

Title: Future Delivery of the Domestic Pest Control Service  
Lead Officer: Marianne Rolfe, Head of Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment  
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Falp  
Wards of the District directly affected: All

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## Summary

This report proposes that the domestic pest control service as provided by Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment is **changed** to an advice and regulatory intervention only service following a three year review of the service and available options for alternative service delivery.

## Recommendation(s)

- (1) The cabinet agree to the **change** of the domestic pest control service as provided by Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment to advice and regulatory intervention only.**
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## 1 Background/Information

### 1.1 Current Service:

- Warwick District Council (WDC) Safer Communities, Leisure and Environment provide a pest control service for domestic properties that are of public health significance (rats, mice, fleas, bedbugs, and cockroaches). The service occasionally treats WDC owned assets, but assets are more routinely treated by an engaged contractor through Assets and Neighbourhood **Services** or as a separate independent contractor in accordance with insurance requirements.
- Table 1 identifies the number of service requests received by the Health and Community Protection, Pest Control Service in the last four years (inc current). Not all of these requests moved on to a treatment phase.
- In response to the covid pandemic the service moved to a telephone advice service and then was only able to respond to emergencies, for example an identifiable extreme rat infestation. From October 2020 the service began treating rats in the external environment, this increased to treating rat infestations in internal environments over 2021 and into 2022. Unfortunately, and principally due to the council not being able to recruit to a vacant post, the service has never fully recovered. At the time of writing, we are still unable to

offer a full pest control service and can only respond to requests for advice regarding pests.

- 1.5 Table 2 demonstrates the 2020 & 2021 fees which were charged for Warwick District Council Pest Control Services and table 3 the fees introduced in 2022. Before 2022, there were agreed reduced charges for those customers identified as receiving a state pension, income support, job seekers allowance or those disabled. This was a common concession provided by councils pre covid. The 2022 fees for charged services were aligned with SDC as a first step in merging of the teams.
- 1.6 With the introduction of the 2022 fees, the service has moved to an online payment method which ensures payments are taken in advance of treatments and has negated the need for cash handling by staff.

*Table 1:*

Type of Pest	2019	2020	2021	2022
Fleas	25	11	7	1
Bedbugs	32	19	7	0
Cockroaches	3	1	3	0
Rats	896	640	569	41
Mice	76	48	33	2
Unknown/ Not confirmed/pest advice				2
Other pest advice (birds, squirrels, bees, badgers, spiders, flies, pesticides)				6
<b>Total Pest Control service requests received per year</b>	<b>1032</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>52</b>

*Table 2: Fees 2020 & 2021*

Pest	Fee	State pension/registered disabled fee	Income support/JSA fee
Rats	Free	Free	Free
Mice	£78	£39	Free
Fleas, bedbugs, cockroaches	£84	£42	Free

*Table 3: Fees 2022*

Pest	Fee
Rats	£100
Mice	£100
Fleas, bedbugs, cockroaches	£100

- 1.7 According to the establishment, there are 1.55FTE Pest Control Officers who deliver the service with support for call handling provided by 2FTE Service Support Officers and a managerial support from the Systems and Support Team Leader. The Pest Control Officers are managed by the Environmental Protection Team Leader. However, the service is being delivered by 0.95FTE pest control officer due to vacancies. There is also a reduction in the Service Support Officers resource available.
- 1.8 Requests for the service can be made online and the target timescale for responses is three working days with a completion target of 35 days. This completion date allows for humane eradication, minimising the risk of harm to other animals in accordance with legislative requirements for the use of poisons and phased treatment good practise (housekeeping, proofing, non-toxic, toxic baits). The service performance measure in 2021/22 shows this area of work averaging at 33 days resolution period for service requests. On average each service request receives a first response on the day of receipt and in July were resolved within 25 days.

Table 4 outlines the allocated budget and actual spend in 2021/22 for pest control. Table 5 identifies the 22/23 budget. This does not include the costs of the support officers or the team leaders as pest control is only a small portion of their function.

*Table 4:*

<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>	<b>Actual Spend</b>
Employee Costs	£59,700	£46,136
Supplies	£10,500	£2778
Central establishment Charges	£32,700	£43550
Income from Fees	£2,100	£1,978
Other income (refunds)	£0	£325
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£102,900</b>	<b>£92,546</b>

Table 5:

<b>2022/23</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>
Employee Costs	£51,400
Supplies	£10,700
Central establishment Charges	£32,700
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£94,800</b>
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Income from Fees	£2,400
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- 1.9 The income generated from the pest control service over the last five years is described in table 6. The income has failed to meet the annual income target set. The 2022/23 has income amounts to £347.47+Vat with the reduced service being operated (two rat treatments and six advice requests).
- 1.10 The current MTFs assumes a recurrent saving of £50,000 by April 2023. This will not be possible with the current service delivery, and it remains unlikely in the event that the service becomes fully staffed in the next few months.

Table 6:

	<u>Total Income</u>	<u>Full fee</u>	<u>Reduced fee</u>	<u>Internal Recharge</u>
2022/23 (part year)	£526	£347.47	n/a	£0
2021/22 (reduced service)	£1,978	£0	£0	£1,978
2020/21 (reduced service)	£1,368.75	£0	£0	£1,368.75
2019/2020	£1,338.35	£135	£165.85	£1,037.50
2018/2019	£1,102.25	£390.82	£157.49	£553.94
2017/2018	£1,302.15	£449.19	£92.08	£760.88

- 1.11 Conversion rates from enquiries to requested treatment is currently 11% before the introduction of fees (pre covid was) 26%. Whilst this is less than pre-covid for the reduced service that is being operated, the reduced resources and the delay in service delivery this is thought to be good.
- 1.12 If the service were to continue with similar conversation rates for treatment and with similar numbers of requests for service. Full cost recovery for each treatment would be approx. £5,925+ vat for an advice visit and £17,775+ vat per treatment. Cost such as these would price the council out of the pest control market.

## **2 Legislation and Statutory Duty for Local Authorities**

- 2.1 Local authorities are not legally required to provide a pest control service. They have a statutory duty under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 to:
- Take such steps as may be necessary to secure as far as practicable that their district is kept free from rats and mice.
  - In particular, keep the local authority's own land, and other land that the local authority occupies, free from rats and mice.
  - Ensure that other owners and occupiers of land comply with their similar duties under the Act.
- 2.2 Regardless of who is at fault for the infestation, the council has no obligation to provide pest control services to its tenants, tenants of private landlords, registered social landlords or housing associations, or those receiving benefits. The law only requires the treatment of council owned land for rodents.
- 2.3 The law provides for the service of enforcement notices for any landowner who does not keep their land free from rodents.

## **3 2019-2022 - Pest Control Service Review**

- 3.1 The pest control service review began in 2019 and has continued throughout the last three years. The initial piece of work identified seven service delivery options. These are further explained in appendix A.
- Option 1 Existing Service: Continue to run the pest control service as it is, serving domestic public enquiries only with cost recovery review of the fees charged.
  - Option 2 Existing Service plus additional treatments offered: Continue to run the pest control service as it is, serving domestic public enquiries only with cost recovery review of the fees charged and consideration of add on services i.e., wasp treatment introduction.
  - Option 3 Commercial Service: Run a full commercial service alongside an increased domestic service. A suitable model for Warwick District council would need to be developed.
  - Option 4 Outsourced Pest Control Operation – Private Company. This option ensures that another qualified pest control service delivers our statutory functions as part of a wider contract to assist in the pest control service we need as an organisation.
  - Option 5 Outsourced Pest Control Operation - Another Local Authority. This option ensures that another qualified pest control service within another local authority delivers our statutory functions as part of a wider contract to assist in the pest control service we need as an organisation under a service level agreement.
  - Option 6 Shared Pest Control operation – Local Authority. This option provides for a shared service delivery with another local authority i.e., Stratford upon Avon District Council to deliver our statutory functions and our wider contract commitments as a council to assist in the pest control service we need as an organisation.
  - Option 7 No domestic pest Control Service This option provides only for treatment of our own assets as required and would require enforcement for landowners failing to treat their land for rodents.

- 3.2 Following the discussion of the original report with the PAB officers began detailed exploration of option 5 – outsourced to another local authority. There are a number of available delivery partners in this category. In the original report, a partnership with Coventry City Council (CCC) was explored. They provided pest controls services to other neighbouring local authorities and as a result they were interested in providing both our council assets service and our domestic property services.
- 3.3 This option was explored in detail in early 2020 and unfortunately discussions were terminated in July 2020 due to us not being able to reach an agreement. Further details are included in paragraph XX
- 3.4 Following the conclusion of the alignment process, officers revisited the original options. **In particular those listed below.** The outcomes were presented to the PAB on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2022 in order to determine the appropriate service delivery option. (Appendix B)
- **Existing Service:** Continue to run the pest control service as it is, serving domestic public enquiries only with further review of the fees charged following the introduction of the new fees in 2022.
  - **Commercial Service:** Run a full commercial service alongside an increased domestic service: This report shows examples of other councils who have done so and the approaches they have taken, details in paragraphs 5.2 to 5.5. A suitable model for Warwick District council would need to be developed.
  - **Pest Control Operation run by another Local Authority.** This option ensures that another qualified pest control service within another local authority delivers our statutory functions as part of a wider contract to assist in the pest control service we need as an organisation under a service level agreement.
  - **No domestic pest Control Service** This option provides only for treatment of our own assets as required and would require enforcement for landowners failing to treat their land for rodents.

#### **4 Option: Existing Service:**

- 4.1 Under this option the council would continue to operate a domestic service only for the public health pests currently treated. The treatment of council owned assets would continue to be via a contractor.
- 4.2 In 22/23, the existing service is estimated to cost £94,800 (including £25,000 salary as outlined in MTFS) to operate whilst with the current fee structure generates an estimated £2,400 income.
- 4.3 The 2022 fees for charged services were aligned with SDC as a first step in merging the teams. Now that the merger is no longer going ahead the fees for

2023 would need to be reviewed to ensure that they recovered the costs for treatment and service whilst staying competitive with the market.

- 4.4 Concerns were raised that through the introduction of fees for rats and the removal of concession fees we would see a reduction in market share of pest treatments. This however does not appear to have been the case based on the enquiries received despite the clear messaging regarding service availability on the website.
- 4.5 In filling the vacant post the service could be delivered in full again and income could continue to be generated. For comparison, the estimated income figures outlined in appendix B have remained as identified in the original pest control service review.
- 4.6 It is recognised that there would need to be a period of onboarding for any new staff member which will prevent full income recovery and additional expenses related to that staff member including ensuring the second pest control van is roadworthy as it has not been used in 2 years. In addition, it should be noted that whilst the van as owned by WDC they are both in need of replacement and do not currently meet the council's green agenda
- 4.7 With this option there is a future opportunity, to increase the range of pests treated to those wider than just the public health pests. There are some additional equipment and training costs associated with any expansion which would be eventually outweighed by the income generated. The limit to this expansion would be time and availability staff resources.
- 4.8 In order to fully expand the service to treat the full range of pests an additional staff member, van and equipment etc would be required. The cost of this expansion is estimated at an additional £49,033. £45,033 of which would be recurring annually. The cost of these additional resources would need to be included in treatment fees in order to ensure the service could recover those costs over a period of years.

## **5 Option: Commercial Service**

- 5.1 This option built upon the provision of the existing service and proposed that a commercial service is run alongside a domestic service. There are a number of local authorities who have taken this approach. It would be sensible that as a first step the pest control service would treat council assets. This would keep any additional pest treatment spending within the council.
- 5.2 The ability to take on any additional commercial contracts with premises outside of the council's assets would require additional resources in terms of additional staffing, vehicles, and equipment. These would need to be costed into services delivered in order to ensure that the service expansion would recover its costs over a period of years.
- 5.3 If the council domestic treatment did not expand there would be capacity to provide some wider commercial sector contracts as well as the councils own

assets. This would however still require the additional investment in equipment, training and marketing but potentially could generate a greater income. Using the figure provided by the soft market testing undertaken in the original pest control service review report this could generate £750+ vat per premises under contract.

- 5.4 It is difficult to determine the market share we might be able to establish in a wider service. The fees currently charged for individual treatments by WDC appear to be competitive with the private market. The council has a reputation for a quality helpful service which would be a unique selling point for a commercial contract with the council.
- 6.5 It should be noted that the local authority cannot use the commercial contracts to subsidise any domestic pest services delivered, and the extent of commercial contracts would need legal advice to understand the implications for the council.

## **6 Option: Pest Control Operation delivered by another Local Authority**

- 6.1 **Coventry:** There are a number of available delivery partners in this category. In the original report, a partnership with Coventry City Council was explored. They provided pest controls services to other neighbouring local authorities and as a result they were interested in providing both our council assets service and our domestic property services.
- 6.2 This option was explored in detail in early 2020 and unfortunately discussions were terminated in July 2020 due to us not being able to reach an agreement. It became clear that Coventry did not require the WDC staff and were not prepared to enter into an agreement with WDC whilst there was a TUPE requirement. They were also not prepared to contribute to any costs WDC may incur as part of this process which were legally their liability.
- 6.3 Coventry held a contract with another local authority to provide a similar service at this time. It is understood that this has since been terminated due to service delivery differences. The neighbouring local authority will not be delivering a pest control service after the 6<sup>th</sup> July 2022.
- 6.4 **Stratford:** The Council also explored a shared service with SDC as part of the alignment process of the two councils. This was a significant opportunity to enhance the resilience of both teams, whilst providing a wider pest treatment service and commercial opportunity. This remains a viable option, however it should be noted that SDC are also carrying a vacancy and may wish to consider the future delivery of their service in light of the decision not to merge.
- 6.5 Initial work on bringing the teams together identified the need for supervisory capacity in addition to recruitment to the vacant posts, host local authority determination, alignment of ICT and infrastructure. The practicalities of such



arrangements would require further discussions. As a result, there would be remaining costs to associated with service delivery and a sharing of income arrangement which would need further work to resolve. Should this be politically acceptable further work would be needed to understand the suitable arrangement and its associated costs.

- 6.6 SDC have been approached to determine if they remained interested in a shared service. Whilst it is recognised that there were previously identified benefits of working together, they are in the process of considering their own service delivery and therefore are not interested in shared working with WDC.
- 6.7 **Rugby:** Of all of the remaining Warwickshire authorities only rugby continues to deliver a pest control service. Initial discussions with Rugby suggested that they would be interested in undertaking some kind of shared arrangement. However, upon review Rugby have advised that they are not interested in taking on a domestic pest control service for WDC and are also reviewing their service delivery options.

## **7 Option: No domestic service delivered**

- 7.1 The council can opt not to provide a domestic service and continue with arrangements to treat their own assets through a contractor in order to meet the requirements of legislation.
- 7.2 Under this option residents would be directed towards the private sector to address their pest control needs and failure to treat their land for pests could result in enforcement actions by the council. During Covid, the team were unable to deliver services, and this some generated complaints from both residents and councillors. However, since Covid restrictions were lifted, the service has been delivering at a reduced level due to staff vacancies. There have been no complaints generated as the service available has been readily communicated expectations managed within the available capacity of the team.
- 7.3 Currently, the council has been unable to recruit to the existing vacancy (internally, externally or contractor) and for a number of resource reasons have been unable to deliver a full pest control service since Covid restrictions were lifted.
- 7.4 This option would have no effect support officers and team leaders as pest control forms only a small percentage of their function. The level of support officer has already been reduced and can be accommodated due to the current position of the pest control service.
- 7.5 Neither North Warwickshire nor Nuneaton & Bedford deliver pest control services. Coventry, Rugby and Stratford currently deliver services. All three are able to accept requests for service within the Warwick boundary and there are a

large number of pest control companies who deliver services within the district and eight that are based within the district.

- 7.6 Council assets would continue to be treated through a contractor as per the existing arrangement.

## **8 Preferred Option:**

- 8.1 Appendix B seeks to compare and contrast the financial and quality benefits and drawbacks of the options in summary. The appendix makes a number of assumptions.

- Service support costs removed from all options as assumed would remain with the council.
- Estimated income is outlined as per the 2019 report.
- Internal organisations spend as per 2019 report
- Estimated costs for new staff member based on current employment costs, leasing of van over 4 years period, repair costs to existing vans, additional equipment, and training costs.

- 8.2 The appendix demonstrates which option provides the MTFs saving or income and the risk of the option to deliver as outlined the service described with the financial options. There is one option which provides the council with the required level of financial savings without the risk. However, the council would be providing a advice only pest service and would need to look at how local businesses could be promoted to deliver pest services to customers.

- 8.3 The PAB advised that officers progress a movement to a advice only pest control service.

## **9 Alternative Options available to (name of Committee/Cabinet etc.)**

- 9.1 As considered in section 3 above, the cabinet could choose an alternative option for the future delivery of the Safer Communities, Leisure, and Environment Domestic Pest Control service. However, Section 3 demonstrates that alternative options are either undeliverable or will result in significantly higher costs. Officers have therefore rejected the alternatives set out in 3.1 above.

## **10 Consultation and Member's comments**

- 10.1 Throughout the service review the Health and Community Protection PAB have been involved in advising the Portfolio Holder of their thoughts regarding next steps and option selection.
- 10.2 The PAB received an initial service options paper in October 2019, further updates as exploratory discussions were progressed with the first option selected, when merger discussions began with SDC, when merge discussions

concluded and most recently following the outcome of the further exploration works requested.

## 11 Implications of the proposal

**11.1 Legal/Human Rights Implications:** The proposed service will maintain the council's statutory duty.

**11.2 Financial:** Table 7 below outlines the budget savings excluding support costs which would be realised by the service alteration. In addition to these savings there would be additional savings made by the sale of the two pest control vehicles. This amounts to a possible further £3000.

Table 7:

	<b>Existing Service</b>	<b>No service</b>
<b>Community Protection Budget</b>	£62,100	£0
<b>Estimated Income - currently treated pests (reduced service)</b>	£1,041	£0
<b>Estimated Remaining Expenditure</b>	£61,059	£0
<b>Savings against existing spend</b>		£62,100

**11.3** There may be an impact on staffing of which our organisation policy for redundancy and redeployment will apply.

**11.4 Council Business Plan:** There are no implications for the council business plan in this report.

**Environmental/Climate Change Implications:** By reducing the service the council can dispose of two diesel vehicles. Reducing its carbon emissions from the mileage and the maintenance of these vehicles.

**11.5 Analysis of the effects on Equality:** There are no impacts on equality identified as services can still be accessed to treat pests in the wider community. There remain enforcement powers for those who do not treat properties/land for pests. The council will also continue to treat its own land in accordance with the legislation through the existing arrangements.

**11.6 Data Protection:** There are no data protection matters highlighted

**11.7 Health and Wellbeing:** There are no impacts on health and wellbeing identified as services can still be accessed to treat pests in the wider community. There remain enforcement powers for those who do not treat

properties/land for pests. The council will also continue to treat its own land in accordance with the legislation through the existing arrangements.

## **12 Risk Assessment**

**12.1** There is a risk that this could have adverse effects in terms of public health and customer satisfaction. If complaints rose (which has not been the case over the review period) officers would need to spend a greater part of their time and resource investigating and taking informal action to secure remedy of the pest infestation as per the requirements of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949.

**12.2** Review of the workloads have indicated that the current level advice and enforcement requests could be managed from within existing resources.

## **13 Conclusion/Reasons for the Recommendation**

13.1 Having explored all available options in order to provide a suitable pest control service. The most cost effective option for the service delivery given the council's budgetary situation, is the recommendation outlined in this report.

### **Background papers:**

Please provide a list of any papers which you have referred to in compiling this report and are not published documents. This is a legal requirement.

You must also supply these when submitting the report.

### **Supporting documents:**

This is not a legal requirement but may assist others in identifying documents you have referred to in producing the report.

### Report Information Sheet

Please complete and submit to Democratic Services with draft report

<b>Committee/Date</b>		
<b>Consultations undertaken</b>		
<b>Consultee *required</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Details of consultation /comments received</b>
<b>Ward Member(s)</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder WDC &amp; SDC *</b>		Judy Falp
<b>Financial Services *</b>		Andrew Rollins
<b>Legal Services *</b>		
<b>Other Services</b>		Tracy Dolphin Lisa Barker Steve partner Phil Clarke
<b>Chief Executive(s)</b>		Chris Elliot
<b>Head of Service(s)</b>		Marianne Rolfe
<b>Section 151 Officer</b>		Andrew Rollins
<b>Monitoring Officer</b>		Andrew Jones
<b>CMT (WDC)</b>		Chris Elliot Andrew Jones Dave Barber
<b>Leadership Co-ordination Group (WDC)</b>		
<b>Other organisations</b>		
<b>Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Ctte/Council?</b>		Recommendation to: Cabinet / Council ..... Committee
<b>Contrary to Policy/Budget framework</b>		No/Yes
<b>Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?</b>		No/Yes, Paragraphs:
<b>Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?</b>		No/Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for ..... (date)

<b>Accessibility Checked?</b>		File/Info/Inspect Document/Check Accessibility
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