

## **FUTURE OF THE PEST CONTROL SERVICE**

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<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision?(yes/no)</b>	No
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	None

### **Summary**

To determine the future of the Council's pest control service

### **Recommendation (s)**

#### **The Committee is asked to:**

**Discontinue the service and agree that suitable sign-posting to an authoritative trade body be substituted on the Council's website.**

#### **1 Reason for Recommendation**

- 1.1 To ensure that resources in this area of the Council are focussed around delivery of statutory services.

#### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Council's pest control service is likely to pre-date the Council itself and will have formed part of the early public health interventions from the 1850s.
- 2.2 Over successive years of spending reviews it was first contracted out and gradually reduced in scope. This culminated in a 2015 decision by the Council's then Social Committee to commercialise the service, eliminate almost all the subsidy, and charge a fee.

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- 2.3 The commercial model operated by exploiting the difference between the rate at which the Council could contractually obtain pest control services, and the rate at which the market would tolerate. This arrangement offered the advantage of a guaranteed profit since income would always outpace expenditure, regardless of volume and the fixed costs would remain on the supplier's side.
- 2.4 Between the years 2017 – 2022, this arrangement generated a modest net income ranging from £1,000 - £5,200 per year which whilst not significant compared to many other areas of the Council, nevertheless made a useful contribution to a cost centre with few other chargeable services.
- 2.5 However, over the past 18 months, inflationary costs have impacted the commercial model and the supplier has passed these costs on. In October 2023 this resulted in it being necessary to increase the Council's fee significantly to preserve the profit margin.
- 2.6 Anticipating this would result in a suppression of demand, Officers have monitored the number of pest control requests since the fees revision came in to effect in November 2023 and can report just 2 requests for pest control have been received since then. The recent years request volumes are broken down as follows.

Year	Number of pest control requests
2024-2025	0 To date
2023 - 2024	77 (with 2 cases between November 2023-March 2024)
2022-2023	157
2021 – 2022	177

- 2.7 At this low level, although technically a profit is made per case, the back office effort to generate the that income is not insignificant resulting in the feasibility of the current model being questionable. The time involved in this administration is not easy to cost since it is integrated into a service covering a large span of support tasks, however, there are staffing costs and card transaction fees which erode profitability. There is also the likelihood that costs will rise further as part of the economic cycle, placing additional doubt on the service.
- 2.8 The original Victorian era intent of the service would have been a monopoly based around public health. However in the modern age, the provision of a Council pest control service is discretionary and in competition with commercial offerings. Owing to the low usage it makes negligible contribution to public health. Residents will commonly attempt a DIY treatment or contract an alternative cheaper supplier.

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- 2.9 The majority of surrounding Councils have discontinued their services and sign post residents to alternative providers. It is proposed that the Council follows this trend and discontinues the pest control service.
- 2.10 In addition, it is proposed that the relevant page on the Council's website is updated with a referral to the British Pest Control Association ([www.bpca.org.uk](http://www.bpca.org.uk)) from where users can locate details of responsible commercial pest control contractors.
- 2.11 The Council will continue to have statutory responsibilities for enforcement of relevant pest control duties which will remain unaffected by the proposal to discontinue a pest control service.

## 3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

### 3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 No equality implications have been identified as part of this report.

### 3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

### 3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 There are no safeguarding implications

### 3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None

## 4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The current budget for pest control is set at £7,000 with an income target of £8,400. Elimination of both will result in a deficit of £1,400 which will be accommodated through managed underspends over the 4 cost centres covering the Environmental Health service area.
- 4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Financial implications are included in the body of the report

## 5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The provision of a pest control service is discretionary and provided by the Council under its general powers of competence.

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5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** As mentioned above, the provision of pest control services is discretionary. Treatment is a separate issue to enforcement of statutory pest control under legislation. Enforcement of statutory pest control legislation remains the duty of the Council. The Council does not have a statutory duty to provide a pest control service.

## 6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Effective Council

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None

6.5 **Partnerships:** None

## 7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

### **Previous reports:**

- Item 18 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Environment Committee 17 October 2023
- Item 8 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Social Committee 6 July 2015
- Item 4 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Social Committee 28 June 2012
- Item 8 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Social Committee 27 June 2002
- Item 16 Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Housing and Personal Services Committee 31 October 1996

**Other papers: None**