



North Devon Council

Report Date: Monday, 7 October 2024

Topic: Pest Control Service

Report by: Darren Hale, Lead Environmental Health Officer Environmental Protection

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. In 2004, North Devon Council stopped providing a Pest Control service to our residents and businesses, which is advised was due to staff leaving, which coincided with a change in pricing policy. The service was subsequently contracted out to SDK Environmental Limited for a 6 month trial period, which then ceased and not progressed. Local pest control provision to residents was then dependent on national and local pest control companies to provide any services. Environmental Health are duty bound to investigate all reports of rodent and other pest problems and take enforcement action where land owners do not comply.

1.2. The increase in demand for our Environmental Protection Team to respond to rodent and bedbug concerns is relatively high that require considerable time in investigating complaints. A lack of an experienced pest control officer increases the impact on resources and the ability to proactively resolve pest problems within the district.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. Members delegate authority to the Head of Planning Housing and Health to develop and implement a North Devon Council operated Pest Control Service.

2.2. Further to recommendation 2.1 above, to recommend to Full Council to amend the Annexe 2 to Part 3 of the Constitution to insert a new paragraph 5.15A as follows:

To provide a pest control service.

2.3. To consider the outcomes of the Equality Impact Assessment as summarised in paragraph 6 of the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. A Council operated pest control service would improve operational service efficiency, deliver a comprehensive service for residents and businesses and provide an opportunity to create a commercial income.

4. REPORT

Demand

- 4.1. Assessing the current demand for a Council run pest control service is challenging and likely to have considerable margin of error that needs consideration. As the Council has not provided a pest control service for many years, there is limited council held data. The Environmental Protection Team investigates certain rodent pests using its powers under the Prevention of Damage by Pest Act 1949. However, the majority of these investigations have recommended the complainant enlists the services of an external pest control company. No legal notices requiring pest irradiation have been issued by the Council in the last 3 years, with a single notice back in 2008. There has been a noticeable demand recently in relation to bedbugs both nationally and locally, as a result of a prevalence of the pest. In addition, the Council's Customer Services Team advise that they take frequent calls asking if we do provide this service, but again cannot substantiate those numbers.
- 4.2. The Council's previous pest control service had initially experienced in the region of 1,200 requests for service each year but this dropped to circa 300 when Council's subsidies and staffing were removed. The passage of time means that it is difficult to determine why there was such a dramatic drop but it is reasonable to assume, from some available information, the service was not marketed and to all intents and purposes the Council stepped back from providing a non-statutory service to residents.
- 4.3. There is no evidence that the Council pursued any commercial contracts with housing providers or businesses, which can provide a significant resilience to a pest control service. Given the large leisure and hospitality sector, combined with housing, farming and industrial sites within North Devon District Council there is considerable scope to market services to these establishments.
- 4.4. As private pest control companies are not required to notify the Council or any government body on where and when a pest treatment is carried out, there is no public data on the level of infestations or types of pests. Environmental Protection Team received 72 complaints of pests during the 3 years.
- 4.5. North Devon Council spent £12,000 on procuring pest control services across its own sites in 2023/24, which includes contracts at Brynsworthy Environment Centre, the Crematorium and other premises, as well as spot purchases to deal with problems at other Council owned sites.

Pricing

4.6. Previous North Devon Council pest control service was aimed at providing an almost free pest control service with charges of around £30 for a rodent treatment. Although this charge was some 10 years ago, it would still have required a three part treatment for rodents and if the administration is considered it would have been a cost to the Council. Allowing for inflation it is not believed this could be been a commercially viable service.

4.7. A Council run pest control services can attract a negative response from local pest control businesses due to concern of anti-competitive concerns. This historically has been due to Council's heavily subsidising overheads and even discounting fees and charges.

4.8. Four Councils in Devon now offer some form of pest control service.

- East Devon charge £90 for up to 3 visits for rodents, £60 for wasps and £130 for Fleas and Cockroaches, inclusive of VAT.
- Exeter offer £72 for rat and mice treatment but do not specify the number of visits. Exeter also seem to charge £72 for wasp nest removal but unsure if this means 'removal' or a treatment, as it is unusual to remove a dead nest. For bedbugs, cockroaches and fleas customers are required to call for a quotation.
- Plymouth have advised that they have an annual income of £111,000 for an expenditure of £48,000. Their pest control fees are similar to those proposed below. Plymouth's focus is on its own property, along with the domestic treatments and some commercial that includes Houses in Multiple occupation.
- Teignbridge still offer a free treatment for rodent, via a contractor but are currently reviewing this service. We are advise however that the cost of providing this level of service is £30,000 per year, which is a useful indicator of expected volumes. Their free service is not well advertised and from the website there is no indication of a free service, which would naturally reduce demand.

4.9. The model at Plymouth (albeit a City location) is along the lines of those suitable to North Devon District.

4.10. Given that an active rodent infestation that requires baits and treatment would typical require at least 3 visits, both East Devon and Exeter appear to be providing a highly subsidised service.

4.11. To provide a fair and commercial facing pest control service the fees would need to be in the range set out below. These take into account the geography of the district and allow to offer a quality service to residents and businesses and provide a balance to ensure that cost of providing the service is recovered.

Pests	Standard Fee	Number of visits	Days between visits
Wasps	£82	1	n/a
Fleas	£269	2	14 to 21
Garden ants (black ants)	£105	1	n/a
Cockroaches	£200	2	n/a
Mice	£180	3	7 to 10
Rats	£180	3	7 to 10
Clothes moths (1-3 rooms)	£290	2	14 to 21
Clothes moths (4-6 rooms)	£330	2	14 to 21
Bedbugs (1-3 rooms)	£290	2	14 to 16
Bedbugs (4-6 rooms)	£330	2	14 to 16

4.12. Research of local pest control companies it is difficult to determine their typical fees for various treatments, due to their pricing models.

Income

The table below provides a reasonable estimate of the volumes and income to be confident of ensuring a pest control service recovers the cost. These figures are assumed with 1 FTE Pest Control Officer in post.

4.13.

Volume	Pest	Unit Fee	Total
400	Rats	£180	£72000
100	Mice	£180	£18000
10	Bedbugs	£290	£2900

60	Wasps	£82	£4920
10	Cockroaches	£200	£2000
5	Fleas	£269	£1345
785	Total	890	£92069

4.14. The volumes in the table above are based on officer experience and an analysis of population, domestic and commercial properties and compared to other local authority volumes. The number of treatments of each pest in the table above are predicted at a reasonable level to ensure that the service can be self-sustainable and ensures that all costs of providing the service are recovered.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. To provide a pest control service that is safe, is sustainable and has the quality, it is expected the Council would need to employ a qualified and experienced Pest Control operative that has a minimum of a BPCA Diploma in Pest Control part 1 or Level 2 RSPH qualification. However, if the Council wanted to advance the commercial market and take advantage of the significant income opportunity it would require a more experienced lead officer. Once established there may be an opportunity to take advantage of apprenticeship schemes for additional staff.

5.2. For each experienced pest control officer, a suitable vehicle (light weight van with GRP lining), would be required. In addition the necessary protective equipment and spray and traps etc. It may be possible to repurpose a current NDDC vehicle, to reduce start-up costs and risks.

5.3. A secure storage unit would be required for supplies of baits and poisons and to store waste for disposal via an approved route.

5.4. Estimated figures for on cost of the service that include, staffing, vehicles, equipment and the direct cost of baits and poisons are circa £80,000 in the first full year of providing a service. An estimated income when considering the volumes at 4.13 is anticipated to be in the region of £92,000, which depending on actual volumes, would ensure a total cost recovery of providing the service

5.5. The Council's current Environmental Health system 'Assure' is already capable to holding the information and creating necessary web forms for customers. Current finance payment system could readily be revised to



include online payment for a treatment. Due to the normally urgent nature of the first visit, cheque payments are not advised to avoid debt issues.

5.6. Officers are also aware of a pest control booking system that includes links to council's online payments, case allocation and online reporting that would be free of charge to North Devon, which could be considered as the service develops.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. There are some positive impacts on Equalities from the introduction of a North Devon Pest Control Service. As a Council run service there is direct control of the service provision that we can build into the provision, to ensure positive impacts. The service will monitor equalities data to regularly review the user needs and identify and groups that may not be accessing the service.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1 Introduction of a new service will have a small impact on our corporate carbon footprint. The Council will be able to devise policies to minimise the use of pesticides and their impact on the environment by using integrated pest management techniques, and will be able to use its purchasing power to ensure the lowest environmental risk.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda: This service has the potential to be developed to provide a commercial element to the service.

8.1.2. Improving customer focus: A Council provided service enables the Council to be able to respond to residents' concerns about pests and provide a customer focused service

8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development: The presence of rodents can significantly impact the look and feel of area and effect the sense of place and adversely impact on economic development and regeneration.

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. Save as provided in paragraph 9.2 below, the decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made by this Committee pursuant to delegated powers provided in Part 3 Annex 1 of the Constitution.



9.2. As noted in the report, the power to decide on one or more of the recommendations in this report is reserved to Council pursuant to Article 4.5.1 and as such the recommendation must be referred to Council to ratify.

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
None

12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Jon Triggs (Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive)