

Scrutiny into Winter Service Plan

I understand that a one-off scrutiny panel hearing is taking place into how well prepared the council was, and how well it responded to the recent severe weather. I have a number of observations, comments and suggestions that I would appreciate considered in your deliberations.

First of all I would like to thank all council staff, services and members of the public who worked so very hard in difficult conditions and showed great fortitude. What was achieved by all was done in good heart, and I am sure everyone in the City is grateful for that.

We could though collectively have done so much better and I am sure so many of those that suffered injury and the misery of disruption could have been spared their troubles if we had been better prepared and organised.

I can't imagine the personal cost for residents and the cost to the local economy but it must be very great indeed. It is therefore vital that the council develops the logistics and resources to more efficiently and effectively tackle similar events in the future.

There are many points I could make, but I think chiefly the point I will make is that there was too little fore thought, and subsequent resource, targeted at maintaining sustainable travel modes.

As both a councillor representing a city centre ward and a resident living on a hill in the suburbs I saw both ends of the extremes of experience – but there is a common thread.

The experience in the suburbs was one of abandonment and total isolation. Bus routes were not maintained for their full reach; bus stops were not gritted, nor were pavements even on key pedestrian routes until the very last days of the prolonged thaw. The snow was much deeper and lasted much longer in the higher areas, but there seemed little appreciation of this in the allocation of the resources. Despite a willingness by members of the public to do their bit, grit bins were too few and even after lorries were able to get through were not replenished for several days at a time. Those with cars were often able to travel much sooner than those without. Anyone with a buggy or mobility impairment was cut off for weeks.

In the city centre while North Street and Western Road were quickly cleared with disproportionate attention, important local shopping areas of London Road and Lewes Road were stricken, especially during the pre Christmas ice. Key pedestrian routes leading off of West Hill to Brighton Station like Guildford Road were lethal. Many injuries occurred for people only needing to travel short distances by foot to get a train or bus. Again, not enough grit bins that people might help themselves and too little gritting of key pavements by the council.

My suggestions:

- In these sort of extremes no one should expect to be able to carry on as normal; it simply isn't possible. The priority then must be to help the greatest number of people to go about their essential business and to access food, medicines and vital services. Not everyone has access to a private vehicle, but everyone has access to the pavement and public transport. We must therefore heavily

prioritise access to public sustainable modes of travel over private vehicles on these occasions.

- A network of pedestrian routes primarily based on major bus routes but supplemented by connecting routes needs to be identified. Keeping these foot and bus routes open will enable people to travel across the city on foot and by bus. Only a single path alongside each bus route may be needed in places, but bus stops do need to be made safe throughout. Important destinations like local shops, pharmacies, medical centres and surgeries and transport hubs, etc need to be connected to this pedestrian network. Hilly areas and heavily trafficked pedestrian routes need to be connected too. The network needs to be established and widely advertised so that the public understand that they might use it to get around safely.
- Clearly the Council will struggle even with its human resources to open and maintain such an extensive network, so it is vital that residents are asked to help with this. Residents and businesses also need to be asked to open and maintain the paths in front of their properties. To facilitate this will need a large increase in the number of grit bins, strategically positioned, along with the logistics to keep them filled. In areas where residents don't have gardens and therefore may not possess a spade, shovels for public use need to be stored at community buildings. A great deal of public awareness and co-ordination is required.
- Opening road routes other than bus routes cannot be seen as a priority if a pedestrian/ bus/ train network is to be operated successfully. Many motorists venture out and get stuck causing obstructions and drawing in resources to help free them. It needs to be made very clear that motor travel that is not absolutely vital will only be adding to the risk of congestion and hampering efforts to get everyone else moving.
- While the efforts of the Council, other service providers and members of the public to help vulnerable people was truly admirable, I know there were many 'not on the books' that went for a long time without help. We must ensure that identifying likely vulnerable people is a responsibility shared more greatly with neighbours, and how to gain service provider assistance is made more apparent.
- A booklet sent to every household 'What to do when it snows' would seem a very good way of informing and gaining buy-in from the public. During the cold war the government felt it worthwhile to issue a pamphlet to households called Protect and Survive which was about what to do in case of nuclear war. Protect and Survive was very well read, though I suspect 'What to do when it snows' would be somewhat more useful.

Yours sincerely,

Pete West

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