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**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR PLACE**

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To Scrutiny Panel  
ON 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020

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TITLE: Pest Control - Rat Population in Salford

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RECOMMENDATION: That the Scrutiny Panel note the actions already taken to control the rat population in the City.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny Panel following concerns raised that the Authority is being experiencing an increase in the rat population. The report provides details of: -

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- the number of treatments undertaken in each ward in 2020 in comparison to 2019,
  - the systems in place to respond to rats in public areas,
  - the work undertaken with social landlords throughout Salford
  - the sewer baiting programme undertaken for United Utilities
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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

1. Future of the Pest Control / Dog Warden Service and proposed charging arrangements report to Cabinet on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2018
2. Review of Pest Control Charges report to the Strategic Director November 2015

KEY DECISION: No

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1.0 Background:

Scrutiny Panel will be aware of concerns raised by some members that the rat population in Salford is perceived to be increasing.

Reports using our current reporting systems indicate that intelligence, requests and complaints received from various sources to the Pest Control Service do not indicate any significant changes in rodent activity either by location, month or year after reviewing reports from the last 2 years

## 2.0 Information

Whilst not requiring the Local Authority to have its own pest control service, the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 imposes a duty on local authorities to maintain its own land free of rats and mice and inspect the Local Authority area from time to time for the same purpose. In addition, it empowers local authorities to serve a notice on owners or occupiers of land infested by rats or mice requiring them to fulfil the occupier's duty to eradicate the rodent infestation.

The Act requires the Local Authority to take such steps as may be necessary to secure so far as practicable that their district is kept free from rats and mice. The in-house pest control service has largely fulfilled this requirement and is an effective means of controlling the rodent population within the City. Without it, there will be many more circumstances where the Authority would need to address concerns raised by residents at a higher cost to the Authority by taking enforcement action against these residents.

The pest control service has evolved following reports to the Strategic Director in November 2015 and a report to Cabinet in October 2018 that introduced a call out charge for all pest control treatments and the merger of the pest control and dog warden service to increase the capacity within the service to deal with seasonal demand. In addition, in May 2020 we introduced for residents the ability to report online, rodents in a public place, where there is no requirement for a fee for us to investigate a rat issue in their neighbourhood under the Prevention of Damage by Pest Act.

## 3.0 Detail:

### 3.1 Treatment Programme

Our treatments are predominantly booked [online via our website](#) on to Zipporah and they do not indicate a significant difference in reports by year or ward between 2019 and 2020 with a total for all wards of 863 treatments in 2019 and 866 in 2020 (to November). The statistics indicate an increase in 15 wards and a decrease in 5 wards.

Given the fact that there are several weeks remaining until the end of the calendar year, experience would indicate that although the overall number of treatments carried out will be higher than in 2019, the level of the increase will be within the historical level of variation year to year.

Experience shows that annual fluctuations in the number of reports of rats of up to 15% are not unusual, driven by a range of issues that influence the number of reports, including temperature, rainfall or on a more localised level, the impacts of major developments or civil engineering projects.

However, these reassuring figures at the citywide level do mask some more significant changes at the ward level, with some wards seeing reductions of around one third in reports but with a small number of wards showing a significant increase in reporting in both percentage and absolute terms.

This shift in the reporting pattern appears to be consistent with the findings of academic research into the impacts of the pandemic on rat populations, as discussed later in this report.

The wards with significant increases in reporting of rats are Eccles, Winton and Boothstown and Ellenbrook. Officers have reviewed the service demands in those areas and the treatments undertaken and can confirm there are no underlying causes for the increases in these wards other than the usual variance seen historically. There was also an alleged spike of notifications to ward councillors earlier in 2020 around the Morrison's superstore in Eccles. A review of this was undertaken and it was confirmed this was down to a small piece of wasteland near to the For-Housing office where a few active burrows were found, and these were successfully treated in partnership with For-Housing.

Officers have also contacted colleagues across other Greater Manchester authorities and no authority has indicated any significant change in their rat populations either, with all authorities, (except for Bolton MBC) charging for rodent treatments.

Reports of treatments requested by the commercial sector, including Social Landlords (as detailed in background document 5) showed not significant change with 204 rats reported in 2019 and 214 in 2020.

### 3.2 Fees and Charges

This issue was discussed and detailed in the previous reports and there has been no significant increase in the charge for rodents with a call out charge kept at the June 2019 charge of £45 as agreed with the Strategic Director. This fee is significantly less than the cost of that treatment to the Authority (approximately £100) and less than commercial charges in this sector.

### 3.3 Sewer Baiting Programme

United Utilities own most of the sewer network in Salford and pay £15,000 per annum to the service to undertake. This equates to the service lifting and if necessary, treating approximately 1500 manholes per year. The team utilise the Pests in a Public Place and other potential hot spots from commercial and domestic treatments to inform the sewers the service treats. Intelligence from our pest control operatives and officers within the Highways Team within Place Directorate have not reported any noticeable activity within the sewer network within the previous two years.

The contract with United Utilities has been in place for several years and its value has not increased during that time. The impact of the reduction of the real term value of the contract due to inflation has been managed by reducing the number of manholes examined and bated each year.

In order to maintain the effectiveness of the programme and to protect the council's financial position officers will approach colleagues at United Utilities to seek a review of the contract early in 2021.

### 3.4 External Research in to perceived increases in rodent populations

In order to control the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the UK government announced the first lockdown in March 2020. Regulatory services have been advised that there have been increased sightings of rats during the period from March until October this year.

It has been established that populations of rats increase after natural catastrophes, and this could be the same with the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>

Reporting in Salford City region may be in part due to the closure of business premises, including catering outlets, the lack of footfall on the street leading to less litter and less food being readily available. This in conjunction with more people being at home, so more attuned to what is happening in their locality. A study undertaken in July this year, found that the number of people reporting rats; had increased since the start of the pandemic <sup>2</sup>

Michael H. Parsons, a visiting research scholar at Fordham University, stated in the New York Times that “rats usually don’t travel far for food and water. This minimises the risk of them being seen by people and predators”<sup>3</sup>

Jim Fredericks, the chief entomologist for the National Pest Management Association further stated that “more rats are venturing out during daytime hours and entering homes that had not previously seen rodent activity”. Dr Fredericks continued “there is no evidence that rats can be infected with Covid-19 or that they can spread it to humans; still they are a public health risk”<sup>3</sup>.

Discussing the increased sightings of rats, Charlie Lee, a wildlife management specialist at Kansas State University, stated that “it’s probably that people are spending more time in locations that they haven’t spent that length of time in previously, and it gives them a greater opportunity to observe rats in those locations.”<sup>2</sup>

In May of this year the City Council launched a Rats in Public Places App where members of the public could report rats they saw in their community. The number of reports averages 2 per day. The intelligence from this APP is used to form the baiting programme for the public sewer system. The money to undertake this work is funded by United Utilities. It should be noted however that the pest control team, and the highways section of the City Council has not seen an increase in rat activity within the public sewer system.

The key points to note from the review of articles, and the comparison of data for the last two years identifies the following:

- Research is ongoing and incomplete;
- this phenomenon is worldwide;
- research with pest control companies, shows that the overall number of complaints stay’s roughly the same, however 30/40% of calls are from first time customers.

- the changes witnessed in rat behaviour, where they are moving into areas not previously seen, is in order to seek food.
- changes in human behaviour – leading to less food waste being readily available, especially from food businesses, people spending more time at home and able to observe rats.
- there is no evidence that rats carry Covid 19.
- there is increased aggression reported, but it appears to be rat on rat, there is no evidence of increased aggression towards humans

**1.Rats and the COVID-19 pandemic: Early data on the global emergence of rats in response to social distancing**

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.07.05.20146779v1> [7th July 2020]

**2.Rats on the Rise: Reports of Rodents Have Increased During Pandemic:**  
<https://www.drovers.com/article/rats-rise-reports-rodents-have-increased-during-pandemic> [31st August 2020]

**3.C.D.C. Warns of ‘Aggressive’ Rats Searching for Food During Shutdowns:**  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/24/us/cdc-coronavirus-rats.html> [24th May 2020]

**Conclusion**

Before the introduction of charges for rodent treatments there was a fluctuation of rat numbers from year to year across the City. Therefore, although it is acknowledged there has been a small change in rodent complaints within certain wards there is empirical evidence to support the assumption that the rodent population has significantly increased in Salford and as indicated in the research any increases may be solely due to a raised awareness by residents and changes in behaviour resulting from the current pandemic. It is therefore recommended that no further changes to the existing service are recommended.

KEY COUNCIL POLICIES: Health

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS: None  
 ASSESSMENT OF RISK: N/A

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS: None

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: None

PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS: None

HR IMPLICATIONS:  
 None

OTHER DIRECTORATES CONSULTED: None

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WARDS TO WHICH REPORT RELATES: All