

metroSTOR Webinar Summary and Transcript

Pest Control: Multi-Agency Approaches that Work

03.12.25

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metroSTOR Webinar **Summary**

Overview

On 3rd December 2025, metroSTOR's Nigel Deacon welcomed attendees to a webinar focused on one of the most persistent challenges facing housing providers: effective and sustainable pest control. The session explored how multi agency working, improved waste management, data driven decision making and resident engagement can significantly reduce vermin issues on complex estates.

Guest speakers Helen Scott and Jo Briggs from Sheffield City Council shared practical insights from their work across the city, including a detailed case study from Lansdowne Estate where a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach achieved a marked reduction in rat activity and increased resident satisfaction.

The session concluded with an in depth Q&A, with participants sharing their own experiences and solutions around baiting regimes, drain surveys, enforcement, resident behaviour and the implications of emerging legislation.

Introduction

Nigel opened the session by highlighting the links between waste management, housekeeping and pest problems, noting that ageing bin store infrastructure, blocked chutes and increasing waste volumes can quickly create food sources for vermin. He emphasised that improving capacity, convenience, cleanness and communication remains central to long term pest prevention.

Understanding the Issues

Helen began by outlining how Sheffield identifies hotspot areas, drawing on increased sightings, staff reports, rising baiting costs, evidence from Environmental Protection officers and missed waste collections caused by operatives refusing to enter contaminated bin rooms. She explained that bin room repairs, damaged doors, blocked chutes and overgrown vegetation often contribute to escalating issues, alongside incorrect waste disposal and well-meaning behaviours such as feeding birds.

Sheffield's experience shows that rat activity cannot be treated in isolation. Each estate presents different challenges and each requires a tailored approach that incorporates Environmental Services, Waste Management, local councillors, community groups and residents.

Case Study: Lansdowne Estate

Jo presented the Lansdowne Estate project, a large inner-city site where visible vermin activity increased sharply after COVID. Initial reliance on baiting proved ineffective and costly, prompting the creation of a dedicated action group that brought together repairs, drainage services, Environmental Services, neighbourhood teams and councillors.

The group introduced a structured plan with clear responsibilities, fortnightly updates and RAG rated priorities. Practical interventions included:

- Returning bins to bin rooms and deep cleaning the rooms
- Installing new doors, sealing gaps and using appropriate materials such as RatEx
- Commissioning drainage surveys and repairing collapsed drains
- Cutting back or removing overgrown vegetation
- Providing smaller refuse bags to address narrow chute apertures
- Door knocking, newsletters, letter drops and community engagement
- A staged recharge process for persistent waste disposal offences

Jo explained that a dedicated Environmental Services officer, funded specifically for the estate, played a key role in identifying entry points and resolving issues quickly. The estate now benefits from a sustained baiting programme, active monitoring and an options appraisal for future waste solutions, including potential chute closures. The results have been clear: fewer sightings, fewer complaints, improved resident confidence and stronger partnerships with community groups.

Key Themes from Discussion

COVID related changes had a noticeable impact on rat behaviour and visibility. Reduced footfall, workforce shortages and the temporary use of open skips contributed to increased food sources.

Infrastructure issues remain central. Damaged bin room doors, insufficient capacity, blocked chutes and misaligned waste facilities increase the likelihood of vermin infestations. Good housekeeping is essential, supported by appropriate bin volumes, user friendly layouts and clear multilingual communication.

Drain surveys emerged as a major theme. Several attendees highlighted the difference between standard drainage surveys and pest focused surveys that identify uncapped pipes and hidden entry points. These can significantly reduce long standing infestations when addressed.

Enforcement and behaviour change were discussed at length. Sheffield's recharge process has reduced persistent waste offences but requires careful handling in areas with vulnerable residents. Participants agreed that education, communication and consistent practice remain vital.

Fly tipping and unauthorised use of communal bins continue to present challenges. Sheffield is expanding the use of mobile CCTV cameras in hotspot areas to identify offenders and support enforcement.

Q&A Highlights

The interactive session explored a wide range of questions, including:

- COVID impacts: Increased visibility, blocked chutes and open skips contributed to post pandemic spikes in rat activity.
- Bin design and materials: Steel bins with fitted bungs performed better; plastic bins were more prone to entry.
- Drain surveys: Pest focused surveys were strongly recommended to detect detailed ingress routes.
- Responsibility for treatments: Sheffield provides free rat treatment for tenants on qualifying benefits and does not charge where wider infrastructure issues are identified.
- Multilingual communication: Sheffield translates letters into commonly spoken languages and uses pictorial signage extensively.
- Bed bugs and other pests: Rising numbers of infestations were noted, with some cases spreading across multiple flats.
- Awaab's Law: Attendees discussed anticipated future inclusion of pest hazards in Phase 2 and the need for clear procedures and training.

Conclusion

The webinar demonstrated that successful pest management relies on coordinated action, robust data, well maintained waste infrastructure and strong collaboration between housing teams, environmental health, waste management, community groups and residents. Reactive baiting alone is insufficient. Lasting improvement requires addressing structural defects, improving housekeeping, tackling food sources and maintaining consistent communication.

metroSTOR will share the recording and slide pack with attendees. Thank you to everyone who joined, shared insights and contributed to another productive session.

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metroSTOR Webinar **Transcript**

Nigel Deacon

Welcome everybody. Thank you very much for taking the time to join our webinar on pest control. It is a new topic for us at metroSTOR, so I am delighted that Helen and Jo have agreed to join us and share their experience from Sheffield. We will see their slides later and a summary. As usual, please feel free to put comments in the chat – any questions, observations, even what the weather is like – anything you think is relevant or of interest. There will be a Q&A session towards the end. As you will know, I am not very good at long introductions, so I will hand over to Helen.

Helen Scott:

Good morning everybody. My name is Helen Scott and I am a Service Manager for Sheffield City Council within the Housing Department. My team is a centralised team that predominantly deals with waste management, open space management and communal cleaning, and pest control fits within that. We have six neighbourhood teams across the city and my team offers support to those teams. I will let Jo introduce herself and then we will continue.

Jo Briggs:

My name is Jo Briggs. I am a Service Manager for Housing and Neighbourhood Services. My area is called Central Area. I am responsible for around 6,700 properties and 17 out of 23 tower blocks in Sheffield are in my area. We have a lot of city centre, communal, high density living and lots of student accommodation and everything else that feeds into the issues we have with rats, including a large number of takeaways.

Helen Scott:

In terms of identifying issues around vermin on our estates, the first thing we do is look at where we have hotspot areas. That is where we have seen an increase in sightings, not only from customers but also from staff who work on those estates daily, and where we have seen evidence of rats. That might be droppings in bin rooms, shredded bin bags in and around bin rooms, shrub beds that look like potential nesting areas, and rat runs alongside tower blocks and maisonette blocks. It can be quite evident where rats are continuously running up and down during the day. We will pinpoint where we are getting information that suggests we have a problem.

We also look at where we have seen an increase in baiting costs in any given area of the city and where those baiting costs are ongoing. If we have been putting bait down for a number of weeks or months and there has not been a resolution or any noticeable change, we will ensure we pick up those areas and address them quickly.

We also look at waste collection issues. In Sheffield, Veolia collects the waste for us. Their contract is very rigid in terms of vermin. Where their operatives identify rats within a bin room, they will not enter that bin room and will not take the bin out for collection. That has a massive impact on our staff, because it means our staff then need to take the bin out of the bin room and put it on the roadside for collection. More importantly, it often means missed collections, which adds to the problem of rats in that area. We therefore work very closely with our partners in waste management to understand where they have identified problems.

We also utilise reports from Environmental Protection Services, who we work closely with. They may pinpoint areas that are not having a massive impact on our tenants and residents yet, but if we do not address those issues they may cause problems for customers in future. We will work with them and use any information they can share.

We monitor complaints regularly, whether they come from customers, staff, local councillors or other partners and stakeholders in the area, such as local businesses and schools. We compile that information and look for common themes in terms of where the problems are.

Repair issues are often a contributing factor. Where we have bin store doors that are damaged or not closing correctly, or issues with brickwork that allow rats to get into a bin store, we will pick those up. We also look at where there is a need for education. For example, where we have customers feeding birds out on the estate, they may not realise they are doing anything wrong, but that behaviour provides a food source for vermin. When necessary, we carry out door knocking exercises and letter drops to inform customers that there is a potential issue and that continuing with that behaviour will have an impact.

We also have issues around waste disposal. We often see customers incorrectly disposing of their waste, again not always intentionally. They may leave a black bag on a communal walkway or stairwell and in areas with rat problems this immediately becomes a food source and adds to the problem. We also look at surrounding vegetation. Shrub beds and overgrown areas can create nesting areas and allow rubbish to accumulate, which creates a further food source.

What we have found in recent years is that we cannot just treat the rats in isolation. We need to look at all the contributing factors. We often determine that different estates need different strategies. In some inner city areas with busy high streets, mixed-use properties and food outlets, we need a different strategy to suburban areas on the edge of the city. What is clear is that it has to be a multi-agency approach.

Where we have identified a problem, we contact all partners who we feel need to be involved. That includes local tenants and residents associations, other community groups, internal partners such as Waste Management and Environmental Protection, and any external stakeholders such as local businesses. We then develop an action plan and set up task groups. That ensures everybody is clear about their roles and responsibilities, we can set timescales, and we can evaluate progress and change course if needed. This has been really important in tackling more serious vermin issues.

We are very much driven by data and information. Where we can gain further information to help inform decisions, we will do so. For example, we carry out drainage surveys to see whether any drainage issues are contributing to the problem.

Post COVID, some of you may relate to this, we saw a dramatic increase in rats during and after COVID, particularly in city centre locations. In the past we might have seen this as a housing issue, but there is now recognition that it needs all stakeholders involved. It is not something we can tackle on our own. Baiting on its own is not enough. We needed a different approach.

We have looked at waste facilities on our estates. We still have a number of tower blocks and maisonette blocks with chute systems. In the tower blocks, those chute systems are no longer fit for purpose. They were built in the 1960s and regularly get blocked. When that happens, customers leave waste where it should not be left, which in turn has an impact on rat problems.

We have also focused on repair issues, such as bin room doors and damage in those areas. Vegetation in and around drainage and buildings all contributes to the problems we see. So in tackling the problem there are several areas we must look at.

This slide shows the Lansdowne Estate. It is a project we have been working on for a couple of years. After COVID we saw a huge increase in rats on this estate. Jo will talk you through what we did to address it.

Jo Briggs:

Lansdowne Estate is a large, sprawling inner city estate. There are three tower blocks and 340 properties across six maisonette blocks. We started getting reports of vermin infestations around 2021. There was a very visible presence on site.

We started by meeting with tenant groups on the estate and involving local councillors. We found that we were paying a significant amount of money for baiting and it was not working. We felt that baiting alone was not enough and that we needed to coordinate with repairs, drainage services, waste disposal, education and enforcement.

We established an action group. We had to get councillors on board because some of the issues were quite sensitive. We have a number of vulnerable tenants and Lansdowne is classed as an area of deprivation with a very diverse population. We involved councillors from the start because we were taking a different approach and anticipated needing support around some of the more sensitive issues.

We RAG rated the issues in terms of priority and allocated responsibilities to specific people. We are a large organisation in Sheffield, with a lot of silo working, and we needed to be clear who was leading on particular elements and that they were accountable for reporting back publicly. The action plan worked really well for that. We met every fortnight, which gave the work real purpose.

Some of the practical measures we put in place were relatively easy. During COVID we had moved the bins outside the bin rooms for various reasons. We moved them back into the bin rooms. We deep cleaned the bin rooms, carried out repairs and filled holes. We installed new bin room doors and filled gaps underneath the doors. I mentioned earlier that we used something called RatEx to fill where the doors were not flush to the floor. We tried to address entry points wherever possible.

We carried out drainage surveys and carried out repairs. We had quite a few collapsed drains. Vegetation was also a problem. Sheffield is very green, which is lovely, but shrub beds, self-seeded trees and other vegetation create a haven for rats. We removed vegetation where we could or significantly cut it back. As mentioned, we deep cleaned the bin rooms because COVID had hit us, as it did everyone, and had contributed to these issues.

We have neighbourhood teams and Helen's team has support officers. We carried out letter drops and door knocking. We produced newsletters and held days of action, bringing skips on site and doing all sorts of things to encourage people to dispose of their waste properly.

The chute apertures on Lansdowne are tiny. You cannot fit a standard black bag in them. We encouraged people to use smaller bags and even delivered smaller bags through letterboxes to encourage that.

We introduced a recharge procedure, which created a lot of interest last time we talked about this. As part of the work, where we found black bags that had been thrown off balconies, for example, and we could identify where that bag had come from, we would door knock that property. We handed over a letter and leaflets explaining that we had identified this, that it was not acceptable, and that if it happened again there was a chance we would recharge them.

Residents effectively get three opportunities to change their behaviour. After that, if they continue, they are recharged. The amount is up to £140 for us removing the waste. We are not talking about large fly tips but household waste in bags. There has been lots of liaison with community groups and tenants and residents associations about this, because it is an emotive subject, especially in an area like Lansdowne, which is not affluent. If we are saying "If you do this, we are going to charge you", we need support for that approach.

There has been ongoing dialogue with neighbourhood officers and waste support officers. They were critical because they were out and about, visible on the estate daily.

We then identified that we needed a dedicated resource from Environmental Services, which my team funded. We had someone working three days a week just on that estate, doing all sorts of practical tasks. He was a bit of a handyman as well, so if he spotted something he could quickly fix, such as putting concrete into a hole, he did so.

We had regular partnership meetings once a fortnight. The work was visible all the way up to Public Health, so it was something we needed to be very open about. Of course we increased the baiting, but we did not just increase baiting; we had to get the infrastructure right underneath that, as I mentioned, through repairs and other measures.

The work is ongoing. We have ongoing support from Environmental Services. We increased baiting to 12 times a year, so once a month they go out, monitor and change the bait boxes and make any recommendations. Our area team actively monitors complaints and sightings. We have an Estate Services Team on site daily. We need to maintain the baiting regime.

We have also carried out an options appraisal around future waste disposal, such as chute closure and what type of apertures and receptacles we need. We mentioned underground bins earlier; we are not sure how feasible that will be, but we are looking at all options to keep on top of the situation.

We have seen a visible reduction in rats, which has been fed back by customers and councillors. There has been a massive reduction in complaints and increased customer satisfaction. It has helped us build really good partnerships with community and voluntary groups, including litter picking groups and others who want to be active in the community. It has also created more confidence in us going forward. People were very critical and it was seen as just a housing issue, when all of us working in this field know it is not just a housing issue. There are many contributing factors. We just need to make sure we keep this up now. Thank you.

Nigel Deacon:

Excellent. Thank you, Jo, really appreciate that. Before we start the Q&A session, I thought it would be helpful to share a couple of slides around good housekeeping on waste management, just to support some of the points we have been talking about. Many of you will already have worked with metroSTOR and know how we operate.

One of the key things with waste management and pest control is good housekeeping. That can be very difficult to achieve with older buildings and ageing infrastructure that struggle to keep up with volumes and with the need to separate recycling and food waste. Someone in the chat has mentioned the Simpler Recycling legislation coming from government.

It is helpful to look again at the root cause process we go through whenever we look at a project or a site. We uncover the challenges that exist, understand why they are happening, and then look at what we can do to help resolve them.

On one side we consider fire safety and compliance, which is not directly today's topic but is something we always look at. For housekeeping, we look at four key areas: capacity, convenience, cleanness and communication. These are crucial for stopping waste building up on the floor or falling on the floor and for dealing with the food source. All of them have an effect. If people are not recycling enough, refuse is likely to start overflowing. If an area does not look tidy, you get more fly tipping.

So we look at each area:

- Have we got enough bins for our own residents?
- Are other people coming in and using them from neighbouring properties, and do we need to control that?
- Are they easy for people to use?

In one example photo (which you probably cannot see clearly here), residents had to walk up a flight of steps to reach the deposit point. Unsurprisingly, bags were being left on the floor at the bottom of the steps.

A huge amount of work goes into managing bin store areas and keeping them tidy, but design and layout can either make your life easier or very difficult. Communication is crucial, including how we communicate and in what languages. Someone mentioned different languages in the chat.

Those are some of the root causes of poor housekeeping. Once we have identified the problems, we can start to apply solutions. There are methods for calculating bin volume in the British Standard – it is 20 years old now – but working with your local authority you can often get updated guidance. We need more space for cardboard these days because so much more is produced.

We work with councils to make sure you have the right type and size of bins for the number and size of properties, number of bedrooms, how many people live there and the amount of waste produced. Convenience is critical, especially as many councils are issuing more bins, including food waste bins. We need layouts that are easy to use, removing obstacles such as the need to lift lids or open heavy doors. We should design so material does not fall on the floor and so bins do not get contaminated or overflow. We also need to be clear in our messaging about what we want people to do.

We are happy to share these slides and hope they help you in your work going forward. We have a few questions in the chat already, but please feel free to raise your hand and come in with questions or observations. We will start with the questions in the chat. One question is why we think there was an increase in rats during COVID. What is your view on that, Jo?

Helen Scott:

I can start on that. I think generally in terms of wildlife overall, certainly in Sheffield, we saw changes during COVID. We saw badgers in Sheffield train station and a small deer in the city centre. Because people were not moving around as much during the early stages of lockdown, we saw a difference. With rats, they were more visible. Maybe they had always been there but we had not noticed them as much because they were hiding more when there were more people around. During and after COVID the visibility was much higher.

In addition, our actions will have had an impact. We have chute systems in our 20 tower blocks across the city, with hopper heads in each individual property. Because of social distancing, the teams that would usually unblock the chutes were not able to do so for a period of time, particularly in the first lockdown. We asked customers to refrain from using the chutes, because they became blocked and it was difficult to unblock them when we could not enter people's homes.

We put skips outside tower blocks for people to dispose of their waste. Those skips were open. From a rat's point of view that is an excellent food source, so that certainly did not help and was one of the reasons for the increase.

Jo, do you want to add anything?

Jo Briggs:

Yes. We also had a massively reduced workforce. We had staff who were clinically extremely vulnerable and unable to come into the workplace. Even though estate services was classed as a critical service, we were working with about 30 percent of our normal workforce, and Environmental Services were in a similar position. Normally we would respond quickly to waste and similar issues, but we were unable to do that. I think that contributed as well.

Nigel Deacon:

Yes, I remember a situation in Manchester city centre where all the restaurants had closed. It really highlights the importance of the food source. The rats had to move towards new food sources, and they are hugely resourceful and adaptable. They found a new "smorgasbord" of opportunity on housing sites and have not left.

There was a question about getting hold of bungs for the bins. Do you work with your waste team on that or have you had to go to other sources? I am sure we could connect Kevin with some suppliers if he is struggling with the council.

Jo Briggs:

We had some difficulties sourcing the bungs that we needed. It took a long time for us to get them. No, we do not provide them directly to customers. We sourced them through Environmental Services because we needed mesh ones that were not readily available. We did eventually get them, but it was not easy.

Nigel Deacon:

That is interesting, using mesh ones. I have not come across that before.

Nigel Deacon:

Kim has raised a point about encouraging customers to dispose of material correctly, which I think all of us have had to work on from time to time. I would agree that part of it is the infrastructure you provide. It helps if you can work with the city's recycling officers on leaflet drops, providing recycling bags for flats and so on.

It remains a challenge. You have to make it as easy as possible for people to do the right thing. A small number probably will not, but your points around enforcement were helpful. Jo, have you actually used enforcement around waste disposal behaviour?

Jo Briggs:

Yes. We developed a process for Lansdowne which has now been rolled out citywide. It has been fairly successful. It has massively reduced the behaviour, although it does not generate a lot of income and some of it has been written off.

For us it was about sending a message that there will be a consequence for disposing of waste irresponsibly. There is always a distinction for us as a social landlord between people who cannot and people who will not. This approach was really targeted at the people who will not, or who choose not to take any responsibility.

We have had quite a few recharges and other areas of the city have also used this process. The amounts are not huge, but it is about sending that message.

Helen Scott:

We also recognise that sometimes our working practices do not help. We have targets to remove communal waste for fire safety purposes within a certain timeframe. Because of that, customers see that if a black bag is placed on a stairwell or communal landing it is taken away very quickly. Sometimes they are not intentionally thinking "I cannot be bothered to use the chute or the bin room." They are thinking "Mr Smith next door did it and his bag was taken away."

We are trying to re-educate customers that this is not the correct disposal method. Yes, we will remove the bag for safety reasons, but what we want is for waste to be put correctly in the bins in the first place.

When customers sign up for a property there is information in the sign-up pack about waste disposal, but at that point rent, housing benefit and other issues often take priority in the conversation, so the waste information can get lost. We encourage neighbourhood officers on annual visits, or when speaking to customers, to reiterate that message.

Waste support officers in my team also do a lot of work in hotspot areas where we have seen problems with incorrect disposal. We carry out door knocking, and sometimes stand in communal areas and talk to customers as they are coming and going. We also deliver information leaflets.

We recognise that we can sometimes contribute to the problem by removing bags too quickly, which can inadvertently reinforce the behaviour.

Nigel Deacon:

That sounds like a great approach, and the main point is tackling the food source. How is it going in Sheffield with Simpler Recycling? Have separate food waste collections been rolled out to your buildings yet?

Helen Scott:

No, not yet. We have a 30 year contract with Veolia and there are still around nine years left on it. We have an exemption in terms of food waste at the moment, so separate food waste collections are not something we are implementing just yet, but it will come in the future.

Nigel Deacon:

I was going to say you are one of the lucky ones from one point of view, although I do think that separating food waste from the general refuse into a separate sealed container is very helpful from a vermin and pest control perspective. I have noticed that a lot of councils are not just putting out standard plastic wheelie bins for food waste; they are putting them into metal enclosures so they are protected from rats. Rats will definitely chew through a plastic bin if that is where the food source has gone, unless there is an easier source elsewhere. Metal enclosures for food waste bins are definitely recommended.

On communications, in multilingual and multicultural areas, is that something you have had to work with in Sheffield?

Jo Briggs:

Yes. All the literature we sent out was translated into the most common languages spoken in each area. We hold information on our systems about what languages are spoken in particular neighbourhoods. We also use lots of pictorial signage, which we find works well. So yes, we make sure letters are translated and we use visuals as much as possible.

Nigel Deacon:

That is good. I always think that consistent icons, symbols and colours – the same wherever you go, ideally across the city – help. Even the recycling bags councils hand out should have the same colours for paper and card, and the same for other materials, because some areas may have 20 or 30 languages spoken. You could never replicate all of those in text form alone.

Kevin raised a great point about making sure drain surveys include checking for rodent ingress. Is that something that happens as a matter of course for you or something you have had to specify?

Jo Briggs:

The drainage surveys that were carried out were looking for anything like broken drains or holes that would provide access points for rats. So it was picked up as part of the survey. I am not sure whether we specifically asked for that or whether it was picked up as standard.

Kevin Johnson:

We started a journey around 6 to 9 months ago to look at drains, especially at repeat problem properties. We found that some of our drain companies were just checking the main pipes and not looking at uncapped pipes and wastewater pipes. That is where rats often get into buildings and cavity walls. We had a detailed report done by a pest control company. They go into every single detail.

We have had sites where we were visiting 30 or 40 times a year. We had standard drain surveys done with no faults found. Then we got pest control in alongside the drain survey and they found all sorts of issues. We fixed those and the problem stopped. It is about the extent of the survey and whether it is being done with pest control in mind, not just looking for breaks in the main pipe.

If you want, I can show you an example afterwards so you can see the difference between a detailed pest control drain survey and a normal one. We have had a lot of success from that approach. It is not just about controlling numbers with bait; it is about stopping the problem at source. The Ombudsman is really looking for first time fixes and an end to historic problems.

Jo Briggs:

I think that is a really good point, Kevin. I suspect we have not gone into that level of detail. I would guess we have commissioned a standard contractor, like Metro Rod, to do routine surveys, but not necessarily with that pest control focus. That is really good to know.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you, Kevin. That is a great takeaway for everyone. There is a question about reducing unauthorised dumping, where people come in and dump waste. What is your plan around that?

Helen Scott:

That is a big problem for us in certain areas. As Jo said, inner city areas with a big student population can be an issue. It is not always intentional. People see communal bins outside some flats and think "Our bins are full, we will just take our rubbish there."

We also have instances where people drive in with a larger vehicle full of waste and dump it in our external bin locations. We will see mattresses, wardrobes and other large items – so that is more like fly tipping. In those cases we work closely with Environmental Services on potential criminal prosecutions, if we have evidence. We have used CCTV in areas where we have identified fly tipping hotspots and we use information from that as evidence.

We definitely have a problem in some areas with people coming into those locations to dispose of their rubbish. Sometimes it is because they see a bin and do not think they are doing anything wrong by leaving rubbish next to it. That creates capacity issues for the flats the bins are actually there to serve. In some cases we do not have enough capacity even for the residents of the block, let alone neighbouring properties.

We do not have a single solution. We try to approach each instance individually, using the tools we have.

Jo Briggs:

Just to add, we are actually funding two more cameras in my area for hotspot locations where contractors are driving in, reversing up and dumping waste. We refer cases to Environmental Enforcement who have access to DVLA, so if we get vehicle registration numbers and encourage tenants and residents to report, they will take action.

The plan is to put the cameras in two hotspot locations and then move them every six months or so, or sooner if needed. We find the cameras are really successful at first and then the effect can tail off, so moving them around helps. I will let you know what sort of success we have, but they have worked well in some other areas.

Nigel Deacon:

That is a great point. As part of that root cause process, we often find that external fly tipping occurs where a bin store already looks a bit messy. People tend to choose an area that does not look well looked after. Getting your housekeeping right and ensuring residents are using the facilities correctly does reduce external fly tipping. Enforcement and issuing fines is often the only remaining route. Kevin, you wanted to come in again?

Kevin Johnson:

We are doing trials of a new CCTV system that is solar powered and uses a SIM card, with footage accessible through an app on a phone. Each unit costs about £250. It is easy to install. There is some GDPR work to make sure we are compliant, but we are starting that trial now. We have identified 19 sites across our geography and we are expecting really good results.

We have trialled the camera itself and it works very well. Sometimes the expense of traditional CCTV makes it impossible. With these units you just screw them into the wall and put the solar panel up. You do not need Wi-Fi or electricity. It only records movement, so you do not have to trawl through 24 hours of footage. It just captures when someone enters the area. It records equally well at night and in the day.

We merged with a company called Flagship earlier this year and they had already been using them successfully. We have borrowed the idea and adapted it. Because they are so easy to remove, you can move them from site to site instead of committing a lot of money to one location. You also do not want CCTV permanently in one place, as some people feel uncomfortable being watched.

If you email me afterwards, I will send you the link.

Nigel Deacon:

Another great point, Kevin. Thank you. If you are happy to share links in the chat to potential providers, I am sure everyone would appreciate it.

Lee Carpenter:

We were looking at reasonably cheap cameras in Caerphilly but were told we could not use them because they used a particular brand linked to security concerns. If you have any details, Kevin, I will gladly look at them. I have a dual role in environmental health and environmental crime, so I am very interested.

Kevin Johnson:

One of the biggest GDPR obstacles is where the data is stored – whether in the UK, EU or elsewhere. With these cameras the data is stored in the EU via the SIM and we have already gone through all the necessary hoops. As soon as people see CCTV, or you catch one offender, the behaviour tends to stop. Because the cameras are easy to move you can relocate them as needed.

Lee, if you email me after the session I will send you the link.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you both. There was a question about bait boxes and also a reference to Awaab's Law. That is not something I know a lot about in terms of how pests are included, so I would be interested in your thoughts.

Helen Scott:

Nothing specific that I am aware of yet. There is ongoing work in the background around damp and mould and we will link in with those service areas as required. I do not have detailed information at the moment.

Jo Briggs:

We are all on training about this this week. We have an external provider coming in to do a session. My session is tomorrow afternoon and most of my team are attending today. We will know more about what the proposals are for our responsibilities as a landlord after that. At the moment I do not know much beyond what we have already said, but we are picking it up in Sheffield.

Helen Gouldthorpe:

Our understanding is that pests will come into Awaab's Law in phase two, similar to damp and mould. That will cover a variety of pests but we do not know the specifics yet.

At the moment we are working on the emergency side of Awaab's Law in relation to any HHSRS hazard. We have implemented certain situations as emergencies for pests. For example, a tenant undergoing cancer treatment with rats in the kitchen is clearly a risk to their health. We treat that as an emergency. The make-safe side is challenging because you cannot really make a property safe from rats until they are fully gone and the property is disinfected.

We are trying to get more information, but there is not a great deal out there yet.

Jo Briggs:

From what I have seen, there is a specific part about hygiene, property standards and sanitisation. That is going to be interesting for us as a landlord, particularly where we have hoarding and other complex issues, and how that will affect us in terms of breach of tenancy. There will be our role in making sure the property meets the standard, but also questions around what we do in those complex cases. I am very interested to hear more in the training.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you for raising that, it is important. There is a question asking whether your contractors actually go into tenants' properties to deal with pests. Is that something they do?

Jo Briggs:

Yes. We place orders with Environmental Services to carry out rat-proofing and treatments in tenants' properties and in communal blocks where needed.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you. There is a question from Tanya asking whether rats can get in and out of open top plastic or steel 1100 litre bins if the drainage holes are closed. In my experience, if they can climb a fence or a tree or a bush, they can often gain entry. Jo, what is your experience?

Jo Briggs:

We have had instances where we have found rats in bins, but with the steel ones we have now, particularly where we have fitted bungs and ensured lids are closed properly, we have had very few reports. I would say the plastic ones are more prone to it, perhaps because rats can get more of a grip on them. I am not entirely sure, but that is our experience.

Nigel Deacon:

I would say never underestimate the ability of a rat to get somewhere.

Lee Carpenter:

I can speak to that. A few years ago I went out with a pest control officer who has since retired. We were standing in a back garden literally watching rats climbing up a smooth external wall, going up over the roof. He had been a pest control officer for 25 to 30 years and said it was the first time he had seen it in person. In theory we knew they could do it but had never seen it. He said I might never see that again, but it proves the point that they will climb anything to get in. I have also seen them jump and do all sorts of things on CCTV footage. Never underestimate them – if they think they can get in, they probably can.

Nigel Deacon:

There is a question from Duncan about whether pest control is your responsibility in general needs properties as well as in blocks and communal areas.

Jo Briggs:

Yes and no. It depends. If it is in a block like Lansdowne, where the whole block is affected, we will go in and treat individual properties as part of our response, and we would not charge for that if we know there are wider issues with infrastructure. If it is an individual property reporting a problem in isolation, then they would normally be expected to pay for that themselves. Environmental Services would do the work, but as a charged service.

Duncan Palmer:

We have a similar approach where if an entry point is identified as part of a repair before the pest issue is reported, then it is our responsibility because we have not acted quickly enough to close down that entry point. We often have to bring together our direct labour organisation, asset management team and the customer to understand whose responsibility it is to take ownership. That can be challenging.

Jo Briggs:

We have that on a regular basis too, if it makes you feel any better. Our general stance is that if it is an isolated individual property, it is a charged service. But particularly on Lansdowne, because we knew there were infrastructure issues, we did not charge residents for treatments.

Helen Scott:

In addition, for individual houses, if tenants are on qualifying benefits, Environmental Services offer free treatment for rats specifically – not for all pests, but for rats.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you.

There are a couple of questions about bed bugs and other pests. We have only a minute or so left, but do you want to say anything briefly?

Jo Briggs:

We have seen a big increase in fleas, bed bugs, cockroaches and other pests. At present, responsibility sits with us. We have had a few instances in tower blocks where it starts in one property and then spreads to others.

We had a particular issue in Stannington with a hoarded property. Because of equalities implications we did not charge that tenant, even though 48 properties in the block were affected as the infestation became so bad. At the moment we pick up and deal with, and pay for, those situations.

Nigel Deacon:

Thank you, that is very informative and helpful.

We are pretty much on time. I am sure everybody will join me in thanking Helen and Jo for everything they have shared today. I really appreciate everyone attending and all the questions, contacts, ideas and information shared in the chat.

As I mentioned, we will send out a summary and recording over the next few days, so please look out for that, and let us know what you would like to see on the next webinar. We are always looking for new subjects and speakers, of course.

Thank you very much everybody. Have a fantastic day.

Helen Scott:

Thank you, bye.

Jo Briggs:

Thank you, bye everybody.

Chat Box Summary

During the webinar, participants raised additional questions and shared experiences in the chat that could not be covered within the live discussion. These included:

- **Awaab's Law preparation** – Attendees asked about training and next steps; Sheffield noted they are undertaking external training and awaiting clearer national guidance.
- **Bed bug management** – Participants requested treatment advice; responses highlighted heat or chemical treatments over multiple visits, with responsibility depending on whether infestations pre-date tenancy.
- **Open-space baiting** – A question on baiting in outdoor areas prompted guidance on secure bait stations, non-toxic monitoring and habitat reduction in line with CRRU rules.
- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** – Attendees asked how IPM is applied; contributors outlined a framework of proofing, reducing harbourage, eradication and ongoing monitoring, sometimes supported by smart technology.
- **Responsibility boundaries** – Questions about who pays for infestations linked to poor hygiene or new lets were answered by explaining that most landlords decide case by case, taking responsibility for structural faults but recharging where tenant behaviour contributes.
- **Service models** – Some organisations reported offering free treatments for pests such as rats, mice and wasps, prompting comparisons with chargeable models.
- **CCTV solutions** – There was strong interest in solar-powered SIM-based cameras, with attendees sharing links and installation notes for monitoring fly tipping and hotspots. Follow-up networking – Attendees exchanged email addresses to share reports, camera details and further pest-control information after the session.

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