

# **CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2011**

**REPORT AUTHOR: Public Protection Manager**

**SUBJECT: The Future of the Council's Pest Control and Dog Warden Service**

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**REPORT FOR: Decision of Portfolio Holder for Housing, Public Protection and Community Safety**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Public Protection Service has been tasked with making revenue savings over a four year period in order to assist the Council in meeting its projected funding deficit of £16m. The Council's Pest Control and Dog Warden Service was identified in the Public Protection Service Strategy as one of the areas with the potential to offer efficiency savings.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement on the preferred option for the future of the Pest Control and Dog Warden Service in the light of a recently completed feasibility study.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 RH Environmental, an independent consultancy located in Wales and specialising in Environmental Health, was commissioned recently to consider and cost a range of options and to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each one. The options range from ceasing to provide any form of pest control service (a non-statutory function), in combination with an in-house or outsourced stray dog collection service (a statutory requirement), through to maintaining the status quo. A copy of their feasibility study is attached as **Annex A**.
- 2.2 Currently the Council provides a free service to householders for the eradication of pests such as rats, mice and cockroaches, which are associated with the spread of disease. This is supplemented by a chargeable service for 'nuisance' pests such as wasps. The latter create a seasonal peak in demand resulting in occasional difficulties in managing and maintaining an appointment based service. The Dog Warden service is provided by the same officers undertaking pest control visits. This work too can disrupt pest control appointments by virtue of an officer having to travel some considerable distance at short notice to collect a stray and deliver it to kennels.
- 2.3 The Council does not provide kennelling directly; instead it contracts out to private facilities based north and south. Work on the enforcement of dog fouling legislation through Local Environment is developing.

### **3. Options**

- 3.1 Unsurprisingly, the study concludes that the greatest cost saving (in the order of £128k per annum) would be realised by ending the provision of a pest control service and outsourcing the stray dog collection and kennelling service (option 4). However the disadvantages of withdrawing completely from providing a pest control service are significant. The whole ethos of the Public Protection Service is about safeguarding human health and well being. By discontinuing the part of the service that makes a significant contribution towards limiting the spread of pathogens such as Weil's disease, carried by rats, the risk of harm would increase to an unacceptable level.
- 3.2 At the other end of the range of options is the maintenance of the current arrangements. The study identifies though that in order for the revenue costs of the service to remain flat over the next few years, increases to fees at levels above the prevailing rate of inflation would have to be made in order to keep up with spiralling costs such as vehicles and fuel. This option is not viable at a time when the service has to reduce its revenue costs
- 3.3 Option 3 on the other hand considers the prospect of maintaining an in-house pest control service, albeit in a modified form, coupled with an outsourced dog warden arrangement. The attraction of this option is that not only does it produce a reasonable level of saving year on year (about £60k) but it also allows the pest control officers to concentrate solely on pests of public health significance, unfettered from the seasonal demands of treating nuisance insect pests and the unpredictable requirements of having to collect and deliver stray dogs at short notice. The proposal suggests a nominal charge of £15 per treatment to offset costs without acting as a deterrent. Levying a modest fee may also reduce the number of missed appointments by householders. The charge is well below the cost of using a private pest controller.
- 3.4 The majority of the saving would result from two of the four officers currently providing the service being redeployed or being made redundant. As a result of a need to restructure the Public Protection Management Team, one of the two service managers whose remit covers this service will also be redundant. These additional savings have been accounted for elsewhere in the Service Strategy. From the start of the feasibility study, affected staff along with HR and Unison representatives, have been kept informed of progress and been given opportunities to contribute to the process.
- 3.5 Option 3 relies on the dog collection and kennelling service being exposed to tender. An allowance has been made within the costing of option 3 for occasional external cover to be provided for the pest control service during extended holiday or sickness absence, in line with current arrangements. Enforcement of dog fouling legislation will continue to be provided by the retained staff until changes are introduced through the Local Environment Initiative.

#### **4. Proposal**

- 4.1 Option 3 enables the service to focus solely on the eradication of pests which pose a threat to public health. It provides the opportunity of enhancing the service to the public by offering an appointment based system uninterrupted by other demands and it also allows the prospect of extending the service to cover council buildings and some commercial premises, subject to demand. It provides a saving to Public Protection calculated to be in the order of £60,000 per annum. Efficiencies gained through the use of the Contact Centre and outsourcing the dog warden service will allow an additional saving in management costs in the order of £50,000.
- 4.2 The study has considered the availability of private contractors willing to provide a stray dog collection and kennelling service and has concluded that there are sufficient within the vicinity to suggest that outsourcing will be a viable option.
- 4.3 It is recommended that option 3 is considered to be the preferred choice.

<b>Recommendation:</b>	<b>Reason for Recommendation:</b>
<b>It is recommended that option 3 of the feasibility study attached as Annex A to this report and outlined at paragraph 3.3 above be implemented within six months of the date of this report, subject to the receipt of acceptable tenders for the stray dog collection and kennelling service.</b>	<b>To reduce the cost of the Council's Pest Control and Dog Warden Service and improve its efficiency and effectiveness.</b>

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<b>Relevant Portfolio Member(s):</b>	<b>Councillor R G Brown</b>
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<b>Relevant Local Member(s):</b>	<b>N/a</b>
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