

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 25 SEPTEMBER 2012

REPORT OF: WINTER SERVICE – REVIEW & UPDATE
ON SERVICE READINESS



REPORT LEAD: JOHN FUREY – CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT
AND TRANSPORT

SUBJECT: WINTER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT FOR 2012/13

SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

The delivery of Winter Service is delivered in two distinct areas:

1. **Pre-treatment Of Routes and Advance Planning** – this ensures that pre-defined route networks including carriageway, cycleway and areas of footway, are pre-treated according to their importance and the weather conditions, to inhibit the formation of ice and facilitate the removal of snow.
2. **Management of Severe Snow Event** – this ensures the service is prepared to reactively manage a severe snow event to reduce disruption and improve safety during a severe weather event.

In 2010 a joint officer and member Winter Task Group was formed to review the overall delivery of winter service. The Task Group success has been identified not only through external nomination of Best Scrutiny Award but also by delivering an increased gritting network within the existing approved budget and an improved level of service for the 2011/12 season.

This report provides the final update from the Task Group, an overview of the performance of winter service last year and recommendations to further improve service and ongoing scrutiny.

RECOMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. the recommendations of the Winter Performance Task Group (set out as recommendations 1-7 on page 2 of this report) and the attached Winter Service Plan 2012/13 be considered for adoption.
2. a response be provided for each recommendation, agreeing actions as appropriate.
3. the Members of the Winter Performance Task Group be thanked for their work.

REASON FOR RECOMENDATIONS

To consider the Task Group's report on the performance of the service operation during the 2011/12 winter season and recommendations for the development of the service for the 2012/13 winter season.

REPORT OF THE TASK GROUP:

4. In accordance with the Cabinet recommendation(s) on 25 July 2011, the Task Group has met to review key aspects and activities related to winter service provision in Surrey.
5. This report is intended to once again summarise progress made and identify areas where further action is required, based on member feedback through the Task Group.

WINTER PERFORMANCE TASK GROUP RECEOMNDATIONS TO CABINET:

6. Subject to final ratification at the Environment and Transport Select Committee in September 2012, the Task Group recommends:-
 - I. That the "people solution" Gritting Route Network as implemented in 2010/11 be formally maintained as the council's gritting network, incorporating the minor amendments following resident and officer feedback.
 - II. That the Gritting Route Network be supported by the provision of Quad Bikes, enabling difficult to reach areas to be fully supported.
 - III. That a minimum level of 16,000t be maintained as the Council's salt stock requirement and Beare Green Highway Depot is identified as an essential depot for the delivery of winter service between October and April.
 - IV. That all Grit Bins be fitted with bar codes to enable officers to remotely monitor stock refills and provide confidence to residents regarding re-filling.
 - V. That communities be allowed to purchase additional Grit Bins at a total cost of £1,000 for a 4 year period, and that Parishes and other statutory bodies are licensed to provide grit bins on the highway.
 - VI. That cabinet approves the Surrey Winter Service Plan 2012/13 (Annex 1).
 - VII. That the current £2.361m budget allocation be maintained at its current level (with inflation) within the next Medium Term Financial Plan to ensure the existing level of service is maintained.

DETAILS:

Background

7. The previous Cabinet report, on 26 July 2011, documented key points to enhance service needs and meet the aspirations of both members and the public. This followed the events and impacts suffered over the previous two winters when

Surrey, together with the rest of the UK, experienced the most severe winter weather conditions for thirty years.

8. This report considers the performance of the service operation during the 2011/12 winter season and the affect of the operational improvements and additional funding approved by Cabinet for that season, together with organisational changes and partnership working arrangements.
9. Throughout their first year as the council's contractor, May Gurney has been working with the Task Group on all elements of our winter service. This has included optimisation of the gritting routes, to maximise efficiency and reduce costs, by reducing the number of routes (a reduction from 39 to 35 is anticipated but not confirmed at the time of report publication). This has been managed in conjunction with the planned replacement of vehicles across both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 winter seasons with 16 vehicles now replaced.
10. After two consecutive years of extreme winters 2011/12 saw a return to a near "average" (52 runs per season) Surrey winter, with 55 precautionary salting runs completed. The accumulations of snow over the weekend of 4th February were, nevertheless, sufficient to test our response to a severe weather event, through the new contract arrangements now in place with May Gurney.
11. The Task Group complimented May Gurney on their gritting route efficiencies and the fact that promised savings had been made. These changes were made based on observation of their predecessor's activities and without the experience of a winter season working in Surrey. Now, with that benefit, they have delivered more than at first promised.
12. This joint report clarifies progress on a number of recommendations from previous years, includes updated information and in some cases proposals and recommendations, with indications of cost where appropriate. These are made by the Winter Performance Task Group for consideration and potential adoption as policy by Cabinet.

Gritting Routes

13. Through route optimisation the additional P1 precautionary salting network, approved last year to provide a 'people solution', has now been consolidated into the main routes, leading to a further improvement in performance.
14. Area Highway Managers (AHM) and engineers, who have direct contact with the public and members during the winter season have been involved in the review and provided feedback on the new routes. On review, with the exception to some minor changes on main bus routes, the P1 network will remain unchanged from last year. Members felt that a clearer communication link through Area Managers to members on any changes on the network, needs to be in place.
15. The inclusion of primary schools on a new P3 network in 2011/12 has been further enhanced to ensure that issues of access, raised during the season, have been addressed.
16. Due to the short duration of snow and mobilisation issues the evaluation of the trial quad bikes and All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) did not take place. It is proposed

that the trial of alternative vehicles will be carried over to the next extreme “event” and that MG will have a full complement of trained operatives and drivers.

17. The ATV provided last year was not felt to be fit for purpose because it had to be transported to site on trailer during commissioning. A different vehicle will be trialled this season which can be driven independently to sites from the depot.

Operations

18. The introduction of tracker technology on each of the gritters enabled real time information to be relayed to ensure network coverage was achieved and also provided information on the salt used during operations.
19. During the snow event the Snow Desk was fully operational and staffed by both SCC and MG to take calls and coordinate operations across the county. This central coordination was one of the keys to our success. However, it was recognised that whilst resources were sufficient to cover the event on this occasion, additional resources must be identified in the MG Winter Operations Plan to ensure continuous 24/7 operation over a longer period.
20. The council maintains contact with the Highways Agency and exchanges information on operational activities during the winter season, together details of salt stock levels.

Salt Management

21. Members acknowledged the improved situation with regard to salt storage and agreed that stocks should be maintained at 16,000 tonnes but noted that the salt supplies are still dependent on one supplier. As such, SCC remains potentially vulnerable in its ability to replenish salt stocks if there is an extended period of severe winter weather, over a large geographical area, as in 2009/10 and 2010/11. Concerns about the resilience of salt stocks, extends beyond a single supplier and includes the acquisition of existing stocks by Government if there is future widespread disruption.
22. The council’s new supply contract with Salt Union, including direct monitoring of usage for automatic resupply, provides assurance that salt stock levels will be maintained throughout the season.
23. The maximum countywide salt storage capacity available in 2012/13 is approximately 16,000 tonnes.
24. The Task Group considered whether a stockpile of 16,000 tonnes of salt, replenished automatically by deliveries when used, provided sufficient resilience for the council. It was suggested that it might be difficult to obtain deliveries during an extended period of severe winter weather, when supplies would be much more in demand and could in some situations be commandeered by the government. In response, officers advised that this situation was much improved on the previous winters when relatively small stocks was held and salt ordered on a just in time basis. The current pre season stock level allows for 12 days of continues heavy salting and is twice that required for an average Surrey winter.
25. Salt stocks will be maintained at the maximum level that storage permits through the peak season until mid February. Stocks will then be allowed to run down to a

minimum of 8,000t (equivalent of 6 days of continuous salting), to enable stock rotation and any salt barn maintenance prior to receipt of new supplies.

26. During 2011/12 there was no need to draw off the reserve stocks held at either Kingswood or Beare Green Depots. However, a cross cutting review of Highway services has recognised that Beare Green is in a strategic position to deliver both the surface treatment programme as, a chipping store, and provide access to salt supplies during a severe snow event.
27. The Task Group supported Beare Green being retained and available as a salt store and for management during a snow event. Furthermore, if Beare Green is to be sold, the Task Group agreed that it should not be released without prior agreement with Highways and MG that acceptable, alternative provision has been made. The main precautionary salting will continue to be delivered from the four main depots.
28. Through the review, Kingswood depot has been declared surplus to Highway requirements and the residual salt stock there will be distributed across the remaining depots.
29. The following table summarises salt stocks and their distribution across highway depots, together with barn capacity figures: -

Depot	Total Barn Capacity (tonnes)	Current Stock Levels (tonnes)		MG/SCC Proposal 2012/13 (tonnes)	
MG Contract:					
Bagshot	3500	2990		3500	
Godstone	4000	3490		4000	
Merrow (including open storage)	5750	5055		5750	
Witley	1800	1330		1800	
Other SCC Depot:					
Kingswood	1900	1190		n/a	
Beare Green	900	695		900	
Total	17850	14750		15950	
Combined Capacity (MG + Highways) for 2012/13					16,000t

30. The Task Group noted that the storage of different salt types in the barns leads to reduced capacity. In order to maximise storage capacity it is, therefore, proposed to investigate alternative storage arrangements for the white salt used in the saturators.
31. The Task Group considered the ongoing benefit of maintaining a small proportion of salt under temporary cover. It was concluded that whilst it was 'easier' and provided a lot more flexibility there is a risk of increasing 'cost' due to more

inspections to prevent excessive leaching and loss of stock due to 'caking'. This practice should, therefore, be minimised and used only where necessary.

32. No interest has been shown to date by any of the SE7 in procuring a joint contract for salt supply. However, to maximise joint working the County Council has joined the regional framework contract with the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO). This process will enable collaborative working and ongoing cashable savings through joint procurement.

Infrastructure Replacement

33. A survey of the salt barns has identified the need to carry out structural repairs to the Merrow salt barn over the next two years. Prior to work commencing a detailed structural survey is required. The Task Group agreed that money should be spent to assess / repair the salt barn at Merrow during the summer months, so that full capacity will be available for storage in the future.
34. Last winter the weighbridge at Witley Depot was regularly out of commission. To ensure good salt management is maintained it has been agreed to move the surplus weighbridge at Kingswood to Witley.

Provision and Use of Grit Bins

35. The county currently manages and maintains 1741 highway Grit Bins (1643 winter service, 98 member sponsored) with an additional 25 recorded at, or near, fire stations that are provided as part of their own business continuity planning.
36. The use of smart chips on grit bins was reviewed by the Task Group and May Gurney advised that barcodes are the preferred option in Surrey. A new computer management system will then require photographs to be taken and logged to evidence when grit bins are refilled.
37. The new barcode solution will enable officers to remotely confirm, in real time, when grit bins have been re-filled and it is anticipated this will be implemented in 2012/13.
38. The cost of providing and maintaining a grit bin, in accordance with the previously agreed county process, has been reviewed to reflect the current contract rates. The cost of a grit bin, including annual refurbishment and filling in line with county standards will be held at £1,000 for a 4 year period.
39. It is noted that various interested parties have proposed, or made prior arrangements to supply and install grit bins in their area. Whilst the Cabinet did not support the approach the Task Group had been asked to review the policy on third party grit bins. In consultation with legal services a licensing agreement has been drawn up to enable Parishes and other statutory authorities to provide and maintain grit bins on the highway (Annex 1).

Borough/District Responsibilities

40. During last winter, in line with the Statement of Understanding, most Boroughs and Districts were involved in supporting the county to maintain footways during the snow event. This shared approach is now well documented with clear lines of communication and understanding on when and where Boroughs and Districts can provide assistance. It was noted that this provided a more coordinated response with minimal duplication. The Task Group considers this shared approach should continue and be recognised on the winter service web site.
41. Salt allocations to Districts and Boroughs were discussed and the Task Group felt that, in some areas, these supplies had been used inappropriately, off the public highway. Members agreed that a process should be drawn up to monitor the use of salt provided to Districts and Boroughs more closely.
42. Officers advised that some Districts and Boroughs had requested extra turbocaster hand propelled grit spreaders be provided for use by partner organisations, such as chambers of commerce etc. The Task Group felt that the District and Boroughs, and partner organisations, should procure these extra spreaders, not SCC. Alternatively individual members may consider using their own community funds.

Farmers, Contractors and Equipment

43. In order to support the Council's snow clearance and gritting response during times of severe winter weather 51 local farmers provided additional assistance in 2011/2012 under a new five year contract. With the enhanced network of snowplough routes, the Task Group recognised the contribution that they had provided, particularly in reaching isolated communities.
44. Information on the location of each local farmer is contained in the information packs to be provided to Members and details their pre-planned activities in the event of severe weather.
45. To further improve resilience, officers will arrange to fit an existing SCC survey vehicle with plough equipment, thus enabling its useful deployment throughout the year.
46. In order to reduce ongoing maintenance costs at the Blackwater Valley weather station it has been agreed to relocate the facility to avoid future costly and disruptive lane closures.

Communications Plan

47. Members felt that Local Committee Chairmen and local Members should be informed of changes to gritting routes and grit bins. It was agreed that a process should be put in place so Area Highways Managers will communicate these changes to local Members.
48. Once a communication process has been agreed it will be the responsibility of the Chairmen to determine how and when this information is brought to the attention of their Local Committee.

49. To manage expectations it was noted there is a need to match daily 'activity' to ongoing publicity campaigns.
50. Although the Task Group will 'disband' following the current winter review, there is still a need for a biannual report direct to Scrutiny. The first will probably be in September, when the service would explain the extent of their 'readiness plans' and the second would be around Easter to report on performance and learning with proposed service 'improvements' that would be brought back to the next September meeting etc.
51. The Task Group also stressed the importance of involving the Local Committees in a timely manner.

Severe Snow Event & Central Severe Weather Contingency Fund

52. The Medium Term Financial Plan includes a budget of £2.361m for winter maintenance; £2.2m of this is allocated to Winter Service Activity One: Pre-treatment of Routes & Advance Planning. This is the minimum amount of funding required to deliver the existing level of service. Following review the Task Group were of the strong opinion that this funding should be protected in the next Medium Term Financial Plan to ensure the current level of service is maintained.
53. A further **£150,000** is allocated within the Medium Term Financial Plan to enable Surrey Highways to manage a severe Snow Event that might be expected during an "average" winter in the south east of England. A severe Snow Event is anticipated to last 1 or 2 days and will involve exceptional snow fall causing significant disruption to commuters, residents and communities. The £150,000 enables:
- I. Two days overtime payment to critical winter delivery staff
 - II. Two days payments to farmers to utilise ploughs to clear roads
 - III. An additional salt delivery to the county's grit bins at **each** Snow Event
 - IV. Additional fuel and plant costs to deliver critical supplies
 - V. Additional emergency salt supplies
54. Incurring more than one Snow Events a year would therefore lead to additional costs. If these costs could not be met within the existing highways budget it may be necessary to call on the severe weather reserve of £5m.
55. The estimated cost of an additional Snow Event is as follows:
- I. £25,000 in overtime and additional materials payments for each day of the snow event
 - II. £100,000 at the end of the snow event to ensure that all grit bins are fully replenished in time for the next snow event
56. Assuming a Snow Event lasts on average two days, each further event will therefore incur an additional estimated cost of £150,000.

57. In the event of another winter like 2010/11 to total financial pressure created could be met by drawing on the central severe weather reserve (£5m).

CONSULTATION:

58. The Winter Performance Task Group consists of Members and officers. The Environment & Transport Select Committee Members and the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment have been consulted as part of the development of this report and its recommendations.
59. The Area Highway Managers and engineers, who have direct contact with the public and Members during the winter season, have also been involved in the review. Members felt that a clearer communication link through Area Managers to members on any changes on the network, needs to be in place.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

60. Section 41a of the Highways Act 1980 states that local authorities 'have a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice'. The qualification of 'reasonably practicable' means that it is not an absolute duty.
61. Risks have been managed through the prioritisation of both roads and footways to provide clear understanding of agreed criteria for each category and the type of response/treatment proposed, taking into account agreed stakeholder views alongside operational requirements which forms part of the annual review of the service.

Finance and Value for Money Implications:

62. The revenue budget for Winter Service activities in 2012/13 is confirmed as £2,361m. This figure continues to reflect the recommendations approved by Cabinet in 2011 and will fully deliver the advance planning and pre-treatment of identified routes to prevent ice and snow build up. See breakdown below:

Winter Service Budget Activity	Budget £000
Labour and vehicles to deliver pre-treatment service to agreed Gritting Network	1,455
Salt usage	447
Grit bins pre-season salt fill & maintenance	131
Weather stations and bureau service (contract lump sum)	50
Re-brand grit bins and install bar codes	39
Relocation of weather station	25
Payments to farmers & partner organisations	38
General maintenance	26
Severe snow event contingency	150
Winter total	2,361

63. As part of the £2.361m allocation, Surrey Highways will maintain £150,000 to manage one severe Snow Event.
64. Separating the Contingency Fund from Surrey Highways Medium Term Financial Plan increases transparency in managing budgets, ensuring the service is only allocated the minimum budget according to its own financial planning.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

65. The S151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues and risks have been considered in this report.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

66. The inclusion of the grit bin licensing for Parishes and other statutory bodies has been approved by legal services.

Equalities and Diversity:

67. The winter service priority is, as far as is reasonably practicable, to safeguard the movement and well-being of all Highway users, both the residents of Surrey and those passing through the County.
68. Within the resources available we are not able to treat the entire network at any one time. The impact of the service will be both positive and negative on all groups identified depending on their location in relation to the priority network.
69. To improve access for a number of these groups the prioritisation process has been developed to provide a 'people solution', with particular reference to facilities such as schools, stations, hospitals, special schools and access to isolated communities. These changes have made the service more inclusive to a wider part of the community. The policy has been further developed, through these enhanced criteria, to allow an increase on the priority salting network.
70. 'Communities access' for vulnerable people is addressed and organised through Emergency Planning and local 4x4 groups etc. The Districts and Boroughs also provide a service to their own care home facilities which is outside the scope of the highway winter service.
71. An Equalities Impact Assessment is currently being developed for the wider highway service but, due to independences, it was not practical to complete a separate section for winter service. However, as the recommendations will have no material impact on existing equality policy and actions the need to complete an assessment prior to report submission was not deemed necessary. A full assessment will be made available to cabinet at a future meeting.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

72. No issues identified.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Approved recommendations will be implemented as part of the Winter Service Plan 2012/2013, if it is possible to do so under the current contractual arrangements.

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Annexes:

Annex 1 – Winter Service Plan 2012/13

Informed:

John Furey – Cabinet Member for Transport

Sources/background papers:

Previous report of the Task Group to the Cabinet – 26 July 2011
