

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference from the meeting of the Community and Housing Committee held on the 18th June 2009 are appended as Appendix 5

Members Briefing Note - Pest Control Review Working Group

Legal and Practical Reasons for Pest Control

The origins of the service are in the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 which places a duty on the Council to 'take such steps as are necessary to secure as far as practical that their District is kept free from rats and mice'. There is a power to serve a Notice on the occupier or owner of land to take such steps as are specified to keep their land free from rats and mice. A Notice can require treatment and works. The destruction of rodents is primarily a public health measure preventing the spread of diseases but also preventing damage to crops and property.

In practice rodents, especially rats, roam over a wide area which in residential areas is very likely to be in different ownership, so identifying an individual householder as being solely responsible for the infestation will in most cases be problematic.

When a free service is provided the treatment can be carried out quickly and in the most appropriate location regardless of 'blame' but by giving the highest priority to the placing of poisonous baits in secure positions away from children, pets and non target species. In addition it will be carried out by a professionally qualified pest controller using the poisons approved for the situation and followed up with repeat treatments until the problem has been eradicated.

In circumstances where charges are made there will be many disputes over which resident has caused the problem and if no one is prepared to pay the charge the Council will need to serve Notices on the occupiers of all the properties that show signs of rodent activity requiring the householders to carry out an effective rat treatment. This would involve Environmental Health Officers in gaining access to the properties, inspecting the gardens, preparing and serving Notices, and subsequently returning to ensure that the Notices have been complied with within a reasonable time. If Notices have not been complied with it would be necessary to carry out works in default and recover our costs, if necessary through the courts.

The provision of a pest control service for other public health and nuisance pests has evolved over time but has its origin in the seasonal demand for rodent control and the consequent ability to provide alternative, revenue generating, pest control services during the quieter periods of the year.

Posts involved in Pest Control

There are two Pest Controller posts, one based at the Saffron Walden Offices covering the northern part of the District and another based at the Council's Dunmow Offices covering the southern area. Management of the Service is the responsibility of a Principal EHO who also has responsibility for a wide range of Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing issues, with some practical assistance from a EH Technical Officer who was a former Pest Controller.

Day to Day Working Arrangements

Requests for services from local residents are routed through the Customer Service Centre although returning customers still phone the EH general office direct, the requests are entered on the Ocella database and job tickets produced. The PCOs

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make their own appointments using their local knowledge of the area and the need to arrange revisits to previous requests for pest control services, if the resident just wants advice then either the PCO or the EHT are able to assist. Following the conclusion of the pest control treatment the PCOs return their job tickets and EH admin staff update the Ocella records. If payments are required residents are offered the opportunity to use their credit or debit card over the telephone or alternatively the PCOs collect cheques or cash during their visit. Stocks of poisons and baits are ordered by the EHT using the Marketplace system and are stored in a facility at the rear of the Dunmow Offices.

Volumes of Work

Pest control is a seasonal activity, traditionally rats and mice have been an Autumn and Winter problem and ants, wasps, fleas and other public health pests more of a Spring and Summer problem. Over the last 5 years rats have become more of an all year round problem and requests for mice have declined following the introduction of charges a few years ago. Wasps are subject to wide year to year variations largely due to weather conditions when the queens emerge in the Spring. Data on visits in connection with pest control activities since the year 2000 is shown in detail in Appendix 1.

Customer Satisfaction

A satisfaction survey was carried out in 2007 and again this year, customers of the service were left with a pre-paid post card to record their responses to a number of questions concerning the service including their initial contact with the Council, the process of making the initial appointment through to having the work carried out. The overwhelming response has been good with many pleasing comments and very few adverse comments. The completed cards and responses are available for the Working Group to inspect.

Budgetary Issues

A copy of the budget sheet for the Pest Control service is provided in Appendix 2, the main areas of expenditure are staffing costs, transport costs and the purchase of equipment and pest control materials such as baits and poisons. Income is sub-divided into wasps, other insects and rodents. There are other internal costs associated with management of the service, the maintenance, insurance and capital costs of the two pest control vehicles, and other central support charges such as accountancy, payroll, and HR.

The gross expenditure to the Council of providing a pest control service in 2007/8 was £87895 and the income generated from the treatment of mice, non-domestic property rats, wasps, fleas, bed bugs and other infestations was £48263. The net cost to the Council was £39632.

The average gross cost per treatment to provide the service was $\text{£}87895/3110 = \text{£}28.20$

The average net cost per treatment was $\text{£}39362/3110 = \text{£}12.65$

This compares favourably with other LA's in the region. A regional survey in 2007/8 gave the following gross expenditure figures (assuming the figures given were fully inclusive gross costs):

Braintree	$\text{£}116000/3287 = \text{£}35.30$ av.
Epping	$\text{£}114920/3534 = \text{£}32.50$
East Herts	$\text{£}204261/2225 = \text{£}91.80$

An average of 9 LA's figures including UDC was £72 per treatment

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Costs for treatment by a private sector company are difficult to accurately obtain as most companies require a survey before giving a quote. In response to a telephone enquiry one company quoted costs of £120 - £130 for domestic property treatment for rats which included 1 initial treatment plus 2 follow ups.

Charging Structure

The Council's charging structure for pest control has evolved over many years and is reviewed annual by the Community Committee and its predecessor Committees. Officers produce a report making recommendations on fees and charges towards the end of the calendar year to enable them to be effective from the start of the following financial year, these recommendations are based on comparison with neighbouring authorities, inflation and market prices from the private sector. The Community Committee at its meeting on the 24th January 2008 resolved not to introduce a charge for rats on domestic premises and this is the Council's current position. The current pest control charges are shown in Appendix 3.

A Members' Working Group have recently considered fees and charges in general and made its recommendation to the Scrutiny Committee on the 7th July 2009, details are reproduced in Appendix 4.