

Cabinet

4th October 2011

Report of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods

Review of Severe Weather Response and the Winter Maintenance Policy

Summary

1. This report informs the Cabinet of the work undertaken to review the council's severe weather response and the winter maintenance policy in preparation for the winter 2011/12. The report outlines the changes recommended to ensure the issues raised during the prolonged period of bad weather during November and December 2010 are addressed. These amendments will be piloted and reviewed during the winter season 2011/12, with a view to making them permanent policy for 2012/13.

Background

2. Last winter, the city experienced the worst weather conditions for around 25-30 years, including heavy snow falls and extremely cold conditions over a sustained period. These conditions placed services delivered by the council under extreme pressure, and limited day to day activity in the city.
3. At the time, a cross council winter maintenance group was established and chaired by a senior officer. This group met on a daily basis when conditions were most challenging and monitored impact on service delivery, including:
 - Closure of some schools
 - Limited travel in the city
 - Customer contact centre and out of hours arrangements
4. The winter maintenance service came under significant pressure but still successfully:

- Carried out 111 grit runs on the primary network over the full winter period compared to an average of 60-70
- Identified and treated secondary routes on eight occasions
- Placed 50 self help salt bags at agreed locations
- Used 6,000 tonnes of salt compared to an average of 2,500-3,000 tonnes

Resources used

- 10 gritting vehicles
- 1 trailer gritter
- 1 Euromech machine for cycle tracks
- 2 'Husky' small snow plough/gritters (now beyond economical repair)
- Hire small snow plough
- 2 loan 4x4's for Social Services visits

5. In addition:

- The winter maintenance group worked well and will be re-established during future extreme weather conditions.
- The response from the communities themselves was truly astounding, supporting the vulnerable and ensuring their wellbeing, the offers of help from people with four-wheel drive vehicles, people coming out of their homes armed with shovels, farmers with their tractors pulling cars to safety – the examples are endless and inspirational.
- The parent texting system used by schools and the general communications on the internet and local radio had a positive impact on keeping residents informed.

Proposals for 2011/12

6. Improvements have been made to the customer contact centre, including access to information; opening hours; out of hours cover; email handling; engagement with vulnerable groups and organisations.

7. The winter maintenance service has reviewed its resources for 2011/12 with some additional pieces equipment that will be hired in on trial with a view to evaluating and testing before consulting and making a recommendation for 2013/14. These are listed below.

- 10 gritting vehicles
- 1 trailer gritter
- 2 snow ploughs attachments purchased for Grounds Maintenance tractors
- 1 Euromech machine for cycle tracks
- 4 footpath snow blowers procured during the summer
- 3 large tow behind salt spreaders
- 3 small tow behind salt spreaders

Additional resources for trial period winter 2011/12

8. Four mini tractors with mechanical snow brushes and rear salting attachment will be hired in for the winter period.

Carriageway Salting

9. The existing primary routes, which can be accessed on the council website, maximises the use of our resources and have been tested over the years, therefore there are no proposals to make changes to the existing primary carriageway routes.

10. It is proposed to identify and record in the Winter Maintenance Manual, the designated secondary routes, using information from last winter. Treatment of these secondary routes will be at the discretion of the Winter Maintenance Group (WMG) who will give due regard to the vulnerable people of the city. These routes will be clearly defined within the Manual for 2011/12 and will be serviced in a systematic way. At this stage, it should be considered that all other roads will not be treated during the initial period of heavy snow.

Routine Footpath Treatments

11. Designated footpaths will be treated on the first day of a predicated period of three or more consecutive days where the temperature at midday is forecast remain below freezing. A list of these can be found in the Winter Maintenance Manual on the council's website at

<http://www.york.gov.uk/transport/roads/gritting/grit/>. The need for repeat treatment will be assessed on a daily basis by the duty officer (WMDO) with knowledge of the weather forecast, resources and salt availability.

12. It is proposed to undertake treatments with the four mini tractor units, supplemented by minimum manual spinners. The usual starting time is 04:30 hrs. Estimated treatment time for completion of all designated priority footpaths is 2 hours.

Heavy Snow Footpath Treatments

13. It is proposed to undertake treatments using the four mini tractors and the Euromech with snow brush attachments and rear salt spreaders. An initial clearing pass with the units will leave a usable surface with further passes as resources are available.
14. A full list of elderly person's homes and sheltered accommodation which will receive treatment during heavy snow is also available in the Winter Maintenance Manual. Access to 4x4 vehicles for mobile wardens to maintain visiting access to vulnerable people will be managed on request.
15. All post offices are identified in the Winter Maintenance Manual and are routinely treated for gritting, salting and snow clearance.
16. On completion of the designated foot path routes, the WMG will meet and decide how best to deploy resources based on known and predicted conditions.

Routine Off-Road Cycle Track Treatments

17. It is proposed to use the same trigger as the footpaths to determine treatments for off-road cycle tracks. A list of these can be found in the Winter Maintenance Manual. The four mini tractors and the Euromech machine will be utilised to undertake the treatment, as the footpaths will be completed by 06:30-07:00 hrs. All designated off road cycle tracks will be treated by 12:00 hrs.

Heavy Snow Cycle Track Treatments

18. The routes set out in paragraph 13 above will be treated first. It is envisaged that during periods of heavy snow, the WMG will meet and decisions regarding treatments will be taken by the group.

19. It is proposed to undertake treatments using the four mini tractors and the Euromech with snow brush attachments and rear salt spreaders. An initial clearing pass with the units will leave a usable surface with further passes as resources are available.
20. It is not possible to use metal snow ploughs on some off road cycle routes, due the raised centre cyclist pedestrian demarcation line. It should be noted that during periods of prolonged heavy snow it will not be possible to maintain a constant “back to tarmac” running surface. During these periods cyclist will need to use the treated carriageway network.

Salt Bins

21. Currently 307 salt bins are placed in agreed locations in early November. During the prolonged period of heavy snow last winter, 50 1-ton self-help bags were placed in designated locations throughout the city. On collection it was found that minimal use had been made of the majority of the bags. This may have been due to the timing of the placements. It is proposed to replace these bags with 50 extra standard salt bins taking the total salt bins to 357. These will go out with the other bins in early November.

Snow Wardens

22. As part of the Council’s priority to Build Strong Communities, a Snow Warden Scheme has been introduced and we currently have in excess of 80 volunteers for Snow Wardens. This also works well with the Love Where You Live campaign. Please see **Annex 1** for scope and proposals. The appropriate training is scheduled before the start of the winter period.

Salt Deliveries

23. This winter we will be trialling an electronic stock control system linked to our suppliers that will ensure continuation of supply based on weekly usage, and ensure adequate stocks over the Christmas break. This is subject to the national position on salt stock, availability of supply and advice from government (The Winter Salt Network Group, formally ‘Salt Cell’).

Consultation

24. Consultation has been undertaken with the council's cycling officer. The report had been positively received as it allows cyclists to identify their own safe routes.

Options

25. The cabinet are asked to note the amendments to practices and proposed trials of the trigger points and utilisation of alternative equipment for secondary routes, footpaths and cycle tracks for the winter period of 2011/12 with a view to receiving a full report on these trials by September 2012, ready for future years.

Analysis

26. All equipment, supplies and timings must respond to the weather conditions facing the City at any one time. This report builds on the lessons learnt from previous years and looks to deliver some certainty to the residents of York so they fully understand the likely road conditions in extreme weather. These trials are being backed up with the availability to the public, of real time visual conditions, transmitted from two cameras directly to our web site.

Implications

27. It is important that all the new equipment is tested in real conditions and that the service is capable of achieving the service targets set out in this report.
 - a) **Financial:** It is proposed to hire the equipment this year, before making a commitment to purchase. All costs are within the winter maintenance budget.
 - b) **Human Resources (HR):** Whilst the previous two winters have tested our resources, it was not declared as an emergency, so all working time directives and terms and conditions were applied. As part of this years trial, all services will be delivered within the statutory employment guidelines.
 - c) **Equalities:** A great deal of consultation was carried out on last year programme. These proposals are looking to enhance the service previously experienced. All outcomes of the trials will be full consulted upon before the final recommendations are presented to Cabinet.

- d) **Legal:** The certainty of salt suppliers has been made more robust through a procurement partnership with North Yorkshire.
- e) **Crime and Disorder:** No implications.
- f) **Information Technology (IT):** The current vehicle tracking devices will continue to be used to ensure the correct routes and spread rates are maintained. Information regarding this service is available on the website.
- g) **Property:** No implications.
- h) **Other:** No implications.

Risk Management

- 28. The equipment used previously has reached the end of its natural life. Replacement with modern equipment is necessary. There are many alternatives currently on the market. To minimise the risk to the council, equipment capable of achieving our needs has been identified, but this proposed trial will be carried out before the final commitment to purchase. All the equipment proposed is being used by other local authorities so the risk of failure is minimal.

Recommendations

- 29. Cabinet is asked to note the improvements made to service delivery, the introduction of the Snow Warden scheme and the equipment trial and request a report back during the summer of 2012.

Reason: To ensure the proposed equipment is capable of meeting our expectations, the effectiveness of the Snow Wardens are reviewed and the response to heavy snow is effective.

Contact Details

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| | Report Approved | ✓ | Date 22 nd September 2010 |
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| Wards Affected: | | All | |
| For further information please contact the author of the report | | | |

Background Papers:

None

Annexes:

Annex 1 - Snow Warden Scoping document