

Meeting: Cabinet

Date: 11th August 2020

Wards Affected: All Wards in Torbay

Report Title: Review of Pest Control services

Is the decision a key decision? Yes

When does the decision need to be implemented? Immediately

Cabinet Member Contact Details: Councillor Mike Morey - Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Environment and Culture, Mike.Morey@torbay.gov.uk

Supporting Officer Contact Details: Kevin Mowat – Director of Place, (01803) 208433, Kevin.Mowat@torbay.gov.uk

1. Proposal and Introduction

- 1.1 The Council's pest control service for residential properties formed part of the contract between Torbay Council and TOR2, which was in operation between 2010 and 2020. It was a requirement of the contract that the treatment of rat and mice infestation should be a free of charge service, whereas the response to other pest problems were a chargeable service.
- 1.2 The TOR2 contract ended on the 30th June and services continue to be delivered by SWISCo, a new company wholly owned by Torbay Council. Services delivered by SWISCo are covered by a commissioning agreement rather than a formal contract.
- 1.3 An opportunity exists to review the provision of pest control services for residential properties.
- 1.4 It is proposed that SWISCo are requested to offer a chargeable service for all forms of residential pest control, including the treatment of rats and mice.

2. Reason for Proposal and associated financial commitments

- 2.1 Pest control in residential properties is not a statutory function and the Council has not provided this service directly for over 10 years. The Council could decide to simply provide advice and guidance, like many other local authorities, and remove the current obligation for SWISCo to provide a free service for rats and mice.

- 2.2 All of the pest control services previously provided by TOR2 were chargeable to the householder with the exception of those dealing with the treatment of rats and mice inside the home. SWISCo would be able to continue to provide a response for rats and mice but apply a charge, which is a common practice with many other Councils.
- 2.3 Many local authorities no longer offer pest control services because there are qualified service providers working in their area. Many household pests can be dealt with by using humane traps and chemicals available in shops and DIY stores. Residents can also be advised to call in the experts to solve a persistent problem with pests. If householders require professional help they can use the internet, trade or business directory to find a suitably qualified service provider.
- 2.4 The Council can provide advice and guidance on pest control via its website, including the information contained in 2.3 above. If residents are looking for a pest control contractor they can be advised to get more than one quote and to check that the company undertaking the work is competent. Furthermore the public could also be directed to the SWISCo website (currently under development) where a chargeable service can be offered.
- 2.5 The Council's budget for 2020/21 assumes that the formation of SWISCo, together with the end of the TOR2 contract, will deliver an overall budget reduction of approximately £1.3m. Proposals contained in this report will greatly assist SWISCo in delivering these anticipated savings.
- 2.6 The recommendation, if approved, would bring the Council in line with many other local authorities, which have already removed free pest control services. There is no legal duty for councils to provide this service and as can be seen in Appendix 1, in some areas it is not provided at all.
- 2.7 In line with many other local authorities, Torbay is under increasing financial pressure and this was already the case before COVID-19 struck but we know that Torbay Council are forecasting an overall overspend on the revenue budget, at period 2, of £4.8m. It therefore seems both prudent and logical to make the decision to remove our free pest control service, which a large number of other councils have already done.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 That the Council should instruct SWISCo to cease providing the existing free pest control service, for residential properties, from 1st September 2020.
- 3.2 That SWISCo Ltd is requested to offer a chargeable pest control service and that improved pest control guidance and advice is provided to the public via the Council website.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Local Authority Pest Control Service Comparison Table

Background Documents

None

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is the proposal / issue?

An opportunity exists to review the provision of pest control services for residential properties.

It is proposed that SWISCo are requested to offer a chargeable service for all forms of residential pest control, including the treatment of rats and mice.

Pest control in residential properties is not a statutory function and the Council has not provided this service directly for over 10 years. The Council could decide to simply provide advice and guidance, like many other local authorities, and remove the current obligation for SWISCo to provide a free service for rats and mice.

It is proposed that the Council should instruct SWISCo to cease providing the existing free pest control service, for residential properties, from 1st September 2020.

Furthermore it is proposed that SWISCo Ltd is requested to offer a chargeable pest control service and that improved pest control guidance and advice is provided to the public via the Council website.

2. What is the current situation?

The Council's pest control service for residential properties formed part of the contract between Torbay Council and TOR2, which was in operation between 2010 and 2020. It was a requirement of the contract that the treatment of rat and mice infestation should be a free of charge service, whereas the response to other pest problems were a chargeable service.

On the 30th June 2020 the TOR2 contract ended and services continue to be delivered by SWISCo, a new company wholly owned by Torbay Council. Services delivered by SWISCo are covered by a commissioning agreement rather than a formal contract.

The table below shows data from the pest control service provided by TOR2 in recent years.

Year	No. of pest control visits	Charge per visit to TOR2	Annual Cost
2018	709	£68.50	£48,566.50
2019	659	£68.50	£45,141.50
2020 (6 months to 30 th June)	273	£68.50	£18,700.50 (Pro-rata reduction likely to be caused by Covid-19)

	<p>The majority of call-outs related to problems with rats or mice but the breakdown of calls is set out below :- 2018 – 700 rats or mice, 7 wasps, 2 fleas 2019 – 646 rats or mice, 7 wasps, 3 fleas, 2 hornets, 1 ‘Other’. 2020 – 273 rats or mice</p> <p>With regards to duplicate visits there are quite a few.</p> <p>2018 – 97 out of the 709 ~ TOR2 visited 612 individual households 2019 – 83 out of the 659 ~ TOR2 visited 576 individual households 2020 – 38 out of the 273 ~ TOR2 visited 235 individual households (Jan-Jun)</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>What options have been considered?</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> Continue to provide the existing free service for the domestic control of rats and mice at a cost of approximately £45,000 per annum. This was discounted because it was clear that an opportunity existed to bring Torbay in line with the majority of other local authorities within the region and at the same time deliver on a budget saving that was expected.</p> <p><u>Option 2</u> Extend the existing pest control chargeable services to include a charge for the treatment of rats and mice. This was discounted because an opportunity existed to provide better clarity about how these services are provided i.e. either by the market or by an approved contractor. A direct service from Torbay Council has not been provided for many years and an in house pest control service would be too small and unsustainable.</p> <p><u>Option 3</u> Cease the service completely both chargeable and free of charge; and direct the public to pest control contractors in the marketplace, including companies wholly owned by Torbay Council i.e. SWISCo. This is the recommended option.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>What is the relationship with the priorities within the Partnership Memorandum and the Council’s Principles?</p> <p>The provision of a free pest control service to tackle infestation by rats and mice will have had an impact to suppress the market. Consequently the removal of a free service will assist a thriving economy.</p> <p>It is clear that the majority of other local authorities in our region have already moved to a chargeable service and therefore this decision supports the Council to be fit for the future.</p> <p>This report sets out how this decision would allow the authority to use reducing resources to best effect.</p> <p>It is proposed that by proving good public information on pest control, via the Council’s website and social media content, we can reduce demand through prevention and innovation.</p>

	<p>SWISCo will work closely with colleagues in Environmental Health and Public Health to ensure that an integrated and joined up approach is taken to enforcement and education to reduce incidents of avoidable infestation.</p>
5.	<p>How does this proposal/issue contribute towards the Council's responsibilities as corporate parents?</p> <p>This proposal does not impact directly on the Council's responsibilities as corporate parents.</p>
6.	<p>How does this proposal/issue tackle poverty, deprivation and vulnerability?</p> <p>This proposal does not tackle poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. There is a small risk that this proposal could have a negative impact on poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. It is therefore important that Torbay Council keep this issue under review and apply suitable intervention measures, if considered appropriate, on a case by case basis.</p>
7.	<p>How does the proposal/issue impact on people with learning disabilities?</p> <p>This proposal does not impact directly on people with learning disabilities, autism or those living with mental health issues.</p>
8.	<p>Who will be affected by this proposal and who do you need to consult with? How will the Council engage with the community? How can the Council empower the community?</p> <p>This proposal could affect any household in the Bay but if they have never had the benefit of the free service previously they would not necessarily be aware of the impact. Any household that has used this free service on a frequent basis will, by definition, have other underlying issues that are causing an infestation of rats or mice. These issues would need to be tackled in any event and the response to such problems would not be the ongoing continuation of a free to use service. Given these circumstances a consultation exercise was not considered appropriate.</p> <p>The Council can empower the community by continuing to provide high quality environmental and public health advice through a range of different platforms, including well established community groups and associated support networks.</p>

Section 2: Implications and Impact Assessment

9. What are the financial and legal implications?

Under the old TOR2 contract a free pest control service was required to be provided to domestic properties in Torbay. The table below shows a broad summary of service usage and cost to TOR2.

Year	No. of visits	Charge per visit to TOR2	Annual Cost
2018	709	£68.50	£48,566.50
2019	659	£68.50	£45,141.50
2020 (6 months to 30 th June)	273	£68.50	£18,700.50 (Pro-rata reduction likely to be caused by Covid-19)

It is clear that Torbay Council has an opportunity to make a saving of approximately £45,000 per year by not providing a free pest control service to domestic premises. This saving has already been assumed by way of a reduced contract/commissioning fee payable to SWISCo. If the free service is continued then SWISCo will require additional funding.

Pest control in residential properties is not a statutory function and so the Council can decide to cease providing the service or make it a chargeable service.

10. What are the risks?

There is a small risk of a 'cost shunt' to Community Safety as the statutory duty remains to keep ALL land free from rats (and mice), which is done through statutory powers to serve notice and do works in default. The removal of the domestic service may lead to some increased demand in this area. This risk can be mitigated through the ongoing provision of high quality environmental and public health advice, along with enforcement action where appropriate.

11. Public Services Value (Social Value) Act 2012

This proposal does not require the procurement of services or the provision of services or the hire of goods or the carrying out of works.

12. What evidence / data / research have you gathered in relation to this proposal?

See Appendix 1.

13. What are key findings from the consultation you have carried out?

	<p>A consultation exercise has not been undertaken for the reasons highlighted in section 8 above. This matter was not specifically addressed or consulted upon during the budget setting process and it is therefore necessary to request a formal in-year decision from Cabinet.</p>
14.	<p>Amendments to Proposal / Mitigating Actions</p> <p>The Council can mitigate against the potential impact of this proposal by continuing to provide high quality environmental and public health advice through a range of different platforms. Furthermore this education and advice can be supported through our well established community groups and associated stakeholder advisory networks for citizens. It will also be necessary to undertake enforcement action from time to time, especially in respect of waste management to prevent rodent infestation.</p>

Equality Impacts

15.	Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups			
		Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
	Older or younger people			There is no differential impact
	People with caring Responsibilities			There is no differential impact
	People with a disability			There is no differential impact
	Women or men			There is no differential impact
	People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) <i>(Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)</i>			There is no differential impact
	Religion or belief (including lack of belief)			There is no differential impact
	People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual			There is no differential impact
	People who are transgendered			There is no differential impact
	People who are in a marriage or civil partnership			There is no differential impact
	Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave			There is no differential impact

	Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)		This proposal does not tackle poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. There is a small risk that this proposal could have a negative impact on poverty, deprivation and vulnerability. It is therefore important that Torbay Council keep this issue under review and apply suitable intervention measures, if considered appropriate, on a case by case basis.
	Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)		This proposal could have an impact on public health if it results in an increase level of rodent infestation in households. However, the Council will continue to provide high quality environmental and public health advice through a range of different platforms.
16.	Cumulative Impacts – Council wide (proposed changes elsewhere which might worsen the impacts identified above)	None	
17.	Cumulative Impacts – Other public services (proposed changes elsewhere which might	A failure in our domestic waste collection service could lead to higher levels of rodent infestation. Pest control services remain readily available within the marketplace.	

	worsen the impacts identified above)	
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