



Report on charging for pest management services

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Respondents to the pest management survey were asked detailed questions about the funding of the service and the charges they levied for pest management treatments.

Twelve percent (n = 28) of respondents (total n = 242) reported that their service was fully supported by local authority funding. The remaining 88% were either fully or partly underwritten by charged-for pest control activities. Table 1 (overleaf) highlights the approaches to charging for pest management services for a range of urban pests. These results suggest that there is little uniformity in approaches to charging.

Table 1: Charging for pest management treatments					
	Free	Charged	Both	Neither	Total
RATS					
Private Dwellings	76%	22%	2%	<1%	229
Council Dwellings	74%	23%	2%	1%	204
Other Council Properties	10%	87%	1%	3%	217
Commercial Food	2%	94%	-	5%	187
Commercial Non-Food	1%	98%	-	1%	212
MICE					
Private Dwellings	53%	44%	3%	1%	229
Council Dwellings	55%	40%	3%	2%	204
Other Council Properties	7%	89%	-	4%	217
Commercial Food	1%	94%	-	5%	187
Commercial Non-Food	1%	99%	-	1%	212
BIRDS					
Private Dwellings	5%	26%	1%	68%	229
Council Dwellings	6%	28%	1%	65%	204
Other Council Properties	2%	35%	1%	63%	217
Commercial Food	1%	40%	1%	59%	184
Commercial Non-Food	1%	37%	1%	62%	212
WASPS					
Private Dwellings	5%	88%	3%	4%	229
Council Dwellings	10%	83%	3%	4%	204
Other Council Properties	2%	92%	-	6%	217
Commercial Food	1%	97%	-	3%	188
Commercial Non-Food	-	98%	-	2%	212
COCKROACHES					
Private Dwellings	42%	53%	2%	3%	229
Council Dwellings	43%	50%	2%	5%	204
Other Council Properties	5%	85%	-	10%	217
Commercial Food	1%	91%	-	8%	187
Commercial Non-Food	1%	94%	-	6%	212
BEDBUGS					
Private Dwellings	43%	52%	2%	3%	229
Council Dwellings	45%	48%	3%	4%	204
Other Council Properties	7%	77%	-	17%	217
Commercial Food	1	86%	-	13%	187
Commercial Non-Food	1%	88%	-	11%	212
DERMESTIDS					
Private Dwellings	9%	44%	1%	46%	227
Council Dwellings	13%	37%	1%	50%	204
Other Council Properties	3%	49%	-	48%	217
Commercial Food Properties	1%	55%	-	45%	187
Commercial Non-Food	-	56%	-	44%	210

Further analyses of those authorities which stated that they had services fully supported by LA funding vs those with services fully/partially underwritten by charged for pest control activities (see Table 2) was undertaken. There were no obvious characteristics which appeared to influence whether particular authorities had decided to fully support in-house provision.

Characteristic	N	χ^2	df	P
LA Type (London Borough, District Council, Metropolitan district, Unitary Council)	241	.772	3	NS
Rural/urban/both	239	.46	2	NS
CIEH centre	242	12.74	13	NS
Stand alone/part of another service	221	.516	1	NS

The issue of charging within the 28 authorities which had confirmed that they were fully supported by LA funding was examined in the context of private dwellings and results are presented in Table 3. Eight of the 28 authorities (nos. 13, 14, 16, 17, 24, 25, 26 and 27) had their pest management services either fully or partially contracted out. Only 7 (nos. 4, 5, 8, 9, 18, 19 and 23) authorities of the LAs appeared to offer a comprehensive free service for all the pests they treated.

These twenty-eight authorities, which may have been considered to provide a simpler model on approaches to charging, underline the complexities involved and suggest that authorities may interpret differently what they mean by 'charging'.

Table 3: Authorities where services were fully supported from LA funds – charging patterns in domestic premises																												
Pest	Authority																											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Rats	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	NA	NA	F	NA	NA	F	F	F	F	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	F
Mice	F	F	F	F	F	F	C	F	F	F	F	F	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	F	F	F	C	F	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	F
Birds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	F	-	F	F	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Wasps	C	-	C	-	F	C	F	F	F	C	C	C	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	F	-	C	C	C	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	C
Flies	C	-	C	-	F	-	-	F	F	-	F	C	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	-	-	C	C	-	-	NA	NA	NA	NA	C
Roaches	F	-	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	F	F	C	C	F	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	C
G ants	C	-	C	-	-	-	-	-	F	C	C	-	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	-	-	-	C	-	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	C
E ants	C	-	C	F	-	-	-	F	F	C	-	-	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	-	F	C	-	-	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Fleas	C	F	C	F	F	F	C	F	F	C	F	C	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	F	F	C	C	F	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	F
Bedbugs	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	F	F	C	C	F	F	NA	NA	NA	NA	F
Lice	C	F	F	F	F	-	-	-	F	-	F	C	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Dermeestids	C	-	C	F	-	-	-	F	F	-	F	C	NA	NA	C	NA	NA	-	-	-	-	-	-	NA	NA	NA	NA	-
Key:	C = Charged; F = Free; - = Neither Free nor charged ticked. NA = Not applicable – service partially/fully contracted out																											

Case study interview summary

Ten Local Authorities were interviewed as part of the survey to obtain more detailed, qualitative information about local authorities approaches to charging. The authorities were selected on a random basis and either interviewed face to face or over the telephone. A copy of the interview format can be seen at the end of this report. Table 4 gives a brief overview of the findings from the interviews.

Table 4: Summary information from the 10 case studies										
Authority	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Type	Met	Met	City	Met	Met	Met	Boro	Dist	Dist	City
Political party	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Lab	Con	Cons	None	None
Service run in-house (IH) partly contracted (PC)	IH	IH	IH	IH	IH	IH	IH	PC	PC	IH
Date nuisance charges introduced	10yrs ago	Early 90's	1996	5 yrs ago	July 1997	Pre 1957	2000	Aug 2003	2000	60's
Charges extended to include more pests	Yes	Yes	No (all charged)	No	No	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
Charging reduced take up of service	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Service fully supported by LA (FS) partly underwritten by charges (PU)	PU	FS	PU	FS	FS	FS	PU	PU	-	PU
Monies returned to pest control budget	Yes	No	No	No	-	No	Yes	No	No	No
Charges reduced/waived if in receipt of benefits	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Pest control should be a statutory function	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Introduction of charging

The dates that charges were introduced varied greatly between authorities. In most cases commercial contracts and some nuisance pests had been charged for historically although many had expanded charges to include public health pests within the last five years.

Seven of the ten authorities reported a decline in take up of some element of the service since the introduction of charges. The extent of the decline seemed to be related to the scale of the increase in the charge and it was felt that a small 'token' charge would have less of an impact. Some authorities are monitoring the affect that charging has had on service requests and it is hoped that this data will be compiled at a future date.

The main trigger for the introduction of charges for the pest control service was funding cuts from central government. Local authorities had to review services and find ways of making savings. It appears that pest control departments were seen to be a way of bringing in much needed income for Local authorities. Some authorities were in such financial difficulty that they felt if charging was not introduced that their department would no longer be able to justify its existence and would probably have been closed.

Only a small proportion of authorities received the monies collected from charging as part of their budget, although some felt that there were indirect benefits as managers were more likely to release funds for resources if the department had met its targets. Many wanted funds to be ring-fenced as this would improve motivation of operators and all involved in the department.

Setting charges

The overriding factor considered when charging levels were set was the amount of revenue required to run the service, to account for overheads and staff

salaries. It was also felt important, for the most part, to set charges at competitive but affordable levels so that they would be accessible to all sectors of the communities and not exclude those most in need. The type of pest was also considered and it was felt necessary in most authorities to keep the services for public health pests free or as low as possible. Comparing prices with other local authorities and the private sector set the final level of charging for services.

Charging levels and their application varied greatly between authorities. Commercial contracts were either charged per hour, at differing rates, or were set depending on the type of pest or the client. Some authorities considered council properties to be no different to domestic properties or they charged the housing department, again at variable rates. Approaches to private rented properties also differed in that in some cases the landlord was billed or in others the tenant. Greatest variation operated in the domestic sector where prices ranged from free, to a token charge of around £12 (mainly for public health pests) up to £40. A small proportion of authorities did take into consideration whether the client was in receipt of benefits, in which case the fee was waived. It appeared that at one time many authorities considered benefits but found that the system was unworkable and had subsequently eliminated that element or at least reduced the number of benefits considered.

Most felt that funding for the service should come from part charging and part tax although it was strongly agreed that treatments for rats and mice should remain free of charge and as such be centrally funded. This would also facilitate block treatments.

The case study interviews confirmed no consistency in the mechanisms or application of charges and revealed a highly complex system. All agreed that national guidelines were needed regarding charging levels to ensure consistency in the policies and approaches to pest management across the country.

Public vs nuisance pests

Decisions as to which pests were charged for were mainly made on the basis of whether the pest represented a public health risk. Public health pests for the main part remained free of charge. There was however some debate over which pests were considered to be a nuisance and which posed a public health risk. As a consequence those pests which were charged for vary greatly. In one case pressure from EHO's in the department resulted in the free treatment of significant public health pests.

Perceived benefits of charging

It was felt that charging had reduced abuse of the system through missed appointments and false/unnecessary complaints. As a result most were in favour of a token charge, at least for the nuisance pests. Waiting times for calls had also significantly reduced and many clients were more willing to carry out their own treatments, particularly for wasps, or 'put up with' the pest. Some raised the issue of anticoagulant resistance in mice as increasing if self treatments persisted.

Conclusions

All those interviewed believed that pest control should be a statutory function to improve enforcement powers, secure funding and to reinforce the importance of pest control as a department and as a discipline.

In the future most wanted treatments for rats and mice to be free of charge but a token charge introduced for nuisance pests. Some felt strongly that the domestic side of pest control should be separate from the commercial side and that it should remain within the remit of environmental health. The primary aim of a pest control department is to protect public health not to make a profit or to be run as a business.