



20 October 2016

Agenda Item: 13

REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE

HIGHWAYS WINTER SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update for committee relating to procedures associated with provision of the Winter Maintenance Service and advice of preparation for Winter 2016/2017.

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 for Highway Maintenance Management; Well Maintained Highways.
3. The 2016/17 season will be the first winter where the service will be delivered by Via (East Midlands) Ltd. The service will be delivered in accordance with current County Council policy and procedures and will be delivered by staff previously employed by the County Council in this service area. Therefore, Members and public can expect the same decision making and service delivery as in previous seasons. There have been no changes made to operational depots.
4. Via (East Midlands) Ltd will be making 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 via the County Council website and social media.
5. 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
6. 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% (approx. 1,560km) of the network is treated as a precautionary measure. This compares with the audit commission's recommendation of 24%-38% for treated network length.
 7. All County Councillors are provided with details of the County Council's 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.
 8. Service improvements implemented for the coming season are as follows:
 - Introducing the use of three new 4-wheel drive gritting vehicles to increase resilience in coping with severe weather. These vehicles will be utilised on routes in Gedling, Broxtowe and Ashfield, where the hilly terrain has indicated that such capability would be useful to ensure route completion
 - Addition of a route into Syerston village including the A46 overbridge onto a severe weather route. Severe weather routes should allow at least one access into communities, however there is only one road into/out of Syerston village. Previously, it had not been possible to include this section as there were no satisfactory turning points for gritters. However, following the completion of the new A46, some widening of the roads adjacent to the bridge now allow use of Greenway, Syerston, as a turning point.
 - Installation of additional weather station on the A608 at Annesley. This will fill a geographic gap in the layout of the County's weather stations and is ideally situated on a high spot to the west of the County. This weather station includes a roadside camera allowing the winter Controller to actively monitor road surface conditions in the area.
 - All gritting vehicles are now equipped with CCTV. This will allow for robust investigation or defence of any driver or vehicle related complaints e.g. poor driving. It will also provide a visible record of completion of routes.

Decision Making Process

9. Precautionary gritting runs will be undertaken where the forecast road surface temperatures are predicted to fall below zero degrees centigrade.

10. The daily forecast is issued around midday by the Met Office. This will be 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 Met Office 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.
13. The Met Office 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.
14. 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 2016/17

15. 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.
16. 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.
17. Over the summer months of 2016 the County Council's salt stocks were replenished to 19,961 tonnes against a countywide capacity of 20,000 tonnes
18. 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 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 10,000 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.

19. 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 forecasts provided by the Met Office 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

20. 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

21. 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.

22. All drivers are trained and assessed annually to achieve the City and Guilds qualification in Winter Maintenance Operations. All winter action decision makers attend the Met Office weather forecasting and decision makers course before undertaking the role. 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 3 and 25 years' experience in the role.

23. 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 which can be mobilised during severe weather.

24. 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 advise on conditions and activities.

25. It should be noted that the Code of Practice is due for replacement with a new document in 2016 which may require modification of policy and procedure and which may require Member approval to implement.

26. The Winter Service Operational Plan is presently being revised and the new plan will comprise two documents. One document will detail County Council policy whilst the second will set out the operational procedures.

27. To further support our preparedness, a winter service readiness workshop was conducted on 11 October 2016, which was organised by NCC emergency planning team. This was a table-top exercise intended to test response and resource availability to a number of severe winter weather scenarios.

Other Options Considered

28. 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.

29. 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

30. 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) Note the preparation made for the forthcoming winter season.

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For any enquiries about this report please contact
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Constitutional Comments – (SJE 14/09/2016)

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

Financial Comments – (SES 16/09/16)

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

Background Papers

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