

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 12th September 2013

Lead Officer: Head of Highways and Environmental Services.

Report Author: Asset and Risk Manager

Title: Preparedness for Winter Maintenance for 2013 / 14 Season

1. What is the report about?

To explain the preparation for the 2013/2014 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 consider the information provided and comment on the Winter Maintenance arrangements that are in place and whether they will be sufficient for an average winter but more severe conditions will be covered by contingency considerations.

4. Report details.

- 4.1.1 For 2013/2014 we have made some minor alterations to our approach to winter maintenance and this report will serve to highlight those changes and improvements. Members should also be aware though that the proven good practice from previous years, most notably demonstrated in the severe snowfall of March 2013 will be retained.

Firstly the number of gritting routes covering the county remains at 11 however, following a review, it was noted that these routes did not fully mirror the extent of the principal bus network. As a result three of the routes have now been amended and extended and this will now result in an enhanced level of service in the Cwm, Llangwyfan/Llangynhafal and Derwen/Clawddnewydd areas.

- 4.1.2 So as to meet legislation relating to drivers working hours we need a minimum of 33 to fulfil the rotas but we will again use some relief drivers to give us additional resilience; a system that has worked well over the last couple of seasons.

- 4.1.3 In terms of our own plant we are about to take delivery of four new gritters which will replace some of our previously ageing fleet. All four machines will be in place by mid - October
- 4.1.4 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 in the Llangollen area and this proved particularly effective. As a result we are now procuring at least one more spreader (to be deployed in the Bryneglwys area) and will look to extend this provision further in the coming years.
- 4.1.5 By the beginning of the season in October we will have received delivery of all of the salt we currently have on order and this will result in a total stock of just under 10,000 tonnes. Works to provide a hard standing in our Ruthin depot have made a tremendous difference and we are now able to significantly increase our capacity here. Further salt deliveries will then be made as the season progresses.

Members may be aware that over recent years we have been using a treated salt in our Kinmel depot which had a greater capacity to remain on the road surface for longer. However due to other changes in recommended salt spread rates and our own review of costs we have decided to revert to the standard dry salt on all of our routes and our re-stocking reflects this change.

Our supplier has now built up the strategic stock at the mine in Cheshire that existed before the previous extreme winters. In addition the Welsh Government is currently constructing a Strategic Salt Store in Rhualt which we will have access to should the need arise.

- 4.1.6 Salt heaping and salt bin replenishment will begin in late September and will be completed before the end of October. It is our intention that these will be kept topped up after any bout of wintry weather.
- 4.1.7 The usual rota arrangements for forecasting and supervision will be in place thus ensuring that full 24 hour per day cover is available and these can be increased should conditions dictate.
- 4.1.8 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.
- 4.1.9 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.

4.1.10 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 £709K with further contingency available should the weather prove more severe than average. It should be noted that the severe weather in March resulted in this contingency having to be used and Members may be interested to note that the ten days of snow clearance activity alone in March cost £176,000 so severe weather can have a significant impact on budgets

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 allocation of £709k to this service to ensure we can properly cope with adverse weather. There is also a separate contingency available of £226k for any particularly severe winters. The amount of contingency used last year due to the severe weather amounted to £176k.

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

Article 6.3 of the Council's Constitution

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