

CABINET MEMBER REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills)

- **Weed Control**

Councillor	Portfolio	Period of Report
John Fairclough	Cabinet Member Locality Services	February 2023

Operational In-House Services

As with many areas nationwide, Sefton has had issues with weed growth across varying areas of the Borough. Whilst there are certainly challenges Boroughwide, the weed growth has been particularly prevalent within the South substantially.

Members will recall that this was given significant focus through the formation of a MRG in 2021 dedicated to exploring these issues and seeking resolution, including the production of a commissioned assessment report from APSE. The South of the Borough has increased street furniture, is significantly more industrialised and high volume of commercial traffic creates increased detritus in channels. In turn, this creates significant seed beds for germination within short periods of time, particularly with warm and wet weather conditions becoming prevalent.

With effect from 1st April 2022, the management of the weed control programme delivered via a contractor was moved from the Highway Service to the Street Cleansing Service as part of recommendations made by the MRG. The interim Operations Manager for the Waste Management & Street Cleansing Service now leads on the contract management of this outsourced provision.

A robust monitoring process has been introduced to ensure contract compliance in addition to regular contract review meetings. The programme delivery schedule completed four blanket sprays Boroughwide during the 2022 season.

During the spraying season, the contractor provides a daily update of areas sprayed and officers undertake spot inspections of those locations to evidence 'die back'. Failure of the weed control chemical is reported back to the contractor for respray at

their costs. A full weed spray and weed removal programme on the identified trunk roads is also provided within the contract and again, a successful outcome was achieved at the end of the spraying season. Significant steps have been taken to ensure that the contractor is fully compliant and understands the quality of finish that is required/expected.

Weed control cannot be addressed as an isolated function. Adequate provision of an effective street cleansing service in conjunction with a weed control and removal programme is key to a multi-pronged approach.

Statistics

The number of weed complaints received over the last 2 years is as follows:

2021/22	289 complaints received
2022/23 (to date)	194 complaints received

This data tells us that there has been an improvement in the complaints received over the last 12 months. The focus will now be to further reduce the complaints over the next 12 months, with stringent performance monitoring and effective communication between management, street cleansing staff and the contractor.

Issues that were identified pre-April 2022:

The service delivers mechanical cleansing (both channel & footpath) and manual cleansing. The current assumed frequency for mechanical channel sweeping is quoted as a 12–14-week rota, however due to only having 3 large mechanical sweepers on the fleet this was not being achieved.

For a Borough the size of Sefton, with the density of population, high leaf fall areas in addition to the highly industrialised locations and docks of the south, this is an ineffective timeframe to address the deterioration of the local environmental quality.

The large mechanical sweeping fleet requires increase to efficiently rectify this issue. Additionally, a 'needs based' provision should be considered rather than a 'one size fits all' approach to fully maximise outcomes.

The employees who deliver the manual cleansing service have a keen focus on the litter picking aspect of their role, however, the wider understanding of 'street cleansing' required reinvigoration. A culture of not seeing the wider issues within the 'street scene' such as accumulation of leaves, fly posting, weed growth or graffiti has developed and this contributes to the deterioration of the local environmental quality or the 'broken window effect' in many locations.

Improvements to the Street Cleansing provision since 1st April 2022:

There has been an increase of the large mechanical sweeper fleet from 3 to 4 – the focus of the new round is the South of the Borough, areas of high footfall and locations with high deterioration of local environmental quality.

Site visits have been undertaken on a regular basis by the Operations Manager to assess quality of finish. Spot visits have also been carried out by both the Assistant Director and the CEO on occasions.

Rear entry teams have increased from 4 teams to 5, they have been allocated their own 'zone' and will work on a continuous loop within the designated zones. This means that the teams will begin to take accountability for their own work area and be a presence within the locations, able to respond to issues timely.

A small pilot project was undertaken within the Litherland Ward which incorporated the full removal of vegetation from the rear entries following fly tipping removal. Whilst this was a costly undertaking as the vegetation removal was undertaken by our weed control contractors, it did provide an excellent outcome. Sadly, it did not deter residents from continuing to fly tip in the rear entries in some areas, often as quickly as within a day of the final clearance.

3 x 'Glutton' machines were purchased and have been deployed across the Borough, they have both suction and wash facilities. Additionally, teams have been provided with additional equipment such as blowers and hand tools. The removal of significant low base epicormic growth from street trees has been underway to prevent trapped litter and detritus.

All street cleansing staff are aware of the necessity to scrape out weeds encompassed within their daily duties.

There are currently 12 x vacancies within the Street Cleansing Service. Recruitment has been underway across the service over a number of months with a focus on internal opportunities in the first instance before external advertisement. Agency staff have been utilised in the interim period until all permanent positions are filled.

Next steps

There are regular meetings scheduled throughout the year between management and the contractor, the meetings will be held to review and monitor the performance of the spraying throughout the scheduled sprays. The meetings will be recorded, and the agreed spraying programme (running order) will be made available and shared with members.

Management to meet with the street cleansing staff to reinforce expectations for the season ahead.

Appointment of Street Cleansing Manager (already within budget) to bring greater focus to the service as a whole and the dual aspect of managing waste and street cleansing means that waste usually takes precedence.

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