

## Winter Maintenance- Summary of County Councillor Responses

### **Background**

The winter weather during 2009/10 was one of the worst experienced in England for almost 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.

A Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee (OSCC) to examine the topic of Winter Maintenance. The aim of the T&FG is to examine what aspects of the County Council's Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan worked well, consider what worked less well and suggest where improvements can be made.

As community champions Councillors (Members) are well placed to reflect the views of residents. During difficult periods, such as harsh winter weather, Councillors are contacted by numerous residents with concerns and suggestions for improvement. The findings below reflect the feedback Councillors have received as a result of the 2009/10 winter and the issues resulting from this.

### **Findings**

Sixteen responses were received from County Councillors on the subject of Winter Maintenance. Members were asked for general comments and for feedback against the following questions:

- How do you feel the County Council performed its statutory winter maintenance duties during the winter weather?
- What do you feel the County Council and its partners could do to reduce the impact of the winter weather in your patch?
- How do you feel local people could assist with mitigating the impact of wintry weather on roads and pavements?

Throughout the responses there were some general themes that emerged and these have been used to draw together and formulate suggestions for the Task and Finish Group to consider or its final report.

### Communication:

- Communicate with elected representatives and ensure plans have up-to-date contact details of key officers/organisations
- A clear communication style is needed for emergencies outlining why certain things are done/are not done, e.g. the non-salting of footpaths
- Keep Parishes better informed, i.e. snow clearance reports sent directly to them
- Encourage Parish Council and District Councils to update their websites with key information during periods of bad weather
- Clear communication to residents of what they can/can't do during harsh winter weather, the myths around the clearing of pavements should be resolved

### Working with Partners:

- BCC should undertake work with District Councils to see if there is scope for their staff to help during periods of bad weather, if they are unable to carry out their day to day tasks, e.g. refuse collectors, groundsmen, street cleaners
- BCC could seek additional funding from NHS Buckinghamshire, as has happened in Durham, in order to salt additional pavements and key routes. Such additional funding could potentially reduce the number of winter related injuries which are very costly to NHS Buckinghamshire
- BCC could instigate better working with Parish Councils by re-devolving responsibility for snow clearance to them
- Coordination with the bus companies to ensure that travel is possible during along all major bus routes

#### Working with Farmers:

- Utilise local farmers to clear minor roads. The County Council will need to prepare for this by negotiating with farmers for this to happen well in advance of the winter period
- Local farmers could be asked to store our grit so that they could help by clearing key routes to enable local residents to get to school and work

#### Residents Helping Themselves:

- It may be possible to establish community volunteers in some localities, this could be coordinated by Parish Councils
- Clarity needs to be sought around the risk associated with residents/businesses clearing snow and ice from outside their properties.
- The County Council could offer salt at cost price to residents
- Lists of 4x4's should be part of the Emergency Plan to coordinate journeys to doctors/hospitals/chemists

#### Salt Bins:

- Increase the number of salt bins
- Contract the filling of salt bins out to District Councils. Each District Council should have a salt store at their depots

#### Key Issues/Questions to Resolve:

- Are contingency arrangements in place for partners to assist the County Council during extreme weather events?
- Public liability for the clearance of snow/ice outside of their own properties

There were some specific local road and pavement issues raised by Councillors, these issues will be passed onto Transport for Buckinghamshire for their planning for the 2010/11 winter.