

30 August 2012

Winter Service Operational Plan 2012/13

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor Ansell - Transport and Environment

Executive Summary:

The development of a suitable and workable Winter Service Operational Plan is of particular importance to the Council in terms of its duty under the Highways Act 1980 and supplementary legislation which extends the duty to prevent the formation of ice on roads as far as reasonably practicable. The Council must maintain the operation of the highway network and other public services to the local community and travelling public under winter weather conditions.

Reason for scrutiny:

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. A report to Cabinet will be presented on 24 October 2012, and any recommendations from this Scrutiny Panel can be considered by Cabinet.

Recommendation:

That the Communities Services and Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel considers this report in respect of the Winter Maintenance Service, receives the presentation of the current plan and, agrees any comments that it would wish Cabinet to consider in making its decision on the Winter Maintenance Service Report.

Background papers:

Winter Service Working Group Environment Scrutiny and Performance Panel 8 September 2011.

Winter Service Operational Plan Cabinet 14 September 2011.

Resource and legal considerations:

The budget available for the Winter Maintenance Service in the approved revenue budget for 2012/13 is £294,588.

The Highways Act 1980 places a statutory duty on Highway Authorities under Section 41 (1A) to 'ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage of the highway is not endangered by snow and ice' and The Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 amends this to the effect that the local authorities have a duty to prevent the formation of ice on

roads as far as reasonably practicable.

Citizen impact:

The Winter Maintenance Service is a high priority for Council Tax payers and other users of the road network in the borough and it is important that the Council ensures that it maximises the value for money it receives from the investment it makes.

Environmental impact:

The salt used for gritting can have an adverse effect on the environment 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 grit bins designed and manufactured for this purpose.

Performance management:

Systems are in place to monitor the weather forecasts, the decision made, and the gritting exercise.

Equality Implications:

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 traffic so far as is reasonable.

Consultation:

Prior to finalisation. the plan will be circulated for comment to officers within the Council, Area Partnerships and Emergency Services together with other partners including Centro, AA and RAC, Freight Transport Association and neighbouring local authorities including the Highways Agency and its agents.

The comments and input from this Panel will be invaluable in this exercise and Glyn Oliver, Service Manager and Marion Parry, Acting Group Leader, will explain the current Winter Plan, gritting routes together with other relevant considerations at the Panel Meeting.

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1. Report

The former Environment Scrutiny & Performance Panel made a number of recommendations last year that were incorporated into the Winter Maintenance Service Plan 2011/2012 approved by Cabinet in September 2011.

The winter that followed was comparatively mild compared with the previous two years. Nevertheless, the changes to the service were noticeable and the Council was able to deliver an improved service.

The main changes last year included:

- Route optimisation by external specialist from 8 to 6 routes with operation times of four hours to complete from call out to completion
- Assessment of and rationalisation of location of grit bins
- Grit bin warning stickers due to thefts from these bins
- Community based assistance in Pelsall and New Invention by Cooperative Society.
- Rationalisation of vehicles and better coordination with school routes and waste collection routes
- Offer of services to Schools

This year, attention is being given to how we can introduce further improvements or refinements. Sandwell MBC last year introduced snow wardens, volunteers from communities, to assist with snow clearance. We kept a 'watching brief' on its implementation to establish if this initiative could benefit Walsall, however, snowfall was thankfully low both in incidence and depth and therefore there were few examples of snow warden actions. We intend again to have a watching brief with our colleagues in Sandwell. For a similar reason, our trial with the Co-ops in New Invention and Pelsall was limited and we do not intend to extend this initiative until we have evidence of its success at the end of the winter coming.

Currently, we plan to only make one alteration to the gritting routes and that is to add Stafford Road, Darlaston as it appears an anomaly. Despite a few reservations, the gritter drivers quickly adopted to the new routines.

We are a member of the West Midlands Winter Service Group and participate in regular meetings. On an annual basis we draft a memorandum of understanding to agree to share salt should salt become scarce as it has done on occasion in previous years. We must also regularly supply information for the Department for Transport for them to be able to assess operational performance and salt reserves. At the new depot we are fully stocked for the forthcoming season with more than 4000 tonnes in store. We generally target a minimum of some 3500 tonnes for the start of the season in November.