



REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

WINTER READINESS

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members with an overview of the plans in place to ensure essential services, assistance to local communities and public information are maintained during severe winter weather.

Information and Advice

Snow clearance, gritting routes and supplies

2. The Council maintains high levels of gritting salt in four specially designed barns in Gamston, Newark, Bilsthorpe, Markham Moor and also in an outside depot at Kimberley. At maximum levels there are 22,000 tonnes in stock.
3. The Council sends the gritters out when road temperatures are predicted to be at or below 0°C and ice is predicted to form on the road surface.
4. Each time the gritters are sent out on main routes they cover 902 miles (approximately 34% of the County's road network) of roads and it costs approx £15,000.
5. Motorways and trunk roads in Nottinghamshire including the M1, A1, A46, A52 and A453 are the responsibility of the Highways Agency including gritting.
6. The Council has never gritted all of the roads in Nottinghamshire; no Council does. Main A and B roads and most main bus routes are gritted, however, if there is snow in a particular area and the main routes are passable then the gritters are deployed to a more extensive snow route network.
7. During severe winter weather highways teams prioritise driving gritters in shifts and clearing footways and also refilling yellow grit bins whenever possible. There are 1250 yellow grit bins provided in key locations off the usual gritting routes.
8. Where yellow bins are not available parish councils and residents groups can purchase a blue grit bin from the County Council, which will be delivered, filled with salt and ready to use, however it is then the responsibility of the parish council/residents group to arrange for it to be refilled with grit perhaps by arrangement with a local builders merchants.

9. Footways are not routinely gritted and members of the public are encouraged to clear footways outside their own houses and in their local community – guidance is available on the Council and government web sites.
10. To assist with local community action parish councils are provided with five bags of salt paid for by the County Council and can order further salt supplies at cost. Some parish councils have also appointed snow wardens who have received training and equipment from the County Council to support their local community during winter weather. It is not too late to appoint a snow warden.
11. The County Council also has arrangements with a number of farmers to assist snow clearance in rural areas. They are paid at an agreed rate.

Schools

12. Head teachers maintain health and safety responsibility to ensure safe access to school premises and therefore the decision to close a school is taken by the individual head teacher. However schools are encouraged to be creative in order to keep schools open if they can, for example by starting lessons later to allow for difficult travelling conditions.
13. The Corporate Director for Children, Families and Cultural Services has written to all head teachers reminding them of the guidance available to inform decisions taken about school closures and how to communicate this information to parents, local media and the County Council. Revised school closure procedures were also sent which includes key contact details to support head teachers, including the number of the 24-hour emergency helpline. Additional guidance continues to be available to all head teachers in relation to the clearing of snow and ice; salting, gritting and the safe storage of salt and grit and the use of volunteers to clear snow from school grounds.
14. Schools are encouraged to obtain their own salt stocks as they are responsible for gritting their own premises. The majority of schools are on or close to main gritting routes. However with the exception of the County's 11 special schools, no special arrangements are in place to grit those school roads that are not on published gritting routes.

Vulnerable people

15. A huge amount of planning is put into ensuring that vital services such as the START home care, meals at home and a variety of children's social care can still be provided regardless of the weather conditions. The Council has invested in training employees that provide critical services and staff volunteers to drive 4 x 4 vehicles (which are either hired, loaned or borrowed) to ensure that vulnerable people who rely on our services to receive adequately care.
16. The Council also works with independent care providers to encourage and support them to plan in advance for a range of emergencies, including severe weather, to ensure that essential care services can continue in these circumstances

Communications

17. Communication with the public is critical during winter weather when services may be disrupted.
18. Key communications activity to ensure the public are given timely and accurate information about services includes:
- Social media – there are approx 7,000 people following the Council on Twitter therefore using relevant hashtags (#grittertwitter, etc) and using the Council's facebook page is especially useful for real time updates and mobilising community support
 - Regular updates to the 'disruption' pages on the County Council's website which lists all services that may be affected by the weather, including a list of school closures – this is also relied upon by the Customer Service Centre in order to update callers
 - Updates, features and interviews with local and regional media about what the Council is doing to ensure business as usual as much as possible during the winter weather
 - Contact with traffic and weather reporters to ensure people are clear when the gritters are out
 - Information on the snowcode in the media, County News and parish newsletters – informing residents what they can do to safely clear snow on their area
 - Updates for employees, Members and stakeholders as required.

Members' support

19. Members play a crucial role as a link between local communities and the Council during severe weather. In addition to the Winter Weather Plan (**appendix A**) and the Elected Members' Emergency Plan, (**available as a background paper**) a pack containing key information and contacts will be distributed to all Members to act as a handy guide when responding to queries from constituents.

Reason for Recommendation

20. To ensure members are fully informed of the Council's plans for Winter Weather.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) It is recommended that elected members note the plans for:

- Snow clearance and gritting
- Schools
- Vulnerable people
- Communications

2) Members approve the Winter Weather Plan 2012

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Constitutional Comments (SG 04/12/2012)

22. Full Council is the appropriate body to decide the issues set out in this Report.

Financial Comments (RWK 27/11/12)

23. The County Council's 2012/13 revenue budget includes a sum of £2.64M for Winter Maintenance. The activities detailed in the report which form the Winter Weather Plan for 2012 will be funded from this budget allocation.

Background Papers

24. 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.

- Elected Members' Emergency Plan

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All