

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Wednesday, 19th July, 2017 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Helen Hollis in the Chair;

Councillors Rachel Bissett, David Griffiths
(substitute for Lauren Mitchell), Rachel Madden,
Glenys Maxwell, Christine Quinn-Wilcox,
Paul Roberts and Mike Smith.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Lauren Mitchell and Sam Wilson.

Officers Present: Chris Booth, Mike Joy and Julie Robinson.

SB.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 7th February, 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.3 Scrutiny Review - Introduction to Pest Control

The Chairman introduced the item and advised the Panel that as part of the Scrutiny Workplan consultation, Members had approved Pest Control, with a particular focus on street vermin, as a topic that would benefit from scrutiny consideration.

As part of the preparatory work, the Chairman reported that she had recently accompanied one of the Pest Control Officers for a morning visiting a number of premises in order to obtain a greater understanding of the role and the work undertaken by the team. The Chairman commented that the experience was both helpful and enlightening and the Pest Control Officer had been extremely professional and knowledgeable in his work.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Panel that the topic was added to the Scrutiny Workplan to gain a more detailed understanding of the services provided by Pest Control, consideration of whether there was an increase in the reporting of street vermin and if any improvements could be made.

At this meeting Members of the Panel were being asked to consider the information both provided in the report and presented to them.

To assist with the review, the Council's Environmental Health Manager was in attendance and proceeded to give a presentation to the Panel in relation to the Pest Control Service.

The Environmental Health Manager informed the Panel that the Team responsible for Pest Control comprised of two Pest Control Officers and a Team Leader (Commercial).

The services provided by the Team included:-

- Control of rats and mice
- Control of pigeons
- Commercial contracts
- Treatment for cockroaches, bedbugs, squirrels, moles, wasps, ants and other insect pests

The Environmental Health Manager informed the Panel that this authority currently charges a set fee of £60 for rat or mice control (x3 visits). However, some neighbouring authorities including Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw no longer provide a pest control service to residents.

The Environmental Health Manager advised the Panel that in accordance with the Prevention of Damage By Pests Act 1949, every local authority has a duty to take such steps as may be necessary to secure so far as is practicable that their District is kept free from rats and mice and in particular:-

1. Carry out such inspections as may be necessary.
2. Destroy rats and mice on Council land/property.
3. Enforce these duties on owners/occupiers.

In addition, under the Act it is the duty of the occupier to notify the local authority in writing if they become aware of substantial numbers of rats and mice on their property. Local authorities can consequently request that owners/occupiers carry out relevant treatments for rats or mice, undertake structural repairs and remove waste and harbourage.

Furthermore, in accordance with the Public Health Act 1936, local authorities can request that owners/occupiers of filthy and verminous premises destroy or remove vermin/rats or mice and thereafter cleanse the premises. The Environmental Health Manager assured the Panel that the Council would provide help and support to residents where necessary to remove waste from their premises.

Members were also asked to note the Service Excellence and Customer Satisfaction accreditations that have been awarded to the Pest Control Service. The service provided is also endorsed by Which? Trusted Trader, ensuring that the authority can be trusted to provide services tailored to meet the needs of the client which are fair and fit for purpose.

The Environmental Health Manager also took the opportunity to refer to Commercialisation with regard to the Pest Control Service. He advised the Panel that most services provided within the Pest Control Service were now fee based (before April, 2013 there was no charge for the treatments for rats and mice in domestic premises). The Council also deal with many commercial contracts and currently nearly 90 commercial contracts are in place.

The Environmental Health Manager emphasised that developing income to cover the costs of providing the service was essential to enable the service to continue. Figures for the net cost and income for the Pest Control Service indicated that the net cost was at its lowest to date.

In order to expand Commercialisation the Council was looking at diversification into other areas such as:-

- Pest proofing of businesses
- Clean and clear of houses/gardens
- Boarding up of premises
- Cleaning and disinfecting of filthy and verminous premises

To conclude, the Environmental Health Manager reported that the Pest Control Service provides a number of community benefits to residents. The professional service provided is recognised as being excellent value for money with positive feedback being received from customers.

Proactive work continues and this includes assisting the Council's Enforcement Officers to take action where necessary and working with Schools and local Community Groups to highlight pest/waste issues.

Panel Members then took the opportunity to ask questions of the Environmental Health Manager and in doing so discussed the following:-

- The most common type of rats within the District , what attracts them onto land and whether there were any 'hotspots' in the District;
- Does the District have a problem with cockroaches?
- Would the Council consider providing a Pest Control Service for neighbouring authorities to secure additional income?
- The current charges for Pest Control Services and the potential for discounts for certain groups;
- Promotion of the Pest Control Service via advertising/leaflets, social media and in Notice Boards;
- Education needs to play a key role to encourage awareness of the problems associated with pests and to ensure that good practice methods are always used;
- Collaborative working with the Waste Disposal Team to encourage responsible disposal of waste (flyers or notices on refuse bins could be distributed for this purpose);
- The enforcement process and outcomes.

(At this point in the proceedings Councillor Rachel Madden left the meeting at 7.30 p.m. during consideration of the above item).

Following conclusion of the presentation and debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Environmental Health Manager for his informative presentation and valuable contributions towards the Panel's review.

Members acknowledged that the Pest Control Service was run by helpful, experienced and knowledgeable fully qualified pest controllers who offered a professional service at all times. Consequently, all Members agreed that the current service provided was fit for purpose and promoted good practice.

RESOLVED

that the following recommendations be submitted to the next available meeting of the Cabinet for consideration:-

- a) Cabinet be requested to explore the promotion of the Pest Control Service via Notice Boards and advertising on refuse bins to highlight the importance of pest control/sensible disposal of waste;
- b) consideration be given to the development of an Education Programme to encourage schools, community groups and local residents to understand the importance of pest control issues;
- c) Councillors be requested to be more focused on pest control issues within their Wards;
- d) consideration be given to using social media as a communications channel to promote and advertise the Pest Control Service;
- e) Cabinet be requested to explore the expansion of commercialisation to enable the Pest Control Service to be offered to neighbouring authorities who currently do not provide this service in-house.

The meeting closed at 7.37 p.m.

Chairman.