

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

FROM: Audit and Risk Manager **SUBJECT:** Places & Projects
TO: Head of Health & Community Protection **DATE:** 13 July 2018
C.C. Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive (AJ)
Head of Finance
Safer Communities Manager
Services Team Leader
Portfolio Holder (Cllr Thompson)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In accordance with the Audit Plan for 2018/19, an examination of the above subject area has been undertaken and this report presents the findings and conclusions drawn from the audit for information and action where appropriate. This is the first time that the topic has been audited.
- 1.2 Wherever possible, findings have been discussed with the staff involved in the procedures examined and their views are incorporated, where appropriate, into the report. My thanks are extended to all concerned for the help and cooperation received during the audit.

2 Background

- 2.1 The audit covered two distinct areas of the service: Pest Control; and the Dog Warden.
- 2.2 The two Pest Control Officers (PCOs) currently provide domestic services in relation to rats, mice and certain insect infestations (fleas, bedbugs and cockroaches). They do not cover commercial properties or other insect or animal pests.
- 2.3 The Dog Warden covers dog fouling and lost or stray dogs as well as undertaking roadshows and general patrols. Issues such as noise nuisance from dogs are dealt with by other sections within Health & Community Protection.

3 Scope and Objectives of the Audit

- 3.1 The audit was undertaken to test the management and financial controls in place.
- 3.2 In terms of scope, the audit covered the following areas:
- Policies and planning

- Requests for service
- Finance
- Risk management.

3.3 The audit programme identified the expected controls. The control objectives examined were:

- The functions are discharged in an agreed manner, which is in line with relevant legislation
- Management is aware of the work that is required of their teams
- Staff and management are able to track the progress of individual jobs
- The Council charges an appropriate amount for the services provided
- Income is received as appropriate for services provided
- Inappropriate control of dogs is appropriately penalised with the use of Fixed Penalty Notices and kennel fees, with the fines acting as a deterrent
- The Council achieves value for money
- Budgets are managed effectively
- Management are aware of the risks associated with the provision of services
- Staff safety is ensured as far as possible
- The health of staff and customers is ensured as far as possible when poisons are used.

4 Findings

4.1 Recommendations from Previous Reports

4.1.1 As this is the first audit of the subject, this section is not applicable.

4.2 Policies & Planning

4.2.1 'Policy' documentation was found to be in place for both the Pest Control function and the Dog Warden.

4.2.2 The Pest Control policy document contains a specific section on the Council's legal powers with regards to pest control and makes reference to the various relevant pieces of legislation. This was last updated in February 2016.

4.2.3 The Services Team Leader (STL) advised that the policy had not operated quite as anticipated with regards to forwarding information to Housing.

4.2.4 The 'protocol document' in place for the Dog Warden services also makes reference to different pieces of legislation, but it has not been updated since August 2009 and various reorganisations have been undertaken since then with changes to management responsibility etc.

Risk

Staff may be working to outdated or incorrect policies.

Recommendation

The 'policy' documents for the Pest Control and Dog Warden services should be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

- 4.2.5 The service overview section of the Health & Community Protection Service Area Plan includes reference to the activities of both the Dog Warden and the Pest Control function.
- 4.2.6 Specific customer measures are also set with regards to the time taken to resolve the service requests as well as operational measures covering the time taken to respond to and complete requests for service (although this is generic covering all services within the department).
- 4.2.7 There is also mention of the potential for commercialising the Pest Control service along with the associated budgetary risks.

4.3 Requests for Service

- 4.3.1 The Civica APP (Flare) system is used to record all requests for service (RFS) in relation to these two services as well as those for other sections within Health & Community Protection. Requests are usually received by the Environmental Support Officers, although the Dog Warden advised that she receives some direct emails.
- 4.3.2 The relevant staff members will review Flare to pick up any jobs that have been requested and will undertake visits to the properties / sites as appropriate.
- 4.3.3 Testing was undertaken on sample RFSs for both services to ensure that they were being updated appropriately, with supporting documentation being held where appropriate. This proved satisfactory.
- 4.3.4 A further test was undertaken on all relevant RFSs that had been received over a six-month period to ensure that they were being dealt with in a timely manner. This highlighted that over 90% of all relevant RFSs were being responded to and over 96% were being completed in line with the targets.
- 4.3.5 The STL advised that it would not always be possible to deal with all RFSs in line with target dates due to issues such as annual leave and long term sickness in the small teams. Furthermore, some pest control issues are now being dealt with differently, with 'good housekeeping' being promoted as opposed to using poisons in the first instance, so target times may need to be reviewed.
- 4.3.6 The STL highlighted that management reports used to be prepared showing RFSs that were overdue but the reports have not been received for a while. However, a new member of staff has taken on the Systems Team Leader role, so it is hoped that these will be resurrected shortly.

4.4 **Finance**

- 4.4.1 The STL advised that the dog control fees were set by legislation, with the Council having decided to use the lower end of the scale (plus an admin fee) for Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs).
- 4.4.2 For the pest control fees there had (at some stage in the past) been a review of fuel and time costs and these had been used to come up with the relevant fees. She also suggested that consideration was being given to commercialising the services, so costs would be reviewed in due course.
- 4.4.3 The fees for pest control and the dog warden activities were included as appropriate within the fees and charges report to Executive on 27 September 2017. There was no specific commentary on these fees changes, with the standard increases being applied to pest control services. As suggested above, dog control fees are determined by legislation, so no increases had been applied.
- 4.4.4 Testing was undertaken on the samples of RFSs to ensure that fees were being received as appropriate, along with the kennel costs associated with stray dogs. Due to the small number of relevant cases in the original samples, further cases were also checked.
- 4.4.5 The testing proved largely satisfactory although it was noted that two fees charged in respect of pest control cases had not reflected the new fees which came into force from 2 January 2018.

Risk

The Council may not receive all income that is due.

Recommendation

Staff should be reminded when new fees come into force.

- 4.4.6 The STL flagged that cash payments are currently taken by staff for services provided. Whilst only small amounts are taken, the current process is considered to present risks such as theft with the associated risks of staff being attacked for the cash held. However, the STL advised that consideration is being given to providing card readers for staff to remove this risk.
- 4.4.7 A contract is in place with Dunsmore Kennels for taking in stray dogs. The contract register includes details of the contract and the signed copy was located in the document store.
- 4.4.8 Budget monitoring spreadsheets are prepared by the Business Support Officer (Finance) and any issues would be raised with the STL. The current income and expenditure against the budget for this financial year and the outturn for 2017/18 were discussed with the STL and the Safer Communities Manager. No issues were identified.

4.5 **Risk Management**

- 4.5.1 The Health & Community Protection risk register was reviewed and was found to contain specific risks relating to the Pest Control and Dog Warden services along with cross-cutting generic risks that are also relevant to these services (e.g. staff resourcing and staff health & safety issues). There is clear evidence within the document that it has been subject to review.
- 4.5.2 Upon review it was confirmed that assessments were also included on AssessNet for both services and that these were up to date in terms of their review dates. AssessNet was also found to include COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) assessments for the poisons used by the PCOs.
- 4.5.3 Relevant staff all undertake lone working. The STL advised that the vans used by the PCOs have trackers installed. The Dog Warden also uses an Oysta tracker and all have mobile phones to enable them to be contacted when on site.
- 4.5.4 The Learning & Development Officer provided details of the training courses that the relevant staff had attended (within the last four years) in relation to lone working and conflict management.
- 4.5.5 This confirmed that the Dog Warden had attended the Lone Worker training and the Safeguarding training (although this is more about spotting signs of abuse rather than how to deal with abuse directed towards them) with one of the PCOs also having attended the safeguarding course.

Risk

Staff may not be aware of how to deal with risks related to their roles.

Recommendation

All relevant staff should attend the Conflict Management training, with the Pest Control Officers also attending the Lone Worker training.

- 4.5.6 It was confirmed that the PCOs had received appropriate training on the safe use of rodenticides. The STL advised that they would be informed when further (refresher) training was required as this was no longer required at set periods.
- 4.5.7 Stocks of the different poisons are held in the lab at Riverside House. Access to the lab is restricted via a pin code lock.
- 4.5.8 A stock record is held in the lab and this was reviewed during a visit with one of the PCOs. The review confirmed that the records were being kept up to date.

5 **Conclusions**

5.1 Following our review, in overall terms we are able to give a SUBSTANTIAL degree of assurance that the systems and controls in place in respect of the Places & Projects services are appropriate and are working effectively.

5.2 The assurance bands are shown below:

Level of Assurance	Definition
Substantial Assurance	There is a sound system of control in place and compliance with the key controls.
Moderate Assurance	Whilst the system of control is broadly satisfactory, some controls are weak or non-existent and there is non-compliance with several controls.
Limited Assurance	The system of control is generally weak and there is non-compliance with controls that do exist.

5.3 Minor issues were, however, identified:

- Policy documentation needs to be reviewed
- Incorrect fees had been charged by Pest Control Officers following the increase approved by Executive
- Relevant staff need to attend lone worker and conflict management training.

6 **Management Action**

6.1 The recommendation arising above is reproduced in the attached Action Plan (Appendix A) for management attention.

Richard Barr
Audit and Risk Manager

Action Plan

Internal Audit of Places & Projects – July 2018

Report Ref.	Recommendation	Risk	Risk Rating*	Responsible Officer(s)	Management Response	Target Date
4.2.4	The 'policy' documents for the Pest Control and Dog Warden services should be reviewed and updated as appropriate.	Staff may be working to outdated or incorrect policies.	Low	Services Team Leader	Policies will be reviewed at the earliest opportunity.	March 2019
4.4.5	Staff should be reminded when new fees come into force.	The Council may not receive all income that is due.	Low	Services Team Leader	New fees are circulated at the beginning of each year. Reminders have been sent following this report.	January each year
4.5.5	All relevant staff should attend the Conflict Management training, with the Pest Control Officers also attending the Lone Worker training.	Staff may not be aware of how to deal with risks related to their roles.	Low	Services Team Leader	Staff have been requested to attend internal courses relating to Lone Working and Courageous Conversations from the WDC 2018/19 training guide following this report.	January 2019

* Risk Ratings are defined as follows:

High Risk: Issue of significant importance requiring urgent attention.
 Medium Risk: Issue of moderate importance requiring prompt attention.
 Low Risk: Issue of minor importance requiring attention.