

# North Yorkshire Council

26 February 2025

## Report of the Scrutiny of Health Committee concerning a Notice of Motion on Use of Glyphosates and Neonicotinoids in Operational Services, following a referral at the meeting of Full Council on 21 February 2024

### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services

#### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

To provide Full Council with a summary of the deliberations and recommendations of the Scrutiny of Health Committee concerning a Notice of Motion on Use of Glyphosates and Neonicotinoids in Operational Services, following a referral at the meeting of Full Council on 21 February 2024.

#### 2.0 Background

2.1 At Full Council on 21 February 2024, the following amendment regarding the operational use of glyphosates and neonicotinoids, in relation to the recommendations for the Council's Revenue Budget for 2024/25, was moved by Councillor Andy Brown, and seconded by Councillor David Noland:

*“To reduce the budget for mowing and spraying by at least £100,000 a year and to cease all purchases of any products containing glyphosate or neonicotinoids.”*

2.2 After debate, the motion was withdrawn, and it was resolved that it should be referred to a Scrutiny committee for further consideration, and a recommendation subsequently returned to a later meeting of Full Council. The Scrutiny Board considered the motion, and decided to refer it to Scrutiny of Health as it was primarily related to health matters.

2.2 At subsequent meetings between officers and Scrutiny of Health members, the key parameters were outlined, and officers were identified to conduct further research. The research was led by Parks and Grounds, as one of the main users of glyphosates, but the issue was cross-cutting and the final report included contributions from Parks and Grounds, Highways, and Public Health.

2.3 The final report and its appendices, which were considered by the Scrutiny of Health Committee at its meeting on 18 December 2024, are available at the links below:

- [Review of Issue Referred from full Council on 21 February 2024 regarding the Council's use of Glyphosate and Neonicotinoids](#)
- [Appendix A: Use of Glyphosate in Operational Services](#)
- [Appendix B: Glyphosate Usage](#)
- [Appendix C: Equality Impact Assessment](#)
- [Appendix D: Initial Climate Change Impact Assessment](#)

### **3.0 Meeting of the Scrutiny of Health Committee on 18 December 2024**

- 3.1 The Scrutiny of Health Committee debated the report at its meeting on 18 December 2024. The report was presented by Jon Clubb (Head of Parks and Grounds), Richard Marr (Highways Area Manager), and Victoria Turner (Public Health Consultant). Councillor Brown, as the mover of the original motion, was also present virtually and was invited to speak after the discussion, to reiterate his points. The following paragraphs from the minutes of the meeting summarise the discussion.
- 3.2 Members heard that currently glyphosate was used by Parks and Grounds for weed control in open spaces, and Highways on kerbs, footways, and paved areas. The information on the potential threat to human health was summarised, there being no consensus on its impact. Glyphosate was categorised as a possible carcinogen by the World Health Organisation in 2015, but other large-scale evidence reviews since that time had not confirmed this. The Bayer glyphosate case in the United States was referenced, and it was highlighted that in many of the lawsuits the issue was the failure to adequately warn users about health risks, rather than the health risks themselves.
- 3.3 Alternatives such as water and hot foam, vinegar, or manual treatment were discussed, but these had limited effectiveness because of their failure to attack the root systems, necessitating repeated treatments. Previous attempts to use alternatives in the former Harrogate Borough Council had been abandoned due to the lack of efficacy. Service research concluded that overall, a move away from glyphosate-based treatment would cost between four and ten times as much.
- 3.5 Members discussed operational details of the council's use of glyphosate, and officers confirmed that use by Parks and Grounds was almost exclusively on areas of hard standing and important high-traffic areas, such as around gates and access points, rather than on green spaces and flower beds. For Highways use, the consequences of failure to control weeds were discussed, including potential for increased trip hazards on pathways, and eventual damage to structures as weeds became more developed.
- 3.6 Some members felt that an inconclusive link to carcinogenesis represented an unacceptable risk, but others argued that the risk was in line with other known risk factors common in everyday life. It was felt that a rejection of glyphosate by NYC, at a time when it was not banned nationally and was still available commercially for use by the public, would be incongruous. Members requested that officers keep the committee updated on regulatory developments if future research does disclose health risks.
- 3.7 The risk of weeds developing if alternative methods such as manual removal were adopted, and then being proactively sprayed by members of the public, was also considered. It was also felt that it would not be possible to meet the aims of the original motion in reducing the spend by £100,000 by ceasing purchase of glyphosate, since the alternatives to glyphosate were less efficient and more expensive and might lead to an increased cost. However, members remained concerned about any potential health risk and asked officers to keep the committee updated on regulatory developments if future research disclosed health risks.

### **4.0 Recommendation of the Scrutiny of Health Committee**

- 4.1 The following recommendation was proposed and agreed by the committee:

It is recommended to Full Council that,

- a) having considered the reports, and having examined and debated the competing evidence on the safety and usage of glyphosate, the motion **not be upheld**.
- b) the Highways and Parks and Grounds teams' efforts to minimise usage of glyphosate, and explore alternatives, be supported.
- c) the efforts to reduce risk to operatives using glyphosate are minimised by the use of appropriate PPE, adequate and up-to-date training, and the use of Continuous Droplet Application where possible, be supported.
- d) it be noted that the reduction of the current total budget by £100,000, from its current level of £144,000 by ceasing purchase of glyphosate, cannot be supported as there are no appropriate alternatives which would maintain highways and parks at their current standards.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 It is anticipated that there are no significant financial implications which would arise if the recommendation were followed, since as outlined in 4. 1. d), it is not believed that the savings outlined in the motion are achievable.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

- 6.1 There are no significant legal implications associated with the motion text proposed.

## **7.0 Climate Change Implications**

- 7.1 The climate change implications arising from the Notice of Motion are addressed in the report considered by the Scrutiny of Health Committee at 2.3.

## **8.0 Equalities Implications**

- 8.1 The equalities implications arising from the Notice of Motion are addressed in the report considered by the Scrutiny of Health Committee at 2.3.

## **9.0 Recommendations**

- 9.1 That Full Council considers the recommendations of the Scrutiny of Health Committee, that:
  - a) having considered the reports, and having examined and debated the competing evidence on the safety and usage of glyphosate, the motion not be upheld.
  - b) the Highways and Parks and Grounds teams' efforts to minimise usage of glyphosate, and explore alternatives, be supported.
  - c) the efforts to reduce risk to operatives using glyphosate are minimised by the use of appropriate PPE, adequate and up-to-date training, and the use of Continuous Droplet Application where possible, be supported.
  - d) it be noted that the reduction of the current total budget by £100,000, from its current level of £144,000 by ceasing purchase of glyphosate, cannot be supported as there are no appropriate alternatives which would maintain highways and parks at their current standards.

Barry Khan  
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12 February 2025

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**Background documents:**

- [Constitution of North Yorkshire Council](#)
- [Agenda for the meeting of the Scrutiny of Health Committee, 18 December 2024](#)

*Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.*