

**PEST CONTROL REVIEW WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10 am on 4 AUGUST 2009**

Present: Councillor R Chamberlain (Chairman).

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

**PCR1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Godwin, Hudson, Miller and Redfern.

**PCR2 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The terms of reference were read and it was noted that the response of the Committee would be made to the Community and Housing Committee with any policy issue being referred to the full meeting of the Council.

Whilst the terms of reference required much work to be carried out, a start had been made on this already.

**PCR3 CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Interim Change Manager referred to the work of the Scrutiny Committee on fees and charges and pointed out that there were in particular two issues peripheral to the pest control review, namely the question of concessions and the question whether to charge for treatment of premises for rats.

The Head of Environmental Health and the Principal Environmental Health Officer considered that rats were an increasing public health issue and were of the view that when charges were introduced for pest treatment this usually resulted in reduced numbers of treatments. In contrast the Interim Change Manager had encountered authorities which charged for rats and believed this had no effect on the rat problem. Since the service was a discretionary one he suggested that income and cost to the Council should at least break even.

Councillor Chamberlain suggested that treatment of rats should be free of charge. The Interim Change Manager reiterated the view that, if the service was to be kept in house, it should at least be made more cost-effective and, ideally, self funding.

It was agreed that treatment of squirrels required an increase from £62 to a realistic charge and the Principal Environmental Health Officer agreed to provide a per job price.

It was noted that the Chief Finance Officer would be developing a fees and charges framework for consideration by Finance & Administration Committee. There was some doubt expressed as to the merits of non means tested discounts to pensioners and it was noted that some councils gave concessions only to those in receipt of means tested benefits.

Action:

That the Group agrees with the views expressed under 3 and 4 of the recent report of the Scrutiny Working Group on fees and charges, so far as this affects the Pest Control Service.

(The Scrutiny Working Group favoured a standard level of discount suggesting 50% discount for those on state benefits. The Group also questioned the need for concessions for over 65s who were not necessarily those in most financial need.)

PCR4

## **OPTIONS**

The Group considered the five options which had been identified by the environmental health officers as possible ways forward.

Councillor Chamberlain suggested that charges should be increased to a level greater than the rise in inflation for services other than treatment of rats; additional income would hopefully arise from alterations to the discounts to those over 65 and those in receipt of state benefits.

The Principal Environmental Health Officer stressed that income from treatment of pests was linked to the weather in Spring, hence difficult to predict.

The Group considered local partnership possibilities and it was mentioned that Harlow had outsourced pest control with a lot of other services to a large company which did not appear to be interested in taking over so small an operation as the Uttlesford pest control service. It appeared, too, that the results at Harlow since outsourcing were rather mixed.

As regards partnership with Braintree, it was felt that some small savings might be made on purchase of baits and on mileage for journeys across District boundaries, and that there might be room to charge Braintree for surplus capacity since they had reduced to two staff and were concerned about their resilience.

In answer to a question from Councillor Chamberlain, the Principal Environmental Health Officer confirmed that the Council used to carry out pest control at Stansted Airport but that BAA had changed to a countrywide contract so the service there had to be discontinued. The position might change if, as seemed likely, Stansted were to be sold as a separate airport.

Action agreed:

1. To support the principle of continuing the pest control service in house, but to look for efficiencies and cost savings, including
  - collaboration with neighbouring councils and (reflecting the discussions at Minute PCR3 above)
  - review of current charges (but with no charge for rats)
  - adoption of the principles of concessions put forward by the Scrutiny Committee
  - reducing overall costs of the service
2. That officers report back to the Working Group on how an in house service could be provided at no cost to the Council.

PCR5

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be Friday 11 September at 10.00 am.

The meeting ended at 11.00am.