



**Report of the Chief Environmental Health Officer
Scrutiny Board (Environment & Neighbourhoods)**

Date: 21st November 2007

Subject: Rodent Control in Leeds

Electoral Wards Affected: All

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides information for Members on the incidence of rodents in Leeds, the Council's obligations under the prevention of Damage by Pests Act, the structure and performance of the Pest Control Service and the further opportunities to develop the service and improve service standards.

2. Background

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 The principal legislative requirements of Local Authorities in relation to pest control are to:
- Destroy rats and mice on land occupied by a Local Authority and to keep such land free from rats and mice as far as reasonably practicable.
 - Enforce the duties of owners and occupiers of land to rid their land of potential hazards which cause pest problems.
- 2.3 To meet this duty, the Council provides a district-wide reactive pest control service to survey and treat for rodents, insects and other pests. It is a well established service and is usually the first port of call for residents experiencing problems with pests.
- 2.4 A range of other services provided by the Council also support the control of rodents. These include street cleansing services, refuse collection, control of litter from fast food premises, fly tipping, returning derelict and empty properties back into use and the control of defective drains and sewers.

These services and activities all assist in reducing the numbers of rodents, particularly the rat population, by removing sources of food and harborage for the pests.

3 Rats and Mice in Leeds

- 3.1 It is impossible to put a figure on the number of rats and mice in Leeds as the population changes rapidly and is extremely difficult to monitor. However, comparative data is available both nationally and locally which demonstrates changes in the rat population in terms of increases / decreases and hotspot areas.
- 3.2 The main source of such information is the trend in requests for pest control services made by residents. This source is clearly not an absolute measure as the numbers reported are affected by residents who tolerate pest problems, treat the pests themselves or choose to use private contractors. This information is supplemented by local surveys undertaken by Environmental Health staff when hot-spots of pest activity become apparent. Data is also obtained from Yorkshire Water who undertake treatments for rats in sewers.
- 3.3 Whilst the number and location of requests for pest control services is not an exact science, it provides a good indication of rodent activity in the city.
- 3.4 Table no1 below details the number of requests for service made to the Leeds pest control service for rats and mice over the last 5 years.

Table 1					
Requests for service Rats and Mice in Leeds 2003 to date showing the year on year change and percentage change from 2003					
Number of requests for service	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 to Oct
RATS	2443	1875	4723	3753	2785 4774*
Change from 2003	-	-24%	+93%	+53%	+95% *
Change, yr on yr	-	-24%	+151%	-20%	+27% *
MICE	463	424	784	447	248 425*
Change from 2003	-	-8.4%	+69%	-3.4%	-8.3% *
Change, yr on yr	-	-8.4%	+84%	-57%	-5% *

* Full year estimates

4. The National picture

- 4.1 The annual National Rodent Survey conducted by the National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA) is the best source of data on national trends in rodent populations. This data also relies on collating requests for service received by participating local authorities. The survey has been undertaken in the same format for a number of years so is a good indication of the national trend over time.
- 4.2 Table no2 shows the latest available data for the year on year increase in requests for service for the common brown rat and house mice from 1998/9 to 2005/6.

Table 2							
NPTA National data Common Brown Rat							
1998 to 2005 year on year increase 39.%							
% Increase	98/99	99/200	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06
RATS	18%	24%	29%	32%	34%	26%	32%
NPTA National data House Mouse							
1998 to 2005 year on year increase 12.5%							
% Increase	98/99	99/200	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06
RATS	-2%	-7%	-7.5 %	-8.5%	-8.5%	-1.5%	12.5%

- 4.3 The sighting of the common brown rat has increased year on year except for a reduction in the trend during 2004/5, whereas the house mouse numbers fell from 1998/9 to 2003/4 but has shown a substantial increase to 12.5 % between then and 2005/6.
- 4.4 The NPTA also provide regional statistics. The Yorkshire region year on year increase at 2005/6 being 6% for the brown rat and 10% for the house mouse. This compares favourably with the national average of 13% for the brown rat and 14% for house mice. The highest levels of increase for 2005/6 were reported at 39% for brown rats in Northern Ireland and 29% for the house mice in the South East.

5. Problems associated with Rats and Mice

- 5.1 Problems with rats and mice in the environment can be divided into two main areas: the health risks and the economic costs in terms of damage caused to property and goods.
- 5.2 The main health risk posed to humans is from parasites and pathogens carried by rats and mice on their bodies and excreted in faeces and urine; the most common pathogens being Salmonella and Leptospira species. The incidence of Salmonella species in humans is more commonly associated with poor food hygiene practices than a direct connection to rodents. Leptospira (an organism that causes Weils Disease) is however, directly associated with rats, in Leeds one case has been reported over the summer this year, previous to this the last reported case of this infection in was in 2003.
- 5.3 In addition, the presence of rats and mice in close proximity or in the home, can exacerbate stress and allergies and of course there is also the risk of the direct contamination of food stuffs.
- 5.4 Economic damage includes the costs associated with spoilage or loss of food stuff, damage to buildings by burrowing or gnawing of electric, gas and water pipes etc. Other costs include lost productivity from people being forced to take time off sick, the cost of treatment / drugs and of course the costs associated with treating the rats and mice either by the Council, home owners or the private companies which are affected.

6. The Pest Control Service in Leeds

- 6.1 The Pest Control Service is provided through the following:
 - Pest Control Manager
 - Senior Technician
 - 3 Technicians
 - 2¹/₂ Admin officers
 - An external contractor (working in partnership with the Council to undertake the bulk of the reactive work on domestic premises).
 - Customer Services Officers at the Corporate Contact Centre who answer incoming calls and give advice.
- 6.2 The service serves a wide and established customer base including businesses, institutions e.g. Leeds University, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, other council departments, the ALMOs and of course the general public. These services comprise of:-
 - Undertaking re-active pest control treatments and associated works on request from the general public, businesses and other Council bodies in partnership with Rentokil Pest Control.

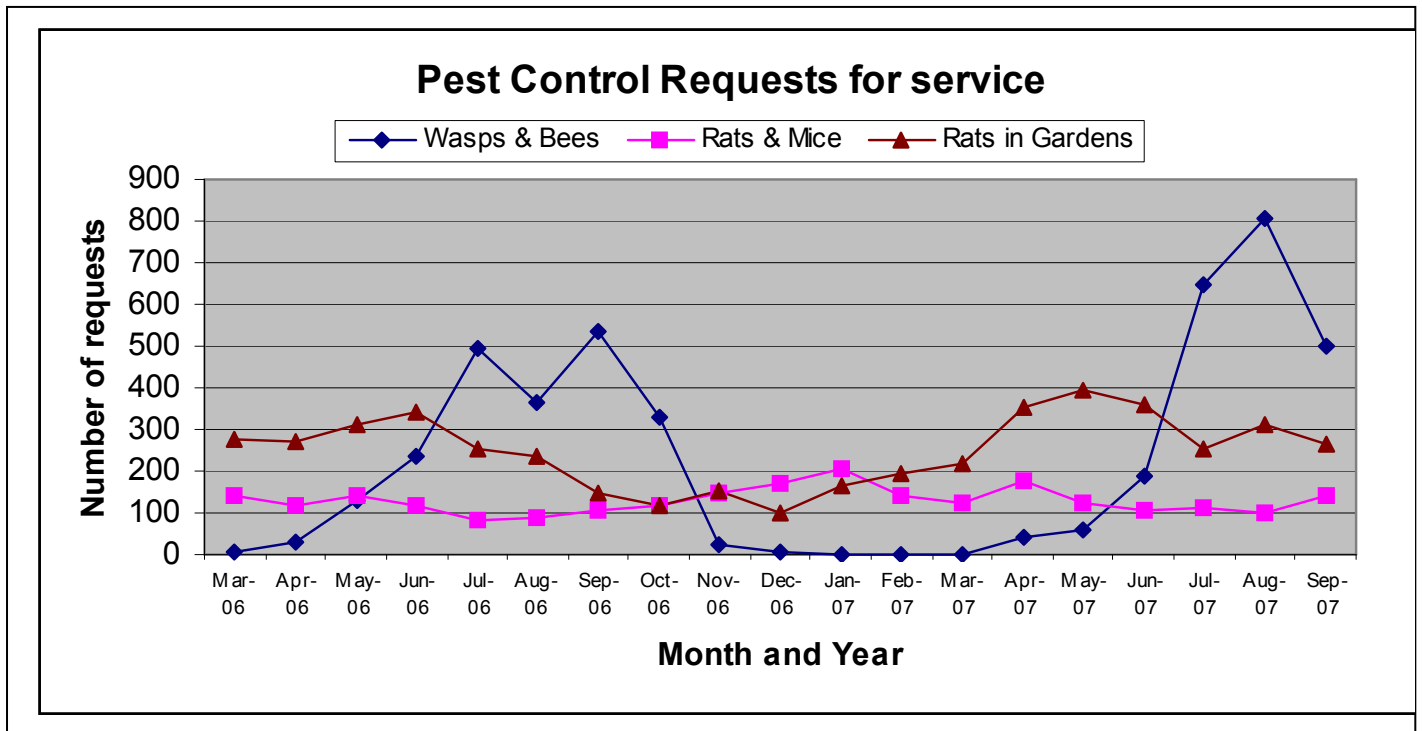
- Entering into contracts with businesses and other Council departments to provide programmed pest prevention services.
- Provision of a consultative service within environmental health and to other council departments e.g. expert advice and joint visits with food safety team and general advice to members of the public around insect identification, “self help” treatments and other issues.
- Provision of the dedicated “Silver phone number” manned by corporate contact centre staff who process requests for service and provide general advice on the treatment of pests where customers do not wish to use our services for which we make a charge.
- Provision of a website and contact point (pests@leeds.gov.uk) which provides access for customer service, advice and information on pest identification and DIY treatment of pests.

6.3 The Councils current charging policy includes the provision of a number of free services to the residents of Leeds. These are a free service for rats in or at residential premises, a free service for wasps’ nests to the elderly in receipt of Pensioner’s Credit and free consultancy / insect identification for all service users. A charge is made for all other services with some exceptions around where area treatments for extensive infestations where it is not always possible to establish any one person as being responsible.

6.4 **Table 3** below details the current charges which have been set for 2007/8

PEST	RESIDENTIAL
Rats (Owner occupier)	Free
Rats (Landlord of rented property)	£75.00 (£63.83 + VAT)
Mice	£75.00 (£63.83 + VAT)
Insects general (fleas, cockroaches, bedbugs, pharaohs ants)	£100.00 (£85.11 + VAT)
Insects other (flies, ants, silverfish, woodlice etc)	£50.00 (£42.55 + VAT)
Wasps	£50. 00 (£42.55 + VAT)
(OAP pensioners credit)	Free
Squirrels	£100. 00 (£85.11 + VAT)
	*All prices are for full treatment

- 6.5 Following an extensive review of the pest control service, changes have been implemented over the last two years to provide a more efficient and responsive service. These changes have included:-
- The extension of working hours to include some services early evenings and every Saturday morning.
 - The introduction of an appointments system for visits, to allow treatments to take place at the customer's convenience.
 - The installation and use of an IT system to log, monitor and track requests for service.
 - the use of the corporate call centre to provide a front of office resource to give practical advice and log requests for service.
 - The use of electronic up-front payment for chargeable services reducing dramatically the cost of invoicing and payment collection.
 - Following a competitive tendering process, a partnership arrangement with Rentokil has been established to provide the reactive domestic pest control service for Leeds
 - The provision of minor pest proofing services for customers when Rentokil technicians are on site.
- 6.6 To ensure that Rentokil have a significant financial interest in particular in reducing the overall rat population in Leeds (and therefore the number of request for service to treat rats).The contractual arrangements require that Rentokil do not to charge the Council for the treatment of rats on or at domestic premises. Rentokil's fee is based on a positive percentage of the income received from chargeable domestic pest control work only (see table 3), which is undertaken by them as part of the contract.
- 6.7 Rentokil were awarded the contract at the beginning of June 2007. Seven dedicated staff are employed to service the contract including three technicians who were transferred to the company as part of the TUPE contractual arrangements. These staff have been supplemented further by Rentokil over the busy months of August and September.
- 6.8 As with most new contracts, there have been teething problems. In this case, these have mainly stemmed from IT system issues which are relied upon for adequate reporting and monitoring arrangements both by the Council and the contractor. There are still a number of improvements and changes to be implemented over the coming months. The problems have unfortunately been compounded by the high level of demand for the service at the time the contract commenced, with wasp treatments being exceptionally high during the late summer. The graph below illustrates the requests for service received between March 06 and September 07 for comparison.



6.9 Regular meetings are held with the contractor to discuss problems, performance and opportunities to improve the service. Continual monitoring of the service and ongoing customer satisfaction information is being gathered and assessed to judge performance.

7. Service Performance Data

7.1 The provision of the Caps Uniform IT system (although not yet fully developed) has enabled the measurement of a range of performance data, the key measurements being :-

- 1) The time taken from the customer calling the contact centre to an appointment to visit being made (target 1 working day)
- 2) The time taken from contacting the customer to the first treatment (target 5 working days)
- 3) The time taken for completing the treatment (varies due to type of pest but for rats and mice its 90% in 15 working days)
- 4) The time taken following completion of the treatment for it be closed out on the computer system (target 5 working days).

7.2 Due to difficulties mentioned earlier, it has not been possible to track all the above key measurements for the first quarter of the contract. Procedures are however now in place and this information will be available for all the requests for service from October.

7.3 Data from the commencement of the contract is however available to show the time taken by Rentokil from start of treatment to finish, where the treatments have now been completed and the database updated. Table 4

below details all pest control treatments which have been completed and closed out on the computer system. This shows LCC performance from January to April 2007 prior to the contract being let and Rentokil's performance from June to September 2007

Table 4			
All pest treatments completed and closed out.			
LCC performance 1st January 2007 to April 30th 2007			
	Total requests for service	Total completed	
		No.	%
Jan	431	430	99%
Feb	469	390	83%
Mar	559	399	71%
April	720	677	94%
All pest treatments completed and closed out.			
Rentokil's performance 1st June 2007 to 30th September 2007			
	Total requests for service	Total completed	
		No.	%
June	707	692	98%
July	1152	1131	98%
August	1282	1059	83%
September	908	647	71%

The data shows that a number of requests for service have not yet been closed down. This can be explained by the treatment being ongoing, but it is more likely that the database has not been updated fully to close-out. Because of the process currently in place Rentokil are only able to up date the data base on completion of the treatments. Work is ongoing to resolve this and Rentokil technicians will be receiving PDA's to record information from November onwards this should enable data to be input prior to completion of the treatment.

7.4 Tables 5 and 6 below show the time in working days from start to finish of the treatment, for requests for service which have been fully closed-out.

Table 5
Completion times for Rats and Mice
LCC performance 1st January 2007 to April 30th 2007

	Total	Total completed		Time to complete			
		No.	%	1 to 15 wkg days		1 to 25 wkg days	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Jan	390	389	99%	95	24%	294	75%
Feb	351	337	69%	47	13%	290	83%
Mar	345	328	95%	46	13%	282	82%
April	566	540	95%	112	20%	428	76%

Completion times for Rats and Mice
Rentokil's performance 1st June 2007 to 30th September 2007

	Total	Total completed		Time to complete			
		No.	%	1 to 15 wkg days		1 to 25 wkg days	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
June	457	442	97%	175	40%	248	56%
July	365	348	95%	70	20%	93	27%
August	419	233	56%	105	45%	149	64%
September	377	148	39%	118	80%	132	89%

Table 6
Completion times for pests other than rats & mice
LCC performance 1st January 2007 to April 30th 2007

	Total	Total completed		Time to complete 1 to 5 working days	
		No.	%age	No.	%age
Jan	41	41	100%	10	24%
Feb	118	53	45%	14	12%
Mar	214	71	33%	28	13%
April	154	137	89%	84	55%

Completion times for pests other than rats & mice
Rentokil's performance 1st June 2007 to 30th September 2007

	Total	Total completed		Time to complete 1 to 5 working days	
		No.	%age	No.	%age
June	250	250	100%	202	81%
July	787	783	99%	681	87%
August	863	823	95%	752	91%
September	531	499	94%	451	90%

7.4 The percentage of requests for service completed by Rentokil within the key performance targets of 5, 15 and 25 working days has increased over the 3 months of the contract (from 81% to 90%, 40% to 80% and 56% to 89% respectively). The percentage of requests for service completed and logged on the computer data base on which these figures are based for these early months of the contract is 87%.

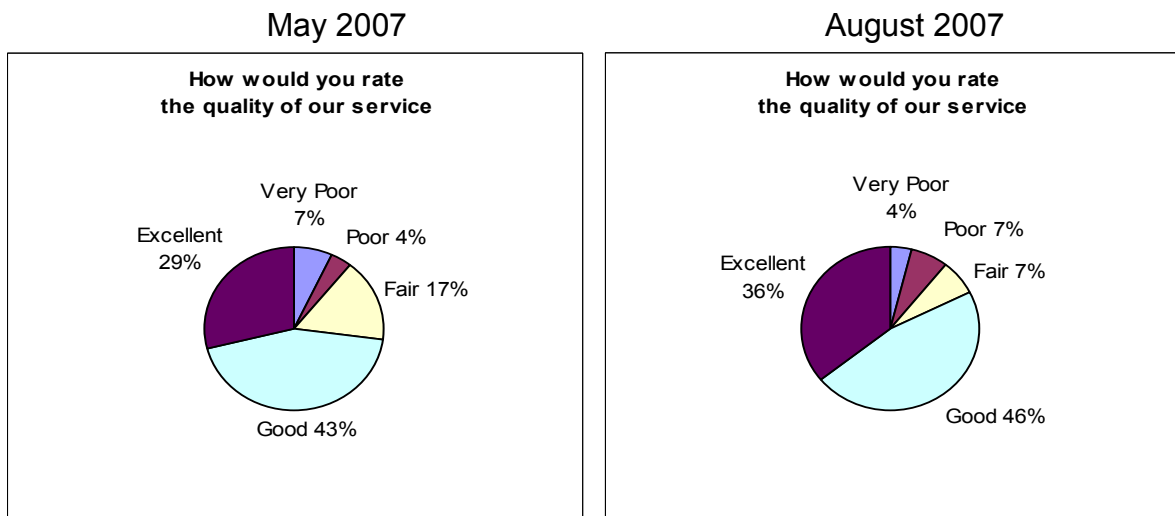
7.5 Rentokil have made a commitment to ensure that the computer data base is updated as soon as possible after the treatment works have been completed. Their processes have been reviewed, systems changed to accommodate this, and the new key performance measures in 7.1 above

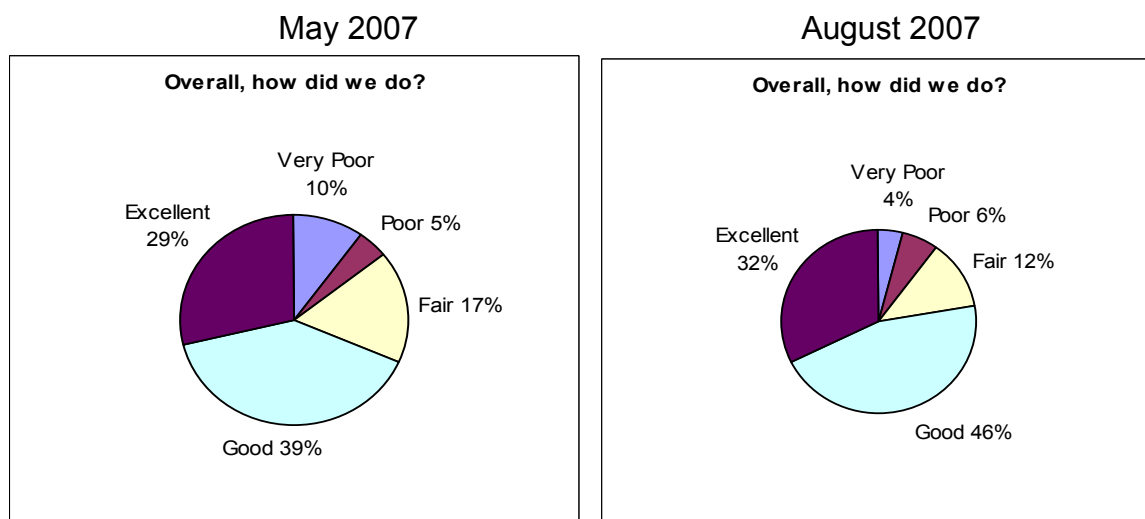
agreed. A key problem has been having one point of reference which can be used to track requests for service and manage the work load. The whole process currently involves 3 separate computer systems (Siebel, Uniform and the contractors own system) with the gaps being filled in by email and phone text.

7.6 Enhancements are awaiting to be completed to the IT and monitoring systems which will reduce a substantial amount of double keying, abortive back office work and make the service more responsive to customers. These enhancements include:-

- A connector to allow the two databases in corporate call centre and the service to communicate.
- The provision of printing and reporting facilities from CAP's Uniform at Rentokil's office to enable their back office staff to monitor work flows and progress daily.
- The provision of hand held technology linking CAP's Uniform directly to pest control technicians on site.
- Use of CAP's Uniform spatial GIS mapping capability to monitor requests for service across the city.

7.7 Data on the quality of service is collected via on going customer feedback surveys. We are currently receiving returns from 40% of our customers. The graphs below show all requests for service, including substantial numbers for the treatment of rats and mice. Customer comments for May 2007 (prior to Rentokil being awarded the contract) are shown, to compare with comments from August, ie two months into the contract.





7.8 Although there have been difficulties during the early stages of the contract, the customer satisfaction feedback is an improvement on the service prior to the letting of the contract. For example, 72% of customers rated the quality of the service excellent or good prior to the contract, with an increase to 82% afterwards. Similarly, views on 'overall how good did we do?' increased from 68% to 78% and 'very poor' reduced from 10% before the contract to 4% after.

7.9 Improvements are in hand to deal with the issues which have arisen during the first 3 months of the contract, however the ideal ITC solution with direct mobile contact with the pest control technicians and real time updating is yet to be delivered.

8. Looking ahead and further opportunities

8.1 Structural changes within Environment and Neighborhoods around the *Smarter Working; Better Results* agenda and the developments within the pest control service over the last 18 months have created opportunities which can be exploited to reduce the rodent population in Leeds.

8.2 Rentokil have recently been awarded the Yorkshire Water contract for the proactive sewer-baiting treatment work in the city. This enables a much more coordinated approach to dealing with area treatments for rats. This, linked to Rentokil's contract with the Council to treat rats at nil cost has focused their work towards Leeds & also certain areas of the city experiencing hot spots.

8.3 The in-house pest control resource is now able to fully attend to area treatments, which are more effective than merely responding to complaints of pests in hot spot areas. One issue which does contribute to increase of the rodent population is the overfeeding of wild birds and again, time freed up from dealing with demand work will enable effort to be placed into advising and educating residents.

8.4 The in-house pest control service provides programmed pest prevention services for businesses and other council departments and the income from this work supports the cost of pest control work generally. In the past, the pest control service has been unable to meet its responsibilities to businesses nor expand this commercial work because of the pressures to complete the day to day domestic reactive work. This is no longer the case and enhanced income targets have been set to maximize income from this source.

8.5 Ongoing discussions to merge the Environmental Health and Enforcement Division currently in City Services will ensure that on the ground area based teams will have a wider remit to deal with issues such as

- Refuse
- Litter
- Fly tipping
- Derelict and empty properties
- Defective drains and sewers
- Waste from commercial premises, particularly food premises.

This local focus and mix of skills in one team under one management group will provide better opportunities for the coordination of these activities (all of which contribute to the control of rodents by denying them access to food and harbourage).

8.6 The activities above are about looking at a change of focus, moving away from just pest control into pest management, working with Rentokil, the area action teams, residents and businesses not only to eradicate infestations but also to reduce the chances of future pest problems.

9 Conclusions

9.1 Indications both nationally and locally in Leeds are that the rodent population is on the increase. However in terms of the national picture, the recorded increase in West Yorkshire for 2005 is well below the national average. In terms of Leeds data for 2007, it does predict a significant increase on last years figures, but because of the cyclical nature of infestation trends, this would be only be a 2% increase on 2005.

9.2 There are real risks in terms of health associated with rats and mice because of the parasites and pathogens they carry. It is difficult to link these directly with the infectious disease data which is collected for Leeds other than the 2 cases of Weils disease noted in the above text. From January to October 2007, 146 cases of Salmonella were reported in Leeds and most of these cases will be linked with poor food handling practices, however a small number of cases could be due to contact with rodents.

9.3 The changes to the pest control service in Leeds and the contracting out of domestic reactive work has created opportunities to develop and improve the service, some of which will be evident in future months. There have been difficulties in the first 3 months of the contract, particularly in terms of

performance data. Whilst this is being addressed, the results of the customer satisfaction surveys indicate that the service is perceived as being better than prior to the contractor-provided service.

- 9.4 To substantially reduce the level of rats and mice in Leeds the focus of the pest control service needs to change from control to management. This will not be achieved with out the support of residents, businesses, our partner Rentokil, Yorkshire Water and activities around the 'cleaner and greener' agenda and other council departments.

10. Recommendations

- 10.1 Scrutiny board are recommended to note the content of this report regarding the population of rats and mice in Leeds, the Pest Control Service, the contract with Rentokil, the current performance data and the improvements which are underway and proposed to be completed in the future.
- 10.2 That a further report be presented to Scrutiny Board to provide an update on contractor performance in particular that reflects the first six months of the contract period.