TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **22 June 2020**
Report for: **Decision**
Report of: **Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Climate Change**

Report Title

Glyphosate Use in Trafford

Summary

This report presents the current position regarding Trafford Council's use of glyphosate and proposed measures to reduce and eradicate its usage, whilst developing and monitoring the Council's weed control strategy that looks to balance the operational challenges with our commitment to protecting our environment and the Glyphosate Free motion as passed by Council.

Recommendation

The Executive is recommended to:

a) Note the trials and research of alternative Weedspray treatments that can be used and have been researched and trialled for use in Trafford.

b) Approve the reductions in glyphosate that have been introduced during 2019 and will continue going forward.

c) Support and approve the continued initiatives to reduce and eradicate glyphosate usage across Trafford and note potential impacts.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: None

Implications:

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	Improving Public Health Improving Air Quality Green and Connected
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	Clean Air Plan Environment Plan

Financial	There are no financial implications from this report. Changing operational methods will be managed within the Amey contract. Future decisions on alternative treatments that have cost implications however, would require to be brought back to the Executive for consideration
Legal Implications:	No legal implications from this report at this time. The weeds that require treating such as noxious weeds including Japanese knotweed and Giant hogweed will still be treated accordingly.
Equality/Diversity Implications	Not Applicable however, increased weeds on hard surfaces if left untreated such as footpaths has the potential to limit access to those with mobility issues.
Sustainability Implications	Reducing glyphosate has positive impact on climate change sustainability. Some Weedspray alternatives increase other sustainability implications including increased energy and water usage.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	Not Applicable
Risk Management Implications	This is covered by the OTP contract risk assessment for weed spray delivery.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	There are wide ranging health benefits through less use glyphosate chemicals.
Health and Safety Implications	The reduced use of glyphosate reduces risk to operatives applying the product.

1.0 Background

1.1 Like the majority of Local Authorities in the UK, Trafford Council via the One Trafford Partnership employs a system of weed control that uses glyphosate as the principal chemical means by which to control the presence of weeds on highways, council land parks and open spaces within its ownership. This allows the Borough to confirm to both the Weeds Act (1959) and the Countryside Act (1981).

1.2 Glyphosate based herbicides have been used for over 40 years and are generally considered a cheap, effective and readily available herbicide essential to grounds maintenance functions. They are a systemic herbicide meaning that there has to be a weed present in some stage of growth for the active ingredients to contact prior to being absorbed and killing the weed.

1.3 Until the early 2000s many Local Authorities used residual based herbicides as a preventative method, which could be sprayed without weed growth being present and stopped weeds growing due to their capacity to remain in soil and detritus. Concerns around the environmental impact of residual herbicides led them to be banned.

1.4 The use of glyphosate based products remains legal in the UK, being licenced until December 2022. Nonetheless, a report from the International Agency for Research on Cancer in 2015, found that glyphosate was “a probable human carcinogen”, sparking a worldwide debate as to the validity of its continued usage. Recent court rulings in the USA have found in favour of claimants who cite glyphosate use as

having caused them to develop cancer. There are also over 18,400 more lawsuits progressing through the US Courts. The scientific data is however conflicting, with the European Food Safety Authority and the European Chemicals Agency's Committee for Risk Assessment have found no safety concerns that would prevent continuing approval.

1.5 At this time there is no overall international consensus on the risks and glyphosate remains a legal product in the UK to use. With regard to category of risk Glyphosate falls within the same World Health Organisation carcinogenic category as meat and shift work, whilst bacon and sausage fall into a higher level of 'carcinogenic' risk category. Alcohol and hair grooming products also fall into the carcinogenic category of risk for glyphosate.

1.6 Weed control in public areas such as within public spaces, on street pavements and footpaths is a crucial service undertaken by the Council on behalf of communities. A good quality, consistent weed control programme reduces slip and trip hazards and potential access issues, reduces the damage caused by root growth to urban surfaces and improves aesthetic appeal.

1.7 In November 2018 Trafford Council passed a motion which stated that the Council resolves to:

- Phase out the use of all pesticides and weed killers on council land.
- Cut out all use of glyphosate based treatments in all council operations in one year.
- Trial pesticide-free alternatives during this period. Particularly those adopted by the likes of Hammersmith and Fulham and Lewes Councils who use biodegradable foam or hot steam treatments on weeds. To be decided by Executive.
- Grant an exception to the above ban regarding the control of Japanese knotweed, or other invasive species, where there are currently no effective mechanical techniques available. However, in this case chemicals such as glyphosate will only be stem-injected, rather than sprayed, to reduce its spread in the environment.
- Grant an exception on sprays only in relation to Giant Hogweed where it’s not safe to be dug out or safely removed by other means.
- Write to the prime minister to inform the government of this Council’s opposition to glyphosate-based pesticides and to call for a UK-wide programme to phase out use

1.8 This report to the Executive informs members on an update in response to this motion and approval for the proposed way forward.

2.0 Weed Control on Highways

2.1 Trafford Council adopts an integrated approach to weed control on the highway, operating a spray treatment version of the herbicide Glyphosate with manual follow up removal where appropriate.

2.2 Herbicide treatment is applied to footpaths and roads on hard surfaces in addition to areas around sign posts and edges of highway verge to minimise overgrowth in these areas.

2.3 Two sprays per year are applied usually in late spring April/May and again late summer or early autumn around September / October. Spray times can vary depending on weather conditions. The sprays are contact based and only spray visible weeds and no residual treatment is used.

2.4 The One Trafford Partnership via its contract with Amey has a contract with Assist hence risks are managed by them which could be associated with the use of glyphosate in highways for the undertaking of weed spray operations and all staff are appropriately trained and use PPE.

2.5 UK law requires operators hold at least NPTC PA1 and PA6 certifications to use Glyphosate products. Training covers the safe use, storage and handling of pesticides with emphasis on techniques that minimise use and off-target drift.

3.0 Parks and Open Spaces

3.1 Trafford manages a diverse range of green space including over 180 parks and open spaces, vast areas of countryside and country park land and public rights of way. The parks also include 70 plus play areas, a number of council owned bowling greens and a mini golf course. 11 of these parks are Green Flag status with many parks having Friends Groups supporting their upkeep.

3.2 Through the use of mulches, growth retardant and weed supressing membranes, as well as traditional hoeing and strimming on hard surfaces the grounds maintenance teams have already reduced to a great degree the amount of Glyphosate used in the parks and green spaces.

3.3 The use of glyphosate has been used for spot treatment of weeds only and to reduce growth around obstructions such as benches, trees and signs and has not been used in and around playgrounds for some time.

4.0 Alternative Treatment Options and Outcomes

4.1 There are a number of alternative options that could be considered for weed treatment or removal.

4.2 It quickly became apparent that there were two distinct areas of glyphosate use that needed to be explored for alternatives. The two areas that were explored included the eradication of glyphosate use in green spaces and parks and eradication on hard surfaces such as on footpaths and roads.

4.3 Following the motion The One Trafford Partnership (OTP) sought to explore alternative options to the use of glyphosate during 2019. A range of trials as alternative options to glyphosate were then undertaken during 2019 in select areas of the Borough and the results have been assessed to determine the most effective solutions that could be used more widely across Trafford.

4.4 Alternatives have been researched and trialled included hot water (steam), foam, heat/flame, acetic acid (vinegar), and manual and mechanical removal options. Appendix 1 summarises the issues and costs associated with the alternatives explored and in place in some London councils including those mentioned in the motion at Lewes and Hammersmith and Fulham council’s.

4.4.1 Hot Water (steam) is being used by Lewes District Council and has been trialled by Trafford in a hard surface location within a typical housing estate. Whilst the operation did remove the weeds at the location to scale the process up across the whole of Trafford across the highway network would not be practical and would take too long to complete. This method of weed control is high in energy and water usage and is best suited to localised town centre locations with clean highway joints that don't have a proliferation of weeds each year.

4.4.2 Hot Foam has been trialled by a number of councils and Hammersmith and Fulham have adopted this method named 'Foam stream' which is a combination of hot water and foam. The costs and scale of this process would need to be carefully considered in Trafford since the energy and water usage is similar to steam with higher overall costs and operation speed is slow. Costs of the water or foam method would increase weed control costs by circa £250k p.a. plus initial outlay of £200k for equipment.

4.4.3 Heat / Flame options were researched and investigated by a number of other Local authorities including London Boroughs, Bristol and Torfaen in Wales. Due to Health and Safety concerns this method could not be adopted to treat weeds.

4.4.4 Natural herbicides – Acetic (vinegar) and Pelargonic (soap) options are also options to consider however, to use these in the quantities required in Trafford would require a substantial increase in costs circa £200k per application. The usage also would have other impacts such as odour and can corrode metal surfaces.

4.4.5 Manual methods – to revert to removal of weeds on the highway with manual labour would be cost and time prohibitive however, within parks and open spaces where weed control is localised to the areas of most use this is a viable option and is being adopted as part of its integrated approach to weed control in parks. Increased co-operation from Friends of Parks, Community payback teams and volunteer groups will support this transition.

4.4.6 Mechanical methods – Trafford has researched and trialled the use of adaptive mechanical machinery to assist with removal of weeds on the highway and on pathways. The use of wire brushes on mechanical sweepers will also be used as part of an improved integrated approach to removing weeds on the highway.

4.5 The outcome of the research and trials was such that the use of glyphosate would be able to be totally eradicated in parks. Alternative options that are already being used in some parks is able to be rolled out further and includes a range of alternatives such as traditional removal methods using hoes, rakes and elbow grease by friends of parks and OTP maintenance staff.

4.6 The options that could be considered for wide spread use on hard surfaces such as on public footways and roads therefore remain more challenging.

5.0 Challenges on Hard Surfaces

5.1 As highlighted earlier the use of glyphosate has been used for a number of years to successfully and effectively treat the typical weeds that can spread rapidly on

footpaths and roads if left untreated. Typically two treatments using glyphosate are undertaken each year to keep weeds at bay on hard surfaces.

5.2 There are impacts associated with not treating weeds which includes damage to hard surfaces, stifling of other flora and fauna and general aesthetic impact. There are not many cost effective and easy solutions that assist with treating weeds on mass hard surfaces however, these have been investigated using localised trials and testing and research with other local authorities.

5.3 Trials and tests using steam, foams and mechanical means alone whilst effective locally would prove too costly and require significant uplift in labour and equipment to roll out across the vast hard surfaces that require treatment and hence renders these options undeliverable and beyond current budget capacity. The equipment required to bring foams, generators and water to site requires large HGV type vehicles which would be inaccessible on some estates in Trafford.

5.4 The solution that was to be trialled more widespread on hard surfaces during 2020 was the use of the treatment using NomixDual. This is a residual approved weed spray product which when coupled with eradication in the use of glyphosate in parks would have reduced the use of glyphosate across Trafford by 70% in 2020.

5.5 Due to the impact of Covid-19 on day to day operations, the ability to treat weeds at the right time of year with the product in addition to training staff in the use of the product continuation of the Borough wide trial with the use of NomixDual for the 2020 season has unfortunately had to be put on hold.

5.6 The alternative therefore to allow Trafford to effectively keep its commitment and substantially reduce the use of glyphosate is to either not treat hard surfaces that would lead to impacts as highlighted above or revert to traditional glyphosate treatment on hard surfaces for 2020 but with one treatment rather than two in this current year.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The eradication of Weedspray is achievable in parks and open spaces. It is not without some impact however, and there may be some feedback from park users on some weeds appearing more readily than in the past in spot locations.

6.2 The reduction in the use of Glyphosate on hard surfaces with other options as detailed in the report has the potential to be cost prohibitive. With the reduction to one spray in 2020 and the trial of NomixDual in 2021 this will allow the Authority to have substantially reduced the overall use of Glyphosate in its operations by 70%.

6.3 With the licence for Glyphosate usage due to expire in 2022 there is likely to be alternative cost effective solutions developed during the next 12 to 18 months in anticipation of the licence not being extended which can be explored further by Trafford for use on hard surfaces.

7.0 Other Options

7.1 A range of initiatives and options to Weedspray are suggested and have been explored as included within this report.

7.2 The alternative to eradicate the use of glyphosate in the interim period and not treat hard surfaces is an option however, there would be a likely increase in public dissatisfaction and the potential for the council to be in breach of the Weeds Act (1959) and Countryside Act (1981)

8.0 Consultation

16.1 Consultation with suppliers, stakeholders, partners and members will be ongoing as part of the further reduction to potential eradication of Glyphosate in 2020/21.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

To inform and seek approval from members on the range of initiatives that needs to be considered and explored further relating to eradication of Glyphosate in Trafford Council.

Key Decision Yes

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? Yes

Finance Officer Clearance **PC**
Legal Officer Clearance **TR**

CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE 

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.

Method	Description	Issues	Councils using this	Cost
Foam treatment	Application of a hot foam containing natural products	Slow, labour intensive, expensive for large-scale use.	Lewes DC, as part of a grounds maintenance contract. Fareham BC use around play equipment and a small airport but not on the public highway.	£0.200m-0.300m initial outlay, plus £0.230m annual running costs. Lewes quote cost per m2 = 66p compared to 3p for Glyphosate
Hot water treatment	Boiling water emitted from a lance.	Aims to kill roots however operators are reporting limited success, with it having little effect on broad leaf weeds and high rates of regrowth.	Hammersmith and Fulham	Hammersmith and Fulham report that 3 treatments per year are £0.200m more expensive than the equivalent treatment with Glyphosate.
Electric shock	Inserting an probe into the soil to apply an electric current to the root.	Better for ornamental flower beds but not practical on a wider scale.	Not known	Not known, but impractical to carry out on Highways weeds.
Propane / flame gun	A flame is used to burn the weed growth.	Can only be used on hard surfaces; H&S risks; banned on the domestic market.	Not known.	Not known but health and safety implications will prohibit this method.
Manual Removal	Includes hand weeding, brushing / hoeing, strimming and pressure washing	Labour intensive and often results in ripping plant at stem, encouraging a faster rate of regrowth.	Westminster Council. However, all roads are swept at least 3 times per week so weeds are less established and easier to pull.	Not known, however the size of the Borough would likely render this method impractical.
Strimming	Weeds are mechanically cut at the stem.	20+ operatives on a 6-weekly cut; substantial regrowth likely.	Unknown, however Havering is trialling this as part of its integrated approach to highways weed management.	£0.350m+ if operated Borough-wide.
Natural herbicides	Pelargonic acid (soap-based) or acetic acid (vinegar-based) can be used effectively, especially on hard surfaces on small plants.	No risk of bio-accumulation. However, unpleasant smell, less effective on larger weeds. Can corrode metal street furniture, and pose risk of burns and eye injuries where not spread in a controlled manner.	Trialled by SH Goss.	Whilst the price per litre is much lower than Glyphosate, overall it requires a much higher amount to achieve the equivalent level of dieback, The current contractor has quoted a price between £0.800m and £.900m per annum.