

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 23 SEPTEMBER 2014

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: MR JOHN FUREY, CABINET MEMBER
FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
FLOODING RECOVERY



LEAD OFFICER: JASON RUSSELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR HIGHWAYS &
TRANSPORT

SUBJECT: HIGHWAYS COLD WEATHER PLAN FOR 2014/15

SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

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

1. **Pre-treatment of Routes and Advance Planning** – this ensures that pre-defined route networks including carriageways, cycleways 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 manage a severe snow event, to reduce disruption and improve safety.

In 2010 a joint officer and member Winter Task Group was formed to review the overall delivery of the winter service. The successes of the Task Group and the principles that it has developed inform annual winter reviews to deliver continuous improvement to the service.

This report provides an overview of the performance of winter service last year and recommendations to further improve service and ongoing scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Highways Cold weather Plan 2014/15, included in Annex 1, be approved for the forthcoming winter season.
2. Respond to the Environment and Transport Select Committee Winter Performance Task Group recommendations, as detailed in the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To agree the Highways Cold Weather Plan for the coming winter season.

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL WINTER SERVICE REVIEW:

1. In accordance with the Cabinet recommendations on 24 September 2013, Officers have met with members of the Environment & Transport Select Committee to review key aspects and activities related to winter service provision in Surrey.
2. This report summarises progress made and identifies areas where further action is required, based on member feedback through the Task Group.

WINTER PERFORMANCE TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET:

3. Subject to final ratification at the Environment and Transport Select Committee on 10 September 2014, the Task Group recommends to Cabinet that:-
 - I. The 2013/14 Gritting Route Network be maintained for the 2014/15 winter season while also incorporating minor amendments resulting from member, resident and officer feedback.
 - II. Beare Green Depot remains available as a key resource for use during severe weather events.
 - III. Communities are permitted to purchase additional grit bins at a total cost of £1,009 for a 4 year period while Parish Councils and other statutory bodies may be licensed to install grit bins on the public highway.
 - IV. At the end of the initial 4 year period those additional member sponsored grit bins that meet with the appropriate criteria score (100 points plus) be transferred to the core winter service. Those grit bins that do not meet that criteria score but are serviceable, be offered extended agreements at a total cost of £709 per bin for a further 4 year period.
 - V. Consideration should be given to supporting the future replacement of the weather stations following a review of their current and future provision.
 - VI. The Highways Cold Weather Plan 2014/15, included at Annex 1, is approved.
 - VII. Approval of any future amendments to the Highways Cold Weather Plan be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Flooding and the Assistant Director Highways and Transport.

DETAILS:

Background

4. The previous Cabinet report, on 24 September 2013, documented key points to enhance service provision and meet the aspirations of both members and the public. This followed the lessons learnt from the previous year of the Kier Contract.
5. This report considers the performance of the service during the 2013/14 winter season, the effect of subsequent operational improvements and funding

approved by Cabinet for that season, together with organisational changes and partnership working arrangements.

6. Throughout their third year as the Council's contractor, Kier worked with officers and members on all elements of the winter service to consolidate on the improvements that have already been achieved.
7. After the severe winter weather event in 2012/13, 2013/14 brought a change in the winter weather pattern with ice and snow being replaced by rain, winds and floods. The situation was challenging with the ground saturated, regular river flooding, standing water in many places and seepage leading to the high probability of ice forming during cold periods. By the end of the season Kier had completed 59 precautionary salting runs in the east of the county and 44 in the west which is comparable to an "average" (52 runs per season) Surrey winter. Salt supplies have regularly been replaced throughout the winter period in accordance with Cabinet's agreed recommendations.
8. With an unusually large number of grit bin replacements combined with new requests (a combined total of 246 in 2013/14) the service response has not always been timely. Mid season this was further affected by the diversion of resources onto the storm response and flood recovery operations. Officers are working with Kier to learn lessons from last season to ensure grit bins can be placed on the highway within a reasonable timescale and that we have sufficient resilience to manage the numbers required.
9. 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.

Network

10. The priority salting network will remain the same as 2013/14 with some minor amendments following consultation with Local Committees, member, resident and officer feedback. Task Group Members were supportive of this approach, particularly as it was in keeping with the localism agenda.

Operations

11. All of the vehicles are now able to spread with a higher degree of accuracy. This combined with the tracker technology has enables target treatment rates to be reduced in line with new national guidance, resulting in greater efficiencies.
12. Officers advised that an efficiency gain had also been made through the use of one of the trial vehicles on low bridges and other restricted access sites.
13. Officers advised that the introduction of route-based forecasts was proposed from next winter, initially operating out of the Godstone Depot. These changes will enhance the precautionary salting decisions that are currently being made across a wider geographical area or 'domain' and could demonstrate efficiency savings in both salt usage and resource across the network.

Salt Management

14. With the winter returning to the longer term Surrey average amount of ice and snow in 2013/14 (52 runs per season) only 4,875 tonnes of salt was used on the network., Salt stock management systems now in place continue to be robust and fit for purpose.
15. Task Group Members agreed that stocks should continue to be maintained at the maximum capacity of 16,000 tonnes prior to the commencement of the 2014/15 season.
16. Although Kier did not have need to operate from Beare Green Depot during 2013/14 it nevertheless remains an important satellite station for local management, salt storage and distribution during severe weather events. The Task Group continue to support its retention for similar winter service operations in 2014/15.

Infrastructure Replacement

17. During the December/January storms both the Godstone and Merrow salt barns sustained extensive roof damage. Officers advised that reroofing of these barns would be completed prior to the coming winter season.
18. As part of a wider development of our Property Strategy for Highways, Property Services are undertaking a feasibility study on future investment including the following elements;
 - 2015-2017 - essential development and maintenance
Including whether the existing salt storage barns need either significant repair or replacement within this time
 - 2017 onwards - a more comprehensive plan looking at the needs of our business
Looking at our footprint and whether we have the right type of depot space in the right location – for example winter operations might be better served by using an increased number of depots which are much smaller in size - during the summer months these could be used for other seasonal activities such as surface dressing or storage of road plannings.

A report will be submitted in early 2015 outlining recommendations.

Provision and Use of Grit Bins

19. The county currently manages and maintains 1737 highway Grit Bins (1504 'core' winter service, 233 member sponsored) with an additional 25 recorded at, or near, fire stations (provided as part of their own business continuity planning).
20. With the first tranche of funded grit bins coming to the end of their four year agreement in April 2015 a decision was required on how these should be managed. Task Group Members expressed the view that the core winter service grit bin numbers should remain consistent and any reductions should be compensated through the transfer of member sponsored grit bins.
21. Officers advised that to maintain the status quo, based on current trends the core winter service would not be able to sustain the incorporation of all the member

funded grit bins following the end of their maintenance agreements. The Task Group considered a number of options:

- Option 1) No transfer of funded grit bins to core service (reduction of 24 grit bins per annum) and extend maintenance funding agreement for further 4 years at a reduced rate (grit bin already in place). No impact on current budget arrangements, decreasing by £1,217 per annum.
- Option 2) Transfer those grit bins that meet with the criteria level (100 points plus) to the core winter service (reduction of 24 grit bins against transfer of 22 member grit bins) and extend maintenance funding agreement for remaining. Negligible impact on current budget arrangements, increasing by £1,885 per annum. By 2018 this would have escalated to £3,413 per annum.
- Option 3) Transfer those grit bins that are influenced by the criteria to the core winter service and maintain until they come to the end of their serviceable life (reduction of 24 grit bins against transfer of 44 member grit bins) and extend maintenance funding agreement for remaining. Marginal impact on current budget arrangements increasing by £4,455 per annum, additional funding required. By 2018 this would have escalated to £16,082 per annum.
- Option 4) Transfer grit bins to the core winter service and maintain until they come to the end of their serviceable life (reduction of 24 grit bins against transfer of 75 member grit bins). Escalating impact on current budget arrangements increasing by £9,086 per annum, additional funding required. By 2018 this would have escalated to £39,761 per annum.

- 22. Without increasing grit bin numbers or cost and in recognition that we are at the same time removing an element of non compliant grit bins off the network the Task Group recommended Option 2 as this would both retain a core number and at the same time encourage Members to consider the criteria when funding future grit bins. Officers were supportive of this proposal.
- 23. 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 and restocking frequency. The cost of a grit bin, including annual refurbishment and filling in line with county standards, is now £1,009 for a 4 year period. At the end of this period where a Member or community continue to support a grit bin an extension charge of £709 would be applied to cover the next 4 year period.
- 24. Although the Highways Service now has better data to manage the grit bin asset, affected Local Members should be copied in to emails notifying the Local Highway Manager of any bins being removed from the network. Officers agreed to publish a list following the completion of the annual survey and included this in the winter service information pack to Members.

Borough/District Responsibilities

- 25. Officers advised that the Borough and Districts are being re-engaged to ensure that the partnering arrangements in place are up to date, including a refresh of the footway snow clearing priorities following completion of the Surrey Priority Network footway hierarchy review.

Farmers, Contractors and Equipment

26. In order to support the Council's snow clearance and gritting response during times of severe winter weather we are able to call on 51 local farmers to provide additional assistance. Whilst not required for snow clearing in 2013/14 they nevertheless responded to our call for assistance during the winter storms and flooding to deal with fallen trees and embankment slips etc. in their locality. They now form part of the wider resilience for severe weather events. The Task Group continues to recognise the valuable contribution they make, particularly in maintaining access to isolated communities.
27. A review of our current weather station provision is required to address aging equipment issues, technology updates and future service requirements, this is supported by the Task Group. The review will consider future investment options and timely implementation.
28. As part of this programme the replacement and relocation of the Botley Hill weather station has become a priority due to constant vandalism. The updating of the high speed sites with GPRS (mobile connection) will also remove the need for costly lane closures to undertake maintenance. To improve our resilience in forecasting in what is known as a "localised cold area", Officers also propose the provision of new weather station south of A31 Hogs Back.

Communications Plan

29. Information bulletins matching daily 'activity' to ongoing publicity campaigns will again form part of the communications plan, ensuring that communications about the winter service are based on accurate, real time information. Following feedback from the "Annual Customer Winter Service Survey" these bulletins will also include information on other severe weather events affecting the highway.
30. Although the winter service has been fully optimised there is still a need for annual reports direct to Select Committee in September each year to agree any changes following a review of performance and learning with proposed service 'improvements'.
31. To ensure stakeholder contributions are captured the review process also includes the spring round of Local Committees together with customer surveys to inform the Task Group. The review timetable is detailed in the Highways Cold Weather Plan 2014/15 included in Annex 1.

CONSULTATION:

32. The recommendations in this report have been developed by Members, Officers and Kier representatives who together formed the Winter Performance Task Group.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

33. 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.

34. 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 form part of the annual review of the service.

Finance and Value for Money Implications:

35. The revenue budget for Winter Service activities in 2014/15 is confirmed as £2.567m. This figure continues to reflect the recommendations approved by Cabinet in 2012 and will deliver the advance planning and pre-treatment of identified routes to prevent ice and snow build up, together with up to 2 days operational response to a severe weather event. See breakdown below:

Winter Service Budget Activity	Budget 2014/15 £000
Labour and vehicles to deliver pre-treatment service to agreed Gritting Network	1,552
Salt usage	500
Grit bins pre-season salt fill & maintenance	67
Hippo bag delivery	5
Weather stations and bureau service (contract lump sum)	47
Weighbridge servicing & maintenance	9
SCC Farmer Plough Maintenance	10
Alternative vehicles	45
Relocation of weather station	60
General maintenance	122
Severe snow event	150
Winter total	2,567

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

36. The S151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues and risks have been considered in this report. Details of the 2014/15 winter service budget are set out in paragraph 35, and Highways officers consider this to be appropriate for a typical winter including a 2 day snow event. In the event that costs exceed the budget, for example due to more severe weather, costs would need to be managed within the wider budget.

Equalities and Diversity:

37. 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.

38. 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.
39. 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.
40. '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.
41. The recommendations in this report will have no material impact on existing equality policy and therefore the need to complete a full assessment prior to report submission was not deemed necessary. A full assessment will be made available to Cabinet at a future meeting, as part of a wider review of equalities in the highways service.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

42. Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 states that a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. Case law has indicated the importance of maintaining a plan, as indicated in this report, setting out the proposals and priorities for dealing with snow and ice on the roads, which can then be referred to in support of any argument that a local authority has performed its duty in a reasonably practicable way.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Approved recommendations will be implemented as part of the Highways Cold Weather Plan 2014/2015.

As part of a wider "Community Resilience Project" being lead by Emergency Management review our response to major emergencies through the development of an overarching severe weather and emergency response plan taking account of the outcomes from the Flooding Task Group October Report.

Report Contact:

Jason Russell, Assistant Director, Highways & Transport – Tel: 020 8541 7395

Consulted:

Members of the Winter Performance Task Group
 Local Committees
 Peter Agent, Asset Planning Group Manager
 Lucy Monie, Network & Asset Management Group Manager
 Simon Mitchell, Maintenance Plan Team Leader
 Tony Orzieri, Finance Manager
 Lisa Beach, Senior Accountant
 Mark Borland, Works Delivery Group Manager
 Richard Bolton, Local Highway Services Group Manager

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Highways Cold Weather Plan 2014/15

Informed:

Trevor Pugh – Strategic Director, Environment and Infrastructure

Sources/background papers:

Winter Service Task Group meeting - 14 July 2014

Environment and Transport Select Committee meeting - 10 September 2014

Previous report of the Task Group to the Cabinet – 24 September 2013

This page is intentionally left blank