



Subject:	Pest Control Service Delivery Update
Date:	13th June 2023
Reporting Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	Helen Morrissey, 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	This report provides an update on the current status of our Pest Control Service, planned improvements and our work towards full resumption of all services.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Note the operational update and response times.
3.0	Main report
3.1	Belfast City Council is the only council in Northern Ireland to operate a free Pest Control Service. There is no legal obligation to provide the service. Pre-COVID we dealt with the pests with the greatest public health significance: rats, mice, cockroaches, fleas and flies. When operationally viable in the summer months, to offer a wasp nest treatment service, we charge a cost recovery fee for treatment . However, the Pest Control Service has been

greatly impacted by the pandemic and we are currently focusing our service priority to the treatment of rats and mice infestations.

We also carry out sewer baiting on behalf of NIW, which provides some financial support for this activity. Sewer baiting has continued throughout the pandemic.

3.2 **Impact of the Pandemic and Recovery**

April - August 2020

Several Pest Control Officers furloughed. During this time the service continued to deliver the sewer baiting programme across the City and residents were offered advice and information by phone by the Pest Control Manager.

September 2020

The Pest Control Service was re-introduced, albeit in a limited capacity. The vast majority of visits carried out were external only, with officers providing advice and information by phone.

June 2021

Internal treatments resumed for rats and mice only and this was solely for the private rented and owner-occupied sectors. Strict COVID control measures meant internal visits took 60 minutes instead of 30 minutes. This reduced capacity by about 25% on pre-COVID levels. Waiting times averaged 3 weeks during the period June - October 2021.

September 2021

Limited service offered to all stakeholders, including NIHE tenants and Housing Association tenants. As a result waiting times for visits averaged 4 - 5 weeks, peaking at 7 weeks at the beginning of January 2022, partly due to a number of officers self-isolating.

June 2022

Following liaison with Corporate H&S, TUs and staff the Risk Assessment was amended and internal visits reverted back to 30 minute time slots. This had an immediate impact on the waiting times which reduced down to 2 – 3 weeks over the coming months.

June 2023

We had planned to re-introduce the wasp nest treatment service this month but this has not been possible to resource management priorities and priority being given to sewer baiting.

3.3	<p>Current Pressures</p> <p>In the last year the number of requests for treatments of rats has almost returned to pre-COVID levels but the sightings of rats externally have increased by 20%. This along with a reported increase in rodent activity from NIW staff has led to more demand for sewer baiting.</p> <p>Requests for sewer baiting for April 23 are up 25% on the number of requests received in April 22. We believe media articles which focused on these issues during April 2022 have also been a contributory factor for an increase in requests for service.</p> <p>Balancing staff resource availability at any one point and managing vacancies and retirements have also added pressure by increasing the demand and subsequent queue therefore pushing the waiting times back up to 4 weeks. This will vary over the summer months, either way, as we continue to monitor and manage service demand by the public within the resources available.</p>
3.4	<p>The Pest Control Service includes a manager (recently retired), a supervisor, 5 officers and 3 operatives.</p>
3.5	<p>Appointments and High No Admission Rate</p> <p>With the exception of sewer treatment, all requests are made to the Customer Hub and the Business Support team manage appointments. Service requests are logged on APP Civica and in Microsoft Teams Shift under the applicable officer's name, depending upon location. With multiple systems being utilised there is no end-to-end customer experience captured.</p> <p>We have had a constant 'no admission' rate of 20% over the last 5 years. We believe this is due to the fact appointments are often being made weeks in advance and residents forget about them and also due to the fact the service is free and people can just call back and make another appointment.</p> <p>We are in the process of introducing Fire Text which is a text reminder alert that will be sent the day before an officer is due to call. Should this fail to address the no admission rate we may need to consider more draconian measures such as introducing a cut off of for individuals when 3 no admissions occur.</p> <p>Microsoft Teams Shifts for each officer are broken into 30-minute slots. Longer term we would be keen to explore the use of mobile workflow management software which will</p>

improve the customer experience, assist with the reduction in our 'no admission' rate, streamline processes and improve efficiencies.

3.6 **Service Requests and Waiting Times**

Requests for the Pest Control Service come in from constituents directly, from Councillors and infrequently from our Environmental Health team. All service requests go through to our Business Support team.

When a Pest appointment for rats/mice is placed, this automatically generates two visits 1 week apart. During the pandemic our service requests reduced significantly due initially to the furloughing of staff, followed by the staggered resumption of service.

It is important to be aware that waiting times will vary depending on time of year and staffing levels. We will always offer the next available appointment.

3.7 **Advice and Self Help**

We believe there is an opportunity to provide greater advice and information to residents about pest control measures that they can take themselves, especially in relation to rats and mice. One of our experienced Pest officers has made a number of good suggestions on how this could improve rat infestation management, which we are keen to explore. This could have a significant impact on rodent activity across the city.

Our Food Safety Team provides general advice to food businesses on pest control, during routine food hygiene visits. There is the potential to develop an educational resource for businesses too.

We are in the early stages of exploring this with colleagues in Corporate Communications.

3.8 **Future Steps**

Our priority remains to provide a good standard of service to the public within the resource we have available. Going forward we intend to:

- Plan for the phasing of the resumption of all treatments including fleas, flies, cockroaches and wasps.
- Continue to review the scheduling system, time slots and officer areas.
- Continue to monitor waiting times and aim to reduce.
- Address the significant issue of no admissions.

	<p>However we will need to continue to manage the expectations of the public in relation to the response times to a service request. Given the size of Belfast and the sheers number of households who could potentially request a service, whilst offering free pest control treatments, demands are always likely to outweigh our resource capacity. We will consider this in light of financial pressures on the Council, the need to consider revenue streams and is therefore important that this will continue to be an area of focus as part of the revenue setting process with Members.</p> <p>Financial & Resource Implications</p> <p>3.9 There are no additional financial implications associated with this report. The proposed changes to the structure will be within current budget. With the exception of wasps, the Council continues to provide the service on a free of charge basis. NIW provide some financial support for sewer baiting.</p> <p>3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>There are no implications associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None