

Safer and Stronger Communities Panel - 18 November 2010

Winter Maintenance Arrangements update.

The winter of 2009/10 was the harshest winter in 30 years and created a significant increase in demand for the Council's winter service. Nationally, over 1.8 million tonnes of road salt was spread on the Country's roads.

Within Bath and North East Somerset 72 individual salting runs were undertaken on the 253 mile long strategic network. This amounts to treating 37% of the network, well above the national average. The council's 9 vehicle gritting fleet spread over 4000 tonnes of road salt, with over 300 tonnes being used to refill grit bins during the winter.

The impact of the severe winter was reported to Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 25 March 2010

During the summer of 2010 officers have reviewed the winter maintenance arrangements. As part of this review officers have consulted both internal and external stakeholders including Members, Town and Parish Councils and Residents Groups.

Feedback from Stakeholders

A very helpful response was received from many parishes, members and resident groups. The stakeholder feedback had three recurring themes:

1. Requests for more grit bins

The council's officers have been investigating the requests for bins. Approximately 90 bins have been requested by the Parishes and Ward Councillors in addition to over 300 requests for bins received from other sources. These requests are still being evaluated against the grit bin policy and available budget.

Officers have also considered the issues in respect of refilling grit bins, which is a very labour intensive process and the subsequent hand spreading of salt is very inefficient. Therefore, alternative methods of providing emergency salt deliveries to communities in severe weather is being considered. The most effective appears to be deliveries of bagged salt. It is not proposed to withdraw any existing bins or stop filling bins currently being serviced.

Officers are visiting other authorities prior to making final recommendations to the Executive Member in respect of this matter.

2. Requests for additional roads to be treated.

These requests have been considered against the salting capacity of our gritting fleet. In order to achieve the required treatment times for applying salt there is limited scope to increase routes. However, some minor route alterations have been made. These are aimed at improving access for schools and ensuring that all key public transport routes are salted. The Council will publish all routes and grit bin locations on a map accessible to the public.

The overall impact of the changes adds approximately 7 miles on to the routes, resulting in 260 miles of road being treated on a presalting run during the coming winter.

3. Request for guidance on clearing snow and advice on self help.

This has also been requested by FOBRA and a number of Parishes in an attempt to encourage and support more self help. The Government, in its new Snow Code has also recommended that local authorities publish information that will help communities respond.

Officers intend to publish a leaflet which will make clear the advice on self help, safe driving tips and other valuable winter information.

Salt Stock

The Council refilled the Clutton depot barn with salt during the summer and currently holds its maximum capacity of 1400 tonnes. A further 500 tonnes of salt is being held at Avonmouth in an emergency store and minor improvements to Braysdown depot should provide capacity for storage of a further emergency supply of 1000 tonnes. Emergency stock supplies will be transferred into Clutton and all gritting operations will continue to operate from Clutton.

Support to Schools and Education

During the course of last winter a robust communication was established with each school receiving winter related information. In addition to salting route changes Highways will also liaise closely with schools during severe weather and subject to availability co-ordinate support from local farmers and staff redeployed from other services to assist with clearing key routes to schools.

Clearing snow, provision of salt and safety within the school will remain the responsibility of each school.

The arrangement of employing local farmers to support the highways operation will continue during the coming winter.

Improving Communication

Regular radio interviews and public information messages were broadcast during the severe weather. The Council experienced a significant increase in the number of hits on the website during the severe weather.

Additional Highway's staff have trained to undertake radio interviews and discussions are taking place with the Corporate Communications team to ensure the authority can provide reliable up to date information to residents and the travelling public.

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