

# Agenda

## WINTER MAINTENANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP

**Date:** Thursday 29 July 2010

**Time:** 1.30 pm

**Venue:** Mezzanine Room 1

Agenda Item	Time	Page No
1 APOLOGIES/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP	1.30pm	
2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
3 MINUTES of the meeting held on 15 June 2010 to be confirmed.		1 - 14
4 CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT- QUESTIONS Contributors <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Val Letheren, Cabinet Member for Transport</li><li>Jim Stevens, Head of Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB)</li></ul>	1.35pm	

**Purpose**

This is an opportunity for members of the Task and Finish Group to question the Cabinet Member for Transport and Head of Transport for Buckinghamshire in relation to Winter Maintenance issues. Members have now received evidence from a number of witnesses, and other sources, and this session should be used to resolve any outstanding issues Members may have.

5 TASK AND FINISH GROUP DISCUSSION- FORMULATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS Contributors <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>All Members of the Task and Finish Group</li></ul>	2.35pm
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**Purpose**

Members will discuss the key findings from the evidence they have heard to-date and formulate these into draft recommendations. The recommendations will shape the report that will be presented to the



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Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee on 7 September  
and to Cabinet on 27 September 2010.

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If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

*For further information please contact: Katy MacDonald on 01296 383604  
Fax No 01296 382538, email: [kmacdonald@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:kmacdonald@buckscc.gov.uk)*

### **Members**

Mr B Allen  
Mr D Anson MBE  
Mrs M Baldwin  
Mr M Brand  
Mr J Cartwright  
Mr M Edmonds (C)

Mr W Lidgate  
Mr D Polhill  
Mr D Rowlands  
Mr D Schofield  
Ms R Vigor-Hedderly

# Minutes

## *WINTER MAINTENANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP*

**MINUTES OF THE WINTER MAINTENANCE TASK & FINISH GROUP HELD ON TUESDAY  
15 JUNE 2010, IN MEZZANINE ROOM 2, COUNTY HALL, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT  
10.04 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 2.35 PM.**

### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr B Allen, Mr D Anson MBE, Mrs M Baldwin, Mr M Edmonds (Chairman), Mr W Lidgate,  
Mr D Polhill and Mr D Schofield

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs P Birchley  
Mr M Chard, Policy Officer - Overview and Scrutiny, Buckinghamshire County Council  
Ms K MacDonald, Democratic Services Officer  
Mr B Murdoch, Resilience Officer  
Mr M Phillips  
Mr B Short, Oxfordshire County Council  
Mr K Stevens, Head of Service Provision (Adult Social Care)

### **1 APOLOGIES/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

David Schofield declared an interest in Item 8 as he is a Member of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority.

Mary Baldwin declared an interest in Item 8 as she is a Member of the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority.

### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2010 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **4 NEIGHBOURING AUTHORITY EXPERIENCE**

Brian Short, Southern Area Engineer, Highway Management, Oxfordshire County Council was welcomed to the meeting. Members were advised that as one of Buckinghamshire's



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neighbouring authorities, Oxfordshire County Council experienced similar problems to the County Council both during and after the winter of 2009/10. The item is an opportunity to find out what similarities there were between the responses of the local authorities, what was done differently and what Oxfordshire are aiming to improve in the future.

The Officer made the following points:

- 43% of the County's road network is treated.
- Priority 1 and 2 routes are salted.
- Initially the weather was mild but the period from 15 December – 10 January 2010 caused problems.
- There were 3 main snow events, which is unusual
- This resulted in a lack of de-icing salt for roads
- The salting of the road network was reviewed last year
- The amount of salt stored was reviewed from the previous year and the amount stored did not change
- Oxfordshire did not change the dosage rate of salt used and did not mix salt with sand for roads, although this was implemented for pavements.
- The Council has a webpage which keeps the public well informed regarding winter maintenance and highlights which roads have been salted. This is well received by the public
- Local media is also used to get the message out regarding salting of the network
- The Emergency Planning Officer is also involved at an early stage to ensure all Council Services are pulled together.
- The introduction of the Salt Cell helped
- The clearance of snow routes to schools where exams were being held also went well

Things which could be improved include:

- Having a continuous supply of road salt - there is not a massive salt stock but there is a reliance on top ups
- There could be better continuity with salting of routes across the County boundaries where salted networks are changed.
- There is a public expectation that all routes are salted and the message needs to be communicated more effectively that this is not the case.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

**How much salt did you start the winter period with?**

Started the winter period with 5,800t. It is the contractor's responsibility to supply the salt. There has previously been no issue regarding salt supplies.

**Residents living in sheltered accommodation, those who receive meals on wheels and elderly residents are most vulnerable. There was an incident in Buckinghamshire where an elderly resident had no heating for a few days as due to the condition of the roads his home could not be accessed. Did Oxfordshire experience any issues?**

The main roads were treated. If the County Council received a particular request or if there was a specific difficulty highlighted the County Council would have assisted.

**What are you planning to do next winter? Salt union have said that they are not able to increase supplies, would you consider block buying salt from abroad with other Counties?**

This year Oxfordshire County Council changed their maintenance contractor. The contractor wants to deliver:

- Covered salt barns
- Increase salt stocks to 8,800t (dependant on supplies)

The Officer said that it was incredible that so much of the Country was dependant on one supplier and advised that following an Officer group meeting the possibility of regional salt storage was being developed.

**Do you work with Parish Councils?**

Yes, Parish Councils can buy salt bins from the County Council, which the County Council maintains. A meeting is to be held with Parish Councils in July 2010 to encourage them to develop emergency plans. There will be one workshop held in each District area and all Parish Councils are invited to attend. Farmers are encouraged to carry out snow ploughing and clearing footways near schools, Post office and shops. The possibility of supplying Parish Councils with a liquid which could be used to clear footways is being explored.

**Does Oxfordshire County Council use local farmers?**

15 years ago there was a formal arrangement with farmers, however there was little snow and the system went into disuse. There is not a very long volunteer list now although this is something which is hopefully to be developed with the National Farmers Union to co-ordinate and encourage more to volunteer. The scheme is dependant on the Country experiencing more snow.

**Is your winter maintenance plan fully budgeted?**

For pre-salting yes, but not for snow events. The service has permission for 36 hours of snow clearance and funding for this comes out of the County Council reserves.

Mr Short asked if it would be useful if Members had a copy of Oxfordshire's winter maintenance plan. Members agreed this would be useful.

**Action: Michael Chard/Brian Short**

**How many depots do you have?**

Five – although not all are full time depots. Two are winter maintenance only, purpose built depots.

**Is your salt supply virtually all gone?**

Yes – our next salt order has not yet been delivered but our contractors seem confident that this will be delivered.

**What did you do about footways?**

Town centres were treated. However when salt stocks started to be depleted sand and grit was used. District and Town Councils do a lot of hand spreading for footways but usually around 2/3 days later which is a bit late for the County Council. Sand on footways also creates a need for cleaning later on.

**What do you do about rat-runs?**

Rat-runs are not treated at all. From 16 January 2010 only A class roads and civil contingency roads were treated.

**Do you top up salt bins?**

Yes – salt bins are paid for by Parish Councils and then maintained by the County Council. When salt stocks were running low not all bins were filled with salt due to the lack of salt.

**What is your understanding regarding the shortage of salt? As a Local Authority can you store salt on concrete with a sheet or in a barn?**

If you interpret the requirements strictly the run off must be collected and disposed of. Small quantities of sheeted salt kept on a hard base is regarded as acceptable by many.

**Rat-runs should be included in specific routes as a priority – do you feel you should isolate rat-runs?**

This is dependant on each Councils policy. Oxfordshire will be reviewing their policies as it is suggested that they do not reflect public expectation and what can be afforded. Rat-runs in Oxfordshire are picked up as secondary routes – low classification but high use. It has been suggested that a simple and clear message needs to be communicated such as - we are only treating A roads.

**Do Parish Councils buy salt bins from the County Council?**

It is not a requirement that they must be purchased from the County Council but as the County Council bulk buys salt bins they are likely to be cheaper.

**Have you resolved the issue with customs and excise regarding white/red diesel?**

I would need to take advice. Although in my personal opinion gritters can be run on red diesel so if farmers use red diesel to plough there appears little difference.

**How much does the County Council charge for salt bins?**

Approximately £150 which includes siting.

**What is the capacity of these bins?**

I would need to check and supply the information following the meeting.

**Action: Michael Chard/Brian Short**

**Buckinghamshire had an issue whereby people were taking salt for personal use – did Oxfordshire experience this?**

Yes. It is very difficult to police. This is one of the reasons why Oxfordshire is looking to brand salt bins so that they appear more official. The value of the salt itself is fairly low but the issue is around re-filling the salt bins.

**Do you salt private or unadopted roads?**

No

**Is Oxfordshire suffering with potholes?**

Yes – as are many authorities nationally.

**What is the timescale it takes your gritters to do one run?**

Last year there was a night shift who are able to leave within 10 minutes of an event. It takes about 3 and a half hours to do all routes (from a standing start). This year there is a new contractor. The routes will be slightly amended and it is envisaged that it will take about 3 hours to treat all routes although not from a standing start.

**Do you have any figures on the number of potholes suffered in Oxfordshire and how long it would take to get the roads back to a decent standard?**

It is a funding issue – as you can only do what the funding permits.

**Do you look at other Local Authorities to see what they are doing?**

There are national indicators available. Officers also spoke to a number of Local Authorities when looking at a new contractor.

The Chairman thanked Mr Short for attending.

**5      LOOKING AFTER VULNERABLE PEOPLE**

Tricia Birchley, Cabinet Member for Adults and Families, Martin Phillips, Cabinet Spokesman for Adults and Family Wellbeing, Kerry Stevens, Head of Service Provision, Adults and Family Wellbeing were welcomed to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member advised the Committee of the following:

- There was a heavier snow fall during the winter of 2009/2010 than usual.
- Clients were categorised according to need. Category 1 clients were those most vulnerable and requiring a physical service. Clients with lesser needs were communicated with by telephoned.
- Meals on wheels delivered frozen meals to cover 3 days during the severe weather to ensure that clients had a meal.
- Staff were very flexible and ensured that everyone who needed a service received it
- Council offices closed early on a few occasions to ensure staff could get home. However social care staff provide a statutory service and it was therefore necessary for them to continue to provide an essential service.
- There was little steer regarding what roads were passable. Real time information would be useful for future years.
- Bucks 4 wheel drive group were unable to help as they were being utilised by other organisations.
- Everyone who needed a service received a service. Although if the severe weather continued the situation was likely to get critical.
- If County Council staff are working from home as they are unable to get into the office. There was a possible suggestion to see if they would they be willing to help out in their local communities.
- Local communities should think how they can help vulnerable residents perhaps taking a hot meal or doing some shopping.
- An email was sent to all staff asking those who had 4 wheel drive vehicles if they would be prepared to help out during the severe weather. There were some offers of help. Consideration of whether a list of volunteers with 4 wheel drive vehicles prepared to help could be developed.

The social care staff were thanked by the Cabinet Member for Adults and Family Wellbeing and also the Head of Service as they showed true commitment, often working longer hours and through extreme conditions to ensure the service was delivered to those in need.

**It is important that residents do not feel isolated. A resident had no heating as the gas company said they were unable to access the property due to the road conditions. Would help should have been available for this resident?**

There were a lot of blackouts as power in some areas was affected. Staff often took out heaters to residents. Should this happen in the future social care should be contacted and they will arrange for help to be provided.

**You relied on good will of staff. Do you have an emergency snow plan in place?**

There is a contingency/resilience plan regarding how the service responds. However there needs to be a degree of flexibility as it may be the case that agency staff may not provide cover.

**Are you consulted on the County Councils winter maintenance plan by Transport?**

There were daily conversations with Transport and there is a good relationship. Transport did what they could to enable access and the service was offered the use of a plough to transport carers should this be required.

**The Service Information Centre (SIC) is due to be launched. Will this online programme be useful for your service area or do you need something more specific?**

Online access would be vital. This would enable routes to be planned for staff. Although a lot of staff preferred to walk rather than drive and the pavements were not treated, so staff ended up walking in the roads on occasions.

**Are you consulted on the annual review (winter maintenance plan) undertaken by Transport?**

Kept informed as opposed to consulted. Although as clients are spread across the County there would not be much to contribute as countywide access was required as opposed to pockets of areas. There were no problems reported regarding access to homes.

**Were staff equipped to walk in the severe weather conditions whilst carrying out their duties? As an employer the County Council is liable if an employee has an accident in the course of their employment. Should the County Council be looking to lease some 4 x 4 vehicles or invest in snow tyres? Should these conditions happen again staff should have access to a vehicle which they can use safely in the conditions. If a vehicle can not be provided they should be issued with footwear and outdoor clothing. It is admirable that staff went to such lengths but as an employer the situation was unacceptable.**

This has been an area of much discussion and as many frameworks as possible have been put in place such as phoning a buddy once a visit has been completed to ensure a clear process of responding. It is important to stress that if the service is not provided, which is a statutory service lives are at risk. There are of course other issues to be factored in such as staff needing to be CRB checked and the requirement to hold a manual handling certificate.

**What would you do differently should the situation arise again?**

Have real time information, have a volunteer list of 4 x 4 owners and ascertain if any staff across the authority would be willing to help out in their local communities if working from home.

**Is there a County Council protocol on how to develop this?**

There will be a meeting held in July to discuss

**Are you looking for help through the Task and Finish Group?**

Chesham Local Area Forum for example are working with the Resilience Team to develop strong resilience plans on a local basis. This could be mirrored across all Local Area Forum/Local Community Partnerships.

**Local Members could help identify vulnerable residents within their wards who must be reached and could help co-ordinate a plan.**

This has been noted.

A Member raised concern that in 5 months time there could be snow on the ground and highlighted the urgency to address the issues.

## **6 RESILIENCE IN WINTER WEATHER**

Robert Murdoch, Resilience Officer, Resilience Team, Buckinghamshire County Council was welcomed to the meeting.

The Officer explained that the Resilience Team looks after the County Council's responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004), which aims to ensure that the County Council is able to respond to an emergency or critical incident whilst continuing to deliver key services.

The County Council's duties under the act include:

- Sharing information
- Risk assessment – Officers participate in the local resilience forum along with other partner agencies to look at risks to the community and emergency plans.



- Emergency planning
- Co-operation
- Business continuity management - ensure that all services operate as business as usual.
- Communicating with public
- Provision of Business Continuity Management

The Officer said that on a day to day basis the Resilience Team could be the first point of contact for all services and co-ordinate the emergency operational plan. The Resilience Team provide staff and equipment to the scene of an emergency. The Committee was informed that this procedure was instigated on May 1 2010 for the English Defence League (EDL) protest.

Members were advised that during the adverse weather conditions the responsibilities of the Resilience Team do not change. During this period the resilience team circulated severe weather warnings to services and partner agencies, liaised with voluntary agencies and 4x4 groups.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

**In relation to the emergency operational centre – what happens if people can not get into the building due to weather conditions?**

Volunteers have been trained of which there are approximately 20 and are also existing County Council staff. On the event of an incident officers would then commence contacting volunteers. It is envisaged they are local people who would be able to walk to County Hall.

**We have spoken to Adult Social Care as part of the Winter Maintenance Review, who have specific issues as a service. How would you work with them?**

The Resilience Team could assist by looking at the Buckinghamshire Business Continuity Plans which each service area should have in place. Lack of transport should be highlighted on the template. The team could also assist by getting in touch with contacts such as the 4x4 group who are a voluntary organisation.

On 21 December 2009 the Resilience Team circulated an email on behalf of Adult Social Care requesting any member of Buckinghamshire County Council staff who owned a 4x4 to assist to transport staff to clients.

**An Officer from Oxfordshire County Council commented on how useful direct contact with the emergency officer with regards to planning in Oxford was. What happens in Buckinghamshire, as there is concern regarding social care staff walking to see clients, where does that fit with the service of the Resilience Team?**

The Resilience Team advises on the Buckinghamshire Business Continuity Plans, it's role is not to provide equipment to staff. It can co-ordinate a response in an emergency but the responsibility lies with the individual service areas.

**Do you have a list of volunteers for the 4x4 groups?**

There are two groups: Bucks 4x4 group and Bucks Search and Rescue. Bucks Search and Rescue only have two 4x4 vehicles at their disposal which is primarily used to assist the emergency services and the number of vehicles for the Bucks 4x4 group is dependant on the number of members. The Resilience Team could contact the treasurer who would then contact individuals.

**How many County Council staff volunteers and 4x4 group volunteers did you have?**

Approximately seven/eight County Council staff volunteered to help for the incident prior to Christmas. There was an issue around insurance and only those who had business insurance could help.

**Is there any reimbursement for those who volunteer?**

They can claim back fuel. They can not operate for hire or reward as there are insurance implications.

**It appears that a more robust line of communication is needed with volunteers?**

There is a robust contact mechanism, which does not interfere with the organisation of the groups. It would not be possible to build the groups into the Buckinghamshire Business Continuity Plans as they can not be relied upon as they are a voluntary group.

**Could we draw up a list of volunteers from Staff/Members and public?**

Yes

**Action: Mr Murdoch**

**Chesham Town Council has set up a local resilience plan – would you recommend this?**

In June 2009 Mr Andy Fyfe, Resilience Manager wrote to all Parish Councils offering them assistance with establishing the plans. To date a response has been received from 53 Parish Councils. The Resilience Team is looking to hold workshops on Community Resilience Plans, the first of which is being piloted with Stoke Mandeville Parish Council in July 2010. Once this has been done it can be taken forward.

**Why didn't you put out a request for volunteers with 4x4s after Christmas – was there a communication problem?**

The two snow events were different. Before Christmas it was more of an emergency as people were stuck on the A41. After Christmas it was more of a business continuity situation.

**Are there templates for Community Resilience Plans on the website?**

The guidance is on the website

**What went well and what went badly during the adverse weather?**

Positives

- The County Council website highlighting school closures went well, although the website later crashed and this caused difficulties.
- Use of the 4x4 group was good and a protocol regarding their use has now been produced.
- Transport for Buckinghamshire staff worked long hours and did a good job.
- The Strategic Co-ordinate group worked well as all Thames Valley partners were involved and communication between agencies good.

Negatives

- School closures and gritting issues
- Accessing Buckinghamshire County Council buildings
- Bus routes – people unable to get to work as bus routes not gritted
- People who were working from home on blackberry's - there was an issue as some messages could not be read. This issue has been resolved.

**Do you have a budget for your service?**

There is a budget for six members of staff and training.

**7 LUNCH**

**8 EMERGENCY SERVICES**

Ian Taylor, Group Manager, Emergency Planning and Resilience, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service attended the meeting to discuss how the emergency services operated during the extreme winter weather.

The Officer handed out a report and talked Members through the report. He said that the red squares on the map highlighted where the three Unimog 4x4 fire appliances were based – those being Great Holm, Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

The Officer then highlighted the following points:

- Bucks Fire and Rescue Service had contingency plans in place for sometime which included situations of ice, heatwave etc.
- The Service has a range of vehicles for different situations. If the service were called to an incident of fire at Black Park due to lack of rain for example a 4x4 vehicle would be needed to gain access.
- The service also has 5 Mitsubishi L200 4x4 vehicles
- On 21 December 2009 there was a snow fall which settled on top of ice which caused some concern in the High Wycombe area.
- The routes which caused the Fire Service the most difficulty were predominately within South Bucks and the Chiltern area, these included:
  - Cock Lane
  - Amersham Hill
  - Marlow Hill
  - The Pastures
  - Rayners Avenue
  - Hammersley Lane
  - Hatters Lane
- The Service received a total of 1105 calls during the period 15 Dec 2009 to 15 January 2010 which resulted in 783 appliance movements. Of these calls there were 20 occasions where the service had difficulty in achieving its 10 minute response standard, mainly due to road and weather conditions. The impact of these delays was off set by an enhanced attendance to some calls and a more robust call challenge process. Calls from businesses which had good security were asked if security would carry out a thorough check in the first instance as the alarms are often tripped. Public awareness of the situation also reduced the calls. No lives were lost in fires or special service calls received by this service (including road traffic collisions) during this period.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

**Are you happy that you are prepared for next year and do you have plans to put winter tyres on other vehicles?**

Capabilities are continually reviewed. Following previous discussions with crew and Thames Valley Resilience Forum the number of Mitsubishi vehicles was increased. In snow the service usually sends the Unimog until other vehicles arrive.

With regards to the tyres on the appliances, the view was taken to change all rear axle tyres to mud and wet weather tyres which increase traction.

**Do you have any available storage facilities for sand/salt at your stations?**

There is sand kept at all stations in case of an incident to ensure that the roads are not left in a dangerous condition. There are also grit bins at the stations.

**Are there things which you think the Local Authority could do better with regards to winter maintenance?**

There were issues in the High Wycombe area. I would also like to see some standards set - perhaps with neighbouring authorities. The closure of Aylesbury Ring Road also caused issues. There had been advance notice of the closure but due to the conditions it caused difficulties for people getting people around.

### **Did you work with Buckinghamshire County Council?**

The Service worked primarily with South Central Ambulance Service, although liaised with Buckinghamshire County Council staff. We offered help should there be any particular difficulties but was not advised of any. Co-ordination needs to be improved for future.

### **Who is responsible to do that?**

It should be carried out jointly and discussed with the Resilience Team.

### **Have other emergency services equipped their vehicles like the Fire Service has?**

The Police and Ambulance Services have 4x4 vehicles. During the period of extreme weather the Police also had use of Army vehicles. The Ambulance Service does get stretched and sometimes struggle to have enough 4x4s as they cover Bucks, Berks, Oxford and Hampshire. Unfortunately however the whole of the region was hit simultaneously and the Ambulance Services resources were stretched. St John Ambulance, The Red Cross and Bucks 4x4 group all helped them.

### **Are there things communities and individuals can do to self help?**

Community Resilience is being pushed. Buckinghamshire County Council Resilience Team is leading on getting local communities to work together. The following issues need to be considered:

- Encouraging groups to work in a better co-ordinated fashion as local communities have greater local knowledge
- Schools need to be kept open as the moment schools close staff are unable to go to work and communities lose key staff such as nurses
- Companies have been helping by effectively 'adopting' neighbours. A company has adopted the doctor's surgery next door to ensure that once they have cleared the pavements, car parks etc they help clear the doctor's surgery. This links in with the concept of helping our neighbours.

### **People have commented that due to the fear of litigation they have not self helped. What is your view?**

In Scotland farmers provide services and people are made aware that Insurance is there to indemnify them. There needs to be assurances to the public and the right approach needs to be taken.

### **If all agencies got together to produce a leaflet, would you be interested in contributing to the leaflet?**

This has already been undertaken and the leaflet circulated to 2.6million homes. The leaflet covers what to do in a heat wave or icy conditions etc.

### **Who contributed to the leaflet from Buckinghamshire County Council?**

The Resilience Team.

The Officer offered to supply Mrs Baldwin with a copy of the leaflet.

### **Self help has to be communicated and co-ordinated. Who is responsible for this?**

There is a Buckinghamshire Co-ordination Group which is chaired by the Resilience Team and attended by Police, Fire, Ambulance, St Johns, Search and Rescue and District Councils amongst others. It meets four times a year. This is the group which drives community resilience which is being directed towards Parish Councils.

### **Might it be better if there was less Resilience Committees?**

There needs to be good engagement between Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council, District Councils, Fire Service and other partners. The 'Warning and Informing' leaflet is a good example of effective joined up working which may otherwise have

been duplicated over 14 times. Being a member of a Committee, particularly in relation to resilience develops good relationship building and ensures the right people are effectively communicating together.

The Officer was thanked for attending the meeting.

## **9 PUBLIC TRANSPORT PROVIDERS**

Brian Fordham, Depot Manager High Wycombe, Arriva and Steve MacDonald, Depot Manager Aylesbury, Arriva were welcomed to the meeting.

Members were advised that this was an opportunity to question representatives from Arriva Buses, one of the County Council's public transport providers, on how the harsh winter weather impacted on their ability to keep the county moving. To find out what went well, what problems were experienced by Arriva as a result of the weather and also how the County Council and its partners could assist public transport providers during periods of extreme weather.

Mr Fordham made the following comments:

- The extreme weather struck between 18– 22 December 2009 and 6-13 January 2010. During this period due to a lack of gritting and parked cars, High Wycombe bus station was unable to operate a full service in residential streets.
- Many of the bus routes passed through residential estates and due to these areas not being gritted some bus services were unable to operate and decisions had to be made regarding what could safely operate.
- Attempts were made to divert bus routes but the conditions got worse and on some dates buses were unable to leave the bus depot. Cressex bus park is located on Shackleton Road, which links to Lincoln Road and then Desborough Road. Lincoln Road is an unadopted road and was not gritted. The conditions were treacherous and subsequently public transport operated by Arriva could not operate.
- Bus depot staff cleared much of the access themselves to try and ensure that the buses could operate.
- There were issues on the roads and 16 buses were left parked up in the roads due to the heavy snow fall and bad conditions. Two vehicles were seriously vandalised and the drivers had to walk back to the depot.
- Drivers were also then unable to work the next day due to constraints on working hours.
- Buses are vital to enable people to travel to work and keep the County moving. This is of greater importance during extreme weather as less people want to drive.
- Ensuring the buses are able to operate should be a priority.
- The roads near to bus stations should be gritted.

Mr Macdonald made the following comments:

- During the period of bad weather in December 2009 there was more co-operation from Officers at the County Council and the vehicles could get out of the depot. As the weather worsened and resources tightened the co-operation deteriorated.
- The Aylesbury depot is based at Smeaton Close which connects to Rabans Lane, Aylesbury. There is a hump railway bridge along this route which causes difficulty in icy conditions.
- There was an incident at John Colet School involving a bus carrying 70 pupils. This resulted in a woman being crushed. Headteachers decide if a school is to open or close. When the decision is made that the school should remain open, bus managers feel an obligation to transport pupils to and from the schools. The road where the accident happened was untreated.

- As the winter weather got worse the gritting of roads was reduced and left the roads in a poorer condition.
- Bus Managers have to assess the risk whether to send out vehicles or not. They have to consider if the vehicle is going to stay on the road and if not the consequences of that event.
- Cars were sent out to assess routes. This is not ideal but there was uncertainty regarding which roads had been treated.
- Communication needs to be improved – particularly with County Council and schools.

Members then asked questions. The questions and answers are summarised below:

**You mention there had been contact with Buckinghamshire County Council. Did you ask for the roads around the High Wycombe bus depot to be treated?**

Shackleton Road is unadopted. Officers understood buses could not get out but said that unadopted roads were not treated. Lincoln Road is a thoroughfare but Officers said it was not considered a main road. All buses leaving the depot need to pass these roads to get onto Desborough Road.

With regards to the Aylesbury depot Officers said it would be put on a priority list. During the earlier weather the roads to the depot were treated, however in the later extreme weather the roads were untreated. Eventually the roads thawed due to heavy usage but the roads should have been treated soon after the snow fall.

**Are you planning on any self help in relation to next winter such as replacing tyres with snow tyres?**

It would take many weeks to go around the fleet to change all tyres. Hand salting is also very time consuming and would take some hours before the vehicles could leave the depot, which would mean that people would get to work late. By changing the starting times of the bus services there would be public uncertainty.

**Would it help if salt bins were provided for depots?**

Staff did salt the depots and surrounding areas on occasions but as highlighted previously it is time consuming.

**When will you make a decision regarding whether you will be investing in winter maintenance?**

It is a Board of Directors decision. The consideration is risk versus cost and whether it is proportional.

**What roads were of particular concern to you?**

There is a lack of communication and the roads which were treated kept on changing. We need to know what roads are treated and ensure that these do not change in the interest of certainty. Instead we had to have an hourly update. Officers did not communicate the real time information to us we had to seek it out. We had to ensure that when sending a vehicle out on a route it would be able to return safely.

The access road to John Colet school was not treated. There must be better joined up communication. Schools opened but the roads were not treated enabling safe access to the schools. If schools open the routes to the schools should be treated as a priority.

A Member requested that Amey be asked how many days the Home to School Transport did not run.

**Action: Policy Officer, Michael Chard**

**CHAIRMAN**

