

**Community Services and Environment
Scrutiny and Performance Panel**

**Agenda
Item No.**

10 October 2013

8

Winter Service Plan 2013 /14

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr A Andrew – Regeneration and Transport

Executive Summary:

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 gives an overview of 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.

Reason for scrutiny:

To advise the Panel of the proposed changes to the Operational Plan for the 2013 /14 winter season. The Plan will operate between 1 November 2013 and 31 March 2014. To draw the Panel's attention to the practical and financial implications of the revised code of practice for winter service delivery. To allow the panel the opportunity to comment upon the proposals prior to the annual winter service report being presented to Cabinet 23 October 2013.

Recommendations:

That:

1. The Panel note the contents of this report

Background papers:

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

Resource and legal considerations:

Section 41 Highways Act 1980

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

Traffic Management Act 2004

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

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

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

The service is delivered by officers of the Council acting as the decision maker with the Council's highway maintenance contractor Lafarge Tarmac delivering the practical pre treatment and snow clearance functions.

Citizen impact:

The delivery of an adequate and suitable winter service is important to ensure residents and businesses maintain accessibility to local goods and services wherever possible.

Environmental impact:

The salt used for treating the carriageway and pavements can have an adverse impact on the environment if deposited in high concentration levels. It is a requirement that any salt stored at locations across the borough for motorists' self help shall be stored in proprietary salt bins designed and manufactured for this purpose.

Performance management:

The decision making process for application of the winter service response is supported by the availability of timely and accurate weather forecast data provided to the Council by its weather forecasting contractor MeteoGroup.

This information is used to determine the most suitable form of treatment for the highway network after cross referencing with recommended spread rates for salting contained within the code of practice.

All decision making is accurately recorded to aid learning and development for decision makers whilst providing an audit trail of the council's winter service response should it be required to defend insurance claims.

Equality Implications:

The service is equally applicable to all users of the highway network and as such no specific Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out

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.

Consultation:

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.

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Report

It is proposed that the Winter Service Operational Plan for 2013/14 makes no change to the treatment routes operated in the 2012/13 winter season. However in September the Department for Transport issued an updated Code of Practice. The team is currently reviewing the potentially significant implications of this updated code which itself acknowledges the significance of the change and recognises that it may take up to 10 years to fully implement all of the requirements.

Whilst the basic routes to be treated will remain the same for this season, lessons learned from the delivery of the 2012/13 winter service have resulted in a number of changes to the proposed winter service delivery plan for 2013/14:

- Introduction of criterion for the application of salt bins
- 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

Initial evaluation of the revised code of practice shows 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.

Headline issues already 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

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.

To assist consideration by the Panel this report will be supplemented at the meeting with Gritting Route Plans and further presentation material.