

Cabinet – 24 October 2012

Winter Service Operational Plan 2012/13

Portfolio: Councillor Tom Ansell -Transport and Environment

Service: Engineering & Transportation

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary of report

The report relates to the Winter Service Operational Plan 2012/13), which sets out the arrangements for treating the borough's road network during the coming winter. In so doing, it will ensure a safe and free flowing road network in line with government guidance and deliver value for money for council tax payers.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Winter Service Operational Plan 2012/13.
- 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 the exercise of the statutory duty under 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. Report Detail

- 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 2012/13 (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 Council's website at <http://www2.walsall.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Meeting.aspx?meetingID=1851> and copies will be deposited in each political 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 minimising delays and accidents directly attributable to the adverse weather conditions.
- 3.4 The Plan is essentially the same as the successful arrangements undertaken during the 2011/12 winter season where recommendations from the Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel were included. After consideration by the Community Services and Environment Scrutiny Performance Panel in August 2012 the roads covered remained unaltered but Stafford Street, Darlaston has now been incorporated within a route.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Due to the re-location of the highways depot from Cable Drive to Apex Road Brownhills last year a review of the service and optimisation of the routes had been undertaken.
- 3.7 Consultation is ongoing with the Area Partnerships to inform them of the slight changes to the process and to ask for any comments.
- 3.8 Key changes and proposals currently now incorporated within the new Winter Service Plan include:
- Stafford Street, Darlaston is to be included within a gritting route
 - Guidance for the public and organisations on how to acquire grit bins and grit as necessary
- 3.9 Cycle routes remote from the highway are not treated but cycle lanes within carriageway on priority routes will be routinely treated.
- 3.10 The routes have been designed, as far as possible, to minimise free running (the distance, which has to be driven while not spreading salt), and obtain the most efficient utilisation of plant, materials and labour.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The provision of an effective Winter Service is extremely important as it directly affects all sections of the community in terms of the local economy and the health and wellbeing of residents and so assists the Council in meeting its three stated priorities.

- 4.2 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. The removal of snow in small shopping centres by community members will increase the safety of shoppers in these areas.
- 4.3 The Winter Service ensures, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage of the highway is not endangered by snow and ice and assists with ensuring that children can attend school in adverse weather, people can attend work and health establishments. This helps to promote the Marmot objectives of 'ensure a healthy standard of living for all' and create and develop healthy and sustainable communities'.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 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.
- 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 and measures will be put in place to manage any potential overspends.
- 5.3 The Masternaut tracking system is installed in the gritter vehicles to capture data including real time and dates, snail trail (recording where the gritter vehicle has been) of routes and satellite navigation. This will provide valuable data for the defence of public liability claims.
- 5.4 Performance will be carefully monitored as part of the Tarmac 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.
- 5.5 The plan, wherever possible, minimises any adverse environmental impact that provision of the service may have.
- 5.6 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.
- 5.7 During and after a snow event snow clearing and removal of ice on the gritting routes will be the priority. 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. This is believed to be in line with the service provided by the majority of metropolitan authorities in England

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 During 2011/12 the gritting fleet was mobilised on 31 occasions and spread 2800 tonnes of salt on Walsall's highway network. The cost of this operation was within budget of £290,000.
- 6.2 The budget provision for winter service is £274,588.00 for 2012/13 and will be managed by Engineering & Transportation with day-to-day service delivery being provided by Tarmac working under contract with the Council.
- 6.3 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.

7 Legal implications

- 7.1 The 'Well-maintained Highways' Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, published in July 2005 requires that the plan be formally approved on an annual basis.
- 7.2 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 reasonably practicable. Previously, the duty in the Highways Act has only been to remove ice and snow as soon as reasonably practicable.

8. Property implications

None.

9. Staffing implications

There are no direct implications as a result of this report as the Council's partner has the appropriate operatives to meet the specific requirements.

10. Equality implications

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Implementation of the Plan will give all 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.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 Consultation has been undertaken with political groups, Area Partnerships and Emergency Services.
- 11.2 The Plan has been circulated, for comments, to officers across the Council and will be 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 2012/13

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Portfolio Holder



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