

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2013

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: MR JOHN FUREY, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT



LEAD OFFICER: JASON RUSSELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR HIGHWAYS

SUBJECT: WINTER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT FOR 2013/14

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 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 success of the Task Group and the principals that have been applied now forms the backbone of the annual winter reviews in delivering 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 recommendations of the Winter Performance Task Group, set out in paragraph 6 on page 2 of this report and the Winter Service Plan 2013/14, included in Annex 1, be approved.
2. A response from Cabinet be provided for each recommendation confirming the agreed actions.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3. These recommendations are the outcome of a Task Group meeting, held on 26 July 2013, to discuss winter service performance during 2012/13 and the development of the service for the 2013/14 winter season.

REPORT OF THE ANNUAL WINTER SERVICE REVIEW:

4. In accordance with the Cabinet recommendations on 25 September 2012, Officers have met with Members of the Environment & Transport Select Committee to review key aspects and activities related to winter service provision in Surrey.
5. 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:

6. Subject to final ratification at the Environment and Transport Select Committee on 11 September 2013, the Task Group recommends to Cabinet that:-
 - I. The 2012/13 Gritting Route Network be maintained for the 2013/14 winter season while also incorporating minor amendments resulting from Member, resident and officer feedback and the new Surrey Priority Network (SPN).
 - II. A process for the Highways Service to access additional funding in the case of a sustained severe weather event be investigated.
 - III. Property Services investigate and report on the viability of repairing or replacing the salt barn at Merrow Depot and the optimum capacity to meet current operational requirements.
 - IV. Beare Green Depot remains available as a key resource for use during severe weather events.
 - V. Communities are permitted to purchase additional grit bins at a total cost of £1,040 for a 4 year period while Parish Councils and other statutory bodies may be licensed to install grit bins on the public highway.
 - VI. The trial of alternative vehicles for use on hills, narrow routes and estate roads etc. is continued during the 2013/14 winter season.
 - VII. The Surrey Winter Service Plan 2013/14, included at Annex 1, be approved.
 - VIII. Approval of any future amendments to the Surrey Winter Service Plan be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment and the Assistant Director, Highways.

DETAILS:

Background

7. The previous Cabinet report, on 25 September 2012, documented key points to enhance service provision and meet the aspirations of both Members and the public. This followed the lessons learnt from the first year of the May Gurney Contract.

8. This report considers the performance of the service during the 2012/13 winter season, the effect of subsequent operational improvements and additional funding approved by Cabinet for that season, together with organisational changes and partnership working arrangements.
9. Throughout their second year as the Council's contractor, May Gurney (now operating as Keir) worked with officers and Members on all elements of the winter service to maximise efficiency and reduce costs. This included:
 - I. Optimisation of the gritting routes, resulting in a reduction in the number of routes to 35.
 - II. The final phase of gritter replacements to improve the quality and reliability of the fleet.
10. After a near "average" (52 runs per season) Surrey winter in 2011/12 a more extended winter followed in 2012/13 with 100 precautionary salting runs completed. Using the full extent of our resources, including the enhanced local partnership arrangements, we were able to effectively manage and respond to the accumulations of snow over the weekend 18th January and the late flurries on the 11th March which affected the south east of the county. Despite the high demand for salt during the winter period the countywide supplies were successfully replenished and reserves maintained which supports the approach adopted by the Council.
11. The Task Group complimented Keir on their gritting route efficiencies and the fact that the intended levels of service have continued to be maintained.
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.

Network

13. Members reported some instances where local residents wanted to swap one road for another on the priority network. Officers stated that if this was mutually agreed locally and did not impact on the strategic network, then there should be no problem changing roads on a 'like for 'like' route length basis. Members were supportive of this approach, particularly as it was in keeping with the localism agenda.
14. It was noted that during extended periods of snow the gritters are released to undertake ad-hoc snow clearing on side roads once the priority networks are clear. It was also recognised that additional pre-planned route cards identifying local routes would assist the resilience of this operation. Officers have advised that a further tier of such routes (to be known as P4) will be developed during 2013/14 to complement the existing farmer's networks.

Operations

15. The introduction of tracker technology on each of the gritters has enabled real time information indicating where vehicles have been and how much salt has been spread. This advance in technology has proved to be invaluable by

demonstrating contractor compliance or identifying and rectifying any shortfall in the service.

16. Following the final replacements to the SCC gritting fleet all of the vehicles are now able to spread with a higher degree of accuracy. This enables target treatment rates to be reduced in line with new national guidance and will result in greater efficiencies.
17. During the snow event in January the 'Snow Desk' was fully operational to take calls and coordinate operations across the county utilising both SCC and Keir staff. This central coordination was one of the keys to our success during the event with sufficient resources being available to cover the extended period. It was, however, recognised that communication links with the local offices needs to be improved and this will be developed through the contractors Winter Operations Plan.
18. The trials of the Fastrac vehicles and quad bikes were both successfully completed in 2012/13. The Fastrac vehicles proved to be excellent on hills but found some dedicated routes difficult to navigate due to narrow road widths or parked cars. The quad bikes were also well received by the public, although issues were identified around safety equipment, transportation and a relative lack of power.
19. The Task Group considered the benefits obtained from the trial of these alternative vehicles, including the additional level of response possible, and agreed that the trial should be extended. Officers proposed two different vehicles for use in 2013/14, a 7.5t dedicated gritter and a demountable spreader, both of which are considered 'halfway' between the Fastrac vehicle and a quad bike.

Salt Management

20. Officers advised that, with the extended winter and over 17,500 tonnes of salt used on the network during 2012/13, our resilience had been maintained through the supply chain. This demonstrates that the salt stock management systems now in place are robust and fit for purpose.
21. Members acknowledged the improved situation with regard to salt storage and agreed that stocks should continue to be maintained at the maximum capacity of 16,000 tonnes prior to the commencement of the 2013/14 season.
22. Although Keir did not regularly operate from Beare Green Depot during 2012/13 we were still drawing off the salt reserves there to assist with the snow clearing operation in January. This demonstrates the ongoing operational importance of the depot and the Task Group continue to support its retention for similar winter service operations in 2013/14.
23. The following table summarises salt stocks and their distribution across highway depots, together with barn capacity figures: -

Depot	Total Barn Capacity (tonnes)	End of Season Stock Levels (tonnes)	MG/SCC Proposal 2013/14 (tonnes)
May Gurney Contract:			
Bagshot	3500	1939	3500
Godstone	4000	2496	4000
Merrow (including open storage)	5750	2642	5750
Witley	1800	1155	1800
Other SCC Depot:			
Beare Green	900	743	900
Total	15950	8975	15950
Combined Capacity (Keir + Highways) for 2013/14			16,000t

Infrastructure Replacement

24. Officers advised that Property Services are currently progressing a detailed structural survey and feasibility study to assess the viability of either repairing or replacing the current Merrow barn. The study will also consider the optimum capacity of the barn as the number of gritters operating from the depot under the Keir contract has increased from 6 to 13 vehicles and the 4,000t reserve stockpile is currently held in open storage.
25. The feasibility report from Property Services is pending but Highways officers have been advised that if the study indicates replacement to be the preferred option the long term operational needs of the service will be taken into account and reports provided for both Members and the investment panel.
26. In advance of the feasibility report, Property Services have provided the following indicative replacement costs for the barn replacement.

Barn Size (tonnes)	Cost (£,000)
1745 (existing barn size)	217
4000	326
6000	390

27. The Kingswood Depot weighbridge was successfully transferred to Witley Depot prior to the commencement of last season. No further upgrades are currently proposed.

Provision and Use of Grit Bins

28. The county currently manages and maintains 1787 highway Grit Bins (1624 winter service, 163 Member sponsored) with an additional 25 recorded at, or near, fire stations that are provided as part of their own business continuity planning.

29. The labelling and tagging of each grit bin is currently being completed. In addition a new web based computer management system will be introduced enabling officers to remotely monitor, in real time, when grit bins have been re-filled and, therefore, the level of salt usage at individual sites.
30. 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, is now £1,040 for a 4 year period.
31. The introduction of the new licensing system enabling Parish Councils and other statutory bodies to place and maintain their own grit bins on the public highway has had a good take up with 49 licences issued to nine Parishes in 2012/13.

Borough/District Responsibilities

32. 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 regarding when and where Boroughs and Districts can provide assistance.
33. This year's winter maintenance information pack will include updated details of Borough and District commitments during severe weather events.

Farmers, Contractors and Equipment

34. 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 2012/2013 under a five year contract which is now in its third year. With the enhanced network of snowplough routes, the Task Group recognised the valuable contribution they had made, particularly in reaching isolated communities.
35. Following a detailed mechanical assessment, the proposed upgrade of the SCC survey vehicle with plough equipment did not take place. This was due to the extensive and costly refurbishment required, which may have also affected the surveying system.
36. In order to reduce ongoing maintenance and traffic management costs, the Blackwater Valley weather station has now been upgraded.
37. A further 4 weather stations have now been fitted with cameras, increasing the total number of sites to 6, to enhance our ability to view and respond to changing weather situations.

Communications Plan

38. To manage expectations 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.
39. Although the winter service has been fully optimised there is still a need for annual reports direct to Select Committee in July each year to agree any changes

following a review of performance and learning with proposed service 'improvements'.

40. To ensure stakeholders' contributions are captured in the review an annual item will be included on the spring round of Local Committees to inform the Task Group. The review timetable has now been incorporated in the Winter Service Plan 2013/14 included in Annex 1.
41. Area Team Managers will discuss proposed changes to the salting network with their Local Committee Chairmen and it will be for the latter to determine how and when information is brought to the attention of their Local Committee for any response within the timescales.

Severe Snow Event & Central Severe Weather Contingency Fund

42. Members on the Task Group expressed concern that the recent Cabinet decision to transfer the severe weather reserve to Highways to be used to repair roads damaged last winter might have a negative impact upon the Council's ability to respond to severe weather events and officers were asked to consider how this might be managed in future.
43. It is noted that since the winter service budget was adjusted in 2010 to reflect the needs of the service there has been no event or circumstances that have necessitated a call on the reserve. This includes the two periods of extended severe weather in 2010/11 and 2012/13.
44. The current winter service budget allocation allows for a 2 day snow event which is considered a fair reflection for most years. In the event of a significant overspend, for example due to more severe weather, it may be possible to absorb this within the wider Service or Directorate budget. In the event that this is not possible, Cabinet would consider the overspend at the end of the year in light of the Council's overall financial outturn position.

CONSULTATION:

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

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

46. 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.
47. 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:

48. The revenue budget for Winter Service activities in 2013/14 is confirmed as £2.564m. 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 2013/14 £000
Labour and vehicles to deliver pre-treatment service to agreed Gritting Network	1,400
Salt usage	500
Grit bins pre-season salt fill & maintenance	120
Weather stations and bureau service (contract lump sum)	45
Re-brand grit bins and install bar codes	56
Relocation of weather station	64
Weighbridge servicing & maintenance	9
SCC gritters	16
Alternative vehicles	36
General maintenance	168
Severe snow event	150
Winter total	2,564

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

49. The S151 Officer confirms that all material financial and business issues and risks have been considered in this report. Details of the 2013/14 winter service budget are set out in paragraph 48, and 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 as explained in paragraph 44.

Equalities and Diversity:

50. 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.

51. 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.

52. 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.

53. '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.

54. 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:

55. No issues identified.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Approved recommendations will be implemented as part of the Winter Service Plan 2013/2014.

Report Contacts:

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Consulted:

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David Harmer, Councillor and Task Group Member
Peter Agent, Asset Planning Group Manager
Simon Mitchell, Maintenance Plan Team Leader
Tony Orzieri, Finance Manager
Lisa Beach, Senior Accountant
Lucy Monie, Operations Group Manager
Mark Borland, Projects and Contracts Group Manager
Richard Bolton, Local Highway Services Group Manager

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Winter Service Plan 2013/14

Informed:

John Furey – Cabinet Member for Transport

Sources/background papers:

Winter Service Task Group meeting - 26 July 2013
Environment and Transport Select Committee meeting - 11 September 2013
Previous report of the Task Group to the Cabinet – 25 September 2012

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