

ENVIRONMENT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 63

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Brighton & Hove City Council's Winter Service Plan 2009-10		
Date of Meeting:	5 November 2009		
Report of:	Director of Environment		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Christina Liassides	Tel: 29-2036
	E-mail:	christina.liassides@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Key Decision:	Yes	Forward Plan No: ENV12780	
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.
- 1.2 This report presents the council's highway winter service plan for 2009/10 which is an operational document detailing the requirements of the service provision.
- 1.3 The report also provides additional information regarding winter service provision generally.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the Brighton & Hove City Council Winter Service Plan 2009/10 as attached at Appendix A to this report.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 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 in Brighton and Hove as far as is reasonably practicable. The duty outlines the aspects of what the service should achieve but leaves the technicalities and practices open to all Authorities carrying out the duties.
- 3.2 Brighton and Hove have developed a process, dating back prior to Local Government Reorganisation, to when we formed part of East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) Highway Network and this underpins our Winter Maintenance Plan. It has been built up by information from weather stations in the City and in ESCC, specialist weather forecasting and analysis and also knowledge developed since taking over the direct management of our highways.

- 3.3 We use the plan to support council officer decisions and communicate with other interested parties i.e. Police, Ambulance, Fire Service, Bus companies, members of the public etc, the actions we are likely to take and also what actions we have taken and why. This is often essential when you have to explain to a resident why we can only treat main routes and essential public transport corridors during the cold weather events. Without the plan we could find our resources being pulled from one request to another and this would not allow a considered and metered approach to the needs of the whole road network. Our effectiveness would fail and so would our requirements under the statutory duty to provide a consistent and safe approach to keeping our roads clear of ice and snow.
- 3.4 The winter service usually runs from 1 November to mid March, although in 2007/08 we had snow in April and had to start winter operations at the end of October for winter 2008/09.
- 3.5 Each year, Brighton & Hove prepares an operational plan which details what is needed in order to provide the winter maintenance service. This service has been running since Brighton & Hove became a Unitary Authority in 1997 and has been tried and tested during both mild and severe winters. A précis of the service has been included in this report together with the Winter Service Plan as Appendix 1. The appendices for the Winter Service Plan are not included here because of the level of operational detail which they cover and the personal information contained in some of the documents (home telephone numbers, computer passwords, for example). The appendices are in the Members' Rooms with any personal information removed.
- 3.6 Although we refer to "gritting" and "gritter" vehicles, in fact, the operation involves salt rather than any grit. Winter service treatments across the UK involve pre-salting the road network in advance of snow, ice, frost or freezing rain. How much salt is put down depends on the predicted severity of the weather event, and other factors such as moisture content and amount of salt already laid from previous treatments.
- 3.7 The salt is spread on the road and works by reducing the freezing point of water. The salt works best when it is in a solution which is why we rely on vehicles passing over the salt to help crush it and form a good solution. However, salt starts to become less effective at minus 5°C and almost ineffective at lower temperatures. As a result, at these temperatures its use becomes practically, economically and environmentally difficult. A salt/grit mix can be used in snowy conditions as this gives better traction for vehicles. Ploughing can be used if the depth of the snow allows this.
- 3.8 Brighton & Hove City Council has Winter Duty Officers, on standby 24/7 on a 4 week rota. These officers monitor the weather forecasts and weather stations in order to make decisions about when and how much to salt, as well as directing overall operations during icy or snowy weather.

- 3.9 Weather forecasts come from one of the major weather companies under contract to BHCC to deliver city-specific forecasts as well as monitoring data from the council's weather stations. There are 3 weather outstations in the city. The UK generally, and particularly the southern part of England with its milder climate, often gets what are called "marginal nights" where it can be very hard to predict accurately in advance whether the temperature will fall below zero. The amount of snowfall is also notoriously hard to predict – forecasters can tell that precipitation is on its way but often not how much will fall at any one time over a specific area.
- 3.10 The Council owns 7 gritter vehicles and 5 snow ploughs. There are 6 gritting routes covering the City's main roads, using 12 gritter drivers on 24/7 standby on a 2 week rota. Gritter drivers are supplied from the Cityclean workforce and must be HGV drivers as well as hold the specific City & Guilds Winter Service qualification. Full training or refresher was given to every driver at the start of 2008/09 winter season.
- 3.11 There are two co-ordinators at the Depot on a rota who carry out shovel loading (filling the gritter vehicles) and co-ordinate the drivers' operation. These are the council's Highways Out of Hours' Officers who also respond to any environmental emergencies during nighttimes and weekends.
- 3.12 Brighton & Hove City Council was originally leasing the gritter vehicles but purchased these outright 3 years ago. This has provided better value in reducing costs on lease hire, as well as ensuring that the council owns and maintains its own vehicle assets. The reduction in vehicle leasing costs has meant that despite the 2 out of the past 3 winters being more severe than usual, the council has been in a better position to meet the increased expenditure arising from this. The council will need to explore options for the replacement of the gritter fleet over the next 5 years, and may be able to realise a residual re-sale value from the old fleet.
- 3.13 Brighton & Hove City Council's gritting routes complement the city's main road network and important public transport corridors. On our most extensive gritting routes, every bus route should be covered. For our full routes, we cover 156 miles, out of a total of 404 miles in the city. This year, the routes are being checked and uploaded onto a mapping system in order that we pick up any changes to the road network or bus routes.
- 3.14 For liability and practical reasons, the gritters must follow the defined routes unless directed otherwise by documented Duty Officer decisions. The council's winter service plan lays out the hierarchy and if we do any additional gritting, this needs to be justified and based on clear reasoning – e.g. for a water leak. We have to do what is reasonable and practicable within our available resources and timescales. 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.

- 3.15 Pavements are rarely treated except in severe and prolonged snowfall as our first priority is to the road network. Most pavements on gritter routes will receive a degree of treatment due to the spread width of the gritting operation. For complete coverage of pavements by hand spreading, operationally and practically this work requires a high level of resources, by which time the ice or snow has usually melted of its own accord. However, grit bins are provided around the city for residents and operatives to use.
- 3.16 There are three different routes, which are carried out depending on the weather conditions:
- Hilltops – 2 routes covering the coldest areas of the city (approx 1.5 hours each to complete)
 - Standard – 6 routes covering most of the city’s primary and bus routes but not the warmest areas (approx 2.5 hours each to complete)
 - Full – 6 routes covering all the city’s primary and bus routes (approx 3.5 hours each to complete).
- 3.17 The council provides over 350 grit bins throughout the city for self-help. We will also if required fill grit bins for emergency services, and can offer salt in small quantities from our stockpile for schools, emergency services and other priority agencies for use on their own property.
- 3.18 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 continued to receive supplies from its supplier albeit initially at a reduced rate. The contract has been re-tendered this year and additional resilience has been built into the specification, including the provision of a minimum amount of tonnes within 24 hours in an emergency situation, and the provision of a local holding depot with a permanently maintained contingency supply.
- 3.19 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.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Officers have held a planning meeting and maintain ongoing communication with Category 1 Responders (fire, police, NHS) and the bus service.
- 4.2 There has also been a meeting and ongoing liaison with the Communications team, Contact Centre Manager and Business Continuity Manager regarding the council’s public response to winter weather events.
- 4.3 A copy of the Winter Service Plan was sent out for consultation to the following stakeholders and any relevant comments incorporated into the plan/service:
- Cityclean
 - Cityparks
 - Transport Planning
 - Business Continuity

- Emergency Planning
- Insurance
- Press team
- Police
- NHS
- Brighton & Hove Bus Company

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The costs of providing the winter maintenance service are covered by a revenue budget of £227,000.
- 5.2 Any underspend in the revenue budget is carried over into the Winter Maintenance Reserve, as contingency for periods of extreme weather. 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 and 2008-9. A minimum of £250,000 is held in this reserve.

Finance Officer Consulted: Karen Brookshaw

Date: 16/10/09

Legal Implications:

- 5.3 The proposed Winter Service Plan will assist the Council to meet its statutory responsibilities in respect of ensuring, 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.)

Lawyer Consulted:

Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 30/09/09

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 we ensure that all areas of the city have accessible options for travel.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.5 Salt has an environmental impact; 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 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:

1. Winter Service Plan 2009-10

Documents In Members' Rooms

1. Winter Service Plan 2009-10 (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