

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy
Performance Board

DATE: 12th February 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Pest Control – review of fees and charges

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform members of a review of fees and charges for pest control services and to seek member approval for the introduction of a new fee from April 2025 to cover the cost of providing rat treatments on domestic premises. This service is currently free for all residents.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

- 1) endorse the proposal to introduce a new fee that recovers the full cost of rat treatments on domestic property; and**
- 2) recommend that the proposal is taken forward by Executive Board and the Council as part of the budget setting process for 2025/2026.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The pest control service is an integral part of the Environmental Health Service within the Public Health Directorate. The team is made up of 3 qualified pest control operatives, one of whom is also the Team Leader.

3.2 The main work of the team is the control of rats in the borough, this includes the provision of rat treatments to domestic premises. This service is currently free to all residents. The team also undertake treatments for nuisance pests such as mice, ants and wasps. A charge is made for these treatments. The team also provide advice and support on pest issues to the wider environmental health team particularly in relation to food safety, housing standards and sanitation issues. The team also treat pests on council owned land and carry out an annual sewer baiting programme. The total net budget for the service is £128,650

3.3 Although standards of hygiene and sanitation have improved significantly over the past century, rats are still considered a public health pest. Rats can carry a number of infectious diseases which can be transmitted to humans from contact with surfaces that have been contaminated by rats, their urine or faeces. These diseases include leptospirosis and salmonella. It is essential to protect public health that rats are controlled in and around domestic premises and premises providing care or preparing food. Rats in and around a property can also be a considerable source of anxiety to residents and can affect their mental health and wellbeing.

3.4 There is a statutory element to the pest control service. The council is under a duty by virtue of the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 to:

“take such steps as may be necessary to secure so far as practicable that their district is kept free from rats and mice”.

In particular the Act requires local authorities to:

- from time to time carry out inspections as may be necessary.
- to destroy rats and mice on land of which they are the occupier and keep such land so far as practicable free from rats and mice.
- to enforce the duties of owners and occupiers of land to keep their land free from rats and mice and take any action required to ensure this duty is fulfilled.

3.5 The statutory nature of the service was confirmed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural affairs in a written response to a question raised by an MP.

“The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that their areas are kept, so far as practicable, free from rats and mice. Should Defra become aware that a local authority is failing to discharge its responsibilities, Defra has certain default powers to initiate action”.

3.6 The provision of free pest control services is not in itself a statutory requirement; therefore, the council has some discretion as to how it exercises its duties under the Act. To date the council has determined that the most effective means to fulfil this legal duty and to protect public health is to provide free rat treatments to all domestic properties. Rats are also treated on the council’s own land.

3.7 In response to the council’s budget position a number of proposals to save money or generate income have been put forward for consideration by members. One such proposal is to introduce a charge for the provision of rat treatments on domestic property. This service is currently free for all residents.

3.8 All Cheshire and Merseyside local authorities have retained an in-house pest control service. Most now charge for rat treatments although some do still offer a free service. The range of charges is set out in the table below.

Council	Fee (inc VAT)	Scope of service
Cheshire West and Chester	£65	Includes 3 visits within 1 month
Warrington	£105	3 visits
Cheshire East	£70	3 visits
Wirral	£97	2 visits
Knowsley	£24	2 visits
Liverpool	Free	
St Helens	Free	
Sefton	46.50	Free for residents in receipt of council tax reduction benefit

3.9 The cost of rat treatments by private contractor's ranges from around £120 to £240.

3.10 The actual cost of providing an average rat treatment in Halton has been calculated at £38. With VAT added this comes to a fee of £45.60. The fee allows for full cost recovery of each treatment including direct labour, materials and overheads per direct labour hour.

3.11 The pest control team currently receive around 2500 requests for rat treatments each year. This number has increased gradually year on year

3.12 In addition to benchmarking fees and charges, each neighbouring local authority was asked for details on request volumes for rat treatments. Of those authorities that responded and who currently charge for treatments, the number of requests ranged from 202 to 787 treatments per year. In a response to a freedom of information request from local media, Liverpool city council who still offer free treatments, reported receiving over 6000 requests in 2024.

3.13 It is clear that where the service is free there remains a high demand for the service, however this demand reduces significantly once a fee is introduced.

3.14 The total number of treatments carried out each year in Halton for each pest species are set out in the table below

Pest	Number of requests per year
Rats	2525
Wasps	143
Ants	12
Fleas	26
Mice	24

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 With members agreement it is proposed to introduce a fee of £45.60 from April 2025 for all rat treatments at domestic premises. This will replace the free service. Residents will be able to book and pay for treatment on the council's website or via the contact centre.
- 4.2 It is proposed that there will be no reductions or concessions to the charge. Applying a means test to the service, such as entitlement to certain benefits, would increase administration costs significantly due to the time it would take to assess eligibility in each case.
- 4.3 It is recognised that this proposal will disproportionately impact low-income households. This is mitigated by the fact the fee has been set as low as possible to ensure the council simply recovers the full cost of each treatment. The fee is still considerably less than using a private contractor.
- 4.4 As with the removal of any free service it is recognised this proposal will be unpopular with the public and many members. If the financial circumstances were different, the professional advice of officers would be that the free treatments should be retained as the most effective means of protecting public health, complying with the council's legal duties and ensuring equality of access to the service. However, the council's budget position requires members to consider a range of proposals to generate income or save money. Introducing a charge for rat treatments is one of these proposals.
- 4.5 It is likely that there will be additional, and currently unknown, hidden costs associated with this proposal. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the property owner to address pest issues at their premises. The Environmental Health department have a range of powers that can be used to require property owners to deal with the causes and consequences of rat activity. Removal of free rat treatments is likely to lead to an increase in enforcement work for the environmental health team, particularly with private rented properties.
- 4.6 There is a risk that if there is a reduction in rat treatments there will be an increase in rat activity in the borough. This risk has been mitigated by setting the fee at a cost recovery level that should remain affordable for many households thereby maximising the number of treatments carried out within the community.

4.7 Discussions will also need to take place with the registered social landlords as this proposal will also impact their tenants.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The fee has been set to recover the full cost of providing a rat treatment at a residential property.

5.2 It is clear from information provided by other local councils that the introduction of a fee has a significant impact on demand. It is difficult to predict the total income that could be realised from this proposal.

5.3 Assuming a 50% reduction in demand it is estimated that the proposal will generate an income of around £50,000 per annum. It is proposed to introduce the fee in April 2025 and then review demand and income over the year with a view to setting a permanent income target from 2026. This would then represent a permanent budget saving from 2026/2027.

5.4 In addition to the new income from the proposal the team also generate around £30,000 per annum from chargeable treatments for nuisance pests including wasps, ants and fleas. However, this income fluctuates year to year as the number of wasp nests is influenced by the weather during the early part of the year. This income includes around £5,000 received each year from United Utilities as a contribution towards the sewer baiting programme.

5.5 From 2025 the pest control team will provide all internal pest control treatments to all council-maintained buildings. This should save around £3,000 on the use of external contractors.

5.6 The full list of fees and charges for domestic pest control from April 2025 are set out below.

Pest	Fee inc VAT	Scope / conditions
Rats	£45.60	Up to 3 visits within 4 weeks if required
Mice inside only	£45.60	Up to 3 visits within 4 weeks if required
Wasps	£69.00	All viable nests on property. Guaranteed revisit if not cleared. Refund if unable to treat.
Fleas	£69.00	Includes 1 revisit if required
Ants inside only	£69.00	Includes 1 revisit if required
Crawling insects	£69.00	Includes 1 revisit if

		required
Bees	No service	Advice only
Bed bugs	No service	

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Rats are a public health pest and are known to carry a number of infectious diseases. Controlling rat activity in and around buildings is essential to protect public health. In addition to providing chargeable rat treatments the service will continue to treat rats on council owned land and carry out a sewer baiting programme.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

This proposal will disproportionately impact low-income households who may not be able to afford the new fee for treatments. This has been mitigated by ensuring that the fee is as low as possible and has been set to only recover the full cost of providing the treatment

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The removal of this free service and the implementation of a charge will not be popular with the public. However, the council's budget position is such that members need to consider a range of proposals to save money or generate income. This new charge will disproportionately impact lower income households. However, this is mitigated by the fact the fee has been set as low as possible to simply recover the costs of the treatment. This will ensure the service remains affordable to as many residents as possible. However, it is very likely there will be a reduction in demand for the service which could lead to fewer treatments and result in an increase in rat activity. To mitigate this risk the service will continue to treat rats on council owned land and monitor complaints of rat activity to ensure the sewer baiting programme is targeted in areas of high activity.

7.2 This proposal is likely to require additional enforcement work from

the environmental health team to deal with the causes and consequences of rat activity on private property. This represents a hidden indirect cost that it is not currently possible to quantify.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Whilst there are not considered to be any issues within the scope of the Equalities Act, the proposal will disproportionately impact low-income households who may not be able afford the new fee for rat treatments.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

'None under the meaning of the Act.'