

Cabinet – 29 October 2014

Winter Service Operational Plan 2014/15

Portfolio: Councillor L Jeavons – Environment and Transport

Related portfolios: None

Service: Engineering and Transportation

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 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 that safe passage is not endangered by snow and ice.
- 1.2 The plan covers approximately 40% of the highway network as 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
- 1.3 This report details the arrangements in place to discharge the duty whilst giving an overview of the progress made to ensure compliance with the national winter service code of practice and changes proposed for the winter 2014/15 season.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Winter Service Operational Plan 2014/15.
- 2.2 That the Executive Director for Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment 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 2014/15 details 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.
- 3.3 The core winter service is delivered during the period 1 November 2014 – 31 March 2015. However, the Council has contingency arrangements in place for the delivery of a winter service response during the period 1 October 2014 – 30 April 2015 should unusual weather conditions dictate a response.
- 3.4 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 iPads 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 criteria 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 localised flooding following significant rainfall or snow melt.
 - Implementation of revised operational procedures for the use of Clean and Green's staff resources to assist with winter service delivery.

3.5 National code of practice for winter service delivery

- 3.5.1 In September 2013 the national code of practice for winter service delivery was revised, with a number of changes introduced. One of the changes is a need to introduce an additional treatment route known as the resilience network route ('RNR'). The RNR will be given priority during extreme weather conditions and situations where man power, salt stocks, plant and fuel for driving the plant is in short supply.
- 3.5.2 The primary purpose of the RNR is to ensure a minimum transport network remains available to support the delivery of key essential services whilst maintaining economic activity where possible.
- 3.5.3 Because of the significance of activating the RNR, it will be undertaken in consultation with the Council's emergency planning team and will be prioritised over and above the delivery of any other route treatment. Full details of the RNR that covers the vast majority of the A road network within Walsall can be found in **Appendix A**.
- 3.5.4 To further improve the initial delivery of the RNR, the gritter fleet will be located at secure strategic locations such as fire and ambulance stations in order to aid the speedy treatment of this route.
- 3.6 A further review of the existing assessment criteria for salt bin deployment has been undertaken following its introduction during the last winter season. Currently this 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**.
- 3.7 Given the importance of the winter service in maintaining accessibility to schools, the provision of salt bins has again been offered. However, this is on a chargeable basis to the individual school given the existing winter service budget is insufficient to meet this cost.
- 3.8 Of similar importance is the maintenance of the bin collection service during periods of snow and ice. The improved collaboration with the Clean and Green service will ensure that where resources are available upon completion of the defined winter service route treatments, they will be directed to treat bin routes not covered under the defined highway treatment routes.
- 3.9 The long term implications of the revised code of practice are significant. However, due to this significance the code recognises that it may take up to 10 years to fully implement all of the requirements. 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's decision makers being amongst the first in the country to achieve this status.

3.10 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 all neighbouring authorities should any unforeseen short term capacity issues arise prior to the release of national strategic salt stock distribution.

3.11 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.

3.12 Winter season preparations are ongoing with the decision makers' review of the need for treatment implemented with effect from 1 October 2014.

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

Operation Snow Fall took place on Saturday 18 October, where all plant and machinery associated with the delivery of the winter service was fully calibrated and tested ready for the start of the core winter season period beginning 1 November 2014.

3.13 The draft winter service operational Plan has been deposited in the political group rooms and can also be viewed online at <http://www2.walsall.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Meeting.aspx?meetingID=2260>

4. Council priorities

4.1 Communities and Neighbourhoods

4.1.1 The delivery of a suitable winter service will ensure access to goods and services is maintained for local communities

4.2 Health and well-being

4.2.1 The safety of all road users will be maintained by the development and application of a suitable winter service plan

4.2.2 The content of this report will support the delivery of the Marmot objective to create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities.

4.3 Economy

4.3.1 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 2014/15 season is £310k, this being approximately 2/3 lower than neighbouring local authorities.

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 2014/15 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 of the Highways Act 1980

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

The case of *Goodes v East Sussex CC* confirms that highway authorities can only do what is reasonable during the winter, according to the circumstances at the time.

7.2 Section 16 of the 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**

No implications as a result of this report.

9. **Health and wellbeing implications**

The delivery of a suitable winter service will assist with maintaining accessibility to health facilities for residents of Walsall.

10. **Staffing implications**

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

11. **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.

12. **Consultation**

12.1 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.

12.2 The plan has been considered by the Neighbourhoods Scrutiny and Performance Panel at its meeting on 13 October 2014. The Panel considered that the RNR plan should be further extended to include Beacon Road in Pheasey, West Bromwich Road in the Delves and Clarkes Lane to Cannock Road in Willenhall.

12.3 The Council has provided a report to the Department for Transport on its preparedness for the winter season. This requirement was as a direct result of the Department's review of national resilience of the transport network to extreme weather events.

Background papers

Well Maintained Highways Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management
(Appendix H Winter Service Practical Guidance)
2013/14 Winter service operational plan

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20 October 2014

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20 October 2014