

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 26 MARCH 2018
REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE SUB-COMMITTEE ON THE PREVALANCE AND ERADICATION OF
RATS IN THE BOROUGH

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 13 November 2018, established a Sub-Committee to review the prevalence and eradication of rats in the Borough.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the recommendations made by the Sub-Committee on the prevalence and eradication of rats in the Borough.
- 2.2 That the recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee be referred to Cabinet for consideration as listed in the appendix with the outcome to be reported back to the Committee.
- 2.3 That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive, at a future meeting, a presentation from the pest control contractor and the Council's Contract Manager on the situation at that time.
- 2.4 The recommendations of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee be made available to Officers undertaking the procurement exercise for the pest control contract so that they can be taken into account for the award of contract.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Three meetings of the Sub-Committee were held to:
- 1) Scope the review
 - 2) Put questions submitted by Members to the invited witnesses to ascertain the taken and current position. The witnesses at this meeting were the Contact Manager for Pest Control together with the pest control contractor from Dial-A-Pest who carried out the pest control for the Council.
 - 3) Put questions submitted by Members to the Heads of Service and Contract Manager invited as witnesses to explain the approach and action taken to the problem.

Name of author	Marie Lowe 01707 357443
Title	Governance Service Officer
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Recommendation 1: Immediate actions to be taken to address significant rat infestation(s) in the borough	
1.1	That appropriate enforcement action, in line with the Council's corporate enforcement policy be taken in connection with the identified large accumulations of rubbish which are providing food and harbourage for rats.
1.2	The Portfolio Holder (Business, Partnerships and Public Health) and/or the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) to write to senior levels in Thames Water seeking clarification of their current approach and intent to rat baiting of sewers in their ownership.
1.3	The Head of Law and Administration to advise on enforcement options where the land in question is in the ownership of the Crown Estate.
1.4	Consideration be given to the advantages/disadvantages of establishing a Council based rat reporting action telephone line/website/community map to enable the community and businesses to more easily report rat infestations and to help inform "hot spot" mapping so action and resources can be more readily targeted.
1.5	The Head of Planning to consider how planning conditions could be used to assist with the control of rats, keeping in mind the significant development which will arise from the local plan. Examples to include the potential use of conditions to protect rodent access/egress from sewers and drains during construction and demolition.
1.6	The Head of Law and Administration to consider and advise on any options for speeding up land ownership enquiries.
1.7	The Head of Public Health and Protection to consider how community protection notices may be of assistance in dealing with significant rat infestations.
Recommendation 2: Joint working protocol to be produced	
2.1	<p>A joint working protocol should be produced to assist all Council service areas to work together to help deal with significant rat infestations in an efficient, effective and timely way. This protocol should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities, including an up to date structure chart and contact details • List of legislative remedies and details of which teams are able to use them • Definitions of waste and approaches for dealing with particular circumstances where waste has accumulated • Communication with members

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with residents and business • Receipt, processing and sharing of information regarding rat infestations • Information on the Council's website with contact details for how to report a rat infestation and what people can expect from the Council or its contractors • Use of social media • Trigger points for when an infestation will need to be dealt with by a task and finish group (see recommendation 3).
Recommendation 3: Officer task and finish group approach to be used	
3.1	<p>For significant rat infestations an Officer task and finish group be set up to ensure appropriate priority is given and a co-ordinated approach is taken across all Council services. This group to be set up in consultation with the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) and the suggested trigger points for considering setting up such a group to be:</p> <p><i>“An Environmental Health Team Leader has determined a significant rat infestation which will require co-ordinated work by more than one Council service area to resolve or which affects more than one Council ward”.</i></p>
3.2	The task and finish group to identify which officers/managers need to be involved based on the circumstances of the case and appropriate legal remedies.
3.3	That Heads of Service ensure that appropriate resource allocation of staff time is given to any task and finish group that is set up (see also recommendation 5).
3.4	The task and finish group to identify the scale of the problem, what needs to be done about it, how co-ordinated action is to be taken, how actions are to be shared and communicated, how other issues affecting the infestation should be dealt with and at what point the task and finish group should be closed. These points to be pulled together in an evidenced based “infestation action plan”.
3.5	Task and finish group to include appropriate representation from outside agencies, as necessary.
Recommendation 4: Good practice to be written up and shared	
4.1	That a carefully managed communications programme be drawn up in full consultation with the Council's communications team to share the good work carried out by the Council (and its contractors) to deal with the significant rat infestation in Hatfield town centre.
4.2	Consideration is given to a regular member information report, available to all members which advises on the current situation

	regarding rat infestations and the actions which are being taken
4.3	The EOSC continues to receive regular updates on pest control, including performance of the Council's appointed contractor, the challenges encountered in pest control work, the outcomes of work to deal with significant infestations and enforcement statistics.
4.4	That EOSC receive a presentation on the work undertaken to deal with the rat infestation in Hatfield.
4.5	To note that the approaches taken and recommended in this scrutiny relate to rat infestations, but could equally apply to other activities – steps should be taken to ensure appropriate learning is identified and shared throughout the Council.
Recommendation 5: Making best use of available resources	
5.1	The resource implications for this work to be discussed with the Council's Executive Board to identify how existing resources may be appropriately used taking account of legal provisions, existing workloads, staff/service skill sets, the risks to public health, reputational risk to the Council, Member and community expectations.
5.2	The approach to enforcement to be consistent across all Council service teams, using the corporate enforcement policy as the basis for determining action.
5.3	The learning from dealing with the Hatfield infestation and this scrutiny process be made available to members who may be assisting in decisions regarding the re-procurement of the Council's pest control contract.