

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 2011/12

Roads:

The total number of turnouts in 2011/12 was 73 compared with 92 in 2010/11. This compares with the 5 yearly averages for previous years of 95. The forecast for snow events was greatly reduced in 2011/12 however we conducted 12 double spread rates for snow events compared to a season average of 13.

Footways:

The total number of turnouts in 2011/12 was 21 compared with 41 in 2010/11. This compares with the 5 yearly averages for previous years of 29.

1.3 Salt usage

Impact of reduced spread rates introduced in order to increase resilience at times of salt shortages:

Due to national salt demand and delays in deliveries over the previous 3 winters, the council followed the national directive to conserve salt stocks. For the 2011/12 winter season a reduction in the rates of spread for treating frost, ice and snow was introduced. This resulted in the equivalent of 915 tonnes less salt being used, which in turn saved the council £33,000.

General Comment

It is evident that the previous 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. Although 2011/12 winter was milder, temperature still fell sufficiently to require consecutive day and night treatments on 12 occasions between 8 and 19 December 2011 and 17 consecutive treatments between 26 January and 11 February 2012. Although expenditure was less than previously, the winter maintenance budget was overspent by £151,000, which was funded by underspends in other service areas.

1.4 Feedback from Community stakeholders

Feeder roads to schools and colleges

During the prolonged periods of cold weather during the 2011/12 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.

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 at times 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.

A request from Lyreco has been received requesting gritting of the slip roads off the A4640 Redhill Way that provide access to Donnington Business Park.

1.5 Gritting Route Optimisation

In order to reduce expenditure and produce efficiencies a review of all nine gritting routes has been undertaken and it has been found that they can be reduced to eight while retaining the existing defined network. The optimisation process compares the length of the defined network, the number of routes and the time taken to complete a route. The outcome will result in savings in the region of £20,000 during a 'normal' winter season such as 2011/12. These savings have been reflected within the agreed budget for 2012/13.

1.6 Conclusion: salting operations

Feedback from key stakeholders suggested that the gritting routes used in 2011/12 provided a satisfactory level of protection to roads even with the reduced rates of spread being introduced. It is however encouraging to confirm that there were minimal reported accidents as a result of wintry conditions on the road network.

Between 1 November 2011 and 31 March 2012 we received five official compliments and two 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 periods of colder weather all helped to ensure public frustration were contained to a relative minimum.

Recommendation: Defined network

That while still retaining the defined network, the number of routes be reduced from nine to eight as suggested by the route optimisation process. That the slip roads serving Donnington Business Park be added to the defined network.

2. GRIT BINS

2.1 Current grit bin policy

The Council continues to provide in excess of 470 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 2011/12 winter season, all Parish and Town Councils were 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. The process will continue for the forthcoming season and all Parish and Town Councils will be written to again regarding the arrangements.

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 2011/12 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 2012/13 winter season. All grit bins have been 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 2012/13 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 2011/12 winter season salt stocks were at the maximum of 2700 tonnes

No difficulties were encountered with salt deliveries during 2011/12 season, orders were placed periodically to ensure adequate stocks and at the end of the season 1800 tonnes were still held. A summer restock will take place shortly in order to take advantage of lower rates at this time of year and take levels back to 2700 tonnes.

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 together with the reduced rates of spread should be more than capable of providing resilience, however the previous 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

The existing storage arrangements have proved to be adequate and 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, did not cause any known difficulties.

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 2012/13 winter season, together with the reduced rates of spread of salt at 10 and 20grams per sqm for the 2012/13 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.
- Gritter twitter and Facebook
- In the event of significant snow/adverse weather or forecast – a dedicated 'Snowline' Contact Centre is available before and after normal office hours

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

4.2 Conclusion

Due to 'round the clock' monitoring and actions the council maintained effective communication throughout the winter season and received praise for its actions and approach

Recommendation: Communication

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

5. WEATHER FORECASTING AND BUREAU SERVICES

5.1 Changes to service provision (For information)

For the past 3 years the Met Office has provided the council with weather forecasts and Vaisala have provided online data services and maintenance of the council's two weather stations. Both contracts expired on 30 April and review was undertaken in order to procure those services at reduced rates under new contracts if possible.

One option was to obtain the new contract through joint procurement with neighbouring authorities, in order to produce savings, however that was not possible at the present time but maybe so in two years when those authorities existing contracts expire.

5.2 Procurement process

In order to ensure that service continuity the procurement process commenced in May 2012. Weather forecasting and bureau services are carried out by specialist companies with few competitive options, however by obtaining written quotes from the Met Office and Meteo Group for weather forecasting and Vaisala and Findlay Irving for the bureau services it was possible to secure an annual saving against existing costs of £5,500 or 30%. These savings have been reflected within the agreed Budget for 2012/13. The costs are fixed for the next two years until a formal tender process is undertaken as part of any joint procurement process.

Until 31 April 2014 the weather forecasting service will be provided by Meteo Group and the bureau service will be provided by Vaisala.