

Winter Maintenance:

Operational Plan and Preparedness for the Winter Service Season of 2019/2020 for Shropshire Highways

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1. Summary

- 1.1. This report summarises a review of Shropshire Highways: Winter Service Operational Plan in preparedness for the winter service season of 2019/20 for Environment and Scrutiny Committee to consider. The Winter Maintenance Policy was reviewed and approved by Scrutiny and Cabinet in September 2018 and the policy remains unchanged outside the scope of this report.
- 1.2. The winter maintenance 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. The winter service is key to supporting communities, supporting the economy of Shropshire and the reputation of the Council.
- 1.3. Shropshire Council's term maintenance contractor, Kier, provide the operational response by provision of staff to deliver and maintain Shropshire Council's owned gritting fleet to deliver the expectation and policies of the Council.
- 1.4. Scrutiny are asked to consider:
 - 1.4.1. The refreshed Winter Service Operational Plan attached in Appendix 1
 - 1.4.2. For Scrutiny to satisfy that arrangements and preparations are in place to deliver the winter service in accordance with the approved policy and available resources.
 - 1.4.3. Satisfy itself that salt stock supplies are sufficient.
 - 1.4.4. Continued support using informal 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.

- 1.4.5. Recognition that Shropshire Council only treat 28% of its network (5,100 kilometres) which is a lower percentage than comparative authorities at circa 35%.
- 1.4.6. The Winter Service web pages have been refreshed and revised to provide up to date information.
- 1.4.7. The interactive gritting map on Shropshire Councils website is updated.
- 1.4.8. Advice from Department for Transport in relation to clearing snow or ice for households or businesses is updated on the Council's web site.
- 1.4.9. Operational meetings with all staff have been undertaken to ensure implementation of local plans is understood and consistent.
- 1.4.10. Kier have provided assurances that sufficient trained staff are in place and that out of hours arrangements are in place. (Refer to attached letter - Appendix 4).
- 1.4.11. All plant and equipment related to the winter maintenance service has been appropriately serviced.
- 1.4.12. Twitter Gritter is in place.
- 1.4.13. A media campaign to remind and refresh the Winter Service will be undertaken during September.
- 1.4.14. A Task and Finish Group of Officers, Members and Insurance will be requested to consider the possible pilot of a snow warden scheme over 2019/20 winter period.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That Scrutiny consider and approve the points listed in 1.4 above.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. An Equality and Social inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 3 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. Provision of an effective winter maintenance 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 £1,462,100, which in normal winter weather is sufficient to support the winter service to the previously approved Policy. In exceptional winters, the ability to utilise the winter service reserve, in consultation with finance business partners, is available to support the service to deliver our statutory requirements.
- 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 of £1,462,100 is also 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. Background

- 5.1. The UK Roads Liaison Group produced a document entitled "Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice", which was implemented in October 2018 - <http://www.ukroadsliasongroup.org/en/codes/> . This code applies 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.
- 5.2. After every winter, a joint review of the winter maintenance 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. 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.
- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. 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.
- 5.6. 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. 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.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1. Scrutiny are asked to consider the Winter Maintenance Operational Plan.

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

- Cabinet Report of 26 September 2018 - Winter Service Highways: Review of Highways Winter Maintenance Policy (new national code of practice).

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Steve Davenport - Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport

Local Member

All local Members

Appendices

Appendix 1 Winter Service Operational Plan

Appendix 2 Equality and Social Impact Assessment.

Appendix 3 Letter from Kier

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