduce the need for chemical application.

Cost: Temporarily more expensive and likely to be more labour intensive but expenditure/income would remain within internal services,

would provide additional skill sets to internal teams and has potential to become the most economic and efficient operation.

2.6.7 Option 3 - Develop a hybrid of part external, part internal

- a) Divide the work by settlement size, utilising the external contractor for the 12 larger urban settlements and internal resources for the smaller more rural settlements.
- b) Although this would allow a lead in period for internal teams to become fully geared up, it has the potential to become complicated and or disjointed.
- c) This would allow alternative methods to be trialled by internal teams on a phased/controlled basis.
- d) This option would still require a tendering process to engage an external contractor and there may be limited choice.

Cost: Initially a little more expensive but should provide an improved level of weed control.

2.6.8 Options 2 and 3 could also have the following additional benefits:-

- Improved operational control.
- The ability to trial other methods.
- The potential/likely removal of the chemical (Glyphosate) due to health and environmental concerns.
- The desire and ongoing aim to reduce where possible our reliance on chemical usage.
- Public safety concerns re vehicles on the pavement.
- Public concerns regarding potential chemical contamination/damage.
- More environmentally friendly options developed.
- To assist in countering the ongoing budget reductions and resulting workload reductions for essential core operational staff.

2.6.9 Once the review of footway weed treatment operations is complete, it would be the intention to submit a further report to the Infrastructure Services Committee.

2.7 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report. Their comments are incorporated within the report and they are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

3.1 The report is submitted for committee consideration in accordance with the Scheme of Governance Part 2A – List of Committee Powers, F.1.1.d and in terms of Standing Orders, Appendix A – Member Promoted Issues, section 3. The Committee has power to undertake a formal scrutiny process in terms of Part 2A – List of Committee Powers, F.7.1.1. Following consultation with Area Committees (except in the case of minor changes), it can review the

effectiveness of Council policy implementation and Council service delivery in respect of any function within its remit and identify and where appropriate implement potential improvements. This power is exercisable in accordance with Part 4A Scrutiny at Aberdeenshire.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because the content of this report does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report although amended working practices may be required.
- 4.3 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report as it is anticipated that costs will continue to be contained within existing budgets. However, future additional mechanical resources, capital and revenue expenditure may be required to fulfil obligations to keep our footways and gutters clear of unwanted weed growth.
- 4.4 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:-
 - ACORP006 Reputation Management – Resulting from poor service provision.
 - ACORP001 Budget Pressures – Potential for cost increase due to more labour intensive operation.
(Corporate Risk Register)

Stephen Archer
Director of Infrastructure Services

Report prepared by Graham Wall, Business Development Manager
Date 22 September 2017

MEMBER PROMOTED ISSUE FORM

SUBMITTED BY MEMBER Fraserburgh and district , WARD 3 .

FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE ISSUE TO BE PROMOTED:

I am asking that a report come forward to I.S.C. committee , about weed spraying contract , with details of when contract ends , and taking into account standard of delivery by current contractor , that the council consider taking the work in house.

IS THIS ISSUE CONNECTED OR RELATED TO ANY OTHER PROJECT CURRENTLY BEING PROGRESSED, PLEASE OUTLINE:

no

HAS THIS ISSUE ARISEN AS THE RESULT OF ANY REPRESENTATION BY CONSTITUENTS OR OTHER PARTIES, PLEASE IDENTIFY ANY INTERESTED PARTIES: yes , many many many complaints , work has been terrible , tall weeds everywhere , and method of spraying has been terrible.

HAS THIS ISSUE BEEN CONSIDERED IN THE PAST AND IF SO, WHEN AND BY WHOM (OFFICER OR COMMITTEE):

SIGNED:

Couincill
or Brian
Anderso
n
Topping.



DATED:

14th of
July
2017

Appendix 2 FOOTWAY WEED CONTROL ISC 5 October 2017

Weed Control Options	Mechanical (Brush - weed ripper)	Burning (Flame Lance)	Steam	Foam	Modified high pressure washer	Hot Water	Chemical (Glyphosate)
Environmental Impact	Moderate	High	Low	High - foam contains palm oil/coconut oil	Moderate	Low	Low
Surface	Only suitable on some surfaces High risk of damage	No Flammable Surfaces	All Surfaces but not near other plants	All Surfaces but the results are imprecise	Often causes surface damage	All surfaces without exception	All surfaces without exception
Health & safety	Some protective clothing needed	Heat proof protective clothing needed	Some heatproof protective clothing needed	No protective clothing needed	Entails risk of operator burns poore economy	No protective clothing required other than safety footwear	Some protective clothing needed
Noise	High noise level	Low noise level	Low noise level	Low noise level	High noise level	Low noise level	Low noise level
Application	Not suitable around lampposts and other barriers, trees or plants	Not suitable around trees or plants, high fire risk	Not suitable around trees or plants	Low capacity, high maintenance	Low capacity, high maintenance, high risk of damage to surface.	Moderate capacity, bulky equipment	High capacity, care required near other plants

Surroundings	Undesirable wear and damage to road/footway surfaces and surroundings	Undesirable damage to other neighbouring plant material	Undesirable damage to other neighbouring plant material, can cause fish die-off when used near water	Undesirable damage to other neighbouring plant material	Undesirable damage to other neighbouring plant material	Targeted weed control, limited risk to other plant material	Targeted weed control, limited risk to other plant material
Energy consumption	Depends on method moderate to high	High	Moderate	High a lot of liquid required for good results	High poor energy and water utilisation	High, water requires to be heated to 98 degrees	Low
Actions	Kills foliage no effect on roots	Kills foliage no effect on roots	Kills foliage no effect on roots	Kills foliage and the roots	Kills foliage and can kill the roots if the temperature is correct	Kills foliage and the roots if the temperature is correct	Kills foliage and the roots
Effectiveness	Very low	Low noise level	low	moderate	Low & uneven	High but slow	High
Further Details	Sweeping and damage repair required following operations	Very high fire risk	High maintenance, weather dependent	Foaming agent very expensive, slow	Not designed for weed treatment low capacity high cost and damage risk	High cost due to energy to heat water costs	Low cost and effective