

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 22 SEPTEMBER 2011

HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE – WINTER SERVICE REVIEW

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 Review the operation and effectiveness of the Winter Service with regard to operational issues encountered during the 2010/11 winter season arising from the prolonged cold spell and national pressures in the delivery of road salt.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the recommended changes to the Winter Service outlined in **Appendices 1 and 2** of the report be adopted, namely:
- The existing above regional average coverage for salt treatment of our road network to remain the same for 2011/12 with the addition of one location-the access route to Harper Adams College.
 - Existing Grit Bin Policy to remain for 2011/12 but to continue close working with Parishes and community groups for local co operative opportunities
 - To provide greater resilience and efficiencies – revise our rate of spread of salt from 15g per m² to 10g per m² for frost prevention and from 30g per m² to 20g per m² for snow events, which will meet DfT guidance and will be the same rate of application as all other regional Council's and the Highways Agency
 - Continue to improve communication channels and access to information for residents and businesses within the Borough

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	<i>Environment plan – Winter resilience</i>
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	<i>Borough Wide</i>
DELIVERY DATE	<i>Winter Maintenance season commences 1st October 2011</i>	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	<i>The proposed changes to the rate of salt spread will reduce salt costs per call out. As detailed within</i>

		<i>the main report expenditure on winter maintenance in recent years has been significantly higher than the base budget available. A reduction in salt costs should help to contain costs. Expenditure on this service is, of course, heavily dependent upon the weather conditions. As in previous years any additional costs will have to be met from any available under spending in other service areas or from corporate contingency. Costs will be monitored throughout the winter period and reported as necessary. JAC 250811</i>
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	<i>The Council has a duty under the Highways Act 1980 to ensure, so as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.</i>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	<i>The scope of the actions of the Winter Maintenance Service will impact on many aspects of life in the Borough including the environment, economy and community cohesion. The actions all impact on the Council's reputation.</i>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	<i>Borough-wide impact.</i>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3.0 REPORT SUMMARY

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In light of this legislation change the Council acknowledged that the previous 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 and cycle ways. The Policy has been further amended and strengthened in July 2009 and September 2010.
- 3.3 Due to the national shortage and distribution problems with road salt, the council in order to protect its network has increased its storage capacity from 1400 tonnes to 2700 tonnes over the past two years. This has led to increased storage costs and in some cases in order to maintain stocks, having to pay premium rates for salt deliveries during the winter season. At the start of the last Winter Maintenance season we were at full storage capacity of 2700 tonnes.

- 3.4 The winter of 2010/11 was at its most severe during the months of November and December, temperatures of minus 16 degrees being experienced in some areas. December was the coldest in the area since 1890 and together with early snowfall in November resulted in a significant increase in snow treatments to ensure the network remained in operation. Our existing salts stocks were put under significant pressure due to a shortage of national salt supplies and orders not getting through.
- 3.5 For the second winter in succession, it has been necessary to reduce salt usage in the Borough by introducing a revised 3 parts salt to 1 part grit mix. This resilience measure ran from 22 December through to the end of the winter season on 30 April 2011 in order to maintain stock levels. It was also necessary to reduce gritting to 5 primary routes only during the period of 22 December 2010 to 4 January 2011 to further preserve stocks. See Appendix 3 for records of turnouts
- 3.6 For the third year in succession, expenditure on winter maintenance has far exceeded normal levels. The 2010/11 service cost £653,487 against a budget of £425,440 resulting in an overspend of £228,047 which reflects the additional snow event and salt treatment of routes, grit and call out costs associated with the extreme winter weather conditions. This overspend was funded from specific service reserves and corporate contingency.
- 3.7 A more detailed performance review of the 2010/11 Winter Maintenance season is summarised in **Appendix 2** and identifies a series of service strands and conclusions, including:
- Salting Operations
 - Grit Bins
 - Salt storage.
 - Communication and advice and guidance
- Each service strand element carries a **service improvement recommendation**.
- 3.8 Each year the Council receives many requests to grit roads that are not included on the primary or secondary gritting routes. When considering any additions to gritting routes it is important that the current policy is rigorously applied. If the Council are to allow roads to be added to the existing gritting network that do not fall within the policy, it will be extremely difficult to decline further similar requests year on year. The Council will run a high risk of having inconsistencies within the policy and this carries a high probability of the Council having difficulties in defending its actions in Court as well as unsustainable increases in service costs.
- 3.9 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.

- 3.10 The grit bin inventory has been shared with Parishes to consider 'added value' grit bin locations. Any Parish can choose to provide additional grit bins if they should require them for local sites other than those provided for by Telford & Wrekin Council. Parishes will be expected to pay for the provision and salt replenishment of any additional bins.

4. **BENCHMARKING**

- 4.1 Having undertaken a recent benchmarking exercise with Midland Service Improvement Group (MSIG), it was found that our current Winter Maintenance Service route coverage is 41% compared to an average of 39% for the group. Also, as a local comparator – our network coverage of 41% is in contrast to Shropshire Council who cover 28% of their network.
- 4.2 Further benchmarking with MSIG identifies that we are the only Council out of 19 members who apply a higher rate of spread of salt per m² i.e. 15g per m² for frost prevention and 30g per m² for snow events. The regional norm is 10g per m² and 20g per m² respectively.
- 4.3 The lower application rate ties in with DfT guidance on salt usage reductions and increased resilience. Existing salt stocks at the start of the Winter season stand at 2700 tonnes, if the lower application rate is adopted, we would be using 900 tonnes less per normal winter season, equivalent to an overall stock level of 3600 tonnes. Therefore we will not have to consider a further increase of our stocks with the resulting increase in appropriate costs i.e. procurement, storage facility costs and land rentals etc. It will also benefit the environment with less mining, transport costs and fuel costs.

Procurement of a further 900 tonnes of salt including storage costs over and above existing stocks of 2700 tonnes would amount to an additional cost of circa £40,000. Should existing salt stock levels be retained and we don't purchase additional salt, but we continue to add grit stone at existing spread rates, as part of the treatment process, this would result in an additional cost of circa £87,000 for the 900 tonnes of grit stone required. This figure covers procurement costs, the resulting additional sweeping and landfill disposal costs.

- 4.4 We have shared this thinking with local emergency services and PCT and based on regional comparable service standards they are comfortable with a recommendation to apply the new spread, subject to review should difficulties arise during any severe weather events.

**Report prepared by David Bell, Public Realm Group Manager,
telephone 01952 384810**