

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 21/7/09

HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE – WINTER SERVICE REVIEW

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF MOBILITY & DEVELOPMENT

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Review the operation of the Winter Service with regard to the difficulties encountered during the 2008/9 winter season due to the national shortage of road salt.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the recommended changes to the Winter Service outlined in Section 7 of the report be adopted and that the amended policy be adopted

3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 This report provides an update on the effectiveness of the Winter Service policy that was approved and adopted in September 2006 and looks at improvements required as a result of the problems encountered during the 2008/9 season.

4.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 4.1 Cabinet – 18th September 2006

5.0 BACKGROUND

- 5.1 In October 2003 the Government introduced an amendment to the Highway Act 1980 which placed a duty on Local Authorities to ensure, so as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.
- 5.2 In light of this legislation change the Council acknowledged that the existing policy fell short of the new Code of Practice and in September 2006 approved a new Policy for the forthcoming winter maintenance season. This policy extended precautionary salting routes to include schools, transport interchanges, industrial estates and strategic footways/cycleways.

5.3 **Policy for 2006/7 and subsequent years**

5.3.1 The main activities of the Winter Maintenance Service are treating the highway to:

1. Try to prevent ice forming known as “pre-salting”
2. Melt ice and snow already formed, “post-salting”
3. Remove snow

5.3.2 **Roads:**

The service aims to prevent ice forming (precautionary treatment) on the “defined network” which consists of main through roads and those serving centres of activity such as commercial, retail, employment, administrative and leisure. These are known as the “frost routes”.

Defined network:

- All “A” and “B” roads
- Regular bus routes (The regular bus routes are defined as Monday to Friday routes with a minimum of one bus per hour during the main part of the day).
- Feeder roads to schools (roads linking main salting routes to main school entrances)
- Access roads to transport interchanges
- Main access roads on industrial estates (Halesfield, Stafford Park, Hortonwood)
- One access route to main villages/hamlets and minor sections of road for continuity

5.3.3 **Footpaths:**

Footpaths/cycletracks and district centres that will be treated when frost is forecast are:

- 1) Adopted footpaths in Telford Town centre.
- 2) Footpaths serving the main shopping areas of:
 - a) Wellington
 - b) Dawley
 - c) Madeley
 - d) Newport
 - e) Ironbridge
 - f) Oakengates

6.0 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT POLICY

6.1.1 Roads

Feeder roads to schools:

Despite the prolonged period of cold weather conditions earlier this year, the salting of feeder roads to schools has been successful in ensuring that for the vast majority of schools have remained open.

Following officer discussion feedback from the Children & Young people portfolio concluded:

Despite the harsh weather conditions earlier this year, the salting of feeder roads to schools was successful in ensuring that for the vast majority of the winter, all the schools remained open.

Access roads to transport interchanges e.g. bus stations & railway stations.

Discussion with the Transport Service provider concluded that in previous years: *"Arriva did not encounter any problems during the winter season"*.

However for the 2008/9 season Arriva stated:

"During the cold snap earlier this year, the council did not seem to prioritise the Quality partnership routes, and the 33 and 55 both routes had large parts of the routes missed out. This may have been due to the fact there was a shortage of grit, so only main roads were prioritised, also we had a problem in getting bus stations gritted."

The reduction in service during 2008/9 due to the national shortage of salt clearly had an affect on public transport.

Main access roads on industrial estates (i.e. Halesfield, Stafford Park, Hortonwood) – all routes were kept open during the frost and snow events.

6.1.2 Footpaths

Salting and snow clearance of the adopted footways at the Town centre and the six main district shopping centres has resulted in a reduction in the number of complaints over the period of the current policy. We have been able to keep footways safe to use for the majority of winter conditions encountered during this period.

6.1.3 Problems as a result of the National salt shortage

Salt stock:

The salt barn at the Granville House depot has the facility to accommodate some 1400 tonnes of salt which is equivalent to approx 30 turnouts for frost (approx 15 days) and 15 for snow (approx 5 days). The Winter Service operates a salt management system that maintains stock levels between min of 1000 tonnes and max 1400 tonnes. Prior to the 2008/9 season this system had been effective with our salt supplier, Salt Union, organising regular deliveries on demand. The difficulties experienced during the 2008/9 season were as a result of a national shortage of salt which was compounded by the only two UK suppliers being unable to meet demand. As a result Government departments & Civil Resilience stepped in and dictated to each highway authority how much salt they would receive.

Gritting routes:

Deliveries were considerably reduced during January & February with the effect that the extent of our gritting operations had to be scaled back in order to conserve salt stock. For the period between 7th February 2009 and the end of the season gritting operations were reduced to only:

- A & B roads
- Roads serving fire, ambulance, police establishments
- Main bus routes in the following centres: Telford Town Centre, Dawley, Madeley, Newport, Oakengates & Wellington.

All salting of footways and refilling of grit bins was also suspended.

6.1.4 Key points from the 2008/9 winter season

Last winter saw much colder temperatures than past winters with a significant amount of snowfall. Salt usage was almost double the average of the last 5 years with almost 60% more turnouts for frost than previous years. The number of turnouts for snow was almost twice the average.

Key points with regard to salt stocks were:

- A colder December meant an early demand on salt stock
- In January Salt Union were already having difficulties with demand and had to acquire additional salt from Ireland
- The barn was at full capacity at the end of January but there was significant usage due to a snow event
- During February salt deliveries were suspended and deliveries were determined by the GOWM co-ordination unit.
- In early February roads to be gritted were reduced to Primary routes only and this level of service was maintained until the end of the season

Whilst the road network that received treatment during the salt shortage was reduced from 40% down to 20% there was no increase in the number of reported accidents.

6.1.5 **Main findings**

Whilst the delays and withdrawal of salt deliveries was outside the control of the Council the issue has highlighted the need to have a reserve stock of salt. The following options have been considered:

- Mutual aid with neighbouring authorities such as Shropshire Council
- Mutual aid – Highway Agency
- Extend salt stock provision at Granville House

Whilst it is considered that the first two options are appropriate for emergency situations it has been concluded that there is a need for this Council to increase its own salt stock.

The current policy has proven to be appropriate in meeting the duty placed on the Council and there is no evidence to suggest the need for fundamental change.

7.0 **PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRENT POLICY**

- 7.1 In conclusion there should be no significant changes to the policy. However there is a need for the policy to be amended to reflect the difficulties encountered in 2008/9 and these are outlined below:

7.1.2 **Recommendation: Extended salt stock**

Additional salt storage of approximately 300 tonnes should be provided at the existing Granville House depot at a cost of £15,000. This would extend gritting operations for a further 7 turnouts for frost (approx 3.5 days) and 4 for snow (approx 1.5 days).

Initial permissions are in place with the Environment Agency and other permissions are being sought from Building Control.

7.1.3 **Recommendation: Gritting routes**

The problems with salt stock have highlighted that this Council's policy needs to be amended so that it has some flexibility to react when faced with this type of problem.

Most highway authorities operated a two stage process for implementing their gritting operations with a defined set of Primary routes and a set of Secondary Routes.

It is recommended that this Council adopts a similar approach with the Primary routes being those set out in 7.1.4 below and secondary routes being those set out in 7.1.5.

In normal operating conditions the full gritting routes set out in 7.1.4 & 7.1.5 would operate.

Cabinet have already authorised the appropriate officer to implement reduced gritting operations (i.e. Primary routes only) should a scenario similar to that encountered in the 2008/9 season arise.

- 7.1.4 Primary Routes:
- A & B roads
 - Roads serving fire, ambulance, police establishments
 - Main bus routes in the following centres: Telford Town Centre, Dawley, Madeley, Newport, Oakengates & Wellington.
 - Access roads to transport interchanges
- 7.1.5 Secondary Routes:
- Other regular bus routes (The regular bus routes are defined as Monday to Friday routes with a minimum of one bus per hour during the main part of the day).
 - Feeder roads to schools (roads linking main salting routes to main school entrances)
 - Main access roads on industrial estates (Halesfield, Stafford Park, Hortonwood)
 - One access route to main villages/hamlets and minor sections of road for continuity.

8.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 8.1 The salting operations on the road and footway network facilitate greater access for all to key services (e.g. shops, jobs, health care, leisure and education)

9.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1 The risk of plant loss immediately adjacent to footpaths/cycleways is minimised by restricting the spread width of the salt. There is a slight risk of pollution from surface water runoff immediately after salting operations. These risks are more than offset by improved safety of our infrastructure.

10.0 OPPORTUNITIES & RISKS

- 10.1 In proposing this action/decision, the Corporate Risk Management Methodology has been complied with. This approach is not intended to eliminate risks but to identify the risks and manage them. However not all risks can be managed all of the time and some risks may not have been identified.

The following key risks and opportunities have been identified and assessed and arrangements will be put in place to manage them

10.2 *Risks*

The Winter Service Policy aims to reduce the likelihood of accidents and injury for users of the Borough's highway network during wintry conditions. For practical/cost reasons not all of the Borough's road, cycleway and footway network will receive treatment during these conditions. In developing the policy the extent of the operation has been determined by the recommendations of the Code of Practice for Highways Maintenance – "Well Maintained Highways" dated July 2005.

10.3 *Opportunities*

The Policy seeks to ensure that access to key facilities that are essential to the livelihood of residents of the Borough are maintained during wintry conditions. These include schools, public transport, town and district centres and main employment centres.

11.0 LEGAL COMMENT

The Council has a duty of care for Highway Maintenance. Much of highway maintenance activity is based upon statutory powers and duties contained in legislation. The statutory basis for Winter Service in England & Wales has been addressed through a modification to the Highways Act 1980 with effect from 31st October 2003. The relevant law now provides that:

- a) The authority who are for the time being the highway authority for a highway maintainable at public expense are under a duty, to maintain any highway which is maintainable at the public expense and,
- b) In particular, a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

In any action against the Council in respect of damage resulting from its failure to maintain a publicly maintainable highway, it is a defence to prove that the Council took such care as in all the circumstances was reasonably required to secure that the part of the highway to which the action relates was not dangerous for traffic. Similarly, in respect of the new duty under b) above, it is a defence to prove that the Council acted within the bounds of reasonable practicality i.e. it needs to devise a plan, in accordance with best practice to address the foreseeable risks.

12.0 LINK WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 12.1 Improved Highway Maintenance has a positive impact upon all of the Council key priorities.

13.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The £15,000 cost of this proposal will be met from existing capital budgets.
- 13.2 The 2008/9 budget for Winter Maintenance was £539,040, with a gross outturn position of £706,930. The budget for 2009/10 is £476,060, following a savings target of £50,000.

Any overspend in revenue costs in 2009/10, which would be influenced by weather conditions rather than this change of policy would have to be flagged as a corporate pressure and a bid made against the corporate contingency fund.

14.0 WARD & PARISH IMPLICATIONS

14.1 Borough wide implications.

14.2 Parish Charter: Parishes will be informed of any changes to treatment routes and other changes that affect their areas. During the winter season contact will be via the nominated Parish Council snow liaison representatives.

14.3 The Grit Bins procedure has been reviewed and concluded that requests for new grit bin locations will in future only be considered from Ward members, Parish & Town Councils or community organisations.

Report prepared by:-

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WINTER SERVICE POLICY STATEMENT

2009/10

INTRODUCTION

The Borough of Telford and Wrekin is the Highways Authority for all the adopted roads in the Borough except for the M54 Motorway and A5 Trunk road from the end of the M54 at Cluddley to Preston Roundabout.

The Highways Authority is responsible for work relating to snow, frost or ice on these roads. The aim of the Winter Service is to provide so far as is reasonably practicable for the safe movement of road users along the highway network during wintry conditions. The Service operates between the 1st October and the 30th April i.e. the Winter Season.

A review of Winter Service Operations is undertaken each year before the start of the next Winter Season.

FORECASTING & TREATMENT OF ROADS

Two weather monitoring stations operate in the Borough, which with information from surrounding areas' stations and forecasting from the Met Office are used to determine the most appropriate action delivered at the best possible time.

We employ the Vaisala weather monitoring and bureau service who advise our experienced staff on optimising the salting of the roads at the most effective and economic times. However with the variable conditions we experience in this maritime climate it is not always possible to complete salting before freezing starts but we endeavour to complete salting as soon as is practicable within the constraints of our resources.

ROADS TO BE TREATED

The main activities of the Winter Service are treating the highway to:

- 1 Try to prevent ice forming known as "precautionary salting"
- 2 Melt ice and snow already formed, "post-salting"
- 3 Remove snow

All the roads are divided into the "defined network" and the "non defined" roads dependent on their priority. The service aims to prevent ice forming (precautionary treatment) on the "defined network" which consists of main through roads and those serving centres of activity such as commercial, retail, employment, administrative and leisure. These are known as the "frost routes".

Frost Routes

The "frost routes" should be salted prior to the formation of frost by the fleet of gritters provided by Telford & Wrekin Services.

Primary Routes:

- A & B roads

- Roads serving fire, ambulance, police establishments
- Main bus routes in the following centres: Telford Town Centre, Dawley, Madeley, Newport, Oakengates & Wellington.
- Access roads to transport interchanges

Secondary Routes:

- Other regular bus routes (The regular bus routes are defined as Monday to Friday routes with a minimum of one bus per hour during the main part of the day).
- Feeder roads to schools (roads linking main salting routes to main school entrances)
- Main access roads on industrial estates (Halesfield, Stafford Park, Hortonwood)
- One access route to main villages/hamlets and minor sections of road for continuity.

Priority will always be given to ensuring that the Primary routes are treated before the Secondary routes.

The remainder of the roads are “non defined” and are not treated for a forecast of frost. However grit bins are provided at high risk sites such as steep hills, severe bends, etc.

Snow and ice routes

Roads to be treated at times of snowfall or prolonged icy periods following snow (post-treatment) are known as the “snow and ice routes”. The “snow and ice routes” consist of the “frost routes, the remaining main and secondary distributor roads and high risk sections of the local network.

In times of snow and prolonged icy conditions the “snow and ice routes” are ploughed, cleared or salted with the frost routes being treated as priority. This work is undertaken under our instruction by Telford & Wrekin Services, farmer operated snowploughs and if necessary local contractors. These activities are aimed at providing safe movement around the Borough between major centres and at least one access route to each hamlet.

When resources allow they will then be deployed onto the “non defined” routes dealing with problems in priority order.

TREATMENT OF FOOTWAYS AND CYCLETRACKS & DISTRICT CENTRES

Frost Routes

Footpaths/cycletracks and district centres that will be treated when frost is forecast are the “defined footway routes” at the following locations:

- 1) Adopted footpaths in Telford Town centre.
- 2) Footpaths serving the main shopping areas of:
 - a) Wellington
 - b) Dawley
 - c) Madeley

- d) Newport
- e) Ironbridge
- f) Oakengates

Snow & ice

In the event of prolonged snow or ice strategic footway/cycletracks will be treated in a priority order. The order starts with town centres, local district centres etc. It is not possible to clear all the footpaths within the Borough during these wintry conditions.

Grit Bins

Grit bins in general are only provided on “non-defined” roads at high risk sites such as steep hills, severe bends, etc. Their provision is determined by on-site risk assessments using a standardised set of criteria and then prioritised based on available resources. Grit bins are provided on the basis of self-help by the public and the service is limited to refilling the bins with salt and replacing damaged bins.

A limited number of grit bins are provided at key locations on the footway/cycleway network defined as routes promoted as Safe Routes to Schools.

Requests for new grit bin locations are considered only from Ward members, Parish & Town Councils or community organisations.

Grit bins are only provided on the adopted highway