



UK RAT ACTIVITY REPORT 2026

Urban Trends, Infrastructure Risk and
Emerging Industry Direction



RatGate
RODENT PREVENTION DEVICES



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The Changing Scale of Rat Activity in the UK

Over the past few years, rat activity across the UK has shown a clear **year-on-year increase**, becoming a growing and increasingly material risk — particularly within urban environments.

Local authority data highlights a sharp rise in activity. UK councils recorded approximately **225,430 rodent infestations in 2022**, increasing to **271,343 in 2023** — an increase of over 45,900 cases, or approximately **20.4% in a single year** (Direct Line Group analysis of UK council data). This marked a significant step-change in activity levels.

In 2024, reporting shifted from recorded infestations to **pest control interventions**, providing a different perspective on activity. UK local authorities recorded **291,132 pest control visits**, of which **91% related to rodents (rats and mice)**.

Intervention volumes provide a strong indication that **rodent activity remained consistently high following the increase in 2023**, and continued to place sustained demand on pest control services.

While public datasets typically group rats and mice together under “rodents”, industry reporting consistently identifies **rats as the primary driver of pest control activity in urban and commercial environments**, particularly where infestations originate from drainage systems (British Pest Control Association).

More recent industry data shows that this upward trend has continued. Reporting from Rentokil, published via PCT Magazine, indicates that **rat activity increased by a further 10% between 2024 and 2025**, with continued **elevated levels into early 2026**.

Rats now account for approximately **25% of all UK pest activity**, making them the single largest pest category (British Pest Control Association).



Urban Environments and Commercial Exposure

Rat activity across the UK is not evenly distributed. It is most concentrated in **dense urban environments**, where population density, waste generation and infrastructure complexity combine to create ideal conditions for sustained activity.

These environments typically include:

- High volumes of waste and food by-products
- Mixed-use commercial and residential space
- Continuous human activity
- Ageing and interconnected infrastructure

As a result, exposure spans multiple sectors, including commercial premises, retail environments, warehousing, housing associations and high-density residential buildings.

In many urban areas, these environments are closely interconnected — often sharing drainage systems, waste infrastructure and service routes — allowing rats to easily move between locations.

Within this broader context, **food-led environments remain among the most exposed**. The presence of food waste, delivery cycles and storage areas creates conditions that can attract and sustain rat activity if access is not effectively controlled.

From a regulatory perspective, the implications are significant. Guidance from the Food Standards Agency makes clear that businesses must prevent pest access and protect against contamination as a fundamental requirement.

Where this fails, consequences include:

- Temporary closures
- Hygiene rating downgrades
- Financial penalties
- Legal enforcement
- Tenant complaints and housing compliance issues

Industry research from the International Conference on Urban Pests backs this up, highlighting that infestations can result in **failed inspections, operational disruption and reputational damage**, particularly within food-led environments.



Infrastructure, Environment and the True Point of Entry

While environmental factors such as waste, population density and climate all contribute to rat activity, **the way in which rats enter buildings is a critical — and often underestimated — part of the problem.**

Across industry guidance and environmental health reporting, there is strong alignment that drainage infrastructure plays a central role. The British Pest Control Association states that up to **80% of rat infestations in urban environments originate from the sewer system.** This is supported by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, which identifies defective drainage systems as a leading cause of recurring infestations. Government guidance even confirms that rats can enter buildings through damaged pipes, unsealed pipework and faulty drainage connections (UK Government).

Rats are highly adapted to sewer environments and can travel significant distances through underground pipe networks, navigate complex drainage systems and enter buildings through openings as small as 15–20mm. In dense urban environments, drainage systems provide a **direct and concealed pathway into buildings.**

Where drainage systems provide access, **infestations are often part of a recurring cycle.** **Internal treatment reduces activity temporarily,** but if entry points remain unchanged, rats are able to re-enter via the same route. **This leads to repeated infestations over time.**

Environmental pressures are also increasing this risk. Rentokil reporting indicates that increased rainfall and flooding are displacing rats from sewer systems, increasing movement and driving entry into buildings.



Why Traditional Pest Control Is No Longer Sufficient

The nature of rat infestations in urban environments has changed — and traditional pest control approaches have not kept pace.

Traditional pest control is primarily reactive, focused on treating infestations after they occur. While effective in the short term, this approach does not address the fact that infestations often originate externally, primarily through drainage systems, which results in a repeatable pattern. Infestations are treated, activity is reduced, but entry points remain unchanged. Rats therefore re-enter, creating ongoing cycles of infestation. Environmental health guidance backs this up by identifying drainage defects as a key driver of repeat infestations (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health).

From a commercial perspective, this leads to:

- Repeated call-outs and ongoing treatment cycles
- Increased cost associated with reactive pest control
- Operational disruption and staff time impact
- Continued compliance and reputational risk

In interconnected urban environments, these challenges are amplified, with multiple premises affected by shared infrastructure.

There is now increasing recognition across the industry that reactive pest control alone is not sufficient. A more effective approach requires identifying and controlling points of entry, particularly within infrastructure.



Geographic Concentration and High-Risk Areas

Rat activity is present across the UK, with estimates suggesting there are over **150 million rats nationwide — equating to more than two rats per person** (British Pest Control Association). However, activity is not evenly distributed. Infestations are significantly more concentrated in specific urban locations where density, food activity and infrastructure intersect.

London represents the highest concentration, accounting for approximately **23% of UK rodent infestations**, with **76,507 infestations recorded across 20 boroughs between 2023 and mid-2025**. Boroughs including Camden, Islington, Brent, Newham and Tower Hamlets consistently report the highest levels of activity.

In the **West Midlands**, rat activity **increased by 16% in 2025** (Rentokil), with Birmingham and surrounding areas showing sustained pressure. Walsall alone has over 2,300 registered food businesses, increasing exposure within a concentrated area.

The **North West recorded the highest growth**, with rat activity **increasing by 19% in 2025** (Rentokil) and approximately **95,000 infestations between 2023 and 2025**, particularly across Liverpool and Manchester.

In Scotland, **Glasgow recorded 10,323 infestations in 2022, a 31% year-on-year increase**, with activity concentrated in areas such as Pollokshields and Shawlands.

In Wales, while national datasets are more limited, regional reporting consistently identifies **Cardiff, Swansea and Newport** as key urban hotspots, with recurring infestations and increasing environmental health concerns. While less formally quantified, these patterns mirror those seen in larger UK cities.

Across all regions, high-risk areas share common characteristics:

- Dense populations
- High concentrations of food businesses
- Mixed-use environments
- Ageing, interconnected drainage infrastructure



Conclusion and Industry Direction

Rat activity across the UK is increasing, with clear year-on-year growth driven by urban density, environmental pressures and infrastructure challenges. While widespread, activity is increasingly concentrated within identifiable high-risk urban locations.

Across these environments, infestations are frequently driven by external sources, with rats entering through drainage systems and spreading across interconnected infrastructure. This creates persistent and recurring issues, even where internal treatment is effective.

Traditional pest control approaches — primarily reactive — are no longer sufficient in addressing this type of activity. While effective in reducing visible infestations, they do not prevent re-entry where access points remain open, leading to ongoing operational, financial and compliance challenges.

As a result, there is a clear shift emerging across the industry towards **preventative, infrastructure-led strategies**, focused on controlling entry at source rather than managing infestations after they occur.

This includes increased use of **physical interventions within drainage systems**, designed to prevent rats from entering buildings in the first place. These approaches complement traditional pest control by addressing the underlying cause of infestation, rather than repeatedly treating the outcome.

In high-density, multi-site and food-led environments, this shift is particularly significant. Where infrastructure is shared and exposure is continuous, preventing access at source offers a more effective and sustainable approach to reducing both initial and repeat infestations.



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