

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO HEALTH & HOUSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 14

meeting date: THURSDAY, 19 JANUARY 2017
title: THE INCREASE OF BED BUGS
submitted by: MARSHALL SCOTT, CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: HEATHER COAR, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 An information document for Committee to consider following the increase in pest control charges as requested at the last Committee meeting.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – The measures recommended by this report will help make people's lives safer and healthier. It will potentially enhance the objectives to promote and support the healthy environmental, economic and social wellbeing of people who work, live and visit the Ribble Valley.
- Corporate Priorities – To promote a healthier environment and lifestyle.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Once a common feature of life in poor households in the first half of the 20th Century, bed bugs have become more common in recent year due to a more transient lifestyle and increased travel.

2.2 Bed bugs are on their way back despite having been almost eradicated in the developed world by the 1980s.

2.3 In the US in the post war years, DDT was used to kill them off. In this country the authorities aimed to motivate the population into seeking their own treatment, by drawing a parallel between infestation and the slovenliness. This established a stigma that survives today. In fact your cleanliness, or otherwise, makes no difference whether or not the bed bugs set up home at your property. They are interested in their survival through the consumption of your blood. If you encounter them on your travels, there is a decent chance that you will be taking them home.

2.4 It is not certain how prevalent bed bugs are. There is no requirement to report infestations, and though many people do call the Council's pest control department when they find them, different Councils record reports in different ways, therefore the data gathered is unreliable. The observed trend however is in an increase in incidents nationally.

2.5 The reason for this increase – globalisation. Bed bugs have become hitchhikers. If you sleep in an infested room, they may climb into your luggage or on to your clothes and when you get home; they disembark and set up home in the darkest ducts of your bedroom, coming out in the hours before dawn to suck on your blood whilst on your slumbering body. No this isn't Halloween, but with and more of us travelling abroad to regions where bed bugs were never eradicated, more and more of us are

likely to bring them back. They thrive in homes inhabited by large numbers of people, where they feed and breed freely.

- 2.6 Unlike microscopic dust mites, bed bugs (or their Latin name *Cimex-lectularius*) are a quarter of an inch long. They travel in clothes and luggage hiding in small cracks and crevices during the day and making use of guests during the night.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 Bed bugs are attracted by body heat and Carbon Dioxide and they crawl out at night to bite your exposed body and feed on your blood.
- 3.2 Not everyone develops a skin reaction to bed bug bites. Some people develop red itchy bumps which can appear 10-15 minutes after being bitten and can last for several days. Generally, bed bugs bites are usually found on the neck, face, hand or arm and are often mistaken for mosquito bites. Bed bugs bite in straight lines.
- 3.3 The thought of bed bugs can be upsetting and it can be stressful to find them in your home; they aren't dangerous and don't transmit human disease, however, action should be taken straightaway to prevent infestation. Bed bugs look like lentils and are visible to the naked eye. They are oval shape, flat and up to 5mm long and they can be between dark yellow, red or brown.



- 3.4 Females lay up 300 eggs over a lifetime. These white specs stick to surfaces and are more difficult to spot. They hatch after about 10 days to form tiny insects that take about 6-8 weeks to grow into adults. As they grow they shed their skin and leave little brown shells on your mattress.



- 3.5 Bed bugs need to feed on blood to be able to mature but they are resilient and they can go up to a year without feeding.

3.6 Bed bugs are found in many types of housing but are most common in short term accommodation such as hostels and hotels.

3.7 How to spot an Infestation

- Look for unexplained rashes
- Check your bed frame and joints of furniture
- Contrary to myths bed bugs do not live in your mattresses, although they may be found in the seams.
- Check your sheets for blood staining.
- If you have a severe infestation, you might have a sweet musty smell around your bed frame.

3.8 What to do if you are infested

Call the Environmental Health service. Our Environmental Health team can deal with infestations of this kind.

3.9 Don't throw away your furniture – there is a chance you will spread them through your home whilst moving it.

3.10 Don't flee the infested room. The bed bugs want warmth and food, they will go where you go. Talk to your neighbours, it is possible the bugs could have come from them or that you have given them to them. Don't panic, bed bugs don't carry disease. Their presence does not make you unclean.

3.11 Over the last 10 years Ribble Valley have noticed a fluctuating demand regarding bed bug complaints. So far this year, we have treated four cases. Last year was a historic high of six cases in the borough. This does not take into account any that have been privately treated by private contractors.

3.12 Following your own vacation or holiday, instead of flopping the suitcase on to the bed, it might be worth doing a quick inspection of your suitcase. It is about containment, especially if an infestation has or hasn't been confirmed. Although your first thoughts will be to throw everything away, it can easily be solved depending on the severity.

3.13 The first thing you should do is tackle your luggage, make sure you vacuum inside and outside of your suitcase and bags as soon as you get home paying special attention to seams. Do your laundry in an area such as your kitchen and wash them on the highest temperature that your clothes will allow.

3.14 Avoiding the bite of the bed bugs comes down to people becoming more aware of these tiny global hitchhikers and taking preventative steps to minimise the impact that they may have on your home, once you have returned.

HEATHER COAR
HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MARSHAL SCOTT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information please ask for Heather Coar, extension 4466.

REF: HC/EL/190117/H&H