

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 December 2023
Report of: Head of Corporate Strategy
Title of Report: Review of Glyphosate use by Oxford Direct Services to manage weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council.

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To make recommendations to Cabinet over the use of Glyphosate by Oxford Direct Services to control weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman Cabinet Members for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies; Councillor Anna Railton (Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice).
Corporate Priority:	Pursue a zero carbon Oxford; Well-run Council
Policy Framework:	Corporate Strategy 2020 -2024

Recommendations:
That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Approve that the Council continues to use Glyphosate for its current limited purposes with this position kept under periodic review until such point as Government changes its advice on use of this herbicide, or another viable, economic and effective treatment emerges; and
2. Approve that the usage of Glyphosate to manage weed intrusion in paved surfaces is delivered uniformly across the city to meet needs.

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Alternative weed treatment review August 2023

Introduction and background

1. Oxford Direct Services (ODS) Streetscene on behalf of Oxford City Council uses Glyphosate (specifically Round Up) - a non-selective, systematic herbicide that is the active substance in many generally available weed killers - to control weeds on highways and streets and other paved areas across the city.
2. A UK ban on the chemical had been set to come into effect on 15 December 2022, aligned with the decision from the European Commission. However, with the UK leaving the EU following Brexit, Britain now makes its own regulatory decisions. Glyphosate remains approved for use in the UK.
3. Following a decision by some councils in England to end the use of Glyphosate, in August 2023 a review was undertaken by the ODS Parks and Opens Spaces team, setting out how Glyphosate is used in Oxford and looked in detail at the cost and effectiveness of alternative weed treatments being trialled in some other council areas across the UK.
4. The review found that significant care was taken in the way that Glyphosate is used by ODS in Oxford to minimise any negative impacts on wider biodiversity. It also found that all of the alternative weed treatments had a higher cost to apply and none had demonstrated the level of effectiveness of Glyphosate.
5. In undertaking the research, it also emerged that Glyphosate is not being used in a small number of locations around the city of Oxford following requests to ODS from some individual ward councillors and local resident groups. This somewhat arbitrary approach is not appropriate or justified.

Officer Recommendation

6. To continue with the tightly controlled application use Glyphosate for its current limited purposes to tackle weed penetration of paved surfaces and invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed, in line with current DEFRA and Environment Agency guidance.
7. This position should be kept under periodic review until such point Government changes its advice on use of this herbicide, or another viable, economic and effective treatment emerges.
8. Furthermore, officers also recommend that the usage of Glyphosate to manage weed intrusion in paved surfaces is delivered uniformly across the city.

Financial implications

9. Alternative weed treatments had a higher cost to apply and none had demonstrated the level of effectiveness of Glyphosate.
10. There are no financial implications if the existing approach to managing weed intrusion is maintained. Adopting other approaches to Glyphosate would require a budget bid.

Legal issues

11. There are not legal issues. Glyphosate – a non-selective, systematic herbicide that remains approved for use in the UK.

Level of risk

12. There is no change in the level of risk from this report.
13. The continued careful management and targeted application of Glyphosate by ODS staff is not thought to create a significant risk to biodiversity or human health.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

14. Glyphosate is applied topically directly onto individual weeds rather than generally sprayed. It is not applied during windy conditions – due to the risk the chemical could impact other plants.
15. ODS staff using the chemical are trained in its use and wear appropriate PPE.
16. Glyphosate hasn't been used around trees, grass verges and in the city's parks and open spaces for the past decade.
17. There are a variety of studies indicating the use of glyphosate can impair navigation and learning by honeybees, and also alter their gut bacteria, as well as impairing collective thermoregulation in bumblebees.
18. The use of acetic acid created new risks to the insect population and to humans.

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Background Papers: None

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