

**SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****CABINET****DATE: 22 SEPTEMBER 2015****PORTFOLIO HOLDER: MR JOHN FUREY, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND FLOODING****LEAD OFFICER: JASON RUSSELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT****SUBJECT: HIGHWAYS COLD WEATHER PLAN FOR 2015/16****SUMMARY OF ISSUES:**

The winter maintenance service is provided by Surrey County Council (SCC) to enable the residents of Surrey to carry out their everyday activities during periods of winter weather. Preventing icy roads and keeping priority roads and footways usable during snowy conditions contributes to the corporate goals by keeping residents safe as they travel about and maintaining the availability of key routes so residents have choices on travel and the impact on the economy of severe weather is minimised. The winter maintenance service is part of a collection of highway maintenance activities, including other severe weather strategies, that keep the road and footway network operational for residents all year round.

The 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 Performance 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 the service.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves the Highways Cold Weather Plan for the forthcoming 2015/16 season, included as Annex 1.

2. Notes the Economic Prosperity, Environment and Highways Board Winter Performance Task Group recommendations as detailed within paragraph 3 of 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 23 September 2014, Officers have met with members of the Economic Prosperity, Environment & Highways Board 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 recommended, based on member feedback through the Task Group.

#### **WINTER PERFORMANCE TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET:**

3. The Task Group recommends to Cabinet that:-
  - I. The 2014/15 Gritting Route Network be maintained for the 2015/16 winter season incorporating minor amendments resulting from member, resident and officer feedback.
  - II. Communities are permitted to purchase additional grit bins at a total cost of £947 for an initial 4 year period and £639 for each subsequent 4 year extension while Parish Councils and other statutory bodies may be licensed to install grit bins on the public highway.
  - III. The Highways Cold Weather Plan 2015/16, included at Annex 1, is approved.
  - IV. Approval of any future amendments to the Highways Cold Weather Plan be delegated to the Assistant Director Highways and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Flooding.

#### **DETAILS:**

##### **Background**

4. A previous Cabinet report, on 23 September 2014, documented key points to enhance service provision and meet the aspirations of both members and the public.
5. This report considers the performance of the service during the 2014/15 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 fourth year as the Council's contractor, Kier worked with officers and members on all elements of the winter service to further consolidate on the improvements that have already been achieved.
7. By the end of the season Kier had completed 58/65 precautionary salting runs in the west/east of the county respectively with a further 23 runs on the North Downs which is comparable with an "average" (56 runs per season) Surrey winter. During the cold snap from 28 January which brought in a number of snow flurries but no significant accumulations, the priority 2 salting network was treated on 4 occasions. As with the last couple of seasons salt supplies have regularly been replaced throughout the winter period without interruption.
8. 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**

9. The priority salting network will remain substantially the same as 2014/15 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.
10. Traffic flow information from the Surrey Priority Network review has enabled us to realign the threshold limit on the priority 2 salting network from the previously estimated 5,000 vehicles per day to 4,000 vehicles per day. There will be no changes to the current priority 2 salting network however this change will more accurately reflect current traffic flows and allow for more informed network decisions in the future.
11. The footway priority snow clearing schedules have been updated and aligned with new Surrey Priority Network (SPN) maintenance hierarchy, providing a consistent approach across the whole of the network.

### **Operations**

12. To improve our driver resilience, over the summer Kier have increased the number of gritter drivers available. This will provide a driver ratio close to the optimum 2:1 ratio additionally the lot 5 contractor subject to final negotiations will be in a position to provide supplementary drivers during a snow event when their normal activities are curtailed.
13. 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.
14. Officers advised that with the number of split decisions being made within East Surrey the geographic area would be split to provide a domain forecast north and south of the A25. This change will enhance the precautionary salting decisions that are currently being made.

15. As in previous years we have agreements with a number of local farmers and local contractors who will carry out snow clearance on specified minor routes across the county.
16. Precautionary salting will continue to be carried out using a 'pre-wet' salt method. The advantage of this method is that the wetness allows for an immediate de-icing action and greater adherence of the salt to the road so less is required, providing environmental and cost benefits.

### **Salt Management**

17. With the winter in 2014/15 continuing the trend around the longer term Surrey average (56 runs per season) combined with the efficiencies of the spreader fleet only 6,974 tonnes of salt was used on the network. Salt stock management systems continue to be robust and fit for purpose.
18. 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 2015/16 season.
19. Beare Green Depot remains an important satellite station for local management, salt storage and distribution during severe weather events. Until the completion of the wider review the Task Group continue to support its retention for similar winter service operations in 2015/16.

### **Provision and Use of Grit Bins**

20. Kier has addressed the previous year's shortfall in the provision of grit bins and had sufficient resilience and provided a timely response to member requests.
21. 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). Grit bins are inspected and refilled as necessary during the summer period in advance of the winter season.
22. The cost of providing and maintaining a grit bin has been reviewed to reflect the current contract rates and restocking frequency. The trend towards milder winters has reduced the annual average restocking frequency. The cost of a grit bin, including annual refurbishment and filling in line with county standards, is now £947 for a 4 year period. At the end of this period where a Member or community continue to support a grit bin that has not been transferred to the core winter service an extension charge of £639 would be applied to cover the next 4 year period.

### **Borough/District Responsibilities**

23. 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.

## Weather Stations

24. Our weather stations are being refurbished or replaced to take account of aging equipment, technology updates and future service requirements.
25. As part of this programme the replacement of the Beare Green weather station is scheduled for 2015/16. The replacement has been prioritised due to both being on a high speed site with poor maintenance access and vandalism.

## Communications Plan

26. Information bulletins matching daily 'activity' to ongoing publicity campaigns will again form part of the Residents Communications Plan, ensuring that communications about the winter service are based on accurate, real time information.
27. Although the winter service has been fully optimised there is still a need for annual reports direct to the Scrutiny Board in September each year to agree any changes following a review of performance and learning with proposed service 'improvements'. The review timetable is detailed in the Highways Cold Weather Plan 2015/16 included in Annex 1.

### **CONSULTATION:**

28. 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:**

29. 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.
30. 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:**

31. The revenue budget for Winter Service activities in 2015/16 is confirmed as £2.437m. 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:

<b>Winter Service Budget Activity</b>	<b>Budget 2015/16 £000</b>
Labour and vehicles to deliver pre-treatment service to agreed Gritting Network	1,643
Salt usage	400
Grit bins pre-season salt fill & maintenance	65
Hippo bag delivery	1
Weather stations and bureau service (contract lump sum)	45
Weighbridge servicing & maintenance	9
SCC Farmer Plough Maintenance	9
Salt spreaders for special (restricted) routes	46
Relocation of weather station	67
General maintenance	25
Severe snow event	127
<b>Winter total</b>	<b>2,437</b>

#### **Section 151 Officer Commentary:**

32. The S151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues and risks have been considered in this report. Details of the 2015/16 winter service budget are set out in paragraph 29, 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:**

33. 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.
34. The needs of all highway users, including those that are vulnerable are considered when making decisions on service provision however 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.
35. To improve access the prioritisation process has been developed with particular reference to facilities such as schools, stations, hospitals, special schools and access to isolated communities. The policy has been further developed, through these enhanced criteria, to allow an increase on the priority salting network.
36. Support and 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.

The recommendations in this report will have no material impact on existing equality policy and therefore a full equalities assessment was not deemed necessary.

#### **Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:**

37. 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 as good practice evidences 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 2015/2016.

#### **Report Contact:**

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#### **Consulted:**

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Flooding  
Members of the Winter Performance Task Group  
Local Committees  
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 2015/16

#### **Informed:**

Trevor Pugh – Strategic Director, Environment and Infrastructure

#### **Sources/background papers:**

Winter Service Task Group meeting - 16 July 2015  
Environment and Transport Select Committee meeting - 10 September 2014  
Previous report of the Task Group to the Cabinet – 23 September 2014

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