

Scrutiny Review of Pest Control Management

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Date of Exercise: January 2025 to April 2025

Introduction

Scrutiny were presented with a suite of information in June 2025 which included a Housing Ombudsman Insight Report covering Pest Control. ForHousing had received a Housing Ombudsman determination of maladministration relating to Pest Control and Stockbridge Community Voice had raised concerns relating to Pest Control. The Partners agreed to include this as an exercise in the programme of Scrutiny.

Scope of the Exercise

The scope of the exercise was to:

- assess ForHousing's approach to managing Pest Control in both communal areas and individual domestic dwellings
- assess ForHousing's approach against recommendations made by the Housing Ombudsman
- analyse reports of pest infestation for the past 12 months
- audit a number of cases (including the case that went to the Housing Ombudsman) to ensure consistency and fairness of handling
- make recommendations to improve handling of Pest Control for tenants and/or ForHousing

Methodology

Desktop work was carried out looking at the following information:

- Pest control guidance notes
- Pest control frequently asked questions
- Reports of pest control for the last 12 months
- Complaints information relating to pest control
- Housing Ombudsman case relating to pest control
- Service level agreement with Premier Pest Control

Focus Groups were held with:

- Neighbourhood Officers
- Customer Connect Hub
- Caretakers

Surveys were sent to 9 tenants with one returned

Mystery shopping was carried out through the Customer Connect hub

Summary of Findings

Guidance documents for staff made it clear that tenants are responsible for pest control in individual properties and ForHousing are responsible in communal areas. This also came out of the focus groups with caretakers and the Customer Connect Hub. It was also clear in communications and through focus groups that outside the home is the responsibility of the tenant. Scrutiny were advised that if the cause was a neighbour's garden this would be dealt with by a Neighbourhood Officer and this could lead to a tenancy breach.

Everybody Scrutiny spoke to was clear on the Service Level Agreement for communal areas and the process for reporting and dealing with pests in communal areas. Caretakers were positive about the service level agreement with Premier Pest Control for the blocks saying there has been a visible improvement. Neighbourhood Officers also said that areas that have been treated are showing low pest problems and bait is not being taken.

Scrutiny were not confident that there is a consistent approach to dealing with pests in individual homes.

- During the scoping meeting, Scrutiny were advised that there is a process for using Premier Pest Control for individual properties – whilst this is more expensive it is a much better service
- Information Scrutiny reviewed says that ForHousing pay for pest control in an individual home unless there is reason for us not to (clearly due to something the tenant is doing)
- The cost increases since Premier Pest Control were contracted suggested individual properties are being treated more regularly
- Scrutiny were advised that at the point of contact, a tenant would be asked how pests are getting in, ie. holes etc – this was also in the guidance notes
- Unless it was obviously something the tenant was responsible for, Neighbourhood Officers would visit to check for holes, check gardens and home for condition and the Neighbourhood Officer would arrange for Premier to attend - we may treat on a promise to pay; the tenant may be asked to pay £70 up front or we may just not treat depending on circumstances

Scrutiny felt that if a tenant might not be aware of any access points or issues with the building fabric they could be advised that it is their responsibility when it isn't.

Only one tenant returned a survey and whilst they confirmed the service was good, they said that they had paid for the pest control when the issue was with a neighbour's garden.

Scrutiny were assured that the service provided by Premier is excellent both for the customer and ForHousing:

- Premier liaise directly with the tenant once the order has been sent and will inform ForHousing of access issues etc
- Premier will carry out any repairs to access points where they can and will report any other findings/ repairs needed to Neighbourhood Officer who is responsible for raising the repairs

Caretakers were unaware that Premier Pest Control could be used for individual properties and always direct customers to their Local Authority and said that everybody needs to be made aware of the process and what is available.

Scrutiny felt that there could be duplication if Premier are identifying access points/ repairs and the Neighbourhood Officer is also visiting.

From the audit of the two cases that had been assessed by the Housing Ombudsman only one was found to be maladministration for taking too long to investigate rats in communal area which led to rats entering an individual flat and causing damage. Scrutiny are satisfied this would no longer be an issue under the new contract with Premier.

Fly-tipping and reduced bin collections seem to be a big contributory factor - mostly bin spillage and residents leaving bin bags on the floor. Large items (sofas etc) are being left in bin areas and in the empty bins which leads to an overflow of rubbish. Caretakers suggested continued education of people about the disposal of rubbish and large items in flat blocks which cause the bin store areas to be full.

Scrutiny interviewed the Waste Management Supervisor and were very impressed with the service being provided and the identified cost savings. Scrutiny felt that there is an ideal opportunity to explore pest control with the Waste Management Team in the longer term as they are already carrying out waste bag removal. However, they are aware that this is a new team and would not be in a position to add this to their workload in the near future.

Scrutiny understand that ForHousing have previously looked at bringing this in house but at the time this was not cost effective.

Recommendations and actions

Scrutiny have made the following recommendations which will be delivered through the identified actions.

| Recommendation | Proposed Action | Responsibility | Timeframe |
|---|---|----------------------|----------------|
| Develop a consistent approach to pest control management in individual homes in all areas | ForHousing agree to amend current information to reflect a consistent approach | Neighbourhoods | March 2026 |
| Ensure a consistent process with clear actions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NO instructs Premier • Premier report back to NO • NO raises any necessary repairs • NO inspects if Premier inform there is a tenancy/ neighbour issue • Tenant has option to have works carried out with a recharge if the issue is caused by them | As above | Neighbourhoods | March 2026 |
| Once a consistent process has been agreed, ensure that all front line staff are aware of the process so can correctly advise tenants | All staff will receive emails/intranet stories as well as the tenant FAQs to ensure the message is consistent | Neighbourhoods | March 2026 |
| Continued communication to educate people about the disposal of rubbish and large items in flat blocks | Communication plan to be developed | Neighbourhoods/Comms | March 2026 |
| Consider longer term bringing pest control in-house perhaps through the Waste Management Team or Wates contract | ForHousing will look at the feasibility of bringing the service in-huse | Neighbourhoods | September 2026 |

Scrutiny would like to thank all staff who took the time to support this exercise.