



AGENDA ITEM 7

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

16 NOVEMBER 2010

PEST CONTROL SERVICE - SUMMARY OF THE ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT

Why the scrutiny panel examined this topic

1. The Council's pest control service is an important function which plays a key role in controlling and eradicating rodents, wasps, flees and other pests. Rat numbers are reported as rising and these, and other pests, can cause structural damage to property as well as being sources of food contamination and possible disease.
2. The scrutiny panel was concerned to examine how the service operates, trends in pest levels and its charging regime.

What the scrutiny panel found

3. The panel found that the pest control service is provided on a chargeable basis for private households, with service level agreements and contracts in place with commercial organisations and local social housing providers. Charges vary depending on the pest concerned and the number of treatments required. Reporting trends were examined, when it was found that rat and ant numbers are reported as rising, while other pest problems remain steady, or are in decline.
4. Performance monitoring is undertaken through agreed service standards, such as targeted response times, and income targets are also set for the service. Services are generally subsidised, with the costs of treatment exceeding the cost charged to households. Budget shortfalls are made up from income from contracts with housing associations etc.
5. Although becks and watercourses are particularly prone to reports of rat problems, a number of these turn out to relate to water voles. As these are a protected species, the scrutiny panel heard how pest control in these areas is undertaken so as not to harm the vole or disturb its habitat.

Summary of the Scrutiny Panel's Conclusions:

6. The scrutiny panel's conclusions are shown in full in the **attached final report** and highlight the following:

1. The importance of the work of the Pest control service and the need to highlight the work that it does.
2. The need to consider how the public can be informed of measures that they can take to minimise the risk of encouraging rat problems.
3. The need to consider how charges can be best collected, both to facilitate convenient payment methods for households and to minimise debt collection problems.
4. The need to ensure that Northumbrian Water's rodent baiting of sewers is effective.

Summary of the Scrutiny Panel's Recommendations:

7. The panel's recommendations are based on the conclusions outlined above. These are shown in full in the **attached final report** and relate to:
 1. Highlighting and publicising the work of the pest control service (for example by writing to all relevant households and businesses to inform them of a successful rat infestation treatment in their area).
 2. Highlighting the trend of increasing rat numbers and advising the public of how they can reduce the risk of rat problems.
 3. Introducing methods of making payment of pest control charges easier.
 4. Liaising with Northumbrian Water to highlight concerns regarding the reduced frequency of sewer baiting and seeking regular updates on results.

Councillor Bob Kerr

Chair of Environment Scrutiny Panel