

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Communities and Neighbourhoods Overview & Scrutiny
Committee - 8 February 2011

Subject: Weed Control and Treatment of Japanese Knotweed

Report of: Director of Neighbourhood Services

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the Councils weed control programme and how Japanese Knotweed is being addressed.

Recommendations

That the councils weed control programme be delivered by in house staff.

Financial Consequences for the Revenue Budget

The proposal has no implications for the City Council's revenue budget.

Financial Consequences for the Capital Budget

The proposal has no implications for the City Council's capital budget.

Wards Affected

All Manchester Wards.

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Background Documents

None

Implications for:

Anti poverty	Equal Opportunities	Environment	Employment
No	No	Yes	No

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 For the past 18 years the Councils weed control programme has been carried out by private contractors. In December 2008 following a competitive tender process a company called Environmental Husbandry were awarded the contract (which included cemeteries) replacing the previous company Weedfree.
- 1.2 Environmental Husbandry came with excellent references from other cities and the value of the contract (£308,000) was £100,000 less than their predecessor. In 2009 the service provided was acceptable but in 2010 this deteriorated significantly. On investigation it was our view that the company had overstretched itself with other contracts. The approach adopted was ad hoc and uncoordinated which meant parts of the city (for example alleyways) were missed. Moreover the company failed to rectify the situation quickly enough which resulted in us having to use some of our own staff to trim a number of alleyways.
- 1.3 In view of these failures we have made it clear to the incumbent supplier they are in breach of their contract and that we will not be taking up an option of a further extension.

2.0 Bringing the Service Back In House

- 2.1 The opportunity now exists to provide this service using our own staff that are already trained in the use of chemicals/pesticides etc alongside their existing roles. This means ownership of the service will rest with locally based operational teams in line with the council's programme for integrated service delivery at a neighbourhood level.

3.0 Provision of the Service

- 3.1 The contract will be for all weed removal along highways, footpaths (including alleyways) shrub beds and cemeteries, the budget provision being £305,000.
- 3.2 It is proposed that there will be three applications of weed killer during April/May (depending on rainfall) June/July and August/September. The service will be delivered by three area teams consisting of four staff in each Team made up of three pedestrian sprayers and one operative on a quad bike. There will be no incentive for the number of miles 'sprayed' in a day for our own staff and a mini tractor will also be used to cater for large paved areas and alleyways.
- 3.3 The three teams will be managed by one Operations Manager and will work in a coordinated way starting in the central areas spending approximately one and a half days in each ward. The service will be more flexible able to operate during the evenings in the case of arterial roads/central islands, early mornings (parks and cemeteries) and weekends (industrial areas and schools). Three mechanical sweepers will also be fitted with weed spraying equipment as a back up. The service could also be complemented by the joint

bulky/flytipping/passage clearance crews by equipping operatives with steel bristled brooms which can assist in removing some of the weed growth in alleyways at the same time.

4.0 Cost of Service

- 4.1 It is anticipated the total cost of the service in the first year will be £305,000 made up of £89,000 on consumables (mainly weed killer), labour costs of £136,000 and one off vehicle costs/storage costs of £80,000. In year 2 savings will accrue from plant and equipment. .

5.0 Non Cashable Added Value

- 5.1 The teams can be flexible on their start dates and if there is rain they can be diverted to other tasks such as cleaning or other grounds maintenance work. Many of the teams will have good local knowledge of their area and by being area based will be "incentivised" to deliver a better service for their neighbourhood. Resources currently spent on contract monitoring will also be freed up. We are also investigating whether the equipment can be adapted to carry out community focused gritting for example at doctors surgeries/old peoples homes. Opportunities may also arise to generate income in the future.

6.0 Japanese Knotweed

- 6.1 Although this does exist in the south of the city most of the reports of Japanese Knotweed relate to the North of Manchester. Last year approximately £17,400 was spent on these sites which included spraying and stem injection. In relation to the latter results from using this approach are the same as spraying in that unfortunately the Knotweed reactivates so our current policy is one of containment with 2/3 treatments per year with glyphosate.

7.0 Japanese Jumping Psyllid

- 7.1 These are insects which eat Japanese Knotweed and have been introduced in a controlled trial in Cornwall. The bugs are eating the plants but again the plant grows back after a period. The trial is ongoing and if it was to eventually prove successful it would not be until 2020 that a release of the Psyllid would be considered.

8. Private Gardens

- 8.1 Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to plant Japanese Knotweed or cause it to grow. However, it is not an offence to have it on your land and it is not a notifiable weed like "hogweed". Private land and gardens do not fall within the definition of wild. If however it is so bad that it detracts from the general look of an area it is possible to use legislation under the Town and Country Planning Act but this would be on a case by case basis.

9. Summary

- 9.1 We are in the process of arranging training for staff as well as procuring the machinery and chemicals for the weed killing programme. In relation to the latter advice from DEFRA and the European Union is to try to look to reduce reliance on chemical spraying in the future so we will be looking at innovative ways of doing this. For example by using mulching materials on existing shrub beds and when new shrub beds are planted introduce a membrane and gravel to prevent future weed growth.