

Winter Service Highways: Review of Highways Winter Maintenance Policy (new national code of practice).

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises a review of Shropshire Highways: Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan in preparedness for the winter service season of 2018 /2019 onwards, in light of the requirements of the revised Code of Practice: Well Managed Highway Infrastructure. Thus, this report seeks approval for the refreshed policy and operational plan in light of the new national requirement.
- 1.2. The winter of 2017 / 2018 was severe, and the winter service was tested in all aspects (policy, operational plan, contract arrangements, working hours, equipment, materials and processes) and intrinsic to the review against the forthcoming national code of practice was an operational review of the previous winter service.
- 1.3. The winter service is part of a package of works that enables Shropshire Council to fulfil its statutory responsibilities as detailed in Section 41(1a) of the Highways Act 1980. Further the winter service is key to supporting communities, supporting the economy of Shropshire and the reputation of the Council.
- 1.4. Intrinsic to the review of the Council's Winter Service Policy and Winter Service Operational Plan, in light of the national code of practice requirements was the routine post winter internal service review. The outcome of these discussions and workshops with internal staff, Kier, insurance colleagues, portfolio holder etc. Is the refreshed winter service policy and plan which is presented in this report.
- 1.5. These refreshed documents were also presented to the Place Overview Committee in July 2018, and following a thorough discussion were endorsed by this committee, with some additional recommendations that are incorporated in this report and recommendations for approval.
- 1.6. Cabinet are asked to consider approval of the refreshed Winter Service Policy and Plan, attached in Appendices 1 & 2 respectively. 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 utilise external procurement to facilitate the delivery of salt and distribution on the road network. The service is also supported by contractual arrangements with numerous local 'farmer contractors' who provide essential snow clearance in more rural and remote areas as an adjunct to the core service provision.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the refreshed Winter Service Policy as presented in this report and as attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the winter service operational plan as presented in this report and as attached at Appendix 2.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approve the recommendation of Place Overview Committee, to develop and pilot a Snow Volunteer Scheme via a Members and Officers working group.
- 2.4 That Cabinet approve the recommendation of the Place Overview Committee to deliver a pre- winter service briefing and workshop to all Members in October 2018.

3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 An Equality and Social inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) has been undertaken and is attached in the appendix of this report. Screening indicates that the impact in equality terms of this updated Winter Service Policy is neutral or positive for Protected Characteristic groupings in the population. It is assessed as having a positive impact for the groupings of Age, Disability and Social Inclusion. An effective winter service policy is likely to be of assistance to the young and old, to their carers, to families, to people with disabilities, and to people living in rural communities who are at risk of exclusion from essential facilities and services if their physical access to these is affected or disrupted by adverse weather conditions, at whatever time of the year.
- 3.2 The expanded use of social media, videos, info graphics and the piloting of Snow Volunteers will further support local communities.
- 3.3 Provision of an effective winter service fulfils Shropshire Council's statutory responsibilities under Section 41(1a) of the Highways Act 1980.

4.0 Financial Overview

- 4.1 The current winter service budget is £2,135,990 and in normal winter weather is sufficient to support the winter service. In exceptional winters, the ability to

utilise the winter service reserve, in consultation with finance business partners, is available to support the service.

- 4.2 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, the winter service receives numerous service requests from individuals, organisations and communities. The approval of a winter service policy and operational plan following a Scrutiny review is crucial in providing a coherent service that can operate within its statutory requirement and its allocated resources. Clear and approved arrangements are crucial in an environment of claims, litigation, and statutory responsibilities whilst balancing service requests being received. These clear approved arrangements allow officers of the service and the wider council to support and justify its decisions.
- 4.3 It should be noted that the budget for the winter service, circa £2.1 million, also is the responsible budget for other severe weather events, such as intense rainfall, localised flooding, fallen trees etc., as previously stated, if severe weather conditions continue for such time, or are so intense, the reserve can be utilised to support services. Also central government's Bellwin Scheme, can be utilised for the council to recover costs (over a nominated financial threshold), if the scheme is made available by Central Government at any particular time or event.

5.0 Background

- 5.1 The UK Roads Liaison Group produced a document entitled "Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice". <http://www.ukroadsliaisongroup.org/en/codes/> . 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. Hence, as the highways authority, Shropshire Council must ensure that the requirements of the National Code of Practice are achieved, due for its implementation in October 2018.
- 5.2 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. 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.
- 5.3 Once the review was completed, the revised Policy and Plan with an accompanying report was presented to Place Overview Committee in July of 2018, the issues were widely discussed and the paper and supporting documents were approved. Key actions arising from this meeting were:

- A request that a pre-winter briefing is held in October for all Members, to support understanding of the issues and service pressures that arise. That the service has to manage and navigate during the winter season.
- A working group will be developed consisting of Members, officers and community representatives to develop a pilot Snow Volunteer Scheme, to develop this initiative and roll out to local communities as appropriate.
- Formalising arrangements with Town and Parish Councils (workforces) to support snow and ice removal, particularly in town and village centres.

5.4 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.

5.5 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.

5.6 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. The inter-relationship between the highways winter service and other weather events and emergency planning team role, is well rehearsed and operationally sound.

5.7 Although a much 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. Notwithstanding the legal and regulatory issues that impact upon the service, the county impact of ensuring the highways network is available for use in winter conditions, to support the economy and social aspects of the county, as well as the overall impact on the council's wider reputation needs to be considered. Hence, it is key that policies and operational plans are in place with Executive approval, to educate, inform and refer to, if any challenge is made regarding the service delivery.

6.0 Key Issues.

6.1 In November 2016, Environment Scrutiny Committee considered the operational and practical elements of the winter service, with a view to ensuring

the preparedness of the service. This report also stated that a refreshed policy and plan would be brought back to this committee. Thus, this report focuses on the policy and plan rather than the operation in preparedness for the new national code of practice.

6.2 The refreshed Winter Service Policy and Plan are attached at Appendix One and Appendix Two respectively.

6.3 The highlights of the Operational Plan are set out below. The Winter Maintenance Policy has not been amended from the previously approved policy other than reviewed and refreshed.

- Refreshed interactive map, available on the council's web site. This provides information on the defined gritting network and where grit bins are located, and by clicking on the appropriate location provides detailed local information. Providing maps of the network to identify:
 - location of grit bins
 - a map of gritted roads, with links to local descriptions
 - identifies Highways Agency road network and neighbouring authorities
 - Responsible gritting area.

Simply type in a post code and it will highlight available winter resources in an area. Link given below:

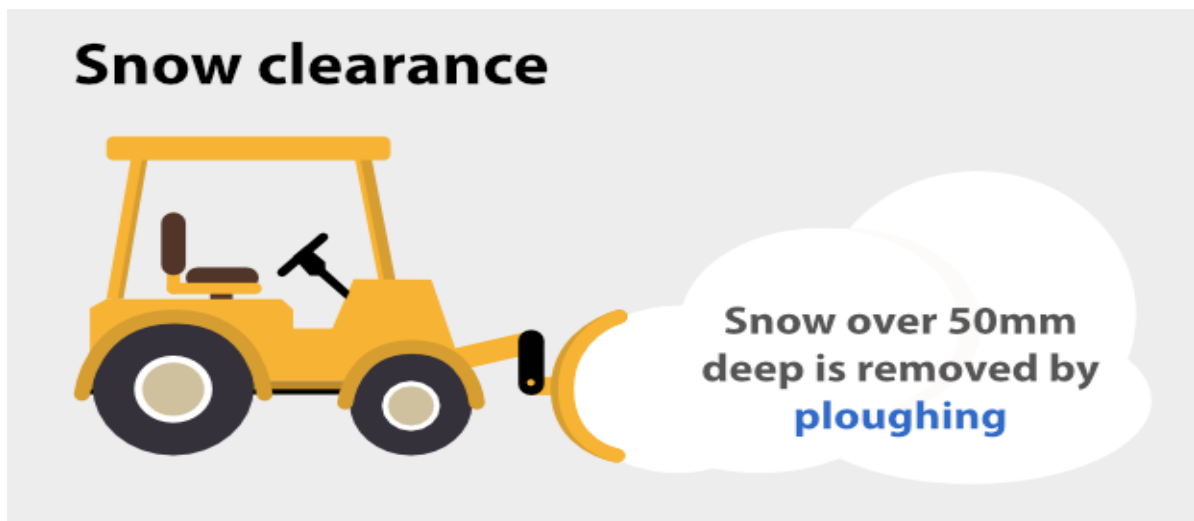
<https://shropshire.gov.uk/roads-and-highways/highways-maintenance/winter-road-maintenance/where-we-grit/>

- Clear information on what is the defined gritting network. It should be noted that 28% of the 5,100 kilometres of highways are identified in the defined gritting network.¹ This defined network is where the council will grit and deploy resources.
- 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 are utilised as required.
- 9 snow blowers are utilised as required.
- Over 850 salt bins are deployed across the county.
- Improved guidance for householders and shop owners on clearing snow and ice from frontages is on Shropshire Council's Highways & Transport web site, and is updated in accordance with central government advice.

¹For 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%

- A snow warden volunteer scheme that will be developed for local councils, providing:
 - training
 - equipment
 - insurance cover
 - volunteers to 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 is in place with use of social media to explain and demonstrate how the service is contracted and deployed, these videos will be updated on a planned basis.
- Use of infographics on the council's winter service web-page, are available to further support information and understanding of the service. An example from the Highways web site is demonstrated below for reference.



- When Gritters are deployed, updates via the Council Twitter feed can be subscribed to and are automatically sent out [@ShropCouncil](#) by the attached feed. Hence live updates and information are valuable via Twitter for users. Known as Twitter Gritter.
- An updated useful winter service page including:
 - Radio station information
 - Winter driving advice
 - Clearing frontages advice

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 Cabinet are invited to approve the Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

- Scrutiny reports of September 2012, October 2015 and November 2016.
- Place Overview Scrutiny report July 2018.

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Steve Davenport - Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

Local Member

All local members.

Appendices

One - Winter Service Policy

Two - Winter Service Operational Plan

Three - Equality and Social Impact Assessment.