

SUBJECT:	Review of Pest Control Fees and Cost of Free Treatments
REPORT OF:	Healthy Communities Portfolio Holder
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Martin Holt, Head of Healthy Communities
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WARD/S AFFECTED	All South Bucks

1. Purpose of Report

To propose a review of the current pest control charges and the entitlement to free treatments for people on benefits to maintain a sustainable level of service provision.

RECOMMENDATION

To consider the options to maintain a robust pest control service at reasonable cost and recommend their preferred option to the Portfolio Holder.

To comment on the options in for additional cost savings which could be achieved by reducing the availability of free treatments bearing in mind that this could have an impact on service requests received and officer time

2. Executive Summary

Historically South Bucks has been able to offer free pest control treatments for most pests to residents on a means tested benefits at no additional cost to the council under the relevant contract.

Since joining the Bucks wide dog and pest control contract in 2014 all treatments are chargeable. In order to maintain the free services we have planned to use a limited (£2500/an) amount of the savings achieved by the joint contract price to maintain these free services.

It has recently become clear that this amount will not be sufficient to cover the full range of free treatments on offer through a busy year for pests therefore there is a need to reconsider the service and the way it is funded.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- To reduce the potential for additional expenditure above current budget.
- To ensure a proportionate approach to providing pest control services to vulnerable residents.
- To ensure best value is being achieved from the Pest Control Contract.

4. Content of Report

Pest control services are provided by local authorities as a non-statutory service for the benefit of local residents. South Bucks provides the service through contractors to enable residents to access a reliable and affordable contractor and to avoid using its

enforcement powers when requiring householders to tackle their pest issues. The use of enforcement powers is an expensive option in terms of officer costs.

Historically South Bucks has been able to offer free pest control treatments for most pests (rats, mice, wasps) to residents on a means tested benefits at no additional cost to the Council under the relevant contract.

Since joining the Bucks wide dog and pest control contract in 2014 all treatments are chargeable either to the customer or currently, if on a means tested benefit to the Council. In order to maintain the free services to those on a means tested benefit we have planned to use a limited amount of the £2500 savings achieved through the Council participating in the joint contract.

Following a revised forecast of current demand, it is apparent that £2500 is insufficient to cover the current range of free treatments, offered by the Council, to those in receipt of a means tested benefit. A recent estimate calculates the potential expenditure for South Bucks to be around £5000/annum resulting in a £2,500 overspend.

In order to continue to offer free means tested treatments for public health pests (rats, mice, cockroaches) a proposal has been received from the contractor to increase the general charge for all wasp nest treatments to reflect market price, increasing from £21.60 to £39.00 and introduce a discounted fee for wasp treatments to residents on a qualifying benefit.

The additional income would allow the contractor to guarantee free treatments for residents in receipt of a means tested benefit for all pests of a public health significance.

5. Consultation

Not Applicable

6. Options

1. Increase budget available to cover free treatments to £5000, maintaining existing service provision and charges.
2. Withdraw or cap free treatments to the existing level of £2500/annum.
3. Accept the proposal put forward by SDK to enable free and discounted treatments to those on means tested benefits.
4. Seek further income or cost savings from the contractor to ensure that free treatments are provided within the existing contract price.
5. Remove free treatments to residents entirely.

Each of the options is viable and available but history tells us that there are risks associated with withdrawing free treatments altogether. This can lead to severe infestations going unchecked and a significant increase in complaints requiring officer time.

7. Corporate Implications

Finance

There are costs associated with the provision of free treatments, this report is seeking to manage the amount and ensure that we are in a position to meet the potential increase in demand associated with a busy pest control season.

Legal

There is no statutory duty upon the authority to provide a pest control service, however there is a duty to maintain the district free from public health pests. This could be achieved through robust enforcement under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act; however this would be a resource intensive and costly option. To withdraw free treatments altogether is likely to require much greater emphasis on enforcement.

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

Links to Council Aims of Delivering Cost Effective Customer Focussed Service and Working towards Safer and Healthier Local Communities.

9. Next Step

Once a decision has been made in relation to the preferred option it will be implemented and the contract costs and published fees will be amended.

Background Papers:	Current Pest Control Fees SDK proposal and projection
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