

**Nottingham City Council Weeding Programme
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
3 March 2021**

At October 2020 Overview and Scrutiny meeting, you reported that the weeding programme has been developed but had been delayed because of changed priorities to cope with the pandemic.

The committee would like some feedback on this issue, particularly on the challenges and how they are being addressed; and timescales, e.g. whether the Council is able to take advantage of the winter season to carry out weeding before the growing season.

Please send a written report which can be presented to the committee.

Councillor Anne Peach, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

First of all, can I thank committee members for their interest in this issue. As the Portfolio Holder responsible for Street Scene, I agree with all of your that clean, tidy streets are so important for everything else we do as a council. They set the tone for how we work and give people pride in their neighbourhoods.

In the first year that I was portfolio holder, some changes made previously were coming into place, including street scene teams completing their own weed spraying, rather than additional resource being brought in to help out. This worked well in some places, but did leave quite a lot of weeds in other places. So I worked alongside officers to develop a new weed spraying programme for implementation from March 2020.

This focused on 'grey' space- like pavements and gullies, leaving 'green' space with less weeding. This allows us to focus resources in areas where it makes the most difference to our overall objectives around having streets we can feel proud of, as well as benefitting our local environment. The weed spraying programme was circulated to councillors and as a service area we were all looking forward to seeing how it would work in practice. However, the COVID pandemic stopped all of that, as you are all well aware.

In the early part of the pandemic, we had much reduced street scene services, as we got to grips with how we could work in a Covid safe way, as well as supporting other services and recognising the increased sickness absence that occurred. The growing season is from March to July, so by the time lockdown ended, it's fair to say that there were fairly significant weeds in some parts of the city. However, in the months since, this situation has much improved. Street scene teams around the city have 'grubbed out' large amounts of weeds. Particularly when they were completing leaf clearance, the teams took the opportunities to remove weeds, leaving many streets looking much better.

This year, we fully intend to stick to the weed spraying programme we designed last year. This means we will complete the first spray in March and April according to the weed spraying programme. This early spray is important

as it prevents the weeds for getting out of hand in that crucial growing period. We are working on a set of parameters for cleansing this year- a sort of 'minimum standard' that we will commit to achieving, with other things on top of that dependent on resourcing. The weed spraying programme is something we are committed to doing with the resources we have available to us.

Having a set of minimum standards will help us as we continue to face immense pressure on the team. Last week for example, a third of the work force were not working on street scene- either because they were supporting colleagues on domestic waste, or off sick or self-isolating. This high levels of absence make it very difficult for us to plan week by week, meaning we have to be flexible and adapt week by week.

Looking ahead, there is light at the end of the tunnel. The roadmap suggests that from June we can look forward to a work without social distancing, which should allow domestic waste to get back to three people in a cab. This in turn will see a significant uplift in the number of people in the street scene team.

So our message is- we are working on our minimum standard that we commit to delivering in the early part of this year. Please bear with us as we do our best in the most difficult circumstances. I am immensely proud of and grateful to our street scene teams who have continued to work tirelessly on the frontline through the pandemic. Things are not perfect, but our key workers are doing their absolute best and I know that as councillors we will continue to support and thank them.

I'm very happy to attend overview and scrutiny or to pick things up directly with councillors if you'd like to discuss this further. Thank you.

Councillor Rebecca Langton
Portfolio Holder for Communities, Highways and Strategic Transport
March 2021