

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.
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

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>

£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
Redcar and Cleveland⁶	Pest Control officers can offer free advice over the phone on a		

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

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

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

	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.
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

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

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

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.

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

⁹ Facts About Rodents – Northumbrian Water Fact Sheet

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:

1. Consideration be given to Middlesbrough Council offering a low cost Pest Control Service to residential properties and whether this would provide an additional income stream to the service area.
2. Investigate whether an amount could be included within the Council Tax charge to provide a pest control service to private residents without any additional fee.
3. Promote educational messages about good house-keeping to prevent vermin infestations through the LoveMiddlesbrough magazine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- 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,
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