

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

6 OCTOBER 2020

Title:

Pesticide Policy and Action Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Townsend, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, Leisure and Dunsfold Park

Head of Service: Kelvin Mills, Head of Commercial Services

Key decision: Yes

Access: Public

1. Purpose and summary

- 1.1 The phasing out of the use of pesticides on Council-owned land is an objective within the council's draft Climate Emergency Action Plan. The draft Pesticides Policy and action plan (attached as Annexe 1) aims to start the process of reducing pesticide usage by the council wherever possible with the ambition of being pesticide free in three years.
- 1.2 This report asks the Executive to recommend the Pesticides Policy to Council for approval, whilst recognising the potential financial and reputational implications in delivering this Policy and action plan.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive recommends the Pesticides Policy and action plan for adoption by the Council, and to note the following:
- 2.2 The Pesticides Policy and action plan will be a living document and following adoption, will be amended and updated, to reflect ongoing changes in legislation, industry practices relating to advances in technology and product availability in respect of alternatives to pesticides.

3. Reason for the recommendation

To reduce and phase out pesticide usage by the Council within the borough.

4. Background

- 4.1 There is a growing movement within society to end the use of pesticides. This has been triggered by the growing public concern over the possible health effects of exposure to pesticides and the effects that pesticide use is having on our environment and wildlife. The decline of bees and pollinators, bird species and mammals have all been linked to pesticide use.

- 4.2 The level of public attention towards pesticides has increased significantly in recent years, due to the debate over the safety of the most widely used amenity herbicide, Glyphosate. The World Health Organisation concluded in 2015 that Glyphosate was probably carcinogenic, in addition to this, the chemical is also linked to a number of other health concerns in humans and animals with direct and indirect impacts on our environment and biodiversity in general
- 4.3 There are however counter claims regarding Glyphosates safety, citing inconclusive evidence being gained from some studies, as the debate over its safety continues, it is expected further studies will be undertaken.
- 4.4 Whilst there is no clear outcome in this regard, many cities and areas in Europe and elsewhere in the world have now banned the use of pesticides, in particular Glyphosate. Indeed some of these bans have been in place over several decades.
- 4.5 In the UK, there are several Councils who are leading the way in pesticide reduction and pledging the banning of Glyphosate and other pesticides. For example, Lewes, Eastbourne, Brighton & Hove Councils and Glastonbury Town Council.
- 4.6 Public awareness has hugely increased and many are now calling for a more precautionary approach to be taken and for the use of pesticides, notably Glyphosate to be phased out and ceased.
- 4.7 Recently a petition was submitted to the Council regarding its use of pesticides and the impact it has on bees. The petition called for the stopping of pesticide usage by the Council in the general Farnham area.
- 4.8 It is a realistic possibility that the Council may receive further petition submissions in the future as public concern grows over the fear of the effects of pesticide usage on human health and the environment.
- 4.9 The Council has also received several individual complaints, enquiries and requests to stop spraying pesticides from concerned local residents and resident groups over the spraying of pesticides on land or near to their homes, it is expected that these will increase over time as public concern continues to grow.
- 4.10 Whilst the Council does not presently have a policy regarding the use and application of pesticides within the borough, the use of pesticides is already controlled and there are various legislative requirements we must adhere to as an organisation.
- 4.11 The phasing out of the use of pesticides on Council-owned land is also in line with the council's Climate Emergency Action Plan Feb 2020. The Pesticides Policy with action plan is attached as Annexe 1.
- 4.12 We have already initiated pesticide free playgrounds this year and are about to embark on an initial pesticide free trial on selected Surrey County Council highway areas within the four wards of: Cranleigh West, Godalming Charterhouse, Farnham Hale and Heath End and Haslemere Critchmere and

Shottermill.

5. Relationship to the Corporate Strategy and Service Plan

This report relates to the following sections of the Council's Corporate Strategy:

- 5.1 Vision 4 - Promote and sustain high quality public services accessible for all, including sports, leisure, arts, culture and open spaces
- 5.2 Vision 8 - Promote and sustain a sense of responsibility for our environment, promoting biodiversity and protecting our planet

This report relates to the following section of the Council's service plan;

- 5.3 Outcome 18 – Reduce and phase out pesticide usage by the Council

6. Implications of decision

6.1 Resource (Finance, procurement, staffing, IT)

- 6.1.1 An initial piece of work was undertaken with our appointed contractor, to outline the potential costs involved with phasing out pesticide usage on key areas, such as SCC highways, housing estates, senior living areas and parks in the grounds maintenance contract. This piece of work identified significant costs for the delivery of pesticide-free weed control in a year at the same level of standard. Delivery of this was estimated to be cost prohibitive.
- 6.1.2 Following completion of the pesticide-free trial on SCC highway areas, we will be in a position to assess more accurately the cost implications. It is expected that further trials of products and methods will need to be conducted through successive years to provide a robust evidence base for a fully informed decision to be made.
- 6.1.3 To reduce the financial impacts of moving away from using pesticides, consideration could be given to reducing the level of weed control expected in the borough. Delivering the current standard of control with the currently available products on the market will be costly.
- 6.1.4 Other areas of significance where the Council currently uses pesticides to control invasive species, sapling and stump re-growth are the management of the ecologically important Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI) heathland sites in the borough. Presently our partner agency Natural England who funds the Higher Level Stewardship and Countryside Stewardship schemes we deliver on SSSI sites, specifically prescribes the use of pesticides to control vegetation in the funding agreements. The full financial and service impacts of alternatives to pesticides are being explored and we will work with Natural England to seek approval for alternative methods of control if they are deemed suitable.
- 6.1.5 Currently, there is no allocated budget for delivering alternative methods of weed control. The proposed trials of alternative methods and reducing levels of weed control treatment will provide the evidence base to support future requests for additional budget which may be required to implement the action plan in full and

is dependent on the preferred method chosen. Should a budget increase be required this will impact on the Council's current medium term budget deficit.

- 6.1.6 Whilst initial costs can exceed the allocated budget, there is evidence that after the initial outlay the costs can reduce over time to equal or even lower than a traditional chemical treatment regime.
- 6.1.7 There are also positive resource implications resulting from a change of management in relation to weed control. For example, within the grounds maintenance contract, should there be less focus on a high level of weed control, staffing resources could potentially be used to provide service improvements in other areas of the contract. There are also the benefits of a pesticide free borough that should be taken into consideration and are not quantifiable in monetary terms.
- 6.1.8 In order to eliminate pesticides it is recommended that a phased approach be adopted as suggested in the Pesticides Policy action plan over a specified number of years. The costs of delivery could then be spread over this time period. The costs of alternatives to pesticides will likely reduce in time, as more products become available and the market grows due to increasing demand.
- 6.1.9 Further resources may initially be required to deliver a communications plan to keep our residents fully informed about the Councils plan to reduce and eliminate pesticides.

6.2 Risk management

- 6.2.1 Significant changes made to the contract specification in a short timescale, as referred to above, could present a legal risk in respect of the Council's grounds maintenance contract. A phased approach could help to mitigate this risk. The Legal Services team's view on the level of risk is set out in the Legal Implications section, below.
- 6.2.2 If some of the financial implications associated with pesticide alternatives prove to be higher than anticipated, the Council could consider altering its expectations in relation to the setting of specifications for service delivery.
- 6.2.3 For instance, the Council could consider the position that there would be an increased presence of weeds throughout the year on footways, roads and sites in general. This may lead to a rise in complaints from the public and Councillors over the increase in 'so called' weeds species in the borough, conversely, with the benefit of an appropriate communications campaign, it may also receive a considerable amount of support.
- 6.2.4 There is also the potential for an increase in pests and diseases, or, more occurrences of infestations due to a reduced control. Some of the alternative methods of control could increase the cost to the Council when eliminating pesticides.
- 6.2.5 Mitigation measures could include borough wide communications to residents on the changes and impacts associated with the implementing the Pesticides Policy, increasing frequencies of alternative control measures and continually exploring

the alternatives to pesticides as they become available.

6.3 Legal

6.3.1 The Council has already secured a clear contractual commitment from its grounds maintenance contractor to gradually reduce its use of pesticides. There is potential for a procurement challenge in relation to the grounds maintenance contract should the Council wish to implement the phasing out of pesticides more rapidly than envisaged, as this would require a significant change to the contract specification. However, officers consider that such a challenge would have no legal basis as the reduction of pesticide use is anticipated within the contract. The risk of challenge diminishes in time and would likely be low risk in any event.

6.4 Equality, diversity and inclusion

6.4.1 There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. Equality impact assessments are carried out when necessary across the council to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010.

6.5 Climate emergency declaration

6.5.1 This report helps contributes towards the council's climate emergency objectives, through the promotion of a Pesticides Policy that seeks to eliminate the use of pesticides wherever possible within the borough.

6.5.2 There are positive indicators for resident's health, plant life, aquatic life, pollinators and a general increase in biodiversity.

7. Consultation and engagement

7.1 The draft Policy has been scrutinised at the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 24 June 2020. The Committee welcomed the policy and asked that the Town and Parish councils were fully consulted on the proposals as it was important for there to be full 'buy-in' from all partners.

8. Other options considered

8.1 Do nothing has been considered but discounted as it does not achieve any reduction or phasing out of pesticide usage and the associated positive benefits.

9. Governance journey

9.1 Executive, 6 October 2020; Council, 20 October 2020.

Annexes:

Annexe 1. Pesticides Policy and Action Plan

Background Papers

There are no background papers, as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972).

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