

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee – 31  
January 2018

**Subject:** Alternate methods of weed control being introduced into the  
grounds management system and the comparative cost of  
reducing the dependency of Glyphosate within Manchester  
Parks

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive Growth and Neighbourhoods

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**Summary**

This report provides the update requested by the Committee at the meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018 regarding the use of Glyphosate to control weeds in parks and open spaces.

**Recommendations**

That the Neighbourhoods and Environment Scrutiny Committee notes the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

None

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 Weed spraying, using Glyphosate, is undertaken by Grounds Maintenance operatives and subcontractors of the street cleansing and waste collection contractor. Spraying is undertaken in parks, cemeteries, open spaces and streets either once or twice a year depending on the requirements. Glyphosate based products are highly effective at controlling weeds and absorbs in to soil, residues are expected to generally be immobile in soil so ground and surface water pollution is limited. Glyphosate can be used in or near watercourses providing an agreement is given from the Environment Agency.
- 1.2 In November 2017 after much debate the European Union voted to extend the license of Glyphosate an ingredient used in weed killer for a further five years.
- 1.3 This report considers the usage of Glyphosate within Manchester's parks and gardens and identifies those service adjustments being actioned to reduce the reliance on chemical weed control moving forward.
- 1.4 The costs of treating weeds in other parts of the public realm, such as grass verges, is difficult to ascertain with any degree of accuracy and as such is not included within this analysis.

## **2.0 Glyphosate**

- 2.1 Glyphosate is used on the basis that it has one of the broadest spectrums of control, killing many different weed species effectively and systemically. It is absorbed by leaves and moves inside the plant to growing points, roots, and other propagating structures. This systemic effect increases the ability to kill annual and perennial weeds as well as relatively large and woody plants.
- 2.2 In 2017 as part of the trial of reducing the dependency on Glyphosate within Manchester parks use was further restricted with general treatments being limited to fence-lines, path edges and obstacles one meter in from the edge of paths. With alternative treatments being used in other areas where Glyphosate and other chemicals were previously used.

## **3.0 Alternative Weed Treatments**

- 3.1 Using information gained from previous small scale alternate use trials, alternative weed control measures were introduced at a number of facilities in 2017.
  - Organic herbicides were used exclusively at 4 parks, the largest being Alexandra Park. There were two treatments undertaken during the growing season. The results were positive with sufficient die back on both grasses and weeds. It is proposed to continue the trial in 2018.
  - Organic herbicides were also trialled on algae on hard standing areas, with limited success.

- Manual weed control methods and limited hand weeding were trialled as a replacement to the use of glyphosate. There were mixed results, dependant on the growing period and the type of weed involved. This is labour intensive and there was insufficient capacity within the existing teams to undertake a manual only approach to weed control.
- Low pressure Hot Water Lance. A trial was undertaken in a number of children's playgrounds in 2017, where a hot water low pressure lance was used to manage both weeds and algae. The trial results were better and more instantaneous during warmer and dryer weather. The trial was successful on annual weeds which died immediately, and both black and green algae as well as the notoriously problematic weed Mares Tale. There was minimal re-growth of the weeds and the hot lance had the added benefit of cleaning the safety surfaces. It is estimated that one full treatment would be required every two years. Additional spot treatments would be undertaken using organic herbicide should it be required.

3.2 It is planned to further extend the mixed approach to weed control to a wider range of parks across the city in 2018. The approach will be as follows:-

- The quantity of glyphosate used across all parks will be further reduced, and will be focused on the treatment of fence lines, and occasional spot treatments. Pathway encroachment will no longer be treated with Glyphosate, it is proposed to undertake a manual reduction with using new mechanical methods as part of the winter work programme. The manual winter reduction programme will then be measured to test if there is sufficient capacity within the teams to sustain this approach moving forward.
- An area based trial will be undertaken in Wythenshawe, whereby all of Wythenshawe's parks (excluding Wythenshawe and Hollyhedge Parks, which are subject to the invasive weed treatment programme for Japanese Knotweed) will no longer be treated with Glyphosate. A mixture of organic herbicides, hot water treatments and manual intervention will be undertaken in its place. Should this proposed approach fail for any reason during the trial there may be a requirement to undertake spot treatments using Glyphosate which will be recorded as part of the trial.
- Stop the use of Glyphosate in a number of small parks where the Friends are willing to support the removal of weeds or sufficient other tasks which enable the grounds maintenance resources to be redirected.
- Continue to use organic herbicides in those parks that were trialled in 2017.

- Introduce a number of additional parks into the organic only herbicide trial
- Use hot water control methods to all fixed equipment hard standing children's playgrounds.

#### **4.0 Financial Impact**

- 4.1 Overall the adjustment to service delivery will result in an increase in costs of an estimated £23k. Employing the hot water lance programme to Manchester fixed equipment playgrounds will increase cost by estimated £15k and the use of organic herbicides will further increase costs £16k. These costs will be partially offset by the reduction in the use of Glyphosate which will save an estimated £8k.
- 4.2 The Grounds Maintenance service is expected to absorb these cost pressures in 2018/19 through the identification of other efficiencies. However there is no additional resources available within the service to further reduce the use of Glyphosate at this time.

#### **5.0 Summary**

- 5.1 It is proposed to continue to further reduce the reliance on the use of Glyphosate within parks by incrementally introducing alternative methods of control within a wider mixed delivery approach.
- 5.2 As part of the trial a total of 23 parks city wide will no longer be subject to a chemical weed treatment programme in 2018/19.
- 5.3 The wider trial area will continue to be monitored to both test the general degradation and robustness of the weeds and to determine the appearance of the areas treated to assess the potential long term viability of continuing a programme of alternative treatment within existing resources.