

Report to Scrutiny Panel

Name of Scrutiny Panel	Communities	
Meeting Date	22 nd October 2015	
Subject	Wildflower Planting and Weed Control Policies – Detailed Review	
Wards Affected	All	
Report of	Scrutiny Support Officer	
Type of Item (please tick✓)	Review existing policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Development of new policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Performance management (inc. financial)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Briefing (inc. potential areas for scrutiny)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Statutory consultation	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Council request	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Cabinet request	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Member request for scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why is it coming here?
Report back on the findings of a detailed review

What are the key points?
The report includes the findings of panel members on both issues and draws conclusions which may form the basis of panel recommendations.

Possible courses of action
The panel may wish to make recommendations based on the findings of the review

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Should this report be exempt?
No

Report to Scrutiny Panel

1. Background

Following representation from a number of constituents, Councillor Dave Young raised the issues of both wildflower planting and the council's methods of weed control at the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 16th July, 2015. The panel agreed to set up a detailed review to look at both issues.

The Review Objectives were:

- To examine the Council's current policy and practices regarding the planting of wildflowers on verges and in open spaces.
- To consider the economic and social impacts of wildflower planting, including community engagement.
- To examine the Council's current policy and practices, and those of key partners, regarding the control of weeds, taking into account recent reports from WHO IARC, APSE and TUC amongst others.
- To consider the economic, social and health implications of alternative options.

Councillors Thompson, D. Young and Greenwood agreed to undertake the review. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, Councillor Thompson was unable to attend the two meetings held as part of the review.

2. Main issues for Scrutiny

As well as background Research, Members met with Amanda Firth, Safer, Cleaner, Greener Manager, and Mark Dempsey, Contract Manager. Mark had prepared some informative presentations, which are attached as Appendices to this report. The discussions divided themselves into separate areas of wild flower planting and weed control, and this report will mirror those discussions.

Findings:

Wild flowers

Generally speaking, the public response to wild flower planting is very positive, although due to the different maintenance requirements some plants can appear straggly toward the end of their flowering cycle. However, the reduced maintenance regime represents a financial and also aesthetic benefit of wild flower planting.

Species and site selection are very important. Some areas suit meadow-style planting, whereas more shaded areas benefit from planting in smaller pockets. It's important to recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate.

There are excellent opportunities for community involvement, whether that be education projects, community seed-planting or even local farmers cutting back swathes after flowering and keeping the resultant hay. There could also be the possibility of “Friends” organisations or other community groups being enabled to make bids for funding to buy seeds.

In other parts of the country schemes have used different mediums to grow wild flowers in, such recycled building material. This could provide opportunities in urban areas where open land is scarce.

Compared to standard verge and open space maintenance, wild flower planting has a higher seed cost, but a lower maintenance cost. We have trained apprentices to harvest seeds from the previous year’s crop, which helps to reduce costs.

The best way to ensure a successful crop of wild flowers is by thorough site clearance and preparation prior to sowing. This is usually done by spraying with Glyphosate, as other measures such as flame guns are not effective against weeds such as dandelions.

Further information is included at Appendix 1 of this report

Weed Control

We currently spray weeds using Glyphosate (commonly known as “Round Up”). This is neonicotinoid, which that it does not kill bees, which are vital for our environment.

There have been some concerns nationally and internationally about the potential impacts of using Glyphosate, but the Chemicals Regulation Directorate of Health and Safety Executive England are content for it to be used. It is covered by COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health), has no aroma and dissipates quickly.

Alternatives include growth regulators, which are even more tightly regulated by COSHH, or brushing, strimming or steaming. These last three options give some short term benefits but are not longer term solutions and not appropriate in all situations. Insecticides would represent a far greater risk than Glyphosate.

Further information is included at Appendix 2 of this report.

3. Conclusions

With regard to wild flower planting, members of the review feel this is something which should be encouraged wherever possible, due to the obvious benefits it brings.

Whilst having some reservations about the use of weed killers per se, members of the review feel that, at this time, the use of Glyphosate by the Council is a reasonable element of overall weed control policy. However, they would like to undertake further research, specifically around looking at alternatives which may be being employed by other local authorities.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Wildflower planting schemes and Alternative Grass Maintenance

Appendix 2 - Weed Control in Calderdale: An Integrated Approach with Common sense, Responsible and reasoned methodology

5. Background Documents

- IARC Monographs Volume 112: evaluation of five organophosphate insecticides and herbicides (World Health Organisation, 20 March 2015)
- Glyphosate Advice for workplace representatives (TUC, May 2015)
- The Need for Integrated Weed Control (APSE Briefing 15-33)
- Best Practice Guidance Notes for Integrated and Non-chemical Amenity Hard Surface Weed Control (DEFRA, February 2015)

6. Documents available for inspection at

Halifax Town Hall, Crossley Street, Halifax, HX1 1UJ