

Winter Maintenance Task & Finish Group
Distribution List

Contact: Katy MacDonald
Direct Line: 01296 383604
Fax: 01296 382538
Email: kmacdonald@buckscc.gov.uk

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Dear Member

Winter Maintenance Task & Finish Group Meeting 01 June 2010

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Yours sincerely

Katy MacDonald
Democratic Services Officer



Report to Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 1st June 2010
Title: Overview and Scrutiny Review – Winter Maintenance
Contact Officer: Mark Averill (x2482)

Background

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group requested a brief paper on the Transport for Buckinghamshire response to the extreme weather experience during December 2009 and January 2010.
2. The report is split into 6 sections

Plant

3. Transport for Buckinghamshire operates a fleet of 25 front line spreaders on behalf of the County Council. The fleet is a mixture of dedicated equipment (bulk gritters) and demount gritters that are operated from the back of 18T or 26T tipper lorries.
4. The fleet is distributed across the network and, for 2009/10 was based at:

Gawcott Depot:- 3 spreaders
Griffin Lane Depot:- 8 spreaders
Amersham Depot:- 7 Spreaders
Handy Cross Depot:- 7 Spreaders

Labour

5. Transport for Buckinghamshire operates a “winter rota” for winter maintenance operations. As a consequence of both the working time directive and drivers’ hours regulations the rota needs a minimum of 50 drivers to work successfully. All drivers are Class 2 LGV qualified and are also holders of the NVQ level 2 Winter Maintenance qualification.

Salt

6. The County Council invested a significant sum of money prior to the contract commencing which enable the construction of 4 salt barns at the 4 formal depot locations. The barns each have a notional capacity of 2000t with the exception of the one at Handy Cross which has a capacity of 2500t. In practice the notional capacity can be exceeded by around 20-25%. With the reduced number of spreaders operating out of Gawcott the barn there is traditionally seen as our strategic stock.
7. Salt can also be stored at the Saunderton Landing, around 1000t was available for the 2009/10 season. Following the apparent theft of some salt from Saunderton over the winter period a new fence and secure gate is to be erected prior to the 2010/11 season.
8. A total pre-season stock of around 9500t was available for use across the county.

Operations

9. Winter "starts" for the County Council in mid-October and runs through to mid April the following year. This last season saw no spreading runs until the end of November, a quiet start to the season.
10. The first snow arrived on the night of the 17th December. Spreaders were in operation all night and had cleared the A road network by the time rush hour next morning had commenced. The closure of the M40 and the subsequent diversion through High Wycombe did however bring the network to a halt. Operations continued through out the day of the 18th and, by close of play that day, all of the priority routes were running relatively freely. No treatment of secondary routes was considered necessary at this time.
11. The second snowfall occurred on the 21st December and started at around 14:00hrs. Spreaders were deployed onto the network but were faced with an already congested network as many residents had chosen to use the first day of the holiday to go shopping. Indeed the A404 Marlow Hill was at a standstill as spreaders left the Handy Cross depot. The combination of traffic and deteriorating weather conditions thwarted much of the operation, and total gridlock of much of the urban network occurred during the late afternoon. Treatment of the whole

network was not completed until around 23:00hrs, some 9 hours after the commencement of the operation.

12. Spreaders continued to work throughout the night, slowly clearing the network and focussing on the A and B class networks first. In parts of the county spreaders worked closely with the Thames Valley Police authority to focus attention on discreet parts of the network to allow free running of certain roads.
13. As the week progressed new fleet arrived on the contract and allowed for better penetration on the network.
14. During this week of heavy activity further deliveries of salt were expected. Unfortunately the levels of activity in Buckinghamshire were also being experienced by much of the United Kingdom, with salt being spread at the rate of some 195000t during the week. No salt deliveries were forthcoming and the decision to scale back treatments to the emergency routes (see Winter Maintenance Policy and Plan) was made on 7th January, reducing the network coverage from around 40% to 26%. With snow still lying on much of the network sharp sand was spread on those parts of the precautionary network that were not covered by the emergency routes.
15. The third snow event occurred on the night of 6th January. Again spreaders worked hard to remove the snow but were restricted to the emergency routes only in the first instance.
16. In all, the County experienced around 30 days of freezing conditions, with parts of the network reaching -8 degrees Celsius.

Public Action

17. Salt bins are provided at around 450 locations around the county, in addition there around 550 locations where salt heaps are formed (predominantly rural areas). These bins and heaps are for the use of residents and are intended solely for use on the public highway. It quickly became apparent that salt placed in the bins was being removed almost as soon as bins were replenished, and was not being used in the way it was intended.
18. Refilling of the bins also caused problems. Bins are traditionally placed in areas where salting is not carried out, it was therefore, at times, almost impossible for our vehicles to access the locations themselves as the road conditions were so poor. It was also apparent that the lack of a re-filling plan was reducing the efficiency of the operation, this will be address for the

forthcoming season and the plan will be made available to the public along with our progress against it.

Winter Review

19. As with all winter seasons a post-season review is undertaken. Normally this involves only operational staff and focuses on apparent difficulties experienced during the season. This year, albeit later than had been hoped, we are also approaching Parish, Town and District Councils to find out what we can do to work together to deliver the service more coherently. All responses will be considered and will be set against what we can operationally deliver.
20. Salt supply was again our most significant problem, reports from Salt Union (our supplier) are indicating that at current production levels the UK will struggle to achieve its pre-season stock levels before November 2010.
21. Transport for Buckinghamshire is exploring alternative options, as it did during the crisis, to deliver salt into Buckinghamshire to achieve our maximum stock levels prior to the season start.
22. Work is also underway to refine the winter operational plan, with the focus shifting towards 4 strategic and 21 local routes. All fleet for next season, except our reserve vehicles, will be equipped with a pre-wetting facility. Pre-wetting allows the treatment rate to be significantly lower and will deliver benefits in terms of a reduction in the environmental impact and conservation of salt stocks.
23. More drivers are also being trained to allow for a more resilient workforce.



Report to Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 1st June 2010

Title: Answers to Members Winter Maintenance Queries

Contact Officer: Tim Fowler (x3767)

Background

During the course of the April planning meeting for the Task and Finish Group Members raised a number of queries. The Area Maintenance Manager North, Tim Fowler, took these away and has supplied the following answers.

Answers to Members Queries

- **How many claims from motorists have been made for winter related accidents/incidents against BCC as a result of the 2009/10 winter weather?**

In terms of numbers, winter related claims against the County Council have increased significantly over this winter, as can be seen from the comparison data below.

Please be advised that cost information should be treated with caution and does not include costs of any claims that are currently being processed. It is likely to some months before a realistic cost of winter claims is known.

01 Nov 08 - 30 Apr 09 - **Potholes** claims - 577; cost to date - £38,924.
01 Nov 09 - 30 Apr 10 - **Potholes** claims - 1423; cost to date - £9,910

01 Nov 08 - 30 Apr 09 - **Ice/Snow** claims - 21; cost to date - £1,053
01 Nov 09 - 30 Apr 10 - **Ice/Snow** claims - 15; cost to date - £ 960

01 Apr 08 - 31 Mar 09 - **All** claims - 925; cost to date - £93,484
01 Apr 09 - 31 Mar 10 - **All** claims - 1974; cost to date £31,358

- **What is the cost of the claims?**

See above

- **What are the additional costs of maintaining the roads as a result of the winter weather?**

Cost of winter service i.e. precautionary and secondary salting. Info required from JB

- **Salt bins- would it be possible to have these located in private roads? What would the costs of this be?**

Salt bins can be provided on private roads at a cost of £450 and £80 for each refill. However, servicing of these bins would be a low priority during times severe weather as salt bins on the public highway will be treated with top priority.

- **House of Commons document- Section 150 (p.2 of document)- does our footway/pavement policy match with what is said in this document. (Please let me know if you would like an electronic copy of this document)**

The current Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan sets out this authority's approach, response and treatments for carriageways and footways in accordance with our statutory duty (Highways Act 1980 and the subsequent new section 41 (1A) inserted under subsequent legislation in 2003) and the guidance contained in section 13 of the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management, "*Well Maintained Highways*".

Winter Maintenance Review- Summary of Public Submissions

Background

1. The winter of 2009/10 was one of the worst experienced across England in over 30 years. This was a challenging period for all concerned in Buckinghamshire and especially the County Council who have the responsibility to clear roads and pavements.
2. As a consequence of residents raising concerns with Councillors and negative press publicity, a Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee (OSCC). The aim of the T&FG is to examine what aspects of the Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan worked well, consider what worked less well and suggest where improvements can be made.
3. As part of the evidence gathering process members of the Task and Finish Group were keen to engage with key stakeholders in order to ascertain their views. Residents, as the Council Tax paying public, are the people who are most affected when events such as snow and ice form on Buckinghamshire's roads and pavements. Therefore two press releases were put out periodically to make residents aware of the review and to ask for submissions to the review.
4. The Task and Finish Group would like to thank all residents who have taken time to submit their views. These will be used as vital evidence to substantiate the findings within the final report.

Summary of Findings

5. As a result of the two press releases circulated to the local press we have received over 30 submissions from the residents of Buckinghamshire. The themes of these submissions covered a number of areas and can be summarised using the headings below:

Gritting the Highways and Pavements

6. From the submissions received by the Task and Finish Group the general consensus was that residents felt that more roads across the county should be treated. Many residents seem either unaware of the County Council's Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan and also the decision taken by the Cabinet Member for Transportation (6 January 2010) to suspend the plan temporarily.
7. Some of the comments received about this subject area were as follows:
 - 'In 60% of cases there was no treatment at all. I read this is Council policy, apparently arrived at without any discussion with the hard pressed council taxpayers'
 - 'We were disappointed that the local councils were unable even to keep some of the main highways open...'
 - 'I think the gritting staff did a sterling job...'
 - 'If Bucks policy is to grit roads and pavements according to the Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan then there should be resources available to achieve the targets specified in the document'

Road Maintenance and Pothole Repairs

8. Much of the public feedback centred on the state of the roads network across Buckinghamshire both before and after the harsh winter weather. Many contributors felt that a poor level of roads maintenance over a number of years exacerbated the impact of prolonged period of snow and ice. Another major concern from residents centred on the number of potholes emerging across the County as a result of the harsh winter of 2009/10.
9. Some of the specific comments received about this subject area were as follows:
 - ‘Even before the onset of the unprecedented winter conditions the local road network was worn out and in serious need of repair/major resurfacing’
 - ‘We consider the state of Buckinghamshire roads, like many others, unacceptable with numerous potholes and many ineffective temporary repairs being made’
 - ‘Repairing them properly (roads) must be more cost effective than constantly patching them up and paying compensation for damaged vehicles...’
 - ‘The other question that has to be asked is, do we get more potholes due to the lack of maintenance during the rest of the year?’
 - ‘If £2m could suddenly be found now, why wasn’t it found before so that on the basis of a stitch saves nine, the roads being in a better state of repair to the tune of the same £2m before the frost/snow then wouldn’t have cracked up so much, and so the same £2m might have achieved a lot more...’

Working with Partners

10. The need for the County Council to work with partners, such as bus companies, to keep access to work, education and key amenities open during periods of exceptional weather was a suggestion put forward by some residents. The need for local solutions, run by District or Parish Councils, was also a theme of residents’ submissions.
11. Some of the comments received about this subject area were as follows:
 - ‘If it’s a bus route, grit it...’
 - ‘In such weather conditions, there needs to be a local response, a partnership of local councils, businesses and residents.’

Residents Helping Themselves

12. There seems to be uncertainty around whether residents and businesses are able to clear pavements without fear of litigation. The importance of providing residents with this information and also the tools to clear snow and ice from pavements, like grit bins, was a theme within the submissions.
13. Some of the comments received about this subject area were as follows:
 - ‘Residents had to wait typically two weeks for grit bins to be filled’
 - ‘Residents and shops are willing to clear paths but are unclear about litigation if they do so’

Communications

14. Residents have raised concerns about how the County Council communicates with the public and how the public can obtain information during unusual weather events. The issue of how the public can report potholes, roads of concern and grit bins to be filled were also topics raised through correspondence to the Task and Finish Group.
15. Some of the comments received about this subject area were as follows:
 - 'There is little or no communication from highways- such as matters reported via the highways fault reporting page on the Bucks CC internet website, yet the only comment when tracking requests is that they have been recorded'
 - 'On the day (7th January 2010) I was unable to get information from your web site about the state of roads under your control and your phone system was only taking emergency calls!... These systems must be capable of servicing emergency traffic. This is when citizens need the information.'
16. Any information relating to specific roads and pavements will be submitted to Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB) for their consideration whilst planning for the winter of 2010/11.

