

CABINET



Report subject	Harmonisation of Pest Control Services
Meeting date	14 April 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The harmonisation of BCP Council Pest Control services requires a policy decision on the provision of 100% fee subsidies that, under legacy arrangements, are offered only to Poole residents in receipt of qualifying benefits.</p> <p>The net additional cost of extending fee subsidies to all BCP Council residents in receipt of qualifying benefits is £23,500 per annum at 100% fee subsidy and £4,200 at 50% subsidy. The recommendation therefore is to offer 50% subsidies to all residents in receipt of qualifying benefits. This would have less financial impact that could therefore be funded from within the service but would maintain subsidised pest control treatments for low income households.</p> <p>Whilst removing the automatic right to 100% fee subsidy in Poole, this recommended policy would benefit low income households in Bournemouth and Christchurch where, under legacy policies, no subsidies are offered at all. Current practice allows for pest treatments to be carried out at nil fee where no responsible person can be identified or where a householder is unable to fund a treatment.</p>
Recommendations	<p>RECOMMENDED that:-</p> <p>(a) Pest Control services across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are harmonised; and</p> <p>(b) A fee subsidy of 50% for pest control treatments relating to rodents, fleas and bedbugs be offered to residents in receipt of qualifying benefits.</p>

Reason for recommendations	The removal of subsidies in Poole could result in a reduction in uptake of pest control treatments and hence might leave some residents suffering the consequences of continued infestations. A 50% fee subsidy is predicted to result in a small budget impact of £4,200 which could be funded from within the service and would enable all BCP Council residents in receipt of qualifying benefits to access significantly subsidised pest control services. A 100% subsidy would result in a budget impact of circa £23,500, which could not be funded from within the service.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr May Haines, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan, Corporate Director – Environment and Communities
Contributors	Kelly Ansell, Service Director - Communities
Wards	All
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The BCP Council Pest Control service is provided by 3 FTE Pest Control Operatives (PCO), with income for 2019/20 of £78,400 and costs (excluding central recharges) of £122,700. The deficit is largely the result of fee subsidies in Poole, together with non-income generating services such as assistance to EHOs investigating pest infestations. Appendix 1 shows the charging structure adopted from April 2020, including current qualifying benefits for fee subsidies.
2. Legacy Borough of Poole policy provides for 100% fee subsidy for rodent treatments and 50% charges for fleas and bedbugs, for residents in receipt of certain qualifying benefits. As we harmonise the pest control service, a policy decision is required on whether to extend fee subsidies to all residents or remove them altogether. All other pest control standards of service and fees were harmonised in April 2020.
3. Experience in Poole suggests that fee subsidies may discourage qualifying residents from undertaking measures recommended by the PCOs aimed at preventing recurrence. 40% of subsidised treatments are repeated, compared with just 10% for full-charge treatments, with PCOs regularly observing failure to implement simple preventative measures.
4. A recent GDPR determination by the Stour Valley & Poole Partnership (SVPP) requires a Request for Information Form to be completed for each customer where confirmation of benefits entitlement is sought. Extension of fee subsidies to all residents in receipt of qualifying benefits would therefore result in additional administrative burdens.

Current Subsidies

5. The rationale behind this practice in Poole is not known, as no policy document or decision record has been identified. However, no such subsidies have been historically or are currently offered in Bournemouth or Christchurch.
6. Analysis of a sample of local authority pest control services across the Country reveals a mixed picture, with some offering various levels of subsidy, some offering no subsidies, and others providing no pest control services at all. It is understood that Dorset Council has recently ceased its pest control service altogether.
7. In 2019/20 93 (37%) of the circa 300 rodent control treatments in Poole were free of charge. The cost of providing subsidies in terms of lost income is circa £11,000.
8. Three policy options are considered for residents in receipt of qualifying benefits: Nil subsidy; 100% subsidy; 50% subsidy.

Policy Option 1: Nil subsidy for any pest control charges

9. Lost income from the provision of current subsidies in Poole is circa £11,000. Assuming staff resource can be diverted to fee-earning treatments, the net saving would therefore be £11,000. The impact on residents would be that some would self-treat, whilst others may continue to suffer the impact of an infestation.

Policy Option 2: 100% subsidy for all pest control charges

10. The estimated cost is circa £28,500 in lost income (based on an extrapolation of costs in Poole to all BCP Council households). There would also be additional administrative costs of benefits checks of circa £5,000, raising the total cost of subsidies to £33,500. Deducting the current cost of subsidies (£11,000) would bring the net additional cost in lost income to circa £23,500.

Policy Option 3: 50% subsidy for all pest control charges

11. Information obtained from a local authority that recently replaced 100% subsidy with 50% subsidy suggests that demand would fall to around 80% of demand at 100% subsidy. This would equate to a cost of £11,200 in lost fee income at 50% subsidy. There would also be additional administrative costs of benefits checks of circa £4,000. The additional cost would therefore be circa £15,200. Deducting the existing cost of subsidies (£11,000), would bring the net cost to circa £4,200.

Summary of financial implications

12. The net saving Option 1 (nil subsidy) is £11,000
13. The net cost in lost income from Option 2 (100% subsidy) is £23,500.
14. The net cost in lost income from Option 3 (50% subsidy) is £4,200.

15. The service is not currently resourced to respond to predicted demand from an extension of 100% subsidised treatments to all residents. Hence the additional net costs of this option would need to be met through revenue growth.

Summary of legal implications

16. There is no legal duty for the Council to provide a pest control service, or to offer concessions where such services are provided. There is however a wider duty to investigate rodent infestations and, depending on circumstances, require a landowner to instigate a remedy. PCOs are integral to the delivery of this duty.
17. Legal responsibility for removing a pest infestation can fall to the land or building occupier, owner, business operator or landlord, depending on the circumstances. Invariably it is the person deemed to be in control of the land or building who must take responsibility and would be the person upon whom a statutory enforcement notice would be served. In the case of landlords and tenants of residential properties, the landlord would be responsible where structural defects were deemed to be the cause of an infestation, and the tenant where the manner of living (e.g. feeding foxes) was deemed to be the cause. Experience suggests that social landlords within the BCP Council area generally agree to conduct pest treatments in most instances.

Summary of environmental impact

18. There is no identified environmental impact arising from the recommendation. Removal of the subsidy may result in residents deciding to carry out treatments themselves which, if poorly carried out, may pose a risk to wildlife.

Summary of public health implications

19. The recommended option enables all residents in receipt of relevant income related benefits to receive subsidised pest control treatments where there is an infestation, where previously subsidised treatments were available only to residents in Poole. It is considered therefore that fewer households overall will continue to endure the effects of infestations. Current practice allows for pest treatments to be carried out at a nil fee where no responsible person can be identified or where a householder is unable to fund a treatment.

Summary of equality implications

20. Residents impacted by the recommendation will be those on lower incomes in the Poole locality. The recommendation would however benefit residents in Bournemouth and Christchurch where, under legacy arrangements, there is no assistance where low-income residents are experiencing public health effects from pest infestations. See Appendix 2 - Equality Impact Assessment.

Summary of risk assessment

21. There is a risk with the recommended option that some low-income residents in Poole may be unable to fund treatments, albeit the mitigation offered will address any public health implications.
22. There is a small risk to reputation if the revised policy receives adverse commentary in Poole.

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Current and legacy pest control charges

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment