

**9 November 2015**

## **Winter Maintenance Policy**

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### **Joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive and Terry Collins, Corporate Director, Neighbourhoods**

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#### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To provide Members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with supporting information in advance of an update presentation on the Winter Maintenance Policy.

#### **Background**

- 2 The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2009 carried out a focused scrutiny review looking at the winter maintenance strategy/service. The review resulted from the severe weather experienced across the UK in 2008/09 following a pro-longed spell of cold weather which exposed weaknesses with existing policies on the supply and stocks of salt.
- 3 During this period, demand for salt outstripped the amount that could be supplied by UK salt suppliers, which left many areas at high risk of running out of salt. The Government was required to intervene in arrangements between Local Authorities and salt suppliers to prioritise distribution in order to keep local road networks functioning. This highlighted the need for Local Authorities to have appropriate plans in place to ensure that such intervention was not necessary should similar circumstances occur in the future. During this period Durham County Council acted as a supplier of salt to a number of Local Authorities who paid the Council for this service as the County Council had adequate supplies.
- 4 The severe weather over the winter of 2008/09 necessitated spending considerably more than in previous years on snow clearing and winter gritting of paths and highways to ensure safe movement, to keep traffic delays to a minimum and that access to emergency facilities was maintained. The Council was not only concerned with the increased costs but the complaints and concerns expressed by organisations, the general public and interested parties in relation to the level of service provided. The report made a number of recommendations which were considered by Cabinet in September 2009 and then incorporated into the Winter Service Plan.
- 5 The following winter of 2009/2010 was the worst winter the country had experienced for 3 decades. During the period December 2009 to March 2010, County Durham was subject to severe weather conditions of sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfall with temperatures of in excess

of -10 degrees C with nine inches of snow falling over the new year weekend which necessitated continuous winter maintenance.

- 6 It was therefore thought appropriate to establish a further scrutiny review group to look at the progress made against the recommendations contained in the winter maintenance strategy/service scrutiny review report. The findings of the review group were considered by Cabinet in May 2010 and resulted in significant amendments to the Code of Practice 'Well Maintained Highways' with these amendments also incorporated into the Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Plan.
- 7 The Scrutiny Winter Maintenance Service Review report 2010 acknowledged the financial pressures that would affect local government in the future and made the following recommendations:
  - To review the pre-salting routes to include main roads into villages and all bus routes including bus routes to schools.
  - To introduce a salt bin numbering system and to devise a system to record and report when the filling of the salt bin is complete.
  - To review the contracts and conditions of employment for farmers.
  - To discuss with farmers whether they can assist with refuse collection during severe winter weather.
  - To approach all Town and parish Councils regarding entering into a service level Agreement to undertake winter maintenance treatment of agreed priority footways.
  - To discuss with neighbouring local authorities the requirement for a consistent approach to winter maintenance at all boundary crossing points.
  - To liaise with the Housing Associations and Arm's Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) operating within the County to identify where there are significant numbers of older/vulnerable people to ensure they are not isolated in severe winter weather.
  - To further develop the opportunities for the Council to use its well being powers.
  - To further develop the use of the handyperson to undertake winter maintenance for older and vulnerable groups.
- 8 Due to the previous involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in shaping the Winter Maintenance Policy updates have been provided to the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the 2013/14 and 2014/15 work programmes. As part of the refresh of the work programme for 2015/16 it was suggested by members that a further update be provided focusing on the current winter maintenance policy making members aware of the processes in place for the delivery of winter maintenance across the County before the start of the winter period. In addition, it is proposed that members receive detail of the delivery of winter maintenance during 2015/16 together with the winter maintenance plans for 2016/17 at a future meeting of the committee.
- 9 Arrangements have been made for Brian Kitching, Policy and Assets Manager to attend the meeting on the 9 November to provide an update for members on the resources available and the processes in place prior to the

start of the winter period 2015/16. The presentation will focus on the following:

- Winter Maintenance Policy – background.
- Treatment routes - Detail – Carriageways Priority 1, Carriageways Priority 2, Snow Routes, footways and cycle ways
- Salt and grit bins – how provided.
- Key facts and figures for 2015/16 including total budget, total salt stocks, number and type of winter equipment available for use (gritters, trailers and snow blowers etc.), salt bins – number of, average salt cost etc.
- How DCC works In Partnership, detail of key partners for 2015/16.
- Key contacts for members/public in relation to winter maintenance.

### **Legal responsibility and duty**

10 The Winter Maintenance Policy details the service levels of where and when the Council will provide winter maintenance on the adopted highway in accordance with the national code of practice 'Well-Maintained Highways – Code of practice for Highway Maintenance Management' (the 'Code').

11 The purpose of winter maintenance is to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. Winter maintenance involves:

- Pre-treatment – precautionary salting before the formation of ice;
- Post-treatment – continuing salting following the formation of ice;
- Clearance of ice and snow;
- Dealing with continuous severe conditions; and
- Provision of salt and grit bins/heaps.

12 As the Local Highway Authority, the Council is responsible for ensuring the highway network is managed and maintained for the safe and convenient movement of people and goods.

13 The Highways Act 1980 sets out the main duties of the Local Highway Authority in respect of highway maintenance. Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 (duty of Highway Authority to maintain highway) states : 'In particular, a Highway Authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice'.

14 The Highways Act does not specify the level of winter maintenance although the Code offers guidance in line with national best practice. Given the scale of commitment and other resources involved in delivering winter maintenance the Code recognises that it is not reasonable either to:

- Provide the service on all parts of the adopted highway; or
- Ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the adopted highway.

The Code expects the Local Highway Authority to formally approve and adopt policies and priorities for winter maintenance and this is the purpose of the Winter Maintenance Policy.

## Objectives of winter maintenance

- 15 The Winter Maintenance Policy is essential to keep the highway network open for the safe and convenient movement of people and goods. The objectives of winter maintenance are as follows:
- Customer - Meeting user needs and expectations through an efficient, effective and proportionate service.
  - Safety - Complying with statutory obligations, meeting user's needs for safety.
  - Serviceability – Ensuring availability, maintaining reliability.
  - Sustainability – Minimising whole life costs, maximising value to the community and minimising environmental impact.

## Winter Maintenance Policy

- 16 Durham County Council's Winter Maintenance Policy covers the following:
- **Treatment routes** – it is not practical to treat all parts of the adopted highway. Therefore, in accordance with the Code the Council has criteria for prioritising certain carriageways, footways and cycle ways within the County.
  - **Provision of salt and grit bins** – The Council undertakes precautionary salting on only a proportion of the adopted highway network and many minor roads are not treated. In these areas the Council will provide salt and grit bins for the public to use themselves based on objective criteria.
  - **Provision of salt and grit heaps** - Salt and grit heaps are provided in rural locations on steep banks and bends for the public to use themselves on a case by case basis.
  - **Deployment and response times** – Criteria and response times for precautionary salting, post treatment and clearance of ice and snow (priority 1 routes and minimum winter network), post treatment and clearance of ice and snow (priority 2 routes) and snow routes.
  - **Resilience** – Following recent severe winters the Council has improved resilience by increasing salt stocks at the start of the winter maintenance season.
  - **Customer Services** – Detail of contact numbers and reporting process.

## Next Steps

- 17 It is intended that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an update informing members of the delivery of winter maintenance during 2015/16 together with detail of winter maintenance plans for 2016/17 at the July 2016 meeting.

## Recommendations

- 18 The Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment upon the information provided in the report and presentation.

19 That an update on the delivery of winter maintenance for 2015/16 and detail of winter maintenance plans for 2016/17 is provided to the Environment and Sustainable Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the July 2016 meeting.

**Background Papers**

Review of the Winter Maintenance Service/Strategy – Scrutiny Review Report-September, 2009.

Review of the Winter Maintenance Service /Strategy – Scrutiny Review Report - May, 2010.

Winter Maintenance Policy 2014/15.

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Report – Winter Maintenance Policy – 10 November 2014

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**Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance – NA**

**Staffing – NA**

**Risk – NA**

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – NA**

**Accommodation – NA**

**Crime and Disorder – NA**

**Human Rights – NA**

**Consultation – NA**

**Procurement – NA**

**Disability Issues – NA**

**Legal Implications – NA**