

ENVIRONMENT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 64

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Brighton & Hove City Council's Winter Service Plan 2010-11		
Date of Meeting:	4 November 2010		
Report of:	Strategic Director Place		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Christina Liassides	Tel: 29-2036
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Key Decision:	Yes	Forward Plan No: ENV18137	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Highways Code of Practice recommends that authorities should formally approve, adopt and publish, in consultation with users and key stakeholders, a Winter Service Operational Plan based on the principles of this Code. Brighton & Hove City Council has produced an annual Highways Winter Service Plan since unitary status.
- 1.2 A Scrutiny Panel sat in early 2010 to hear submissions from a wide range of individuals, partner agencies and other organisations in order to look at issues arising from the severe snow events of winter 2009/10. The panel made a number of recommendations which were accepted at the Environment Cabinet Member Meeting on 26 July 2010 subject to practical and timescale considerations.
- 1.3 The Secretary of State for Transport commissioned an independent review into the UK transport system's resilience in winter with the interim report produced in August 2010; a further report is expected in late autumn 2010.
- 1.4 The Local Government Association also produced a report "Weathering the Storm II" in July 2010 on local authorities' experience of the severe winters of 2008/09 and 2009/10.
- 1.5 The government's Code of Practice for Well Maintained Highways was updated in August 2010 to include additional complementary information or amendments to the original Code.
- 1.6 The council's Highways Winter Service Plan 2010-11 (Appendix A) has been produced incorporating the relevant local and national guidance and recommendations as well as operational experience based on previous winter service provision and plans.
- 1.7 It should be noted that not all the recommendations arising from the various reviews are for the council's transport service; there is also an expectation that all sections, businesses and agencies will review their resilience plans.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the Brighton & Hove City Council Highways Winter Service Plan 2010/11 as attached at Appendix A to this report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

Context for Winter Service Plan

- 3.1 The Winter Service plan is needed to fulfil a statutory requirement placed on all Highway Authorities which states that we must take measures to prevent or remove accumulations of ice and snow from the public highway as far as is reasonably practicable. The duty outlines what the service should achieve but leaves the technicalities and practices open to all authorities carrying out the duties.
- 3.2 Brighton and Hove's original highway winter service plan was developed prior to the formation of this authority under local government re-organisation when we formed part of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) highway network. Subsequently it has been built up by information from weather stations in the city and East Sussex, from specialist weather forecasting and analysis and also from knowledge and experience since taking over the direct management of our highways.
- 3.3 The plan is reviewed annually in liaison with other sections and agencies, as part of continuous improvement to the service.

Annual review 2010

- 3.4 Following the winter of 2009/10, officers have analysed the information arising from their own experience, from the national reviews and from the Scrutiny Panel. The winter service team is a small team of 5 people, all the Duty Officers being volunteers in addition to their agreed job descriptions and day-to-day tasks. In order to progress the various strands, officers drew up a project plan, appointed an in-house project officer and have been working through the summer months to carry out the actions required.
- 3.5 Considerable discussion and consultation has taken place with other council teams, including via the Sussex Resilience Forum and individually with partners and providers, such as the bus company, schools and the NHS (see section 4 of this report). This ensures a good shared understanding of what the council's highways service can provide and how best to target this to support other services' priorities.
- 3.6 The Highway plan includes work by Cityclean and Cityparks to provide the winter service; therefore the plan covers the whole City Infrastructure delivery unit's response to cold weather.

- 3.7 It should be noted that many of the good practice points arising from the reviews were already in place in previous years and were put into action during the severe snow events. For example, the Winter Service Plan of 2009/10 was drafted in consultation with partner agencies. Pavement clearance following extreme conditions is carried out by BHCC whereas some local authorities do not do this.

Service provision

- 3.8 Through the Winter Service Plan we endeavour to use the resources available to us as effectively as possible. We have a finite supply of materials and staff to carry out the work so it is simply not possible to keep all 2,700 of the city's public roads, pavements and footpaths free from ice and snow during a severe freeze. The Code of Practice acknowledges this: "Given the scale of financial and other resources involved in delivering the Winter Service it is not reasonable either to:
- provide the service on all parts of the Network;
 - ensure running surfaces are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network."
- 3.9 For clarity, liability and practicality, the gritters must follow the defined routes unless directed otherwise by documented Duty Officers' decisions. The council's winter service plan lays out the agreed hierarchy based on council and partner agency priorities. Any additional gritting needs to be justified and based on clear reasoning – e.g. for a water leak. In particular, where snowfall continues to fall over several days all resources are prioritised to treat the agreed routes and there is no opportunity to extend the operations. This does mean that roads not on the gritting routes may be icy, frosty or snow-covered during cold weather and will not get treated.
- 3.10 Our defined routes are all main roads and all bus routes. Because the bus routes in the city are very extensive, this means that all areas of the city receive gritting treatments although obviously not every road. We have to ensure that the main roads are as safe as possible because these have the most traffic from people coming in from all over the city and from outside the city. We identify pavements for clearance in priority order based on heaviest usage and where important services such as hospitals are located.
- 3.11 It should be noted that there are specific environmental factors that will reduce the effectiveness of salting/gritting. This means that although the council will continue to apply treatments to the identified routes, we cannot guarantee that the gritted roads will be free of snow and ice.
- 3.12 Some of these limitations are acknowledged directly in the Code of Practice: "It is often extremely difficult and inefficient to remove significant depths of snow using only salt and therefore consideration should be given to the use of snow ploughs. However, in urban areas there may be considerable difficulties in utilising snow ploughs and in this situation any consideration should be on a risk based approach."
- 3.13 Additional reasons that pavements and roads outside the city centre tend to be harder to clear are:

- They do not get as much heavy traffic as the city centre and therefore are more resistant to treatment. Salt/grit needs to be tracked in by substantial vehicle or pedestrian traffic in order to work well and break down the layers of snow.
 - They tend to get more snowfall as they are higher up
 - They are colder than city centre areas
 - Cars abandoned on junctions or badly parked will prevent the larger vehicles such as buses getting through
 - Some roads are too narrow for the gritters when they have ploughs on
 - Ploughing opens up the road but tends provide a narrower band of clearance so leaves less room for manoeuvre for larger vehicles such as buses as well as pushing the snow into the kerbside which can make bus stops harder to reach
 - Ploughing is not very effective over speed humps, steep junctions and pronounced cambers.
- 3.14 The council provides 400+ grit bins throughout the city for self-help. Compared to other authorities, this is a high quantity within what is a relatively small geographical area. This is because we recognise that Brighton & Hove is a mainly urban area with steep hills serving a large population. We will also if required fill grit bins for emergency services, and can offer salt/grit in small quantities from our stockpile for schools, emergency services and other priority agencies for use on their own property.
- 3.15 It can take up to 12 days to fill all the grit bins in the city so provision of more grit bins needs to be balanced against the capability to refill quickly during snow events as well as available salt stocks.
- 3.16 In line with experiences of last year and scrutiny recommendations, we have set in place arrangements for dropping off grit for self-help at even more locations round the city if severe snow or ice is forecast. However, this is dependent on available supplies and re-stocking opportunities.
- 3.17 The calculated average for gritting operations per year is 33.
- 2007-08 was above average, where we did 43 operations in total for the winter season.
 - In 2008-09, a total of 62 gritting operations were carried out, of which 27 operations were full routes, i.e. our largest coverage of the city.
 - In 2009-10, a total of **112** gritting operations were carried out of which **62** were full routes.

Vehicles

- 3.18 The council is in the process of acquiring new gritter vehicles. Substantial and detailed market research has taken place to ensure we purchase the best vehicles for the challenges facing the city during severe winter weather. Brighton & Hove's terrain means that vehicles have to navigate narrow streets, parked cars, steep hills, speed humps and high cambers in a predominately compact urban environment. However due to fixed timescales for the procurement and build process (26 weeks average vehicle build time), new vehicles will not be in place for winter 2010/11. The procurement process is a legal requirement and set timescales must be adhered to.

- 3.19 The existing vehicles have scheduled services and are thoroughly checked at the beginning of each winter season.

Salt Stock

- 3.20 The average amount of salt used per winter is about 800 tonnes. In 2009-10, the council used 1,900 tonnes of salt and a further 2,609 tonnes of grit (sharp sand). Sharp sand is an accepted treatment for heavy compacted layers of snow and ice, often proving more effective than salt alone.
- 3.21 The council has a contract in place for the supply of salt. This is delivered by boat from one of the two salt mines in the country direct to Shoreham Harbour. During the national supply salt crisis last year, the council did not run out of salt and continued to receive supplies from its supplier albeit at a reduced rate.
- 3.22 The Department for Transport's survey of council's salt re-stocking has found that most local authorities have ordered greater quantities of salt over this summer than in previous years. The resilience review states that "the total of this re-stocking demand not only leaves [salt] suppliers with no stock of their own as at November 2010, but it exceeds the estimated UK production capacity to November 2010 by some 0.15m tonnes, even after allowing for 0.05m tonnes of imports already placed by certain LHAs."
- 3.23 This means that if the country experiences another severe winter, it is likely that obtaining further supplies of salt will again prove difficult. Brighton & Hove has limitations on how much the council can store in advance and must also balance purchase against lifespan/likely usage of the stock. As we have no options to increase salt storage within our boundaries, we have arranged for additional storage at a depot in West Sussex. In total, we should start the winter season with 1,500 tonnes in stock rather than the usual 1,000 tonnes.
- 3.24 The local and national government reviews accept that a single minimum standard for salt stocks would not provide an effective solution to the problems councils experienced during the last two winters. Factors such as distance from the source of supply, weather predictions and local topography as well as capacity to store the salt will have a bearing on appropriate levels of stock.
- 3.25 Using the utmost storage capability available to us, Brighton & Hove City Council has 8.5 days' resilience in severe snow conditions, or 12.5 utilising the additional salt ordered for storage at West Sussex. This is using the government's calculations for usage during such events but based on a mix of sharp sand and salt rather than pure salt. The minimum standard recommended by the government is 6 days' resilience.

Reviews and recommendations

- 3.26 The recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel's review with officer comments are attached as Appendix B for information.
- 3.27 The recommendations from the national review into the UK's Transport Resilience are attached as Appendix C for information with officer comments where applicable.

- 3.28 The recommendations from the Local Government Association's review are attached as Appendix D for information with officer comments where applicable.
- 3.29 The recommendations in the Highway Maintenance Code of Practice (Well Maintained Highways) are attached as Appendix E for information with officer comments where applicable.
- 3.30 Recommendations pertinent to Brighton & Hove have been incorporated into the Highways Winter Service Plan 2010/11 where timescales, resources, equipment and practicalities allow.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Working with the Civil Contingencies Officer, highway officers have held several planning meetings and maintain ongoing communication with members of the Sussex Resilience Forum. This includes category 1 Responders (fire, police, NHS, ambulance service), the bus service, schools service, housing management and other important city services/premises
- 4.2 There have also been meetings, ongoing liaison and training with the Communications team, Contact Centre Manager and Business Continuity Manager regarding the council's public response to winter weather events.
- 4.3 Highways, Cityclean and Cityparks have worked together on planning the Winter Service.
- 4.4 A copy of the Winter Service Plan is sent out for consultation to the following stakeholders and any relevant comments incorporated into the plan/service:
- Cityclean
 - Cityparks
 - Civil Contingencies
 - Insurance
 - Communications team
 - Police
 - NHS
 - Fire Service
 - Brighton & Hove Bus Company
 - Schools
 - Other Sussex Resilience Forum agencies e.g. Brighton Marina
 - Seafront services
- 4.5 Accident statistics from the police and NHS were obtained and analysed to see if changes to the road or pavement gritting might be required. The data showed that the hotspots were mainly in areas of highest footfall and major road junctions. These were already included in our hierarchy.
- 4.6 The Head of Network Management attends SEASIG – the south East Authorities Service Improvement Group – with particular reference to winter and other highway maintenance. This has enabled sharing of information and resources across council boundaries.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs of providing the winter maintenance service are covered by a revenue budget of £331,710. This includes an additional annual investment of £100,000 which was provided out of contingency during the annual budget setting process for 2010-11.
- 5.2 Any underspend in the revenue budget is carried over into the Winter Maintenance Reserve, as contingency for periods of extreme weather. A minimum of £250,000 has been held in this reserve. This fund is used to provide operatives, gritter fuel, gritter maintenance, contractors and other costs associated with an ongoing major operation. Network Management have had to make use of this Reserve due to severe weather conditions during financial years 2006-7, 2008-9 and 2009-10, and last year the sum taken from the reserve was £243,000. In recognition of the recent demands on the Winter Service, an additional £204,000 has been added to the reserve this year.

Finance Officer Consulted: Karen Brookshaw Date: 03/09/10

Legal Implications:

- 5.3 The Council is required to ensure, as far as practicable, safe passage on the highway and safe movement of all users (as detailed in the Railway and Transport Act 2003 and Traffic Management Act 2004.) The proposed Winter Service Plan 2010-2011 set out in this report will assist the Council in meeting the relevant statutory responsibilities.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert Date: 01/09/10

Equalities Implications:

- 5.4 The Winter Maintenance service covers main routes and all bus routes. It is not logistically or economically feasible to cover all roads in the city, so by treating bus routes and pavements on a priority basis we ensure that most areas of the city have some accessible options for travel and target areas of highest usage first.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 Salt has a negative environmental impact e.g. on the water table or vegetation. Sharp sand does not dissolve into solution and has a negative impact on drainage and appearance. Therefore resources are carefully deployed in order to provide a balance between network usability and detriment to the local environment.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.6 None.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.7 The objective is to provide a winter service, which will permit, as far as is reasonably possible, the safe movement of traffic on designated roads throughout Brighton and Hove and to keep to a minimum delays and accidents brought about by adverse weather conditions.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 The winter service is an essential support service for the city's economy by helping to provide an accessible road network.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The only alternative is not to produce or approve a winter service plan but this would be contrary to the Code of Practice. The plan also acts as information about what to expect from the service and as a business continuity tool which lays out detailed operational directions on how to run the service.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The report ensures that the Winter Service Plan can be formally considered and adopted.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

- A Winter Service Plan 2010-11
- B Scrutiny Panel recommendations & officer response
- C UK Transport Resilience in Winter
- D Local Government Association's "Weathering the Storm"
- E Updated Code of Practice Well Maintained Highways – Winter Service

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. Winter Service Plan 2010-11 (Full Version with personal information removed)

Background Documents

1. Well-Maintained Highways Code of Practice 2005
2. UK Roads Liaison Group Lessons Learnt from the Severe Weather February 2009