



REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, HIGHWAYS

HIGHWAYS WINTER SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

To provide an update for committee relating to procedures associated with provision of the Winter Maintenance Service and advise of preparation for Winter 2015/16.

Information and Advice

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 accumulations of snow from the highway. The Council meets this statutory duty 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 for Highway Maintenance Management; Well Maintained Highways.

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. This document was last amended in December 2014 and received approval at T&H committee at the meeting of 8th January 2015.

Winter Service Operational Plan, developed by Highways Division setting out operational arrangements, procedures, routes, equipment associated with delivering the highway winter maintenance services

In accordance with the above documents and the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, 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 for example, where a bus route may have changed or most recently in relation to NET extension. The overall size of the County Council's gritting network is considered average given the geography of the County and currently 35% of the network is treated as precautionary measure. This compares with the audit commission's recommendation of 24%-38% for treated network length.

All County Councillors are provided with details of the County Council's winter service arrangements in October/November of each year. A copy of the 2014 edition of Winter

Maintenance, Information for Members is included here as Appendix A. This document includes useful information, advice, contact telephone numbers for constituents and specific contact information for Members. This document will be revised including an update to all contact details and reissued for the 2015/16 season

There has been a number of service improvements implemented over the last 3 years in response to an increase in snow events being experienced. These include the setting up of two additional routes to cover the Gedling and Carlton areas covering roads that are prone to disruption in severe weather due to their steepness.

Additional service improvements include an investment in 'slush' blade type ploughs. These are far more effective to clear wet snow or smaller depths of snow than the full size plough blades. An alternative supplier of rocksalt has been appointed. This will offer alternative secure salt supplies when difficulties or shortages are being experienced from our main supplier. Parish and District Councils are also being supplied with a quantity of rocksalt in advance of the winter season to enable local resilience and self-help among local communities.

Over the summer months of 2015 the County Council's salt stocks have been replenished to 20,000 tonnes, this 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 for Highway Maintenance Management. 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 10,000tonnes. As a consequence, the Council is in an excellent position to respond, operate and maintain around-the-clock treatment in severe weather conditions, and salt supplies will again be replenished over the winter period.

Communications strategy is agreed between highways officers and communications teams at the start of each season including operational arrangements, key facts and figures and out of hours contact numbers. During the winter communications are managed through social media to advice on conditions and activities. Members may recall the severe weather conditions that prevailed on Boxing Day 2014. In light of adverse comments surrounding the service at that time despite all operational decisions being taken correctly and in accordance with approved procedures and based on live forecasting it is considered that the pre Winter Communications review considers using additional information for the public, for example such as live gritter updates via the website.

It is intended to host an informal event for members in advance of Winter 2015/16 at which equipment and the management system will be available for viewing, and highways staff we be on hand to answer questions regarding the winter service operation.

Operational Procedures

The daily forecast is issued at midday by the Met Office and is interrogated by the day Duty Controller who makes decisions regarding the appropriate course of action for the conditions. This 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. The Duty Controller will be responsible for issuing the gritting instruction via e-mail and to organise the gritting shift as necessary. The Night Shift Controller commences shift at 20:00 hours and is responsible for verifying the Met Office forecast. The

Night Shift Controller will act on the instruction issued by the day Controller, but has authority to amend the instruction in order to respond to changing weather conditions.

All winter action decision makers attend the Met Office weather forecasting and decision makers course before undertaking the role. In addition, all decision makers are in the process of completing the IHE Professional Certificate in winter Service Operations which is now the benchmark qualification amongst practitioners. All decision makers have between 2 and 25 years experience in the role. All drivers are trained and assessed annually to achieve the City and guilds qualification in winter maintenance operations

Precautionary gritting runs will be undertaken where the forecast road surface temperatures are predicted to fall below zero degrees centigrade. In addition to the forecast, Ice Prediction software is utilised which forecasts the predicted road surface temperatures and road surface condition. This is monitored throughout the forecast period also The Met Office will contact the Duty Night Shift Controller with any amendment to the forecast.

The usual approach to anticipated snow conditions is to apply a greater quantity of salt prior to the snow starting to fall. Salt underneath the snow and ice is far more effective than the subsequent application of salt spread on top but this approach is dependant upon the weather conditions. Salt applied when it is raining becomes ineffectual as it is easily washed away prior to any subsequent snowfall. The movement of traffic is also an integral part of the effectiveness of the salting operation as this helps to circulate the salt within the snow and turn it into slush

An actual snow fall of less than 25mm will usually 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 may be augmented by additional ploughs. Only once main routes are passable will resources be transferred to other parts of the network

During prolonged or heavy snowfall, gritting resources will concentrate on ensuring the Priority 1 gritting routes remain passable. Once this is achieved, this resource can be allocated to Priority 2 routes or other locations on a reactive basis. Based on forecast conditions, additional labour and vehicle resource will be mobilised to undertake ploughing or snow clearing activities. These additional ploughs will initially concentrate on Priority 1 routes, but will be reallocated once these are passable to other locations as required.

The co-ordination of road lengths requiring treatment that are not on Priority 1 or 2 routes will be undertaken by District Managers and resources will be allocated to these dependant on condition of the priority 1 and 2 routes.

The County Council'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 forecasts provided by the MET Office to the Council and through a bespoke arrangement that includes data from the Council's own weather stations, located at:

- A606 Tollerton
- A611 Coxmoor
- B6045 Blyth
- A614 Perlethorpe

- A60 Costock
- A631 Beckingham
- A614 Burntstump

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

It should be noted that the Masternaut vehicle tracking system enables the whereabouts of each vehicle to be monitored centrally during the gritting operations. Additionally, The County Council is presently procuring an on-board vehicle CCTV recording system to support the management of the winter maintenance service. This system will allow quicker and more robust defence of third party claims arising from our activities leading to possible reductions in insurance costs. An additional advantage of this system will be to provide further evidence to validate the successful completion of the gritting activity. It is intended that this system will be in place prior to the start of the forthcoming winter season.

Operations take place from four depots Countywide in Gamston, Markham Moor, Bilsthorpe and Newark. There are a total of 31 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 that can be mobilised during severe weather.

The County Council also has coordinated assistance from farmers who have signed up to the winter weather support scheme. To avoid any risk of delay, farmers do not have to wait for authorisation to act however when the duty officer considers operations should commence, a group text alert is issued to all farmers in the scheme. Farmers are paid an agreed rate to undertake snow clearance in a specified area. Currently approximately 20 farmers are part of this scheme, predominantly in the northern areas of the County. Farmers submit an invoice for hours worked as part of this scheme paid at the agreed hourly rate (£29 per hour).

Other Options Considered

The provision of a service to maintain the highway in a safe condition, and to maintain the highway free from snow and ice is a statutory duty under section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980, as such the County Council as highway authority must provide this service.

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

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 where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee note the contents of the report.

Neil Hodgson
Interim Service Director Highways

For any enquiries about this report please contact:
Garry Chadburn, Team Manager, Highway Operations

Constitutional Comments (SJE 24/08/2015)

As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (TMR 24/08/2015)

The financial implications are set out in the 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

