

Appendix 2 - WINTER SERVICE STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE:

1. SALTING OPERATIONS

Winter Maintenance Service Policy – salting

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

1.1 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 (which in the main are serviced as part of school sites or district centres. These are known as the “frost routes” .

Defined network:

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 and Ironbridge
- 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/colleges (roads linking main salting routes to main 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.

1.2 Turnouts in 2010/11

Roads:

The total number of turnouts in 2010/11 was 92 compared with 154 in 2009/10. This compares with the 5 yearly averages for previous years of 95. It must however be noted that we conducted 22 double spread rates for snow events compared to a season average of 13.

Footways:

The total number of turnouts in 2010/11 was 41 compared with 38 in 2009/10. This compares with the 5 yearly averages for previous years of 25.

1.3 Salt usage

National Salt Shortage Impact:

Due to national salt demand and delays in deliveries, the council followed the national directive to conserve salt stocks. In turn, for the second year in succession we reverted to a 75/25 salt/grit mix. This took effect from mid December through to the end of March. The use of grit provided extra traction for vehicles but does cause maintenance problems in relation to street sweeping and gully emptying. It also causes a burden on disposal costs as the collected grit has to be dried before it is disposed of.

General Comment

It is evident that the last three concurrent cold winters have seen a significant increase in the use of salt and the numbers of turnouts have resulted in a significant increase in the year end costs for the Winter Service. This increase has been met from corporate funds given the service priority.

Benchmarking Standards:

It is recognised that our current Winter Maintenance Service Policy is to a higher standard than that of other Councils and is above the national average in terms of expenditure.

Having undertaken a recent benchmarking exercise with the 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.

Further benchmarking with Midland Service Improvement Group (MSIG) identifies that Telford and Wrekin 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.

The lower application rate ties in with DfT guidance on salt usage reductions and increased resilience. Should we adopt the lower application rate we would be using 900 tonnes less per normal winter season and will therefore will not have to consider further increase our stocks with the resulting increase in appropriate costs i.e. storage facility and land rentals etc. It will also benefit the environment with less mining, transport costs and fuel costs.

1.4 Feedback from Community stakeholders

Feeder roads to schools and colleges

Despite the prolonged period of cold weather conditions during the 2010/11 winter season, the salting of feeder roads to schools has been successful in ensuring that schools have remained open.

Comments by the Capital & Facilities Manager were:

The winter maintenance programme proved very effective last year and as a consequence there were no school closures which resulted directly from road closures or dangerous surfaces caused by the ice or snow.

A request from Harpers Adams College has been received requesting gritting of the access road to the college.

Access roads to transport interchanges: Bus companies

Comments by the Area Manager, Midland Arriva (Telford) were:

I would have to commend the efforts of the council and say that we were very pleased with all your hard work in keeping roads open. Apart from locations with inclines, which were affected by the worst of the weather, our services continued to run

Main access roads on industrial estates

Halesfield, Stafford Park, and Hortonwood – all routes were kept open during the frost and snow events.

1.5 Conclusion: salting operations

Feedback from key stakeholders suggested that the gritting routes used in 2010/11 provided a satisfactory level of protection to road even with the salt/grit mix being introduced. It is however encouraging to confirm there were minimal reported accidents as a result of wintry conditions on the road network.

Formal complaints to the council increased compared with previous years. Regretfully this was to be expected, considering the severe and long period of weather experienced meant that snow lay on many untreated estate roads, particularly over Christmas. Between 1 November 2010 and 31 March 2011 we received eleven compliments and sixteen formal complaints relating to the winter maintenance service.

Feedback from customers would suggest that a mixture of increased information on the Councils web site, national & local media coverage including a series of radio & television interviews, public understanding and the excellent service delivery from the council and contractor throughout the prolonged period all helped to ensure public frustration were contained to a relative minimum.

Recommendation: Defined network

Given the overall effectiveness of the service performance across the current defined network, it is prudent for the routes to remain unchanged with the exception of the access road to Harper Adams College.

2. GRIT BINS

2.1 Current grit bin policy

The Council continues to provide in excess of 460 grit bins on non-treated roads that are considered high risk locations. These sites have been subject to a risk assessment criteria or they remain in situ due to historical placement reasons. The number of grit bins we currently provide far exceeds the average compared to other Councils.

All high risk sites are now accommodated, however future requests for grit bins for community/public use provision can be on the basis of a co operative approach and/or financial contributions from community groups such as Parish Councils which the Council will assist in relation to purchasing and replenishing on their behalf.

Prior to the commencement of the 2010/11 and the forthcoming winter season, all Parish and Town Councils have been written to regarding local provision of grit bins and to seek their views on providing grit bins at their expense. This is only the case when the Council criteria for sighting a bin are not met. This has led to a successful take up with several Parishes wanting to engage.

Grit bins are provided on the basis of self help by motorists for use on the public highway. There is evidence from community feedback that grit bins are sometimes

requested and used for the gritting of private footpaths & driveways. We also receive complaints from residents regarding the siting of them near their properties and Parishes are mindful of this.

During 2010/11 as in past years there continued to be a number of 'one off' requests for grit bins which were made generally during snow events where drivers experienced difficulties with traction on untreated estate roads.

Some Parish Councils have enquired about the locations of grit bins in their area so that they can review whether they are meeting the needs of the community. An up to date inventory list and location maps will again be circulated to all Parishes prior to the start of the 2011/12 winter season. All grit bins will be numbered and have the prefix 'P' where Parish owned.

2.2 Conclusion: Grit bins

The number of grit bins installed and serviced is much higher than many other council's. Further consultations are in process with Parishes on the locations of grit bins in their specific areas so they may consider local demand and provision.

Recommendation: Grit bins

Given the current provision it is recommended that the Grit Bin Policy remains unchanged for 2011/12 and a co operative approach is more widely publicised on the website.

3. SALT STORAGE/USAGE

3.1 Effectiveness of changes to salt storage

Members may recall the difficulties experienced during the 2008/9 season and as a result of a national shortage, additional salt storage of 350 tonnes was created at the Granville House depot prior to the start of the 2009/10 season. This extended the total storage of salt to 1700 tonnes. Prior to 2010/11 permission was given to acquire a further 1000 tonnes, which was stored locally at a facility owned by Jack Moody on Redhill Way, Telford. Therefore at the start of the 2010/11 winter season salt stocks were at the maximum of 2700 tonnes

The 2010/11 prolonged winter weather conditions started earlier than previous years and as with every council in the country, we again experienced problems with salt deliveries similar to that encountered in 2010/11. The cold snap and snow falls in November and December together with extremely low temperatures for that period created a national shortage of salt requiring the reintroduction of the Government led Salt Cell.

This brought about resilience actions being imposed on all councils to reduce salt usage by up to 50% but for the majority of the time we were able to maintain a near normal service without any reduction to the gritting routes by introducing a 75% salt:

25% grit mix. However for the period 22 December 2010 to 4 January 2011 in order to maintain rapidly dwindling stocks of salt, it was necessary to reduce our gritting routes to the 5 main primary routes.

Following the severe winter of 2009/10 in order to increase resilience the DFT set up strategic reserve stocks of salt, from which authorities could request supplies. Salt deliveries were restricted by the DFT with priority being given to those authorities in a critical situation. Telford and Wrekin Council requested and received a total of 1084 tonnes. In addition due the uncertainties surrounding this process and the ongoing lack of domestic supplies it was necessary for the Council to be proactive and we sought deliveries from other sources.

- 200 tonnes Mutual Aid from Shropshire Council
- 1000 tonnes from JC Peacock (marine salt from Australia)

Further measures to preserve salt also included filling salt bins with grit and using grit for footways.

3.2 Impact of prolonged cold winters and the national salt shortage

The previous two winters had seen a significant increase in the amount of salt being used. In 2009/10 there were 5,345 tonnes used and 5,160 tonnes in 2008/9. However milder weather from the beginning of February 2011 through to the end of April 2011 resulted in total salt usage of 3964 tonnes. This compares to the 5 yearly averages for previous years of 3916 tonnes. Though it must be noted, during the time of national shortage, we had to pay a premium for winter salt orders and deliveries, including that from the strategic reserve stock. There are currently only three main suppliers of road salt in the UK

Salt Union (current supplier)
Cleveland Potash
Irish Salt

The salt barn at the Granville House depot now has the facility to accommodate some 1700 tonnes of salt which is equivalent to approx 40 turnouts for frost and 20 for snow. The additional stock of 1000 tonnes stored at Moody's will provide approx 24 turnouts for frost and 12 turnouts for snow.

In total this allows for 64 turnouts for frost turnouts and 32 for snow,

In normal circumstances this level of stock should be more than capable of providing resilience, however the last two severe winters have proved, despite the increased resilience that this may not be the case. The Government recommendation is to maintain not less than 6 days stock. If we were to have a really bad spell of snowfall, we could provide 16 days of double treatment twice a day which is far in excess of the Government recommendation.

3.3 Conclusion: Salt storage/Usage

Given the benchmarking findings highlighted in section 1 above, in order to further increase resilience for the Council and without the need to increase storage capacity and costs, consideration should be given to reduce the rates of spread of salt.

Reducing the rate of spread from 15 grams per sqm to 10 grams per sqm when pre treating for ice and from 30 grams per sqm to 20 grams per sqm when pre treating for snow, would result in the equivalent of 900 tonnes of salt being saved per average season. Therefore resilience would be increased to the equivalent of 3600 tonnes with no increase in procurement or storage costs.

The revised rate of spread is used by many other Local Authorities and the Highways Agency without any adverse effects, including locally both Shropshire Council and Staffordshire County Council. This proposed spread rate also falls within suggested national guidelines.

Recommendation: Salt storage/Usage

It is recommended that the current salt storage capacity remains unaltered for the 2011/12 winter season but in order to increase winter resilience the rates of spread of salt be reduced 15 grams per sqm to 10 grams per sqm and from 30 grams per sqm to 20 grams per sqm for the 2011/12 winter season.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

4.1 Positive Actions undertaken

In order to assist Elected Members, Parishes, the media and the community as a whole, the council provided access to a series of information channels which were available on the council website, in relevant customer services teams and electronically available to all Members & Parishes.

The information included:

- Borough wide maps indicating defined gritting routes
- Winter maintenance: Frequently Asked Questions
- Winter Maintenance – Facts and Figures
- Who to contact
- Daily service disruption information i.e. refuse & kerbside collections, schools, leisure sites etc.
- Notification of 'real time' gritting operations to all Ward Members, Parish and Town Councils.

There was also a series of meetings with Parish representatives which also assisted in developing the information above.

During the peak of the national salt shortage the council maintained daily contact with the media, GOWM Regional Resilience Team and a local 'virtual' Silver Command Group involving key emergency & public service representatives

4.2 Conclusion

Due to 'round the clock' monitoring and actions the council maintained effective communication throughout the very testing set of circumstances and received praise for its actions and approach

Recommendation: Communication

It is recommended that in future the same approach is adopted and a more proactive style of communication is developed with a particular emphasis on the council website and information to Parishes and co operative opportunities particularly around grit bins. This is to include up to date records and plans highlighting local grit bins.