
Executive

20 July 2010

Report of the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

Review of Winter Maintenance Policy

Summary

1. This report informs the Executive of the work undertaken to review the Winter Maintenance policy in preparation for the next winter maintenance period from November 2010. The report outlines the changes recommended to ensure the issues raised during the prolonged period of bad weather during December 09 to Jan 10 are addressed and seeks approval to this approach for amending the policy.
2. The main changes proposed are:
 - A modest increase in the precautionary gritting network
 - A modest increase in the precautionary gritting of footways.
 - Establishment of a list of secondary routes in times of extreme weather
 - 24/7 coverage by the York Contact Centre (YCC) during prolonged spells of bad weather and other emergency events
 - Formation of a Winter Maintenance Group (WMG) to take control of resources and communications during prolonged periods of bad weather.
 - Improvement in the information available on the CYC web site
 - Establishment of priority cycle routes (although this work is not complete)

Background

3. Last winter the City of York along with the rest of the United Kingdom experienced the worst weather conditions for around 25-30 years, resulting in
 - 20 days of snow and ice
 - 143 grit runs on the primary network over the full winter period compared to an average of 60-70

- 6000 tonnes of salt used compared to an average of 2500-3000 tonnes
4. During the severe weather period in December and January around 800 requests for service, complaints and Councillors or customer enquiries were received from various forms of communication to varying destinations. The issues could be broadly divided into'
 - Lack of highway gritting. These were in the main about roads not on the gritting network.
 - The condition of footpaths.
 - The condition of off road cycle ways.
 - Lack of available information
 - Difficulty in contacting the CYC especially out of hours.
 5. However, it was generally acknowledged that the authority dealt very well with the extreme conditions with no breakdown of the traffic infrastructure that was experienced in other parts of the country. As far as delivery of the existing policy is concerned the staff involved worked extremely hard in very difficult conditions for a sustained period of time including the Christmas New Year holiday period.
 6. In the light of the experience a decision to review the policy was taken to ensure lessons learned could be put to practical use in the contents and implementation of the policy. Some of the issues raised had wider implications for the way the authority runs services and deals with other emergencies or situations where contact demand increases. A group consisting of representatives from each directorate, chaired by the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods, has met on several occasions over the last 5 months to contribute to the review.
 7. Issues arising from the review:
 - Operations - coverage of the network, salt bins, cycle ways and footpath treatment.
 - Contingency plans in the event of restrictions on the supply of salt.
 - Treatment of surface level car parks.
 - Customer contact - normal and out of hours customer contact especially with the CYC Contact Centre.
 - Communication - use of web based material, working with press and radio and other ways to communicate with residents.
 - Use of IT.

- Emergency Planning - a review of the links during extreme weather conditions with the emergency planning framework.
 - Multi agency working - ensuring all interested CYC departments and any external agencies (police, fire, ambulance, PCT etc) are involved and informed as needed.
8. The Council's winter maintenance policy was last reviewed in October 2009 in preparation for the 2009/10 winter period. The current policy is well established and tested and requires the treatment of 320km of road (44% of network), around 22km of footpath (less than 3% of all footpaths) and 36km of off-road cyclepaths (45% of network). The policy sets out gritting practices, priorities and procedures. This document is a public document, available on the Councils website, and at the time of review in the autumn was publicised in preparation for the winter ahead.
 9. The Department for Transport has announced an independent national review into the resilience of Transport systems to periods of inclement weather. The outcome of this review would need to feed into our local policy review, especially around the issue of maintaining salt supplies. It is expected that the review will publish findings in September.

Officer review

10. The Winter Maintenance Group chaired by the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods has met on several occasions over the last 5 months to feed into the review. The team consists of representatives from each directorate to cover the issues highlighted.
11. A "talkabout" survey of 1000 residents was undertaken to seek feedback on the policy and a summary of the outcomes of the survey is contained within Annex 1. The full report can be seen in the Market Research and Consultation area of the CYC intranet.
12. Officers have also attended ward committees explaining how the current policy is delivered and seeking feed back on experiences during bad weather and things customers would like to see included in the policy.
13. A full review of the winter maintenance policy has taken place with regards
 - primary route coverage
 - secondary route coverage
 - the provision of self help salt bins
 - footpath treatment
 - off road cycle way treatment
 - emergency cover and working with other agencies

- ensuring the needs of vulnerable groups are prioritised.
16. In coming to a decision on the above issues we have taken into account the issues that were raised by concerned residents and members during the winter period details shown in Annex 4, feedback from the Ward Committees and the “Talk about” survey.

Primary route coverage

17. All current routes have been reviewed under the criteria for primary treatment. The criteria to determine the primary routes is:
- All primary (A class) roads and all B class roads
 - Public transport and school bus routes
 - Access roads to Park & Ride sites
 - Areas close to shops, post offices and schools
 - Links between villages and main roads

A map of the existing routes with proposed additions is shown in Annex 2. The cost of treating the additional roads is minimal and can be absorbed within current budgets.

Secondary route coverage

18. During last years extreme weather it became clear that CYC needed a policy for treating roads not included in the primary route coverage. It is proposed that in times of extreme conditions additional roads may be treated or cleared as resources allow. In order to determine which roads could receive treatment the following criteria has been used:
- have minimum width 5m that are not regularly obstructed by parked cars
 - are links between other roads (no cul de sacs)
 - serve areas of dense population, care homes or schools
 - form part of a logical route

A map of the streets under consideration for inclusion in the secondary routes is shown in Annex 2. The secondary routes will be confirmed in the policy manual. There is no guarantee that these roads will be treated. The decision on when these roads would receive treatment would be determined by the Winter Maintenance Group, and treatment will be dependant on the roads being free from obstruction such as parked cars. It is extremely unlikely that roads outside this secondary list would ever be treated or cleared.

19. Any treatment of secondary routes would not be covered within existing budgets for winter maintenance and, as in previous periods of bad weather, would likely result in an overspend of the winter maintenance budgets.

Self help salt bins

20. It is not proposed to add additional salt bins to the current list of bins already provided unless Ward Committees ask and pay for them. However a list of suitable locations for salt will be drawn up in consultation with the wards. In times of extreme winter conditions it is proposed to serve these additional locations with disposable bags of salt. The bags will hold around 0.5 tonnes of salt. A photograph of the proposed bag is shown in Annex 7. The locations and ownership of the current bins are shown in Annex 2. In view of comments in the Talkabout survey it is proposed to include details of salt bin locations in the ward committee newsletters.

Footpath treatment

21. A review of the current footpaths that are treated has added several footpaths. These can be seen in Annex 2. Treatment of additional footpaths during extreme weather will be directed by the Winter Maintenance Group, and will be subject to available resources.

Off road cycle ways

22. The spreading of salt on cycle ways does not necessarily clear them of snow and ice, in order for salt to be activated it requires significant traffication which is not provided by cycle use. For that reason during cold weather we tend to use grit sand mixed with rock salt to provide additional traction.
23. Working with the CYC cycling officer it is proposed to identify the most heavily used 'commuter' routes for priority treatment during severe weather. A network of cycle counters has been established as part of the Cycling City project and this will be used to prioritise the off-road network. Any additional work will be subject to available resources and determined by the Winter Maintenance Group.
24. A specialised Euromec maintenance vehicle has been purchased with Cycle City funding which will only be used on the cycle route network and will assist other existing narrower maintenance vehicles in the clearance and gritting of the off-road routes. Work to amend barriers, to improve access to these routes, for this vehicle and existing narrower vehicles is ongoing, this is proposed to be complete by the end of summer 2010.
25. Possibilities for the treatment of the Millenium Bridge, which is an important part of the cycle network, are being explored. The construction of the bridge, conventional materials used for de-icing could result in accelerated deterioration of the bridge structure resulting in earlier than designed maintenance costs. As yet no suitable agent for de-icing this bridge has been found. However work is continuing on trying to find a safe option.

Surface level car parks

26. The treatment and removal of snow and ice from surface level car parks is problematic. Whilst gritting can be carried out using a small Husky type machine, this is ineffective at removing snow and ice in any significant volumes. Parked cars give limited space for larger vehicles to manoeuvre and

manual clearance is very labour intensive and very expensive to carry out. Attempts to clear some of the larger car parks last year resulted in damage to surfacing and the removal of white lining.

27. It is proposed that on request precautionary gritting of car parks can be carried out as happens under the existing policy. Decisions to clear snow and ice from surface level car parks will be taken by the Winter Maintenance Group as resources will allow.

Winter Maintenance Group

28. During the recent severe weather period a group consisting of representatives from all directorates met at the Eco Depot to coordinate the council's response. This action replaced the opening of the Severe Weather Control Room, which formed part of the policy when City Strategy was the winter maintenance client.
29. The new group proved successful, so in future once certain conditions are reached it is proposed that the Winter Maintenance Group will be convened. All decisions about use of resources would be referred to the group who would meet as often as the conditions require. The primary function of the group would be to co-ordinate the CYC response to the weather and ensure,
 - All available resources are used in an appropriate way to ensure the best response possible to the conditions
 - The needs of vulnerable groups are considered
 - All agencies are co-ordinated in their response
 - Appropriate and timely co-ordination of information to elected members and the public

The proposed specification for the Winter Maintenance Group, which will be included in the policy is included as Annex 3.

Customer Contact, York Contact Centre, (YCC)

30. Recognising the need to provide 24/7 coverage during times of emergency or severe weather we are looking to remodel the current out of hours call answering provision at the Eco-depot to be included within the YCC responsibilities. This will provide a more customer focussed service and have the capacity to deal quickly with a sudden increase in call volumes whilst maintaining a professional image for the authority.
31. In order to ensure there is capacity we are exploring the options open to us these include;

Home Working

32. This will provide skilled people to take calls and contact appropriate services 24/7 as required without the need to create additional office capacity or deal with transport issues that may arise if roads become unusable.

There will be additional costs associated with 'stand by' duties, night and weekend working.

These proposals will require a change of staff contracts terms and conditions with some start up costs and ongoing maintenance costs for IT infrastructure etc. However, this approach is in line with increased flexible working across YCC services and in line with the "office of the future" agenda being trialled as part of the Admin/Accom project.

Shared service

33. We are also exploring opportunities for the current Warden Call/Adult & Children's Services for potential solutions to shared resource opportunities as they already manage out of hours cover.

Meetings are taking place with North Yorkshire Police to identify and explore other potential opportunities to share the CCTV resource and any other options.

There are some potential risks in the last two options where there may be no or limited customer services experience and service knowledge – associated training requirements are being investigated further.

E-mail

34. Processes have been improved so that under normal working conditions these are actioned on the same day as received (or on following working day if received overnight and on a Monday if received during the weekend).

However, during prolonged periods of bad weather or during other emergency situations additional resources will be in place to ensure all e-mails are responded to on the same day or where critical issues are raised, these will be handled immediately. Our new systems in the future will allow automatic feedback to be generated to customers when the service request has been actioned and closed but only where we have these details and permission to use from the customer.

Work is progressing to develop a dedicated resource to manage contact from Members.

IT & T

35. The highway team now have access to the York web site so that information to the public can be updated as required.

36. The council's web assistant, who looks after web content as a whole, transferred from ICT to Marketing and Communications in May, and this has speeded up the ability to update the website content in an emergency or severe weather situation
37. The gritting routes and salt bin maps will be upgraded to allow more detailed inspection on the York Map format.

Network Management

38. A representative from Network Management will be on the Winter Maintenance Group to ensure resources are directed as required and also co-ordinated with neighbouring authorities and the Highways Agency.
39. The variable message signs will be used to warn drivers of bad weather and road conditions.

Communications

40. External media were reasonably positive in reporting gritting efforts. Key messages about changes in gritting arrangements as salt stocks ran low were communicated through the media and website. There were positive features in the Press, Radio York and on Look North they were understanding of the council's position. Interviews with public in the street (known as 'vox pops') were mostly supportive.
41. A member of the press team will be part of the winter maintenance group, ensuring communications with members and the public are timely and appropriate.
42. Daily updates from the team were established. It is proposed to implement these updates once the Winter Maintenance Group is convened. The recent research among talkabout panel members has indicated the need for greater publicity about the existence of the web updates and this will be addressed in any future severe weather event.
43. York Contact Centre will have a representative sitting on the Winter Maintenance Group, this will ensure that up to date information is relayed to the Contact Centre and in turn this information will be relayed to members and the public when enquires are received.
44. It is proposed to hold an open day at the EcoDepot on Saturday 9th of October, where members and the public can view plans, proposals and equipment.
45. Once the new policy is complete, there will be a redesign and relaunch of the leaflet 'Clearing snow and ice' which shows the maps of the areas to be covered by the policy. The publicity around this will be incorporated into the Your City and Your Ward publications

Neighbourhood Management Unit

46. NMU, in partnership with York CVS will create a volunteer register for each ward in the City. Using this information, consulting with local residents and in conjunction with the emergency planning team, they will explore the role of the community in emergency situations with a view to establishing community based plans.

Emergency planning and Multi Agency Working

47. The issues arising over the winter of 2009/10 are now covered by the proposed Winter Maintenance Group.
48. Emergency Planning are working with Government Office to review the effectiveness of the "Salt Cell" and issues around the salt suppliers ability to meet demand into the next winter period and beyond.
49. Emergency Planning will liaise with and co-ordinate multi agency working - ensuring all interested CYC departments and any external agencies (police, fire, ambulance, PCT etc) are involved and informed as needed once the Winter Maintenance Group is convened.

Adults, Children & Education

50. The list of elderly and vulnerable people is currently being updated in preparation for the next winter period.
51. Adult Services will ensure that ALL home care services maintain regular contact with the YCC so that customer enquiries about their care can be answered without delay. This was the one thing that most customers wanted to ring and check for - that their carers were still going to visit. All CYC Adult Care services need to ensure regular updates on the status of their services are provided to YCC.

Salt Supplies

52. The highways team and emergency planning have attended meetings with other authorities and regional Government office to review the salt supply situation and the operation of the Government Salt Cell during the bad weather. There is an acceptance that the cell needs to be reviewed to ensure supplies are properly co-ordinated. There is a concern that the suppliers are unlikely to have the capacity to get all authorities restocked before the start of the next winter period.
53. Every effort will be made to bring our supply to 3000 tonnes, which is the capacity level of the salt barn. Members will be updated on this situation as things progress. We are now optimistic that the barn will be at full capacity before the start of the winter maintenance period.
54. A proposal for restricting salt use in times of salt shortage is contained in Annex 5. This was produced and used last winter and proved to be very effective in reducing salt use.

Consultation

55. Consultation has been undertaken through a special Talkabout survey and officers' attendance at Ward Committee meetings.

Corporate Priorities

56. Through the proposed measures Communities and Neighbourhoods supports delivery of

the Thriving City, Sustainable City, Safer City, Inclusive City and Effective Organisation themes from the corporate strategy.

Implications

Financial Implications

57. There are no financial implications from the proposals in this report for a normal winter with the exception of standby cover for the YCC. The available budgets will cover the amendments to the service during a normal winter. If the service experiences a further severe winter and secondary action is required this will result in financial pressures.

Human Resources (HR) and other implications

58. Issues around 24hr coverage at the YCC will be dealt with as part of the review of the current organisation review within customer services.

Equalities

59. This report has taken into consideration the impact of the Council's Equality Strategy when recommending the proposed winter maintenance operations.

Legal

60. Under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 (modified on 31st October 2003, by Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Act 2003.) The council as *"the highway authority for a highway maintainable at the public expense are under a duty ... to maintain the highway. And In particular, a highway authority are under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice."*
61. Section 150 of the Highways Act 1980 imposes a duty upon authorities to remove any obstruction of the highway resulting from "accumulation of snow or from the falling down of banks on the side of the highway, or from any other cause".
62. The Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a network management duty on all local traffic authorities in England. It requires authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic

moving.

63. A member of the public who clears snow from a footpath would only become liable for any injuries suffered by a user of the path if they acted negligently. In effect this is likely to require them to have made the situation worse through their actions, for an injury to have occurred and for the injury to be a reasonably foreseeable consequence of their actions. We are not aware of any case law on this issue – which tends to suggest that the risk may be more theoretical than real. Westminster City Council have published advice which is included in Annex 6. Following such advice should remove any residual risk.

Crime and Disorder

64. There are no crime and disorder issues.

Information Technology (IT)

65. IT issues are dealt with in the report.

Property

66. There are no property implications.

Other

67. There are no other implications in this report.

Risk Management

68. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, the main risks that have been identified in this report are:

- Strategic Risks,
- Physical Risks,
- Financial Risks,
- People Risks,

69. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood the risk score for all of the above has been assessed at less than 16. This means that at this point the risks need only to be monitored, as they do not provide a real threat to the achievement of the objectives of this report.

Recommendations

70. Members are asked to
- a) Note the work carried out so far.
 - b) Approve the approach for amending the winter maintenance policy in particular:
Approve the minor changes to the primary routes

Approve the secondary routes proposals in times of severe weather
Approve the consultation with ward committees on the location and provision of self help salt bins

Approve the revised approach to out of hours contact with the YCC and improvements in communication with members and residents.

- c) Note the situation with salt supplies nationally
- d) Note the open day to take place in October following the review of the policy.

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Report Approved **Date** 07.07.2010

Sally Burns
Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods

Report Approved **Date** 07.07.2010

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

