



Pest Control: Rats and Rubbish

05 April 2005

Report to the City Council

Pest Control: Rats and Rubbish



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Preface

By Councillor Kath Hartley
Transportation and Street Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee (Lead Member)



Members have been receiving increasing numbers of complaints about rats over the past few years. This is why Members of the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee decided that now was an opportune time to examine the issue.

The first question was whether or not rat numbers actually were increasing. The answer appears to be yes, although this is based on a steady increase in reported sightings of rats across the city and across the country. No absolute measure of rat populations exists.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we found wide variations in reported sightings across the city, and these are not easily explained. Poor quality, densely-packed housing and deprivation are obvious factors, but it's the habits of the human population which cause the biggest impact on the rodent population of the city. Littering (particularly the discarding of fast-food packaging and remains), advancement of weekly rubbish, fly-tipping and overgrown shrub areas are basic sources of rat-friendly environments.

Our review also looked at the health risks and damage to property caused by rats.

In general, this review found that the Pest Control Service in Birmingham does a good job in responding to complaints (or "requests for assistance"). However, key to having a real impact on the rat population is the employment of a range of **pro-active** measures. There are already cases of this, for example pro-active baiting of sewers is undertaken in conjunction with Severn Trent on an on-going basis.

However, most pro-active work is done within the Districts. Localisation provides opportunities for Districts to take steps in tackling this problem, whether via dedicated Pest Control Officers, Environmental Wardens or other measures. However, these are funded from temporary sources such as regeneration pots rather than as a core part of what the Council does.

My fellow Members and I are therefore keen to ensure that the messages arising from our review carry beyond the Pest Control Service and that all aspects of this essential public health service are brought into the mainstream.

We thank everybody who contributed to our review, especially the external agencies and members of the public who gave their time to come and tell us about their views and experiences.



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1 Summary

- 1.1.1 Members of the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified an issue of concern to their constituents, in terms of the perceived increase in the number of rats in the city and how they were being dealt with.
- 1.1.2 The first step was to gauge the size of the rat population in Birmingham. This proved difficult, as no absolute measure of rat population exists anywhere in the country. However, viewing comparative data from earlier years does show an increase in the number of complaints about rats, both across the city and across the country. It was also possible to identify those areas of the city which have the biggest problems with rat infestations.
- 1.1.3 The reasons for this increase were explored. Poor and degraded environments provide a good habitat for rats, as does anywhere rubbish accumulates. Littering and fly-tipping is a particular problem, although this is being tackled, with some success, through the "You Are Your City" programme.
- 1.1.4 Evidence gathered on the Pest Control Service itself showed the service to be well regarded. Members contacted a random sample of customers as part of the Review and found that the Pest Control Service was considered to be satisfactory or very satisfactory by three-quarters of respondents.
- 1.1.5 However, the issue was revealed to be wider than simply that of the response of the Pest Control Service. There are many factors in the creation of a rat-friendly environment, including many within the remit of the City Council. Fly-tipping, advancement of waste and littering undoubtedly contribute to the growth of rat populations. The questions of both enforcement and education were considered, alongside the potential for more cross-departmental working – all of which were addressed in the recommendations.
- 1.1.6 Particular attention was paid to the role that Districts could and do play in reducing the number of rat friendly environments. In particular, the increasing use of Environmental Wardens was welcomed as an important conduit of information and advice, as well as a further source of enforcement action.
- 1.1.7 Overall, it was felt that increasing awareness of the problem of rats and what causes infestations across the Council and the public would go a long way to reducing the incidence of rat infestations and to improving the environment in which we live.



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2 Summary of Recommendations

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	<p>That a mechanism for gathering customer views, such as the annual survey previously held, is reinstated.</p> <p>This should include the means to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify data relating to Requests for Assistance for rats; • identify and respond to customer concerns; and • feedback action to respondents. 	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	October 2005
R02	<p>An evaluation should be conducted of the cost-benefits or otherwise of providing additional visits to bait once an infestation has been identified.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005
R03	<p>A review of the effectiveness of the publicity measures currently used in-house to promote awareness of the Pest Control Service should be undertaken.</p> <p>This should identify steps to increase awareness of the service across the city, taking into account:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • available resources to deal with the resulting demand; • the range of languages used across the city 	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005
R04	<p>Training for Environmental Wardens should include elements of pest recognition to enable infestations to be identified correctly.</p>	Public Protection Committee	September 2005
R05	<p>Consideration should be given to employing more Environmental Wardens using mainstream funding. A report should be presented to the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee.</p>	Public Protection Committee	November 2005
R06	<p>The Pest Control Service should identify areas across the Council where liaison with other departments would result in more effective pest management. An action plan to deal with key priorities should be developed with these departments.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005
R07	<p>Progress towards achieving these recommendations should be reported to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee no later than its December 2005 meeting.</p> <p>Subsequent reports on progress will be scheduled by the Committee on a regular basis thereafter until all are completed.</p>	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005



3 Introduction

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 Public Health is at the traditional heart of municipal service and the control of pests is a crucial element of this. Local authorities have a plethora of public health responsibilities placed upon them, including a number relating to the control of rodents.
- 3.1.2 The duty of the City Council to keep its district free from rats and mice is enshrined in the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949. Specifically, it is the duty of the local authority to:
- Destroy rats and mice on land which they occupy, and to keep such land so far as practicable free from rats and mice.
 - To enforce the duties of owners and occupiers of land, to carry out such operations to rid their land of potential hazard causing pests.
- 3.1.3 Underlying this is the widely held belief that controlling and eliminating pests is a basic function for a civilised society.
- 3.1.4 Members of the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that now was an opportune time to consider this important service. There was concern over the fact that rat numbers are reported to be increasing. Public concern, as reported to Members, was also on the rise.
- 3.1.5 The problems associated with rats are well-known and the perception that Birmingham has an increasing problem must be addressed. It was therefore determined to review the Pest Control Service as it currently operates, and also to consider preventative measures and the impact of localisation.

3.2 Scope of the Review

- 3.2.1 The Review addresses three key questions:
- What is the scale of the rat problem in Birmingham?
 - How does the Pest Control Service respond?
 - What preventative action is or should be taken?



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- 3.2.2 Early on it was decided that Brown Rats or common rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*) would be the focus of the review as there are very few Black Rats in this country (*Rattus Rattus* - thought to be responsible for hosting fleas which carried the Bubonic Plague).
- 3.2.3 It was also determined that the domestic service would be the focus, as there is a limited commercial service offered by the Council as a result of a desire not to conflict with enforcement powers also held.

3.3 Methodology

- 3.3.1 The Review Group commenced its work in October 2004 and took evidence in three main sessions in the first half of November.
- 3.3.2 The first session addressed the 'problem' of rats in Birmingham, and sought to establish the number of rats in Birmingham, the main problems posed and what steps the Council should be undertaking in relation to this problem. Members heard evidence from two main witnesses:
- Mr J. Barrie Sheard FCIEH: the Chairman and Promotions Officer of the National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA). The NPTA has members from the private and public sectors of the Pest Control Industry and was formed in 1993 in response to the perceived need to represent technicians individually, rather than just companies or organisations. However, within months of its formation hundreds of smaller businesses also applied to become members.
 - Mr Bob Mayho: a Policy Officer at the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH). The CIEH is an independent professional body and registered charity representing those who work in environmental health and related disciplines. Its primary function is the promotion of knowledge and understanding of environmental health issues. It has a membership of around 9,800, 70% of which are employed by local authorities.
- 3.3.3 This meeting was held at the National Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham, during the NPTA "PestTech" Exhibition, where Members were the guests of the NPTA. Members were able to view the Exhibition and pick up the latest industry information.
- 3.3.4 The second session focussed on the pest control service provided by Birmingham City Council. Officers and managers who provide the service were asked about the operation and performance of the service.



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- 3.3.5 The final session invited officers from across the Council to discuss the various street interventions and other preventative measures that could and are being undertaken. Representatives from Housing, Waste Management and Building Control attended along with two Environmental Wardens and a District Director.
- 3.3.6 A further session was held to meet with Mr Phil Lenton of Severn Trent to discuss the programme of sewer baiting undertaken by the Council.
- 3.3.7 In addition, Members contacted customers to gather their views on the service. A random sample of 186 recent customers of the Pest Control Service were sent a short questionnaire to gauge their reactions to the service. Fifty-six returned the form (a response rate of 30.1%). Of these, twelve attended an informal discussion group with Review Group Members to discuss their experiences in greater depth.
- 3.3.8 Finally, all members of the Council were invited to give evidence of their experience of problems with rats in their wards.

3.4 Why do we have rats?

- 3.4.1 In order to answer the three questions listed above (section 3.2), it was first necessary to gain an understanding of why rats are present in our environment. Rats thrive where they have shelter and food and can live undisturbed. A number of factors were found to contribute to this.
- 3.4.2 Primarily, the presence of rats is linked to poor and degraded environments. The English House Conditions Survey 1996 found a high correlation between widespread litter, vandalism, unkempt gardens and neglected and vacant buildings, and rat infestations.¹ Neglected and derelict properties may allow rats to escape from sewers to the surface from dried out U-bends or broken drainage fittings.² High density of housing properties is also a factor.³
- 3.4.3 Rats flourish where there is rubbish as this provides both refuge and food. Any increase in litter and fly tipping create perfect habitats for rats to live and breed, as does rubbish left in gardens.
- 3.4.4 Advancement of rubbish is a particular problem in Birmingham with some black bags being placed on the street five or six days early. These may be ripped open by animals or humans and rats will be able to access the food inside.
- 3.4.5 The food source is increased again with the overfeeding of wild birds.

¹ Battersby, S.A.; Parsons, R.; Webster, J.P. *Urban rat infestations and the risk to public health* Journal of Environmental Health, Volume 1 Issue 2 2002 p.7

² *National Rodent Survey Report 2003*, National Pest Technicians Association, Nottingham

³ Battersby, S.A.; Parsons, R.; Webster, J.P. 2002 *ibid.* p.4



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- 3.4.6 Certain forms of landscaping, in particular the use of low shrubs, provides perfect cover for rats, particularly if near an abundant source of food (litter, overflowing waste bin etc).
- 3.4.7 These last three points were also identified as significant factors by customers in the discussion group held with Members.
- 3.4.8 In addition, neglect by private landowners allows large numbers of rats to reside near both residential and commercial properties.⁴ Enforcement action can be taken by the Council, but it can sometimes be difficult to identify the owner.

⁴ *National Rodent Survey Report 2004*, National Pest Technicians Association, Nottingham



4 Rats in Birmingham

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 In order to appreciate fully the task faced by the Pest Control Service in Birmingham, Members first sought to gauge the scale and character of the rat problem in Birmingham – and indeed whether the current situation actually constitutes a ‘problem’.
- 4.1.2 This chapter therefore addresses the three aspects of this:
- the size of the rat population in the city,
 - the problems associated with rats,
 - the extent of any threat.
- 4.1.3 In the course of the Review, Members came across a number of myths about rats, which are discussed further.

4.2 The size of the rat population

- 4.2.1 It is impossible to put a figure on the number of rats in Birmingham or in the country. No organisation has conducted a census of rats, as the population changes rapidly and is extremely difficult to monitor - indeed very little research has been done into the Brown Rat at all.⁵
- 4.2.2 However, comparative data is available both nationally and locally which demonstrates relative changes in rat populations, both in terms of overall increases and decreases and in changes in “hotspots”.
- 4.2.3 The main source of such information is requests for assistance, i.e. requests for treatment from residents made to local authorities. These are clearly not an absolute measure of rat numbers and will be affected by:
- Communities or individuals who are more used to seeing rats;
 - A preference to deal with the infestation themselves or through private contractors;

⁵ More research has been done on rats in rural areas and in particular the impact on agriculture because of devastation to grain supply. However, rats are much easier to track on farms than in urban areas.



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- More frequent sightings of rats in daylight resulting from changes in rat behaviour.
- 4.2.4 However it is the best measure available: studies conducted in Birmingham have shown that although there are fewer requests for assistance than actual rats (due to under-reporting) there is a correlation between areas of low, medium and high numbers of rats and areas of low, medium and high numbers of requests for assistance.⁶

The National Picture - the NPTA Survey

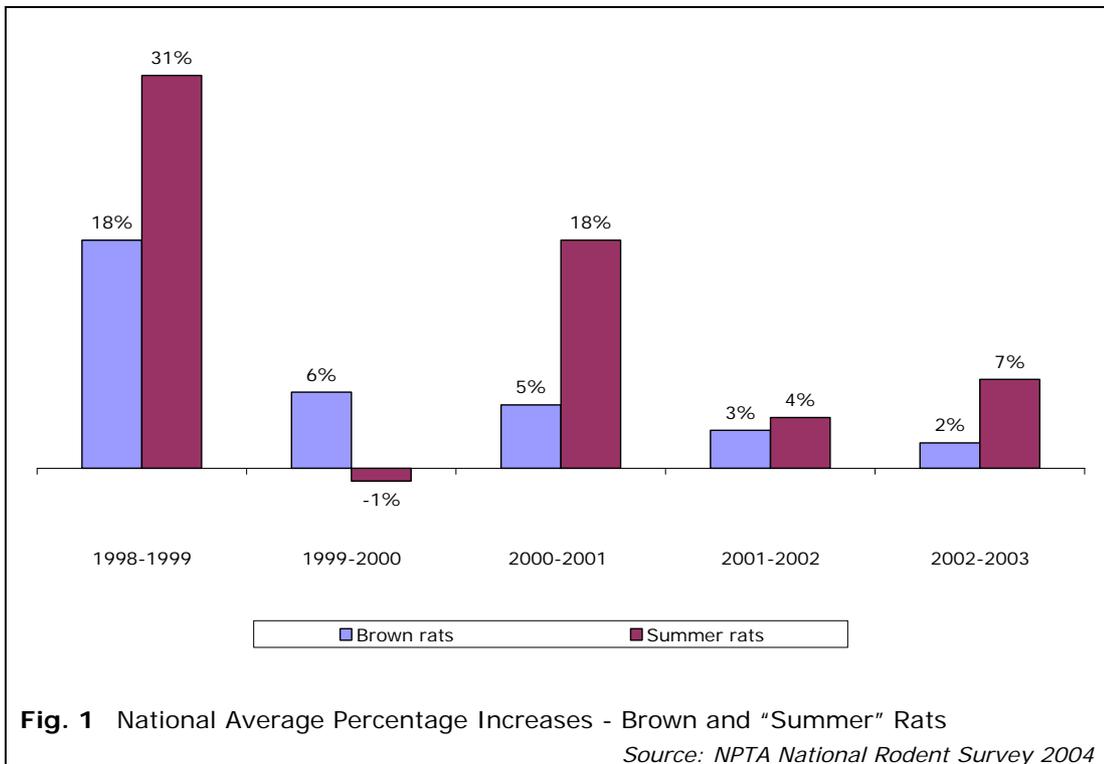
- 4.2.5 The annual National Rodent Survey conducted by the NPTA is the best barometer of national trends in rat populations. This also relies on requests for assistance from participating local authorities, which are compared across the country to indicate relative increases and decreases. The advantage of this survey is that the same questionnaire and methodology are used annually to enable year on year comparisons.⁷
- 4.2.6 The most recent report available presents data from 1998 to 2004. The most recent data for 2003 to 2004 shows:
- The number of reported sightings of brown rats overall increased by 2%;
 - The number of reported sightings of brown rats reported between April 1st and September 1st (called "summer rats") increased by 7% (Figure 1).
- 4.2.7 This follows five years of increases – the highest overall being an increase of 18% in 1998/1999. However, the figures do show the rate of increase to be slowing (Figure 1).
- 4.2.8 The report also gives a breakdown by region, and this shows that the three areas with the biggest increases are:
- Scotland (13% increase throughout the year, 15% increase in summer);
 - Northern Ireland (12% increase throughout the year, 16% increase in summer);
 - North West (11% increase throughout the year, 9% increase in summer).
- 4.2.9 In the Midlands, the increase was 2% throughout the year and 5% increase in summer.

⁶ Hurst, J.L. and Beynon, R. J. (1998) *Brown Rats in the Urban Environment: Assessment of Population Size and Complexity* September 1998 Birmingham

⁷ *National Rodent Survey Report 2004*, National Pest Technicians Association, Nottingham



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The Local Picture - Requests for Assistance

4.2.10 Data provided by Regulatory Services shows that over the past three years the number of requests for assistance (RFA) for rats in Birmingham has increased by 16%. This does include a decrease last year (2003/04) of 4% (Figure 2).

4.2.11 Figure 2 also reveals that the vast majority of all requests for assistance are for rats (82.7% in 2003/04) and this proportion has remained broadly constant.

	2001/02		2002/03		2003/04	
	N	% increase	N	% increase	N	% increase
All RFAs	22699	-	24577	8%	23874	-3%
RFAs (rats only)	17062	-	20489	20%	19748	-4%
RFAs (rats) as % of all RFAs	75.2%	-	83.4%	-	82.7%	-

Fig. 2 Requests for Assistance 2001-2004
Source: Regulatory Services

4.2.12 Using the RFA data, it is possible to see where the biggest problems with rats are to be found in Birmingham. Analysis by District (Figure 3) shows that two districts account for a third of all RFAs received:

- Hodge Hill - 3,302 RFAs, 17% of the total;



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- Sparkbrook and Small Heath - 2827 RFAs, 14% of the total.

4.2.13 Other districts with relatively large numbers of RFAs are:

- Ladywood (11%);
- Selly Oak (10%);
- Perry Barr (8%);
- Yardley (8%).

4.2.14 Breaking this information down by ward allows the areas with most RFAs to be pinpointed further. Figure 4 shows that the five wards with the most RFAs are:

- Sparkbrook (1,290);
- Bordesley Green (1,206);
- Washwood Heath (884);
- Springfield (853);
- Soho (806).

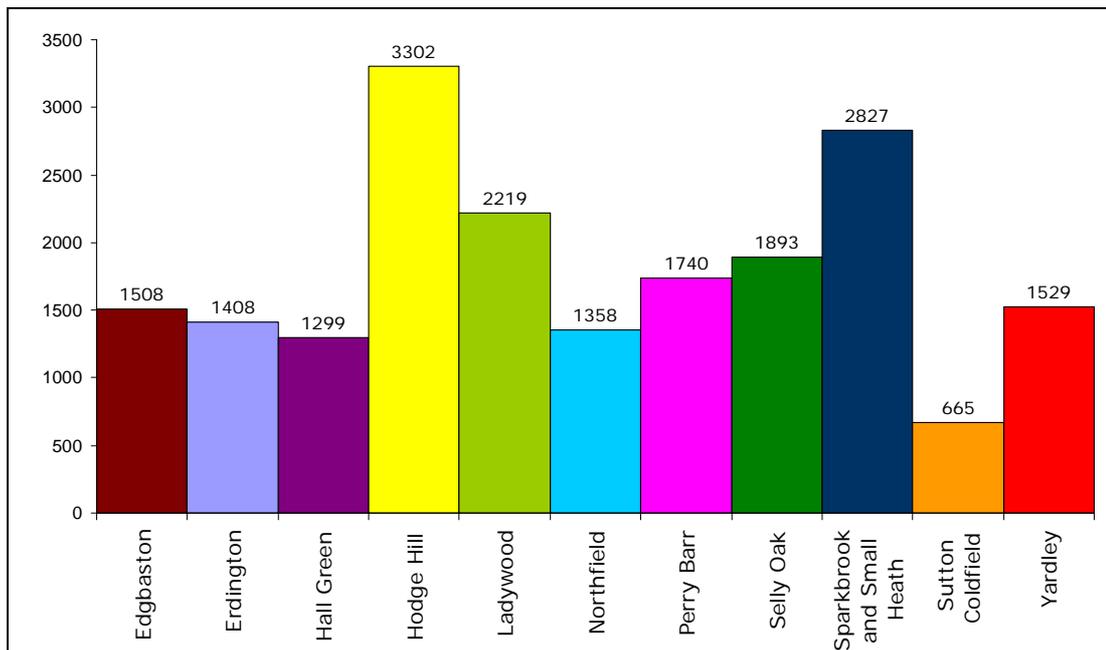


Fig. 3 Requests for Assistance 2003/04 by District

Source: Regulatory Services



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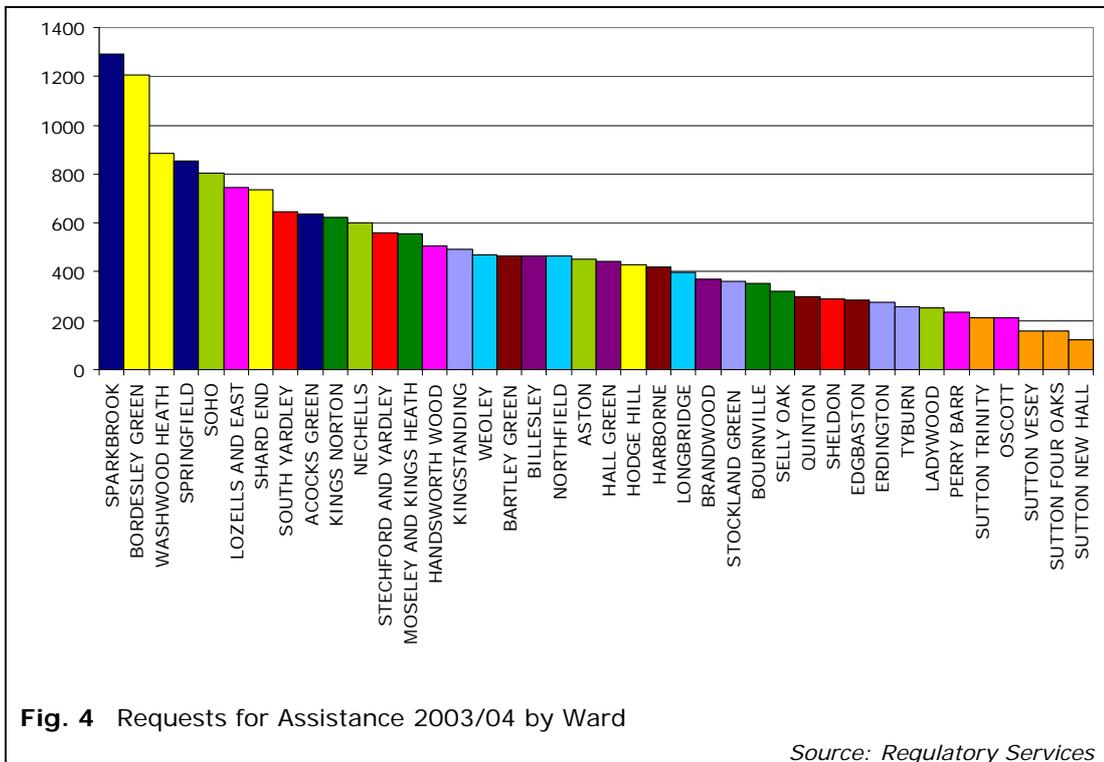


Fig. 4 Requests for Assistance 2003/04 by Ward

Source: Regulatory Services

- 4.2.15 Explaining why this is the case is not straightforward: comparing the above figures with the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000⁸ (IMD) shows a general correlation between the IMD and number of RFAs (see Figure 9 in Appendix 1). The top wards for RFAs also have the highest IMD scores, with the exception of Aston, which has the highest IMD, but mid-range number of RFAs. (IMD Scores are shown in Appendix 1).
- 4.2.16 Clearly other factors also come into play here, for example the character of housing. The ward boundary changes may also be a factor.

4.3 Problems associated with rats

- 4.3.1 Problems associated with rats can be divided into two broad categories:
- Health risks;
 - Economic damage, including damage to property and goods.
- 4.3.2 Despite the well-known undesirability of rats in the environment, there has been surprisingly little study into rats and the harm they cause, either in terms of their numbers (as we have already seen), or the health or economic impact.⁹ However, what is known is summarised below.

⁸ However, the IMD figures are based on the old ward boundaries.

⁹ Hurst, J.L. and Beynon, R. J. (1998) *ibid.*



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Health risks

- 4.3.3 The main health risk posed to humans by rats is from the **parasites and pathogens** carried by brown rats on their bodies and in urine and faeces. There is an absence of data to link diseases in rats directly to diseases in humans, nevertheless it is known that rats carry a range of organisms (e.g. *capillaria spp*, *leptospira spp*, *toxoplasma gondii*) which are associated with diseases in humans (*capillariasis*, *leptospirosis*, *cryptosporidiosis* respectively).
- 4.3.4 In addition, the presence of rats in close proximity can exacerbate **stress and allergies**, and there is also the risk of **contamination of foodstuffs**.

Economic damage

- 4.3.5 No information on economic damage caused by rats is held by the Government or the insurance industry. However, a recent article in the Journal of Environmental Health (JEHR) attempted to assess the cost of rat damage and whether those costs justified the investment in improved rat control strategies.¹⁰
- 4.3.6 Their model for assessing the potential economic cost of rat damage suggests a figure of up to £522.4m (based on an estimate of 50 million rats), exclusive of social costs and costs to the environment and health. This is based on a range of suppositions, but what is known is the types of damage caused by rats and this was summarised by authors and is reproduced below (Figure 5).
- 4.3.7 Rats are burrowing creatures and so will eat their way through poorly maintained foundations and sewers and damage signalling and rail infrastructure. Electric fires and electrocution are often caused by rats gnawing through wires and flooding by rats chewing through plastic pipes.
- 4.3.8 Other environmental damage includes land slips and flooding caused by rats burrowing and undermining the stability of the ground.

Myth: We are never more than 10ft from a rat.

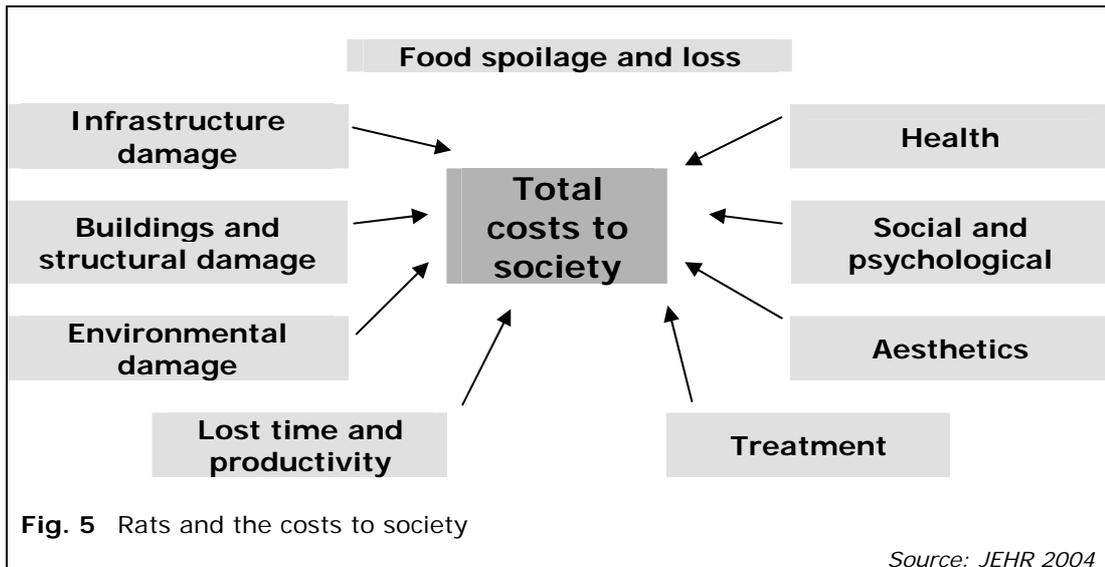
Most recently repeated on a Channel 5 documentary, this, the experts assure us, is a "complete myth". It has most likely sprung up as a result of peoples' proximity to sewers in all urban areas, and sewers are associated with rats. However, there are not rats in every sewer.

¹⁰ Battersby, S.A. (2004) Public health policy – can there be an economic imperative? An examination of one such issue *JEHR Vol 3 Issue 1 2004*



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- 4.3.9 More dramatic examples are cited in a 2004 article in the Journal of Environmental Health: an incident in which a rat gnawed through a lead gas-pipe, the gas leaked and an elderly person asleep in bed was poisoned; rats gnawing cables in a car production plant led to an electrical fault causing £100,000 worth of damage, including cars falling off the end of the assembly line.¹¹



- 4.3.10 The health consequences have already been discussed, but it must be remembered that this also has an economic impact in terms of lost time and productivity where people are forced to take time off sick.
- 4.3.11 In addition there are costs associated with treatment - either via commercial firms paying for treatment or the Council tax payer funding the local authority response.

4.4 Extent of threat

- 4.4.1 The evidence gathered with regard to rat numbers supports the theory that numbers are increasing. This is supported by the concerns of the public health professionals interviewed and by the public.

Myth: Rats will travel long distances.

A rat will travel as far as it has to in order to find a friendly habitat - unfortunately in many towns and cities, this need not be far. However, rats on the run tend to be killed more easily - either by natural predators, road vehicles or bait as a result of being seen.

¹¹ Battersby, S.A.; Parsons, R.; Webster, J.P. 2002 *ibid.* p. 20 Quoting Meehan (1984)



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- 4.4.2 The reasons for the increases are likely to be due to a number of diverse factors, encompassing:
- Global warming: with milder winters causing the breeding cycles of brown rats to continue around the whole year and wetter summers increasing the water table so rats are moving to higher ground and are therefore more visible;
 - Observed changing behaviour of rats: it is increasingly the case that rats are becoming bolder: straying out into open spaces and in daylight, which enables them to access more food sources. ¹²
- 4.4.3 These are in addition to the factors already discussed in Chapter 3.4, as to why rats co-exist alongside humans.
- 4.4.4 What is certainly beyond doubt is the harm, to humans and the economy generally, that rats cause. Public concern is well justified and the importance to any local authority of a functioning Pest Control Service is clear. This will be assessed in the next chapter.

Myth: *Rats will attack humans.*

Rats are, apparently, pleasant-natured animals and will only bite when they are frightened. As they are neophobic (afraid of new things) they are unlikely to approach humans for no good reason. When they are frightened and cornered, they may try to jump over your shoulder to get away – hence the myth about them going for the throat.

¹² *National Rodent Survey Report 2003*, National Pest Technicians Association, Nottingham



5 Controlling the problem: The Pest Control Service in Birmingham

5.1 The Pest Control Service – All Pests

5.1.1 Birmingham City Council provides a pest control service through its own Pest Control Team, which is part of the Regulatory Services. The Domestic Pest Control Service includes a free of charge treatment service for rats, cockroaches and bedbugs in occupied homes. The Commercial Pest Control Service includes a range of pest control treatments and clearance services for filthy or verminous materials.

5.1.2 Additional services include:

- The provision of information on how and where free mouse poison can be obtained for residents to deal with any mice problems they may have in the home;
- Fact sheets on ants, bed bugs, booklice, carpet beetles, cockroaches, fleas, flies, foxes, mice, pigeons, rats, squirrels and wasps;
- An affordable chargeable service for treating Wasp Nests in domestic premises;
- A free pest identification service;
- A customer feedback/complaints procedure if customers are not entirely satisfied with the service.

5.1.3 Full details of the Pest Control Service can be found in Appendix 2.

5.2 The Pest Control Service - Rats

5.2.1 The domestic Pest Control Service with relation to rats has three defining characteristics:

- The service is provided in-house, by Pest Control Officers and managers employed directly by the City Council;
- It is a free service;



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- Although some proactive work is undertaken in areas of high activity, the service is more usually a reactive service, i.e. any measures are taken in response to residents' reporting of sightings of rats.

In-house service

- 5.2.2 There was consensus amongst the witnesses from the CIEH and the NPTA (who represent both public and private sector members) that an in-house facility was the preferable method of providing this service.
- 5.2.3 The main reason for this is that an in-house service allows for closer working with other departments and the other arms of environmental health provision.

Free service

- 5.2.4 Birmingham City Council does not charge for the service it provides in relation to rats, due to the associated public health concerns. It is possible for the Council to charge for this service, and indeed charges are made for other services provided by the Pest Control Team (for example commercial call-outs and services for wasps' nests). These subsidise the domestic service.
- 5.2.5 A report to the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services in early 2004 outlined the reasons for continuing to provide a free service, which included:
- Charging leads to a reduction in those using the service;
 - Charging would disproportionately affect those least able to pay;
 - The Council has a statutory responsibility to ensure the city is kept clear of rats and this is the most cost effective means of doing so.¹³
- 5.2.6 The tendency for requests for assistance for rats to drop on the introduction of charging is also cited by a number of other sources. There is real concern that this leads to an increased hidden population of rats. Both the NPTA and CIEH support this view. The NPTA in their 2003 report is particularly vehement on this matter, citing officers from authorities which have started to charge for services. These claim:¹⁴
- A decrease in requests for treatment after charging commences which does not reflect other assessments of rat numbers;

¹³ Report of the Senior Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) to the Cabinet Member For Transportation And Street Services, 2nd March 2004: *Review Of Charges For Pest Control Services 2004 / 2005*

¹⁴ *National Rodent Survey Report 2004*, National Pest Technicians Association, Nottingham



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- One authority has re-introduced a free service after a reduction in the number of reported sightings, refusal to pay the charge and the time needed to follow up non-treatments with threats of notices.

5.2.7 As stated in paragraph 4.2.15, there are links between rats and levels of deprivation in Birmingham. The impact of charging is therefore likely to be severe.

Reactive service

5.2.8 The current service is based upon responding to complaints from residents. Requests for assistance can be made by telephone, e-mail or completing an on-line form on the Council website.

5.2.9 Once a complaint is made a Pest Control Officer will visit, and if rat presence is confirmed, will decide how and where to lay bait. Follow-up visits take place to ensure the infestation is eliminated (up to four visits).

5.2.10 The Pest Control Team consists of:

- Seventeen Pest Control Officers and one supervisor for domestic complaints;
- Two for commercial cases;
- Two officers work on sewer baiting;
- A further three are employed on fixed term contracts to work within Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath wards using NRF money, and Aston as part of the NDC programme there.

5.2.11 Commercial premises are also treated by the Pest Control Team, but this service is not advertised as the Council, under Regulatory Services, also holds enforcement powers, including the power to close food premises down if infested. Greater involvement in treating these premises would risk compromising the enforcement side of the work.

5.2.12 The domestic Pest Control Officers are deployed according to demand, determined by the Pest Control Manager and Supervisor according to the level of complaints. Typically one officer covers two wards.

5.2.13 There are some examples of the Team undertaking more pro-active work, for example if there a lot of complaints from a concentrated area, the houses in that area will be leafleted and each house called at to offer the service. However, it is still up to the individual resident to allow the Pest Control Officer access to the premises in order to lay the bait.

5.2.14 A further example is in the sewer baiting undertaken for Severn Trent – this is discussed in more detail below (Chapter 5.5).



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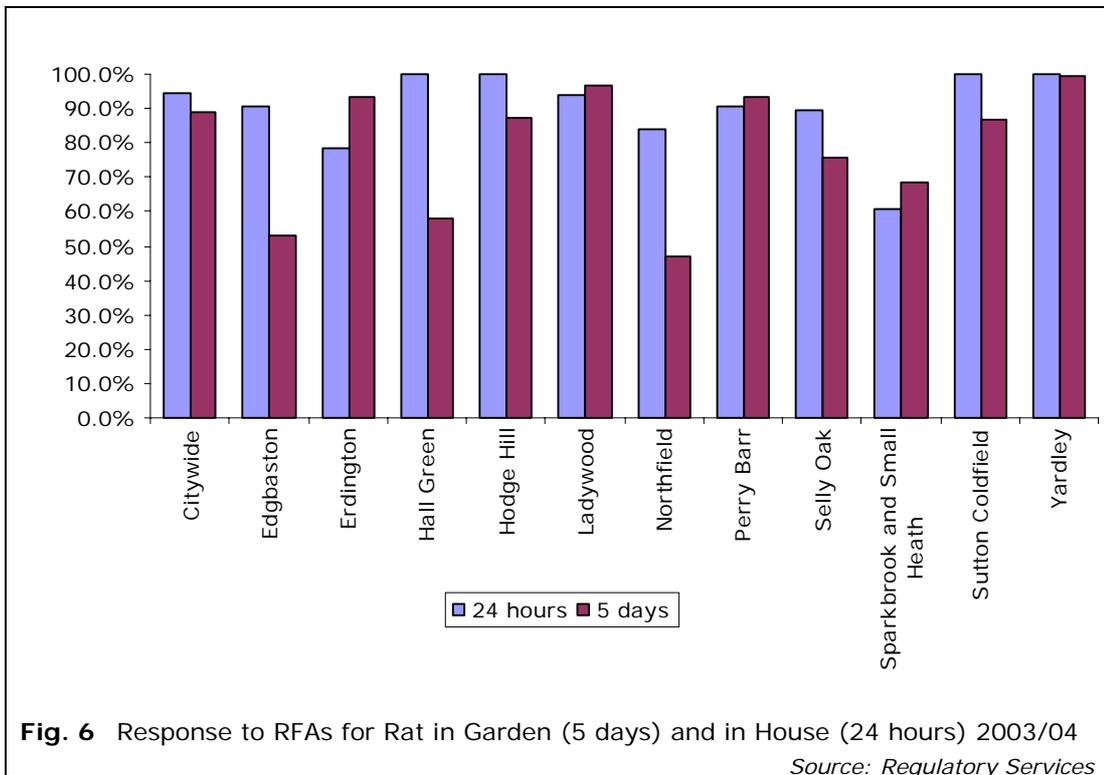
5.3 Performance

Performance data

- 5.3.1 The Pest Control Service publishes service standards – these are contained in Appendix 2.
- 5.3.2 The key performance targets are:
- Response to complaint of rat in garden within 5 days (95%);
 - Response to complaint of rat in house within 24 hours (95%).
- 5.3.3 This data is used to identify where problems lie and intervene if necessary.
- 5.3.4 Data from the previous municipal year shows the target with regard to rats in gardens was almost achieved (94.5%) and the target with regard to rats in houses was some way from being achieved (88.7%).
- 5.3.5 The breakdown by district shows a varied picture: 100% of RFAs were responded to within the target time of 24 hours for rats in houses in:
- Hall Green;
 - Hodge Hill;
 - Sutton Coldfield;
 - Yardley.
- 5.3.6 This fell to 60.6% in Sparkbrook and Small Heath and 78.6% in Erdington.
- 5.3.7 The target for response to complaint of rat in garden within 5 days was met in two districts in 2003/04:
- Ladywood (96.7%);
 - Yardley (99.3%).
- 5.3.8 Yet this fell to 47.1% in Northfield, 52.9% in Edgbaston and 58.2% in Hall Green.



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Customer feedback

5.3.9 Customer feedback is no longer collected on a regular basis by Regulatory Services. Up until 2001/02, an annual survey was conducted across all public health services. Given this lack of up to date information, the Review Group carried out a small survey to gather indicative data on customer satisfaction with the service. In addition, respondents were invited to attend an informal group discussion to examine further the issues raised.

5.3.10 Three-quarters of respondents (74.5%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the Pest Control Team (Figure 7). Comments made included:

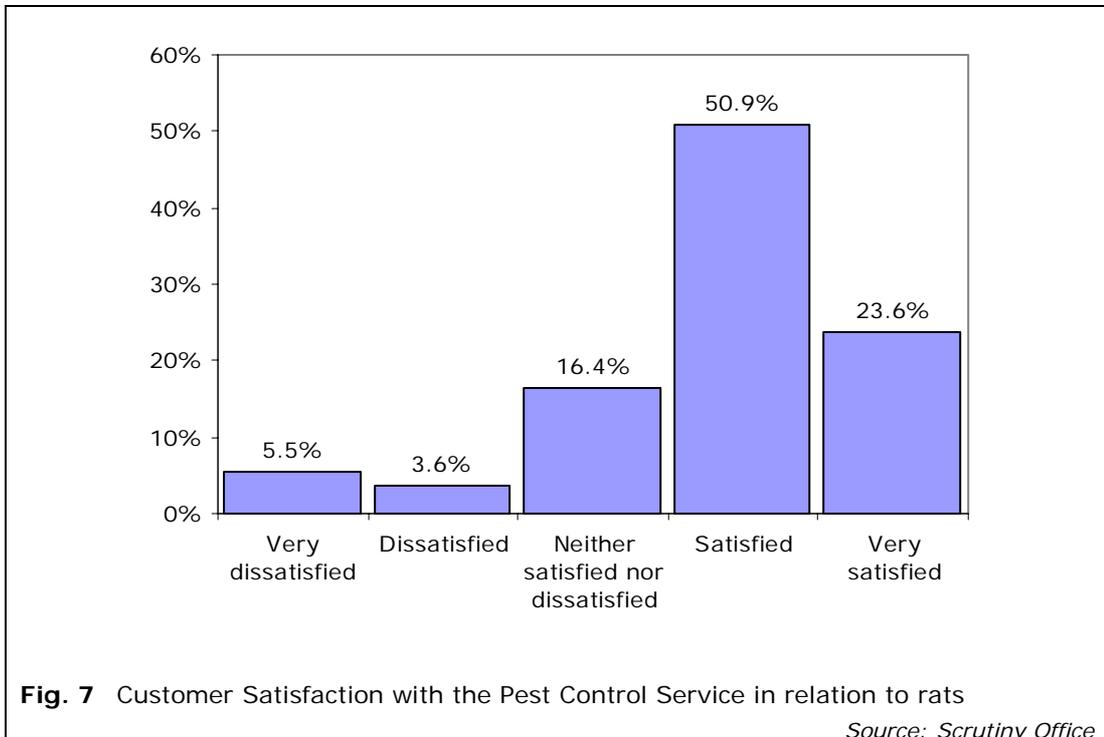
[He] came quite promptly. Left number to call back if the rats returned or was not rid of them within 10 days.

Having reported a problem with discarded rubbish in my neighbour's garden, both the environmental officer and the pest control officer came to see me within 24 hours. The Pest Control Officer now comes out on a regular basis.

He came out promptly (within 7 days). Keep up the good work of cleaning up after fly tipping and emptying public waste bins. Thank you.



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5.3.11 Of those who were dissatisfied, the following explanations were given:

Officer came without notice - I was out. I called his mobile many many times to rearrange but he didn't call back. I dealt with the rats myself in the end.

Dead rats were left in the garden and bins. The problem occurred in the first place because the bin men were not emptying the bins so the rubbish attracted rats. It would have been better if someone had come to remove the dead rats.

Although the man came, no steps were taken for further investigation. I have tried to make contact several times with environmental service managers!

5.3.12 An informal discussion was held with twelve customers, and a broad summary of their experiences of the service was that it was a good and professionally delivered service. Attendees said that Pest Control staff came when they said they would and were generally very responsive to their issues.

5.3.13 There was only one reported bad experience from a customer, and this was when a visit was promised by the call centre but was never scheduled.



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- 5.3.14 A good example given of responsiveness was where the Pest Control Officer left his mobile phone number with the customer. This enabled the customer to contact him directly if there was any recurrence of the problem.
- 5.3.15 Reported means of finding out about the service were:
- From the Council House Switchboard or Contact Birmingham;
 - Via the Housing Service at the local Neighbourhood Office;
 - By word of mouth from a neighbour;
 - From local Environmental Wardens;
 - Through their local Councillor.
- 5.3.16 Suggested improvements to the service included more proactive work, including educating people to keep their gardens clear and checking whether there were problems with rats around the property that the service is specifically called to.
- 5.3.17 Other suggested improvements were not directly related to the service and included providing dustbins for all properties and pursuing the behaviour of problem student tenants with their university.

Member response

- 5.3.18 Members of the Council were also given the opportunity to comment, as they are often a point of contact between residents and the Pest Control Team. Again, the comments were largely positive:

I have had occasion to get Environmental Services out to people's houses and my experience tells me they respond quickly and efficiently.

Yes, I have always found them to be helpful - in many cases advising residents on courses of action they may wish to take.

- 5.3.19 Problems identified included:

The complaints about rats are not as many as there have been of late. This may be that residents do report the incidents themselves or they are so common that people may take rats for granted, or feel nothing seems to be done about the problem.

Overstretched - too few staff with too many demands on them.

One of the problems people have highlighted is people do not know who to call if there is a problem with rats. Communication via posters, media (local radio stations etc) would make the service more accessible in the ward. Also, the



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information needs to be relayed in a variety of community languages to reflect the population of Sparkbrook.

5.4 Localisation

- 5.4.1 The Pest Control Service remains a centrally provided service, with relations with the Districts governed by Service Level Agreements.
- 5.4.2 Under this arrangement, the Pest Control Service can continue to guarantee a response to each request for assistance made, regardless of how many have already been made in any one district. The free service will continue to be subsidised by the fee-paying services.
- 5.4.3 There was pressure for the service to devolve, on the grounds that the rat problem is localised (Chapter 4), and districts are best placed to determine a local response. This was resisted on the grounds that:
- The service is not large enough to split effectively between districts – for example, the small number of staff means some districts would get an unmanageably small workforce, with difficulty covering sickness and holiday;
 - District level provision would increase costs as, for example, the number of poison and vehicle stores would have to increase;
 - There is a need to maintain overall flexibility with the budget as rat populations change and a strategic overview of rats above and below ground is needed.
- 5.4.4 However, there is the opportunity for Districts to buy in more services, including on a pro-active basis, as part of a wider local solution. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

5.5 Sewer baiting

- 5.5.1 One of the concerns raised with the Review Group was that the rat population was increasing as routine pro-active annual sewer surveys and treatments across the country decreased. Studies in Birmingham have shown that there is "substantial vertical movement of rats between sites above and below ground",¹⁵ and so this is an issue of real concern.
- 5.5.2 However, the Review Group found that, unlike most areas of the country, Pest Control Officers from Birmingham City Council bait sewers as part of a *pro-active* programme. This is funded mainly by Severn Trent.

¹⁵ Hurst, J.L. and Beynon, R. J. (1998) *Brown Rats in the Urban Environment: Assessment of Population Size and Complexity* September 1998 Birmingham



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- 5.5.3 Severn Trent has responsibility for sewer baiting across 64 local authorities and works with each of these Councils on an individual basis, including one-to-one meetings as well as liaison groups, area and environmental health groups.
- 5.5.4 Birmingham receives a significant proportion of the budget for sewer-baiting from Severn Trent. The result is a planned sewer baiting programme in Birmingham, the focus of which can be adapted according to need (determined by bait taken and complaints made). This is combined with a reactive approach which responds to areas of infestation. However, the Council must subsidise this activity as the Severn Trent funding is not enough to carry out a full programme of sewer baiting.
- 5.5.5 The benefits of pro-active sewer baiting are disputed within the water industry. However, both the CIEH and NPTA strongly support it and state that successful rat control in sewers can reduce above ground infestations. The pro-activity of Severn Trent and Birmingham City Council is therefore to be welcomed.

5.6 Summary

- 5.6.1 Most of the witnesses spoken to in the course of the Review were satisfied with the service provided by the Pest Control service, though clearly many thought more could be done on a pro-active basis. However, it was acknowledged that this would be heavily dependent on funding which is unlikely to be forthcoming. It is also recognised that where possible, e.g. sewer baiting, the Council already does more than the minimum.
- 5.6.2 The key feature of the service is that it is mainly reactive, focused on responding to customer demand. This places two objectives at the heart of the service:
- Meeting targets on response times;
 - Ensuring customer satisfaction.
- 5.6.3 On the whole, performance targets were almost achieved in the last municipal year. However, not all wards appear to receive the same level of service as attainment of performance targets varies significantly between districts. Given the Pest Control Service's determination to continue to provide a centralised city-wide service it is important that this service is seen to be fairly distributed across all areas of the city. Last year's performance targets suggest there is still some way to go on this.
- 5.6.4 However, customer satisfaction is shown to be generally high. Three-quarters of those surveyed by the Review group were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided by the Pest Control Team. Respondents who took part in the discussion group also praised the service.



6 Prevention and Intervention

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 This report thus far has considered the problem of rats and the Pest Control Service's specific response to them. However, this is a reactive solution to a problem already in existence. In the current lexicon of the industry, the need to manage the environment in a way that discourages or halts the infestation of rats is recognised by using the term "pest management" rather than "pest control".¹⁶
- 6.1.2 Rats are found where conditions are favourable and so prevention is clearly not within the hands of the Pest Control Service alone. A wider view, encompassing an outlook on the street scene, waste management, housing and local issues must be addressed.
- 6.1.3 Such an approach fits with the Council's "Clean and Safe" campaign and the Government's "Crime and Grime" agenda, highlighted in this year's Queen's Speech. These look to tackle community safety and environmental degradation including the street scene, through vigorously tackling problems such as fly-tipped waste, abandoned vehicles and graffiti, which undoubtedly contribute to more rat-friendly surroundings.
- 6.1.4 This chapter looks at the various schemes and actions taken by a range of bodies across the Council and the City which directly or collaterally impact on rat populations. These involve district and ward level programmes as well as more traditional approaches from different departments of the Council.

6.2 Environmental Wardens

- 6.2.1 The Review Group found that one of the most significant innovations in recent years has been the use of Environmental Wardens. There are now 49 Environmental Wardens employed across the City, with the number set to rise to 59.

¹⁶ Chartered Institute for Environmental Health *The Role of Pest Management in Environmental Health: a guidance document for local authorities* 2003



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- 6.2.2 The Wardens are employed across the city (with the exception of Sutton Coldfield) and are funded by a range of sources including NRF, the City Council or specific schemes (including New Deal for Communities).
- 6.2.3 Although not trained in pest control, Environmental Wardens make an important contribution to cleaning up the street environment in which rats like to live. They tackle environmental crime and work with communities to raise civic pride. Their main duties relevant to this Review are:
- **Street Beat Walks:** frequent inspections of area "beats", to look for signs of environmental crime;
 - **Dealing with advanced waste:** wardens can leaflet individuals to advise them of the collection dates and follow up with fixed penalty notices;
 - **Preventing littering:** issuing anyone littering with a fixed penalty notice;
 - **Preventing fly-tipping:** enquiries can be made as to the source, the matter maybe referred and surveillance options maybe considered;
 - **Providing a duty of care:** wardens are authorised to require the production of documents from businesses, so that the City can be satisfied that the waste from the business is being disposed of satisfactorily.
- 6.2.4 They also have duties in relation to graffiti, dog fouling, fly-posting and placarding. Environmental Wardens work in partnership with schools, residents and local forums, as well as other service providers such as the Housing Department, Police and Fire Services.
- 6.2.5 As has already been mentioned (Chapter 3.4.4), the problem of "advanced waste" (where residents or businesses put out the black sacks regardless of collection date, which often split and scatter waste across the street) is a particular problem with regard to rats. Environmental Wardens act as an early warning and follow up with enforcement: this is to be welcomed.
- 6.2.6 This last point is an important one: Environmental Wardens funded by the Districts and employed through the Public Protection Committee have the enforcement powers delegated to them by that committee to tackle environmental crime. Other types of wardens have not got these powers. This is a crucial part of their role, as having the ability to act on matters such as advancement of waste and fly-tipping quickly can stop the problem escalating or the rubbish becoming a home for rats. Since April 2004, they have served:
- 319 Section 46 Environmental Protection Act (EPA) notices;
 - 47 Fixed Penalty littering notice.
- 6.2.7 They also undertake rubbish bag searches to discover who has left fly-tipped waste (799 between April and November 2004).



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- 6.2.8 However, NRF funding is set to finish in March 2006, and so these Environmental Wardens are employed on temporary contracts, which in turn lead to a high turnover of staff and a loss of good and highly skilled wardens.¹⁷
- 6.2.9 The role also has an educational element: leaflets are distributed which address issues of waste reduction and disposal (including the free Bulky Waste Collection Service) and generally promote awareness of services offered by Birmingham City Council.
- 6.2.10 Although not a key part of their job, Environmental Wardens clearly contribute to “pest management” in reducing the opportunity for rat infestations. However, they are only one of a number of weapons available at the District’s disposal.

6.3 Districts – Local Initiatives

- 6.3.1 With localisation has come the opportunity to employ more “joined up” approaches and to buy in more of certain services, including pest control (either by Regulatory Services or using an external contractor). As can be seen from the data in Chapter 4, rats are not a big problem everywhere in the city, so those areas that do have a particular problem can direct resources as required.
- 6.3.2 The use of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) has already been mentioned in relation to Environmental Wardens, but there are a number of other ways in which this money can be used to tackle rats, rubbish and related issues:
- Employing extra Pest Control Officers to work in Districts (see Case Study below);
 - Special street collections (e.g. Hall Green);
 - Neighbourhood Warden Schemes (e.g. Northfield);
 - Beat sweepers and vehicles.
- 6.3.3 The Council also provides money to districts as part of the “Clean and Safe” campaign. The overall budget (£3.35 million) is split on a district basis according to need (based on RFA data). This budget funds a number of activities, which include:
- The city-wide environmental warden scheme (as above);
 - Removal of graffiti, placards and fly posting;
 - Improving recycling facilities (including the introduction of a paper recycling scheme across the north of the City), waste storage and street lighting;

¹⁷ Report of the Senior Assistant Director (Regulatory Services) to the Public Protection Committee, 16th April 2004: *Environmental Wardens*



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- Remove highways and residential shrubberies and landscaping.

6.3.4 A number of individual schemes have been uncovered by this review, some directed specifically at tackling the rat problem, others where reducing infestation is one part of a wider agenda. They range from the Aston NDC programme, to smaller projects initiated by local forums.

Case Study: Aston NDC

6.3.5 New Deal for Communities is an initiative that supports the intensive regeneration of some of the country's poorest neighbourhoods. The Aston NDC programme started in April 2001 and will end in March 2011. The area includes 4,500 households.

6.3.6 A major part of the project is the "Enhanced Environmental Services Project" (approved by Cabinet in September 2004), which seeks to tackle issues of concern to local residents, including the immediate removal of dumped rubbish and street litter and a programme of education and enforcement.

6.3.7 The project represents an holistic approach to the problem of a degraded environment, including the presence of rats. There are four Environmental Wardens and an Enforcement Officer alongside an extra beat-sweeper and a compactor crew, as well as an extra Pest Control Officer. Rubbish is collected daily on top of the usual weekly round.

6.3.8 Work is undertaken with a variety of partners including Groundwork (will make referrals if rats are sighted), the Fire Brigade (for the removal of wood rubbish) and the local radio station, Witton FM (which provides free advertising). Educational programmes will be undertaken with schools, colleges and community groups.

6.3.9 All this is backed up with enforcement powers, particularly with regard to fly-tipped waste and advanced waste.

6.3.10 At the start of the project, the area was surveyed in 50 metre blocks and residents were asked about all possible nuisances (rats, dogs, prostitution). Only a third of residents said that they thought their area was a suitable place to live. This rose to 40% in the first seven weeks of the programme. The survey will be repeated at the end of the project to see what, if any, further difference has been made.



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Case Study: Small Heath South Neighbourhood Forum

6.3.11 The reported rat population in this area is high, due to many contributing factors such as high population density and local bird feeding. Therefore an application for NRF funding has been approved to employ a pest control officer for a period of three months to deliver a proactive exercise. The officer will visit all households in the area, surveying homes and gardens, leafleting and offering advice.¹⁸

Case Study: Tara and Bournbrook Neighbourhood Forum

6.3.12 Selly Oak has a large population of students (6 to 7,000) which brings particular challenges as these are of course a transient population who mostly live in multi-occupancy dwellings.

6.3.13 The Neighbourhood Forum identified a particular problem where the waste collection service came on a Monday, as those who went away for the weekend would leave rubbish out as early as Friday. An agreement was reached with Fleet and Waste Management that rubbish bags could be left in front gardens, and would be picked up from there. Three thousand houses were leafleted with this information and posters were put up.

6.3.14 The difficulty with this was that foodstuffs were accumulating in front gardens, providing a haven for rats. This became a problem and there was potential for a conflicting message to go out.



¹⁸ Report of the Interim District Manager to Yardley District Committee, 4th November 2004



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6.3.15 In response to this, it was felt that a range of initiatives were needed to tackle the problem. These include:

- “Bring out your bed” – where a crew works through the area on a Saturday on an ad-hoc basis to collect bulky waste and other rubbish, sometimes accompanied by an Environmental Health Officer;
- Awareness raising with local MPs and Councillors, who would take part in walkabouts;
- A rat education programme, supported by funds raised from BCEN, including a high impact leaflet, aimed mainly at student households on the factors in rat infestation and the dangers, and encouraging landlords to supply sealed containers for rubbish.

6.3.16 It is felt that targeting landlords and letting agents rather than the students is a more efficient use of resources due to the transient nature of the student population. Given the over-supply of property in the area, appealing to landlords to make their properties more attractive would also benefit them.

6.3.17 The project is on-going and the Forum will continue to work with the Guild of Students at the University of Birmingham, utilising *Redbrick*, the student newspaper, to get across the health message.

6.4 Education and Enforcement

6.4.1 The above projects illustrate that a lot of time and effort is going into persuading some people that they need to change their habits with regard to waste and litter. Such an approach depends on both *education* and *enforcement*.

Education

6.4.2 Each of the above schemes clearly pays a great deal of attention to raising the awareness of residents with regard to the consequences of their actions and the services available from the Council to help them (e.g. the free bulky waste collection service, the free pest control service for rats).

6.4.3 There is certainly an issue of lack of awareness: the Pest Control Officer working in the Aston NDC area found that, after visiting 1700 houses:

- 32% had unreported rats (now treated);
- 87% had unreported mice (free poison given).¹⁹

¹⁹ Evidence given by Pest Control Officer working in Aston



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- 6.4.4 This clearly demonstrates under-reporting of the rat problem – the officer also found that 60% of residents spoken to were unaware the Council provides a free service in relation to rats.
- 6.4.5 Currently the service is publicised via the website, leaflets, yellow pages, A to Z of Council Services, at Neighbourhood Offices and in the Birmingham Voice (recent article). There is clearly a question as to how effective this approach is.
- 6.4.6 The Pest Control Service also publishes a leaflet outlining what attracts rats and how to spot an infestation (Appendix 3).
- 6.4.7 However, the problem is much broader than this: any educational campaign needs to focus on the dangers of rubbish left lying around, the danger of having rats and wider issues of responsibility for property owners.
- 6.4.8 It is unlikely that a real change in attitude to such things would be achieved immediately - rather ongoing educational campaigns will get the message across. Environmental wardens are a major step forward, particularly in their work with communities (for example, in organising community groups and Waste Management to undertake litter picks on open land or shared entryways - the community involvement helps to maintain the sites in a clean state) and in talking to individuals: Environmental Wardens are encouraged to make contact and speak to as many residents as possible.
- 6.4.9 It is also hoped that major projects such as Aston NDC, although not funded permanently, will foster a change in attitude which will last.

Enforcement

- 6.4.10 However it was increasingly evident that equal attention must be paid to enforcement, particularly with regard to:
- Advancement of rubbish;
 - Rubbish in gardens;
 - Fly-tipping;
 - Litter.
- 6.4.11 There are a number of powers open to the Council:
- Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990 (Section 46), if the rubbish is deemed to constitute a nuisance;
 - Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949;
 - Rubbish and rats in the garden could come under a broad definition of anti-social behaviour, and it may be open to the Council to use Anti-Social Behaviour legislation in dealing with persistent offenders;



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- Tenancy agreements (for Council tenants) - provisions within the agreement ensure residents "keep garden areas neat and tidy" and "take reasonable steps to keep the property free from rats, mice and other pests". Action can be taken if residents do not abide by these, including fixed penalty notices and injunctions, whereby the Council undertakes the necessary work and fines the resident. Such legal action is rare.

6.5 Other Council Departments

- 6.5.1 In addition to work in the Districts and with residents, it is essential to look at how the actions of other Council departments have an impact on rat problems.
- 6.5.2 Representatives from three key departments were called to give evidence in this review to address three particular problems:
- Housing – as there is a perceived problem with rats in void properties;
 - Building Control – as demolition of buildings can cause the displacement of rats;
 - Waste Management – as this department deals with fly tipped waste and the advancement of rubbish.

Housing

- 6.5.3 In general, rat sightings are referred directly to Pest Control or via the Area Offices and Housing officers work closely with Environmental Wardens. As noted in Section 6.4 above, there are additional powers open to the council in respect of Council tenants via the Conditions of Tenancy agreement.
- 6.5.4 However, the main issue is in relation to empty properties. The Brown Rat Study, conducted in Birmingham in 1998, reiterated that void properties are particularly good at providing undisturbed harbourage for rats.²⁰ Whilst void properties are currently secured against human intruders, no action is taken to limit the risk of rodent settlers. Indeed, properties designated for demolition are often not emptied first, meaning food is often left in the empty properties for some time, providing another attraction for rats.
- 6.5.5 A second area of concern was also raised with the Review Group – the case study of the work undertaken by the Tara and Bournbrook Neighbourhood Forum illustrates the problem often encountered with private landlords. These can often be absentee, and therefore have little interest in reducing the occurrence of rats or rubbish. Customers also raised this issue in the discussion group as being a particular problem.

²⁰ Hurst, J.L. and Beynon, R. J. (1998) *Brown Rats in the Urban Environment: Assessment of Population Size and Complexity* September 1998 Birmingham p.18



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6.5.6 A relatively small number of routine inspections of private rented property are carried out - the Council has tended to focus on the problems in its own stock. However, staff are being recruited to work in this area, and new legislation will require the licensing of larger multi-occupied households (though this will not capture all of them).

Building Control

6.5.7 Building Control has two main responsibilities with regard to the demolition of buildings:

- To regulate demolition in the private sector;
- To project manage the majority of demolitions for the Council - the main client being the Housing department.

6.5.8 In the first instance, once notice has been given of demolition, an inspection will be carried out. If an infestation is suspected, Pest Control is notified. In addition, every notice is forwarded to Pest Control, so if the demolition is taking place in an area susceptible to rat infestation, then Pest Control officers may undertake an inspection.

6.5.9 Under the second responsibility, where a private contractor carries out the demolition, a counter notice can be served under section 82 of the Building Act 1984 if certain requirements are not met, e.g. debris not removed in a reasonable time.

Waste Management

6.5.10 Officers from Fleet and Waste Management work closely with Pest Control Officers and Environmental Wardens in:

- Stopping work and reporting infestations spotted whilst an area is being cleared of fly-tipped waste, so they do not have a chance to disperse;
- Beat sweepers will report suspected infestations to supervisors and there is very good liaison with the Pest Control Service;
- Officers work with Environmental Wardens in distributing leaflets.

6.5.11 Enforcement action includes leaflets reminding residents of the law, a warning letter followed by a notice (with bags searched if necessary to identify the culprit).



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6.6 Summary

- 6.6.1 The above section clearly illustrates that much action can be taken outside the narrow confines of the Pest Control Service to combat the spread of rats. Currently, much depends on cross-departmental working, short-term funding and individual efforts within Districts.
- 6.6.2 Cross-departmental working is evidently key to reducing the instances of infestation and even greater co-operation would yield positive results. In aspiring to a framework of "pest management", all departments need to be aware of the problem and be prepared to assist Pest Control Officers in minimising it.
- 6.6.3 A number of excellent schemes exist across the city, however these are funded on a short-term basis, for example the Environmental Warden posts. The Districts represent a great opportunity to employ a range of different local solutions as appropriate, and this should not be undermined by uncertain funding.





7 Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 In examining the issue of rats in Birmingham, the Review Group considered:
- The extent of the problem in Birmingham;
 - The performance of the Pest Control Service;
 - Wider issues of prevention and intervention.
- 7.1.2 It was found that it seems likely that numbers of rats are increasing, although there is no absolute measure of rat numbers available. This could be due to a whole range of factors, including increasing amounts of rubbish and fly-tipping, poor housing conditions and milder winters. The extent of the threat was also assessed, in terms of the health and economic impact, and the damage caused by rats is beyond doubt.
- 7.1.3 However, it was clear that perceptions held by the public differed. There was clear evidence that some people were unaware of the consequences of leaving rubbish out and therefore underestimated the rat problem. Others tended to over-estimate the problem, believing the City is being over-run, which is clearly not the case.
- 7.1.4 In considering the Pest Control Service and the Council's wider response to the problem, three key themes emerged:
- The nature of the Pest Control Service provided in relation to rats;
 - The shared responsibilities of other Council departments;
 - The importance of Birmingham residents accepting responsibility for the environment in which they live.
- 7.1.5 Each of these is considered below.



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7.2 The Pest Control Service

- 7.2.1 The Pest Control Service was found to be a professional and valued service, providing treatment and expertise across the city. Whilst improvements could be made in relation to the section's own performance targets, no serious failing was found and the customers contacted were largely satisfied with the service.
- 7.2.2 A key point is that the service is currently configured to be a reactive one - a comprehensively pro-active service is deemed to be prohibitively expensive. The service is therefore focused on dealing with visible problems, reassuring residents that the rat population is under control and that any complaints will be responded to within a reasonable timescale.
- 7.2.3 The Review also looked at how the service works within the Districts as part of schemes using alternative funding streams (e.g. New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund) and found several examples of pro-active work to eradicate the rat problem.

Conclusions:

- The Pest Control Service in Birmingham provides an effective reactive service with regard to rats at present, given the level of resource set.*
- Although the service is largely a reactive one, there are good examples of pro-active work which supports other initiatives across the City.*
- However, given the focus on the customer, it is surprising that surveys of customer opinion are no longer conducted. Such an exercise is crucial in ensuring that the service is reacting in line with customer expectation.*
- There was concern raised around the number of visits made once an infestation was identified. A number of witnesses felt that more visits and longer baiting were necessary to ensure the infestation was eradicated.*
- It was found that a significant proportion of residents were unaware that the Council provides free rat treatment. This undoubtedly leads to many infestations not being reported and either ignored or treated ineffectively.*

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R01	That a mechanism for gathering customer views, such as the annual survey previously held, is reinstated. This should include the means to <ul style="list-style-type: none">• identify data relating to Requests for Assistance for rats;• identify and respond to customer concerns; and• feedback action to respondents.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	October 2005



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R02	An evaluation should be conducted of the cost-benefits or otherwise of providing additional visits to bait once an infestation has been identified.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005
R03	A review of the effectiveness of the publicity measures currently used in-house to promote awareness of the Pest Control Service should be undertaken. This should identify steps to increase awareness of the service across the city, taking into account: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• available resources to deal with the resulting demand;• the range of languages used across the city.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005

7.3 Responsibility across the Council

- 7.3.1 There are plenty of examples of the Pest Control Team working with other departments and Districts to provide a wider, often pro-active, service in some parts of the city.
- 7.3.2 However, these are mostly dependent on individual projects and short-term funding. The use of Environmental Wardens by Districts in enforcing laws on fly-tipping, and educating residents where necessary was found to be very valuable. However, the funding for the posts is uncertain in the long-term.
- 7.3.3 Examples of good practice in working with other departments include:
- Waste Management: ensuring any rat infestations are dealt with before clearing fly-tipped rubbish;
 - Building Control: notifying Pest Control where infestations are found in buildings to be demolished.
- 7.3.4 Both these measures ensure that any infestation is dealt with rather than displaced.
- 7.3.5 However, these are individual examples and are not replicated throughout the Council. Best practice would encompass "pest management" rather than simply "pest control" and this would entail working with a range of other departments to not only eradicate infestations, but prevent new ones occurring.

Conclusions:

6. *The work within some of the Districts and the use of Environmental Wardens is undoubtedly contributing to keeping rat populations down. However, this work is often dependent on the will and resources of the Districts.*
7. *The Review Group felt that mainstreaming some of this funding would*



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alleviate retention problems and facilitate the development of a dedicated and properly co-ordinated team.

8. *Environmental Wardens are currently not trained to recognise the signs of rat infestation. This can lead to unnecessary call-outs for Pest Control Officers.*
9. *The Pest Control Service works well with other Council departments. However, there is more scope for cross-departmental working to reduce the incidence of infestations. This could include work with departments on designing landscaping or with the Housing department in emptying void properties of food sources and treating for infestations.*

	Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R04	Training for Environmental Wardens should include elements of pest recognition to enable infestations to be identified correctly.	Public Protection Committee	September 2005
R05	Consideration should be given to employing more Environmental Wardens using mainstream funding. A report should be presented to the Transportation and Street Services O&S Committee.	Public Protection Committee	November 2005
R06	The Pest Control Service should identify areas across the Council where liaison with other departments would result in more effective pest management. An action plan to deal with key priorities should be developed with these departments.	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	December 2005

7.4 The Responsibility of Birmingham Residents

- 7.4.1 Given the conditions which rats favour, there is clearly a role to be played by the residents of Birmingham in keeping the number of rats down. This was a view shared by customers participating in the group discussion.
- 7.4.2 There are a number of ways in which the Council can support and encourage appropriate behaviour. One recurring theme throughout the review was the lack of awareness displayed by some members of the public of the consequences of rubbish being left out or food being discarded.

Conclusions:

10. *Public awareness of the consequences of inappropriately discarding food and rubbish needs to be raised in order to reduce the number of habitats suitable for rats. However, this is not an issue that would be resolved by any one campaign. Further consideration of this issue is essential.*



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7.5 Progress on Implementation

- 7.5.1 In order to keep the Committee informed of progress in implementing the recommendations within this report, it is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services reports back on progress on a regular basis.

Recommendation	Responsibility	Completion Date
R08	Cabinet Member for Transportation and Street Services	October 2005

Progress towards achieving these recommendations should be reported to the Transportation and Street Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee no later than its October 2005 meeting.

Subsequent reports on progress will be scheduled by the Committee on a regular basis thereafter until all are completed.



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Appendix 1 Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000

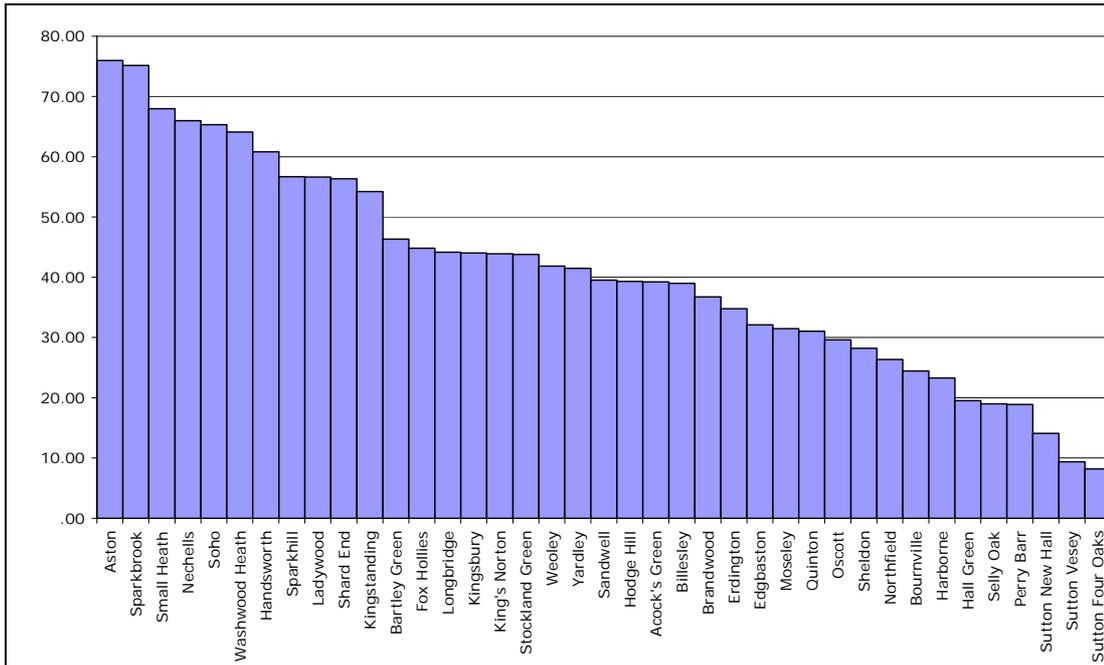


Fig. 8 Index of Multiple Deprivation Score (based on old ward boundaries)

Source: ODPM

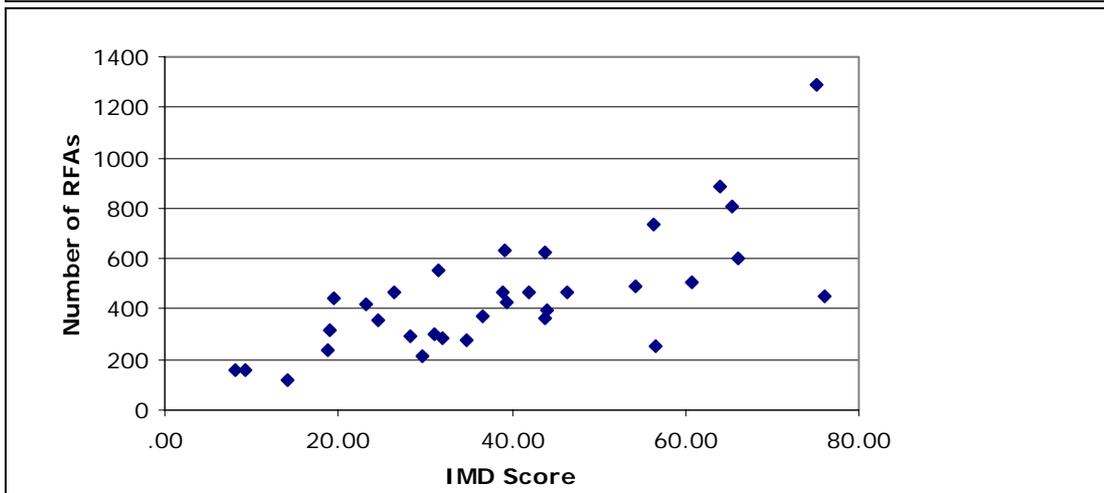


Fig. 9 Index of Multiple Deprivation Score and number of RFAs

Source: ODPM and Regulatory Services



Appendix 2 Birmingham City Council's Pest Control Service

A2.1 Public Health: Pest Control

- A2.1.1 The Pest Control Team is part of the City Council's Regulatory Services. Our Domestic Pest Control Service includes the provision of a FREE of charge treatment service for rats, cockroaches and bedbugs in occupied homes. Information is also provided on how and where FREE mouse poison can be obtained for residents to deal with any mice problems they may have in the home. Downloadable fact sheets are also provided on ants, bed bugs, booklice, carpet beetles, cockroaches, fleas, flies, foxes, mice, pigeons, rats, squirrels and wasps and we also provide an affordable chargeable service for treating Wasp Nests in domestic premises.
- A2.1.2 Our Commercial Pest Control Service includes a range of competitively priced commercial pest control treatments and clearance services for filthy or verminous materials.
- A2.1.3 Our Pest Control Service:
- is not for profit;
 - uses trained and qualified Pest Control Officers;
 - complies with health and safety and industry best practice standards;
 - carries appropriate public liability insurance;
 - is a member of the British Pest Control Association;
 - provides free advice;
 - includes a free pest identification service;
 - uses safe modern baits that are approved for use in the UK;
 - aims to visit within 5 working days or within 24 hours for rats inside occupied homes;
 - includes a customer feedback/complaints procedure if you are not entirely satisfied with the service.



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A2.2 Pest Control: Domestic Premises

- A2.2.1 We provide a FREE service to treat for rats, bed-bugs and cockroaches in occupied domestic properties.
- A2.2.2 We also supply mouse poison free of charge to any Birmingham residents to self-treat for any mice problems they may have. This is available free from the City Council's Neighbourhood Offices and Regulatory Services District Offices.
- A2.2.3 We provide an affordable CHARGEABLE service for the treatment of wasps in residential premises. See our page for details on the Wasp Nests service and charges.
- A2.2.4 We do not provide treatment for:
- Squirrels;
 - pigeons and other birds;
 - houseflies;
 - fleas and ants - however crawling insect powder is available for a small charge from Neighbourhood Offices and most hardware/DIY stores. Please remember to follow the instructions carefully and use pesticides safely;
 - foxes;
 - bees - which are a protected species. In most cases it is illegal to kill bees and the most appropriate method of control is the safe removal to a hive. The City Council does NOT provide this service and you should contact a local beekeeper via the British Beekeepers Association who may charge for their services. The City Council does not recommend or endorse any particular beekeeper or accept responsibility for services provided.

A2.3 Pest Control - standard conditions of service

- A2.3.1 We aim to make the first visit within five working days of a treatment service being requested.
- A2.3.2 For any treatment visits arranged, morning appointments are usually any time between 8am and 12noon, and afternoon appointments are usually any time between 12noon and 4.30pm. We operate weekdays Monday – Friday (except bank holidays), but we are currently unable to make weekend visits.
- A2.3.3 If we call, but there is no access we will leave a calling card with our contact details to advise that a visit was made.



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- A2.3.4 All charges made are in respect of treatments undertaken as specified. Payment does not afford a guarantee of complete eradication or protect against further re-infestation.
- A2.3.5 We reserve the right to decline the provision of a pest treatment service in situations where in our opinion we consider such a treatment would adversely affect public or environmental safety.
- A2.3.6 The treatments available and charges made are subject to change without notice.
- A2.3.7 We make every effort to fulfil bookings made. However events can sometimes prevent this. On the rare occasions when we are unable to keep an appointment, we will contact customers at the earliest possible opportunity and offer them the best alternative appointment available. If the missed appointment is caused by events beyond the Council's control, we cannot accept responsibility for any inconvenience or losses incurred.



Appendix 3 Information leaflet on rats

A3.1.1 Rats are a worldwide pest due to their capacity to cause structural damage, spread disease and to compete with humans for food.

Breeding Habits

A3.1.2 Rat populations can grow very quickly because they can breed throughout the year if they have abundant food and mild weather. A female rat can have 7 litters of 8 – 10 offspring in a year. Rats can live for up to 3 years, although in the wild the lifespan is about 18 months.

What do rats eat?

A3.1.3 Rats will eat almost any food source available including dog mess, their own droppings or each other. They must also drink, so a supply of water is needed.

What to look for?

A3.1.4 Rats can live both indoors and outdoors so evidence can usually be found:

- Droppings are the most easily identifiable evidence, usually dark in colour and about the size and shape of a sultana;
- Burrows - Naturally a burrowing animal, they can live in gardens by burrowing under sheds, into piles of rubbish and compost heaps. The burrow entrance will be 70 – 120 millimetres diameter;
- Smears can be found along surfaces where rats have been running. It is a grey/black build up of grease from their fur;
- Footprints may be found in mud, dust or flour;
- Damage to packets of food, electrical cables, gas and water pipes, woodwork and shredded paper for nesting maybe found. Rats must gnaw hard materials such as wood, plastic and soft metals to keep their front teeth short.

What can be done to control rats?

A3.1.5 The Pest Control Section provides a free treatment service for rats at occupied houses and gardens. The Council uses poison baiting as the method of treatment. Where poison is used, children or household pets must be prevented from access to the bait. Do not expect instant results. It can take 3 – 10 days for the rats to die after eating the poison.



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Prevention of rats

A3.1.6 To prevent re-infestation by rats and improve the effectiveness of any control by poisoning it is essential the following works are carried out:

- In houses it is essential that good hygiene and proofing be carried out;
- Hygiene – any areas where evidence of rats is found must be free from all food sources. This will involve thorough cleaning of food equipment such as cookers, fridges/freezers and microwaves to remove any food debris and spillages;
- Ensuring stored foods such as packet foods, fruit and vegetables are positioned where rats cannot feed on them and if necessary place them in air tight or metal containers to prevent access;
- Proofing – this is the technical term for blocking holes and gaps rats may use. Any holes or gaps must be blocked. For holes fill with wire wool and then hold in place with plaster or filler. For gaps under doors use brush/bristle strips which will also act as a draught excluder.

A3.1.7 In gardens it is essential that the following works be carried out:

- Remove food sources;
- Securely store rubbish;
- Bird feeding – only place bird food where only birds can reach, clean up any spillages and do not leave out overnight;
- Pets – if you keep or have garden pets such as rabbits and pigeons make sure that their food is stored securely and clean up any spillages;
- Clean up any dog mess;
- Remove water sources;
- Clear blocked drains;
- Repair leaking taps and overflows;
- Turn any containers that may collect water upside down;
- Prevent nesting;
- Do not let gardens become overgrown;
- Remove disused garden sheds and greenhouses;
- Remove piles of materials such as bricks, wood etc.