

BRECKLAND COUNCIL

Report of: Elizabeth Gould, Executive Member for Planning & Environmental Services

To: Overview & Scrutiny Commission: 18 July 2013
Cabinet: 30 July 2013

Author: Richard Boole, Environmental Protection Manager

Subject: **PEST CONTROL SERVICE**

Purpose: To seek Cabinet approval for the withdrawal of the Pest Control Service with affect from 1 April 2014.

Recommendation(s):

To support the recommendation that Cabinet: -

1. Withdraw the Pest Control Service with affect from 1 April 2014 and provide appropriate sign-posting to commercial providers via the Customer Services Team.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Pest Control Service currently provided by the Council was highlighted by residents during the "Could We Should We" consultation events in September 2012 as a potential area for disinvestment.
- 1.2 This report has been put together following this consultation and recommends the withdrawal of the Pest Control Service with affect from 1 April 2014.
- 1.3 Under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (PDPA) the Council is required to inspect its area for rodent infestations and require land owners to take action to control such incidences. There are no equivalent provisions regarding insects.
- 1.4 To help fulfil this obligation, the Council has traditionally delivered a Pest Control Service.
- 1.5 For domestic properties, a free service has been provided for rodents (rats and mice) with charges being made for the treatment of insects (wasps, fleas, cluster flies and bed bugs). For commercial properties, charges have been levied for all services/treatments.
- 1.6 The Pest Control Service is provided by an external contractor, Pest Express Ltd, at a budgeted cost to Breckland Council of £59,090 in 2013-14. The present contract runs from 1 May 2011 to 30 April 2014 with an option to renew for a further year (the cost of this further year would see an increase in costs by an RPI (retail price index) formula identified within the contract).
- 1.7 Pest Express Ltd provide a service during normal working hours Monday to Friday with an emergency service out of hours and at weekends.
- 1.8 The above costs are offset in part by income from chargeable treatments, which are subject to significant fluctuation (weather dependent plus other factors beyond our control).

1.9 In 2011/12 the income received from chargeable treatments totalled £21,574. In 2012/13 the equivalent figure was £6,575.

1.10 The numbers of treatments requested are shown in the table below: -

Pest	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Rats	701	625	665
Mice	107	128	149
Wasps	583	565	118
Fleas	44	49	53
Bed Bugs	13	18	12
Cluster Flies	21	24	8

1.11 With regard to the pest control service provided by neighbouring authorities: -

- Broadland District Council and Great Yarmouth Borough Council provide free treatment for rodents in domestic properties;
- Broadland District Council provides a chargeable service for insects in domestic properties;
- Great Yarmouth Borough Council do not provide a service for the treatment of insects but have agreed preferential rates with Pest Express Ltd;
- Norwich City Council and South Norfolk District Council provide a chargeable service for rodents and insects (e.g. South Norfolk District Council charges £30 per rodent treatment);
- North Norfolk District Council and Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council do not provide a Pest Control Service.

2.0 ISSUES

2.1 As highlighted above Breckland Council currently provides a full Pest Control Service through an external contractor with a combination of free treatments (rodents) and chargeable services (insects).

2.2 Withdrawing the full Pest Control Service would save the Council circa. £46,100 per annum in 2014-15.

2.3 Withdrawing the Pest Control Service would not compromise the Council's obligations with regard to the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (PDPA). That said, some additional work would be picked up within the Council's existing Environmental Health resource if the full service was withdrawn.

2.4 As demonstrated above demand for some treatments/services has decreased over recent years.

2.5 The full Pest Control Service could be retained and charges could be introduced for those services currently provided without charge (rodents). To make this service cost neutral to the Council it is estimated that a charge (per treatment) of £98.90 would need to be levied. A lower charge could be introduced, thereby reducing the net cost of the service but not making the service cost neutral.

2.6 A charge of £98.90 is high when compared to the charges applied by neighbouring local authorities, e.g. South Norfolk District Council (£30). Indicative charges provided by private contractors are listed below (excluding VAT): -

- Rodents £50 for 2 visits thereafter £20 per visit
- Wasps £40 per treatment

- Bed bugs from £150 per treatment
- Fleas £125 per treatment
- Flies £125 per treatment

Breckland Council's current charges are provided in the appendices of this report. The above figures suggest that our current Pest Control Charges for insects are low when compared to the market; the proposed charge for the treatment of rodents detailed above is higher than the market rate. Should Members decide to retain the Pest Control Service then a review of Fees and Charges [and the associated contract price] should be undertaken.

- 2.7 The withdrawal of the service or the introduction of charging could have the effect that domestic property owners are less willing to actively seek treatment for problems as they arise and could lead to increased requirement for the Council's enforcement function.
- 2.8 That said, experience from other local authorities suggests that there wasn't a significant impact on the Environmental Health Service in terms of additional enforcement activity after the withdrawal of a Pest Control Service.
- 2.9 Furthermore, experience from other local authorities that have withdrawn such provision would suggest that although some impact and customer dissatisfaction is felt in the early stages following the change, this subsides over time as people become accustomed to the new arrangements.
- 2.10 It is important that the withdrawal of the service is well publicised, the website amended and the Customer Service Team supplied with suitable scripts, to help keep customers well informed and to ensure that as little impact as possible was felt by the Environmental Health Team.

3.0 OPTIONS

- 3.1 Do Nothing – retain the Pest Control Service at a budgeted cost of £65,630 in 2014/15 including tendering costs. The cost being offset by income from seasonal insect treatments, circa. £19,530. Net cost to Breckland Council would be circa. £46,100 (inc. contract re-tendering costs).
- 3.2 Withdraw the Pest Control Service with a saving of circa. £46,100 in 2014/15 and provide appropriate sign-posting to commercial providers via the Customer Services Team.
- 3.3 Retain the Pest Control Service but introduce a charge for domestic rodent treatments at an amount similar to that charged by South Norfolk Council i.e. £30. Based on the current rodent figures for 2012/13 with some reduction for people not able to pay, 400 payments of £30 and an income of £12,000 could be expected. Net cost to Breckland Council of the Pest Control Service would therefore be circa. £34,100.
- 3.4 Retain the Pest Control Service but implement appropriate charges to ensure that the service is cost neutral. An income of £19,530 from insects (based on budgeted income is assumed. If 400 rodent treatments are provided each year then a charge of £98.90 would need to be levied to realise an additional income of £39,560 which would make the service cost neutral (excluding re-tendering costs of £6540).

4.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 4.1 The Pest Control Service is not a statutory function and disinvestment would make a significant contribution to the Council's "efficiency programme". There is public support for disinvestment as evidenced in the "Could We, Should We" consultation

events. Experience from elsewhere suggests that the impact on residents and businesses diminishes over time and is not significant.

- 4.2 Retaining the Pest Control Service and introducing charges for all treatments could make the service cost neutral. That said, it is difficult to predict the level of income that would be generated due to the evidenced fluctuations in demand and the overall reduction in demand for such services. Furthermore, there would be a need to re-tender and renegotiate any contractual arrangements with an associated cost to the Authority and vary fees and charges annually to reflect the demand for service.

5.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS AND TIMELINES

- 5.1 Revenue saving of circa. £46,100 per annum from 1 April 2014 forward.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Carbon Footprint & Environmental Issues

Not applicable.

6.2 Constitution & Legal

Legal implications have been considered and have been included within the report.

6.3 Contracts

The current contract expires on 30 April 2014 (with the option to extend for a further year) and there is no legitimate reason to seek early termination.

Should the service be retained there would be a need to retender the contract from mid 2014. Tender processing using an external agency is estimated at £6540. It is unclear what the cost of a new contract price would be per annum until the market is tested, the only benchmark being the contract we already have.

6.4 Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

6.5 Equality and Diversity & Human Rights

No specific implications identified, other than the potential impact on low income families were a free or low cost treatment service not available.

6.6 Financial

See above and attached Proforma B

6.7 Risk Management

Business risk issues have been identified and are covered in the report. Additionally, were the service to cease, there may be public relations / reputational risks that would need managing, particularly in the short term immediately after the contract ended.

6.8 Staffing

Staffing issues have been considered and are included within the report.

6.9 Stakeholders / Consultation

Not applicable.

6.10 Other

Not applicable.

7.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

All Wards

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Key Decision: Yes - This report results in Cabinet making a key decision.

Appendices attached to this report:

Current Pest Control Charges