

Cabinet – 22 October 2008

Winter Service Operational Plan 2008-09

Portfolio: Councillor Anthony Harris, Transport
Councillor Rachel Walker, Environment

Service: Engineering & Transportation

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

The report sets out the proposed Winter Service Operational Plan 2008/09.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Winter Service Operational Plan 2008/09.
- 2.2 That the Head of Engineering and Transportation be authorised to make amendments to the plan, as necessary, in the light of case law or legal advice, which might assist in managing the risk of litigation in relation to statutory duty Section 41 (1A) of the Highways Act 1980 to 'ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage of the highway is not endangered by snow and ice'.

3. Background information

- 3.1 Walsall Council needs to ensure that the way we provide services to the public can continue in the face of seasonal changes in the weather. The Winter Service Operational Plan 2008/09 (the plan) specifies the detailed arrangements for the precautionary treatment of roads prior to ice formation and the clearance of snow. The plan will be available on the internet and copies have been deposited in each group room.
- 3.2 The plan sets out Walsall's strategy to deliver a quality winter service in an efficient, practical and reasonable manner. Walsall Council recognises the importance of the winter service and the high value placed on this service by both users and the wider community.

- 3.3 The objective of Winter Service operations is to provide a winter maintenance service which, as far as reasonably possible, will permit the safe movement of vehicular traffic on the more important parts of the highway network while minimizing delays and accidents directly attributable to the adverse weather conditions.
- 3.4 430Km (267miles) of Walsall's highways will be subject to precautionary salting out of a total length of highway within the Borough of approximately 856Km (532miles).

There are now 16 precautionary salting routes split into two priorities:

- (a) Eight Priority 1 routes comprise roads on the primary network and other roads carrying substantial volumes of commercial traffic together with some roads with high risk of early ice formation
- (b) Eight Priority 2 routes comprise:
- i. most bus routes in residential areas
 - ii. important industrial estate roads
 - iii. roads used by heavy commuter traffic at peak periods
- 3.5 Footways are not routinely treated but important pedestrian precincts are included on the precautionary salting routes. However, during periods of snow fall and lying snow, labour is deployed to move snow from footways in town centres and other sensitive areas.
- 3.6 Cycle routes remote from the highway are not treated but cycle lanes within carriageway on priority routes will of course be routinely treated.
- 3.7 The routes have been designed, as far as possible, to minimize free running (the distance, which has to be driven while not spreading salt), and obtain the most efficient utilization of plant, materials and labour.
- 3.8 'Well-Maintained Highways' Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, published in July 2005, requires formal approval of the plan each year.
- 3.9 During 2007/08 the gritting fleet was mobilized on thirty-nine occasions and spread 2,104 tonnes of salt on Walsall's highway network. The cost of this operation was £180,496 against a budget of £229,002. The reason for the saving was due to two relatively mild winter seasons in succession during 2006/07 and 2007/08. The particularly mild season of 2006/07 allowed the authority to stockpile additional salt and this was the primary reason for the saving. April 2008 saw the fleet mobilized on three further occasions and so significant expenditure has already been made during the current financial year.
- 3.10 The plan is essentially the same as the successful arrangements undertaken during the 2007/08 winter season. The roads covered remain unaltered.

4. Resource considerations

- 4.1 **Financial:** The budget provision for winter service is £228,958 for 2008/09 and will be managed by Engineering & Transportation with day-to-day service delivery being provided by the new Service Provider for the Highways Repair and Maintenance Contract 2008 once this has been agreed. The cost of the service, however, is ultimately dependent upon the severity of the winter weather conditions.

Additional resources in excess of the existing budget may be required should a particularly harsh winter with periods of heavy snow prevail. Under such circumstances the service will continue, but measures will be put in place to address any potential overspends, and every effort would be made to contain any such overspend within the Neighbourhood Services cash limit.

- 4.2 **Legal:** Section 111 of The Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 amends Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 to the effect that local authorities now have a duty to prevent the formation of ice on roads, so far as is reasonable. Previously the duty in the Highways Act has only been to remove ice and snow as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 4.3 **Staffing:** There are no direct implications as a result of this report.

5. Citizen impact

- 5.1 The need and value in terms of meeting the Council's statutory safety and transport requirements to provide a winter service is recognised. The plan sets out Walsall's strategy to deliver a high quality winter service that is efficient, practical and reasonable.
- 5.2 The plan sets out the council policy, route planning strategy, the use of weather forecasting, personnel, plant and vehicles, communications, salt supply and distribution, performance monitoring, comprehensive details of salting routes, position of salt bins, record keeping and the decision making process which determines whether precautionary salting takes place.
- 5.3 Implementation of the plan will give citizens using Walsall's highway network during winter conditions, standards of service which will maintain the safe passage of vehicular traffic so far as is reasonable.

6. Community safety

- 6.1 The implementation of the plan will assist community safety by making, whenever possible, the major routes in Walsall's road network available for safe use in the winter period.

7. Environmental impact

- 7.1 The plan, wherever possible, minimises any adverse environmental impact that provision of the service may have.
- 7.2 A dedicated, detailed forecasting system is purchased from 'MeteoGroup UK RoadCast', which uses data from sensors embedded in road surfaces. Walsall works in conjunction with the other West Midlands authorities in procuring the weather forecasting service and maintaining the sensors.
- 7.3 Snow clearing and removal of ice takes place on priority 1 and 2 routes first. When these are running freely and ice conditions persist, such resources as are available will be targeted to clear footways within the town centre areas of Walsall, Willenhall, Aldridge, Darlaston, Brownhills and Bloxwich, and then minor roads. This is believed to be in line with the service provided by the majority of metropolitan authorities in England.

8. Performance and risk management issues

- 8.1 **Risk:** The Council's risk and insurance team has identified that the key area of concern for the plan is "whether procedures are in place to ensure quality". This continues to be addressed by the inclusion of reality checks and accurate record keeping as part of the operational activity.

The most significant risk is that of a particularly harsh winter with periods of heavy snow. Under such circumstances the service will continue, but measures will be put in place to address any potential overspends, and every effort would be made to contain any such overspend within the Neighbourhood Services cash limit.

- 8.2 **Performance management:** Performance will be carefully monitored as part of the Highways Repair and Maintenance 2008 Contract and benchmarking with similar authorities will be routinely undertaken both during and upon completion of the winter season.

There is a rota of duty officers to ensure that weather conditions and forecasts are monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during the winter period.

9. Equality implications

None arising from this plan

10. Consultation

The plan has been circulated, for comments, to officers across the council and is also distributed to our partners including the following: Police, AA and RAC, Centro, Ambulance Service, Fire Service, Freight Transport Association, Birmingham City Council, Wolverhampton City Council, Sandwell MBC, Staffordshire County Council, Optima and Amey Mouchel.

Background papers

1. Well-maintained Highways' Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, published July 2005
2. 'Winter Service Operational Plan 2008/09'

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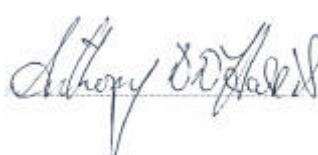
Jamie Morris
Executive Director

13 October 2008



Councillor Rachel Walker
Portfolio Holder

13 October 2008



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