



Date: Thursday, 11 November 2021

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND

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PLACE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

TO FOLLOW REPORT (S)

6 Winter Maintenance (Pages 1 - 6)

To understand progress in reviewing the winter maintenance policy and ensure council responds to recommendations of Task and Finish Group's report. (To Follow).

Contact: Andy Wilde (Tel: 01743 255472)

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Place Overview Committee
11/11/2021

<u>Item</u>
6
<u>Public</u>

HIGHWAY WINTER MAINTENANCE

Responsible Officer Professor Mark Barrow; Executive Director of Place
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1. Summary

- 1.1. A paper was presented to the Committee in March 2021 outlining current service provision for Winter Maintenance and plans for improvements to the service. The Committee endorsed the development of a revised Winter Maintenance Plan Winter Service and proposed that a Task and Finish group to inform the review.
- 1.2. This paper provides an update on progress on improvements to the winter maintenance service and highlights some emerging issues that have been required to also be considered.

2. Decisions

The Committee is asked to;

- 2.1. Note the contents of the report.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. Accessibility to key infrastructure and services across the county is essential to maintain the vitality of the county's residents and businesses. Incidents of severe ice and/or snow can at times compromise this access and therefore it is important that an effective Winter Maintenance policy and plan is in place to ensure that the highway network maintains access resilience.
- 3.2. Budget availability is however finite, and it is therefore important that the correct balance is struck between ensuring that ensuring that the network remains as safe as practicable, accessibility to key destination points is

available and affordability to ensure that we derive the greatest value from the available budgets.

4. Financial Implications

4.1. There are no further financial implications as a result of this update report.

5. Climate Change Appraisal

5.1. The country has seen an increasing regularity of severe weather events over the last 15 years and this has resulted in increased demand for winter maintenance in recent years.

5.2. It is anticipated that these weather events will continue to increase in frequency and severity over the coming years and therefore it is essential that the Council has an effective plan in place to maintain the resilience of the highway network.

6. Background

Emerging Issues

6.1. Earlier this year it became apparent that the salt barn at Bridgnorth was showing signs of structural failure and was deemed to be unsafe for use. As a result the depot was closed and operational activity transferred to Craven Arms and Longden Road depots to ensure that there was sufficient resilience over the winter period. New interim arrangements on the impact on winter maintenance is discussed later in the report.

6.2. The national issues relating to the HGV driver shortage have been well reported and of course has the potential to pose a risk to the delivery of winter services. Shropshire Council and Kier are very aware of this risk and have sought to ensure resilience plans are in place to reduce the likelihood of this impacting the service. There is currently a full rota of drivers for winter, with call off arrangements within the broader Kier organisation and local supply chain and with stand by contracted drivers, to ensure that there is cover throughout winter.

Winter Maintenance Service Review

6.3. A member working group was set up to inform the scope of the review and progress on each of the areas to be reviewed is provided below;

Gritting Routes

6.4. It was agreed that current gritting routes needed to be reviewed to ensure that they best reflected access to contemporary needs and newer developments, employment hubs and other key services.

- 6.5. This review has now been scoped and a revised route optimisation exercise is in the final stages of commission. The exercise will ensure our existing routes are both efficient and effective. The optimisation will subsequently overlay Shropshire's key assets in Health, Education, Commercial Centres and Public Transport to develop new revised routes to meet the ambition of our future service model.
- 6.6. These revised routes will be rationalised against our grit bin assets, to ensure synergy across the county and provide the greatest level of resilience.

Grit Bins

- 6.7. A full on-site verification audit of our existing 1,700 grit bins is being undertaken and this has enabled a revised and updated database layer within both our GIS and Confirm digital systems to be created. This will help to facilitate smart routing for refilling ahead of the winter.
- 6.8. The service has procured an additional 300 new grit bins in advance of winter. This will ensure there is sufficient stock available to facilitate swift responses to issues identified as the audit progresses and to supply new bins identified within the service review.
- 6.9. The service has received its initial deliveries of salt and are beginning an exercise to restock grit bins as they have been audited.

Operational Delivery Model

- 6.10. The service is operating a hybrid operational delivery model this year (2021/2022) which reflects the changes to depots that has necessarily had to be implemented because of the salt barn at Bridgnorth being found to be structurally unsound.
- 6.11. The service has negotiated a mutual aid agreement with National Highways which will see greater collaboration with the Council. This will see salt stored at the National Highways depot at Stafford Park, Telford and 2 salting routes delivered from that depot and reciprocally some stretches of the A49 (which is the responsibility of National Highways) to be salted from Craven Arms. This will enable services to be undertaken more efficiently as there is a combined reduction of non-salting travel distance which can be achieved compared to previous salting routes.
- 6.12. The first gritting run of the season has been undertaken using these new arrangements and have found to be effective.
- 6.13. Working closely with Kier, the service has been seeking to deliver greater operational consistency and derive better value from our funding. As part of the services broader improvement plan the daily strategic gritting decision making will now be made jointly between Shropshire Council and Kier. This will provide increased resilience and reduce delays between decisions being taken and operations being mobilised.

- 6.14. The new arrangements will enable Shropshire Council Technicians to continue to operate an availability rota throughout the period, focusing on local sensitivities utilising our historical network of local Shropshire contractors.
- 6.15. We are undertaking a full review of local contractors and completing a data cleansing exercise and database transfer to ensure that information is contemporary and improve knowledge of availability and contact details for our local Shropshire contractors are updated as this has caused process communication delay in the past. This work will be completed shortly.

Communication

- 6.16. The service has started the implementation of a new reporting system, Fix My Street, which will enable easier contact and engagement with the council to report needs. The Fix My Street app will enable better quality reporting of issues across the service and allow the service to respond more efficiently to service requests. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that this will be fully in place for this winter period, with the current programme seeking to have it fully implemented for April but will significantly improve reporting and feedback in the future.
- 6.17. The Shropshire Council Customer Service Centre has a dedicated phone number for elected members to call if the matter is urgent or cannot be reported via the website. The Customer Service Team are currently looking at the out of hours provision for this, as this is currently only operated during office hours. Emails from elected members sent to customerfirst@shropshire.gov.uk which have "Members Enquiry" in the title are also prioritised by the team.

Local Engagement

- 6.18. At the meeting in March, the committee expressed a desire that the service work more closely with Town and Parish Councils to ensure that initiatives such as snow wardens, monitoring of grit bins and path clearance could be empowered.
- 6.19. The service has set up a working group with a small number of town and parish clerks to begin trialling the roll out of new initiatives across all highway services and winter service engagement will form part of the programme for review ahead of next winter.

Coverage

- 6.20. In the previous report it was reported that Shropshire has a lower network gritting coverage (28%) than other authorities with the average authority gritting coverage being 36%. There are no current proposals to significantly extend network coverage for gritting as there is insufficient budget availability to significantly enhance this. Upon completion of the review and with a better

understanding of the scale of any efficiencies which can be achieved from current arrangements, savings may allow the network coverage to be extended.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1. The highway service has undertaken significant improvements to winter services since the meeting in March which will see a better ability to react more quickly to gritting and to be more proactive in ensuring that salt supplies are available to gritting bins for local use.
- 7.2. The need to react to changes at Bridgnorth depot and address HGV driver resilience has however slowed the services ability to progress as much as it would have hoped and as a result there are some initiatives which will not be in place for this winter but for which there is high confidence will be in place for next year.

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

Winter Maintenance Policy 2018

Winter Maintenance Plan 2018

Winter Maintenance Report – March 2021

Shropshire Council Winter Service Policy – report of the Place Overview Committee working group – April 2021

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) - Cllr Dean Carroll

Local Member - All

Appendices - None

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