

Report of the Director of Place to the meeting of the Keighley Area Committee to be held on 14 December 2017.

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Subject:

Parks & Green Spaces Service Weed Spraying Contract Report

Summary statement:

A report on the weed spraying contract that is delivered across the district reviews the delivery during the past year and considers the future options with regard to weed control on the highway and footpath network.

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 A report on the weed spraying contract that is delivered across the district reviews the delivery during the past year and considers the future options with regard to weed control on the highway and footpath network

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The Parks & Green Spaces (PGS) Service

2.1.1 PGS currently sits in the Sport and Culture Service, which is part of the Department of Place and the main function is the management, maintenance and development of the district's parks and other green spaces. The area of land managed by the section totals over 1,000 hectares of parks/grassed areas and around 850 hectares of woodland.

2.1.2 Unlike the constituency based approach to maintenance of parks and recreational spaces, due to economies of scale and routing solutions, highway weed spraying and technical services are delivered on a District wide basis from 5 operational depot's.

2.1.3 PGS has provided growing support to the council's highway winter gritting operation with 25 staff now regularly employed as drivers to cover precautionary gritting routes or ride-on tractor operatives to treat footways.

2.2 Weed Spraying on hard surfaces

2.2.1 The council is responsible for the treatment of weeds on the adopted public highway throughout the Bradford district and this includes areas such as, paved/tarmaced footways, kerb edges and channels, areas around street furniture and hard central reservations. The treated areas amount to around 3400km of linear surface.

2.2.2 Whilst this is a highway function and part of that departments remit the PGS have always undertaken the service delivery of this remit as an addition to the highway verge maintenance it undertakes. However, due to the staffing demand, the specific nature of the works and the specialist equipment required the council has looked to tender this work outside of the service areas as it is generally more cost effective to use a specialist contractor as opposed to delivering the service in-house.

2.2.3 The general weed spraying contract has been successfully tendered out to specialist contractors since the late 1990's. Previous to this, the in-house grounds maintenance teams did undertake this task for a while but due to the limited qualified staff resource and the existing workload the scale of the work required proved to be far too difficult and costly to manage.

2.2.4 Since the ban on the use of Residual chemicals (these lay active in the ground for a long period of time and stop germination of seedlings) was introduced in the late



1990's the chemical widely used for treatments, including the Bradford district, has been Glyphosate. The chemical Glyphosate is a broad spectrum systemic weed treatment and is used to kill grasses and broad leaved annual weeds and when applied it is absorbed through the plant foliage and, as such, cannot be used as a 'pre emergence' treatment.

2.2.5 As Glyphosate is a contact treatment it will only kill weeds that are present at the time of spraying and further weed growth can, and does, quickly re-appear following a spraying application. Therefore, the use of Glyphosate is seen more as an effective weed control as opposed to eradication.

2.2.6 The council is working to conform with the EU's proposals for the Water Framework Directive and the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive and therefore looking to reduce the amount of chemical it uses in the environment.

2.3 Weed Spraying Contract

2.3.1 The contract is generally tendered for a period covering 3 years and usually has an extension clause included of an additional year.

2.3.2 The contract requirement is for the contractor to carry out 3 applications annually of the weed killer Glyphosate. This application is applied to the adopted footpaths and highways within the Bradford District that fall within the contract parameters.

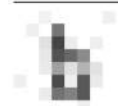
2.3.3 The council has specified in the contract that by conforming to the above mentioned directives in 2.2.6 that contractors should ideally use the latest up to date vehicle mounted technology for the majority of the spray application. Such technological advances have developed an application through sensors and infra-red beams that can detect chlorophyll in a plant which allows only the weeds that are present to be sprayed. This results in a lot less chemical being used in the environment and better conforms to the above mentioned Directives.

2.3.4 The benefits of using such a technological advanced system are:-

- Weeds are targeted accurately and controlled
- A reduction of around 80% in chemical use
- No off-target spray damage to grass verges and adjacent gardens
- Improved productivity for sole operator

2.3.5 The contractor is also expected to use hand applications, such as knapsacks and hand lances that may assist to spray weeds in areas where the Weed IT vehicles are unable to access.

2.3.6 Within the tender documents it is stipulated that the contractor must conform to all the industry regulation Health & Safety requirements and must have the Amenity Assured Registration or ISO 9001 (Accreditation for weed control) and ISO14001 Environmental Standard.

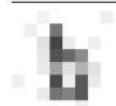


2.4 Method of Operation

- 2.4.1 Prior to the commencement of the contract the successful tenderer agrees with the council the proposed method of operation and organisation of the spraying schedules. Dependent on the size of the ward, they are sometimes split into 1,2 or 3 zones, for operational purposes, and identified on a map.
- 2.4.2 A weekly table of operation is then agreed (see Appendix 1) for each of the 3 sprays and it is agreed in which wards the teams will be present with the weeks being dated from the start of the spray until the final planned application. All spraying takes place between April – October but is dependent upon the weather conditions at the time. For example, if the early spring has been warm and dry then there will be weeds present, however, if it has been wet and cold germination will have been at a minimum and it may be better to postpone any spraying until a later time to allow weeds to be present.
- 2.4.3 Each spray of the whole district takes around 9 weeks to complete with the follow on application commencing straightaway. This results in the contractor being present in the district throughout the duration of the spraying period.
- 2.4.4 The council officer overseeing the contract will meet with the contractor prior to the first spray and usually every 2 weeks throughout. In addition to this, telephone conversations occur weekly along with regular email exchanges.
- 2.4.5 The contractor will also supply a weekly update of the work chart (appendix 1) highlighting wards that have been either completed or partially completed.
- 2.4.6 The officer will undertake a visual inspection of sprayed areas around 2-3 weeks after completion and it is expected that following a successful application there should be a very high percentage (around 90%) of destroyed vegetation visible. Should there be concern that this level has not been achieved, through either the contractor missing areas or weather patterns causing disruption, (ie, rain/wind), the contractor will be requested to re-attend an area and carry out a further spray.

2.5 Complaints Procedure

- 2.5.1 In line with all other council services complaints in relation to weed spraying are logged through the council's Contact Centre. These are then recorded as a Front Line Complaint and forwarded to the designated contacts in the PGS.
- 2.5.2 Once received, complaints are updated on the system with notes advising of the time-frame within the schedule when the likely spraying of weeds will take place in the particular area (ward) of concern.
- 2.5.3 Should there be a regular repeat of complaints for one particular area the designated officer will specifically visit the site/address and visually assess the situation before making contact with the customer who raised the concern.



- 2.5.4 At the start of each year's spray, the contact centre managers are provided with a copy of the proposed work schedule (Appendix 1) so that they are prepared and can advise the customers of a projected date when action is likely to be taken.
- 2.5.5 The number of complaints received does fluctuate year on year and is dependent a lot on seasonal weather conditions. The statistics for this year (2017) from January – November highlight that there were 389 complaints received in relation to weeds with 34 being specific to the Keighley wards (78 for the whole Keighley constituency).

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Over the years further consideration has been given to the alternative methods that are available to treat weeds on the highway and this council has sought advice from other councils nationally, through networking channels like APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence), and other frameworks such as the Sustainable Use Directive and the Northern Amenity Forum.
- 3.2 Other alternative methods of treatment include the following:-
- Hot water and foam – Too labour and resource intensive and the trials have not proved beneficial or sustainable in the short term.
 - Flame gun – Not practical in the general public domain, too labour intensive and costly.
 - Acetic Acid (Vinegar) – Found to be slow acting with a downside being a lingering odour.
- 3.3 Therefore, at this moment in time, the most widely used treatment for weed control is spraying with Glyphosate and whilst there has been a lot of adverse press in recent times around its use and its future, the EU has yet to announce an outright ban on the chemical and the indications are that its use will continue.
- 3.4 As a way of looking to reduce the overall complaint numbers that are received around this service area a level of consideration should perhaps be given to include Highway officers in the monitoring of the contract as the contract is predominantly highway based and that department deploys officers to inspect the footway and highway on a daily basis.
- 3.5 As a further consideration, this committee could consider using its delegated powers to request that the Highway Department takes overall control of this contract as they may be better resourced to monitor the contract district wide.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 The present budget allocation associated with this contract is in the region of £148,000 per year and this covers the contractual elements. There are no additional finances to cover the officer time involved in its procurement, management or monitoring.



5. AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None apparent

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 The contents of this report are in accordance with the decisions of the Executive on 9 October 2012 and 16 April 2013.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Area Committee decisions will need to be made in line with Equal Rights legislation. This will require Area Committees to assess the potential equality impact of any decisions they make.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Increased local decision making has the potential to create more sustainable solutions to local issues. The council is committed to using less chemical in the environment through its operations and in doing so restricts the potential of contamination and 'run off' into drainage and water systems. The use of Glyphosate also negates the potential for the chemical to lie dormant in the ground which again avoids the potential for chemical build-up in the water table.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

There are no greenhouse gas emission implications apparent.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are no Community Safety Implications arising from this report.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

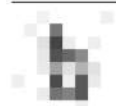
There are no Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

7.6 TRADE UNION

Trade Unions at all levels are engaged in consultation over the proposals included in this report.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The information in this report is relevant to all Wards in the area.



8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

None

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Keighley Area Committee notes the approach to highway weed spraying in the Keighley constituency.

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Table highlighting the programme of works

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

