

REPORT TO: Environment and Regeneration Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 12th November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Pest Control – Update on fees and charges

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members with an update on the pest control service following the implementation of a charge for rat treatments in April 2025.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: that Members endorse the proposal to continue with the current means tested charges for rat treatments. This includes the provision of free treatments for residents in receipt of council tax reduction benefit.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Following a report to the Board in February 2025 members resolved to endorse the proposal to introduce a new fee that recovers the full cost of rat treatments on domestic properties. However the Board requested that the original proposal be amended to ensure that free treatments were provided to residents in receipt of council tax reduction benefit. This proposal was ultimately agreed by Council as part of the budget setting process for 25/26. However, the Board requested that an update be provided to the November meeting to assess the impact of the new charge.
- 3.2 Until April 2025 the provision of rat treatments had been free for all residential properties. Prior to the introduction of a fee the council received around 2500 requests for rat treatments a year. The February 2025 PPB report stated that it was difficult to forecast demand, but the experience of other local authorities suggested there would be significant reduction in demand once a fee was introduced. Based on an assumption that demand would fall by 50% it was estimated a charge would realise income of around £50,000 a year based on a fee of £38 + VAT (£46.60).
- 3.3 The table below sets out the number of rat treatments carried out between 1st April and 30th September 2025 compared with the same

period last year. The 2025 figures are further broken down into jobs that were charged and jobs that were carried out for free.

Table 1 Rat Treatments April to September 2024 and 2025.

April – September 2024 Total	1337
April – Sept 2025 Chargeable	240
April – Sept 2025 Free	173
April – September 2025 Total	453

- 3.4 It can be seen from the table above that there has been a considerable reduction in the number of treatments carried out. This is also considerably lower than the 50% reduction in requests anticipated. Based on the £38 + VAT fee, income from rat treatments for the first half of the year will be £9,120. Assuming a similar rate of jobs and income over the next 6 months the income from chargeable rat treatments is likely to be in the region of £18,000 to £20,000 per year. This is considerably below the £50,000 anticipated in the February 2025 report. The service will therefore not achieve the income targets set for 25/26.
- 3.5 However, on a more positive note, the potential negative impacts of implementing a charge that were set out in the February 2025 report have not materialised. These included an increase in rat activity and an increase in enforcement cases for the Environmental Protection team. This is likely to be due to some of the mitigation measures the service has put in place. These measures include undertaking a comprehensive sewer baiting programme to treat rats in sewers. Also, where it safe to do so, the service carries out rat treatments in public areas and council land where there are reports of rat activity.
- 3.6 A small number of complaints have been received from customers who had noticed rats on and around their property but did not want to pay for their own treatment. In these cases, those areas were included in the sewer baiting or area treatment programmes.
- 3.7 A comprehensive advice and information booklet for customers was produced which provided advice and guidance on reducing pest activity and set out the service that customers could expect to receive. This included information on booking any revisits that were included in the fee. To date the service has not received any complaints about the standard of service received.
- 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**
- 4.1 Although there has been a considerable reduction in service requests since the charge was introduced there has so far been no significant negative consequences as a result of this change. Therefore, it is proposed to retain the charge. The fee has been set to recover the costs of the council providing individual treatments. Setting the fee at this level ensures the service remains accessible

for as many households as possible.

4.2 Providing a free service to those in receipt of council tax reduction benefit ensures that low-income households are not adversely impacted by the new charge. Therefore, it is also proposed to retain the free service for benefit recipients.

4.3 The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 places a duty on local authorities to control rats on council land. Maintaining rat treatments in public areas and council land along with the sewer baiting programme ensures the council continues to fulfil its statutory obligations.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Due to the demand for chargeable services being significantly less than projected the service will not achieve the additional income targets set. The service also charges for the treatment of other pest species such as wasps and ants. The overall income target for 25/26 for all chargeable pest control work is £74,860. Projected income for the full year is £45,407. Therefore, there will be a shortfall in income of £29,353. This will represent an overspend on the pest control budget for 25/26.

5.2 Restoring the free service and removing the charge will only worsen this overspend position. To mitigate the current projected overspend other services within the Public Protection Regulatory Services Division will either need to increase income or reduce spending accordingly.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

Rats are a public health pest and are known to carry a number of infectious diseases. Controlling rat activity in and around buildings is essential to protect public health. In addition to providing chargeable rat treatments the service will continue to treat rats on council owned land and carry out a sewer baiting programme.

6.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy** None

6.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families** None

6.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need** The fee has been set to only recover the full cost of providing the treatment to ensure the service remains accessible to as many households as possible. The provision of free rat treatments to

those in receipt of council tax reduction benefit ensures the service remains accessible to low-income households.

6.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**

None

6.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The mitigation measures implemented by the service and the implementation of a means tested element have ensured that there have been no significant negative impacts associated with the charge. Therefore there is no significant risk associated with retaining the charge.

7.2 However, demand and income have been lower than anticipated resulting in a potential over spend on the pest control budget which will need to be managed within the wider departmental budget.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The retention of free treatments ensures the service remains accessible to low-income households.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None

10 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’