

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

Date: Tuesday 23rd February, 2021
Time: 10.30 am
Venue: Virtual Meeting

AGENDA

Please note: this is a virtual meeting.

The meeting will be live-streamed via the Council's Youtube channel at 10.30 am on Tuesday 23rd February, 2021
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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of interest.
3. Minutes - Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel - 20 January 2021 3 - 8
4. Review of Tree Policy

The Head of Environment Services and Senior Area Care Manager will be in attendance to present the Council's updated draft Tree Policy.

Recommendation: That the Panel considers and notes the draft Tree Policy.
5. Review of Pest Control - Draft Final Report 9 - 16

Recommendation: That the Panel considers the content of the draft Final Report and agrees conclusions and recommendations for submission to the Executive.

6. Date of Next Meeting - 24 March 2021

7. Overview and Scrutiny Board Update

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 27 and 29 January and 11 February 2021.

8. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered

Charlotte Benjamin
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall
Middlesbrough
Monday 15 February 2021

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors M Saunders (Chair), B Hubbard (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, L Lewis, M Storey and S Walker

Assistance in accessing information

Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Susan Lightwing, 01642 729712, susan_lightwing@middlesbrough.gov.uk

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 20 January 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors , B Hubbard (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, M Storey and S Walker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: S Carter-Smith, S Deeney, S Driscoll, J Legget, P Millward – CityFibre

OFFICERS: S Lightwing, S Bonner, C Cowley, R Horniman, S Muir-Williams and J McNally

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors M Saunders, D Coupe, T Furness and L Lewis

20/33 **WELCOME**

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Councillor S Walker, who had recently joined the Panel, as well as all who were present. The Vice Chair placed on the record his thanks to Councillor L Garvey, who had recently resigned from the Panel, for his contributions to the Panel's work.

20/34 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/35 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 16 DECEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 16 November 2020 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

20/36 **MIDDLESBROUGH REGENERATION POST COVID-19 SCRUTINY REVIEW - BROADBAND**

CityFibre's City Manager - Tyneside and Wearside, and his team, which included the City Manager - Tees Valley, Area Build Manager, City Build Manager and Regional Marketing Manager, were in attendance at the meeting and gave a presentation in relation to their company's business, plans for investment in Middlesbrough and post Covid-19 recovery.

CityFibre was a competitive fibre builder, building brand new networks across sixty plus cities in the UK. The overall investment for the project was £4 billion and aimed to reach 8 million homes within five years, which was approximately 30% of the UK. Connecting all UK homes was the core ambition for all of the telecommunications networks.

CityFibre had been in the telecommunications sector for ten years and developed an ambition to build fibre networks. CityFibre had worked with Sky and TalkTalk on a test project in York and then acquired a larger footprint across the UK. The original aim was to roll out to 26 cities which had now increased to 60, including Middlesbrough. The company was working with Government, not only focussing on city builds, but to understand how those city builds could be used as jump off points to connected broader rural infrastructure to fibre builds across the UK.

Networks were brand new and built from scratch. The CityFibre team looked at all towns and cities and their existing infrastructure. Their approach was to develop a well-planned network and install end-to-end fibre everywhere. All the way from the exchanges to the individual premises would be full fibre. As well as the opportunity to connect to every single premises or home, a well-planned network would also connect to all mobile sites, 5G, businesses or business parks, and any public sector sites across the town.

The investment in Middlesbrough was around £40 million and CityFibre was making some design changes to maximise its reach. The initial target of 70 to 80 thousand homes had already been increased towards 90 thousand homes with expansion beyond Middlesbrough's boundaries into Grangetown, South Bank and East Cleveland. CityFibre had also worked with a company called Regeneris, who had provided data on the value of this long term investment to the town in terms of the impact on the economy in Middlesbrough over the next fifteen years.

In terms of consumers, about 92% of homes in the UK with a superfast broadband connection, would receive roughly 30 mbps upwards and this would be a hybrid solution. The connection would have fibre at some point but also copper. CityFibre's broadband was full fibre, so by taking a network connection and working with one of their ISPs (Internet Service Providers), customers would receive speeds of up to 1000 mbps. It was a synchronous solution providing the ability to upload and download at similar speeds. One of the key differences was the quality of service and as more people came to rely on the digital structure this was vital.

CityFibre's Middlesbrough build was due to launch in April and the first homes would be connected approximately 3 to 6 months later. The build programme would be completed mid-2024. The investment was solely from the private sector and no public sector funding was required. The company was keen to work in parallel with partners such as the Council and be as collaborative, open and transparent as it could. Governance structures that met the needs of the local authority, as well as the build, would be established with weekly, monthly or quarterly governance sessions. Governance sessions could involve reporting against metrics, partnership working with local authority teams, regular feedback and addressing any challenges or problems. It was acknowledged that the amount of work being undertaken had implications for the town and CityFibre wanted to be transparent and share progress. CityFibre's build teams were also keen to look at how they might co-invest in infrastructure and schedule the build around any capital works that the Council might be undertaking.

The Area Build Manager provided a detailed overview of the build programme from the initial high level design, planning and sequencing of the build, construction and deployment. The provisional desktop planning in Middlesbrough was complete and the low level design was underway and in quite an advanced stage. Surveyors were working in Middlesbrough 5 days a week along with the design partner. Middlesbrough would have two fibre exchanges: one at Sotheby Road, Skippers Lane Industrial Estate and one at Lytton Street, small industrial estate close to the Town Centre. This enabled CityFibre to build the network more effectively because of the natural boundary of the railway line that came in from Nunthorpe all the way into the town centre. Having a fibre exchange on either side massively reduced the need for specialist engineering and also reduced costs.

Two fibre exchanges would enable everyone in Middlesbrough to receive service and the area could be extended to gather up more homes.

Connectivity would be to approximately 92.5 thousand premises and about 900 km of fibre cable would be deployed. As opposed to many of its competitors, CityFibre had a diverse network and therefore a dramatically increased level of resilience should there ever be a strike by a digging machine for example. The network could be fed in east and west directions and service could be restore quickly. A single flex line would have presented a number of engineering challenges to navigate the railway and the beck that ran alongside. Early on in the process of reviewing Middlesbrough, the two flex model was proposed, giving a better coverage and service for residents and a more acceptable level of challenge in terms of engineering.

In the full fibre network the primary node was always underground, fed using large fibre cables. Once the fibre reached the primary node, the fibre could be fed using Duct Pole Access (DPA) or Pole Infrastructure Access (PIA). DPA used the existing network underground to the property whereas PIA was an overhead install, similar to a telephone line. The primary node was reached through a secondary node, which was a smaller cabinet taking up to 48 premises maximum. From that point there were individual 7mm tubes fed to the curtilage of the premises and once an installation was a requested a very small fibre could be blown through and provide connectivity within an hour or two of the installation engineer's arrival on site.

The construction process was straightforward and site setups were in compliance with the Red Book and Code of Practice. CityFibre's Build Assurance Engineers and Supervisors performed regular, frequent and robust checks to ensure compliance. Ducts were laid through narrow trenching or open cut method, rather than thrust boring or other techniques. Directional drilling might be necessary in some instances above ground, for example on busy roads. The pavements were always reinstated in accordance with industry standards and subject to robust auditing. The pavement, roads, and grass verges were always left in the condition they were found as this was key to minimising the impact on residents.

Once construction work in a street was completed, the cable teams could work quickly. Around 1km of cable could be fed through the underground ducts per day using a three man team. The process was quick and low impact.

In terms of community engagement and marketing, all residents and Councillors were kept up to date with what was happening in their area. CityFibre had released a press release in 2020 in Middlesbrough and had received positive feedback. Residents' communications began at the construction stage and carried on throughout the build. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, the usual door-knocking team could not be deployed. However, a couple of weeks prior to construction, a leaflet would be delivered to all premises in the area. This was followed by a letter which explained any action residents needed to take – such as moving cars off the street – and also provided a FAQs and details of the one line customer service telephone number.

Once on site, banners would be installed, to make residents aware that CityFibre were digging in the street. Wider community engagement included local adverts and events, with information provided on how to pre-register on the website once the service was available. Throughout the pandemic, CityFibre had made a commitment to safety and all construction workers had vests and received training so that they knew what to do if approached by members of the public. There were additional banners informing the public that work was permitted and workers were social distancing.

There was a one project telephone number for residents' issues or queries. All issues raised were tracked and passed onto the build team and none were shut down without being resolved. CityFibre would also engage with Ward Councillors in trying to get their messages out to the community.

Fibre Fans was CityFibre's school engagement project. As the construction process built past schools in Middlesbrough, CityFibre would engage with them and had developed free learning materials for curriculum subjects.

In response to a query, it was clarified that, depending on the local topography, the fibre installation in a hybrid city such as Middlesbrough was generally 70% overground and 30% underground, although this could change depending on the age profile of the specific location. Overhead was a much more effective and efficient deployment that minimised impact on the environment.

The core network was always underground and water ingress had very little impact on optic fibre, whereas with copper it caused corrosion and electrolyte reaction very quickly. With regard to durability there was a vast improvement with fibre from copper.

CityFibre worked collaboratively with Local Authorities and other Utilities in terms of co-ordinating all planned construction schemes to minimise impact on residents and the environment.

The Vice Chair thanked the CityFibre residents for their attendance.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

The Public Rights of Way Officer gave an update on flood risk management.

Following major floods in 2007, the Pitt Report recommended that Local Authorities' scrutiny committees should receive an annual summary of actions taken locally to manage flood risk.

World weather patterns were changing and it was essential that authorities responded by planning ahead and increasing resilience to the changing demands of climate change. Potential risks of climate change included wetter winters, hotter summers and rising sea levels. Extreme weather events were likely to happen more frequently and with more intense isolated downpours during summer that could lead to more regular flooding. There was therefore an increasing need for authorities and the public to adapt and prepare for these conditions.

Middlesbrough's drainage system was extensive and complex in nature, comprising open and culverted watercourses and a surface water/combined sewerage system. Parts of the highway drainage network dated back to the early 1900s and little was currently known about its capacity and condition and it was therefore uncertain how it would cope with increased rainfall. Over the years there had been increased flooding from the highway drainage network due to reduced capacity within the road gullies and the drainage network. Ground water levels were rising as a result of increased rain during the summer, thus reducing the ground's capacity to take the increasing amount of rainfall in the winter and resulted in greater instance of surface water runoff.

The Environment Agency (EA) had produced a map showing areas where it predicted surface water would collect in Middlesbrough when there was a one in one hundred year storm event.

Flooding could come from a variety of sources including surface water run-off, ordinary watercourses and surcharging sewers. Surface water flooding occurred when intense rainfall, often of short duration, was unable to permeate into the ground or enter the drainage systems quickly enough, resulting in ponding or overland flows. This could cause considerable problems in urban areas such as Middlesbrough. Middlesbrough was one of the worst areas affected by surface water flooding in the north east due to its urban nature and the presence of clay close to the surface.

The Council worked closely with Northumbrian Water (NWL) on Integrated Drainage Studies. Middlesbrough had four or five drainage areas which were catchment areas where the water fell and was collected into specific drains. The strategic studies highlighted and prioritised the areas of greatest risk from flooding within each of the catchment areas. Stage 1 of a study focussed on the collection, collation, analysis and prioritisation of information to identify areas of high risk from flooding. Stage 2 focussed on identifying opportunities within the top three or four high risk areas to reduce or prevent flooding. The results of the studies provided all the information required to apply to the EA for funding for flood management schemes.

Currently there was one study in progress which was in Middlesbrough East. Stage 1 was undertaken in 2018 and identified 10 flood risk areas. Three of those areas were taken to Stage 2 and that study began in 2019 and was predicted to be completed by June 2021.

Funding could be achieved either through the EA and central government funding or through local levy which was collected through council tax. Funding could be used for studies or for ground work. The EA's six year programme, called the 'Medium Term Plan' ended in 2020. Middlesbrough had received funding for schemes in Saltersgill, Ormesby Hall are and Cornwall Close.

The Council now had to submit schemes to be included the next six year programme – the 'Long Term Plan' for Flood Defence Grant in Aid (FDGiA).

The schemes submitted by Middlesbrough were:

Gresham Road and Newport.
Lawnswood Road.
Barrington Crescent.
Pallister.
Berwick Hills.
Thornfield Road.
Whinney Banks.
Connaught Road, Nunthorpe.
Shevington Grove, Marton.

It was confirmed that funding would be forthcoming to investigate the potential benefits of all the schemes. Four of the schemes; Lawnswood Road, Barrington Crescent, Pallister and Berwick Hills, were within the East Middlesbrough study area. These nine schemes would potentially protect 588 homes.

The Council continued to investigate the highway drainage system, which had not been previously recorded or mapped. The aim was to increase knowledge of the system and the interactions with sewers and watercourses. The system could then be repaired and cleansed as appropriate. The Council undertook regular maintenance of the gullies and worked to resolve any flooding issues when they occurred.

The Council also continued to work with Developers to ensure that Sustainable Drainage (SuDs) techniques were part of all major developments. In partnership with the Planning Department there was a draft Green Blue Infrastructure Plan that looked at the whole of Middlesbrough, what green spaces there were and what benefits could be brought to those areas. Middlesbrough needed the green spaces to be able to hold water and also undertake schemes to hold water back. The Council also considered how the same areas could be utilised, for example schools having ponds in their grounds.

A detailed update was provided on progress with current schemes which included:

Saltersgill Fields - creation of ponds and scrapes and a bund to better protect 306 properties. Although slightly delayed due to the covid-19 pandemic and also unprecedented rainfall, the scheme was completed in November 2020, on budget, and with additional benefits. The additional benefits included the installation of a footpath across the fields and a knee rail around the overflow car park to prevent vehicular access to the fields. In response to a query it was acknowledged that the knee rail was not effective against motorcycles but it did prevent other vehicles from accessing the fields.

Cornwall Close – creation of a bund and deflection of surface water into highway drains to provide flood risk reduction to 3 properties. Funding had been approved and planning permission would be submitted soon and construction would begin later this year.

Ormesby High Street – creation of a bund, flood defence wall and some property level protection. This revised scheme covered two flow paths with potentially 100 homes better protected compared to the original 18. The EA had recently undertaken works to the trash screen on the culvert to allow water to flow through more quickly.

Another major scheme during the last year was the Marton West Beck Scheme which was managed by the EA in partnership with Middlesbrough Council. The aim of this scheme was to reduce the amount of water coming downstream so that the lower stream culverts could cope. A series of bunds had been created in Albert Park to hold water back, the height of the wall at the side of the Park had been raised, and the lake was now utilised as a water storage area. The trash screen at the north east end of Albert Park had also been improved with a lateral screen added. Work had also been undertaken at Borough Road where the flood walls had been improved. A series of bunds had also been created upstream, near to Nature's World, which would hold the water back and release it gradually into the beck. The scheme on target to be completed by March 2021.

A Member raised concern in relation to the work at Nature's World and drainage area that had been formed but did not appear to be holding water. The Officer explained that there were different types of SuDs. Ponds would hold water all the time and release it gradually, whereas bunds would only fill up when there was a one in one hundred years type storm event.

Responding to a query, the Officer explained that in relation to new housing developments, he provided comment on all planning applications in relation to the design of flood management. All developers had a legal responsibility to ensure that all water was managed on site.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

20/38 REVIEW OF PEST CONTROL - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Vice Chair presented the draft Terms of Reference for the Panel's review of Pest Control for comment. The Chair and the Vice Chair had formed a Task and Finish Group to gather information from other Local Authorities which would be presented to the Panel at a later date.

The Vice Chair asked Members to forward any evidence of requests or complaints from residents about pest issues, to assist in establishing the extent of the pest control problems in Middlesbrough as evidence for the scrutiny review.

AGREED that the following Terms of Reference for the review of Pest Control were approved:

- A) To examine the Pest Control Services currently offered by Middlesbrough Council including the resources required to run the service and income achieved.
- B) To establish the range and cost of pest control services provided by other Tees Valley Councils and local private operators.
- C) To consider whether expanding Middlesbrough Council's pest control services could provide an additional income stream to the Council.

20/39 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel had been rescheduled and would be held on Tuesday 23 February 2021.

NOTED

20/40 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Vice Chair provided a verbal update on items considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 18 December 2020 and 14 January 2021.

20/41 ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDEREDTeesside Crematorium – Final Report

The Panel's Final Report on Teesside Crematorium had been approved by Executive at a meeting on 19 January 2021 and the service area had agreed to implement all four recommendations.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

**FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL –
PEST CONTROL SERVICES**

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AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

1. The aim of the investigation was to consider whether the pest control services currently offered by Middlesbrough Council are fit for purpose and to assess whether further income could be achieved by expanding the service.

MAYOR'S PRIORITIES

2. The scrutiny of this topic fits within the following priorities of the Mayor's Priorities:

Quality of Service: We will ensure that we place communities at the heart of what we do, continue to deliver value for money and enhance the reputation of Middlesbrough.

COUNCIL'S THREE CORE OBJECTIVES

3. The scrutiny of this topic aligns with the Council's three core objectives as detailed in the Strategic Plan 2021-2024¹:
 - People - working with communities and other public services to improve the lives of our residents.
 - Place - securing improvements in Middlesbrough's housing, infrastructure and attractiveness, improving the town's reputation, creating opportunities for local people and improving our finances.
 - Business - promoting investment in Middlesbrough's economy and making sure we work as effectively as possible to support our ambitions for People and Place.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel's short review are:
 - A) To examine the Pest Control Services currently offered by Middlesbrough Council including the resources required to run the service and income achieved.
 - B) To establish the range and cost of pest control services provided by other Tees Valley Councils and local private operators.
 - C) To consider whether expanding Middlesbrough Council's pest control services could provide an additional income stream to the Council.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. A local authority has specific legal powers to take steps to ensure that its area is free from rats and mice. They must take action to destroy rats and mice on their own land and can

¹ Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2021-2024

serve a notice on an owner or an occupier ordering work to get rid of the problem.²

6. Middlesbrough Council currently provides pest control services in the following areas:
 - Back Alleys.
 - Council owned open spaces.
 - Council Buildings
 - Commercial Contracts.
 - Thirteen Housing.
7. There are four pest control operatives: three permanent full time employees and one agency worker. Seven Area Care staff are trained in rodent control and eleven additional staff are undertaking online pest control training. The rodent control training is a one-day training course.
8. Pest Control Technicians have completed the Level 2 Pest Management Level course, awarded by the RSPH (Royal Society for Public Health UK), which enables them to carry out a wider range of activities. This Level 2 qualification is designed to provide an understanding of public health pests and their management. It fulfils the legal requirement relating to the training of pest control technicians as set out in the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.³ The training takes approximately four to six weeks to complete on a day release basis.
9. The Council's aim is to build up resilience across departments and enable the Level 2 qualified Pest Control Technicians to focus on the back alleys, contracts, and council owned spaces, whilst the area care staff provide a pest control service to Council buildings and cemeteries.
10. The intention is to continue identifying and training additional members of staff from the back alley cleansing and area care teams, as well as building managers, in rodent control. One of the current Pest Control Technicians will also be upskilled to complete the Level 2 qualification to build additional resilience in the team.
11. The Council has 70 commercial contracts across Middlesbrough which generates approximately £43K per annum. The number of commercial contracts has decreased during 2020, due to a number of businesses ceasing trading or opting to request pest control as and when needed, rather than having a regular contract. The Council has worked with businesses during the Coronavirus Pandemic to assist where possible, by delaying payments if necessary.
12. The team carries out approximately 542 visits per year to a variety of customers including restaurants, fast food takeaways, schools, Middlesbrough College and private businesses.

² <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/housing/repairs-in-rented-housing/repairs-common-problems/repairs-infestations-of-pests-and-vermin/>

³ <https://www.rsph.org.uk/qualification/level-2-award-in-pest-management.html>

13. The Council also has a joint contract with Durham County Council for Thirteen Group which covers a wide area across the north east. Middlesbrough Council covers Middlesbrough, Redcar, and Saltburn. The income from this contract is approximately £95K, with the total number of jobs completed approximately 1300. Up to four visits per property can be carried out under this contract. Income from the Thirteen contract covers the Council's costs in terms of running the service.
14. Currently Middlesbrough Council does not offer a pest control service to private residential properties across Middlesbrough, although it has provided one in the past. The Council focusses the pest control service on contract work and open spaces.
15. **Tees Valley Councils – Pest Control Services for Domestic Properties**
- The Panel ascertained that the other Tees Valley Councils – Stockton On Tees, Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool, all offer various pest control services to their residents. Some services are free and others are chargeable. Darlington Council does not provide pest control services to commercial businesses and properties.
16. Searches on the websites of Stockton On Tees, Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland and Hartlepool Councils revealed the following information in relation to pest control services Charges:

Council	Free Service	Chargeable Service	Charge
Stockton On Tees⁴	Rats Mice (indoors only) Cockroaches Bed bugs	Ants and flies Bees and wasps Biscuit beetles Carpet beetles Fleas and mites Moles and squirrels Pigeons Silverfish Spider beetles	Subject to required treatment from £35 + VAT
Darlington⁵		Rats and mice	£10 (this charge does not apply for council tenants as pest control for mice and rats is included in the rent)
		Insects	£70.20

⁴ <https://www.stockton.gov.uk/our-people/environmental-health/pest-control/>

⁵ <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/pest-control>

Redcar and Cleveland⁶	Pest Control officers can offer free advice over the phone on a number of different pests		
		Rats/Mice	£83 (up to 2 visits)
		Bees (subject to individual assessment to determine whether treatment can take place)	£83 (up to 2 visits)
		Wasps	£83 (up to 2 visits)
Hartlepool⁷	Free advice and identification service		
	Rats (if in house)		
		Rats	£40 – refunded if confirmed rates in house
		Mice	£80.00 visit + up to 4 Re visits then invoiced for time £40.00 per hours + materials
		Insects	Advice visit £40.00 if require treatment additional £20.00 charge

17. Redcar and Cleveland Council has recently reduced its pest control team from two to one member of staff who also deals with stray dogs. Whilst Redcar and Cleveland Council offers free advice, it is reported that the take up of treatment option is poor.
18. **Commercial Operators**
19. Searches on websites of commercial pest control operators revealed that they generally charge according to the type and extent of the pest problem following consultation, rather than offering a set pricing structure. Where prices are quoted online they range from £50 per hour plus materials, to £270 plus VAT, for 3 visits to a rat infestation.
20. A Panel member was charged £160 for a commercial operator to treat a garden rat infestation. The Panel member reports that one commercial operator informed him that demand is currently so high he is unable to take on any more work through his website.

⁶ <https://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/resident/Pages/Pest-Control.aspx>

⁷ https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/info/20049/pest_control/435/pest_control_service/2

21. During the first UK lockdown in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, 51% *of British Pest Control Association (BPCA) members reported an increase in rodent activity. In October 2020, 78% of pest controllers polled reported increased rat sightings, with 63% noting a rise in mouse-related incidents.⁸
22. There are a number of factors contributing to the rises, one of which is that milder winters are leading to increases in rodent populations. During lockdown people are spending more time at home and in their gardens, and are putting more food out for birds and other wildlife, which in turn attracts vermin. The most effective rodent control method is to remove food sources, water, and items that provide shelter.
23. Other issues include fly tipping, and bag slashing in back alleys. Household rubbish disposed of in bin bags creates a natural food source for rodents. Whilst in Middlesbrough there is a programme of baiting in the alleys, discarded food sources such as pizza boxes are far more attractive to the rodents than poisonous bait.
24. Middlesbrough Council previously had a contract with Northumbrian Water to bait the sewers but this is no longer in place. Northumbrian Water state that their responsibility is confined solely to their sewer network and their leaflet "Facts About Rodents"⁹ provides the following information:

"We are committed to working closely with local authorities and our customers to deal with rats.....

.....When we receive a report of a rodent sighting from a member of the public, we will advise the local authority so that it can consider surface baiting. We will carry out up to three cycles of rodent baiting in manholes within the affected area. A site visit will be carried out after each cycle of baiting to see whether any bait has been taken.

If any bait has been taken, we will re-bait the manholes. If after three cycles the bait is still being taken the matter will be referred to one of our technical support advisors to assess whether further investigation, or further baiting, is needed. If we find that the bait has not been taken, this would suggest that either the rodent activity is not sewer-based, or if it was, activity has now stopped. In either case, no further work would be carried out by ourselves."
25. During the last calendar year 2020-2021, Middlesbrough Council served 14 prosecution notices on private homeowners or private rented tenants in relation to pest nuisance.
26. Middlesbrough Council does not keep a record of requests for pest control services from residents and no formal complaints about the lack of this service have been received.

⁸ <https://bpca.org.uk/News-and-Blog/pestaware-the-impact-of-lockdown-on-pest-control/267047>

⁹ Facts About Rodents – Northumbrian Water Fact Sheet

CONCLUSIONS

27. The scrutiny panel reached the following conclusions in respect of its investigation:

TERM OF REFERENCE A – To examine the Pest Control Services currently offered by Middlesbrough Council including the resources required to run the service and income achieved.

The Council has 70 commercial contracts across Middlesbrough which generates approximately £43K per annum. The Council also has a joint contract with Durham County Council for Thirteen Group and the income from this contract is approximately £95K. The income achieved from the Thirteen contract covers the Council's costs in terms of running the service.

TERM OF REFERENCE B – To establish the range and cost of pest control services provided by other Tees Valley Councils and local private operators.

The costs of pest control services offered by the Tees Valley Councils varies, ranging from a free service up to £83, depending on the type of pests and number of visits required. Commercial Operators' fees are similarly varied and appear generally more expensive.

TERM OF REFERENCE C – To consider whether expanding Middlesbrough Council's pest control services could provide an additional income stream to the Council.

Unlike the other four Tees Valley Authorities, Middlesbrough Council does not currently offer any pest control services to private residents. Anecdotal evidence gathered indicates that there is an increasing rodent problem in Middlesbrough. However, as the Council does not record service requests for pest control services from private residents, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the problem or the likelihood of take-up of any such Council service by residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

28. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Executive are as follows:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

29. The Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance with its work:

G Field, Director, Environment and Community Services.

J Ingledew, Bereavement Services Manager, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

D Lumsden, Pest Control Technician.

A Mace, Head of Environment Services.

P Shaw, Operations Manager, Recycling and Education.

A Wilson, Pest Control Technician.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

30. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

Informal meeting with Pest Control Technicians on 9 December 2020.

Minutes of the meeting of the EDEI Scrutiny Panel held on 16 December 2020.

British Pest Control Association website.

Citizens Advice website.

Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton on Tees Councils' websites.

Northumbrian Water Factsheet.

**COUNCILLOR M SAUNDERS
- CHAIR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SCRUTINY PANEL**

The membership of the scrutiny panel is as follows:

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel 2020-2021

Councillors M Saunders (Chair), B Hubbard, (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D Branson, D Coupe, T Furness, L Garvey, L Lewis, M Storey, S Walker

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