

**AGENDA ITEM:
SUMMARY**



Report for:	Housing and Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	19/03/2014
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of Report	Pest Control Service: Proposed Changes
Contact:	<p>Cllr Neil Harden, Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services</p> <p>Author/Responsible Officers:</p> <p>Chris Troy, Group Manager, Regulatory Services</p> <p>Dave Austin, Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery</p>
Purpose of report:	To update Members on proposed changes to the Council's Pest Control Service.
Recommendations:	That Members consider the proposals and that any comments are passed to the Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services for his consideration.
Corporate objectives:	<p>Resources and Value For Money; Optimise Resources and Implement Best Practice.</p> <p>Clean and Safe; Ridding environments of pests and vermin will have an overall public health benefit for Dacorum.</p>
Implications:	<p>Financial:</p> <p>Any initial outlay of resource will be offset by the income generated once charging is implemented.</p> <p>Value for Money:</p> <p>Introducing charges for pest control will generate income while giving access to a greater number of residents.</p>
'Value For Money Implications'	

Risk Implications	There is a risk that some residents will no longer use the pest control service once charges are introduced. This is highly unlikely according to the experience of other LA's that have introduced similar low cost charges and in any case the Operations team has a number of commercial contracts to maintain the service if there was to be reduced take up initially.
Equalities Implications	The proposals will be more equitable than existing arrangements as all residents in Dacorum will be able to access the pest control service instead of just owner occupiers and council tenants. Fees will be discounted for holders of the Dacorum Card.
Health And Safety Implications	Risk assessments are carried out for all pest control activities and pest control staff need to be trained on Health & Safety before they carry out pest control work.
Consultees:	Clean, Safe & Green
Background papers:	Local Authority Comparison Charges: Appendix 1
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

Pest Control: Proposed Changes

1. Introduction

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Overview & Scrutiny Committee on recent changes to the Pest Control Service in Dacorum and ask members to consider future changes to the existing scope of the service. In particular, with regards to the control of rats, so that consideration can be given to the proposal to charge a fee for the treatment of rats in domestic settings. In addition there are proposals to provide a chargeable service for other pests such as mice, fleas & wasps and to increase the number of contracts in the commercial sector.

1.2 Key Proposals:

- Introduce a charge for rats in domestic premises
- Provide a chargeable service for other pests including mice, wasps, fleas
- Plans to further develop services in the commercial sector

That Members consider the proposals and that any comments are passed to the portfolio holder for Regulatory Services for his consultation.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Operation's team within the Regulatory Services (Environmental Health) is responsible for the day to day running of the Pest Control Service as well as other functions such as the Dog Warden Service, Clinical Waste, Cesspool Emptying and Emergency Planning/Business Continuity (Resilience). The team is currently being restructured to prioritise those services that are more readily aligned to the overall Environmental Health function within Regulatory Services. The priorities in the future will be Pest Control, Resilience and the Dog Warden function.
- 2.2 In relation to pest control, the realignment of these services will increase the section's capacity to deal with a broader range of pest control activities in a wider variety of premises and will include both domestic and commercial sectors. Currently the pest control service covers the treatment of rats in domestic premises plus a small number of commercial contracts (1 FTE is employed across the whole of DBC), however, there are plans to increase this capacity so that the section can cover additional domestic and commercial work to meet the needs of our residents and local businesses. Some expansion of the commercial service is already in progress and DBC is about to take over pest control contracts for Hertfordshire County Council for 15 of their largest sites.
- 2.3 In anticipation of the new expanded service 4 officers have been trained up and will be deemed competent to carry out pest control treatments from 1st April 2014. These officers currently work within Regulatory Services and cover the waste and enforcement functions and therefore there is no need to employ additional staff.

3.0 Scope of current Pest Control service

- 3.1 Currently, Regulatory Services just treat rats in certain domestic properties, i.e. those which are owner occupied and those occupied by Council tenants and a small number of commercial premises. The domestic treatments are offered with no direct charge to the customer. Housing Association and other privately renting tenants are referred to their 'landlords' to take responsibility for arranging a Pest Control treatment, as part of their overall management obligations. This is an historical arrangement, which resulted from a service restructure some years ago.

3.2 Unfortunately, there are a number of anomalies with this system:

- The provision of free treatments to some tenants seems to put others at a disadvantage.
- Offering free treatments seems to remove the incentive for tenants to take some responsibility for the control of rats, e.g. factors include the way refuse is stored, how gardens are maintained, the use of inappropriate composting methods, increased popularity of feeding wild birds, the storage of pet foods, keeping chickens in the garden, etc. The Council therefore picks up the cost of the treatment of infestations that may have been quite easily prevented.
- The Council is called out for treatments that the officers are unable to administer when they arrive on site, i.e. the pests other than rats. (This results in a lot of wasted time.)
- Some infestations have already spread to several properties by the time Regulatory Services are called out. It is particularly difficult then to deal with a mix of tenures, i.e. where the Council is able to treat the owner-occupied and Council properties, but not any other tenures.

In 2010/11 we received 569 requests from owner-occupiers and council tenants for initial rat treatments, 501 requests in 2011/12 and 502 requests in 2012/13. A genuine infestation of rats would take an officer a minimum of 3 to 4 visits (over a 3 to 4 week period) to eradicate.

4.0 Proposal for a revised Pest Control service

- The new service will continue to carry out treatments for rats but a realistic charge will be made for such treatments and the service will be extended to include domestic settings across all tenures.
- The service will be extended to cover chargeable treatments for other pests such as mice and insects i.e. fleas, wasps.
- Plans to further develop services in the commercial sector: the service is planning to increase the number of commercial contracts.

5.0 Treatment for rats

5.1 It is proposed that the service is extended to enable the treatment of rats in domestic settings across all tenures, i.e. equally available to all Dacorum residents. This would enable approximately 11,000 additional households to access the service directly.

5.2 It is further proposed that a call-out charge is introduced. This charge would contribute towards the cost of the Pest Control Officer's time, whether this is spent discussing preventative measures with residents, or for the actual baiting of rat infestations. We propose that a £40 charge is introduced for all customers requesting a domestic rat

treatment (£10 for Dacorum card holders). The charge would apply equally to all residents whether they are owner-occupiers, council tenants or privately renting.

- 5.3 It is hoped that the introduction of a charge would make residents consider their role in helping to prevent pest infestations and would encourage greater local accountability, rather than relying on the Council to cover the full cost of this public health issue through reactive measures. At the same time, a low charge should not deter residents from reporting an infestation. This would also enable the Pest Control operative to perform an educative role during visits and provide information to help prevent further infestations.
- 5.4 Following the introduction of the charge, officers would analyse the number of call-outs over a period of twelve months to gauge the effect on the service.
- 5.5 Officers have undertaken a comparison of fees charged for rat treatments by other Local Authorities in the surrounding area. These are shown in the table appendix 1:
- 5.6 Officers have contacted several of the councils that have introduced charges for pest control and they did not see a significant impact on either enforcement rates or the number of treatment requests, (except for any seasonal variation). In addition their pest control officers reported a fall in what they would class as 'time waster' jobs, i.e. jobs where no treatment could be carried out as there was no evidence of infestation but the pest control officer had been called because the service was free.
- 5.7 If figures remain in the 500's an estimated income of approximately £15,000 per year would be generated. This would cover the additional costs of call handling and Pest Control revenue costs. Costs of call handling will be reduced further when planned web- based payments come into effect.

6.0 Treatments for other pests

- 6.1 The current service does not routinely carry out treatments for mice, wasps, fleas etc and it is proposed that these additional services are provided. This would be offered to all domestic premises and to businesses, again charges will apply. A list of charges for domestic premises is given in appendix 1 which compares the proposed DBC costs with those of other LA's. In some instances the DBC fees are lower when compared to other LA's but this will enable the service to assess the initial take up of these services and set realistic costs in the future.
- 6.2 A review will take place after 12 months and a decision will be taken whether the fees need to be increased. In coming to these figures

resources including officer time, travel expenses and materials have been taken into consideration. The degree to which these additional services are offered will be dependent on the demand for rat treatments, as this is clearly a priority in terms of public health.

7.0 Plans to further develop services in the commercial sector

- 7.1 As stated earlier in this report DBC will be providing a pest control service for Hertfordshire County Council. There is also potential to take on other commercial contracts including local businesses, schools and even commercial operations outside of DBC. (One large food retailer has expressed interest.) The Operations section will be in a better position to consider these once the restructure of the section has been undertaken. Call outs for small businesses will be at reduced rates, however, any contracts for larger businesses will be levied at a rate approaching a standard commercial rate (these charges would be bespoke to the operation being considered and would take into account all resources necessary to maintain effective treatment & monitoring)
- 7.2 By offering businesses a low cost pest control service it is likely to have benefits to residents living in the vicinity. Commercial premises often provide a source of food and harbourage to pests which can cause numbers to increase in an area. Controlling this at source will prevent wider public health issues as well as save time on enforcement action.

8.0 Summary/Recommendations

8.1 This report outlines the key proposals:

- **Charge for rats in domestic premises**
- **Provide a chargeable service for other pests including mice, wasps, fleas**
- **Plans to further develop services in the commercial sector**

8.2 The proposed changes to the Council's pest control function provides 'value for money' as costs will be met by the income generated, and it will be more equitable as all members of the public will have access to low cost rat treatments, which would be a much fairer and more consistent approach. It would also give our Pest Control team the opportunity to educate members of the public & business in all aspects of pest control and to encourage them to take more responsibility for preventative action.

8.3 Ultimately this should result in a better place to live, that is clean and safe for all residents of Dacorum and represents value for money.

