

## **TRAFFIC, ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY SCRUTINY PANEL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 8 June 2023 at 9am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

### **Present**

Councillor Judith Smyth (in the Chair)  
Jason Fazackarley  
Graham Heaney  
Mark Jeffery

- 5. Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)**  
Apologies were received from Councillors Simon Boshier, Chris Dike and Charlotte Gerada (Councillor Graham Heaney deputised for her).
- 6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)**  
No interests were declared.
- 7. Minutes of the Previous Meeting. (AI 3)**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 be noted.**

- 8. Scrutiny review into reducing the use of pesticides on council land (AI 4)**  
The following documents were circulated with the agenda:
  - The PAN Local Authority Tool Kit (PAN LA Tool Kit)
  - The scoping document.
  - A draft timetable.

Adrian Rozier, Parks Development Manager gave a summary of the progress made on this:

The three years given in the Notice of Motion to reduce pesticides use is a realistic timeframe. The aim is to eradicate use where possible. There may be scenarios where officers report back along the journey regarding the management of sports pitches or incidents of Japanese Knotweed.

Three departments cover parks, green spaces and public realm areas; each has its own challenges and contractual constraints.

The March report to Cabinet had more information on the practices used in the Housing and Parks departments and not much on Highways. The conclusion was that trials of alternative weed removal techniques were required. It was clear that in some scenarios, pesticides use would need to continue. The council is fully committed to find alternatives and assessing them in terms of costs, resources and effectiveness.

Glyphosate use was driven by cost and resources but has been significantly reduced.

It may be necessary to accept that some areas will not be kept at the same standard in terms of appearance.

Pesticides are sprayed once a year where needed.

The number of environmental enhancements and green corridors across sites continues to increase. Mowing frequency has reduced where appropriate.

To prepare a wild meadow, the ground is scarified, and yellow rattle (a grass parasite) is sown. The wildflower seeds are sourced from nearby countryside sites and are therefore more compatible.

When a request is made for a change in the maintenance regime, the Countryside Officer reviews the site and suggests suitable enhancements.

The analysis of the trials at Kingston Cemetery will be ready at the end of the year.

Phil Bentley, Head of Estates Services included the following points in his summary:

The supply of pesticides has been used up. Weed management is carried out with by scraping, strimming and mechanical sweeping.

Operatives have reported that the battery powered trimmers were not effective for tall weeds. They had to go back to using petrol trimmers which are not as good in terms of hand to arm vibration.

Japanese Knotweed is treated with injections as recommended in PAN LA Toolkit.

The meadow at the junction of Lake Road and Kingston Road is the only one that has required intervention as it was struggling. On the advice of the wildflower supplier selective herbs were sown and the meadow recovered.

Richard Stock, Highways PFI Deputy Contract Manager (Technical) gave the following update:

The Highways Act sets out a duty for LAs to properly maintain the public realm. The aspect must be maintained to prevent degradation of the surface caused by weeds.

The concentration of glyphosate sprayed has reduced; in 2018 860 litres were used across the network and in 2022 it was 560 litres. A trial of a new product is being carried out this year this has a concentration of 360g per litre. The previous concentration was 490g per litre.

Targeted spraying is carried out, rather than blanket spraying; this is more effective.

The regulations stipulate that pesticides must not be used around areas where vulnerable people are likely pass including schools, hospitals, shopping centres and playing areas.

Detritus is removed from drainage channels as it provides a habitat for weeds. It is not possible when a car is parked over it.

The trials carried out prior to 2021 using alternative weed removal methods was not entirely successful. Some public realm footways are relatively narrow.

Officers monitor the techniques other local authorities are using and see where these can be adapted and used here.

He suspects that there is no silver bullet and that the management techniques will continue to evolve.

Footfall keeps vegetation down.

Colas has the PFI tender to maintain the highway and subsequently if the methods change substantially, they are likely to ask the council to reimburse them for additional costs.

In response to questions from the panel, Phil Bentley explained that residents' gardens have evergreens and shrubs with seasonal flowering. Residents would not want them to be full of weeds.

During the discussion that followed, members noted:

The motion was more ambitious than reflected in this review's scoping document. It was proposed that the purpose of review was to scrutinise progress made on reducing the use of pesticides across Portsmouth.

It is important for the report to be published before the budget is considered.

The way land is managed depends on its use.

It is the council's role to consult residents for this new way of land management. Information about the process for creating a communications strategy will be considered as part of this review.

Hard surfaces should be taken up where possible.

Using alternative weed management techniques will lead to better outcomes and less work for the contractor. Their reputation may be enhanced by using greener methods.

It is not for this panel to seek public opinion on pesticides use.

More people are creating wildflower areas in their gardens.

A summary of the feedback that has been received by officers regarding weed management will be included in the panel's report.

Portsmouth was recently recognised again as a Tree City of the World for its commitment to planning and caring for trees in the city. This is commendable, particularly given that it is an urban, densely populated city where opportunities for planting is limited.

It is essential that the council learn from other local authorities' trials.

Adrian Rozier explained that prior to the report that went to Cabinet last March, officers contacted more than 40 Local Authorities for information on their land management policies. They reached out again following the previous panel meeting. He noted that authorities have different set ups e.g. Fareham Borough Council deals with parks but Hampshire County Council is responsible for its highways.

Within the team in the Parks department, the maintenance of public open space comes under either the in-house grounds operatives, or the countryside officers. However, all the team work together, led by him and the Parks Operation Manager.

Richard Stocks asked the panel to note that the Highways department carries out one series of spraying per year and therefore a trial could not start before next year. A complaint had recently been received about long grass that was making it difficult to children to play.

Last year several panels reviewed recommendations from past reviews and reported their findings to the Scrutiny Management Panel.

The timetable for meetings was agreed:

**13 July at 3pm**

- Invite the relevant Cabinet Members.
- Discuss the PAN LA's Toolkit.
- Discuss what a Pesticide-free city would look like.

**25 July at 5pm**

- Cabinet Members who could not attend the earlier meeting would be invited to this meeting.
- Summary from officers about land management techniques used by other local authorities.
- Review the responses to the questionnaires.

**22 September at 3pm**

Review the alternative land management trials undertaken by the council.

**13 October at 5pm**

Receive any further evidence.

Review the draft report and draw up conclusions and recommendations.

**22 October at 5pm**

It was agreed that a questionnaire be sent to the organisations below seeking details on their land management policies.

Baffins Pond Association  
BH Live  
The Bowls Association  
Allotment Associations  
Gunwharf Quays  
Lakeside Estate Management  
Portsmouth Football Club  
Housing Associations  
Portsmouth Naval Base Property Trust  
University of Portsmouth  
Port Solent Residents Management Company.

Portsmouth Friends of the Earth  
Portsmouth Disability Forum  
Portsmouth Cycle Forum  
Portsmouth Pensioners Association  
Neighbourhood Forums  
H&loW Wildlife Trust  
Portsmouth Tree Wardens  
Portsmouth Climate Action Board  
Greenpeace Portsmouth  
Friends of Victoria Park  
Sustrans.

#### Actions

1. The March 2022 Cabinet report will be circulated to the panel.

The following information will be brought to a future meeting:

2. The changes in the amount of pesticide used from year to year and projected use in terms of areas and concentrations.
3. The Local Government Association's views.
4. Lewis District Council and two London Boroughs' policies.

#### **9. Future Items for the Panel's Work Programme (AI 5)**

The panel discussed possible topics including how the police update Ward Councillors on local crime statistics. It was noted however that an annual report comes to the Health & Wellbeing Board, joint meetings are held and information is readily available upon request.

**RESOLVED that this item be discussed at the next meeting.**

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Councillor Judith Smyth  
Chair

