Agenda Item

XXX Council



Subject: Becoming a pesticide-free borough / city / district

Date of Meeting: xxx

Report of: xxx Officer

Ward(s) affected: All

Contact Officer: xxx Email: xxx

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 To set out the case for going pesticide-free as a borough in order for an informed decision to be taken by the council. This is in line with council’s commitment to environmental improvement and improving public health, as set out in (insert relevant Council policy)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Cabinet Member / Committee decides that the borough /district / city will go pesticide-free.

2.2  That the Cabinet Member / Committee requires the Environment Director to bring to the next meeting a timetable for this, setting out the council’s current uses of pesticides, and in line with the re-letting of the contract for weed spraying.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Problem

3.1 Pesticides – including herbicides, insecticides and fungicides – are used in our borough to control a range of perceived problems including weeds and vermin. They are used in schools, parks, playgrounds, hospitals and on our streets. These are all areas used, on a daily basis, by our residents and visitors – and often by those most vulnerable to the adverse effects of pesticides: elderly people, young children and pregnant women.

3.2 Pesticide use can have serious human health impacts, harm biodiversity and contaminate water supplies. There is growing evidence that glyphosate - the most commonly-used “systemic” weed-killer - is a higher health risk than previously assumed, with growing understanding of the damages caused by other chemical weed killers and pesticides to health and the environment. Childhood health problems and diseases including childhood leukemia, Attention Deficit Hyper-activity Disorder, allergies, and endocrine and immune system disruption have been linked to increases in pesticide use.[[1]](#footnote-1)

3.3 In April 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer - part of the World Health Organisation - concluded that Glyphosate – the most widely used pesticide in our urban areas – is “probably carcinogenic to humans”. Other studies have linked glyphosate to birth defects and even the rise in antibiotic resistance.

3.4   Pesticide use has a negative effect on urban wildlife and has been identified as a contributory factor in the decline of hedgehogs, for example.

3.5 Finally, pesticides sprayed onto the hard surfaces in towns and cities rapidly run off into drains and sewers and can find their way into water supplies, the cost for removing pesticides from our water supplies runs into the £ millions per annum.

Going pesticide-free

3.6 Ending the use of pesticides in urban areas is becoming more common. Hundreds of villages, towns and cities around the world have reduced, and even in some cases banned, pesticide use in their areas. In France, for example, the use of all non-agricultural pesticides has been banned in public green spaces since January 2017. Large cities like Copenhagen, Paris, Rotterdam, Seattle and Tokyo all restrict or ban pesticide use in public spaces.

3.7 Public “pesticide-free” campaigns by residents across the UK are on the increase and several local authorities have already gone pesticide-free: Lewes, Hammersmith & Fulham, Glastonbury, with others set to follow suit.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 The Cabinet Member / Council has a duty to safeguard the well-being of the borough’s residents, as well as to its own staff. So it needs to take due regard of changes in risk and so consider a precautionary approach wherever possible.

4.2 One alternative option is to trial non-chemical and mechanical alternatives during a testing period, during the summer and to require officers to inform Members of the Committee as to which alternatives are being trialled and of the methodology.

This option is recommended in the short term in order to identify what alternative systems are available for weed and pest control across the town / borough, and allow the town / borough to make an informed choice once the specifics of efficacy, ease of use and cost implications have been assessed. It would be necessary to continue with the existing spray and treatment regime outside of trial areas so this is not the most precautionary approach but more a fact-finding exercise.

4.3 Another option is to go pesticide-free for almost all uses, but to retain very limited use of a systemic pesticide for Japanese Knotweed, a highly invasive plant which the authority is bound to control effectively by law on any sites where it occurs.

This option is recommended as it would meet the requirements of a precautionary approach of stopping the use of pesticides in order to protect residents and the environment from potentially harmful effects and it would allow the town / borough to meet its legal requirements for dealing with invasive plant species. However, it is essential that the least harmful method for invasive species eradication is adopted to be in line with a pesticide-free / reduction policy.

4.4 There is also an option to reduce the frequency of spraying - effectively tolerating more weeds and growth in pavements - and thus reducing both residents’ and staff exposure to pesticides. This would also have the advantage of reducing expenditure - or at least offsetting some of the increase that has come about due to longer growing seasons resulting from climate change.

This is not recommended at this time because it requires public support and education, and sends a mixed message about the reasons for going pesticide-free. It may be useful to consider a public consultation about elements of this in due course.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

5.1 The decision of this meeting / committee should be used to promote a dialogue with residents about the pesticide-free approach and to gauge support for this.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The reasons for going pesticide-free as a borough are sound and the council should begin this process as soon as possible.

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

7.1 The pesticide-free approach is broadly cost-neutral if a combination of alternatives is adopted. There is to date limited experience from other councils as this is a relatively new concept. But where systems have been trialled or adopted it has been seen that the costs are broadly in line with current pesticide regimes. We recommend that in the first instance an audit of current Council spending on pesticides, including herbicides, fungicides and insecticides is undertaken. We further recommend that contact is made with councils that have recently converted to pesticide free in order that we can assess their experiences and knowledge of costs.

Finance Officer Consulted:   
Date: ….

Legal Implications:

7.2 There are legal implications regarding the treatment and eradication of Japanese Knotweed and other invasive species. The Infrastructure Act 2015, for example, gives relevant agencies the authority to pass down a control order to landowners if they are not adequately controlling invasive species. This could have serious cost implications if the situation were to arise. We would recommend that systems such as stem injection are looked into as they provide a more environmentally sensitive approach to dealing with invasive species.

Equalities Implications:

7.1  There is evidence to suggest that the negative public health impacts of using pesticides has a disproportionate effect on some groups within our population (see para 3.1 above) and therefore going pesticide-free has positive implications for equalities in the borough.

Sustainability Implications:

7.2 There are positive sustainability implications arising from the report: improved public health and happiness; a reduction in environmental harm to wildlife; and an improvement in run-off pollution, reducing the energy-intensive need to strip pesticides out of water.

7.3 Any Other Significant Implications: None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

Documents in Members’ Rooms

Background Documents

Notes

1. See PAN Asia Pacific study: Poisoning our Future – Children and Pesticides study [http://www.panap.net/sites/default/files/Poisoning-Our-Future-Children-and-Pesticides.pdf](http://www.panap.net/sites/default/files/poisoning-our-future-children-and-pesticides.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)