

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY SELECT COMMITTEE

07 February 2024

Report of the Director of Planning, Housing & Environmental Health

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision

1 REVIEW OF PEST CONTROL SERVICE

Summary

The Council currently offers a pest control service through the contractor Monitor and a contract is in place until 31 October 2024. It was agreed that a full review would take place early in 2024 in order to inform the ongoing provision of this service. This report outlines the current service and options from November 2024.

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The current pest control contract with Monitor, procured in 2020, was extended in October 2023 with some increases to the charges and our approach to a subsidised service for those residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.
- 1.1.2 The contract was let in partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and was originally procured by their procurement team. The contract operates on a referral basis, with all customers being put through to the contractor who will then deal with the report, take payments, and book & carry out any treatments, including follow up visits as required. Residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction are entitled to a subsidised treatment (for rats and mice only now). In these cases, TMBC staff check their entitlement and take payment before passing the customer through to Monitor. Monitor then invoice TMBC monthly for these subsidised cases. The contract also allows for optional services to be provided for TMBC's own estates such as the car parks, council offices and country parks.
- 1.1.3 The cost of providing the service for the last three full financial years is provided below:

Year	Rebate received from contractor	Cost of treatments funded by TMBC (for residents on Council Tax Reduction)	Total Cost to Council
2020/21	-£2,000	£2,596	£596

2021/22	-£2,500	£3,399	£899
2022/23	-£2,500	£3,435	£935

- 1.1.4 When the contract was extended in October 2023 the contractor indicated that there would have to be a significant increase in referrals for any rebate to be triggered indicating a level of 375 jobs per Council. When we looked at the phone enquiries about pest control, we did not believe this was a realistic figure for us to reach so have made any ongoing assumption that this rebate would not be paid.
- 1.1.5 When the increased costs of the pest control treatments under the extended contact are considered, the impact on the budget for the next 12 months considering the number of free treatments we paid for in 2022/23 (60 jobs in total) is estimated to be £10,820. This is for the period 01 November 2023 to 31 October 2024 (12-month extension).
- 1.1.6 When you add that we will not receive the annual rebate this would have resulted in an estimated total additional cost to the Council of £13,320.
- 1.1.7 A number of scenarios relating to partly subsidising the costs rather than fully subsidising and which treatments to subsidise were considered in relation to the additional cost to the Council and a Cabinet Member decision was taken in October 2023 to:
- 1) Approve a 12-month extension/variation to the pest control contract at agreed revised rates from 1/11/23;
 - 2) Approve a charge of £50 per treatment of rats and mice be introduced for residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction from 1/11/23;
 - 3) Approve the cessation of subsidised treatments for bedbugs and cockroaches from 1/11/23;
 - 4) Agree a full review of the service by the Communities and Environment Scrutiny Sub Committee in early 2024.
- 1.1.8 The introduction of the charge for rats and mice and cessation of subsidised bedbugs and cockroaches treatments meant the estimated total additional cost to the Council is then reduced to from £13,320 to £6,660 over the 12 month period assuming a similar level of work.
- 1.1.9 The provision of a pest control service is not mandatory. The Council do have mandatory requirements relating to enforcement of pest control related matters, for example the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 however resolution of these matters does not depend on the Council having a pest control service.
- 1.1.10 It is important to note that if the cost of a treatment is prohibitive for a household this could lead to a pest problem not being addressed and causing wider issues in

neighbouring properties which could lead to an increase in cases for the Environmental Protection team and the potential for increased works in default where the Council carry out required treatments. If notice is served under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (as an example) expenses incurred by the local authority may be recovered however this may prove difficult if the recipient of the enforcement action is in financial hardship. The Environmental Protection team also seek to ensure that Registered Social Landlords are fulfilling their requirements in terms of pest control measures.

1.2 Expression of interest exercise

- 1.2.1 Four local authorities – Tunbridge Wells BC, Swale BC, Maidstone BC and ourselves - have come together to conduct an expression of interest exercise to test what interest there is to tender for pest control services led by local authorities. This has been supported by the mid Kent partnership procurement team. There is no commitment yet from any local authority as to actually carrying out a formal tender exercise and each are going through their own decision making process on this.
- 1.2.2 The brief sought an understanding of what organisations may be interested in delivering such a service on our behalf. We were particularly interested in how service delivery and value could be enhanced for customers as well as for the councils. We were also interested in ideas to make the service fully auditable and how the use of technology may make this possible. The specification for what was required was intentionally broad to welcome ideas on the way we could collaborate with a service provider to deliver this service for the next few years.
- 1.2.3 Three responses were received and are currently being fully evaluated with some clarification queries being sought. I will update Members further at the meeting if there is any further information however the initial analysis is that there is a preference to tender across four local authority areas than one, there is a preference to have uniform prices across the local authority areas, there is reference to digital solutions such as apps etc, there is no reference to referral payments or potential income generation.

1.3 Position across Kent local authorities

- 1.3.1 From a search on Kent local authority websites the following table details the current position in terms of provision of pest control services:

Local authority	Position
Ashford	No service
Canterbury	No service
Dartford	Provide a service – free rat treatments

	for all, subsidised mice treatments
Dover	Provide a service – full charges for all
Folkestone & Hythe	No service – promote a preferred supplier
Gravesham	No service
Maidstone	No service (involved in expression of interest as outlined above)
Sevenoaks	Provide a service – not clear if any subsidised charges
Swale	No service (involved in expression of interest as outlined above)
Thanet	No service – promote a preferred supplier
Tunbridge Wells	Provide a service – free treatment for rats and mice (involved in expression of interest as outlined above)

1.4 Future options

1.4.1 There appears to be three future options that Members should consider for the pest control service beyond October 2024 as follows:

- 1) To cease to offer a pest control service. It is not a statutory requirement and we could provide information on the Council's website on industry expert bodies who provide details of pest control services that residents can use.
- 2) To tender for a pest control service from November 2024 where we can refer all residents to with no subsidised payments. There would be no direct cost to the Council however there would be some staff contract management costs incurred.
- 3) To tender for a pest control service from November 2024 where we can refer all residents to and subsidise agreed treatments for those residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction within an agreed maximum cost to the Council annually. This would involve considering the cost of the treatments and demand on service and setting subsidised rates each year accordingly.

1.4.2 The pros and cons for each suggested option is provided in the table below:

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>To cease to offer a pest control service</p>	<p>It is not a statutory requirement to provide a pest control service so the Council is not spending any money on a non statutory service</p>	<p>We have no direct control over a pest control service in our area in terms of standards of work or assistance with any pest control related cases</p>
	<p>We can provide information on our website of trusted industry bodies where residents could approach for local pest control services</p>	<p>There will be no access to subsidised treatments for those households on the Council Tax Reduction scheme so some pest control issues could go untreated</p>
<p>To tender for a pest control service from November 2024 where we can refer all residents to with no subsidised payments.</p>	<p>We will have some control through the contract on service standards and a complaint process</p>	<p>There will be some staffing cost to the Council with procurement and management of the contract</p>
	<p>The Council will be seen to be assisting residents with this service</p>	<p>There will be no access to subsidised treatments for those households on the Council Tax Reduction scheme so some pest control issues could go untreated</p>
		<p>It is unclear as to the appetite to tender for this service amongst providers especially if we were to do this as a single authority</p>
		<p>There is no guarantee that any rate will be the cheapest option in the market</p>
<p>To tender for a pest control service from</p>	<p>We will have some control through the</p>	<p>There will be some staffing cost to the</p>

<p>November 2024 where we can refer all residents to and subsidise agreed treatments for those residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction within an agreed maximum cost to the Council annually.</p>	<p>contract on service standards and a complaint process</p>	<p>Council with procurement and management of the contract</p>
	<p>The Council will be seen to be assisting residents with this service especially for those in receipt of Council Tax Reduction who will be able to access a reduced rate</p>	<p>There will be a direct cost to the Council of providing subsidised treatments. This could be controlled with a maximum overall cost to the Council set and the subsidy rates calculated from there.</p>
		<p>It is unclear as to the appetite to tender for this service amongst providers especially if we were to do this as a single authority</p>
		<p>There is no guarantee that any subsidised rate/full rate will be the cheapest option in the market</p>

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 There is no statutory requirement to provide a pest control service.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 There is presently a direct cost to the Council from providing subsidised pest control treatments estimated to be £6,660 from November 2023 to October 2024 based on a similar level of work to last year.

1.6.2 The future cost to the Council will depend on the option chosen.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 None

1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 To **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet the preferred option for the pest control service from November 2024.

Background papers:

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Nil

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