

Report to Portfolio Holder for Public Protection

Subject: The introduction of charges for the provision of pest control services provided by Gedling Borough Council.

Date: 7th November 2023

Author: Community Protection Manager – Public Protection

Purpose

The report details a new set of Fees and Charges for the Public Protection Pest Control Service for the internal and domestic treatment of Rats, Mice, Bedbugs and Cockroaches, and seeks approval for their introduction from 21st November 2023.

Recommendation(s)

- 1) To approve the new set of Fees and Charges for 2023/24 as detailed in the report.**
- 2) To agree for the price revisions to be introduced from 21st November 2023.**

1 Background

- 1.1 Whilst there is no Statutory duty for local authorities to provide pest control services for its residents the Council has done so for a number of years. The service has been free in domestic properties for rats and mice inside as well as bedbug and cockroach infestations. Properties that have been infested with fleas are treated by the Council at a cost of £85.50.
- 1.2 As part of Council efficiencies it is now proposed to introduce a scheme of charges for pest control services. However, service users who are on

a means tested benefit can continue to access bedbug and cockroach treatments for free.

- 1.3 As the Council have not charged for some of these services in the past there are no recorded figures regarding the numbers of service users on means tested benefits and those that are not. However, it is estimated that around 60% of requests for services (RFS) come from residents who are not on a means tested benefit, leaving approximately 40% who are. As such, two sets of fees have been produced which are inclusive of VAT, and are at Tables 2 and 3 below:

Table 1 – the number of requests from 2019 – 2023 and the average number per year

	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	Average
Bedbug	5	12	15	18	13
Cockroach domestic	2	1	0	1	1
Fleas domestic	14	10	17	12	13
Mice domestic inside	88	105	100	73	92
Rats domestic inside	261	307	262	232	266

Table 2 - shows the proposed fee for residents not on a means tested benefit (60% of total RFS)

	Number of RFS (60%)	Current cost	Proposed fee	Expected income
Bedbug	8	Free	£110	£880
Cockroach	1	Free	£140	£140
Fleas domestic	8	£85.50	£85.50	£684
Mice domestic	55	Free	£110	£6,050
Rat domestic	160	Free	£110	£17,600
Total	232	-	-	£25,354

*£21,128 net of VAT.

Table 3 - shows the proposed fee for residents receiving a means tested benefit (40% of total RFS)

	Number of RFS (40%)	Current cost	Proposed fee	Expected income
Bedbug	5	Free	Free	£0
Cockroach	0	Free	Free	£0
Fleas domestic	5	£85.50	£85.50	£428
Mice domestic	37	Free	£110	£4,070
Rat domestic	106	Free	£110	£11,660
Total	153	-	-	£16,158

*£13,465 net of VAT

- 1.4 Rodent treatments can vary depending upon the severity of the case but on average, an initial visit of 1 hour and four follow up visits of half an hour is sufficient to eradicate the problem. Various products are used to administer the treatment including rodenticides, traps, secure baiting points, various tools and devices as well as drain testing equipment. Based on the time taken for visits, labour costs are around £90 and materials cost around £20 including fuel. The cost of the service will be £110. This price is competitive and officers do not feel it will prohibit residents from accessing the service.
- 1.5 The cost for bedbug treatment of £110 has been calculated in the same way as a rodent treatment based on the average number of visits needed, the work required, products used and time taken to complete a successful treatment. The service is currently free to all customers. This proposal will see those who are not in receipt of means tested benefits paying for the full cost of the treatment. Due to the public health significance of a bedbug infestation, which can cause those affected to have wounds which can become infected and have impacts on the wider quality of life, it is felt appropriate that this service remains free for those in receipt of means tested benefits.
- 1.6 The Council already charges £85.50 for flea treatment for all residents. It is proposed that this remains the same. The price is competitive and fleas are a non-public health pest and are often associated with poor management of a pet animal.

- 1.7 The cost for cockroach treatment has again been calculated on the average number of visits needed, the work required, products used and time taken to complete a successful treatment. It is proposed to charge £140 for residents not receiving a means tested benefit. Cockroaches are seen as a public health pest and as such treatment is free to those on a means tested benefit. This charge is competitive when compared to the open market.
- 1.8 If the charges are introduced they could potentially generate income (net of VAT) of £21,128 from non-means tested residents and £13,465 from means tested residents, a total of £34,593.
- 1.9 A bench marking exercise has been carried out with neighbouring authorities as follows:

Authority	Charging Type	Normal Fee	Benefit Recipient Fee
Nottingham City	Rats and mice	£115.00	£115.00
Rushcliffe Borough	Rats and mice	£95.00	£48.00
Barnsley Metropolitan	Rats and mice	£109.00	£109.00
Sheffield City	Rats and mice	£132.00	£132.00
Ashfield District	Rats and mice	£74.00	£74.00
Ashfield District	Fleas	£88.00	£88.00
Ashfield District	Bedbugs	£160.00	£160.00
Ashfield District	Cockroaches	£74.00	£74.00
Broxtowe Borough	No service provided	£50 pest control credit provided	£50 pest control credit provided
Newark and Sherwood	No service provided	N/A	N/A
Mansfield District Council	No service provided	N/A	N/A
Bassetlaw District	No service provided	N/A	N/A

The prices of pest control services will always vary from Council to Council and change from year to year. Private contractors do tend to charge significantly more and officers have identified fees varying from £120 to £240 for a rodent treatment inside a domestic dwelling.

- 1.1 Under the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Government Act 2003 the Council has the power to charge for discretionary services i.e., where the authority has a choice whether or not to undertake the service. Most

1.11 local authority functions are discretionary in nature. One such example is pest control. The Council can only recover up to the cost of the service.

1.1 Many councils have abolished the in-house service of pest control and now direct all enquirers to look up pest control services on the internet. They take the view that they only provide the services they are legally obliged to under the law. At this point in time, officers feel that this is not the way forward for Gedling Borough and see the new proposal as a way of generating vital income to assist in sustaining and improving the service whilst still supporting and protecting its residents and in turn helping to deliver our service and policy aims.

1.1 The reduction of local authorities now offering the service coupled with the high prices of private contractors means that the potential pool of customers increases as the services would be available to non-residents who are looking for affordable services.

In the case of pest control the Council will charge the users of their services before they have been provided, by requesting that they pay in advance for the treatment to be undertaken.

2 Proposal

2.1 That the Portfolio Holder approve the new scheme of introducing charges for pest control services as detailed in the report and as shown at Appendix 1 with introduction from 21st November 2023.

3 Alternative Options

3.1 Not to introduce pest control charges and to not generate any income but continue to provide a free service to members of the public. A further alternative is to stop providing a free, at the point of need, pest control service altogether, but with this option there is a risk to public health from diseases associated with untreated rodent and insect infestations. Furthermore, due to the cost of living crisis this risk is increased to those members of the community on a means tested benefit.

4 Financial Implications

As part of the 2021/22 budget setting process an efficiency was approved by Council of £32,500. This was calculated to cover 80% of the pest control officers post and related expenditure, on the basis that

20% of the officer's work was in relation to internal pest control services for council assets, and other works which generate an income separately, which includes sewer baiting.

Paragraph 1.8 above sets out that potential income (net of VAT) could be £34,593. However, there is a risk that some residents do not take up the service, reducing the amount of income expected. The service would need to generate an income of £32,500 in order to meet the approved efficiency, and to start to reduce the subsidy on this service.

The table below shows the reduction in subsidy if the service can meet the approved efficiency and generate income of £32,500. Any amount of income generated over this would further reduce the subsidy.

	Current Budget	Proposed Revised Budget	Difference
	£	£	£
Employee Costs	41,400	41,400	0
Supplies & Services	3,900	3,900	0
Overheads	15,700	15,700	0
Income	-8,800	-41,300	-32,500
Total Subsidy	52,200	19,700	-32,500

4.1 The efficiency target was approved as part of 2021/22 budget process (and deferred for later delivery), and set to recover 80% of the cost of the service. For the current year the figures would be as follows:

- Total costs (excluding overheads) of £45,300 x 80% = £36,240
- Total costs (including overheads) of £61,000 x 80% = £48,800

It is clear that the calculated income of £34,593 currently falls short of both targets. As the year progresses and numbers can be more accurately measured, a further piece of work will be undertaken to determine if the subsidy can be reduced further as part of a wider Council approach.

4.2 As this service is currently subsidised in part by the Council the introduction of charges will provide income to reduce the current subsidy rather than creating any significant new income.

4.3 There will be no marketing costs as these will be obtained from existing budgets.

- 4.4 As the service only has one employed member of staff, then it has to buy in an external contractor to cover the work during periods of sickness and holiday. Again this has traditionally been offset against existing budgets and this will need to continue.
- 4.5 Whilst an average activity level has been calculated, this is based on current fees (some of which are free). With the introduction of fees and residents facing a cost of living crisis it is not possible to predict the impact on activity these new fees will have.
- 4.6 Whilst the additional income has been included in current budgets it remains unclear how many residents will not take up the service, this will be reviewed as part of regular budget monitoring and once taken up we can determine what action may need to be taken.

The fees and charges for this discretionary service have been set in line with market prices and the aim to reduce the current subsidy on the service.

Best practice has been followed in that a regular review of the fees and charges applied takes place on an annual basis to ensure that they are reasonable and provide good value.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Section 3 of the Localism Act 2011 and section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 permit Councils to charge a fee for services, which they are not statutorily required to provide, as long as the recipient of the service has agreed to the service being provided. In making a charge for the services, the Council has a duty to ensure that in any given financial year, the charges should not exceed the costs of providing the service.
- 6.2 The introduction of charges for these previously free services may lead to a greater number of untreated infestations requiring enforcement action to be taken in order to ensure compliance with the Council's statutory duties under the Environmental Protection Act and the Public Health Act 1936.

7 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The introduction of pest control charges could have a disproportionate effect for those on benefits and in less affluent parts of The Borough. It is therefore proposed to introduce the service at a reduced fee for those on means tested benefits.

8 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 8.1 Where members of the public choose to self-treat the infestation using products and articles such as illegal traps from the non-reputable services this could result in non-target species (hedgehogs, birds of prey, cats, bats and other wildlife) being affected.

9 Appendices

- 9.1 None

10 Background Papers

10. None

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Statutory Officer approval

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Chief Financial Officer

Approved by:

Date:

On behalf of the Monitoring Officer