

Public Document Pack



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6. **Public Questions with Responses (Pages 1 - 4)**

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PUBLIC QUESTIONS TO COUNCIL – 02 FEBRUARY 2022

a) Question from Ann Sheehy, Acclimatise Whaley to Councillor C Renwick, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure and Environment

“On behalf of our members I wish to raise our concerns about the continuing use of glyphosates by Derbyshire County Council.

The regulatory regime in place in the UK recognises that there are risks to the use of herbicides such as glyphosate and has set in place, for nearly a decade, measures which should limit use of such products. In March 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic to humans”. There is a live debate about glyphosate’s environmental impacts and use in gardens. Some countries and many cities across the world have banned or strongly regulated the use of glyphosate.

What is DCC’s policy on the use of glyphosate in particular and herbicides in general and is there any plan to reduce levels of herbicide used by the Council and its contractors?”

Response:

Thank you. Glyphosate as a weed controlled product is used in only very small quantities on Derbyshire County Council sites and by certified staff using the appropriate PPE. This includes our Countryside Service sites and other land and property assets.

Primarily it is used as a herbicide on INNS, which is invasive non-native species on our Council sites and in practice this is giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed which to be honest there is very little satisfactory alternative treatment. This is generally applied by spray but we have actually already started to use an injector to deliver a neater dose onto the plant stem which is a far more effective method of treatment and obviously reduces the amount of glyphosates that are used.

b) Question from David Ingham to Councillor S Spencer Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Budget

“I have recently attended Council meetings. It is beneficial for the public to see directly positive work done by members, their discussions and time committed. The other reason the public should ideally attend is because minutes are not verbatim.

At the Audit Committee in September 2021 two particularly pertinent points regarding the whistleblowing procedure were raised by members but not recorded. At the Governance Committee, which was in October 2021, an individual raised matters about the Chair's annual report. Neither the matters raised nor the individual's attendance was actually recorded.

At most meetings I have been the only member of the public present, and whilst I don't feel lonely I do consider more can be done. The Council website detailing meetings open to the public is not correct, albeit I now know it has been corrected, and has been raised by myself. Also on individual webpages for each Committee meeting it is not clear that the public can attend, and indeed at the Scrutiny Committees even submit questions.

I ask if this key information can be added as it can only help to support open government and may possibly serve to reduce the number of questions raised directly to Ward members and in turn the number of questions at full Council unless there is still a compelling need."

Response:

Thank you Mr Ingham for the question.

I always welcome contributions from the public at any meeting. I have to say that some of the points you raise in your question are pertinent, relevant and will be looked at very carefully in due course.

Obviously public engagement participation is part of the democratic process. It is essential for good governance and we do our best in making the public aware of the meetings that are taking place and when. I think it is fair to say, Mr Ingham, that our website is a little clunky and that is being looked at as we speak and we will continue to streamline the process of allowing people to access information on that website more freely and more easily as we move forward.

With regard to the minutes, the minutes are a record of the decisions that are made fundamentally and unless we go down the route of carrying out verbatim minutes at all meetings, which is costly I have to say, it would be inappropriate to mention some issues that were mentioned and not all, so it is a record of decisions and how those decisions were reached which is obviously confirmed at the following meeting that takes place.

Having said that the new Head of Democratic Services who started with the organisation only ten days ago is looking at how we present those minutes on the Council website. I suspect there will be a few changes and hopefully improvements as far as you are concerned. I also think it is pertinent and

appropriate that anybody in attendance at that meeting should be recorded in those minutes. I hope that answers your question.

Supplementary question:

My only supplementary would be in relation to kind of how quickly that work would be done? I totally take on board in relation to the minutes, even I wouldn't expect them to be verbatim. I think it is just around people's understanding that they are not verbatim and the fact, which is what I was trying to indicate, I think it is really important the public understand they can have access (*defective microphone - buffering*).

I spoke to a very nice lady outside who was obviously - I am not getting involved in the campaigning and things like that - but somebody who was actually here I did actually say to her "Do you know you can come to Council meetings and do you know you can actually ask questions?" Interestingly she said she didn't. I just thought that is so telling isn't it really, but thank you as always, Councillor Spencer, for your response.

Response:

If I can just say, Mr Ingham, it isn't everybody's cup of tea to come and stand in an audience such as this and ask a question but anybody who wishes to do so is more than welcome to and hopefully we can give them a clear and distinctive answer to their question.

You did raise another point which I failed to answer in your previous question. That was about members not bringing unnecessary issues to full Council and dealing with them in the form of an email. I wholeheartedly agree, Mr Ingham, on that position. I would suggest that many of the questions today could have been answered by the appropriate Cabinet member and they would have been answered more quickly than waiting two months for the next full Council meeting, but I share your view. Thank you.

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