

Report to Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny

1st October 2018

Dealing with infestation incidents – Environmental Protection Service

1.0 The context

The Public Health team received over 2,500 service requests last year (2017/18), many of these relating to statutory nuisance. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, we have a duty to make reasonable investigations into statutory nuisances and issue notices if it is considered appropriate to do so.

Vermin and insects are included in these provisions and our responsibility is to identify the source of the nuisance and to offer public health advice. There is no requirement to treat homes affected by the infestation.

2.0 Fly infestation, South Llanelli May/June 2018

2.1 Background

The Public Health Team were aware of sporadic complaints of flies in the South Llanelli area at the beginning of May 2018. The majority of complaints in relation to large numbers of flies in the area were received from 22nd May 2018 onwards.

Our immediate response, during the first week, was to direct resources to try and identify the type of fly causing the infestation and where the likely potential sources could be. We also tried to visit as many homes as we could to offer advice. This was very challenging, given the overwhelming demand at the time.

We liaised with Public Health Wales to confirm that the advice being given to residents was correct and applicable, and we issued a series of press releases/social media posts targeted at the local community and businesses.

The complaints were coming from various areas in South Llanelli, and the flies were affecting many homes. During this time, the weather was very warm, humid and dry, which offered ideal conditions for flies to breed.

As the last week in May progressed it was clear that we were dealing with a major fly infestation and it was causing, understandably, great concern and anxiety for the local community. At the beginning of June, more resources were targeted at the area with a particular emphasis on supporting anyone that was considered vulnerable, including older people, people with disabilities or people suffering with more serious medical conditions. This was over and above what we potentially needed to do, but was clearly necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.

2.2 Identifying the type of fly and source

Officers were investigating certain areas to attempt to seek the source of the flies from the initial complaints being received. This investigative work, however, was escalated as the numbers of complaints increased from the 22nd May.

Resources were deployed to visit potential sites in the areas affected and we worked with a private pest control company (Killgerm). They provided expert advice on the types of premises or environments to check initially, supporting officers remotely. The experts did acknowledge, however, that the source could be a very small area and difficult to find. They did give an example of a previous fly infestation they had located elsewhere in the UK where the source was a small pool of water the size of an iPad. This gave us a realistic expectation of the difficulties we were facing.

Officers continued to visit and revisit (where applicable) premises and environments that matched the advice of Killgerm, and this continued to the end of May. This included an initial visit to the metal processing plant but there was no evidence to suggest, nor were we informed, that there was a potential fly infestation problem at the time.

Fly samples were taken from three homes on 23rd May 2018 and it was confirmed, at the end of May, that it was the common house fly. This was important information on the types of environment that could support the breeding site. It was re-iterated, however, that the source could be extremely small and could still be difficult to find.

An expert from Killgerm visited the area on 7th June, and accompanied an officer from the Environmental Protection Section to many locations in the area. It was during this exercise that the most likely source was identified as a local metal processing facility. This expert was able to confirm the breeding site by actually identifying fly pupae in waste material on site. Samples were also taken at this location and were subsequently confirmed as the same type of fly as found in the surrounding areas.

As soon as the site was confirmed as the most likely source, the site manager arranged for the area to be treated with insecticide and the offending material started to be removed from the site within 2 days. All the material was taken off site by 13th June. Further insecticide treatments were also undertaken while the material was being removed. The removal of waste and insecticide treatments were monitored by Environmental Health Officers to ensure it was adequate and safe.

2.3 Responsibility for the identified source

It should be noted that the site where the likely source was located is regulated by Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The Council did not have any responsibility for regulation and monitoring of the site.

With the metal processing facility being permitted by NRW, officers notified the organisation on the same day it was confirmed as the most likely source, so that they could take any action considered necessary.

The recycling centre was receiving mixed recyclables from sites in England, which contained residual putrescible waste and had provided an ideal breeding environment for the common house fly.

NRW carried out several site visits following the notification on the 7th June, to supervise the removal of the waste to a suitable permitted facility.

2.4 Supporting the local community and businesses

The following demonstrates the extent and breadth of the work carried out by the Council during the period of the fly infestation.

1. Undertook over 350 visits to homes and businesses in the area affected, with staff working during the day, evenings and weekends to provide support. These visits continued until we were sure the infestation had subsided, as we were conscious that even though the source had been located, the infestation could carry on for some time.
2. Installed over 100 fly traps in homes, businesses, schools and at various locations in the community where it was considered necessary to do so.
3. Delivered six insecticide treatments inside homes that were particularly badly affected.
4. Carried out follow - up visits to determine whether the assistance provided had improved the situation, and ensuring continuing support for those most in need.

5. Employed a private pest control agency to assist us with supporting the community and businesses.
6. Regularly cleared waste from back streets/lanes and emptied street bins in affected areas.
7. Responded to any complaints of waste in the public areas the same day.
8. Emptied gulleys and re-scheduled gulley cleaning in the affected area.
9. Provided skips in Seaside and Morfa on 12th June, so that local residents could remove waste from their gardens for free. Waste is a potential breeding site for this type of fly, and offering an opportunity to remove rubbish was considered beneficial in reducing the number of flies quickly.
10. Communicated messages to the local media through press releases and social media. We issued three press releases, answered 32 media enquiries, and media interviews were provided to the BBC/S4C. Posts issued by, and responded to, by the council's marketing and media team on social media amounted to approximately 82,000 'impressions' (the number of times/people posts were seen by) and resulted in approximately 1,300 clicks through to information hosted on the council's website.

The Executive Board Member for Public Protection also updated Full Council at its June meeting.

11. Invested significant additional resources in terms of staffing, pest control and general community support.

2.5 Steps to prevent it happening again

Whilst it is not possible to guarantee that infestations will not occur again, officers have met with NRW specifically in relation to the metal processing site. This has resulted in:

1. NRW looking to vary the operator's environmental permit of the site. Due to the nature of the variation, comments from Carmarthenshire and other statutory consultees will be sought.
2. NRW also requesting a pest management plan to be submitted with the application. This management plan will be shared with the Environmental Protection Section for comment.

3. A commitment from the NRW that they will seek additional external advice on the suitability of the plan to significantly reduce the likelihood that this year's fly problem is repeated.
4. NRW agreeing to share intelligence, understand permitted premises within the County and share good practice. Since the infestation, the NRW has shared their public register with officers that identifies NRW regulated sites and dates are in the calendar for multi-disciplinary meetings.

3.0 Conclusion

The above provides a clear account of the issues that were faced and how the Council responded to the fly infestation. It hopefully demonstrates the breadth and volume of work undertaken across the Council.

It is fully recognised, however, that it was a challenging time for residents and businesses. There were understandable frustrations that came to the fore at times, but this must be seen in the context of dealing with a very difficult set of circumstances.

Finally, it is very important to highlight the effort and commitment put in by Council staff (particularly those working in Public Health, Environment and Media sections) and the local members, ensuring we resolved the infestation as quickly as possible.