

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

DATE: **WEDNESDAY 11 JULY, 2012**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT**

SUBJECT: **WINTER MAINTENANCE**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members on the extent of winter maintenance operations over the 2011-12 winter season and the performance of the Councils new Winter Maintenance Policy during the period

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 On 27th July 2011, a report was presented to Members of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing details of the new Winter Maintenance Policy and advising them of the arrangements that were in place for the coming winter period. The report included a recommendation that an appraisal of the new Policy together with a summary of winter maintenance operations should be presented to the Committee members after the 2011-12 winter period.

2.02 On 20th September 2011, the Executive approved the Councils revised Winter Maintenance Policy.

2.03 When compared to the previous three extremely cold winters, the 2011 -12 season was relatively mild and during the period there were only two minor snow events, the second event occurring in April 2012. The number of gritting turnouts for ice prevention was 65, which is also below the number undertaken in the previous three years. However the number of turnouts during the year is close to the average number over the past 10 years.

In total 3,998 tonnes of rocksalt was laid by the Council during the winter. (this compares to 9,025 tonnes used in 2010-11 and over 10,300 tonnes used 2009-10)

2.04 Because of the relatively mild conditions there were no difficulties in obtaining rocksalt and the strategic stocks held both by the Council and Welsh Government in the County were not required. The material is however stored in a sealed environment and will be available for use in future years.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The following paragraphs outline the areas of Service that were subjected to the Policy review.

3.02 Prioritisation of roads

Work has been on going to prioritise all of the roads within Flintshire into priority 1, 2 and 3 routes. The definition of each is contained in the Policy document and result from a Risk Assessment of each category of road on the highway infrastructure

A summary of each classification is as follows:

Priority 1 routes will be roads carrying substantial volumes of traffic having characteristics, which require protection from frost throughout the night. These routes form the spinal road network of the County and merit high priority to sustain the free flowing movement of traffic.

Priority 2 routes will consist of unclassified roads that form main distributor routes in both urban and rural areas and known problem areas i.e. sections of roads with significant gradients, exposed areas and other topographical features. These routes will be treated in periods of snow and prolonged ice once the Priority 1 routes are completed and subject to the availability of resources at that time.

Priority 3 routes will be all remaining roads. The treatment of these routes will normally be dependant upon the availability of appropriate resources following the satisfactory attention to priority 1 and 2 routes and will be restricted to operations carried out within normal working hours.

The percentage of the total road network treated as a Priority 1 by Flintshire County Council is well above the all Wales national average - Figure 1

Figure 1 Percentage of network treated per Authority



The new prioritisation has brought a consistency to the routes and ensured all the priority areas, including the primary access to schools, are treated when ice or snow is forecast.

Salt Bins and Heaps

3.03 The Streetscene supervisors have made progress in individually assessing the location of the existing salt bins and salt heaps against the strict criteria within the Policy. Whilst this work is not yet complete, all sites will be assessed before the start of the next winter period. All salt bins were filled at the start of the previous winter season and refilled again following snow conditions. In line with the Policy, this will be subject to the availability of rocksalt in future.

The Streetscene Service continued to provide salt bins and rock salt within Council establishments on request and on a rechargeable basis to the relevant Department. This included sheltered housing developments.

The Streetscene Service also continues to work with Community Councils in relation to the provision of additional salt bins. All Community Councils were able to purchase salt bins and rock, salt from Streetscene Services with the intention of supplementing the authority's own provision and to the benefit of the general public. The salt bins purchased by Community Councils and placed upon the adopted highway, with the prior approval of Streetscene Services, were distinguishable from Council salt bins and the future maintenance of the bins will be the Town and Community Council's responsibility.

Salt storage

3.04 A concrete base was constructed at Greenfield Recycling Park in September 2011 and a strategic reserve of 5,500 tonnes of rocksalt was procured by the Council for use when material was unavailable elsewhere. This additional material brings Flintshire's stock level, at the start of the winter, to 10,200 tonnes and provides additional resilience to the service.

In addition the Welsh Government has negotiated a lease agreement with the Council and has a store of 5,000 tonnes of rocksalt in Queensferry depot. This material will be made available to all North Wales Councils in the event of a shortage. The Welsh Government is also negotiating with the Council to lease a section of Halkyn depot for a permanent salt barn to house this material.

Type and quantity of rocksalt to be used

3.05 **(a) Carriageways** The Council gritting operations follow the standard guidance issued by Welsh Government as part of the Trunk Road Maintenance Management Policy and the Code of Practise for Highway Maintenance. The de-icing material used by the Council continues to be Safecoat and there have been no reported issues in respect of the rate of spread or the material used during the winter period.

(b) Footways Following successful trials, an alternative de-icing material is now used on footways in town centres, car parks and some sheltered accommodation. The product is called 'Safethaw' which is a brine solution mixed with agricultural by-product similar to that used on the highway. 'Safethaw' is sprayed by using a knapsack sprayer or a self propelled spray bar fitted to quadbikes and is applied in periods of heavy snow and prolonged icy conditions in accordance with the risk

assessment for the network.

The introduction has been a success although with limited applications due to the mild weather. The material purchased will be available for use in future years

The use of local contractors for snow clearing

3.06 The Authority employs 41 agricultural contractors to clear the highway during periods of snow. Each Contractor has a dedicated route which enables the authority to clear the entire adopted main highway network within the County. During snow conditions contractors may be hired at the discretion of the Duty Officer or his representative at previously agreed tendered rates. Although there were relatively minor snow falls during the past winter, the system was actuated on two occasions and both times the contractors responded well.

The use of local contractors for snow clearing has proved a very effective and efficient means to supplement the authority's fleet of gritters to remove snow from the adopted highway in a very short time scale. It is intended to carry on utilising this resource in future years.

Future community involvement in footway clearance

3.07 During 2010 – 11 a pilot scheme was introduced in the Buckley area to engage with local community volunteers to clear snow and ice by the provision of small quantities of rocksalt and tools. In line with the Policy, the initiative was introduced across the County during the past winter and all Town and Community Councils and Resident Associations were asked for their assistance in identifying interested groups or individuals willing to take part. Approximately 40 kits were distributed and the recipients will be contacted before the start of each winter to ensure they are still willing to partake in the work in future years.

Weather Forecasting Domain

3.08 Discussions took place with the Council's service provider, Meteogroup regarding installing an additional weather forecasting station closer to the coastal area to improve the accuracy of the forecast and the Council's response to it. These discussions are ongoing and no further decisions have been made at this time, however any proposals will be introduced in time for the 2012 – 13 season

Snow clearance arrangements at sheltered housing units

3.09 The winter maintenance service on publicly accessible roads and footpaths at sheltered accommodation units is now carried out by the Streetscene service with the caretaker/housing services clearing individual drives and paths. This provides Members and residents with a single point of contact for the service and a provisional budget has been allocated to the Environment Directorate for the provision of this service.

Number and type of gritting vehicles used for winter maintenance operations

3.10 The current number of front line gritters has been maintained, however options to provide multipurpose vehicles are being explored. In addition the following equipment was purchased and successfully utilised over the winter period:-

- 2 de-mountable gritter bodies for the narrow access sites.
- Quad- bikes currently utilised in other Streetscene services have been adapted for the application of 'Safethaw' through a spraybar system.

Streetscene

- 3.11** The additional resources provided by the combined Streetscene service are available to be allocated to winter maintenance in periods of greatest need. This provides flexibility and additional resilience to the service

Waste collections continued throughout the 2011 – 12 winter period with staff from all the Streetscene services involved in footway snow clearance in areas where collections were due to take place when snow had fallen.

Depot Arrangements

- 3.12** The service now operates predominately from the Alltami depot, supplemented by a satellite rock-salt storage facility at Halkyn which covers routes in the North of the County

- 3.13** The new policy has operated effectively over the 2011-12 season and should continue to be utilised in future years. The guidance notes for National Good Highway Maintenance Practise, recommends a full review of policy is regularly completed to ensure the Council complies with its statutory duty. The next review of the policy will take place after the 2013 – 14 winter season.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01** That Members of the Committee note the review of the Winter Maintenance Policy and the actions taken by the service during 2011 – 12 winter period.
- 4.02** That a full review of the Winter Maintenance service is undertaken after the 2013 – 14 winter season

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01** The 2011-12 budget for winter maintenance was £998, 595
- 5.02** The service reported an under spend during the year due to the milder weather and particularly due to the lower than yearly average number of snow events during the period

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01** Not applicable

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01** The supplier of the de-icing material have worked closely with the Environment Agency to understand the impact of the product on the environment.
- 7.02** The new storage facility at the Greenfield Recycling Park complies with environmental guidance.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 No impact

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 Winter maintenance operations on the highway infrastructure are carried out predominantly by the Streetscene Staff and resources supplemented by local agricultural contractors as necessary.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

None

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation has been undertaken with the following in the development of the policy

- All Members
- Town & Community Councils

12.00 APPENDICES

None

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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