

5 October 2017**Agenda Item: 5**

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE

HIGHWAYS WINTER SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek endorsement of the procedures associated with provision of the Winter Maintenance Service and the preparation for Winter 2017/18.

Information and Advice

Background to service

2. The Highways Act 1980 places a duty of care upon Highway Authorities “to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice”. It also states that it is a duty to remove obstructions arising from an accumulation of snow on the highway. The Council meets these statutory duties through the provision of both a planned and reactive winter service, which meets the national standards that are set out in the Code of Practice: Well Managed Highway Infrastructure (October 2017) and associated documents.
3. Currently, three key documents provide the basis of the service delivered to the public by the County Council in response to winter weather, these are:
 - **Winter Weather Plan**, published by the Council’s Emergency Planning team.
 - **Highway Network Management Plan**, which sets out the policies associated with the provision of the winter service.
 - **Winter Service Operational Plan**, sets out operational arrangements, procedures, routes, equipment associated with delivering the highway winter maintenance services.
4. In accordance with the above documents and the Code of Practice: Well Managed Highway Infrastructure, each year the Council publishes on its web site information about the winter service including the routes where precautionary gritting is undertaken, and general advice to the travelling public and to motorists. There have been very few changes to these routes over recent years, except to include minor changes to the highway network. The overall size of the County Council’s gritting network is considered average given the geography of the County and currently 35% (approx. 1,560km) of the network is treated as

precautionary measure. This compares with the audit commission's recommendation of 24%-38% for treated network length.

5. Via will make and circulating the daily gritting decision by e-mail to all interested stakeholders as for previous seasons and NCC communications team will be using this information to inform all stakeholders through the County Council website and social media. Previously Members of the County Council have individually opted-in to receive by email the daily winter maintenance forecast and decision. This list is presently being updated, and Members will be contacted shortly to confirm if they wish to opt-in or out of this email notification.
6. All Members of the County Council are provided with a document which explains winter service arrangements in October/November of each year. This document includes useful information, advice, contact telephone numbers for constituents and specific contact information for Members only. This document is being updated for the coming season in conjunction with the County Council communications team and will be published shortly.

Service Improvements and changes for the 2017/18 winter season

7. Service improvements implemented for the coming season are as follows:
 - Three gritting vehicles have been replaced by new vehicles for the 2017/18, thereby maintaining the age and condition of the winter service fleet.
 - Roadside weather stations at A614 Perlethorpe and A611 Coxmoor have been refurbished and upgraded during the summer to replace sensors and add CCTV cameras. These improvements will support the quality of forecasting information available to the winter service decision makers.
 - The contract for the provision of winter maintenance road forecasting services expired at the end of the 2016/17 winter season, and a tender process is underway to replace this. The new forecasting service / provider will be in place prior to commencement of the 2017/18 season.

Decision Making Process

8. Precautionary gritting runs are undertaken where the forecast road surface temperatures are predicted to fall below zero degrees centigrade.
9. The daily forecast is issued around midday by weather forecast service provider. This is interrogated by the day Duty Controller and the gritting decision made which will take into account predicted temperatures, rainfall, and timings. In the event of a marginal or extraordinary forecast, another member of staff having received the appropriate training will verify the decision.
10. In addition to the forecast, Ice Prediction software will be utilised which will show in graphical form the predicted road surface temperatures and road surface condition. This will be monitored throughout the forecast period.

11. The Duty Controller is responsible for issuing the gritting instruction via e-mail and to organise the gritting shift as necessary. From 20:00hrs each night, the Night Shift Controller will take over and is responsible for verifying the weather forecast. The Night Shift Controller will act on the instruction issued by the day Controller, but has the discretion to amend the instruction in order to respond to changing weather conditions.
12. The weather forecast service provider will contact the Duty Night Shift Controller with any amendment to the forecast. In severe weather, salting treatment will be extended to Priority 2 Routes as resources allow once Priority 1 Routes are in a satisfactory and passable condition.
13. Snow fall of less than 25mm will normally be treated with precautionary salting rather than ploughing. Where moderate snowfall occurs (25mm-100mm), consideration will be given to ploughing. Lower amounts will usually be treated by slush blades fitted to gritting vehicles. This can be supplemented by additional lorry mounted ploughs where conditions dictate. During heavy snowfall (>100mm), gritting routes will be augmented by additional ploughs. Only once main routes are passable will resources be transferred to other parts of the network.

Preparation for Winter 2017/18

14. Arrangements are being made for Parish and District Councils to be supplied with a quantity of rock salt in advance of the winter season to allow for some local resilience to amenity infrastructure and self-help among local communities.
15. Contact is also being made with farmers who have previously volunteered to undertake ploughing of local roads using their own resources to ascertain their continued involvement in the scheme. Currently 63 farmers Countywide take part in this.
16. Over the summer months of 2017 the County Council's salt stocks were replenished to 19,961 tonnes against a countywide capacity of 20,000 tonnes
17. The stock held is more than is used during an average winter and more than 10,000 tonnes over the nationally recommended minimum stock level which is taken from the Code of Practice. This prescribes that Highway Authorities should hold sufficient salt stocks at the beginning of the winter season to deliver 12 days or 48 gritting 'runs', which for Nottinghamshire equates to 10,000 tonnes. As a consequence, the Council is in an excellent position to respond, operate and maintain around-the-clock treatment in severe weather conditions. Salt supplies will be replenished over the winter period as required.
18. Via's frontline gritter drivers operate on a night-shift basis from the beginning of November through to the end of March each year in order to provide a guaranteed flexible response to differing weather conditions. The drivers are supported and coordinated by a night controller who monitors the weather conditions from the forecast provided by the weather service forecast provider and through a bespoke arrangement that includes data from the Council's own weather stations, located at:

- A606 Tollerton
- A611 Coxmoor
- A60 Costock
- A631 Beckingham
- B6045 Blyth
- A614 Perlethorpe
- A614 Burntstump
- A608 Annesley

19. In addition, the Council has shared access to four weather stations owned by other authorities, located at:

- A1 Claypole
- A57 Newton
- A453 Clifton
- A52 Saxondale

20. Gritting vehicles operated by Via have a GPS tracking system installed that enables the whereabouts of each vehicle to be monitored centrally during the gritting operations and this provides and records the time, location, gritting activity, vehicle speed etc. Additionally, all vehicles are now equipped with on-board CCTV system.

21. All drivers are trained and assessed annually to achieve the City and Guilds qualification in Winter Maintenance Operations. All winter action decision makers will undertake training to fully understand forecasts provided by the weather forecast service provider. In addition, all decision makers have completed the IHE Professional Certificate in Winter Service which is now the benchmark qualification amongst practitioners. All decision makers have between 4 and 26 years' experience in the role.

22. Operations take place from four depots Countywide in Gamston, Markham Moor, Bilsthorpe and Newark. There are a total of 30 gritting lorries in the fleet ensuring adequate availability throughout the season to cover the 23 routes. In addition, there are two gritting tractor units and two towable gritting units which can be mobilised during severe weather

23. 1,382 grit bins are located across Nottinghamshire providing a resource to enable members of the public to self-help in the event of snow and ice. These bins are placed at highway junctions, where there is a steep gradient or in heavily pedestrian traffic areas, predominantly on roads not subject to routine precautionary gritting. The grit bins are inspected and refilled at the beginning of each season, and maintained throughout the winter.

24. Communications strategy is agreed between Via, highways officers and communications teams at the start of each season including operational arrangements, publication of key facts and figures and out of hours contact numbers and contact with local media. During the winter communications are managed through Council's communication team using social media to advise on conditions and activities.

Other Options Considered

25. Ensuring, as far as reasonably practical, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow and ice is a statutory duty under section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980. Removing any obstructions arising from an accumulation of snow on the highway is also a statutory duty under section 150 of the Highways Act 1980. As such the County Council as highway authority is responsible for the fulfilment of these duties.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

26. The manner in which the service is provided, the routes, operational, management and recording arrangements have been developed over a number of years to provide the best balance of service against costs against risk. Whilst the highway officers continue to review operations and routes no significant alternative options for the delivery of the service are considered suitable at this time.

Statutory and Policy Implications

27. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is **recommended** that Committee:

- 1) That Members endorse the procedures and communications approach relating to the highways winter service contained within the report

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Constitutional Comments – (LMcC 04/09/17)

The Communities and Place Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report. If Committee resolves that any actions are required, it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's terms of reference

Financial Comments – (SES 08/09/17)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Winter Weather Plan
- Highway Network Management Plan
- Winter Service Plan

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All