



Committee and date

Place Overview Committee

12th July 2018

Item

7

Public

Winter Service:

Review and Preparation for the New National Code of Practice

Responsible Officer Steve Brown, Transport and Highways

Email: Steven.brown@shropshire.gov.uk ; Tel: 01743 257809

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises the review of operational preparedness for the winter service season of 2018 /19, in light of the requirements of the revised Code of Practice: Well Managed Highway Infrastructure.
- 1.2. The winter service is part of a package of works that allows Shropshire Council to fulfil its statutory responsibilities as detailed in Section 41(1a) of the Highways Act 1980.
- 1.3. Intrinsic to the review, has been a refreshment of the Council's Winter Service Policy and Winter Service Operational Plan, which are presented for wider discussion and debate, prior to presentation at Scrutiny in September 2018.
- 1.4. Shropshire Council's term maintenance contractor, Kier, provide the winter service by provision of staff to deliver and maintain the council owned gritting fleet (a risk-managed approach) and utilising external procurement to facilitate the delivery of salt and distribution on the road network.
- 1.5. This Scrutiny is asked to consider the refreshed policy and operational plan, and to provide comments as appropriate.

2. Recommendation

2.1. That Scrutiny comment and consider the:

- The Winter service Policy
- The Winter service Operational Plan

2.2. The contents of this report are noted.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. Provision of an effective winter service fulfils Shropshire Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 41(1a) of the Highways Act 1980.

4. Financial Overview

- 4.1. The current winter service budget is £3,108,556 and in normal winter weather is sufficient to support the winter service. In exceptional winters, the ability to utilise the winter service reserve budget, in liaison with finance business partners, is available.
- 4.2. However, pressure on revenue budgets required reductions to be incurred from April 2017, and over time, this could put pressure on this service, these discussions are ongoing at the time of writing this report. However, the need to recognise the council's statutory responsibility is key, and that minimising areas of expenditure on none, or less essential winter service service(s) now requires a more robust response from local highways staff. Typically, requests for additional grit boxes, 'one off' gritting runs that fall outside the defined network, treating footpaths and car parks when the current policy identifies that this should occur after some prolonged winter period. Scrutiny should note that officers would be required to be more robust in the application of the winter service policy, in the context of an anticipated reduction in the winter service budget.

5. Background

- 5.1. The UK Roads Liaison Group produced a document entitled "Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice". This code will apply across the United Kingdom and has thirty-six recommendations that all highways authorities should implement. Winter service is one of these thirty-six recommendations. The code is designed to promote the establishment of an asset-managed approach to the highways infrastructure.
- 5.2. Hence, as the highways authority, Shropshire Council must ensure that the requirements of the National Code of Practice are achieved.
- 5.3. A working group of highways managers, Kier staff and insurance colleagues have considered Shropshire Council's existing winter service policy and operational plan and using the requirements of the Code of Practice have reviewed the document taking into account contractual requirements, resources and the ability to deliver a winter service.
- 5.4. After every winter, a joint review of the winter service operation is undertaken to ensure that the complex, dynamic nature is understood and that a quantitative and qualitative evaluation is achieved. This review has formed the basis of the revision to the policy and plan.
- 5.5. Although sometimes called 'Winter Maintenance', the particular network management requirements during winter are not 'maintenance' in the traditional sense, but specialist operational services. Therefore, the term 'Winter Services' has been adopted by Shropshire Council.

- 5.6. Winter service deals with regular, frequent and reasonably predictable occurrences like low temperatures, ice and snow, as well as exceptional events. Whilst the effects of climate change are likely to result in an increased frequency and intensity of severe winter events, these can be taken into account in winter service planning. Therefore, Winter Service can and should be subject to the same regime of plan, deliver, review and improve, as other aspects of the highway maintenance regime.
- 5.7. Policies and plans developed for Winter Service are likely to have relevance in emergency planning for dealing with extreme weather conditions, including flooding, high winds and high temperature. The incidences of such events may be affected by climate change. They are also likely to have some relevance to the wide range of non-weather-related emergencies that could affect the highway network.
- 5.8. Although a very specialised area, Winter Service is a significant aspect of network management, both financially and in terms of its perceived importance to users, it can also have significant environmental effects. The organisation of the service is likely to have considerable implications for the overall procurement and management of other highway maintenance services. This section of the Code of Practice should therefore be read in conjunction with other sections dealing with these issues.

6. Key Issues

- 6.1. In November 2016, Scrutiny committee considered the operational and practical elements of the winter service, with a view to ensuring the preparedness of the service.
- 6.2. This report also stated that a revised policy and plan would be brought back to this committee. Thus, this report focuses on the policy and plan rather than the operation.
- 6.3. The highlights of the Policy and Operational Plan are:
- 28% of the 5,100 kilometres of highways are identified in the defined gritting network. For comparison:
 - North Yorkshire County Council has a defined gritting network of 54%
 - Suffolk County Council has a defined gritting network of 51%
 - Worcestershire County Council has a defined gritting network of 30%
 - 25 gritters plus 5 spare gritters are in the Shropshire fleet, owned by Shropshire Council, and operated by Kier,
 - 27 tractor-mounted gritters - utilised countywide by local contractors (predominantly for rural lanes),
 - 9 footway ploughs,
 - 9 snow blowers
 - more than 1000 salt bins.

- Improved guidance for householders and shop owners on clearing snow and ice from frontages is on Shropshire Council's Highways & Transport web site.
- A snow warden volunteer scheme that will be developed by winter 2019/20 for parish councils, providing:
 - Training
 - Equipment
 - Insurance cover
 - Volunteers spread grit / clear snow / refill grit bins
 - Provision of grit etc.
- A link from Shropshire Council's web-site to videos detailing the winter service operation.
- Use of infographics on the Council's Winter service web-page.
- Use of Twitter.gritter, with more information provided.
- Improved web-pages providing maps of the network to identify:
 - location of grit bins
 - a map of gritted roads, with links to local descriptions
- An updated useful winter service page including:
 - Radio station information
 - Winter driving advice
 - Clearing frontages advice

7. Conclusions

7.1. Scrutiny are asked to consider the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny reports of September 2012, October 2015 and November 2016.
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Steve Davenport - Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport</p>
<p>Local Member</p>
<p>Appendices</p>