

**7 November 2019****Agenda Item:4**

## **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 2019/20.

#### **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, two key documents provide the basis of the service delivered to the public by the County Council in response to winter weather, these are:
  - **Highway Network Management Plan**, which sets out the policies associated with the provision of the winter service.
  - **Winter Service Plan** sets out the County Council’s policies, 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. 1,712km) 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 2019/20 winter season**

7. Via EM Ltd are currently undertaking a procurement exercise to purchase a replacement vehicle tracking and navigation system for Nottingham's fleet of gritters.
8. The new system will be web-based and will allow driver performance to be monitored more effectively because it will be possible to produce reports with greater ease. All the functionality of the previous GPS system will be replicated i.e. the ability to monitor the whereabouts of each vehicle centrally during the gritting operations and to record time, location, gritting activity, vehicle speed etc. The new system will also provide real time 'in-cab' route guidance that will enhance the resilience of our winter service operations because it will allow drivers to complete routes, they may be unfamiliar with. All vehicles are also equipped with on-board CCTV system.
9. A new Weather Station has been installed on Mapperley Plains, this new station will provide information about the weather conditions in the Gedling area and will assist in our winter maintenance decision making process. The new weather station also has the potential to improve our communication and collaboration arrangements with Gedling District Council during times of severe winter weather.
10. The County Council is working with Via EM Ltd. to establish a programme of weather station refurbishments and upgrades which includes replacing sensors and adding CCTV cameras to the stations which currently lack them. The weather stations on the B6045 in Blyth and the A606 in Tollerton will be refurbished later this year, these improvements will support the quality of forecasting information available to the winter service decision makers.

### **Decision Making Process**

11. Precautionary gritting runs are undertaken where the forecast road surface temperatures are predicted to fall below zero degrees centigrade.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The gritting instruction is issued by email and the gritting shift organised as necessary. From 20:00hrs each night the weather forecast is verified.

15. 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.
16. 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 2019/20**

17. 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.
18. The County Council currently has approximately 18,000 tonnes of grit available, this is more than the amount used in an average winter and 7,000 tonnes more than the nationally recommended stock levels specified in the Code of Practice. The Code recommends 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 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
  - Mapperley Top
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. 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. The County Council has a fleet of 30 gritting lorries - *seven of which have been purchased this year to replace older vehicles* – this ensures there is adequate availability throughout the season to cover the 23 routes. In addition, there are two towable gritting units which can be mobilised during severe weather.
23. 1,403 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. Meetings with the District and Borough Councils will take place 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).

### **Changes to the Winter Service Plan for 2019/20**

26. The 2019/20 Winter Services Plan forms Appendix A of this document.
27. The County Council and Via EM Ltd. have completed their preparations and stand ready for the forthcoming winter season, these preparations included undertaking the annual review of the Winter Service Plan which sets out how the service is provided. The 2019/20 Winter Service Plan incorporates the results of the gritting route review which took place during the summer months. The routes take the following factors into account:
  - The requirement to align Nottinghamshire's gritting routes with the revised road hierarchy system which resulted from the introduction of the new code of practise for highway maintenance (i.e. 'Well Managed Highway Infrastructure').
  - The previous routes within the ex-Managed and Operate Partnership (MOP) areas were expressions of District and Borough Council's priorities at the time the MOPs were in existence rather than those of the County Council at present.
  - The previous routes had remained largely unchanged for some time and had been developed to provide the most efficient use of the gritting fleet when operating from the

depots which existed in 2012. The new routes ensure the most efficient routing of vehicles from their existing operating bases.

- The new routes include recently adopted roads which meet the gritting criteria, but which may have been inadvertently omitted because the old routes had been developed in an incremental fashion.
- Where possible gritting routes include roads used by significant school bus services.

28. No road lengths have been removed from gritting and the additional roads to be treated are detailed in Appendix 4 of the Winter Service Plan.

### **Other Options Considered**

29. 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**

30. 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**

31. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance 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, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that Committee:

- 1) Endorses the procedures and communications arrangements - *set out in this report* - which will ensure Nottinghamshire's highway winter service is fully prepared to meet the challenges of the forthcoming winter season.

**Adrian Smith**  
**Corporate Director, Place**

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Martin Carnaffin, Contract Manager,  
Tel: 0115 9774227

### **Constitutional Comments (SLB – 12/09/2019)**

32. Communities and Place Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

### **Financial Comments (RWK - 12/09/2019)**

33. The 2019/20 revenue budget includes a provision of £1,172,600 for gritting works and £500,000 for the purchase of salt.

### **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.

- Highway Network Management Plan
- Winter Service Plan

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All