**Rats**

**How do I spot them?**

A rat can be found anywhere that offers shelter, food and water - including sewers. They are efficient burrowers and like compost heaps, areas under hedges and sheds where they dig shallow burrows and make nests with dry grass and leaves. In houses they nest in wall cavities and beneath floorboards.

The brown rat weighs between 350 and 500 grams and is typically between 200 and 270 mm long. Its fur colour can vary from almost black through to the most common grey/brown.

They are agile climbers and jumpers, often nesting in roof spaces and upper floors. Rats are mainly active at night but can be seen searching for food and water during the day.

The first sign of a rat infestation is often visibility of their droppings. Rats produce droppings approximately 20mm (3/4”) long.

Other signs of rats are damaged packets of food, cartons, bags etc. and grease/dirt smear marks on skirting boards, doors and chewed through pipes or wires.

**How do they affect me?**

Rats can pose a risk to health by eating and contaminating foods intended for human consumption. They can spread diseases through bites, urine, droppings, skin contact and parasites.

They damage and destroy property by gnawing wood, metal and can even cause fires by gnawing electrical cables.

Rats are prolific burrowers and can burrow up to 3 ¼ metre deep; their burrowing can cause subsidence and damage drainage systems. Sometimes you will find burrows in the garden.

**Drainage problems**

If regular baiting with rodenticide is not getting rid of your rats there may be a hole or break in your drains.

**You may need to invest in a private camera survey to establish if this is the problem.**
How to protect your home from rats

✶ **Do not attract a rat**
Firstly, remove any source of food and water. Rats can be attracted to bird and pet food too, so it’s advisable to use a rat-proof bird table and clear away all spilled pet food.

✶ **Use your wheeled bin**
Take care that all waste foods are disposed of into your wheeled bin and not left lying around in bags or sacks. Make sure that your dustbin lid can be closed.

✶ **Control rubbish**
Avoid the accumulation of rubbish, piles of wood and garden waste. Clear any overgrown areas of your garden. These can all provide excellent nesting places!

✶ **Maintain your property**
Ensure that your property is in good repair to make it difficult for rats to gain access. If you are carrying out any DIY work, which involves making holes in the cavity walls, e.g. new pipe work, please make sure that the holes are thoroughly resealed as this is often a route into houses for rats and mice.

Check your external wall for holes in brickwork, broken airbricks, broken windows, badly fitted doors etc where rats may be entering the property. Remember, a rat can squeeze through a gap of only 2cm. Check your drainage is in good repair as rats can access the house via broken pipe work.

✶ **Building works**
If you are building an extension or adding a conservatory pay attention to good workmanship as unfinished or poor workmanship underground can provide a perfect access to the cavity for rats. Make sure your builder bears this in mind especially when adding new drainage. Once the building works are finished it is almost impossible to establish where the rats are getting in and very expensive to try and put it right.

✶ **Maintain your compost.**
If you have a compost bin, only dispose of garden and vegetable matter. **DO NOT** dispose of meat or cereal products on compost heaps. Make sure the compost bin is resting on a hard standing to stop rats burrowing up into it. A badly constructed or poorly maintained heap will provide an attractive home for rats!
What can you do if you discover you have rats?

- Poison baits can be bought over the counter but always follow the manufacturer’s instructions.
- You can call a professional pest control operator.
- Reading Borough Council offers a treatment service for rats and mice in domestic premises

Reading Borough Council Pest Control Charges

- Householder without a concessionary ‘Your Reading Passport’: £72 (inclusive of VAT)
- Householder with a concessionary ‘Your Reading Passport’: £46 (inclusive of VAT)
- £12 missed visit charge if you do not keep an appointment

This charge covers the initial callout by the Pest Control Officer, and, if bait is laid, up to 2 further visits.

What Reading Borough Council Pest Control WILL do

- Assess the problem that you have with rats or mice.
- Lay poison/bait in appropriate areas.
- Leave advisory information detailing the poison/bait used.
- Offer some advice on any structural work that may be necessary to help you solve the problem (e.g. drainage work).
- Revisit as necessary up to a total of three visits to check that the poison/bait has been taken and that the rat/mouse problem is reducing or been resolved. You will need to pay again if we agree that further visits are needed.

What Reading Borough Council Pest Control will NOT do

- Carry out any structural work to keep rats/mice out of houses, buildings or gardens (including lifting floorboards or heavy manhole covers). For people over 60 who are unable to do the work themselves the ‘Handihelp’ scheme (01635 588822) might be able to help.
- Start a second course of treatment if you do not undertake any necessary structural work or investigation that is advised.
- Start a third course of treatment without referring the case to a senior officer for further investigation on the matter.
- Lay poison/bait in inappropriate or unsafe areas. This is usually at the discretion of the operative but includes open spaces, alleyways or other areas where children or pets may have unsupervised access to poison/bait.
- Routinely remove dead rats or mice. (To dispose of these, double-bag them and put them in to your wheeled bin.)

To arrange for a visit by Pest Control ring 0118 937 3737