



Subject:	Update on Pest Control Service
Date:	25th March, 2022
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services David Bone, City Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Aoife Moody, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	As requested at the Council meeting on 10th January 2022, this report provides an update on the recovery of the Pest Control Service and on the proposed improvements for a full resumption of services to pre-Covid levels.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• note the progress made to date on the recovery of the pest control service and support the proposed improvements for full resumption of pest control services across the district; and• agree that an operational service review be progressed in 2022/23 that aims to improve the customer experience, streamline processes and improve effectiveness of service delivery, with a report to come back to the Committee.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware of the impact that the pandemic had on our pest control service, with several pest control officers furloughed April-August 2020. During this time, the service continued to deliver the sewer baiting programme across the City and residents were offered advice and information by the Pest Control Manager. The tenants of social housing were advised to contact their housing provider to obtain pest control services.</p>
3.2	<p>The Pest Control service was re-introduced in September 2020, albeit in a limited capacity. Risk assessment were reviewed and various covid control measures to protect our staff implemented, this resulted in a significant reduction in home treatments compared to normal levels that could be carried out. Visits therefore had to be prioritised and restricted to only the most vulnerable and where significant public health issues were identified. The vast majority of visits carried out were external only, with officers providing advice and information by phone.</p>
3.3	<p>In June 2021, internal treatments resumed for rats and mice only, with the support and guidance of Corporate Health and Safety and the Trade Unions in order to support a phased and manageable return. The safety measures introduced impacted on the number of internal treatments that could be completed in a day thus at that's time it was agreed to only carryout treatments in the private rented and owner-occupied sector initially. We continued to refer the tenants of social housing to the Housing Executive and Housing Associations where private contractors facilitated the service. When the service resumed, waiting times averaged 3-5 weeks during the period Jun-Oct 2021.</p>
3.4	<p>In September, the Council's Chief Executive received correspondence from Minister Hargey, Department for Communities raising concerns about its restricted Pest Control services for NI Housing Executive and Housing Associations. Following an update on Pest control services on September 7th to Council members, it was agreed that pest control services would resume to all tenures. It was also requested by members that officers would investigate the establishment of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with both the NIHE and Housing Associations with a view to the Council recouping the costs for these services.</p>
3.5	<p>A meeting was arranged with the NI Housing Executive to explore the option of an SLA and recouping of costs. The NIHE officers shared their concerns about ensuring equity across all constituents and tenures allowing access to BCC pest control services free of charge.</p>

3.6	<p>The officers expressed the need to ensure their tenants should be entitled to benefit from the Councils free public health pest control services. In light of discussions with the NIHE and taking account of issues of equality for all BCC residents, the issue of cost recovery for the pest control services would need to be considered across all sectors at a future point if at all.</p>
3.7	<p>From September 2021 to date, all stakeholders have availed of the restricted service and waiting times for visits have averaged 4-5 weeks however this peaked at 7-weeks at the beginning of January due to a number of officers self-isolating as a result of the new variant and as a result of demand for services. The current waiting time for an appointment is now 3 weeks. In January, a high-level service review was carried out which identified that the scheduling system was inefficient and offered spare capacity for additional appointments. The scheduling system was amended which resulted in an immediate 1-week reduction in the waiting time.</p>
3.8	<p>For the past number of months, the Pest Control service has not had a full complement of staff, however two open vacancies have now been filled with 1 x officer starting on 21st March and 1 x Operative starting on 1st April. Waiting times are, therefore, expected to further reduce once the personnel have been onboarded. It should be noted that the Pest Control team has remained the same size for several years and has not grown with the population of the district.</p>
3.9	<p>The safety of our staff is paramount and we are continuing to operate with the original Covid restrictions in place. Officers have a list of questions to ask the householder before entering the property and they are required to change their PPE between visits. This system required additional time between each visit compared to the pre-covid levels and this reduces the overall capacity for appointments by around 25%. This Risk Assessment is currently being reviewed with staff and the trade unions with the ambitions of full resumption of pre-covid operations and reducing waiting times further.</p>
3.10	<p>Whilst we have navigated the service through Covid and made operational changes the pest control service was last reviewed in 2005/06 and the operating environment has since changed. Our priorities going forward as part of commissioning an operational review are to provide an exceptional service to all constituents by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resumption of all treatments including fleas, flies, cockroaches.• Review of scheduling system and time slots and the systems used to support this.

<p>3.11</p> <p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of works planning and area / regional approach which will offer further efficiencies. • Monitor waiting times and aim to reduce. • The synergies with the customer hub <p>Longer term, we would be keen to explore the use of mobile workflow management software which will improve the customer experience, offer reductions in our no admission rates, streamline processes and improve efficiencies. A report will be brought back to committee on the findings of the review.</p> <p>Finally, as part of the City Services transformation project, Ms. Helen Morrissey has been appointed as the City Protection Manager – Neighbourhood and will oversee the Pest Control function in the new financial year among other functions.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications associated with this report. With the exception of wasps, the Council continues to provide the service on a free of charge basis. We will commission a review during 2022/23 and the costs for this will be met from the existing City and Neighbourhood Services' revenue budget.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no implications associated with this report.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>None</p>