

**Report To:** Communities Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012

**Lead Member / Officer:** Stuart Davies, Joint Head of Highways and Infrastructure.

**Report Author:** Tim Towers, Section Manager (Network Services)

**Title:** Preparation for Winter Maintenance for 2012/13 Season

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**1. What is the report about?**

To explain the preparation for the 2012 / 2013 winter maintenance programme.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

To provide information regarding the delivery of safer routes for the county's residents and keeping the county open for business during adverse weather conditions.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

That Members agree that the Winter Maintenance preparations are sufficient for the winter conditions anticipated, and that the contingency arrangements for more severe conditions are also adequate.

**4. Report details.**

4.1.1 For 2012 / 2013 we have not made any changes in our approach to preparing for winter maintenance. The number and extent of the gritting routes covering the county remains at 11. In previous years we have undertaken twelve routes but working closely with Conwy we have reduced the number of routes through cross border arrangements.

4.1.2 So as to meet legislation relating to drivers working hours we need a minimum of 33 to fulfil the rotas. The vast majority of these will come from within our own workforce but an advertisement asking for relief drivers will go out this week as we are five drivers short at the moment. A similar request last year had a good response so I'm confident that this shortfall can be filled by suitably qualified personnel.

4.1.3 We have again retained the services of a number of Agricultural Contractors and they will provide a support service to the remainder of

the rural network in the event of any snowfall. One of these was equipped with salt spreading capability last year. We are hoping this will significantly improve the coverage in the Llangollen area and will be using this as a pilot with a view to providing an enhanced service in other locations in the future.

- 4.1.4 At the time of writing we have over 5,000 tonnes of salt either in stock or due for delivery by the end of October. We store the salt in three locations namely :-

Kinmel Depot, Bodelwyddan where we will hold 1500 tonnes of the Safecote treated salt. This will be delivered in the next week or so to add to the stock of 300 tonnes we already hold there.

Corwen Depot currently holds in excess of 2,000 tonnes of the traditional dry salt. We only run two routes from this location but the depot has the capacity to store more salt than required and we have taken the opportunity to store as much salt here as possible.

Ruthin Depot is holding around 1500 tonnes as we go into the winter. Through the summer we have been undertaking some drainage work at this location and this has taken longer to instigate than hoped due to a delay in obtaining the necessary consents. This work is now complete and we will now be carrying out some surfacing work so that the salt is stored in much better conditions thus extending its usefulness and making for safe working conditions. Once this work is completed we can then increase the salt stock to a county total of 8,000 tonnes as we have over the past two winters – which gets us closer to the minimum stock required by the Welsh Government advice.

Nevertheless, the 5,000 tonnes which we will have in stock by the end of October is more than we would use in an 'average' winter.

Our supplier has now built up the strategic stock that existed before the previous extreme winters and therefore, with added resilience available via the Welsh Government, it is not felt salt supplies should be a particular area of concern.

- 4.1.5 Salt heaping and salt bin replenishment began at the beginning of October and will be completed before the end of the month. It is our intention that these will be kept topped up after any bout of wintry weather.
- 4.1.6 The usual rota arrangements for forecasting and supervision are in place thus ensuring that full 24 hour per day cover is available and these can be increased should conditions dictate. Agreement on

payments to all concerned have been agreed following protracted negotiations.

- 4.1.7 The communication strategy developed over recent years in conjunction with the Public Relations team and Customer Services will be used again as this has proved to be particularly effective. It is also used to announce road and school closures. Daily reports are already being sent indicating the day's action and the forecast for the next five days.
- 4.1.8 Should the weather turn particularly severe then we have contingency arrangements with officers and staff in both Countryside Services and Public Realm who can assist and they also have access to 4 x 4 vehicles which can supplement our own fleet.
- 4.1.9 In conclusion we feel that we are as well prepared for winter as we can reasonably be.

**5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

It is a service priority that residents and visitors to Denbighshire will have access to a safe and well-managed road network and the provision of a timely and effective winter maintenance activity is a fundamental aspect of this aim.

**6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

There is a base budget from the Highways revenue allocation of £780,000 with further contingency available should the weather prove more severe than average.

**7. What consultations have been carried out?**

Provision of the Winter Maintenance service is now a Statutory requirement under Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 as amended by section 111 Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003. To what extent we are required to meet this duty is a matter of some debate but it is accepted that our published gritting routes give the minimum provision that we would be expected to achieve. Over and above this would be a matter of available resource and we hold regular discussions with stakeholders to ascertain the best approach to this.

**8. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

There is a significant budget allocated to this service to ensure we can properly cope with adverse weather. There is also a separate contingency for any particularly severe problems although this has not been drawn on in recent years.

**9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

As stated in Section 7 above, this is a statutory duty and the Authority can be held responsible should we fail to meet this responsibility. There is the potential for many things to go wrong (failure of drivers to turn up, vehicle breakdown etc.) but we believe that to the best of our ability we have mitigated these risks as much as possible. Spare vehicles, additional stand by arrangements, reciprocal agreements with other councils regarding ensuring salt supplies can be shared are just a few of these.

**10. Power to make the Decision**

Highways Act 1980