

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 14th September 2021
Report Subject	Winter Maintenance Policy Review 2021-2023
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Streetscene
Report Author	Chief Officer – Streetscene & Transportation
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to seek Scrutiny comment for the review of the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy.

Winter services operations play a fundamental role in ensuring that highway networks are safe and available during adverse weather conditions from October through to April each year. The winter maintenance service is recognised as one of the most important functions that the highway authority provides. Maintaining access to the network is crucial for emergency services, businesses, social services, education and the general public.

This report outlines the current Winter Maintenance Policy (see Appendix A), the legislative requirements of providing such a service, and the actions taken by the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio to support the winter maintenance service operations. In addition, the report outlines the County's response to other adverse weather events, such as flooding and high winds.

We have committed to regularly reviewing the Winter Maintenance Policy and this report outlines the salient points of the most recent revision of the Winter Maintenance Policy being put forward for approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Scrutiny approves the outcome of the review of the Winter Maintenance Policy 2021-2023 (Appendix 1) and procedures for delivering the winter maintenance service operations, along with the County's response to other adverse weather events.
2	That Scrutiny supports the need to maintain the budget at present levels, 'top up' the reserve by £150k and carry forward an MTFs revenue pressure for 2023/24 onwards.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND OF WINTER MAINTENANCE POLICY
1.01	The Council, as the Highway Authority for County Roads, has a general duty, under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980, to maintain the highway network in a good state of repair so as to render it safe for ordinary traffic at all times of the year.
1.02	Highway authorities in England and Wales have a duty <i>“to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice”</i> (Highways Act 1980, Section A1 (TA) as modified by Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003)
1.03	In addition, under Section 150(1) of the Highways Act 1980, there is a requirement for the highway authority to remove an obstruction resulting from an accumulation of snow, subject to a number of factors stated in Section 150(3) of the 1980 Act.
1.04	Furthermore, the Traffic Management Act 2004 has placed a network management duty on all local traffic authorities, which requires authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving. In meeting the duty, authorities are required to establish contingency plans for dealing promptly and effectively with unplanned events, such as unforeseen weather conditions, in so far as is reasonably practicable.
1.05	<p>The legislation does not impose an absolute duty, but rather involves a balance between the degree of risk and the steps necessary to eliminate the risk. This legislation informs the best practice identified to highway authorities on winter service operations, which has changed in recent years.</p> <p>Given this duty, the industry has developed a best practice guide, the latest version of which is the Well Managed Highway Infrastructure 2016 Code of Practice (COP), which provides a broader view of asset management. It is supplemented by Practical Guidance from the National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG) which was issued in 2020. The COP reflects many years of operational practice and current issues and problems and is regarded as a benchmark by which local authorities will be assessed by both the general public and the courts should disputes occur.</p> <p>Flintshire County Council liaises with other North Wales highway authorities and the North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA) to ensure a consistent approach is adopted when reviewing operations and introducing changes or improvements.</p>
1.06	Under the COP, a Council must have a policy on winter maintenance services, which should be reviewed on a regular basis. In Flintshire, we currently review the policy every two years.

1.07	Last winter was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and operational working arrangements were changed to ensure the resilience of the service. For example, creation of “bubbles” with the crews, separate welfare facilities, drivers going straight to the gritting vehicles. The working arrangements last year worked well and we are looking to keep the benefits that were gained from these changes, but at the same time limit any wider disruption to the rest of the operational services. Our aim is to maintain the service levels set out in the policy, but should it become necessary, we may have to put similar contingency measures in place again to ensure the continuity and resilience of this priority service.
1.08	<p>The review of service was undertaken by officers from the Streetscene and Transportation portfolio and considered the following key areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the current service meet the statutory requirements? 2. Are there any changes to standards which should be incorporated into the new policy? 3. Are there any local concerns or complaints with the service which might require a change to working practices? 4. Are there any changes in local circumstances which would require changes to policy? 5. Is the current supply chain effective and sufficient to support the service? 6. Are current salt stocks sufficient to deliver the service effectively? 7. Are arrangements to treat car parks and footways sufficient?
1.09	The review concluded that the current operating model is adequate in responding to the risk presented during periods of adverse weather. The service is effective in the deployment of resource, whilst limiting the impact of disruption to the rest of the operational service and road users.
1.10	<p>The following factors have however resulted in increased costs for the service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developments to the resources and equipment required during the winter maintenance season, • Steadily increasing average numbers of callouts and application of preventative salting
1.11	The conclusion of the review is that the policy remains fit for purpose. However, we continue efforts to improve the timing of communications and the channels for communication both internally, through better use of technology, and externally, through increased access to social media.
1.12	Adverse weather arrangements (i.e. high winds, heavy rain) are planned in advance of the winter season and have now been included within the Winter Maintenance Operational Handbook, which had been revised and will be distributed to all personnel involved annually and updated as a controlled document throughout the season.
1.13	5 Duty Officers will be rostered throughout the winter period to monitor weather forecasts and decide on appropriate preventative action.

1.14	A minimum of 26 operational staff will be rostered to be on-call throughout the season to respond to adverse weather. There are also on-call highways response teams, if necessary, alongside the wider operational teams in times of prolonged adverse weather.
1.15	Normally, on receipt of a severe weather warning (high winds, flooding, snow event, etc.) an operational control room will be established in Alltami. It will be operated by staff from Streetscene Services, who will act as a dedicated point of contact for the Contact Centre staff and coordination of the response. The staff within the operational control room have direct contact with Streetscene Coordinators and Supervisors, who will be on-site to investigate complaints, inspect the network and mobilise dedicated gritting vehicles and operational teams under their direct control. It also acts as a single point of contact for the senior leadership team and corporate communications, through which communications will be made.
1.16	In the event that high winds are forecast, the details of the forecast are examined by the Duty Officer and consideration will be given as to whether or not to close the Flintshire Bridge (A548). The process to follow in the event that the bridge needs to be closed is set out within the updated Winter Maintenance Policy 2021-2023.
1.17	<u>Allocation of Salt Bins/Sandbags</u> Requests for additional salt bins across the county are subject to an assessment scoring matrix and must conform to the policy for the purpose of consistency. Requests from Community Councils will be supported with the installation of Green Bins.
1.19	The distribution of sandbags in the event of heavy rainfall and flooding will be applied as described in the Sandbag Policy adopted in September 2017.
1.20	Following the damage caused to the network by Storm Christoph in January 2021, a number of projects have continued throughout the Spring and Summer of 2021 to identify assets and responsibilities of those assets, and address any infrastructure issues in a number of areas across the County. This has resulted in infrastructure improvements, new maintenance programmes and response plans being developed in each case and a joint project group has been set up to oversee the developments and progress of each scheme.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	<p>The Winter Maintenance budget is ring-fenced and reserves are reviewed annually to ensure that adequate funding is available throughout the season.</p> <p>In recent years, the average number of turn-outs per season has increased steadily and the running costs of operations, including labour and fleet costs, have risen. Consequently, reserves have regularly been used to meet the shortfall in budget.</p>

	Given the increasing costs, it would be prudent to maintain the budget at present levels, 'top up' the reserve by £150k and carry forward an MTFS revenue pressure for 2023/24 onwards.
2.02	Winter maintenance operations on the highway network are carried out by Streetscene staff and resources are supplemented by local agricultural contractors as necessary.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The winter maintenance service has undertaken various risk assessments on the provision of road surface treatments, which are outlined within the policy.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>Consultation has taken place with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the Cabinet Member • Operational service teams and stakeholders • Neighbouring local authorities in relation to their Winter Maintenance Operations • North and Mid-Wales Trunk Road Agency (NMWTRA) • Trade Unions

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Revised Winter Maintenance Policy

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Highways Act 1980.
6.02	Railways and Transport Act 2003
6.03	Traffic Management Act 2004
6.04	Well-managed Highway Infrastructure (2016) (UKRLG)
6.05	Planning For Winter Service Delivery (2020) (NWSRG)
6.06	Quarmby Report – July 2010
6.07	Welsh Government Trunk Road Maintenance Manual
6.08	Welsh Government Advice Documents

6.09	WLGA Advice Documents
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7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Barry Wilkinson, Highway Network Manager Telephone: 01352 704656 E-mail: barry.wilkinson@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
8.01	Financial Year (FY): the period of 12 months commencing on 1 April
8.02	Budget: a statement expressing the Council's policies and service levels in financial terms for a particular financial year. In its broadest sense it includes both the revenue budget and capital programme and any authorised amendments to them.