



REPORT TO: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024

SUBJECT: BUDGET FOR EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES – PHASING OUT THE USE OF GLYPHOSATE BY 2025

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, AND FINANCE)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To ask the Committee to consider options relating to the Council's current methods of weed control and phasing out the use of Glyphosate, as requested by this Committee on 7 February 2023.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (F) (11) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to exercising functions in relation to parks, open spaces and woodland management and maintenance.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) note the contents and wider context of the report;**
- (ii) consider whether to pursue option 1 or option 2 at para 3.8;**
- (iii) If option 2 is preferred:**
 - a. consider whether the project specification in the appendix meets the requirements of the Committee and;**
 - b. if the specification is agreed, agree to recommend to Full Council that an allocation of a budget of £50k from reserves is approved, to fund external consultancy services to review the Council's current weed control methods and detail, through a report and costed action plan, how the Council can phase out the use of Glyphosate by 2025.**

3. **BACKGROUND**

3.1 On 7 February 2023, this Committee considered a [report](#) on the Use of Glyphosate (weed killer) in open spaces (Paragraph 14 of the minute refers) and agreed to:

- note that, although there are public concerns, Glyphosate is legally approved for use in Great Britain until December 2025 and that it continues to be the most cost effective and efficient method of managing weeds;
- approve the proposals to reduce the use of Glyphosate through a managed approach in certain settings as outlined in the report, and note that, whilst these can be introduced without additional cost, a greater presence of weeds and longer vegetation would need to be accepted and tolerated within the environment;
- note that Officers will continue to monitor the cost and effectiveness of alternative approaches of weed control;

An agreed amendment to the recommendations requested:

- **that a further report be brought to a future meeting of this Committee detailing how Glyphosate will be phased out by 2025.**

3.2 The Head of Environmental and Commercial Services advised the Committee that a budget would be required to resource the preparation of a report detailing how Glyphosate will be phased out by 2025, and that approval would need to be sought from Full Council given that there is no allocated budget to do this nor any internal capacity or expertise to undertake such a study.

3.3 The proposed scope of external services is outlined at **APPENDIX A**. Whilst the cost for this service will not be known until a tender is produced and published to the external market to achieve best value, it is estimated that a budget of £50k would be required to deliver this scope of work. This is based on previous scopes of work issued by both this Council and other authorities.

3.4 Following the report to this Committee on 7 February 2023 the Open Spaces team amended its working practices throughout the spring/summer of 2023 to reduce the amount of glyphosate used on Council open spaces. This resulted in a reduction of 993.5 litres equating to a 49% reduction. The alternative practices included:

- ceasing application of glyphosate around the base of trees;
- ceasing application of glyphosate around obstacles (benches, signs);
- ceasing application in play areas where grass matting and rubber crumb surfacing are installed.

3.5 As reported to this Committee on 7 February 2023 there are a number of alternatives to the use of herbicides containing glyphosate including: thermal controls (flame, hot water and/or foam), acetic acid (active ingredient in vinegar), manual controls (hand, tool or machinery removal), fatty acids

(pelargonic acid) and electricity. As previously reported each alternative method has their pros and cons with none currently considered suitable as a direct cost effective or efficacious replacement for glyphosate based herbicides.

3.6 APSE advice is that the use of alternatives to Glyphosate will add to revenue costs for weed control (including labour, materials, vehicles, and fuel), with many requiring capital investment. Officers continue to monitor experiences of other local authorities through the APSE member network and trade journals and have noted to date that in general others have found alternatives to be less effective, more costly and labour intensive, and that alternative methods of control could increase labour and costs manifold.

3.7 As reported to this Committee on 7 February 2023 the Open Space team does not have the capacity, information or full knowledge of the alternatives to glyphosate in order to produce an action plan for removing the use of glyphosate. The services of an external consultant are therefore required to produce a developed and fully costed action plan. The plan would include addressing the following headline areas:

- review the Councils current methods of weed control;
- use of Herbicides with Glyphosate;
- review of potential alternatives to replace the use of herbicides;
- develop and cost an integrated weed management action plan for Moray detailing how it can phase out the use of Glyphosate by 2025.

3.8 Giving consideration to the information contained within this report Committee has a number of options available with regards how to progress with regards reducing the use of glyphosate. The options are detailed below:

- Option 1: Recognise the significant progress that has been made with regards reducing the usage of glyphosate, and that there are challenges with making further progress, and as such defer further action until November 2024 to review the regulatory landscape (ie to see whether there is the potential for an extension to licensed use beyond 2025 as is now the case in Europe) and progress made by other organisations which will inform our working practices, costs to determine our own pathway to cease use and decision making. In the intervening period Officers will continue to work proactively across its partner networks to keep abreast of alternative methods and encourage collaboration on the alternative solutions.
- Option 2: Make further progress on a costed action plan, recognising the resourcing and expertise issues previously set out to Committee, and approve the commissioning of an external provider to produce fully developed and costed action plan for review by Committee

4. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

Enhancing biodiversity delivers a wide range of social and environmental benefits that will support corporate and community planning objectives.

Environment – looking after the world we live in to protect it for the future. We want to encourage everyone to take small steps to preserve and protect our environment as we go about our daily activities

(b) Policy and Legal

The Council's Open Space Strategy aims to ensure public open spaces in Moray are of sufficient quality and distribution to meet the needs of local communities and local biodiversity.

There are no direct legal implications. Glyphosate is currently legally approved for use in Great Britain

(c) Financial implications

There is currently no budget allocated or available to procure external services to undertake this work. It is currently estimated that a budget of £50k is needed to deliver this scope of work.

When the Council approved the budget for 2023/24 on 1 March 2023 (paragraph 5 of the Minute refers) it balanced only by using reserves and one-off financial flexibilities. The indicative 3 year budget showed a likely requirement to continue to make savings in the order of £20 million in the next two years. All financial decisions must be made in this context and only essential additional expenditure should be agreed in the course of the year. In making this determination the committee should consider whether the financial risk to the Council of incurring additional expenditure outweighs the risk to the Council of not incurring that expenditure, as set out in the risk section below and whether a decision on funding could reasonably be deferred until the budget for future years is approved.

It is anticipated that there will also be an on-going budget pressure from additional cost of alternative methods of weed control but this will be dependent on the options developed by the consultant, if approved.

(d) Risk Implications

Given increasing public concerns over the use of Glyphosate to control weeds in open spaces there is a potential reputational risk to not considering further approaches to reduce or eliminate its use. There is however a risk to biodiversity by phasing out glyphosate too soon if there is no effective alternative for control of invasive non-native species

The Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) have advised local authorities that alternative methods of weed control are more expensive and sometimes not as effective than the current method of control and therefore there is a risk that additional revenue and capital budgets for

labour, plant and equipment will be required to implement the costed action plan resulting from this scope of work, and to achieve the objective of phasing out the use of Glyphosate by December 2025.

In terms of option 1, there is a risk that the Councils implementation of alternative working practices from December 2025 could be delayed, were it necessary to procure equipment to facilitate the alternative working methods which have extended lead times for delivery. However, at this stage this risk cannot be quantified.

If an extension to licensed use is granted, then spend in terms of option 2 would be discretionary rather than essential at this point. Should Moray not then cease all use by December 2025 on a discretionary basis, there is a risk that products and practices have moved on by the revised statutory deadline such that the approach per the specification would then require further review.

(e) Staffing Implications

There is no available staff capacity or budget to research or adopt alternative methods of control.

(f) Property

Weed control around fixed infrastructure and buildings is currently in place to help reduce damage to infrastructure.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

The recently agreed reductions in the use of Glyphosate helps to support increasing biodiversity and contribute to community health and wellbeing by reducing inequalities of access to nature.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

Reduction in the use of herbicides including Glyphosate support mitigation of, and adaptation to, the climate and biodiversity crisis. The Council has recognised the biodiversity crisis through the Climate Change Strategy, Nature Emergency, and its support of the Edinburgh Declaration on Biodiversity. The negative impact of glyphosate is particularly relevant to pollinators, especially bees, which are under a number of growing pressures and the resulting pollinator decline will have risks to human food systems. Flowering 'weeds' are an important food source for pollinators which in turn hold up human food systems and much more, so there is benefit from leaving them to grow wherever possible. Therefore, attempts to reduce the use of glyphosate should be supported. However it is important to acknowledge the role glyphosate plays in managing invasive non-native species (INNS) – particularly Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed. A balance needs to be struck as INNS have significant negative effect on biodiversity which is likely to worsen with climate change. The costs of dealing with INNS are currently £343 million per year in Scotland alone. Properly applied, glyphosate is one of the few really effective way to treat these plants.

(i) Consultations

Depute Chief Executive (Economy, Environment and Finance), Head of Environmental & Commercial Services, Principal Climate Change Strategy Officer, Legal Services Manager, Chief Financial Officer, Committee Services Officer (L Rowan), Head of Housing and Property, Roads Maintenance Manager and Equal Opportunities Officer have been consulted and comments received have been incorporated into the report.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Environmental Protection Service does not have an allocated budget or resource to review the Council's current weed control methods and detail how the Council can phase out the use of Glyphosate by 2025 as requested by the this Committee on 7 February 2023.**
- 5.2 An estimated budget of £50k would need to be approved from reserves to procure external professional services to undertake this action.**
- 5.3 Alternative methods of weed control are anticipated to be more expensive and would therefore likely require a future increase in revenue and capital budgets to implement the findings from this scope of work.**
- 5.4 Against this background, there may be benefits in waiting for larger better resourced authorities to lead developments in response to the 2025 deadline from which Moray could learn, as well as deferring non-essential spend until it is clear whether the UK will follow Europe in extending licensed use.**

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Background Papers: [Use of Glyphosate to Control Weeds in Open Space Report](#)

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