
Meeting of the Executive Members for City Strategy and Advisory Panel

10 September 2007

Report of the Director of City Strategy

WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE 2007/08

Summary

1. This report advises Members of the outcome of a review called for by a resolution at the EMAP City Strategy revenue budget estimates 2007/08 Committee. The resolution required an efficiency saving of £10,000 from winter maintenance.

Background

2. It is a statutory duty for highway authorities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the highway is safe for users during periods of frost, ice and snow.
3. The Council as part of its highway maintenance policy invest around half a million pounds each year treating a defined 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. The approved policy was set out in 1998 and describes the extent of the defined road network and a limited footway priority network.
4. Last year was a particularly mild winter and there was no need to open the emergency control room. In fact we had very little snowfall and carried out only 50 treatments of the road network (70 being the average) and 6 treatments of the footway network.
5. At present the Council treats around 48% of its road network, the national average being 40%. This is done by Neighbourhood Services using Safecote, an environmentally friendly de-icing agent. There are ten defined road routes around the City. These routes, approved by Members, were originally developed by a number of highway engineers, using their knowledge and wide experience of York's roads network, together with specific thermal characteristics and consideration of the climatic domain influences across York. These routes were examined in 1998 by Vaisala who carried out a route optimisation project for the City of York Council. This confirmed the City Council's routes were, in the main, extremely optimum and route efficient, in fact we had a route efficiency rating above 70% which is a percentage advised by the Audit Commission Guide Lines in respect of treatment route lengths. Since 1998 there has been additions to the road network following requests from Members, members of the public, parish councils and others, but these additions were only included if they met the specific criteria laid down in the

Council's winter maintenance policy. The roads covered by the Council include the main public transport routes and busy school bus routes, access to park and ride sites, and main car parks, areas close to shops, post offices, schools, residential buildings, main links between villages and main roads.

6. Prior to a change in the legislation in 2004, footways were not routinely treated when wintry weather was forecast. Since the 2004 winter season the Council has treated a limited defined footway network which is mainly made up of city centre streets, footways that link the railway station and main car parks to the city centre and two shopping areas, at Acomb and Haxby. Treatment only takes place when conditions dictate.
7. A large element 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. Over the last three years close assessments have been carried out as to the usage of the self help salt bins and the results are as follows:-

Year	Number of Salt Bins	Number Replenished	Number barely used or not used at all
2004/5	400	27	373
2005/6	436	67	369
2006/7	436	17	419

8. Last year Members requested that some form of sticker or badge was placed on the salt bins to indicate the salt was free for public use. Unfortunately there was not sufficient time to arrange this for last year before all the salt bins went out following approval of the report. Arrangements have been made for plates to be placed on all the salt bins, which go out this coming season. The plates will indicate the salt is free for public use.
9. Officers also considered the possibility of consolidating the ten road routes into nine by removing some of the long established carriageway salting routes from the network. The streets which were considered feasible to be removed are attached as Annex 1. This would still leave us with ten routes as it would not be possible to consolidate the remaining routes down to nine and still have a route efficiency of 70%, nor would we be able to comply with the code of practice guidelines which say all routes must be able to be completed within a two hour time period. To actually consolidate ten routes to nine more radical work would be needed to remove additional road lengths, such as links into villages. This has considerable implications and officers seek Members advice in whether or not further extensive work on this should be carried out. Removing long established and relatively well used routes from the definitive treatment list needs very careful consideration as it may not turn out to be the efficiency saving envisaged.

Discussion

10. Members can see from the information provided for the last three years the number of self help salt bins that have actually been used by the public is considerably less than the number the Council positioned. An option therefore is to keep the 86 number ward committee/community service salt bins out plus

the 100 number of well used City of York Council salt bins, 100 being the most used in any of the three years monitored.

11. Reducing the number of salt bins from 436 to 186 would make an efficiency saving of £10,000. Additionally each year where the bins are brought back around 10 are found to be vandalised to a state that they are beyond repair. This means that the purchase of new salt bins each year at a cost of £380 each has to be made from the winter maintenance revenue budget. If Members approve a reduction in the number of bins based on the fact many of the bins are not used or used very rarely, this would effectively make a further saving of £3,800 in not having to buy in new replacement bins.

Option

12. Option 1 - To reduce the number of self help salt bins placed around the Councils network from 436 to 186, specifically leaving only the ones frequently used over the last three winters and those funded by other parties.
13. Option 2 - Continue as we do at present and position all the salt bins out this coming winter and continue to monitor the situation. This would then be reported back to Members as part of next years winter maintenance review.
14. Option 3 - Carry out further work regarding the removal of a number of long established carriageway routes from their winter maintenance definitive list.
15. Option 4 – Discontinue work on removing any long established carriageway routes from the winter maintenance definitive list.

Analysis

16. Option 1 – Reducing the number of self help salt bins from 436 to 186 would bring an efficiency saving of £14,000 but it would bring increased customer dissatisfaction and may have a detrimental effect on the Councils winter maintenance strategy for footway treatment which in turn could lead to an increase in third party winter maintenance claims from people slipping on the footway.
17. Option 2 – There would be no efficiency savings and the required saving of £10K would have to be achieved elsewhere from the highway maintenance budget. There would be no increase in customer dissatisfaction, nor would there be any detrimental effect on the Councils winter maintenance strategy for footway treatment.
18. Option 3 – Removing some long established streets from the winter maintenance network definitive list will certainly lead to increase customer dissatisfaction. It would more than likely increase the Councils corporate costs in respect of additional third party liability winter maintenance claims. However, should Members wish officers to continue looking at this option it is likely it would bring in efficiency savings in the region of £15,000, but Members must consider that should this lead to only one increase in the number of claims, this efficiency saving will be wiped out as the Council now pays out the first £50,000 of any claim made against it.

19. Option 4 – This would mean there would be no prospect of any efficiency savings being made in respect of reducing the number of routes but it would keep Councils winter maintenance policy strong, coherent and ensure winter maintenance claims continue to be repudiated ensuring an overall corporate saving to the Council, as well as maintaining its excellent reputation in this field.

CONSULTATION

20. This reduction in salt bins will be reviewed and the outcome of this efficiency saving will be reported back to Members as part of next years winter service review report.
21. Members should note that over the summer months of 2008 as part of the review their views will be sought on the implications of removing some of the bins which are not used much or not used at all.
22. Members should note this process does not effect any ward committee provision and members will still be able to provide any additional salt bins via ward committee provision in the usual way.

Corporate Priorities

Maintenance of the public highway has a direct impact on several of the Council's corporate aims and priorities:

23. Corporate Aim 1: (Environment)

Take pride in the City by improving quality and sustainability, creating a clean and safe environment.

Specific priorities:

- 1.1 Increase resident satisfaction and pride with their local neighbourhoods.
- 1.2 Protect and enhance the built and green environment that makes York unique.
- 1.3 Make getting around York easier, more reliable and less damaging to the environment.

24. Corporate Aim 3: (Economy)

Strengthen and diversify York's economy and improve employment opportunities for residents.

Not directly relevant to any of the specific priorities, but good quality highway infrastructure is vital to the local economy.

25. Corporate Aim 4: (Safer City)

Create a safe City through transparent partnership working with other agencies and the local community.

Specific priority:

- 4.7 Make York's roads safer for all types of user.

26. Corporate Aim 8: (Corporate Health)

Transform City of York Council into an excellent customer-focused "can do" authority.

Specific priority:

8.9 Manage the Council's property, IT and other assets on behalf of York residents.

Implications

Financial

- 27. The forecast efficiency implications are as follows:
- 28. Option 1 - £14,000 saving for 2007/8 onwards if approved.
- 29. Option 3 – Potential £15,000 saving for 2008/9 onwards if approved.
- 30. Option 2 and 4 – No savings.

Human Resources (HR)

- 31. There are no human resources implications.

Equalities

- 32. There are no equalities implications.

Legal

- 33. Section 41(1A) on the 1980 Highways Act puts a duty on the highway authority to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable safe passage of the general public along the highway during periods of snow and ice.

Crime and Disorder

- 34. There are no crime and disorder implications.

Information Technology (IT)

- 35. There are no information technology implications.

Property

- 36. There are no property implications.

Other

- 37. There are no other implications.

Risk Management

38. In comparison the risk management strategy, the main risk associated that are being identified in this report are risks arising to persons and property (physical), these which could lead to financial loss (financial), and non-compliance with legislation (legal and regulatory), as well as being unpopular leading to increased dissatisfaction with the Council (Reputation).
39. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, only the implementation of Option (3) would lead to an increased risk to the authority.

Recommendations

That the Executive Member for City Strategy be advised to :

40. Note the report and approve Option 1, namely to reduce the number of self help salt bins which are disturbed around the network for the general use of the public;
41. Give advice in respect of Option 3, whether or not to continue investigating the possibility of reducing the number of carriageway treatment routes from ten to nine.

Reason:

42. To ensure the current Council winter maintenance policy is robust whilst ensuring the budget is expended in the most cost effective way based on the Council's assessed priorities.

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Report Approved



Date 24/08/07

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Report Author

Wards Affected

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

There are no relevant background papers.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Winter Maintenance Gritting Routes – Roads to potentially be omitted.