

**13 October 2014**

**Winter Service Plan 2014 /15**

**Ward(s)                      All**

**Portfolios:** Cllr L Jeavons – Environment 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 whilst giving an overview of the progress made to ensure compliance with the national winter service code of practice that was significantly updated in Autumn 2013.

**Reason for scrutiny:**

To outline the improvements in service delivery achieved during the 2013/14 winter season.

To advise the panel of the proposed changes to the winter service operational plan for the 2014 /15 winter season.

To draw the panel's attention to the progress made against compliance with the updated code of practice and the need for development of a timetable to ensure full compliance over a 10 year period.

To allow the panel the opportunity to comment on the winter service arrangements prior to the annual winter service report being presented to Cabinet 29 October 2014.

**Recommendations:**

That 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)  
2013/14 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 2014 /15 season is £300k

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 against insurance claims.

**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 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 Detail

During the 2013 /14 winter service season a number of improvements were successfully implemented, improving the Council's resilience to manage the impacts of adverse weather conditions.

- The increased number of decision makers coupled with much wider sharing of measured and forecast weather information with the winter service contractor, ensured that decisions were made more quickly and consistently.
- The use of IPAD's for provision of remote access for decision makers to CCTV images of the highway network has reduced the need for borough wide travel to determine road conditions.
- Extensive use of technology has now provided the ability to coordinate delivery of the winter service irrespective of the ability, or need, to travel.
- Introduction of criterion for the application of salt bins has rationalised the distribution of this valuable self help resource to areas of most need.
- Moisture content testing of salt stocks has provided the ability to more accurately match spread rates to those required by the code of practice, reducing the risk associated with public liability claims following road traffic accidents.
- Significant effort has been put into a revised gully cleansing regime aimed at reducing the risk of floods following significant rainfall or snow melt.
- Improved procedures for the management of clean and green staff resources to assist with winter service delivery.

The 2013/14 winter service plan detailed six treatments routes for snow and ice clearance. Following the latest updated to the code of practice there is a requirement to introduce a further route known as the resilient network route. This route will be given priority during extreme weather conditions in order to maintain economic activity and access to key essential services.

Activation of this route treatment will be undertaken in consultation with the Council's emergency planning team and will be prioritised over and above any other route treatment. Details of this proposed additional route can be found in Appendix A.

The existing assessment criterion for salt bin deployment currently includes a category that awards points for having a substantial population of either elderly or disabled persons living nearby to the requested location. This category has proved to be extremely difficult to accurately quantify and resulted in all assessments being awarded maximum marks in this category. It is proposed that this category be removed from future assessments given its limited ability to aid the decision making process. The revised assessment process will now only consider the physical characteristics of the road and total number of properties served. Details of this proposed revision can be found in Appendix B.

The revised code of practice acknowledges the significance of change and recognises that it may take up to 10 years to fully implement all of the requirements. However, one of the most significant requirements is the need for fully trained and accredited decision makers. All of the current decision makers have now undertaken this training and accreditation, with Walsall decision makers being amongst the first in the country to achieve this status.

The development and implementation of the resilient network as detailed above is a further significant requirement of the code of practice. Delivery of this during the 2014/15 winter service season will demonstrate Walsall's commitment to providing a resilient transport network during extreme weather conditions.

The code requires a thorough review of salt stock holding to ensure that at all times during the winter season a minimum stock holding of 48 treatments is maintained. This has been calculated and stock replenishment arrangements put in place to provide for this. Additionally, salt sharing arrangements are in place with neighbouring authorities should any unforeseen short term capacity issues arise prior to the release of national strategic salt stock distribution.

Given the significant change in the code of practice, the Council will be required to continue to review its response to winter service provision. Headline matters for consideration in the implementation plan include:

- Cost benefit analysis of investment in alternative forms of de icing treatment.
- Need to upgrade spreader equipment that can finely distribute de icing treatments with the coverage and precise concentration required by the new code.
- Consideration of snow champion programme.
- Review of further shared service provision options.

Winter season preparations are ongoing with the decision makers review of the need for treatment started with effect 1 October.

General advice on preparedness for winter will be cascaded to the general public during October, with Walsall specific information and general Highways Agency campaign literature to be used.

Operation Snow Fall will take place Saturday 18 October, where all plant and machinery associated with the delivery of the winter service is fully calibrated and tested ready for the start of the core winter season period beginning 1 November.