

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	19 OCTOBER 2017
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PEST CONTROL		
Portfolio Holder:	N/A		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Detailed Information

This topic was placed onto the Scrutiny Workplan to gain a more detailed understanding of the services provided by Pest Control, consideration of whether there is an increase in the reporting of street vermin and whether there are any improvements that could be made.

The Panel were assisted by the Environmental Health Manager throughout consideration of this topic.

Recommendations

- 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 (within existing resources) 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 continue 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.

National Picture

In 2017, the British Pest Control Association reported that rat numbers have increased to an estimated 200 million, from 160 million in 2014, with many now becoming increasingly resistant to poison and losing their fear of humans.

This is increasingly becoming an issue due to rats carrying diseases including Leptospirosis, Salmonella, Listeria, Toxoplasma gondii and Hantavirus – all of which can be fatal. The Black Rat (*Rattus Rattus*) and the Brown Rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*) are the two main types of rats that cause concern to the public. They are common pests in both private and home businesses.

According to the BPCA National Survey 2016, Rats have continued to be the most popular pest call-out for UK Local Authorities to receive over the past six years. Overall, there were 186,192 rat call-outs across the UK LAs operating a pest control service (247 out of 325) for the 2015/16 financial period, accounting for 46% of total UK pest call-outs.

Reasons for Increased Rat Populations

Primarily, the presence of rats is linked to poor and degraded environments. The English House Conditions Survey 1996 found a high correlation between widespread litter, vandalism, unkempt gardens and neglected and vacant buildings, and rat infestations. Neglected and derelict properties may allow rats to escape from sewers to the surface from dried out U-bends or broken drainage fittings and high density of housing properties can also be a factor.

Rats flourish where there is rubbish as this provides both refuge and food. Any increase in litter and fly tipping create perfect habitats for rats to live and breed, as does rubbish left in gardens.

Keep Britain Tidy reported recently that the rat problem has become more acute in recent years, coming in tandem with increased binge drinking which has led to countless takeaways being eaten and containers and leftover food dumped in the street.

They further added that fast food was not the only reason, it explained that although some people might believe dropping biodegradable fruit peelings was acceptable, that also encouraged vermin; this kind of litter often gets dropped on pavements at lunchtime, with the food breaking down into a mushy meal for rats.

Pest Control – Ashfield District Council

Ashfield District Council offer a comprehensive, discreet and professional commercial Pest Prevention and Control Service and is “Which? Trusted Trader” endorsed, ensuring services are effective and safe with high levels of customer satisfaction. They offer a rapid response and can often visit within 24 hours.

This service is provided on a commercial basis to both residential and businesses, offering one off treatments, annual contracts or other service levels to meet individual needs. This includes;

- A thorough inspection of the affected property
- A consultation
- Creation of a plan which will minimise the potential for pests and the factors associated with them.

Current charges for rat or mice control are £60.00 for three visits. Where required, additional visits cost £18.00.

The Panel were informed 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

Legislation

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.

Commercialism

During the review, Members enquired about costs for the service. The Panel were advised 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 there are 90 commercial contracts are in place.

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
- Cleaning and clearing of houses/gardens
- Boarding up of premises
- Cleaning and disinfecting of filthy and verminous premises

Customer satisfaction / needs

The Environmental Health Section uses a number of customer satisfaction survey methods to enable its customers to rate the service. Gauging customer satisfaction allows the Council to identify customer needs, wants and expectations whilst providing a consistent mechanism

to highlight customer satisfaction levels.

The Council's Commercial Team currently collects customer feedback and satisfaction through paper questionnaires provided to pest control customers on completion of their treatment and with food hygiene inspection letters.

Shadowing Visit with Pest Control

As part of the review fact finding, the Chairman accompanied one of the Pest Control Officers for a morning visiting to a number of premises in order to obtain a greater understanding of the role and the work undertaken by the team.

This visit included both residential and commercial property visits. 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 and had provided an excellent service to each customer, undertaking both practical solutions and preventative measures whilst providing advice to the customer.

Conclusion

In concluding their consideration of this topic, 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.

Members further concluded that education and knowledge was key to promoting cleaner streets and discouraging vermin. This included consideration of further use of social media, advertising on our existing bins and educating young people.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Communities and Environment - Ensure the foundations for a good quality of life are in place; reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and facilitating cleaner and more attractive neighbourhoods.

Legal:

No Legal implications are identified arising from this report. Legislation relating to the Council's responsibilities and powers to deal with pest and vermin is detailed in this report.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	Pest control is a commercially operated service. There is currently no additional budget allocation for external advertising on billboards or bins. Any such considerations would need advice from Finance to explore potential financial implications.

Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Potential risk of community / businesses not being aware of the commercial Pest Control service provided by the Council	Improved visibility and advertising through social media and consideration of utilising bins / notice boards to raise awareness.

Human Resources:

There are no Human Resources implications arising from this report.

Equalities

There are no Equality implications arising from this report.

Other Implications:

None

Reason(s) for Urgency (if applicable):

N/A

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