

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

PEST CONTROL TREATMENT SERVICE – REVISION OF CUSTOMER FEES AND CHARGES

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to make the Council Executive aware of proposed updates to fees and charges for the provision of pest control treatment services offered by the council, and seek approval for the updated fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

This report is not connected to a motion agreed at the West Lothian Council on 22 November 2022 requesting a report be provided to the Public and Community Safety PDSP regarding rats and statutory nuisance. As requested by the motion a separate report is being prepared for the PDSP.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council Executive:

1. notes the content of the report; and
2. approves the proposed changes to fees and charges for delivery of the pest control treatment service set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	<p>There is a legal responsibility to ensure land and premises are kept free from pests included in the following legislation, Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949; Environmental Protection Act 1990; Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008; Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006.</p> <p>It was agreed by Council Executive in regard to annual council fees and charges that council housing tenants will receive pest control treatment free, as costs are covered by Housing Services.</p>
III Implications for Scheme of Delegations	There are no identified implications.

to Officers

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| IV | Impact on performance and performance Indicators | There are no identified impacts. |
| V | Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement | We live longer, healthier lives and have reduced health inequalities.

We make the most efficient and effective use of resources by minimising our impact on the built and natural environment |
| VI | Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property) | The pest control service provided by the council is required to operate on a cost recovery basis. The proposals to revise charges would allow recovery of costs which are more reflective of service delivery. Income from delivering the service has not met the costs of delivering the service to date. There is no information within the service to identify when costs were last reviewed. |
| VII | Consideration at PDSP | The report was presented to the Public and Community Safety PDSP on 8 December 2022. The panel were advised the report would be submitted to the Council Executive with a recommendation to approve the change to fees and charges. This was agreed by the panel. No changes were required to the proposals or report. |
| VIII | Other consultations | Financial Management Unit. Housing, Customer and Building Services. |

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D1 Background

West Lothian Council have provided a pest control treatment service for many years. The pest control team are part of the Environmental Health and Trading Standards Service. Pest control treatment, including preventative and proofing works, are offered by the service to internal and external customers, commercial and domestic. Details of service provision and standards are found on the council website. A link is provided in Section F of this report.

In order to prevent the complete removal of the service to meet budget demands, income targets were introduced in 2014/15 as part of the Delivering Better Outcomes programme. To protect service delivery, annually increasing income targets towards achieving full cost recovery of service were set out. Income targets have however not been achievable, although income for the service has been achieving good results. The targets are not likely to be met even though the range of service provided has expanded.

It was agreed that Transforming Your Council savings would be met by reducing service costs by reducing the team from 4 members to 3. The team is now operating with 3 officers following a retirement within the team. However, full cost recovery remains unlikely. Any further reduction in staffing would compromise cost recovery and service sustainability and delivery even further.

So far any under recovery has been offset by staffing vacancies within other parts of the Environmental Health & Trading Standards Service. But this is not sustainable going forward, particularly as it would continue to compromise higher priority public health and consumer protection work. Pest control staff have absorbed some dog control duties, and also assist with some public health site visits, but the scope for any further assistance within the service is limited by pest control demands on the team and the professional knowledge and competence required for other environmental health workload. Whilst income recovery is accepted as a means of maintaining service provision in difficult times it is clear that full cost recovery is not being achieved and a further review of approach is required.

D2 Service Quality and Best Value

The pest control team was one of the first to achieve the Charter Mark Award for the council in 1995 and have retained it ever since as part of Corporate Customer Service Excellence. Their contribution is a significant part of the overall EH&TS service high performance in WLAM. Pest control is part of the [Trusted Trader Scheme](#), and continues to achieve positive customer service feedback.

The range of service provided has expanded in recent years to ensure a greater level of assistance to council services, West Lothian households, and business community. Service delivery pricing is based mainly on treatment costs, not just visits. This has provided excellent value for money to date as a treatment can cover a number of visits to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the customer concerns. However, it is clear that the real costs of some treatments have not been reviewed and updated to reflect the costs of service delivery.

The service provides significant savings to other council services in comparison with procuring external service providers. Having pest control in-house also means that any issues can be quickly resolved through internal governance and council management.

The professional knowledge and competence of the pest control team are essential to the other public health and safety duties of the environmental health team. They are used and consulted on many occasions by Environmental Health Officers in food safety investigations and interventions, and investigation of public health nuisance concerns.

The service was delivered throughout the recent COVID pandemic as an essential service. Although demand for the service and the service delivery model changed there was a clear indicator of the public health importance of pest control as the number of complaints and requests for service regarding rat activity increased significantly. In comparison with the average number of calls of the previous two years the number of calls increased by almost 300% in 2020. While so many council staff worked from home, the pest control team have been out providing a direct frontline service helping the West Lothian population in very challenging times.

D3 Legal Responsibility, Public Health and Property Protection

West Lothian Council as a property and landowner has legal obligations and duties to prevent and control pest activity in its property or on its land. The consequences of pests can be significant in terms of public health, disease transmissions, building damage (including fire prevention), restriction on service delivery, and reputational damage.

This does not mean it has to provide pest control internally, but it does mean it has to take preventative steps to avoid pest problems, and reactive steps to address any concerns. Use of external providers for the range of premises and land uses within the council could prove to be very costly. A number of council sites are particularly sensitive in terms of health controls – schools, care settings, food production and therefore a combined preventative and reactive approach would be very important.

D4 Proposals to update fees and charges

The existing fees and charges for pest control have been in place for a long time, with only annual inflationary increases being applied. There is no evidence available of how these costings were reached initially and a recent review has identified that these are not reflective of the costs of providing some treatments at this time.

The current fees for treatments do not limit the number of visits to complete a treatment. The average number of visits for treatments has been reviewed and this clearly demonstrates that the actual costs of treatment far exceed the fee currently being charged.

A review of charges from other pest control providers was also carried out. Whilst the specific costs are not readily available there are average figures available from various sources. It is also clear from this information that treatment costs are based on a defined number of visits or actions.

The revised cost proposals are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

It is important to state that concessions will still apply to any treatment costs, and housing tenants will continue to have treatment costs covered by the council as landlord. The internal pest control treatment service will still deliver best value, and better value than external service providers to council services requiring pest control assistance.

The revised fees and charges would apply from 1 April 2023, and would rise in line with the agreed annual rate of inflation. Any need to revise charges beyond this would go through the appropriate scrutiny and approval process.

E. CONCLUSION

It is essential that any cost recovery for ensuring the ongoing delivery of pest control treatment by the council is realistic and reflective of actual costs.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

1. [Information regarding pest control treatments and fees and charges for service](#)
– link to website.

Appendices/Attachments: One

Appendix 1 – Proposed fees and charges for pest control treatment.

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Appendix 1

Proposed fees and charges for pest control treatment

The current fees and charges for most pest control treatments are set for the whole treatment and not visits. A treatment can involve a number of visits to resolve the pest problem. The current fees and charges for a number of treatments are therefore not reflective of actual costs of service delivery and need to be updated.

A review of treatment costs has been carried out. It identified that costs for treatments for rats, mice, and insect pests (not wasps) were not reflective of actual costs as these created the need for a number of visits to resolve. There is currently no specific limit set for the number of visits as part of a treatment. Costs from external providers would specify costs based on a maximum number of visits.

It is therefore proposed to establish costs and visit limits which are reflective of the cost of service delivery. The existing and proposed costs are provided below to show the difference in costings for these treatments. The change is also represented against average prices for external pest control companies. This helps to demonstrate that costs are still providing good value to customers and the council. Only the treatment costs which are proposed to change are included. Other treatment costs e.g. wasps, squirrels, bed bugs, previously agreed, will remain as they are as they have been assessed to be appropriate. Details of these are available using the link in Section F of this report.

The costings are based on staff costs, travel and vehicles, materials, equipment, visits per treatment, administration, and VAT which is required. The average visits per treatment is five, and therefore this will be set as the limit. Any treatment required beyond this would require a request and agreement from the customer, and full payment of the treatment fee to cover a maximum of five further visits. It is likely this will be unnecessary in most cases, and experience has tended to indicate that it is generally required where the home owner or occupier has not taken steps to help control the pest problem. In such cases at the moment we reserve the right to withdraw treatment.

This will not apply to commercial establishments paying commercial rates where the job is based on hourly rates, and may be part of an ongoing treatment and monitoring contract. Concessions of 50% will still apply in appropriate circumstances.

Proposed fees will apply from 1 April 2023, and will rise in line with the annually agreed inflation rate. Any revision required beyond that increase will be subject to appropriate scrutiny and approval by the Council Executive.

Pest	Existing Cost (no visit limit – avg 5 visits) (Includes VAT)	Proposed Cost (5 visit maximum) (Includes VAT)	External provider cost - (avg cost of external pest control firms) (VAT unknown)	External provider cost based on 5 visits. (VAT unknown)
Rats	£94.10	£162	£120-£190 (2 visits)	£300-£475
Mice	£94.10	£162	£120-£190 (2 visits)	£300-£475
Fleas	£94.10	£162	£80-£140 (1 visit)	£400-£700
Other insects	£74.46	£162	£100-£200 (1 visit)	£500-£1000