

“Work Plan Study - Pest Control”



Report by the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

August 2017 – October 2017

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Chair's Foreword and Acknowledgements

This is the first Task and Finish group study that I have chaired. We started the study in August 2017 with a presentation from Craig Sharp and Simon Neighbour at Preston City Council, which gave us the background and overview of pest control and Preston's Service Offer.

Our second meeting included evidence from Mr Sharp and Mr Neighbour on How Society Controls Pests, in which they outlined the hierarchy of prevention and alternative methods of service delivery and delivery models.

We held three sub groups, interviewing Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation, Pete Alston, Pest Control Technician and Paul Charleson, National Pest Advisory Panel.

This Work Plan Study was suggested for review by our fellow councillors and has proved to be very informative. It has offered an insight into the Pest Control Service and the exceptional service they provide to the people of Preston despite severe budget constraints.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the interviewees who gave evidence, officers who supported the work plan study, and also fellow Task Group members for their contribution and support.

Councillor Lynne Wallace

Chair

The members who contributed to this study were:

Councillor Wallace (Chair)

Councillor Hammond (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Mrs Brown

Councillor Corker

Councillor Mrs Crompton

Councillor Crowe

Councillor Eaves

Councillor Mrs Edmondson

Councillor Greenhalgh

Recommendations to Cabinet

- 1) That the existing Public Health model be retained for the Pest Control Service, as opposed to an income based model;
- 2) Subject to funding availability, review the Pest Control Service with a view to improving the service by increasing the team by at least one member of staff. This review to be carried out on an annual basis;
- 3) To improve the effectiveness of the Pest Control Service, introduce multi skilling from other service areas to create greater flexibility to support the Pest Control Service;
- 4) Explore the business case for utilising digital technology in order to reduce back office / administrative tasks, e.g. a 'smart device' which can be used on site at appointments rather than having to return to the office to input the data;
- 5) To introduce a Preston City Council 'Rodent Control Strategy' to include all aspects of Environmental Health (e.g. Pest Control Service, enforcement, food safety, waste collection etc.) and how the Council educates the public about pest control and prevention.

1.1. **Background / Aims of this study**

The topic for this study was proposed at the Priority Setting workshop on 16 May 2017. It was subsequently approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Plan 2017/18.

1.2 **Scope of the Study**

A draft scoping document for this study was considered and approved by the Task and Finish Group on 17 August 2017 (see Appendix A). It included:

- Why society controls pests
- How society controls pests
- The recent (post 2000) history of Preston City Council Pest Control service offers
- The current Preston City Council Pest Control Service offer
- Alternative local authority pest control service offers
- Alternative pest control service delivery models

1.3 **Methodology**

The Task and Finish Group held two formal meetings in August and September to gather factual evidence relating to the background, service history, current service offer and alternative models of delivery.

It also held three sub group interviews on 27, 28 and 29 September 2017 as detailed in Appendix B of this report.

The Task and Finish Group then held a final meeting on 13 October 2017 to consider its findings and agree its recommendations.

1.3 **Key Information - Presentation by PCC Officers**

Meeting on 17 August 2017

Background and Overview of Pest Control

Craig Sharp, Chief Environmental Health Officer delivered a presentation giving the background and overview to the subject of Pest Control, outlining what is meant by a pest, how society controls pests and what are the Council's statutory duties.

Mr Sharp explained that pest control covers several pieces of legislation e.g. Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949, Environmental Protection Law,

Public Health Law, Food Safety Law, Workplace Health & Safety Law and Housing Standards Law. This means that often the Pest Control service necessarily involves other services the Council provides such as food safety;

for example, approximately half of food premises closed by the Council have a rat or cockroach infestation. He also indicated that pests concerning domestic properties are primarily rats or mice.

Preston City Council Service Offer

Simon Neighbour, Environmental Health Manager gave a presentation about the Council's Pest Control service, which provided information concerning sewer baiting, external rodent control, domestic rodent control, domestic cockroach control, contracts, and culling.

Mr Neighbour provided information and answered questions on the following issues:-

Sewer Baiting - The Council has an arrangement with United Utilities, i.e. they cover 50% of the cost, i.e. £16,500, which the Council matches.

Requests regarding control of pests - There has been a decreasing number of requests since 2014/15, however as the Council's resources are limited, a number of people may be going to private companies. This means that it is difficult to monitor the overall pest population in the City. The Council will carry out follow up visits for every call-out. There are typically 2.4 revisits for each new job.

Contracts - The Council has a number of contracts for pest control prevention services, but these have decreased in value in recent years from £20,000 to £15,000. The target for revenue from contracts is a 25% profit margin but this has been exceeded.

Service and Priorities

Mr Neighbour indicated that 98% of service requests come from domestic properties via the Contact Centre or website, and mostly concerned rats and mice.

Regarding how work is prioritised, Mr Neighbour explained that an agreed percentage of officer time was allocated to contract work, and the service would attempt to maximise profit in this area. There were currently three staff (reduced from six) and one manager (i.e. Mr Neighbour).

Rat Population

The Chair enquired whether the rat population was increasing. Mr Neighbour indicated that only seven councils in Lancashire are still providing a free pest control service; others have introduced a charge and some are not providing a service at all, so complainants must use the private sector. Mr Neighbour suggested that this is likely to have an impact, although it is difficult to monitor the situation due to the variance in service provision. He also indicated that case studies have shown in relation to some other Councils where pest control services were stopped and then reintroduced, the service struggled to meet demand due to the pest population increase.

It was noted that attempting self-treat the problem with, for example, rat poison, can be irresponsible because it can cause pests to become resistant if not done properly. Also food composting and leaving takeaway food in an accessible place can attract pests. The importance of education was stressed.

Resources

Mr Neighbour indicated that the pest control section works well with other council services such as planning, food safety and waste collection. However, resources are an issue and the Council is effectively competing with the private sector. As a comparison, Mr Neighbour explained that the private sector only do what they are paid to do by the individual domestic property, whereas the Council will investigate more widely if necessary to identify the source of the problem e.g. in a row of terraced housing.

The Task and Finish Group made enquiries and requests for information which would assist the study, i.e.

- should we charge landlords (including Registered Social Landlords) for treatments in domestic properties; and
- availability of pest control performance targets / statistics.

1.4 Meeting held on 13 September 2017 - Presentations

How Society Controls Pests

Mr Simon Neighbour, Environmental Health Manager gave a presentation on How Society Controls Pests, in which he outlined the hierarchy of prevention. He explained that there were several options for dealing with pests (e.g. rats, mice) and different benefits appropriate to the circumstances, as follows:

- Remove food / nesting sources e.g. compost bins

- Traps – pests learn to avoid the area;
- Gassing (not used by Preston City Council)
- Poisons – i.e. anticoagulant bait which at a milder strength, over a longer period of time will actually kill a larger population.

He indicated that the need to control pests was a balancing act between wider public health and individual (e.g. domestic) needs.

As requested at the previous meeting, Mr Neighbour presented statistics relating to pest populations by ward. He stressed that the figures only reflected users of the Council's service, not that of the private sector. Factors influencing higher pest populations in some wards included an increased concentration of housing, availability of food, age and tenure of properties, and affordability of pest control services. He indicated that the average cost for those local authorities in Lancashire charging for services was £33.00, whereas others charged around £100. Residents in more affluent areas may decide to pay a premium for service from the private sector, especially as the Council is no longer able to guarantee a next working day response service.

PCC Service Offer History

Mr Craig Sharp, Chief Environmental Health Officer / Deputy Director of Environment gave a presentation on the Council's pest control service offer history, prior to and after budgetary constraints introduced in 2010.

Up to 2010

From **at least 1989 and up to 2010**, a full service was provided, with a Pest Control Officer (manager) and 5 pest control technicians, which included ad hoc service at cost.

At that time the service dealt with wasps on a seasonal basis, around 2 – 2 and a half months during the summer / autumn period. Mr Sharp explained that the wasp population would depend on a number of factors such as climate and lack of food available in the countryside, attracting them to the towns. He also indicated that historically rats and mice had been a lesser problem during the summer but in later years they had become an issue all year round, resulting in some years being extremely busy due to both rats/mice and wasps. Due to the variable demand, it was difficult to manage staff resources.

2010

Due to cuts in government funding, the council reduced its service offer to four pest control technicians and a part time labourer. The manager was no longer an operational pest controller and managed other services such as food safety. An agreement with United Utilities regarding sewer baiting was implemented.

2011

The Council no longer dealt with squirrels due to the time consuming nature of controlling these pests and the resources needed to regularly check traps to ensure their welfare (it is illegal to release a squirrel once trapped).

2012

The service reduced its contract work to focus on the most profitable.

2013 - Present

The service has been reduced to three technicians, resulting in increased workload and therefore waiting times. The impact if staff were on leave or off sick is now more pronounced.

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

Mr Sharp presented the results of customer satisfaction surveys:

2016/17 – 91% satisfied with the service*

2015/16 – 90%

2014/15 - 100%

(*caveat that we only survey people who use the service so given there were lengthy waiting times in early 2017 we would not have captured the thoughts of those who decided they couldn't wait for service and who went elsewhere for pest control treatment).

He explained that despite the reduction in staff, sewer baiting was a priority due to both the contractual agreement with United Utilities and the fact that this work had the greatest impact upon controlling rat numbers.

With regard to improving service efficiency, Mr Sharp explained that previously the access rate during revisits was as low as 50% due to customers not being at their property on the agreed date/time. The service now uses text reminders and we try to make appointments at regular times e.g. same day / time. The access rate is now above 90%.

Public Health Issues such as biting insects migrating from abroad

A query was raised regarding biting insects from warmer climates which may carry disease. Mr Sharp indicated that this would be addressed as a public health issue if and when appropriate; such pests tend to migrate first from the Continent to the South East of England where the climate is suitable, rather than the North, however, this may alter due to climate change in the future.

Wasp Nests

Members also related concerns from residents regarding wasp nests on domestic properties. Although the Council's pest control service no longer deals with wasps, perhaps it might be possible for the Council or ward councillors to recommend a private sector contact that operates at weekends, for example. Mr Sharp indicated that the Council would normally direct the public to online directories or trade bodies; however, it would be difficult for the Council to recommend a specific private company due to potential reputational and vetting issues. It was suggested that members review the information about the Pest Control Service on the Council's website and report feedback to the next meeting.

Waste Refuse Issues

With regard to non-management of refuse, especially food outlets, Mr Sharp confirmed that Neighbourhood Services could be involved and that enforcement action would be pursued by Environmental Health in relation to food safety and pests. He indicated that older properties perhaps lacked the facilities for storing refuse e.g. ginnels that no longer exist, or yards which have been built upon.

Alternative Service Offers and Delivery Models

Mr Sharp and Mr Neighbour gave a presentation on a range of pest control service offers provided by other local authorities and alternative models of service delivery, including by the private sector.

Comparative Data – Local Authorities in Lancashire

They presented data comparing the service offer of several local authorities in Lancashire, all of which had charges for domestic pest control issues except Preston City Council. Mr Neighbour indicated that this reflected a delivery model in which pricing policy acted as a 'disincentive' for attracting domestic pest control issues in order to direct greater resources to contract work. Mr Sharp also indicated that although the local authorities generated additional income, none actually made a profit after deducting costs and overheads.

The data presented (up to date 2014/15), was as follows:

Local Authority	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cost £K	£55	95	120	154	162	192	220
Income £K	36*	57*	20	35	35	115	101
Net cost £K	20	38	100	119	127	77*	119
Free public health?	x	X				x	
Other pests charged?			n/a				
FTE staff	1	2	3	3	2	4	4
Jobs/year	300	1200	2200	2000	1800	2400	2500

* Higher contract and “charged for” service income;

1=300/FTE pa

2=600/FTE pa

3=730/FTE pa

* Pricing as “disincentive” to domestic pest control issues

Alternative Service Delivery Models

Mr Sharp then outlined alternative models of service delivery. One option would be to have a service based heavily on taking enforcement action. However, this is time consuming and resource intensive, requiring multiple visits if the owner refuses treatment, serving enforcement notices, obtaining a warrant etc. Another option is to charge for pest control at domestic premises. Mr Sharp explained that the cost would prevent some people dealing with an infestation or act as a disincentive to take action at the earliest opportunity, thus leading to an increase in the rat population. Experience from other local authorities suggested that even if the price were much cheaper than the private sector, there would be a fall in service users between 50 – 80%. In addition, if the person who contacts the council is not the property owner e.g. a neighbour, who is responsible for the cost?

Other options included variable charging (i.e. based on financial need) or a general move towards an income based service. However, Mr Sharp highlighted the following issues/points to consider in this instance:

- Legal issues which may require the Council to set up as a trading company
- that it was difficult for local authorities to make a profit due to large overheads (e.g. terms and conditions of employment);
- that the Council would effectively be competing with smaller private enterprises (with considerably lower overheads) at one end of the market and large national companies at the other end, and that it therefore may be necessary to offer a 'niche' service, requiring additional staff
- that the Council would also need to attract more regional/national contracts to be lucrative and that would require a vastly different operating model.

He also advised that given a majority of the Pest Control Team's work was in the most deprived inner city wards, households in those wards had a high likelihood of one member being on a passported benefit and so potential income may be low and may not offset the significant additional costs of managing and operating a charging regime.

2.1 Meeting – 12 October 2017

Sub Group Interviews – Summaries

2.2 Interview with Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation – 27 September 2017

A key issue raised was the service reduction in terms of staff, resources and service offer since 2010. Councillor Moss indicated that he would prefer that the service be delivered as it was in 2010, with additional staffing, but this was not currently possible due to budget constraints. Therefore, there was less capacity if a staff member went off sick and this would affect response times. Councillor Moss stated that he was comfortable with the Council was doing at the moment and that it was doing its best with the resources available.

Both he and the Sub Group felt that staff delivered an excellent service, given the limited resources; they do go the extra mile and are aware of how pest infestation can affect people emotionally.

In addition to the notes of the interview, the Sub Group also translated their findings into the 'evidence based questions' format, both of which are attached at Appendix C.

2.3 Interview with Peter Alston, Pest Control Technician – 28 September 2017

Peter Alston, Pest Control Technician gave some background to his career at the Council and the Pest Control Team. He informed the sub-group that during his time he had seen the staffing of the Pest Control Team reduce by 50% from 6 people down to 3. This had resulted in a reduction in the type of pests dealt with. He felt that the team was now at the bare minimal staffing level dealing with the basics. There were now longer waiting times for appointments and a particular increase during periods of staff absence due to leave or sickness.

Mr Alston thought the service would vastly improve if there was another member of staff employed. He thought the waiting time for customers would reduce. Some customers are currently waiting up to for 3 weeks for a visit. He also felt that sewer baiting would increase. An ideal service would be a return to full service which would allow the Team to deal with wasps and other pests, have reduced waiting times and more sewer baiting.

Mr Alston was asked about administration. He felt around 10% of the time was spent on admin duties. The call centre takes the info for the jobs and book the initial appointments for the Team. These are then printed off as job sheets. Following the days visits approx. 1 hour per team member is spent

updating the computer records. Each team member has access to a computer.

2.4 Interview with Paul Charleston, Member of the National Pest Control Advisory Body – 29 September 2017

Paul gave an introduction to his experience of pest control work and his role as Secretary of the National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP). He was asked about service levels which all local authorities are under pressure to deliver in the light of budget constraints. His key points were:

- If the ethos of the local authority is to protect public health then a pest control service is a key component of that.
- Public health should not be limited just to the spread of disease, there is clear evidence that having a pest infestation in your home has a seriously detrimental impact upon some peoples' mental health.
- There is a broad concern that local authorities are cutting back on pest control services.
- A focus on charging can divert from a focus on the public health ethos as introducing any charge will exclude some people from taking up the service.
- Some local authorities that have introduced charges have reverted back to a free at the point of use service because of the public back lash in their area.
- Some local authorities have tried to ration services by restricting the number of visits per premises (e.g. a maximum of two). However, this never works and is always a decision that is reversed.

He stressed that removing local authority pest control services is removing a fundamental building block of public health and NPAP are extremely worried about this trend in some local authorities.

2.5 All the sub groups were satisfied that the evidence they had obtained was sufficient for the purposes of the study.

3.1 **Examining the Evidence – Findings and Conclusions**

To assist in reviewing their findings and making conclusions which are evidence based, the Task and Finish Group then considered their responses to the following questions:

1. Is the Council meeting its statutory obligations on pest control?

The Council is meeting its statutory obligations as regards relevant legislation i.e. Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949; Environmental Health law, Public Health law; Food Safety law; and Workplace Health and Safety law.

The Council is required to regulate the activities of all land and property owners and take enforcement action, but it does not have a statutory duty to undertake the work to remove or eradicate pests. However, the Council provides a pest control service in the interests of public health. The Task and Finish Group accepts the argument that a lack of prevention would lead to a greater need for enforcement, which is more costly and resource intensive.

Commercial premises often make their own arrangements for pest control with a private contractor. It is very rare where a domestic property owner would refuse a free service from the Council.

2. Is the Service Value for Money?

Yes, the Council is delivering an excellent service with limited resources. In particular the staff provide added value, in terms of dedication and a very caring approach to disabled and vulnerable people.

The most up to date annual cost figures for the Pest Control Service (2016/17), reported at the meeting on 12 October 2017, were as follows:

£175,000 spent

£32,000 income

£143,000 - net cost.

3. Is the service providing good customer satisfaction?

Yes, as indicated by customer surveys carried out over the last three years, which revealed satisfaction rates of 91% for 2016/17, 90% for 2015/16 and 100% for 2014/15.

During the 28.9.17 interview session, the next available appointment was checked. It was found that the next available slots for both urgent and non-

urgent jobs was the next day*. If staffing levels were reduced to 1 or 2, however, the service could not offer next day appointments.

(*The borough is split into three districts and the appointments are allocated to each district on a rotational basis. However, if there were a call out in a non-allocated district, cover would normally be available).

4. Should alternative models of service delivery be considered?

The Task and Finish Group believe that the existing model of service currently represents the best method of delivery for Preston. The Group looked at comparative data on local authorities in Lancashire which had an income based model or variable charging and the key point identified was that these models did not generate a net profit.

The Council would effectively be competing with smaller private enterprises (with considerably lower overheads) at one end of the market and large national companies at the other end, and that it therefore may be necessary to offer a 'niche' service, requiring additional staff. It would also need to attract more regional/national contracts to be lucrative and that would require a vastly different operating model.

It was also noted that given a majority of the Pest Control Team's work was in the most deprived inner city wards, households in those wards had a high likelihood of one member being on a passported benefit and so potential income may be low and may not offset the significant additional costs of managing and operating a charging regime.

Another alternative was to have a service based on enforcement action. However, as indicated at 1), the Task and Finish Group accepts the argument that a lack of prevention would lead to a greater need for enforcement, which is more costly and resource intensive.

Notwithstanding the above, some members felt that it may be appropriate to look at alternative models but again subject to budget constraints. Alternative models should be considered if/ when more money is available for the service.

5. Are there any improvements / efficiencies that can be made to the service (e.g. use of digital technology?)

The Task and Finish Group identified an issue arising from the sub group interview with Pete Alston, Pest Control Technician regarding time required to be spent on administrative tasks e.g. printing off jobs, inputting data. The Group observes that at present, digital technology is not used by the Pest

Control service and considers that the use of a 'smart' device on site may reduce time spent returning to the office. The Group were advised that new ways of working utilising digital technology were already being implemented in Food Safety.

At its meeting on 12 October 2017, the Task and Finish Group were also informed about multi skilling in other service areas and the Group would like this to be explored for Pest Control. An example given was Chorley Council, which had officers which incorporated a wide range of Environmental Health functions such as pest control and litter enforcement.

4.0 Corporate Management Team Commentary

CMT welcome the report on the Pest Control Service and note the recommendations.

CMT agrees there is scope to make the service more resilient from within existing resources and to improve effectiveness through the application of technology.

Any proposal to increase the expenditure on the service would need to be considered by the Budget Working Group alongside other spending and savings commitments as the budget is developed. The Council remains in a deficit position over the medium term and difficult decisions about service provision remain.

Scoping Document

Key background information

Why society controls pests

How society controls pests

The recent (post 2000) history of Preston City Council Pest Control service offers

The current Preston City Council Pest Control Service offer

Alternative local authority pest control service offers

Alternative pest control service delivery models

Key people to hear from

PCC Chief Environmental Health Officer, Craig Sharp

PCC Environmental Health Manager, Simon Neighbour

PCC Pest Control Technician

Paul Charleston, National Pest Advisory Panel

Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation

External Visit

Useful external visits would not be pragmatic. Instead, anonymised examples of pest control work within Preston can be conveyed via a photographic presentation and also a session provided for Panel members to discuss practical pest control work with one of the Council's frontline Pest Control Technicians.

Lead Officer

Chief Environmental Health Officer, Craig Sharp

Panel size

9 (5, 3, 1)

Time estimate

Maximum of 4 meetings. Suggested scrutiny programme:

Meeting 1

Session A

Panel agree the work programme / methods / aims (Craig Sharp)

Session B – Why society controls pests. Brief overview presentation addressing public health, nuisance, and financial loss caused by key pests as well the Council's legal duties. (Craig Sharp)

Session C – The current PCC service offer. Presentation of the services offered and using photographs to explain how the Council's pest controllers carry out their work. Current service provision issues, including the capacity to deliver service. (Simon Neighbour)

Meeting 2

Session E – How society controls pests. Brief overview presentation of the hierarchy of prevention. Consideration of service provision to protect community public health versus meeting the needs of individuals with a pest control infestation. (Simon Neighbour)

Session F – PCC Pest Control service offer history since circa 2000. Understanding of why the Council does and does not provide certain pest control services and the reasons why service is provided as it currently is. (Craig Sharp)

Session G – Alternative service offers. Consideration of the range of pest control service offers provided by local authorities. (Simon Neighbour)

Session H – Alternative service delivery models. Consideration of the alternative models of delivering pest control services; including service charging, restricted offer based on financial or other need, private sector offer. (Craig Sharp)

Sub Group Interviews

To be held with the following:

PCC Pest Control Technician

Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation

Paul Charleston, National Pest Advisory Panel

Meeting 3

Any additional evidence identified by the Panel at meetings 1 and/or 2

Drafting of report and recommendations

Meeting 4 (if required)

Agreement of final report and recommendations

Resources

None other than officer time

Target Audience

PCC Councillors

Appendix B

Date of Interview	Interviewee	Councillors attending
27.9.17 1.00pm Meeting Room B, Town Hall	Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation	Councillor Hammond (lead) Councillor Mrs Crompton Councillor Eaves
28.9.17 12 Noon Meeting Room C, Town Hall	Pete Alston, Pest Control Technician	Councillor Wallace Councillor Mrs Brown (lead) Councillor Greenhalgh
29.9.17 10.00am Meeting Room B, Town Hall	Paul Charleston Member of the National Pest Control Advisory Panel	Councillors Crowe and Corker

Notes for Sub Group Interviews

Sub group Notes - 27.09.17

Interview with Councillor Moss

Attendees:-

- Councillor Hammond
- Councillor Mrs Crompton
- Councillor Ms Eaves
- Councillor Moss
- Craig Sharp

Councillor Moss was invited to the Pest Control sub-group as the Executive Member for Planning and Regulation who has responsibility for the subject matter. Members put a number of questions to Councillor Moss to which he responded in full, the details of which are below:-

Q. Are you aware of any records of complaint from registered social landlords and private householders, do you know of any that would be keen to assist you making decisions?

Cllr Moss was unaware of a register but had spoken with Simon Neighbour in the past and he understood that any official complaints regarding the service were followed up as necessary, but whether there was a database or spreadsheet of actual complaints he was not certain. Craig Sharp stated that the system operated to ISO 9001 Quality Assurance Management System so both informal and formal complaints were recorded. In previous years a report was sent to the Cabinet Member with all the complaints and compliments regarding the service being set out in a table format. This gave the Cabinet Member the opportunity to discuss the overall service, however it was unknown as to why it was not provided this year. Craig said that if Cllr Moss would find it useful the process could be reintroduced. Craig confirmed that all calls were reviewed in line with the quality assurance system and this was the case for the whole of Environmental Health. A report could also be provided detailing the customer satisfaction survey results which showed that Council was just slightly over 90-91% for pest control which was very high.

Q. What do we as a Council do to go that extra mile? We have statutory duties that we have to comply with but after that do we do anything extra?

Councillor Moss stated that the Council does not actually have a statutory duty to undertake the work to remove or eradicate pests that was a non-statutory duty. Councillor Moss had been in to the department and had spoken to staff as well as been out on pest control visits with the Pest Control Technicians. The staff do go the extra mile and are very conscientious about the work they do which they carry out properly and professionally. The staff deal with the problems appropriately and they are aware of how it can affect people emotionally. So in terms of going the extra mile the Council certainly look after the residents of Preston and it is the officer's intention to see that they continue to do their level best to eradicate the problems that the residents may have, despite their limited times and resources. Councillor Moss reported that he had heard of times when calls had been received by vulnerable elderly or disabled people, when officers, who had been on leave at the time of the call, had in fact visited properties in their own time to make sure that work was done immediately.

Q. If you have extra money/finance where would you put it in Pest Control?

If the Council had additional financial resources, Councillor Moss stated that he would like nothing more than for the Council to be able to respond to reports of problems in exactly the same way as the Council did in 2010 when it had additional staff. The problem with the reduction in staffing was that there was no capacity to take on the work of others if one of the Technicians went off sick. The service would then unfortunately be reduced and this would affect response times. Non-statutory services are scrutinised each year due to budget reviews and obviously the Council had priorities in regards to statutory services so non-statutory services unfortunately would suffer from time to time. Cllr Moss stated that he was comfortable with what the Council was doing at the moment and it did its best with the resources available.

Craig said that if you looked at the current service offered, the Council had not changed anything since the last budget came in. The Pest Control Service did suffer if one person was on leave and another off sick as the service cannot run with just one person. However, Craig said the work could be caught up and that it was about resilience. If the office was at full capacity then the service could just about be delivered.

Q. Can you demonstrate how we work with other organisations to keep this at bay and do you think there are enough signs for people to be aware of the problem?

Craig and Cllr Moss are having lengthy discussions not only about pests but other things e.g. dog muck. Come to the conclusion that most signs don't actually work we do have large signs on the docks due to people feeding the birds leaving food left behind and this is bringing in the rats, also had the problem on moor park people

feeding the ducks and leaving left over food and this is bringing in rats. Clearly there are areas where we can enhance awareness. We need to stop people feeding other animals in the first place. Rubbish and waste is an issue, trying to be more pro-active with this issue. In terms of awareness don't want to be putting leaflets through people's doors about the rats as this will lead to increase in public concern. Signs are put up where we think is necessary Cllr Moss and Craig have spoken about this. In regards to working with others, we do have a contract with United Utilities to make sure the sewers are clean.

Q. With regards to previous press coverage regarding a rat problem in Moor Park, Cllr Hammond enquired as to why the Council was seemingly caught out as it appeared to not be aware of the problem. He asked if the Council should have known and could it not have put up soft signs informing the public that feeding the ducks could attract rats?

Councillor Moss said that the Council's problem is no larger nor smaller than any other town/city our size.

Craig said that the signs were put up in Moor Park to change people's behaviour. With all new infrastructure going up the Council could look at different ways to help with the problem e.g. bait traps at the bottom of litter bins and these would be safe to put out in public as no one would see them. Also if the Council were to build brick flower beds it could put bait traps in there which was also safe and children are unable to access them.

Cllr Moss stated that Craig was working with many other organisations e.g. dock management.

Q. Can you make it easier for people to report pests to the Council?

Cllr Mrs Crompton raised a problem about an elderly constituent and how long it took for the rat problem to be dealt with.

Craig stated that all calls about pests go through the Contact Centre. The positive side of this was that online booking was now available so the public could book a time for their own appointment. Craig said he could ask for information from the Contact Centre Manager to find out how many calls were answered and how many dropped phone calls were made. However, phone call problems had not been raised as part of the customer survey and it was difficult to give priority to people when there was so little staff.

Councillor Moss agreed and said the problem was a result of the budget cuts and something had to go. He said the Council could not keep doing the same with less. Staff still work by a public sector ethos where they were here to serve the public and staff do their best despite the cuts which are in place. He said there were very few instances where the Council was unable to provide a good service, however, there

may be a need to look at charging for the service and this would then mean competing with other businesses.

Q. How quickly could we let the public know of an epidemic?

There were two scenarios given by Craig:-

1. Is a slow scenario and this is when it begins on the other side of England and slowly moves closer. The Council can make people aware of an epidemic before it is urgent and measures can be put into place for when it arrives.
2. Is a fast scenario when something happens unexpectedly. In this case we would work very closely with staff at Public Health England to work out an emergency response.

Craig said that there had been no epidemic in Preston regarding pest control aside from a few years ago when there was a mass of starling in and around the town centre and Deepdale.

Pest Control Task and Finish Sub-Group - 27.9.17

Interview with Councillor Moss –

Evidence Questions Format

1. Is the Council meeting its statutory obligations on pest control?

At the sub-group meeting we were informed by Councillor Moss that the Council does not actually have a statutory duty to undertake the work to remove or eradicate pests as this is classed as a non-statutory duty. Councillor Moss stated he had been in to the department and had spoken to staff as well as been out on pest control visits with the Pest Control Technicians. He believes staff do go the extra mile and are very conscientious about the work they do which they carry out properly and professionally. The staff do deal with the problems appropriately and they are aware of how it can affect people emotionally. So in terms of going the extra mile the Council certainly looks after the residents of Preston and it is the officer's intention to see that they continue to do their level best to eradicate the problems that the residents may have, despite their limited time and resources. Councillor Moss reported that he had heard of times when calls had been received by vulnerable elderly or disabled people, when officers, who had been on leave at the time of the call, had in fact visited properties in their own time to make sure that work was done immediately. Despite there not being any statutory duties in regards to Pest Control the staff at the Council do go above and beyond to deal with this problem.

2. Is the service giving value for money?

Yes we believe that the service provided is providing good value for money. However, if there was more money available more could be done for the service i.e. bigger staff presence and therefore quicker response time. Craig stated that if we looked at the current service offered, the Council had not changed anything provided by the service since the last budget came in. We believe that the staff are working hard with the money constraints they have.

3. Is the service providing good customer satisfaction?

We as a sub-group believe that the service and staff are providing good service to the customers. We received information in the sub-group meeting advising that satisfaction survey results, received from residents after an incident, are just over 90-91% for pest control which was very high.

4. Should alternative models of delivery be considered?

Yes alternative models of delivery should be considered, but again we need to look at the budget constraints. The pest problem is currently being maintained as efficiently as possible and to a high standard. Alternative models should be considered if/ when more money is available for the service.

5. Are there any improvements/efficiencies that can be made to the service use of digital technology)?

At the sub-group meeting we were told that the service operated to ISO 9,001 Quality Assurance Management System. All phone calls both formal and informal were recorded on this system. In previous years the end of year collated report has then been sent to the Cabinet Member for them to look over and discuss the overall service. All phone calls regarding pest problems are answered by the contact centre and are then filtered through to the Pest Control Service where the problems are looked at and dealt with accordingly. We believe little can be done to improve the efficiencies of the staff within the Pest Control department.

The Task and Finish Group were impressed by the efficiency of the Cabinet Member and the Chief Environmental Health Officer. From what we saw in the sub-group meeting they are fully in control of the operation and quickly aware of changes that need to be made in times of emergency or in cases of a potential epidemic. It appears that Preston City Council is in full control of any pest problems that arise and are as efficient, or more so, than any other council of comparable size.

Task and Finish Pest Control interview

28/09/17

Attendees

Peter Alston (PA) Pest Control Technician

Craig Sharp

Cllr L Wallace

Cllr Stuart Greenhalgh

Cllr P Brown

Background

PA told us he has been in his role as a Pest Control Technician for 23 years. The team of three are a close knit team and have worked together for many years. The newest member of the team has worked in their role for approximately 10 years. The team works flexible hours. The team is managed by Simon Neighbour who also has responsibility for Hygiene, Food and Environment. PA informed us he enjoyed his job and felt he had job satisfaction. He also felt the team worked well together. He felt trusted and valued they were left to get on with the job with support from Simon. Every day was different not knowing what to expect.

Training

Training to become a Pest Control Technician is 10 days on day release. This was followed by other types of training on various subjects. PA believed people skills was the most important aspect of the job.

Effects of budget cuts

PA informed us that during his time he had seen the staffing of the Pest Control Team reduce by 50% from 6 people down to 3. This had resulted in a reduction in the type of pests dealt with. Previously there were more variety of pests dealt with including squirrels and wasps. PA felt that the team was now at the bare minimal staffing level dealing with the basics. Also the staffing reduction meant a reduction in the amount of sewer baiting carried out. Previously this was done more frequently when there was a team on sewer baiting. There were now longer waiting times for

appointments. The waiting times increased during periods of absence from leave or sickness. This peaked around 20 weeks waiting time for rats in gardens appointments last year. Team members being absent can cause additional work as customers needed to be contacted and appointments rearranged. Holidays have less impact because visits are planned around pre-booked leave arrangements.

PA was asked what he thought the effect would be if there was a staff increase. PA thought the service would vastly improve if there was another member of staff employed. He thought the waiting time for customers would reduce. Some customers are currently waiting up to for 3 weeks for a visit. He also felt that sewer baiting would increase.

PA was asked what his ideal vision of Pest Control would look like. He replied a return to full service including wasps other pests, reduced waiting and more sewer baiting.

Working routine

PA took us through his working routine. He told us each of the technicians had a set number of jobs each day. This was 4 new jobs per day arranged by AM or PM appointment and between 10 to 15 call backs on follow up jobs which included maintaining the contract jobs. The technicians worked out their own routes to jobs to maximise the time available for appointments.

H&S

PA informed that the team members were provided with mobile phones. They mainly attended jobs alone. If there was any unease or aggressive behaviour displayed from a customer a marker is placed on the system to warn others who may need to visit to be cautious. If any team member feel the need a colleague can accompany them on a visit. The team meet up for lunch at the dep on a daily basis.

Specialist protective clothing is provided including gloves and masks. PA informed that the equipment was sufficient and in good condition. It was not a problem to have replacements provided when required. The team members carry first aid kits.

Type of Work

PA described the different approach of proactive and reactive pest control measures. Sewer baiting is proactive and the most effective method of control. The other methods used are reactive dealing with a reported pest problem. Sewer baiting requires a minimum of two people. This is now carried out only on Mondays. Every manhole cover is lifted in an area and the bait lowered down.

Pigeon culling is done by shooting on early Sunday mornings when required.

PA was asked about pest body disposal. He informed the bodies are kept in a freezer at the depo and later disposed of under contract.

Contract work is done on ad hoc basis between arranged appointments. This is mainly preventative measures.

PA was asked about administration. He felt around 10% of the time was spent on admin duties. The call centre takes the info for the jobs and book the initial appointments for the Team. These are then printed off as job sheets. Following the days visits approx. 1 hour per team member is spent updating the computer records. Each team member has access to a computer.

Public V Private Pest Control Work

PA was asked how he thought the role the team differed from a private pest company. He explained they had different approach. A private company would charge on average £400 a visit and put some bait down. They would not show someone how to take preventative action such as covering a missing brick gap, and they would not have the same incentive to give public health advice on pest prevention or if necessary speak to a neighbour if the problem was thought to be elsewhere. It is in the interest of private companies to generate profit from visiting pest problems. The main aim of the Council's Pest control is to prevent by sewer baiting and public education on pest prevention. Visits are made to ensure public health and mental well- being. These are prioritised according to need. It is unlikely the most vulnerable and those likely to most at risk or need would be able to afford the cost of a private company.

Public engagement.

PA told us the team were generally well received by the public and most people were pleased or relived to see them. PA shared some of his experiences of dealing with the public. He told us about a vulnerable person he visited. The person was suffering with mental health problems and also had a baby living with her in the house. The person was living in terrible conditions. The electric was cut off, her husband was in hospital. There was evidence of rats everywhere in the house. PA was very concerned the rats could easily been in the baby's cot. He reported the situation to his boss and a referral was made involving the Environmental Protection Team. This resulted in the person being rehoused within two days. It was clear to PA the person needed help. This person's vulnerability and danger both herself and her baby faced had been missed by other agencies including the person's health visitor. PA told us how it was more important for the team to be aware of potential

signs of need since the cut back on other areas of social care which have become more of a challenge for County.

CS informed that the council no longer has responsibility for people who can't look after themselves as this is now part of Social Care we do however still have responsibility for properties.

PA told us how every day has its unknowns and they visit the most vulnerable people in society. PA informed us that they are trained to be aware of a range of potential situation including signs of potential child exploitation. They are the 'eyes and ears', helping to get help where it is needed and work closely with other departments such as the Environmental Protection Team. PA told us how they always try to make the customers feel at ease and treat them with respect no matter what they are faced with.

Public education on pest prevention and hygiene is also carried out when the technicians make their visits. This is done in a sensitive manner so not to upset or offend anyone. PA gave us an example of explaining to someone the danger of putting out food to feed birds that may be encouraging rats. This extended to visiting a neighbour of the person being visited to provide hygiene or pest control education in relation to resolving a wider pest problem.

PA informed on how each job is risk assessed and technical expertise is applied to the control method the position and the type of bait used according to each situation pets, children in house etc. The customer is left a copy of the risk assessment form PC03/0 which also is the customer signed consent to the type of bait being used and other important medical advice and general advice and information on pest prevention methods.

PA was asked if language was ever a barrier when dealing with customers. He stated an interpreter was available if needed but usually they got by ok with the help of neighbours and others willing to help if language caused any difficulty.

Finally, at the interview session, Craig Sharp checked when the next available appointment was. It was found that the next available slots for both urgent and non-urgent jobs was the next day. This is now done by district so the appointments are also dependent on your next due date.

Pest Control Scrutiny Sub Group – Interview with Paul Charleson – 29.9.17

Present: Cllr Corker

Cllr Eaves

Paul Charleson – National Pest Advisory Panel

Craig Sharp – Chief Environmental Health Officer

Paul gave an introduction to his experience of pest control work and his role as Secretary of the National Pest Advisory Panel (NPAP).

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) has set up the NPAP to take the lead in setting high professional standards for EHPs and to offer advice and guidance to those in charge of local authority pest control departments.

NPAP comprises pest management professionals from right across the environmental health community and runs an annual programme of projects, seminars and events. Its prime objectives are:

- To raise the profile of pest management in the UK, leading to better understanding of the need for good pest management
- To establish channels of communication throughout industry, government, local authorities and academia, leading to a greater awareness of problems and the need to set priorities
- To improve the standards of pest management throughout the UK by promoting good practice, leading to reduced pest levels and pesticide use
- To provide expert advice to government departments and agencies via the CIEH
- To identify and promote research needs in the area of pest management

As Secretary of NPAP Paul also sits on the UK Pest Management Alliance. The Alliance brings together local authorities (via NPAP), private sector pest control companies (via the British Pest Control Association representing larger national companies and the National Pest Technicians Association representing smaller local and regional companies), academics specialising in pest control, and suppliers of pesticides to the pest control industry.

Paul explained the importance of effective pest control to safeguard public health, with one of the key issues being that services were available and affordable to those that needed them.

Question: How does Preston compare resource wise with other local authorities?

- Very difficult to compare because there are different needs in different areas, for example rural versus urban, the affluence of the area.
- All local authorities are asking the questions what service level do we need? What do we want to do?
- If the ethos of the local authority is to protect public health then a pest control service is a key component of that.
- Public health should not be limited just to the spread of disease, there is clear evidence that having a pest infestation in your home has a seriously detrimental impact upon some peoples mental health.
- There is a broad concern that local authorities are cutting back on pest control services.
- A focus on charging can divert from a focus on the public health ethos as introducing any charge will exclude some people from taking up the service.
- Some local authorities that have introduced charges have reverted back to a free at the point of use service because of the public back lash in their area.
- Some local authorities have tried to ration services by restricting the number of visits per premises (e.g. a maximum of two). However, this never works and is always a decision that is reversed.

There then followed a discussion on how services were delivered and the public stigma of having a pest control van parked outside your house.

Question: Do you think local authorities should prioritise pest control services to the vulnerable, such as the elderly and those with young children?

- Pest control is a very important service that the public really want and appreciate and local authorities should be championing their pest control services, even in these challenging times.

Question: Is there work done to compare service levels between different local authorities?

- Paul explained that across Lancashire district councils compare their differing resources and service levels to inform decision making and share expertise.
- As explained, it's always difficult to directly compare between local authorities.

- Environmental Health Lancashire run an annual best practice day to share expertise and provide cost effective training for local authority pest control staff.
- Pest control is a skilled job, it involves putting poison down in people's homes.
- Paul explained about rodenticides and the need for pest controllers to be competent not only for the public's health and safety but because of the risks of damaging wild life if rodenticides are used inappropriately.
- The Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) led to changes in the law to ensure good stewardship with the use of rodenticides. There is now a high level of training required for professional pest control staff to ensure they are competent to use rodenticides safely for people, non-target species and the wider environment.
- This has helped bring the whole pest control sector (private, local authority and agriculture) up to a high standard.

Question: What are your thoughts on the importance of sewer baiting?

- Sewer baiting is extremely important for effective rat control in towns and cities.
- In Lancashire it's done under a shared broad agreement with United Utilities and works well in most Lancashire local authorities.
- Preston's financial contribution from United Utilities is a fair amount and is comparable with that received by other local authorities, relative to population.
- If the service were not provided by local authorities then United Utilities would take it in house. Evidence from elsewhere in the UK shows reduced control where local authorities are no longer involved.

Question: Are mice a problem in tower blocks / share blocks?

- Yes and it's always important to treat the whole block including common parts.
- The difficulties of treating in shared blocks is made much more complicated where there are service charges; who pays?
- The private sector would only ever be interested in treating in individual flats unless there was a whole building contract.

There then followed a discussion in which Paul advised that there was often a lack of public awareness of the services provided by local authorities and that people often only know about what local authorities do when they use a particular service.

There then followed a discussion on rogue traders within the private sector and Paul gave examples of some of the exorbitant charges that have been made to vulnerable people using rogue trader pest controllers.

Question: How do you see pest control services developing over the next few years?

- For local authorities it very much depends on what the local authority wants their service to be. If protecting public health is important to them then services should be maintained in one form or another.
- Removing local authority pest control services is removing a fundamental building block of public health and NPAP are extremely worried about this trend in some local authorities.
- Improvements in continuing professional development of pest control technicians is an important ongoing area of work.

Response by Cabinet

8 November 2017

Minute CA52

Summary

Councillor Wallace the Chair of Pest Control Task and Finish Group was in attendance to present the Work Plan Study report by the Group. The report included five recommendations for consideration by Cabinet. Councillor Wallace highlighted key issues from the report and thanked all Members and in particular Officers involved in producing the report and gathering evidence. Cabinet acknowledged the work of the Task and Finish Group and the Officers and thanked all involved for an excellent report.

Decision Taken

That Cabinet endorsed the report and the recommendations.