Delegated Cabinet Member Decision Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area:	**Cllr Hannah Roberts** **Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods**
Date of Decision:	**February 2023**
Subject:	Pest control – Free public health related pest control service (private domestic properties only)
Report Author:	**Neil Crabtree – Head of Public Protection**
Ward(s) Affected:	N/A

Reason for the decision:

The impact of pests and vermin on residential properties and those residing in them has long been established, both from a physical health perspective (disease) but also from a mental health, wellbeing and housing standards perspective. The problem of pests and vermin has been compounded by failing / aging property and wastewater infrastructure, reduction of proactive baiting on behalf of utility undertakers and due to increased waste, fly tipping and a significant reduction in the uptake of paid pest control contracts by those who cannot afford the costs.

Evidence suggests that pest and vermin disproportionately affect the poorest and least well-off sections of society, and Oldham Council data suggests that the problem has exacerbated as a result of the cost-of-living crisis with fewer residents contracting the service at a time where all indicators suggest the problem is worsening. In addition, those that are living in private rented properties are also at greater risk of being impacted by pests and the Housing Act 2004 considers certain pests a Category 1 hazard. Given the above, a free to all service will enable any resident with a pest problem (see criteria below) to request treatment from the council.

The free service will be available in accordance with the following criteria:

- Within a domestic premises and effecting habitable areas;
- Pest infestations are of public health significance, namely rats, mice, cockroaches, bed bugs and fleas;
- The owner/occupier of the property must work in conjunction with the Council and undertake all necessary pest proofing of the building and other housekeeping measures as advised;
- The treatment for rats and mice will be limited to 3 visits per job with all poisons being removed on the third visit;
- Where the domestic property is within the same building as a commercial business, it will be the Landlords responsibility to treat and rectify the problem;

In order to meet the expected demand and to ensure the Service is adequately resourced to deliver, the list below outlines current and proposed recruitment:

- 2 X GR4 Pest Control Technicians (**Current)**
- 1 X GR4 Pest Control Technician (**Proposed** - created as a result of the financial savings in the service 2023/24 Budget Process)
- 1 X GR4 Pest Control Technician (**Proposed** - created due to the new service offer)
- 1 / 2 X Trainee Pest Control Technician(s) (**Proposed** - created due to the new service offer)
- 1 X Business Support Officer (**Proposed** - created due to the new service offer)

There are currently at least 3 private/independent pest control contractors that operate in Oldham – the revised service offer will have an impact on their business model. We are considering, depending on the demand, to

commission services from these providers during busy periods (wasp season). Any such commissioning will adhere to procurement rules.

The structure outlined above, is expected to meet 'normal' demand and allow Oldham Council to undertake additional baiting in sewer networks. Given the new service delivery offer, there is still a risk that demand will increase significantly, both due to the move away from private sector providers and also because of requests for service from individuals who couldn't previously afford a pest control service. Given these risks, we may have to consider additional resources in due course. any such request will follow Oldham Council procedures.

Summary:

Oldham Council has decided to invest £100K **in a 12-month long trial (starting April 2023)** to introduce a free and universal pest control service for all domestic premises in the borough. The service will be aimed at all owner occupier/private rented properties but excludes those that are let by Housing Providers and Registered Social Landlords.

The revised service will cover all Public Health related pests (rats, mice, cockroaches, fleas and bedbugs) that are causing an infestation within a residential property. Although not exclusive, these are the main pests that impact residential properties and also have a public health significance.

Naturally, any such introduction will have financial, service delivery and sustainability impacts and challenges. The Council leadership has decided that all domestic properties (other than those owned and let by residential social landlords) will be entitled to use this service.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option 1 – Do nothing.
Option 2 – Provide a free pest control service to enable any resident with a pest problem (within the set criteria) to request treatment from the council.

Recommendation(s):

Option 2.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*	The total cost of the additional staff will be £154k for the 2023/24 financial year. In addition, there will be additional material and fleet costs, currently estimated to be in the region of £40k and a loss of income from providing a free service currently estimated to be around £60k. The precise level of demand for the Pest Control service following the implementation of the revised charging policy can only be determined once the scheme is operational. However, there is a risk that demand for the service may exceed the capacity of the revised staffing structure and further staff or engagement with external contractors may be necessary, which will incur further costs. The 2023/24 budget contains provision for additional funding of £100k and there is some scope to absorb the additional staffing costs via an upcoming service restructure. However, it is possible that the total costs of the service cannot be met from within the existing service budget. Opportunities to finance any additional costs will be considered from within the wider Place and Economic Growth directorate. The service position will need to be closely monitored and reported on via the 2023/34 budget monitoring process. (James Postle)
What are the ***procurement*** implications?	Should option 2 be approved, the recruitment of the new roles has no procurement implications however the use of private organisations during the busy periods does. The Contract Procedure Rules must be adhered to when commissioning any such services. (Emily Molden)
*What are the **legal** implications?*	The proposed option is lawful and consistent with the Local Authority public health duties. The proposed option might impact upon existing commercial service providers and it would be an appropriate public law consideration for the decision maker to take such implications into account in balancing wider public health needs against such commercial interests in considering the proposed options. (Colin Brittain)

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*	If option 2 is approved, the appropriate Council approval procedures for the creation of roles and recruitment to them will need to be followed. Any matches on the redeployment register should be considered initially to support the current workforce. (Catherine Pearson, Strategic HR Lead)
***Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment** attached or not required because (please give reason)*	N/A
*What are the **property** implications*	N/A
Risks:	The report sets out the proposal to implement Council Policy. No specific risks are anticipated at this point (Mark Stenson)
Co-operative agenda	The provision of a free pest control service to all residents who need it puts the health and safety of resident's first. The proposal to recruit additional staff to support the service is welcomed, though It is important for the service to recruit co-operatively within the borough (Mahmuda Khanom, Policy Support Officer).

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?	Yes
Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?	Yes
Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?	No

There are no background papers for this report

Report Author Sign-off:	Neil Crabtree – Head of Public Protection
Date:	1 February 2023

Please list any appendices:-

Appendix number or letter	**Description**
None	

In consultation with

Executive Director of Place & Economic Growth  Date: 21 February ‘23

Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods 

Date: 20 February 2023