

## **Cabinet – 23 October 2013**

### **Winter Service Operational Plan 2013/14**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Adrian Andrew – Regeneration and Transport

**Service:** Engineering & Transportation

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary of report**

The Council has a statutory duty to develop and implement a winter service operational plan to ensure so far as reasonably practicable, that traffic keeps moving even in unforeseen weather conditions and safe passage is not endangered by snow and ice.

This report details the arrangements in place to discharge that duty and outlines proposed improvements to service delivery as a result of lessons learned from the 2012/13 winter season. The report further outlines the significant changes that will need to be developed as a direct result of the September 2013 update to the national code of practice for winter service delivery.

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Winter Service Operational Plan 2013/14.
- 2.2 That the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Transport, be authorised to make amendments to the Plan, as necessary, to ensure the ongoing efficient and effective delivery of the winter service.

#### **3. Report Detail**

- 3.1 The Winter Service Operational Plan 2013/14 details the arrangements for the precautionary treatment of roads and pavements prior to ice formation and the clearance of snow.
- 3.2 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. The draft Operational Plan is published on the Council's Committee Management Information web pages.

3.3 The core winter service is delivered during the period 1 November 2013 – 31 March 2014. However, the Council has contingency arrangements in place for the delivery of a winter service response during the period 1 October 2013 – 30 April 2014 should unusual weather conditions dictate a response.

3.4 The draft Operational Plan will be deposited in each political group room prior to Cabinet. A number of key changes have been introduced to the 2013/14 plan as a result of lessons learned from the delivery of the 2012/13 plan:

- Introduction of criterion for the application of salt bins. To ensure a consistent approach for the provision and location of salt bins, an assessment will be made for any request, whether from the public or members. The assessment will consider aspects such as road gradient, road geometry etc. No existing salt bin will be removed as part of this assessment.
- The provision of remote access for decision makers to CCTV images of the highway network
- The provision of remote access for decision makers to variable message signs that provide information to the travelling public
- More detailed testing of the moisture content of salt stocks held by the Council
- The need to ensure the treatment routes identified in the winter service plan are delivered as a first priority
- An increase in the number of decision makers

Should this plan be approved then it will be made available for inspection on the Council's website – Council Services/Transport and Streets/Highways Maintenance/Winter Service.

3.5 As a result of changes to the code of practice for winter service delivery announced by the Department for Transport 18 September 2013, an initial evaluation of the potential implications has been undertaken. It is clear that the Council will be required to significantly review its response to winter service provision in future years. This will have operational and financial implications; however the full detail will need to be developed further.

3.5 Whilst the revised code acknowledges the significance of the change and recognises that it may take up to 10 years to fully implement all of the requirements, headline issues identified for development and delivery in 2014/15 and beyond include:

- The requirement for thermal mapping of the borough to assist with developing revised treatment routes covering general precautionary treatment routes, snow clearance routes and emergency only routes

- The requirement for detailed escalation procedures and protocols that trigger the need for a change from one type of treatment route to another. This will require much closer involvement with the Council's emergency planning function
- The need to utilise spreading equipment that can more closely calibrate the spread rates of salt onto the road network
- The need to consider the use of other forms of ice prevention treatments on the road network
- The requirement for ongoing formal accreditation and training of decision makers

3.7 Given the significant implications of the new code of practice, it is proposed that the winter service plan for 2013/14 will make no change to the treatment routes or the allocation of existing salt bins as operated in the 2012/13 winter season.

#### **4. Council priorities**

- 4.1. The delivery of a suitable winter service will ensure access to goods and services is maintained for local communities
- 4.2 The safety of all road users will be maintained by the development and application of a suitable winter service plan
- 4.3 The content of this report will support the delivery of the Marmot objective to create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.
- 4.4 By maintaining the safe and efficient operation of the public highway during inclement weather, the efficient delivery of goods and services will be supported, helping to reduce operational costs for businesses and ultimately prices to customers.

#### **5. Risk Management**

- 5.1 The Council must produce a plan for the delivery of its winter service and deliver against that plan as a first priority. Additional requests for winter service treatment can only be considered once the requirements of the Council approved plan have been delivered.
- 5.2 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.

#### **6. Financial implications**

- 6.1 The winter service revenue budget allocation for the 2013/14 season is £301k.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 It is anticipated that the changes proposed for implementation during the 2013/14 winter season will be delivered within the available budget. However, the more substantial changes that will be required for future seasons may require one off investment but could release ongoing savings as a result of that investment. Further development of the financial implications will be undertaken for consideration.

## **7 Legal implications**

### **7.1 Section 41 Highways Act 1980**

Duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, safe passage is not endangered by snow and ice.

### **7.2 Traffic Management Act 2004**

Duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, traffic keeps moving even in unforeseen weather conditions.

### **7.3 Given the scale of financial and other resources involved in delivering the winter service it is not reasonable either to:**

- Provide the service on all parts of the network
- Ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network

## **8. Property implications**

### **8.1 No implications as a result of this report**

## **9. Staffing implications**

### **9.1 The proposed increase in the number of decision makers will assist with meeting the requirements of the working time directive.**

## **10. Equality implications**

### **10.1 The service will give all citizens using Walsall's highway network during winter conditions, standards of service which will maintain the safe passage of vehicular and pedestrian traffic so far as is reasonably practicable.**

## 11. Consultation

- 11.1 The winter service plan has been developed in consultation with neighbouring authorities to ensure wherever possible a consistent winter service is delivered across the region.
- 11.2 The plan has been considered by the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel at its meeting on 10 October 2013.

## Background papers

Well Maintained Highways Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management  
(Appendix H Winter Service Practical Guidance)  
2012/13 Winter service operational plan

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14 October 2013