

23rd April 2013**Agenda Item: 8****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE
AND PUBLIC PROTECTION****WINTER WEATHER EMERGENCY PLANNING AND RESPONSE****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the emergency plans in place for responding to the impact of severe winter weather in Nottinghamshire, how these plans were used during the last winter and what lessons were learned from this for future incidents.

Information and AdviceIntroduction

2. The winter just past saw an exceptionally long period of low temperatures and numerous periods of significant snowfall across many parts of the UK. Overall, it was the coldest winter period since the early 1960s. Nottinghamshire did not experience the scale of snowfall seen in many other areas, but aspects of our emergency plans were utilised to cope with the worst effects of the prolonged winter.
3. In 2009, and again in 2010, severe winter weather caused disruption to communities and services in Nottinghamshire. National shortages of salt in the winter of 2009-2010 exacerbated this problem, and in reviewing this experience it was decided to produce a winter weather emergency plan for the County Council, to assist in providing a rapid and effective response to severe winter weather events in the future. This has been supplemented with the production of a specific '4x4 Vehicles Plan' to coordinate and priorities the use of this vital resource during snow and ice conditions.
4. These plans were revised last summer and autumn, and gained approval from the 'Risk, Safety and Emergency Management Board' (RSEMB). The 'Winter Weather Emergency Plan' was not required during the winter just passed, however the '4x4 Vehicles Plan' was. The possible need for emergency response was monitored continuously and reviewed through meetings of the RSEMB and by groups under the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

Winter Weather Emergency Plan

5. The 'Winter Weather Plan' details the County Council's response to low temperatures and heavy snowfall; it does not address other severe weather events such as flooding or high winds, or incidents which may arise as a result of winter weather, such as disruption to utilities. The stated aim of the Plan is to facilitate and coordinate Nottinghamshire County

Council's assistance to Nottinghamshire communities during winter weather. To achieve this aim, the plan identifies the following objectives:

- To outline gritting routes, and the impact of salt conservation on communities.
 - Establish a flexible activation procedure to ensure a timely response to severe weather.
 - Outline the measures in place to ensure effective communications with communities, County Council staff, Elected Members, and partner organisations, prior to and during a severe winter weather event.
 - Document the system for recording school closures.
 - Detail arrangements for obtaining additional resources to help maintain critical services.
6. The plan includes sections on our access to weather forecasts, our salting routes and salt supplies, arrangements for schools, communications, resources, and the command, control and coordination of the County Council's response. The appendices to the plan include advice on clearing snow and ice, winter driving, risk assessments and Human Resources Guidelines. The plan links to the following NCC plans and LRF plans:
- NCC Highways Winter Service Operational Plan
 - NCC Major Emergency Plan
 - NCC Corporate and Departmental Business Continuity Plans
 - NCC County Emergency Centre Plan
 - NCC Elected Members' Plan
 - NCC Transport plan
 - NCC 4x4 Vehicles Plan
 - LRF Communicating with the Public Plan
 - LRF Community Resilience Plan
7. As previously reported to the committee, the RSEMB met for a routine meeting at the time when Met Office forecasts were providing detailed predictions of the likely extent of snowfall. On this occasion the Board was able to decide that normal business continuity measures and the use of the '4x4' plan was sufficient to cope with the anticipated impact of snowfall. Consequently, it was not necessary to activate the 'Winter Weather Plan' on this occasion.

4x4 Vehicle Plan

8. The RSEMB approved a revised '4x4 Vehicle Plan' in September 2012, and staff training on the plan followed in advance of the winter. The aim of this plan is to facilitate and coordinate Nottinghamshire County Council's deployment of 4x4 vehicles to critical services during an incident. To achieve this, the plan has the following objectives:
- To outline the critical services pre-identified who require 4x4 vehicles
 - To match donating services to requesting services
 - To outline how services activate the use of 4x4s in an incident
 - To outline staff 4x4 familiarisation sessions available through NCC departments.
 - To outline what 4x4's will not be used for.
 - To outline the use of the LRF Logistics cell to supplement 4x4 provision

9. The plan includes sections on sources of additional vehicles, prioritisation of vehicles, other transport available, and manager's responsibilities. The appendices to the plan include information on winter driving, training and logistics, plus checklists for vehicle handovers.
10. This plan was activated and used during the past winter, and a debriefing meeting involving interested parties was held on 19th February.

Snow Clearance Support

11. County Council Highways colleagues have their own operational plans and resources for snow clearance, and this is supplemented by a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with District and Borough Council's regarding their assistance in these operations. The expressed purpose of the memorandum is to formalise the arrangements for supporting Borough and District Councils to grit and clear snow from the Highway and to undertake gritting / snow clearance at strategically important off-highway locations. The agreement relates only to works undertaken with hand tools and pedestrian propelled gritters. The provision of grit is the only form of consideration the County Council makes to participating Borough and District Councils, no other form of payment is made. Appendices include a Schedule of priority locations. Assistance is also available from local Tarmac resources.
12. Highways colleagues also have a Snow Warden system in place. Wardens are appointed by parish councils and they receive training and basic equipment from the County Council. They are able to carry out basic snow clearance work within their community. They also act as a local contact point, providing current information on local conditions to Highways Area Offices. Highways offer Parish Councils 5 x 25kg bags or 1 ton bags of grit free each year, however very few take up this offer before the deadline.

Preparations for Winter

13. Staff training and exercises play a key party in our annual preparations for possible severe winter weather. Specific events include training on the '4x4 Plan' and a call-out exercise to test the activation of these arrangements. There is also training of additional critical service staff to drive 4x4 vehicles, plus recruitment and training of additional 4x4 owner drivers.

Lessons from Last Winter

14. Following the snow incidents of January 2013 a debriefing event was held for the services that used 4x4 to deliver critical services. Also, feedback was also taken from NCC staff owner drivers and Nottinghamshire 4x4 response team. Contributors were asked to identify the most challenging aspects, the most successful aspects and the lessons learned for future incidents. In doing so they considered topics including communications, access to vehicles, health and safety, and operational matters.
15. Many detailed observations were made, and from these the key conclusions included:
 - Closer linkage with the 'Meals at Home' service for joint working in the Mansfield area
 - Extra details to be added to arrangements for accessing vehicles
 - The use of purchase cards for obtaining fuel
 - The need to trust weather reports

16. In view of these findings, it has been suggested that services may benefit from producing their own action plans from the lesson learnt to take forward service-specific planning.
17. Outcomes from debriefing will be used to inform this year's review of the '4x4 Vehicle Plan' which is scheduled to go to the RSEMB for approval in September, in time for next winter.

Future Plans

18. The Emergency Planning Team will continue to maintain and develop the 'Winter Weather Emergency Plan', and a further revised and updated version will be in place before next winter. Topics for further planning including working with District and Borough Councils to assist them with arrangements they may wish to develop for community self-help schemes. It is hoped that this will include research around concerns that elderly residents are deterred from leaving their homes during icy weather if paths are not cleared to and from bus stops.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. 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 included in the report.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted.

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Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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