

PEST CONTROL REVIEW WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 1.30 pm on 23 NOVEMBER 2009

Present: Councillor R H Chamberlain (Chairman).
Councillors E J Godwin, J E Hudson, M Miller and J A Redfern

Also present: Councillor A J Ketteridge

Officers: Colin Rockall (Interim Change Manager), Geoff Smith (Head of Environmental Health), Will Cockerell (Principal Environmental Health Officer), Cathy Roberts (Democratic Services Officer).

PCR6 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Task Group held on 4 August 2009 were approved and signed as a correct record

PCR7 **MATTERS ARISING**

Members confirmed that they were content for the arrangements for chairing the Group to continue.

PCR8 **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND THE PRINCIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER ON OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

The Head of Environmental Health outlined the five options available, explaining that the Council had one full time pest control officer and one officer on a temporary six month contract, and describing in detail possible methods of achieving savings.

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and invited questions from Members.

Councillor Godwin's experience was that a private pest control service tended to be more expensive and of less reliable quality than the Council's service. She was also concerned that if people thought they would have to pay they would not report sight of rats.

In answer to a question from Councillor Godwin, the Head of Environmental Health confirmed that officers had contacted other authorities with a view to possibly providing a shared service. The Harlow Council's contractor was not enthusiastic about offering solely a pest control service in Uttlesford. Braintree had reduced the number of its pest control staff a year ago and had no spare capacity; they would welcome reciprocal arrangements at the Braintree/Uttlesford

boundaries by way of mutual aid but could not contribute more than this to the Uttlesford service.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Environmental Health outlined the legal responsibility of the Council in terms of its public health role and the link to pest control.

Members considered whether they wished to continue the free service for treatment of rats and the Head of Environmental Health informed the meeting that last year's figure of 2100 rat treatments could expand a great deal if treatments ceased.

Members then considered possible methods of reducing the net cost of the service. The report identified the potential for increasing the number of contracts for commercial premises and reviewing charges for other pest control services.

Additionally, the Scrutiny Committee's review of fees and charges had recommended that the Council should no longer provide automatic concessions for those aged 65 or over. There was some discussion about possibly raising the age at which the concessions became available to 75.

The Interim Change Manager informed the meeting that the Strategic Management Board was stressing the need to reduce costs across the whole range of council services, as envisaged by the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Technically the pest control service was a discretionary one and, if no charge was to be made for dealing with rats, then it would be necessary to consider increasing income in order to reduce the costs of the service overall.

Members also considered that the availability of the service should be given more publicity.

In answer to questions about the costs of the service, the Principal Environmental Health Officer explained that these were in the main the salaries of the two pest control officers and the costs of the baits and the two vehicles used for the service. The income was about £36,000 per annum which left a £24,000 shortfall. The report to the Task Group suggested that introduction of the measures referred to above could reduce the cost of the service by around £15,000 p.a.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 no charges be introduced for the treatment of rats in domestic premises for 2010/11.
- 2 that the pest control service remain in house and the recommended ways of reducing the net cost of providing the service are adopted, including:

- Increasing the charges for, and number of, contracts with commercial premises;
 - Removing the discretionary discount for people aged 65 and over
- 3 the effect of removing the concessions to those aged 65 and over, in terms of hardship, be monitored during the 2010/11
 - 4 appropriate steps be taken to increase public awareness of the service – for example in Uttlesford Life, parish magazines, the Phone Book and the Web, and
 - 5 consideration be given to the practicability of introducing an extra charge for rapid response to requests for the pest control service. .

The meeting ended at 2.15 pm.