

CABINET

14 SEPTEMBER 2011

PROPOSED PEST CONTROL SERVICE CHARGES 2011/2012

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RECENT REFERENCES:

[CAB2032](#) – Environmental Services Contract – Progress Report & Tender Evaluation Framework, 9 July 2010

PER191 – Environment Services – Pest Control & Street Care Teams (exempt), 6 June 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

As part of the project to renew the environmental services contracts the City Council determined that the Pest Control Service which had previously been managed by Serco should be brought back “in house” (Report CAB 2032 dated 9 July 2010 refers). At the same time it was agreed that charges should be introduced for this service similar to several other local authorities in Hampshire.

This report proposes charges for the services to be provided by the Council taking into account the levels of charges set by other authorities in Hampshire.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That the charges proposed as set out in Appendix 1 for Domestic Pest Control Services be applied from 1 October 2011.
- 2 That all charges for commercial premises be set at full cost recovery based on the hourly rate for the service.
- 3 That the Head of Environmental Protection be given delegated authority to reduce these charges by 50% for all persons in receipt of “means tested” benefits requesting the services provided that any advice to assist in the

control of pests is followed.

- 4 That the Head of Environmental Protection be given delegated authority to waive "one off" charges in such circumstances as may be necessary to prevent any public health or nuisances arising.
- 5 That the Head of Environmental Protection be given delegated authority to set future pest control service charges in consultation with the Head of Finance and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) having regard to the principles described in paragraph 2.6 of this report.

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### PROPOSED PEST CONTROL SERVICE CHARGES 2011/2012

#### REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENT)

##### DETAIL:

#### 1 Pest Control Services

1.1 As part of the project to re-let the environmental services contracts the City Council determined that the Pest Control Service which had previously been managed by Serco should be brought back in house (Report CAB2032 dated 9 July 2010 refers). At the same time it was agreed that charges should be introduced for this service similar to other local authorities in Hampshire.

1.2 Pest Control Services comprise two elements namely treatments undertaken for householders affected by a range of pests and commercial properties that may require assistance. This service has in the past been undertaken by Serco on the Council's behalf and will from 1 October be transferred "back in house". Report PER192 to Cabinet dated 15 June 2011 dealt with the organisational and staffing arrangements associated with the transfer.

#### 2.0 The Current Position

2.1 Currently all requests for treatment of rats and mice are undertaken free of charge. All other treatments including wasp nests, insects including fleas, bedbugs etc are undertaken on a commercial basis by Serco who retain the income raised. Under the new arrangements all income raised will be retained by the Council and used to offset the cost of the service.

2.2 In considering the appropriate level of charges to be introduced officers have carried out a bench marking exercise of charges for other local authorities in Hampshire. The results are shown at Appendix 1.

2.3 **Rats and Mice:** currently 7 authorities charge for treatment of rodents at domestic premises and all charge for insects or other treatments. Charges for the treatment of rodents range between £28 - £68.60 and all authorities make a reduced charge for hardship cases and those on means tested benefits. Some authorities recognise that householders may contribute to their own problems by the excessive feeding of birds or alternatively failing to maintain their gardens in such a condition as to avoid excessive harbourage for rodents and this is also reflected in the charging structure. Problems can occur due to long term drainage defects where repairs are required or improvements have not been undertaken correctly.

2.4 **Insect Pests:** again charges vary between authorities with concessions being provided to those in difficult financial circumstances. The highest charges relate

to the treatment of bed bugs where several visits are usually required to ensure eradication of the infestation. Whilst the incidents of bedbugs are increasing nationally at present such infestations are infrequent within the Winchester District.

- 2.5 **Commercial Premises:** generally rates are set at levels which are comparable to other commercial pest control companies. However, all authorities give priority to domestic premises rather than competing with the private sector for commercial contracts. Where work is undertaken on behalf of commercial premises the charges are set on an hourly basis for both ad hoc treatments and contracts to reflect the full costs of undertaking the work. The income generated can be used to offset the cost of the domestic treatments.
- 2.6 In deciding on the level of charges to be set it is important to apply 4 principles. The charges need to be set at a level whereby they:
- encourage householders to make use of the Council's service
  - take their own precautions to prevent and avoid infestations
  - take into householders in "difficult" financial circumstance.
  - use the principle that any income offsets the cost of the service rather generating additional income.
- 2.7 The proposed charges for the Winchester District are included within Appendix 1 and meet the above criteria. They are also comparable to other authorities. Charges raised by the private sector companies are significantly higher.
- 3.0 Impact of Charging
- 3.1 It is expected that there will be a reduction in the number of requests for treatment when charges are introduced with some householders deciding to undertake their own treatments. This anticipated reduction in overall treatments was built into the original business case. Should this arise then the implications from a staffing perspective will need to be further evaluated and a subsequent report will follow on this issue.
- 3.2 It is recognised that some residents on limited incomes may have difficulty paying for treatments and it is therefore proposed that all charges are reduced by 50% for those in receipt of means tested benefits. Proof of such benefits will need to be provided prior to the delivery of the service. In cases where the customer repeatedly ignores the advice of the Pest Control Service to assist in the control of pests, then the Head of Environmental Protection may elect to withdraw the 50% concession on further treatments. In these cases it may be necessary to resort to enforcement action to deal with infestations.
- 3.3 Whilst there is a need to fix charges for pest control treatments from time to time situations may arise where it is appropriate to waive charges for the purposes of expediency and to avoid any potential risks to public health or more widespread nuisance. It is therefore recommended that discretion to waive charges is delegated to the Head of Environmental Protection when such circumstances arise.

4. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Project Management papers stored in the retriever system.

5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

- 5.1 An Equalities Impact Review has been undertaken for the proposed changes to the service, a summary of which is detailed in Appendix 2.

6. CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 6.1 The services overseen by the team are also a vital part of the Council's role in ensuring a High Quality Environment.
- 6.2 The setting of a charging policy also supports the City Council's Working Better aims to deliver services efficiently and effectively as well as the performance management aim to provide services that are efficient and at reasonable cost.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Members are reminded that charging for all Pest Control Services were approved by Cabinet on 9 July 2010 (Report CAB 3023 refers) and a report on proposed charges will be brought to Cabinet for approval in September.
- 7.2 The July report on the business case included projected income of £15,000 for 2011/12 and £30,000 for 2012/13 onwards and these sums have been budgeted for in the business case to offset the cost of the service.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Hampshire Authorities Summary of Pest Control Charges and – WCC Proposed Charges for Comparative Purposes.

Appendix 2 – Summary of Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix 1Summary of Domestic Pest Control Charges for Domestic Premises – Hampshire Authorities

<u>AUTHORITY</u>	<u>Rats</u>	<u>Mice</u>	<u>Wasps</u>	<u>Fleas/ Insects</u>	<u>Bed Bugs and Carpet Beetle</u>	<u>Comments</u>
WINCHESTER (Current charges)	£0	£0	£45	£45		Rats and mice treatments currently undertaken free of charge.
WINCHESTER (Proposed Charges)	£35	£35	£45	£45	Hourly rate on quotation	Free to those receiving means tested benefits only. Reduced charges (50% for pest control services)
SOUTHAMPTON	£47	£47	£45	£56		Rats and mice £10 for those on recognized benefits means tested benefits. Other treatments reduced by 50% for those receiving benefits
PORTSMOUTH	£0	£40	£37	£48		Rats free, reduced fees for those on Housing or Council Tax Benefits £11- 15
EASTLEIGH	£60.60	£63.60	£35	£84.20		Free to those receiving Housing or Council Tax Benefits.
HART	£63	£63	£48	£50		Rats and mice free to those on mean tested benefits. Reduced for other services
TEST VALLEY	£60	£60	£55	£60 per hour		Rats and mice treated free for those on recognized benefits
GOSPORT	£0	£0	£61	£61		Rats and mice free to those receiving recognized benefits
FAREHAM	£28	£28	£56 per hour	£56 per hour		Rats and mice treatments free for those on Income Support and Job seekers allowance
NEW FOREST	£37	£37	£38.50	£55.50		Rats and mice treatments free for those on recognized benefits
EAST HANTS	£48	£48	£51	£68		Rats and mice free to for those on means tested benefits. Reduced charges for other services.
RUSHMOOR	£0	£0	£51	£68		Rats and mice only treated. Customers are referred to private contractors for all other requests for treatments

## Pest Control – Equalities Assessment

### 1. Process.

The assessment looked at all the key elements of the above service and explored their impacts on customers having one or more of the 'protected characteristics' defined in the new Equality Act 2010.

Using WCC's Equalities Impact Assessment Guidance Manual, the group went on to consider each group in turn and judge whether they are impacted by the changes to the Pest Control Service, and if so, whether in a positive or negative way.

When considering whether a customer group might be susceptible to disadvantage the group used relied on the professional judgement and experience of the assessment team in relation to current service.

### 2. Key Findings

1. **Impact of Charging;** by bring the service back in house the Council would ensure that an effective Pest Control Service would continue to be provided and maintained in difficult financial circumstances. By providing discounted charges to those on means tested benefits together with the discretion to undertake free treatments should ensure that any potential impact on vulnerable groups is minimised.

Awareness Raising: by improving the awareness of staff employed on the service and developing closer working relationships with Community Safety and Environmental Protection Teams greater attention could be give to preventing discrimination and dealing with equality issues should they arise.

2. **The Community:** the presence of directly employed staff working in the community provided benefits to a range of groups not only in terms of the services they were providing, but also in terms of helping to make people feel safe in public places and acting as the councils' "eyes and ears".

Pest Control Staff will also be in a better position to liaise with the Council's Community Safety and Environmental Protection Teams and play a more significant role in reporting anti social behaviour and environmental crimes such as fly tipping.

3. **Safeguarding.** A detailed discussion took place on the issues of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and domestic abuse. In light of the councils' legal responsibilities in these areas, the assessment team felt that
  - (a) there could be a situation where workers in these services encountered actual or potential situations involving abuse of adults or children, and
  - (b) that it was important to ensure that all staff are aware of these issues and provided appropriate training to its staff on how to recognise and report such occurrences.

The assessment team recommended that the all staff receive further training in these areas and by attending the Council's internal training programme in future.