

Written responses to supplementary questions (ET2, NC4 and NC5) on minute 82:  
 Questions on Notice from Members of Council

<b>ET2 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner – Budget / Turnover Saving</b>	
<p><b>Question</b>            I note that the budget’s proposed “Turnover Saving” refers to a policy of intentionally leaving a gap between an employee’s departure and their replacement starting in post in order to save staffing costs. Do you agree that while not directly customer-facing, by inducing short-term labour shortages and inhibiting effective handover this is likely to have a negative effect on all council operations and therefore should be emphasised for reversal as future income permits?</p>	<p><b>Written Response</b>            In reality a one month drag on all posts that become vacant (on which this saving is based) is likely to take place anyway particularly as most appointees are on 3 months’ notice periods, so this is a sensible way of assessing likely spend based on likely levels of staff turnover. The councillor has the opportunity to propose an amendment to this measure if he is concerned about the impact. We will of course look at the progress on this and other savings as part of our regular budget monitoring, as well as any impacts upon services, and we always try to include insights from this process in future budget rounds.</p>
<p><b>Supplementary Question</b>            Considering that no corresponding turnover item appeared in the previous year’s budget, is it true that a manager who was able to ensure an overlap and an in-person handover would now be exceeding their budget, whereas previously this would have been the default situation and any unwanted break in between post holders would have constituted an unexpected windfall saving?</p>	<p><b>Written Response</b>            In reality, given usual 3 month notice periods is that it would seldom be the case that managers would be able to secure an overlap. The saving is therefore a way of better estimating budget spend, rather than an instruction to individual managers to delay filling posts. It is correct to say that in the absence of a turnover saving, turnover could lead to a budget underspend (though this would depend on arrangements made for cover).</p>

**NC4 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Glyphosate Usage**

<p><b>Question</b> How often did the Council (whether directly, or through ODS or other contractors) use glyphosate in 2020, 2021, 2022? Please provide figures for each year individually.</p>	<p><b>Written Response</b> 2020 – 3 times a year 2021 – 3 times a year 2022 – 3 times a year</p>
<p><b>Supplementary Question</b> Could you tell us the locations where glyphosate was used on these occasions in 2020, 2021 and 2022?</p>	<p><b>Written Response</b> ODS confirms that while its use of glyphosate is sparing and targeted, this nonetheless includes thousands of individual locations around the city over the past three years. The cost of gathering this information would surely outstrip its value. Glyphosate treatment is licenced by DEFRA and HSE. It is used predominantly to help maintain tennis courts and highway paths, and safe systems of works and risk assessments are in place for spraying.</p>

**NC5 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Glyphosate Alternatives**

**Question**

Has the Council trialled the use of any alternatives to glyphosate?

**Written Response**

ODS has carried out extensive research on this issue, and concluded, that at present, there are no practicable/financial viable alternatives. The current approach is therefore to use as little as possible and only where strictly necessary.

**Supplementary Question**

Could you provide details of the extensive research that ODS has carried out into alternatives and about what alternatives are dismissed as unviable? Other cities similar to Oxford have made alternatives work, so it would be interesting to know why we can't do that here.

**Written Response**

ODS' last detailed assessment of glyphosate against comparable alternatives to managing weeds on hard surfaces was pre-2020, and it would be appropriate to review this again, not least in the light of the fact that important EU regulators are due to come to a view about its continued licensing by the end of the year. The UK, as you know, has given weedkillers with glyphosate licence to be used till 2025 but may reconsider if the EU does come to a different view. In March we will be bringing a paper to Cabinet setting out the scope for developing a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford. Consideration of the use and impacts of herbicides and pesticides will naturally be part of the work proposed. ODS will in parallel undertake a further assessment of alternative processes for weed management. Taken together the information should provide new guidance for decisions on future use of glyphosate – balancing environmental impacts and costs.

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