

SUBJECT:	Weed Spraying Trial using our Sweepers
REPORT OF:	Environment Portfolio Holder Cllr Luisa Sullivan
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Head of Environment Chris Marchant
REPORT AUTHOR	Contract Manager Elizabeth Cullen
WARD/S AFFECTED	All

1. Purpose of Report

This report contains information about a trial to spray weeds at the kerbside using new equipment retrofitted to our existing large road sweeper.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Members note that weed spraying equipment will be fitted on a trial basis on one sweeper with a view to expanding it if weeds are visually reduced, the sample roads look cleaner and the ongoing costs are reasonably within the actual and estimated figures outlined in this report.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 That Members are aware of the aims of a trial to see whether we can improve the visual appearance of the kerb edge, reduce trapped litter, improve the efficiency of the road sweeping process and ultimately reduce detritus entering gulleys.

3. Content of Report

3.1 The spraying of weeds along highway verges is a County Council function which has in recent years been undertaken by companies subcontracted by Transport for Buckinghamshire. The budget for this has always been low and this has been reflected in the outcome achieved, to the point where the service has now been abandoned to make savings and the relevant policy changed to reflect this.

3.2 This impacts on the district council's street cleansing services and in the general appearance of the district. SBDC's contractor, Biffa Municipal Plc, sweeps all kerbed road edges on frequencies commensurate with need, location and accessibility. Established plants at the highway edge or above the kerb are too strong or inaccessible to be removed by the sweeper brushes (even the twisted steel cable variety), and can look unsightly and trap litter /detritus. The trapped detritus inevitably

gets washed into the gullies which with reduced emptying /maintenance can cause local flooding.

3.3 Over the years several unsuccessful attempts have been made at Officer and Member level to open discussions about assisting BCC with this function on the Highway Authority's behalf using our road sweepers. The road sweeper would be fitted with a spray bar at the rear so it can sweep and then spray the kerb edge with targeted weed killer. BCC will still have to deal with footway back edge.

3.4 The District Council has one large road sweeper (15t) and a small sweeper (7.5t).

3.5 The latest discussions have revealed that there is now support for SBDC helping BCC with this matter on a trial basis using the large sweeper only. This would incur the following one off and ongoing firm and estimated costs:

Equipment and Fitting	£3,000
Training (£500pp)	£1,000
Herbicide*	£2,000/yr est
Servicing costs	£400/yr

* Estimated herbicide costs based upon an estimate of Council's usage

3.6 It is not possible to lease or hire the equipment, so the basis of the trial would be to monitor effectiveness on one sweeper with a view to either purchasing equipment for the other one, continuing with the one sweeper until the end of the contract, or abandoning it altogether. Prior to commencement of a 12 month trial, photographs will be taken of sample roads for comparison 3, 6 and 12 months later.

3.7 Aside from Zone One areas (High Streets), other roads are swept on varying frequencies with most on a 12 week schedule. Most can be swept by either sweeper, but some roads are better suited to either the large or small one. With the spray equipment only fitted to the large sweeper, the expectation of the success of this trial needs to recognise this. The cost of doubling the trial to both sweepers would be roughly double the above total. A request to Bucks CC to fund part of the trial, such as training or herbicide, has been made and declined.

3.8 The lead in time is 1-2 months, although the manufacturer has recommended February 2018 as the best time to fit the equipment. The sweeper will be off the road for 2 days for the equipment to be installed. The cost of this can be met within current capital and revenue budgets.

4. Consultation

- 4.1 The Highways authority has raised concern over continuous spraying, spraying before rainfall (both are not recommended), and damage to highways when dead weeds are removed. The equipment that has been selected includes a control panel in the cab which the driver can use to turn the spray arm on and off, and even select the spray width. The spray arm, which is fitted to the rear of the vehicle, can be manually positioned to target areas of growth. As we would be able to spray year round rather than in the few weeks selected by a subcontractor, we can choose to spray when rain is not forecast. The current practice of lightly spraying with water to control dust during sweeping operations is apparently not enough to impede the effectiveness of the herbicide.
- 4.2 We would probably need to use a strong metal brush to remove dead growth which could damage delicate highway edges – BCC will have to accept this risk and confirm in writing they will accept it. However, it is envisaged that this brush would only need to be used once or twice and once weeds have been removed the usual poly propylene brush head can be used and further weeds kept under control with the herbicide. The herbicide to be used would be approved by BCC meeting the restrictions imposed by the Environment Agency for such matters and be designed to minimise impact on wildlife such as bees.

5. Options

- 5.1 Although the one off costs are modest and achievable within current budgets, the ongoing costs of taking over what has to date been a Highways Authority function in the long term will need to be included in the next waste contract.
- 5.2 Not only will the visual success of the trial need to be monitored; the costs will need to be too as the herbicide cost is at this stage an estimate.

6. Corporate Implications

Financial – there are small but ongoing costs to the Council, plus further potential outlay should the trial be successful. These can be met within current budgets.

Legal – there will be a requirement for an indemnity to be provided by the County Council to cover the small chance of damage to road surfaces that may be incurred during removal of the weeds. It is worth noting that established weeds may have already weakened the road surface, making minor damage during removal more likely.

7. Links to Council Policy Objectives

This matter relates to the following council objectives -

- 7.1 Striving to conserve the environment and promote sustainability.
- 7.2 Council priority to continue to improve the street scene and cleanliness of the district as a key public services coordinator.

8. Next Step

8.1 The equipment is due to be fitted in February and pre-trial photos taken beforehand. It is proposed that the outcome of the trial is conveyed to Members in the form of an update report in circa March 2019 with verbal reports to the Portfolio Holder during the year.

Background Papers:	None
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