

Scrutiny Review of Winter Gritting Policy

Briefing Paper - CYC response to the Winter Conditions and preparation for remainder of season

Summary

1. This paper reviews and summarises the Council's response to the extended period of extreme winter weather conditions, and considers how best to ensure CYC's resilience for the remainder of the gritting season. The report highlights short and medium term actions in the event of further bad weather before the end of the winter season and outlines the methodology for a full officer review later in the year.

Background

2. The Council's winter maintenance policy was last reviewed in October 2009 in preparation for the 2009/10 winter period. The policy is well established and tested and requires the treatment of 320km of road (44% of network) and around 14km of footpath (less than 5% of all footpaths). The policy sets out gritting practices, priorities and procedures. This document is a public document, available on the Council's website, and at the time of review in the autumn was publicised in preparation for the winter ahead.
3. From the night of the 17 December 2009 to the 10 January 2010; York, most of the country and Europe, experienced the worst winter conditions for around 25-30 years. During that period the temperatures, both day and night, rarely rose above freezing and dropped at times to -10 degrees C. In addition to this in excess of 35cm of snow fell on multiple occasions.
4. During the four week period there were:
 - In excess of 10, 000 operative hours utilised (50% of this on non-policy works)
 - 4200 tons of Rock Salt used(an average winter would expect to use around 2500-3000 tonnes)
 - 88 treatments of the priority network have been completed (for the same period in 08/09 20 gritting runs were completed)
 - Salt bins have been filled and refilled 4 times
 - Targeted treatments of schools, old peoples homes and post offices were undertaken by request outside the requirements of the policy as resources allowed.
 - Car Parks were ploughed and gritted twice and a mechanical clearance of snow and ice was undertaken outside of policy.
 - Park and ride sites were gritted 3 times as requested by the P&R manager. This is not covered in policy.

- Cycle Paths were gritted 3 times. These are not budgeted within the policy.

Response to conditions

5. The Council's winter maintenance policy is designed in essence to keep as far as is reasonably possible the safe movement of traffic, pedestrians and cyclists in times of adverse weather conditions whilst keeping delays and accidents to a minimum. The service in normal times is managed by a "Winter Maintenance Duty Officer" (WMDO) who takes the decisions on treatments based on accurate forecasts from the Meteogroup who provide forecast data to CYC and NYCC through a joint contract. If conditions dictate the WMDO alerts the NS Winter Maintenance supervisor who mobilises the team.
6. During prolonged severe weather conditions the winter maintenance Duty Officer has discretion to open the control room and should be done when there is 50mm of lying snow and the conditions are forecast to last for more than 3 days.
7. Our response to the conditions has been considered in terms of resources, operations, salt supplies, customer contact, communications and media, and member information. From this, Annex B summarises the short term and longer term actions to be taken as lessons learned and to be included in the review of the corporate response to the severe weather.

Resources

8. We have 10 gritting routes with two teams of drivers. They effectively worked a 12 hrs on 12 hrs off rota for the duration of the event. The gritters are multi use vehicles with drop backs that are used for road maintenance during the normal working day. Neighbourhood pride staff and Waste teams were also deployed to clear snow. There are 233 salt bins of which around 50% are funded by ward committees.

Operations

9. The winter maintenance teams have clearly been put under extreme pressure over an extended period of time over the Christmas and New Year period. In general terms the critical routes and footpaths have been treated as required by the policy. But the experience has brought into question the treatment of areas such as Car Parks, Cycle Networks both on and off road, Park and Ride Sites which are not included in the policy.
10. The off road cycle network does create challenges and will have significant budgetary implications if they are to be kept fully functioning during extreme conditions. There is no quick solution to this as they do not get gritted as part of the regular treatments and have insufficient traffication by cycles to activate any rocksalt. Clearing them only works if it doesn't then snow again and will involve a lot of manual resource as ploughs do not clear to tarmac. The on road cycle lanes have also been a problem as the snow ploughs automatically push the snow to the side of the road and cover the cycle ways making them unusable. An initial meeting with the CYC cycling officer to review these issues has already taken place
11. The extreme conditions across the whole of York, clearly raised expectations of residents, members and the media therefore additional treatments of non priority

routes and non priority footpaths where agreed to try and assist residents struggling with persistent ice and snow.

12. The severe weather control room was not convened during the period although a cross directorate group was established in late December to improve customer response, maintain and coordinate media briefs and manage the gritting work/salt stocks as the conditions continued.

Salt Supplies

13. At the start of the period there was around 2,600 tonnes of rocksalt in the salt barn at the eco depot, with another 1000 tonnes pre-ordered. This was called forward from the supplier on the 18 December 2009. This would be more than enough to cope with the requirements of an average winter. The Government recommendation of at least 6 days supply was well exceeded even at maximum usage of 300 tonne per day.
14. In addition to this a further 3000 tonnes of rock salt was ordered. 1000 tonnes before Christmas and another 2000 tonnes in early January 2010. 2300 tonnes of these orders are yet to be delivered
15. The availability of ordered rocksalt from our supplier (Cleveland Potash) was limited as they became clearly under pressure to supply many Local Authorities and the government also placed restrictions on deliveries. Requests have been received by the City from other Councils for salt but regrettably these had to be declined.
16. In early January it became clear that if the conditions persisted, and supplies were not forthcoming, it was evident that the service would run out of salt. The cross Directorate team established options/methods to be utilised to conserve stocks further. These were amended following a further meeting with the Chief Executive on the 8 January 2010 and are listed in Appendix 1. These options and the levels of salt at which such decisions are made need to be established within the Councils Policy in preparation for future events.
17. The current supplies in the salt barn are at 480 tonnes. Efforts are being made to re-establish stocks to a healthier level as soon as possible. The minimum level in the policy is 1000 tonnes although we will increase this as supply eases.

Customer Contact

18. During the period more than 800 requests for service were received from members of the public and elected members. In the main these related to untreated footways, cycle ways, roads and the lack of accessible salt bins. Although every effort was made to respond on a priority basis, resources had to be and were, concentrated on the priority gritting and footpath clearing work as per the policy. Considerable resource was put into dealing with work outside of the stated policy. A more detailed breakdown of this work, response times and performance will be available at a later date. It was evident that a response to requests was not always possible given the pressure on resources.
19. Calls taken outside of the YCC were initially received by the Neighbourhood Services night service coordinator based at the eco depot, and this created considerable strain on the service. As the period progressed additional resources were deployed out of normal working hours in the highways office to assist and

support. Further standby resources were also identified in the YCC, although during the weekend of the 9 and 10 of January only 12 calls were received and the weekend of the 16 and 17 only 6 calls relating to potholes and so additional resources were not needed.

20. On the 23 December 2009 arrangements were made to allow the CYC website to be updated daily by the winter maintenance team to include information on current gritting and weather situation, and eventually information about the locations of salt bins was also established on the website. This information was extended again in early January to include School closures and winter weather advice for vulnerable people.

Members

21. During the period 86 requests for services were received from Members. Some of the initial complaints clearly indicated lack of understanding of the gritting policy/location of salt bins etc. Between Christmas and New Year a series of member update e mails where commenced which assisted understanding. A copy of the map showing the location of the salt bins was also provided. Members where also asked to assist in providing information and given an e-mail address to do so which also helped to manage expectations. A similar approach was taken with the local MP.

Communications and the Media

22. Criticism of the Council in the media was heavier in the first two weeks of the severe weather. This began to change as more proactive press was provided, and reporters spent time with gritting crews to understand the issues. Bad weather articles where the most commented upon stories on the press website for at least a two week period. A number of letters appeared on the letters pages during the period, however not all these where responded to.
23. Over the last three weeks with the help of colleagues in marketing and communications, staff at Neighbourhoods Services and members have undertaken around 25 interviews for television, radio and press, including one from New Zealand!

Financial Implications

24. The winter maintenance budget for 9/10 was £ 480,000, this is now nearly £200,000 overspent with nearly 11 weeks left to operate. It would be reasonable to expect to spend at least another £150,000 before the season finishes meaning a total spend approaching £900,000. During 2008/9 the total spend on WM was £696,000, this was again an overspend as the winter was harder than average.
25. A survey of the potholes and damaged and displaced paving slabs which have occurred as a result of the extreme weather is underway to try and establish the additional financial pressures that these will also create. Additional gangs are being deployed to deal with the growing need to repair potholes and loose paving flags caused by the freezing conditions. 270 potholes have already been identified on the main gritting routes. 70 were repaired over the weekend.

Next Steps

26. The immediate and short term actions to be implemented for the remainder of the winter period are set out in Appendix 2. In addition a full review of the service will be carried out in the light of experience to be presented to Executive with options for change in the summer ready for the next winter season. The officer review will be led by the Director of Neighbourhood Services - see scope set out at Appendix 3.

Conclusion

27. In conclusion it must be acknowledged that all the staff who have worked on the winter maintenance programme across the council have shown great resolve to maintain services and are deserving of the highest praise. The service has received many compliments from residents and members of the public which have been most welcome and have been forwarded to the teams concerned.
28. The severe conditions have identified the need for the actions identified in the short term to be put in place and for a further review of the winter maintenance policy to ensure we make changes based on lessons learned.

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Appendix 1 – Options / Methods For Conserving Salt Stocks

Appendix 2 - Immediate & Short Term Actions To Be Implemented

Appendix 3 - Scope of Officer Review

Appendix 1 - Options

OPTION 1 - MIX ROAD SALT WITH GRIT SAND 3:1

Pros

- Gives 33% extra coverage
- Continue gritting the full Defined Network for a longer period (complying with policy)
- Maintain public confidence, public will see gritters as normal
- Grit sand will grind down ice and will give traction to vehicles

Cons

- Grit sand will deposit in drainage systems
- Not as effective

OPTION 2 - REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF TIMES WE TREAT THE DEFINED NETWORK

Pros

- Saves Salt
- Reduce driver hours
- Optimise treatment times (don't grit when minimal traffic flows)

Cons

- Untreated Defined Network
- Increased likelihood of road hazards

OPTION 3 - REDUCE THE SPREAD RATE FROM 15g/m² to 10g/m²

Pros

- Saves Salt

Cons

- Option 1 gives better spread rate of salt (11.25g/m²)

OPTION 4 - ALTERNATE TREATMENT BETWEEN FULL NETWORK AND THE PLOUGHING ROUTE

Pros

- Saves Salt
- Maintains main arterial routes
- Ploughing routes generally are worst condition (exposed)
- Maintains public confidence
- Routes 1-4 are warmer ∴ possibly less treatment required

Cons

- 50% of Defined Network compromised

OPTION 5 - ONLY TREAT THE PLOUGHING ROUTES (MAIN ARTERIAL ROUTES)

Pros

- Saves Salt
- Ensures main arterial routes are kept open for supplies (food/salt/etc)

Cons

- 50% of Defined Network (internally) will deteriorate
- Will take a considerable amount of time to bring the above back to today's standards

OPTION 6 - MIX ROAD SALT WITH GRIT SAND 1:1 FOR ROUTES 1-4 AND 9

Pros

- Saves Salt
- Ensures main arterial routes are kept open for supplies (food/salt/etc)
- Only being used on 30mph roads

Cons

- Not as effective
- Grit will deposit in drainage system

Appendix 2 - Short/Medium Term Actions

Issue	Action	Responsibility/When
RESOURCES		
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek feedback from staff. • Review working arrangements 	Assistant Director of Maintenance Services End February
Plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and source additional plant for off road cycleways as budgets allow 	Head of Highway Infrastructure (HHI) with Cycling officer Now and during review
OPERATIONS		
Co-ordination of event	<p>Ensure Cross Directorate panel implemented promptly in the event of further extreme snow or flooding.</p> <p>Review membership</p> <p>Review responsibilities of panel and chart in policy . Develop detailed Contingency plan</p> <p>Establish decision log for panel similar to emergency planning</p> <p>Review and gather corporate information for cold weather</p>	<p>Director of Neighbourhood Services in consultation with Emergency planning and Executive member.</p> <p>Implemented</p> <p>Assistant Director Maintenance Services mid February</p> <p>AD Maintenance Services and Head of Emergency Planning end January</p> <p>Head of Marketing and Communications end January</p>
Emergency Services	Seek Feedback from Emergency Services	Head of Highway Infrastructure (HHI) Received

Off road cycle ways	Review of treatment, specification, information to users and budgets.	Cycling officer with HHI During review end July
Car Parks	Consider additional treatment as budgets allow	HHI with Head of Parking Now and again during review
Park and Ride Sites	Consider additional treatment as budgets allow	HHI with P&R Manager Now and again during review
Salt Bins	Review numbers and location. Develop audit trail from Ward committee decisions.	HHI During main review
Bus Routes	Check process for updating	HHI and AD City Strategy end January
Priority Information	Review information provided to public in terms of priorities. Manage expectations.	AD Maintenance Services with Head of Marketing and Communications. By end of Jan and during full review
Roads on a gradient	Review any roads not on priority list over a set percentage gradient to be agreed	HHI During main review
SALT SUPPLIES		
Stock	Restore stock in salt barn to 2000 tonnes minimum as suppliers will allow	Assistant Director Maintenance Services Immediately
Emergency Options	Amend Winter Maintenance policy to include annex relating to options in case of shortages	Assistant Director of Maintenance Services Immediately
CUSTOMER CONTACT		
Customer contact centre	To review the role of YCC in emergency and other response plans, and opening	AD Resources (Customer Service and Governance) in consultation with DNS,

	hours determined by severity of event up to 24/7 if required	Emergency planning. Immediately and during review
Review out of hours interface	As above and review of Night Service co-ordinators role in out of hours service	AD of Resources (Customer Services and Governance) in consultation with DNS, Emergency planning. Immediately and during review
MEMBERS		
Briefings	Develop standard member briefings for similar events	AD NS with Head of Marketing and Communications
Members Open Event	Arrange open day for members at Eco-depot to see arrangements and to give feedback for review	AD Maintenance Services and HHI. April 2010
COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA		
Media response	Develop plan to ensure regular and co-ordinated briefings are established including updating the CYC website information. Respond to press letters and monitor "blogs".	Head of Marketing and Communications with Head of ITT By end of Jan
Availability of WM manual	Ensure manual is accurate and accessible to all and that some form of advertising of its availability takes place. Utilise all communications.	Head of Highway Infrastructure (HHI) with ITT and Media team By end of Jan and again during full review
Frequently Asked questions	Devise frequently asked questions for information on the web ie; Can I sweep my drive? Can I use the salt out of a bin if it is more than 100m from my house?	Head of Marketing and Communications By end Jan

Text Services	Explore further utilisation of Text services	HHI with Head of ITT During review
Route maps	Review quality and availability	HHI with ITT During review
FINANCE		
	Assess affect on budgets and report to Executive	Head of finance with finance managers By end of Jan
REVIEW		
Winter Maintenance Review Team	Establish team and conduct full review	Director of Neighbourhood Services Team established end Jan Review complete by end of June
Consultation	Feed back from residents about experience and suggestions for future response	AD DNS Ward Committee team and Ward Committees

Appendix 3 – Officer Review of Winter Maintenance Policy In Readiness for 2010/11 Season

Lead: Director of Neighbourhood Services

Contributions from:

- Chief Executive
- Leaders of four main Political Groups
- Executive Member for NS
- AD of Resources (Customer Services and Governance)
- AD Maintenance Services
- Head of Highway Infrastructure
- Head of Civil Engineering
- Head of Marketing & Communications
- Head of Emergency Planning
- Frontline staff

Scope - The review should cover among other issues:

- The current network coverage
- The policy concerning treatment of footpaths
- The treatment of cycle ways and car parks
- The provision of self help salt bins
- Co-ordination of the City of York council's response to media enquiries and improved timely communications to inform residents of what is happening, where and why.
- Links with the operation of the City of York councils contact centre
- Cross departmental working and emergency planning in times of extraordinary weather or similar events.
- The accuracy and adequacy of the information available on the City of York Council website.
- List of responsibilities and budget holders for areas and properties not included in the highways WM policy (i.e. EPH's Schools, Cycle paths, shopping centres, car parks, park and ride sites).

Best Practise/Networking:

The service will also network with other Local Authorities and Government office to ensure we also build on the experiences of others and achieve best practise.

Consultation

- Public consultation to inform the review should be highlighted in the Ward Committees to seek feedback.
- Seek feedback from residents via the CYC newsletter.

Expected Outcomes

- Revisions to existing policy
- Corporate contingency plan in case of extended/severe weather/similar events

Timescales: Report to Executive Summer 2010