
Meeting of Executive Members for City Strategy and Advisory Panel

11 September 2006

Report of the Director of City Strategy

Winter Maintenance Service 2006/07

Summary

1. This report advises Members of the outcome of a review of last season's Winter Maintenance Service in respect of the use of salt bins and the use of "safecote" as a treatment material. It also considers a request to carry out routine treatment of the Council's car parks. The report recommends no changes to the defined network for treatment of roads and footways and also the continued use of safecote.

Background

2. The Council, as part of its highway maintenance policy invests £513,000 per year by treating defined sections of its road and footway network to prevent the formation of frost and ice on the road and footways and to clear snow from both as necessary.
3. It is a statutory duty on highway authorities to ensure, so far as is reasonable practicable, the highway is safe for users during periods of frost, ice and snow. As a result a defined network of roads and footways were approved for treatment which amounted to almost 50% of the total network. The proposal is not to change any existing criteria used to trigger action nor any changes to the defined network which was formulated following consultation with Members and extensive research by officers.
4. A large part of the Council's footway treatment policy is the placement of 436 self-help salt bins around the City's footways. These consist of 86 funded by either Ward Committees or Community Services, the other 350 are funded by the Winter Maintenance Revenue Budget. A close assessment was carried out last winter as to their usage and the results are as follows.
5. Out of the 436 salt bins which were placed at the beginning of the winter maintenance season only 67 were actually replenished during the period between November and April. The rest were either not used sufficiently enough to warrant salt replenishment or were not used at all. Out of the 67 used only 50 were funded by the winter maintenance revenue budget i.e. 50 out of 350. Officers will continue to monitor their usage and report back future results to Members in due course
6. Last year approval was given to the trial of a de-icing agent known as Safecote. It is pleasing to report that the proposed efficiency savings that this material was trialled to bring did indeed materialise with no detriment to the winter maintenance service provision. Apart from the financial savings, produced by

using Safecote, the product proved to be a better de-icing agent than pure rock salt. The material gave a much wetter surface because the salt became a brine solution much more quickly than neat rock salt and in areas where water seepage occurred it seemed more resistant to wash off than pure rock salt.

7. In previous years for whatever reason there has always been one or two instances where residents or parish councils have contacted the Council to say a certain road had not been treated, even though officers knew the road had been treated and therefore there should be no problems. Last winter was the first winter that can be recalled where no such incidents were reported in respect of the perceived non-treatment of treatment routes. Again testament to how this de-icing agents appears to have improved the surface delivery.
8. The only concerns expressed about this product were by two residents and one Member who felt that the road surfaces were perhaps more slippery in dry conditions and they all queried whether or not the Safecote product could contribute to a reduction in skid resistance, particularly for cyclists. When investigated, the locations of the roads in question were split, approximately 50-50, between roads which were on the treatment network and roads which were not. Furthermore officers consulted with Kirklees Council where the Safecote product is being trialled on one of their many routes. They too had had concerns from residents regarding the slipperiness of dry surfaces particularly for two wheeled vehicles and when they investigated these concerns they found that all the roads in question were actually on routes treated by neat rock salt or on routes which were not treated and that none occurred on the route where Safecote was being used. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that which the Traffic Research Laboratory also came to when they tested the product and that is the skid resistance of roads which use Safecote are not in any way found to be more slippery than routes where neat rock salt is used or routes which are not treated at all. In view of this, if Members are so minded, it is proposed to continue with the use of the Safecote product in order that the efficiency savings and improved service delivery can continue in the forthcoming seasons.
9. During the 2006 summer months the Council's Health and Safety Liaison Panel asked officers to look at whether or not the Council's car parks should be routinely treated in periods of wintery weather. A thorough analysis including a risk assessment was carried out and came to the conclusion that the cost to routinely treat the Council's ground level car parks was (£350,000) prohibitive given the current scale of risk. However it also concluded that this risk should be monitored on an annual basis and a risk assessment will be carried out each Autumn prior to the winter season to determine whether or not there should be a change to our current policy. Annex 1 gives more detail on this issue.

Consultation

10. Consultation regarding the use of Safecote has been carried out with neighbouring Authorities and a number of reports commissioned by the Department for Transport and carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory have been assessed as to the effectiveness of the product.

Options

Use of Safecote

11. Option 1: To formally approve the use of Safecote as the proprietary de-icing product for York's road network.

12. Option 2: To revert back to the use of neat rock salt as the proprietary de-icing product for York's road network.

Analysis

13. Continued use of the Safecote product will continue to bring efficiency savings in the region of £21,000 per year, based on an average 70 callouts. It will also bring about environmental benefits in that it is less damaging to the green environment and to residents cars than pure rock salt.
14. Additionally it will bring additional benefits (Gershon savings) because, due to Safecote having a corrosive inhibitor, the plant used to spread the salt will have an extended life of two or three years. Whilst this may not bring a direct saving to this service budget it will have a saving on the Council's overall budgets in that plant maintenance will be reduced and the life expectancy of equipment can be extended.

Corporate Priorities

15. The winter maintenance service meets the corporate aims of "Take Pride in the City by improving quality and sustainability, creating a clean and safe environment". It also supports the priority of "Increase the use of public and other environmentally modes of transport" by providing a safe environments for all users of the highway.

Implications

Financial

16. The forecast efficiency implications are as follows:
Option 1 - £21,000 saving for 2006/07 onwards if approved.

Human Resources (HR)

17. There are no human resources implications.

Equalities

18. There are no equalities implications.

Legal

19. Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003, Amended Section 41(1A) of the 1980 Highways Act such that there is now a statutory duty to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the safe passage of the general public along the highway during periods of snow and ice.

Crime and Disorder

20. There are no crime and disorder implications.

Information Technology (IT)

21. There are no information technology implications.

Property

22. There are no property implications.

Other

23. There are no other implications.

Risk Management

24. In compliance with the Council's Risk Management Strategy, the main risks that have been identified in this report are risks arising to persons and property (physical), those which could lead to financial loss (financial), and non compliance with legislation (legal and regulatory).

25. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, if Option 1, to approve the continued use of safecote, is approved the risk will clearly decrease.

Recommendations

25. Members are recommended to:

a. Adopt the use of Safecote as the de-icing agent to be used during the winter maintenance season on the defined road network.

Reason: The trial of this material in 2005/06 has shown it to be a better de-icing agent than neat rock salt as well as bringing efficiency saving of £21,000.

b. Note the outcome of the analysis and risk assessment of the treatment of the Council's car parks in wintery weather and the proposal not to carry out routine treatment but to carry out an annual risk assessment.

Reason: The risks involved in not carrying out treatment balanced against the prohibitive costs of £350,000.

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Report Approved



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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

There are no specialist implications

Wards Affected

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

There are no relevant background papers.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Consideration of the Council's Duty to Grit Car Parks