

## Cabinet

16 November 2011



### Winter Maintenance: State of Preparedness for 2011-2012 and Winter Service Plan Update

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#### Report of Corporate Management Team

Terry Collins, Corporate Director for Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Bob Young, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic Environment

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#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update regarding the improvements and state of preparedness for winter 2011-2012, together with details of the annual Winter Service Plan 2011-2012 for approval and adoption.

#### Winter Service and State of Preparedness

##### Background

- 2 Durham County Council currently treats (salts) 45% of the highway network in frost conditions. It should be noted that in recent winters, due to the national salt shortage, the treated routes have been reduced to 35% in order to conserve salt supplies which has been at the request of the Department for Transport (DfT). The presalt network (45%) is used as the basis for snow clearance and can take up to four or five hours to complete each route.
- 3 Currently salt/grit bins are provided for use by motorists on the untreated network where significant hazards occur, such as severe banks and bends. Members and the community are increasingly asking for more salt/grit boxes to enable self-help in locations that benefit the community at large.
- 4 During the last few years, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) have made a series recommendations based on lessons learnt reviews from the experiences of the two previous severe winters to improve the delivery of the winter service. A report will be provided to OSC on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011, incorporating the content of the latest review.
- 5 As part of the review undertaken this year, the OSC members were given the opportunity to visit the Boulby Potash Mine in North Yorkshire, the mine that supplies Durham with its salt. All Members who attended found this visit extremely interesting and now have a better understanding of the difficulties in providing salt during the winter months.

## Improvements to Service

- 6 Durham County Council founded and Chair the North East Regional Winter Maintenance Group. This is a forum where all twelve North East Authorities come together, to share best practice, secure salt supplies and prepare joint communication plans to ensure that communications, particularly during bouts of severe winter weather, are consistent and that the region has one voice.
- 7 As a Unitary Authority, Durham County Council is much better placed than it was before local Government review. In preparation for the coming winter, meetings between Streetscene, Highways Operations and Strategic Highways, along with the experience gained over the past two winters, have led to a joined-up approach to service provision within the Authority.
- 8 The salt stocks currently held by the Authority in the nine strategic depots across the County is currently 46,000 tonnes. This is an increase of 6,000 tonnes over the stocks held going into last winter.
- 9 The pool of farmer contractors has been extended to 60 in total, an increase of 17 over the number in place last year, all with the ability to deploy tractor trailers, tractor ploughs and loading shovels when the need arises.
- 10 The service has critically assessed its snow clearance programme and how this is delivered. Significant opportunities for change and improvements have been identified, focussing on a specified core network. During periods of extreme snowfall, frontline resources will concentrate on a core network. Extreme snowfall can be significant accumulations over a short period or perhaps a lesser amount over a prolonged period. Nevertheless, the event will have significant disruption for the travelling public and or place vulnerable people at risk. By concentrating on a reduced core network, the frontline gritting fleet will be able to plough and treat each route within two hours. The use of farmer contractors will supplement the snow clearance operation. The snow clearance operation will be deployed as detailed below.
  - The front-line gritting fleet will be deployed on 45 routes on the core network. This represents c21% of the network, with all routes cleared within 2 hours.
  - Utilising the farmer contractors. A further ten routes will be ploughed and treated, these routes representing a further 7% of the network.
  - A further 45 tractor plough routes will be called upon to clear designated routes as required.

The network coverage will now include links to industrial estates, most schools, strategic bus routes and strategic routes within housing estates. This new approach will allow quicker and wider access to the network and is aimed at keeping industry working. Additional farmer contractors will be utilised to assist with refuse collection managed by Streetscene (at present this number is 17 farmer contractors).

- 11 When severe weather is predicted, Members will continue to be informed of forecasts, conditions and activities on the network, through regular daily bulletins. Meetings will be held on a regular basis with the Portfolio Holder

and Management Team to ensure that all activities are co-ordinated and are appropriate to the prevailing conditions.

- 12 During periods of severe weather, Neighbourhood Services are able to offer a wide range of assistance to the emergency services and to other Service Groupings. The cost of this assistance will be borne by Neighbourhood Services during the working day but outside of these times, and where this is not on the core network, Service Groupings will be expected to fund these activities.
- 13 More efficient ways of refilling salt/grit boxes have enabled criteria for their provision to be extended to community use. The assessment will take into account footway use and important local services/community needs. There are two hundred salt/grit boxes that have been purchased for this purpose. Trials are to take place on how to engage with the community regarding 'self help' and will be carried out during the winter period.
- 14 Significant work continues with Town & Parish Councils along with Volunteer Groups to encourage self help. Meetings with Town and Parish Councils have encouraged partnership working in clearing footways or filling of salt/grit boxes. A further three Parish Councils have signed up for 2011/2012, bringing the total number working in partnership with Durham County Council to eleven. Assistance is given to Parish Councils by providing footway clearance equipment, salt and protective clothing. The existing arrangement with volunteers from the East Durham Trust has also been extended, with a view to reaching more vulnerable people and offering assistance. Work continues to introduce this into other areas of the County.
- 15 Footway snow clearance plans remain unchanged and the following remain key target areas.
  - Category 1 and 1A Footways (Town Centres)
  - Salt Bin Filling
  - Public Transport Interchanges
  - Hospitals
  - Doctors Surgeries/Health Centres
  - Selected Category 2 Footpaths (Small Village Shopping Streets)
  - Sheltered Accommodation
  - Care Homes
- 16 Further details of service provision are detailed in Appendix 2.

## **Winter Service Plan**

### **Background**

- 17 Each year Durham County Council updates and distributes the Winter Service Plan widely, both internally and to neighbouring Authorities/key stakeholders. The plan is normally updated annually to incorporate any minor changes which have taken place during the last year along with keeping abreast of current legislation and practices.
- 18 Following the national severe weather events of the past three winters a number of reports have been produced by Central Government which, in turn, have led to the code of practice for highways entitled 'Well Maintained Highways' being updated substantially in relation to winter maintenance. Where necessary, these updates have been incorporated into the Winter Service Plan, together with the outcomes of the Scrutiny Reviews over the last three years.

### **Amendments**

- 19 There are a significant number of amendments to the Winter Service Plan (full details detailed within Appendix 3) that have been made for this year. The key changes are detailed below.
- Amendments to the National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS)
  - Amendments to the salt bin criteria
  - Amendments to Durham County Council's response to extreme weather
  - Additional salt stocks and resilience
- 20 Once approved, the Winter Service Plan, excluding operational information, will be uploaded onto the website.

### **Recommendations and Reasons**

- 21 Cabinet are asked to recommend the following.
- Note the improvements and state of preparedness for Winter 2011-2012
  - Approve the amendments to the Winter Service Plan 2011-2012

### **Background Papers**

- Winter Service Guidance to Local Authority Practitioners
- The Resilience of England's Transport Systems in Winter - Interim Report - July 2010

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Finance**

The current budget of £2.54m covers pre-salting of 45% of the network. Any snow clearance, as a result of prolonged severe weather, will exceed this budget and is expected to be treated outside of the cash limit.

### **Staffing**

There are no staffing implications as this draws on Drivers and Operatives from Highways Operations and Streetscene.

### **Risk**

There is a potential increase in public liability claims and damage to reputation of the Authority if the report is not approved.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

An equality and diversity impact assessment screening has been carried out  
Appendix 4

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable

### **Consultation**

Not applicable

### **Procurement**

Not applicable

### **Disability Issues**

Not applicable

### **Legal Implications**

Section 41 (1) of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a statutory duty to ensure, as far as practicable, that safe passage along the public highway is not endangered by snow or ice.