

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 5  
NOVEMBER 2024, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)  
Councillors E Buckmaster, R Carter,  
N Clements, A Holt, C Horner, G McAndrew,  
S Nicholls, M Swainston, J Thomas,  
G Williams and D Woollcombe

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Crystall, S Hopewell and  
T Hoskin

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Committee Support Officer
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Jess Khanom-Metaman	- Head of Operations
Ian Sharratt	- The Leisure and Parks Development Manager

221 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors D Andrews, P Boylan, and N Cox. It was noted that Councillor A Holt was substituting for Councillor P Boylan.

222 MINUTES - 10 SEPTEMBER 2024

Councillor Buckmaster proposed, and Councillor Nicholls seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held

on 10 September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

223 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements.

224 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

225 THE USE OF GLYPHOSATE IN GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

The Executive Member for Wellbeing invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the report following the interest expressed by Members in scrutinising the Council's use of Glyphosate. She said that the use of Glyphosate had been a topic of debate for some years now, and this debate had been informed by chemical suppliers and the agriculture industry against a background of environmental groups raising concerns about its safety.

The Executive Member summarised the pros and cons of using Glyphosate. She said that the council previously explored the use of Glyphosate through a scrutiny process to tender the current grounds maintenance contract.

The Executive Member said that the new administration had expressed concerns and raised new questions. The scrutiny proposal form was submitted in September

asking about alternatives and how this herbicide was currently used by the ground's maintenance contractors.

The Executive Member said that the proposal recognised that some local authorities had found in favour of Glyphosate and others were against, and that some had reversed their policies. The proposal had emphasised that this was a topic of public interest and had asked for a greater depth of detail than what had been included in the previous summary bulletin circulated in May.

The Executive Member said that the report provided answers to the questions in the scrutiny proposal form and summarised why and how the council was currently using Glyphosate, offering reassurances about how this use was controlled. The report also explored how the council might choose a way forward taking into consideration the complexity of the debate, advice from our current contractors and the pragmatic issue of cost.

Councillor Buckmaster said that one or two boroughs in Hertfordshire had resolved not to use Glyphosate, but a vast number of councils in Hertfordshire did use Glyphosate on the basis that this substance was the most viable and effective method of control compared to other substances. He said that he believed using Glyphosate was the way forward for the foreseeable future, until a more viable cost effective and effective solution was introduced for treating weeds.

Councillor Carter said that Members needed to consider the use of Glyphosate not just from the point of view of financial cost. She referred to the ecological and biodiversity emergency declared by the council in July and commented on the findings of the 2023 state of nature report which had documented the fall in insect numbers, particularly pollinators on which humans were dependent for food suppliers.

Councillor Carter said that doing nothing was not really viable going forward due to the biodiversity emergency. She said that the increase in the use of pesticides and herbicides was about 20-fold since the 1980s, and there were different methods of controlling weeds. She acknowledged that it was a difficult problem to solve as councils had become dependent on these herbicides to manage the public expectation of no roadside vegetation.

Councillor Carter asked if the council blanket sprayed roadsides or whether spraying was limited to areas where there were weeds. She said that some councils were diluting the amount of pesticide that was being used and were keeping records of the amount of Glyphosate used.

The Leisure and Parks Development Manager said that Glyphosate worked on contact with weeds and was not blanket sprayed. He advised that lances were used in parks whereby chemical was only applied to active plants. He added that where a vehicle was used to control weeds on the highway, there could be a point where it was possible that a gap between active weeds might be sprayed. He would review this with the highway contractor.

Councillor Carter referred to the dilution of Glyphosate by Broxstowe Borough Council. The Leisure and Parks Development Manager confirmed that diluting the herbicide beyond the manufacturer's recommendation would make Glyphosate less effective and an additional application might then be necessary.

Councillor Carter said that many residents did not want Glyphosate used in parks so that dogs and children were not exposed to toxic herbicides. The Leisure and Parks Development Manager said that Glyphosate was used only minimally in the parks along fence lines and around obstacles. He advised that the spraying of footpath edges to prevent weeds encroaching onto paths was useful to

avoid irreversible damage to surfaces and the loss of footpaths.

Councillor Woolcombe talked about the known risks of sprayable weed killers being a carcinogen and anyone who used it was exposed to that risk. He mentioned the safety of the contractors and said that he felt that not quite enough emphasis had been placed on that within the report.

Councillor Woolcombe agreed that a complete ban was not possible due to the cost of the alternatives, and he felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should maintain a watching brief as there might be new alternatives coming forward. He said that anything that Members could do on this committee to mobilise support for wider research into the alternatives, the quicker things could move forward towards the total ban that was desirable for the council to implement.

Councillor Swainston expressed a concern that there was not enough detail for Members to scrutinise in terms of research into Glyphosate and alternative methods of control. She said that research which she had done suggested that there was more evidence that other methods were as effective if a little more expensive initially. She said that this issue needed to be looked at in more depth.

Councillor Swainston said that there was time within the period before the contract was changed to look seriously at methods of control. She expressed a concern that contractors would look at different types of herbicide control without specifying what was being used. She said as Glyphosate had been used so widely, there was a lot of evidence of how toxic or damaging it is and swapping to other chemicals where there was less evidence was not really the way forward.

Councillor Swainston commented that she would like to see the council restrict the use of Glyphosate in terms of the herbicide being used less in open public areas such as parks and playing fields. She cited the example of Glastonbury where Glyphosate was only used on roads, and not in any public areas.

Councillor Williams asked what form of Glyphosate was being used to clear gullies and to weed paths nearer to rivers as one weed killer agent was considered to be harmful to aquatic life. He asked which type of herbicide was used and if the council measured how much potentially ended up in waterways following the spraying of gullies or clearing paths alongside rivers.

The Leisure and Parks Development Manager said that he could not say what specific brand of glyphosate was currently being used by the contractor but could confirm this later. He said that the guidance that the contractors follow will consider not spraying near water for that very reason. He said that contractors would not spray right next to a river, and he could not think of a reason why the council would need to spray next to a river. Members were advised that Officers could look into the possibility of run off from roads including Glyphosate. He said the council was not responsible for tow paths.

The Head of Operations said that Officers had been through a tender process and Officers had delivered what was agreed as part of that process. She said that, as part of this scrutiny process, the council would need to retender the grounds maintenance contract and a cross party working group would be explored as part of the process. She said that there would be specific workshops around the use of Glyphosate.

Members had a general discussion in respect of the merits of a cross party working group and workshops regarding Glyphosate. In reply to a comment from

Councillor Horner regarding the oversight of the activities of the grounds maintenance contractor, the Head of Operations said that there was a contract monitoring team for queries of this nature and all feedback was useful and was welcomed.

The Head of Operations said that she would give Councillor Carter a detailed written answer in respect of the frequency of street sweeping and how this worked in respect of pesticide control and the shared waste service.

The Leisure and Parks Development Manager confirmed to Councillor Williams that Glyphosate was used to control weeds in shrub beds on the highway. He said that most of the shrub beds the council managed were on the highway as part of the agency agreement. He confirmed that there were not many shrub beds in the parks themselves, but Glyphosate was used to control weeds within those shrubs.

The Leisure and Parks Development Manager said that there were many conflicting reports about Glyphosate being a carcinogen. The Head of Operations said that as part of work the council was doing moving forward regarding the pros and cons of Glyphosate, it might be that some independent work could be considered to scrutinise some of the studies to give members a clearer position.

Councillor Clements said that keeping weeds under control was a balancing act between aspirations to reduce the use of herbicide and resident expectation. He noted that, in respect of trade-offs, it will be important to measure the impact of any decisions going forward in relation to the cost of change and whether the required funds might be better spent on more urgent or higher impact issues.

Councillor McAndrew said that the Environment Agency could be asked to attend a future meeting to discuss the matter of water contamination. He said that the Association of Professional Services Excellent (APSE) could be asked what the best practice was around the country in respect of any topic. He referred to the pros and cons of using or not using Glyphosate and unintended consequences. He cited examples of councils that had stopped using Glyphosate and summarised the consequences.

Councillor McAndrew proposed and Councillor Woollcombe seconded, a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the report and recommended that, within the next 12 months, an all-party work group be formed as part of the process to scrutinise the re-tender or extension of the grounds maintenance contract, to explore the following:

- Whether glyphosate usage at East Herts in the grounds contract has been reduced over more recent years and whether it could be further reduced;
- whether the tender process might include seeking prices to deliver the standards using alternative solutions;
- whether cutting back on or stopping the use of glyphosate might have unintended and undesirable consequences;
- consider whether the Council continue to deliver a service to County to control highway weeds or not in the next agency agreement;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee to circulate questions and concerns to the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to seek feedback from other local authorities on good practice.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.



**RESOLVED** – that Overview and Scrutiny have considered the report and recommended that, within the next 12 months, an all-party work group be formed as part of the process to scrutinise the re-tender or extension of the grounds maintenance contract, that will include exploration of the following:

- Whether glyphosate usage at East Herts in the grounds contract has been reduced over more recent years and whether it could be further reduced;
- whether the tender process might include seeking prices to deliver the standards using alternative solutions;
- whether cutting back on or stopping the use of glyphosate might have unintended and undesirable consequences;
- consider whether the Council continue to deliver a service to County to control highway weeds or not in the next agency agreement;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee to circulate questions and concerns to the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) to seek feedback from other local authorities on good practice.

## 226 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

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The Committee Support Officer submitted the work programme report and drew Members' attention to the list of potential items for scrutiny detailed at paragraph 2.3 of the report. Members were invited to consider this list and determine the work programme going forward.

The Committee Support Officer reminded Members to complete the scrutiny proposal form. He said that the

Parking Engagement Strategy was in the work programme for the January meeting and the March meeting was for Housing.

Councillor Buckmaster said that heat pumps could probably be removed from the work programme, as council policies had been adjusted since the outcome of an appeal. He thought that the residents who were concerned about this were more satisfied than they were.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the item entitled IT and Cyber Security and he had thought from earlier discussions that this was IT and digitalisation of the council services. The Chair invited the Members to complete the scrutiny proposal form to formulate the questions and refine this topic.

Councillor Nicholls mentioned that the matter of IT and cyber security came up regularly at the Audit and Governance Committee where there were quarterly risk reports. The Chair said that Members needed to complete the form to construct an argument for this matter to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Horner said that he noted the inclusion of the anti-racism charter, and he had noted that the Executive forward plan included the Equalities Strategy coming to Executive in February 2025. He commented on whether these two matters could be consolidated into one topic for the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in January 2025.

The Chair said that the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy had offered to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF), which had been extended. He had offered to give an update on how this funding was being spent. The Chair said that he would welcome that and this topic could be included on the work programme in either January or March 2025.

The Committee were supportive of the above suggested changes and additions to the work programme. Councillor Jacobs proposed and Councillor Horner seconded a motion that the 2024/25 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1, be agreed subject to the following changes:

- The topic of Heat pumps be removed from the work programme;
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) considered on either 14 January 2025 or 4 March 2025;
- Scrutiny proposal forms be submitted to refine the topic relating to IT and Cyber Security and the digitalisation of council services;
- The anti-racism charter and the Equalities Strategy be consolidated into one topic for the meeting in January 2025.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the 2024/25 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1, be agreed subject to the following changes:

- The topic of Heat pumps be removed from the work programme;
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) considered on either 14 January 2025 or 4 March 2025;
- Scrutiny proposal forms be submitted to refine the topic relating to IT and Cyber Security and the digitalisation of council services;
- The anti-racism charter and the Equalities Strategy be consolidated into one topic for the meeting in January 2025.

227 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.05 pm

Chairman .....

Date .....