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## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 16 December 2020.

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

**OFFICERS:** S Bonner, C Coverdale, G Field, S Lightwing, A Mace, J McNally and P Shaw

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** were submitted on behalf of Councillor L Garvey

### 20/27 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

### 20/28 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 18 NOVEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 18 November 2020 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

### 20/29 **PEST CONTROL**

The Director of Environment and Community Services, the Head of Environment Services and the Operations Manager Recycling and Education were in attendance at the meeting to provide an overview of Middlesbrough Council's Pest Control Services.

During the first UK lockdown in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) had reported a 51% increase in rodent activity. Following the second lockdown in October and November 2020, this increased to 78% and Pest Control companies saw a rise in requests for services for vermin control.

There were a number of factors that contributed to the rises, one of which was that milder winters were leading to increases in rodent populations. Another issue related to the lockdown was that people were spending more time at home and in their gardens, and were putting more food out for birds and other wildlife, which in turn attracted vermin. Another issue was fly tipping, and bag slashing in back alleys. In Middlesbrough, this was particularly prevalent in the Central, Newport and North Ormesby Wards. Household rubbish disposed of in bin bags created a natural food source for rodents. Whilst there was a programme of baiting in the alleys, discarded food sources such as pizza boxes were far more attractive to the rodents than poisonous bait.

The Council currently offered pest control services in the following areas:

- Back Alleys.
- Council owned open spaces.
- Council Buildings
- Commercial Contracts.
- Thirteen Housing.

There were four pest control operatives: three permanent full time employees and one agency worker. Seven Area Care staff were trained in rodent control and eleven additional staff were currently undertaking online pest control training. Of these eleven staff, two worked in

The rodent control training was a one-day training course which staff completed. The pest control operatives had completed a Level 2 course, which enabled them to carry out a wider

range of activities. The aim was to build up resilience across departments and enable the Level 2 qualified pest control operatives to focus on the back alleys, contracts, and council owned spaces, while the area care staff could provide a pest control service to Council buildings and cemeteries.

The intention was 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 would also be upskilled to complete the Level 2 Pest Control qualification to build additional resilience in the team. The Level 2 training took approximately four to six weeks to complete on a day release basis.

The Council had 70 commercial contracts across Middlesbrough which generated approximately £43K per annum. The number of commercial contracts had decreased this year 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 had worked with businesses during the Coronavirus Pandemic to assist where possible, by delaying payments if necessary. Under the contract, the team carried out 542 visits per year to a variety of customers including restaurants, fast food takeaways, schools, Middlesbrough College and private businesses.

The Council also had a joint contract with Durham County Council for Thirteen which covered a wide area across the north east. Middlesbrough Council covered Middlesbrough, Redcar, and Saltburn and the income from this contract was approximately £95K, with the total number of jobs completed approximately 1300. Up to four visits per property could be carried out under the contract.

Currently Middlesbrough Council did not offer a pest control service to private residential properties across Middlesbrough, although it had provided one in the past. The Council focussed the pest control service on contract work and open spaces. The Director commented that this was more likely due to capacity, rather than a conscious decision to stop offering this service, and was something that could be considered in future. Whilst potentially, offering this service could provide some income to the Council, there were other private companies to compete with and it was unclear what volume of work might be available. Income from the Thirteen contract covered the Council's costs in terms of running that service.

Concern was raised in relation to the town's hotspot areas for vermin and it was highlighted that education was key to addressing actions including food being left out for birds and other wildlife, food waste being dumped and people looking through bins and tipping out the contents. The service had information leaflets that were delivered when there was a spike in the number of rodents in a certain area. The Officer commented that the vast majority of people took the advice offered on board. A Member suggested that the LoveMiddlesbrough magazine could also be used to provide residents with information in relation to vermin control.

It was acknowledged that education was a continuous exercise and the Council was developing a Community Strategy which would include environmental education. The Council was also awaiting proposals from the Government on the Environment Bill 2020 and proposals for dealing with food waste collections.

It was highlighted that Northumbrian Water had ceased baiting watercourses a number of years ago. It was confirmed that the Council was in regular contact with Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency to address rodent problems and other issues.

In relation to the litter/bait bins, the service was currently mapping where all this type of bin was located across the town so that a comprehensive programme of baiting could be implemented. Some of the bins had been moved to different locations over time.

**AGREED** that the information provided was received and noted.

The Vice Chair provided a verbal update on items considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 20 November and 3 December 2020.

20/31 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 20 JANUARY 2020 - 10.30 AM**

The next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel would be held at 10.30 am on Wednesday 20 January 2021.

20/32 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

Transporter Bridge

The Chair referred to the audit of the Tees Transporter Bridge which was due to be considered at a forthcoming meeting of the Corporate Affairs and Audit Committee. It was agreed that a scrutiny review of the Transporter Bridge could be undertaken under the Panel's remit.

**AGREED** that the Chair would make a formal request to the Overview and Scrutiny Board to add the topic of the Transporter Bridge to the Panel's Work Programme for 2020-2021.