

TECS Scrutiny Panel discussion paper on communicating pesticide changes

Context

At the request of Cllr Smyth, this paper has been written to give members of the Transport, Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel elements to consider should they choose to include a recommendation relating to communications in the final report on the use of pesticides.

Approach

- The approach for this work will need to be defined once it is decided what steps are being taken, how they will be implemented (where, when etc) and who it will impact. Communication plans would be tailored to reach the appropriate audience depending on the work.
- In general, as well as telling people what we are changing, we should focus on explain the reasons for the change, the benefits it will bring, what will appear different and reassure any likely concerns.

Resources

- The marketing communications team will need some informal direction from Cabinet on where this sits in relation to other campaigns in order to gauge how to prioritise it.
- The more budget available the more can be achieved, but as no source of funding has been identified for this work it would be assumed that no additional budget is available and activity will focus on free council channels including:
 - Email bulletins
 - Social media posts
 - Media activity
 - Flagship and HouseTalk magazines
- To ensure as wide a reach as possible opportunities should be looked at to include messages in campaigns on related projects such as tree planting / greening, or if Colas is writing letters to residents it could include an update on managing wild flowers and the council's marketing communications team would be happy to provide advice on this.

Garnering support

- A stakeholder analysis would be beneficial to establish who has an interest in the project. This should include everyone from cllrs to residents.
- It should not be taken for granted that any particular group will support specific plans introduced, for example cllrs may have voted for the notice of motion to reduce use of pesticides but they may not agree with a specific way of implementing it.
- Where there is opportunity, stakeholders should be given appropriate opportunity to engage with or even influence plans that might impact them

Information or consultation?

- As a general rule we should only ask residents for an opinion on something they can influence. If a decision is going to be made regardless of resident opinion, as potentially one on pesticides could be for health or environmental reasons, we would not advise consulting residents on it.

- Even if stakeholders cannot influence an overall decision on use of pesticides they may be able to have a say in how it is delivered such as what settings we take action in first, how methods are trialled etc.
- Allowing residents input on the elements they can influence may help increase public understanding and support for the work, but this needs to be balanced with the practicalities of delivering a service.