

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 2018/19.

Information

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 following highway adoptions. The overall size of the County Council’s gritting network is considered good 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 EM Ltd. will make and circulate the daily gritting decision by e-mail to all Members and interested stakeholders, NCC communications team will use this information to inform all other parties through the County Council's website and social media.
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 2018/19 winter season

7. The roadside weather station at the A60 in Costock has 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.

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 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 gritting instruction is issued by email and the gritting shift organised as necessary. From 20:00hrs each night the weather forecast is verified.
12. The weather forecast service provider will 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 2018/19

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 2018 the County Council's salt stocks were replenished to be excess of 19,000 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 EM Ltd.'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 EM Ltd. 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. 1,431 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 EM Ltd., 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.
25. A number of interviews have taken place with the local media to keep them informed about the County Council's arrangements for the coming winter maintenance period. These interviews have resulted in several of articles about our preparations appearing on ITV Central News and in local newspapers
26. Meetings with the District and Borough Councils will take place in October to discuss how all Authorities in Nottinghamshire can work together to provide an effective winter maintenance service (i.e. District Council staff normally employed to undertake parks maintenance could be deployed on the highway to clear snow from footways).
27. Following concerns raised last season a review was undertaken of the County Council's Winter Maintenance approach in the Gedling area. The Committee Chair along with senior officers from NCC met with Officer and Members from GBC, as well as the local MP. As a result of this review, it is proposed to install an additional Weather Station on Mapperley Plains to improve our forecasting knowledge and also improve arrangements for communication and collaboration in times of severe winter weather.

Changes to the Winter Service Operational Plan for 2018/19

28. The 2018/19 Winter Services Operational Plan (The Plan) forms Appendix A of this document.
29. The Plan has been formatted to separate it into two sections, one for policy and one for operational matters. The new format reflects the split of responsibilities between Nottinghamshire County Council and Via EM Ltd.
30. The triggering points for the Salt Conservation Criteria described in section 2.1.2(4) are now expressed as tonnages rather than the number of runs until stocks are exhausted.

31. Section 4 of The Plan sets out the following:

- A requirement to undertake a Pre-Winter review of the winter maintenance network in June/July
- The list of tasks which Via EM Ltd. will undertake in preparation for winter.
- The list of checks Via EM Ltd. will use to assess the success of its activities during the course of the winter season.
- A requirement to undertake a Post-Winter review of the effectiveness and efficiency of the previous season's activities.

32. Section 7.4 describes the arrangements for 'Performance Monitoring, Audit and Update', this includes reporting whether the routes were completed on time i.e. KPI 07 of Via EM Ltd.'s Performance Management Framework (PMF) and the requirement to produce Monthly Activity Schedules (MAS) which contain details about the costs of winter maintenance activities and the productivities achieved. Both the PMF and the MAS are submitted to the County Council's contract management team.

33. The other changes which have been undertaken are either minor textural amendments, the elimination of duplicated text or the movement of information from the main body of the document into appendices. None of these changes have any factual impact.

Other Options Considered

34. 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

35. The manner in which the service is provided, the routes, operational, management and recording arrangements have been developed over a number of years and reflect current industry best guidance. 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

36. 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) Endorse the procedures and communications approach relating to the highways winter service contained within the report.

Adrian Smith
Corporate Director, Place

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Carnaffin, Contract Manager,
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Constitutional Comments [SJE 10/10/2018]

37. Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report.

Financial Comments [SES 02/10/2018]

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

Background Papers and Published Documents

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