
Report to: Overview and Scrutiny (Regeneration and Environmental Services)

Date of Meeting: 20th September 2011

Subject: Review of Winter Service Policy

Report of: Alan Lunt, Director of the Built Environment

Wards Affected: All

Is this a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan? No

Exempt/Confidential

No

Purpose/Summary

To consider revisions to the current winter service policy and make recommendations to Cabinet for approval

Recommendation(s)

Consider the content of the report and make recommendations to Cabinet

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		X	
2	Jobs and Prosperity		X	
3	Environmental Sustainability		X	
4	Health and Well-Being		X	
5	Children and Young People		X	
6	Creating Safe Communities	X		
7	Creating Inclusive Communities	X		
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy	X		

Reasons for the Recommendation:

To make any required amendments to the winter policy in light of the extreme weather experienced in 2010.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The costs of the service are weather dependent. Costs are monitored regularly throughout the winter season and are reported to Cabinet Member

(B) Capital Costs

Funding for an extensive increase in grit bins would need to be identified.

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Legal	The Highways Act 1980 section 41(1A) places a duty on a highway authority to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice	
Human Resources	None	
Equality		
1.	No Equality Implication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.	Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact on Service Delivery:

The report seeks to improve the current service during extreme weather.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Head of Corporate Finance (FD996) and Head of Corporate Legal Services (LD335/11) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Are there any other options available for consideration?

The current policy could be retained

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

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Background Papers:

Winter Service Policy

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Members will be aware of the extreme weather events experienced in Sefton during December 2010. While current practice ensures that the policy is reviewed after each winter, a more detailed consultation process has been undertaken as a result of that event and the Council's ability to respond effectively to those unique conditions.
- 1.2 A report was presented to Cabinet on 27th January 2011, which identified some potential additions to the service. Members resolved to authorise the purchase of additional snow plough blades for both carriageway and footway gritters. This resolution has been implemented.
- 1.3 In light of the events of December 2010 and taking into account the comments made as a result of the consultation process, an options paper has been sent to every Elected Member and Parish Council in advance of this meeting, seeking their views on the options. A copy of the options paper is attached at Annex A.

2.0 Proposals

- 2.1 With the agreement of the Cabinet Member, this report is being presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20th September 2011. The comments and recommendations of this committee will be included in a further report to Cabinet for the adoption of a revised policy for the coming winter season
- 2.2 Members of the committee are therefore requested to consider the options paper and make their recommendations accordingly

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Approximate costs have been included in the options paper for information. Typically with this service, the full costs are dependent on the severity of the winter and the need to repeat operations to deal with extreme weather conditions.

Winter Service Review September 2011

A Introduction

Members will be aware of the situation faced by the authority last year in response to the extreme weather event which commenced on 17th December 2010. This was the second extreme weather event in Sefton in two years. 2009 saw a lesser sporadic snowfall between 19th and 23rd December. During that period, temperatures only fell to minus 4.8 degrees, and rose above freezing each day to assist with the thawing process. The timing and levels of snowfall made the response at that time more effective.

In comparison, 2010 saw temperatures fall to minus 17 degrees and fail to rise above freezing for over a week. This prevented any thawing from occurring and limited the effectiveness of the response. In reality, there was only one snow episode in 2010, but the severity and the lack of any thawing, coupled with the fact that salt is only effective to a temperature of minus 8 degrees, meant that the extreme conditions remained despite the continuous efforts employed.

A number of issues were brought to light during that period and a review of the winter policy has been ongoing throughout the summer months to enable the authority to be more explicit in stating what service we can deliver and therefore what everyone can expect in the event of a repeat of the conditions we all experienced.

It is important to understand that the extreme weather event we experienced was very rare and that any response should consider that such conditions may or may not be repeated. The conditions persisted for a relatively short period and the Council needs to consider the overall impact on a major investment in light of perceived benefits.

At the end of the last winter season, an interim report was presented to Cabinet who elected to authorise the purchase of additional snow plough blades for both the road and footpath gritters. This instruction has been implemented.

An extensive consultation exercise has been undertaken with a wide variety of bodies including PCT, CVS, Elected Members, Parish Councils, businesses, emergency services, travel authorities and also residents via Sefton's website. This is estimated at a catchment of over 2500 not including the potential coverage via the website.

B Issues

Approximately 100 responses were received to the consultation exercise and the issues raised therein, coupled with other comments received both during and after the extreme weather event have raised issues that the Elected Members will need to address in order that any revisions can be incorporated into the policy for the coming winter.

The main issues raised were as follows:

- **Insufficient snow ploughing**
- **Insufficient grit bins**
- **Insufficient manual snow clearance**
- **Perceived lack of gritting**
- **Perceived slow response**
- **Poor communication**
- **Emergency response**

This paper will address each of those issues for consideration

Insufficient Snow Ploughing

During last winter, based on the experience of previous winters and particularly the snow event in 2009, two gritting vehicles were fitted with snow ploughs as this was deemed sufficient for most circumstances. Indeed, this had been confirmed each time the policy had undergone annual review.

The extremity of the snow event in December 2010 has made a re-consideration of the number of snow plough blades necessary. As a result, snow plough blades have been purchased for all eight routes to ensure that the most extreme of events (perhaps only occurring once every 30 years) could be dealt with more effectively.

In addition, current routes are gritted in one direction. Therefore, they are currently only ploughed in one direction also. An exercise has been undertaken to identify those roads where we would be able to plough in both directions, and additional routes have been designed to allow for this to be done. This work has been undertaken in liaison with Merseytravel and based on main bus routes as advised by them. It is important to appreciate that not all roads can be ploughed, either due to their narrow width, or indeed the implication of where the snow would be deposited by the action of the plough. There are many situations where the action of ploughing the snow could result in obstructions being created by large piles of snow being deposited either across private driveways or across side roads. This can create more problems than it solves. Furthermore, a judgement will be needed on completion of ploughing and gritting initial routes whether to plough and grit them again or to grit and ploughing the new routes. There are insufficient resources to undertake both simultaneously.

Whilst the cost of the plough blades has already been accounted for, there will be an additional cost in ploughing and gritting the newly designed routes. This operation will also use more grit and additional stocks may need to be acquired. Please refer to section C for indicative costs.

Insufficient Grit Bins

The authority currently sites 58 grit bins throughout the borough. Locations of grit bins are based on the following criteria:

- 1, Bridges with made footways over railways and canals
- 2, Footways on steep inclines
- 3, Footways on sharp bends

Grit bins will not be provided at the following locations (except in exceptional circumstances to be determined by the Director of Built Environment)

- 1, Footways that are included on the footway gritting routes.
- 2, Areas where no footway exists

One suggestion from the consultation exercise was that we provide 10 grit bins per ward (totalling 220) in addition to the existing stock (the existing stock meets the above criteria) the locations to be determined by the ward councillors/parish councillors/communities. There will be an expectation that the new grit bins will be filled much more frequently as they will be in highly visible locations and emptied by the community regularly. There is anecdotal evidence that the existing grit bins are often emptied by persons who take the grit for private use. An increase in grit bins may not have the effect of improving highway conditions if we accept that grit bins located in much more prominent positions are much more likely to be emptied either for private use, or more frequently when not necessarily required.

Coupled with the concern over usage is an even greater concern over costs. Not only are the grit bins expensive, they are static and do not offer the necessary flexibility of approach. Last winter there was a need to target resources at certain parts of the borough and locating grit bins on a ward basis can tie up resources and prevent the targeting that may be needed.

A preferable alternative to increasing the number of grit bins would be to stockpile bagged grit to be ready for deployment where there is most need. Locations could be as advised by Elected Members and communities that officers could inspect and provide bagged grit or even spread grit ourselves if necessary. This will afford the flexibility of approach needed to respond to targeted areas as required.

This approach would offer a much more targeted and cost controllable response with more likelihood that the grit would be used in an appropriate manner where most needed.

We could seek the support of the local communities in spreading the grit on the public highway however there is a health and safety risk involved in this. It is the highway authority that has the duty to maintain the highway. That is not a duty we can delegate. If we seek the assistance of private citizens we allow issues to go beyond our control. If someone acts in such a way as to cause an injury to themselves or others then they could deflect that onto the highway authority because we had asked them, or given them permission to act on our behalf.

Please refer to section C for indicative costs. To spread the grit ourselves would potentially add further costs unless internal resources were utilised. This is discussed further below.

Insufficient Manual Snow Clearance

The extent of the snowfall created an expectation that Sefton would employ numerous operatives for footway snow clearance. We will, wherever possible, call upon the services of Council staff to undertake snow clearance and assist the elderly, disabled and those in need of access to hospital treatment. Operational Services has approximately 140 staff that may be available to be redeployed onto snow clearance if their substantive role is suspended by their Director. This could potentially be supplemented by another 50 staff from Leisure activities and Coast and Countryside. These staff could potentially be deployed to clear snow and spread grit at the locations detailed in the grit bins section above. This would negate the need to involve private citizens and therefore reduce the Council's risk. These services currently have 1 small tractor at Botanic Gardens, 2 4x4 tractors one Bobcat and 7 Landrovers at Ainsdale Discovery Centre, 6 small gritting spreading machines (3 North & 3 South) plus a snow plough attachment for the bobcat & forklift truck and 1 large spreader unit for the use on a 7.5 Tonne vehicle. Some or all of these operatives and equipment may be utilized as required at no additional cost to the Council.

In addition to this, snow plough blades have been purchased for the footway gritters. This will allow for a much quicker and more suitable response to snow clearance from footways. The first priority will remain the agreed footway routes; however this provision could then be targeted at other key locations to assist with snow clearance. Again, those areas could be identified by communities and ward Councillors. This would be at an additional cost to the Council. Please refer to section C for indicative costs.

Such operations will require additional grit supplies and further stocks should be purchased and retained for particular use in an extreme weather event.

We will also have contractors on stand by to call out if required which hopefully would be rare but nevertheless could be arranged and deployed swiftly. A number of local contractors have indicated that they would have both operatives and equipment available for hire by the Council in extreme weather situations. This would be at an additional cost; however the resource has been identified and can be called upon by the Director or chair of the extreme weather event team (EWET)

Perceived Lack of Gritting

Other comments received at the time and during the consultation was the perception that the gritters were either not operating or when they were, they were not spreading grit. Whilst this has been disproved by virtue of the processes we currently have in place (GPS tracking on the gritters with grit weighed into and out of the gritters before and after operations), this could

possibly be enhanced by enhancing the GPS system to include indicators of both spreading operation and deployment of the snow plough blades. Please refer to section C for indicative costs.

Perceived Slow Response

The extreme weather event in December 2010 occurred on a Friday night. Despite continuously gritting and ploughing throughout that weekend, a meeting of senior officers did not occur until the afternoon of the following Monday. This led to the perception that the Council was inactive during the key time period of the extreme weather. Clearly this was not the case, however the opinion was difficult to refute to everyone's satisfaction at the time. This has now been addressed in a number of ways. A revised system has been incorporated into the policy document to involve more senior officers at the first forecast of any likely snow fall. An extreme weather event team (EWET) whilst already effectively in existence although not explicitly referred to in the policy document has now been detailed and includes key officers with responsibility to deliver a whole range of services. The appropriate officers will be called upon from those identified in the policy dependant on the extent and nature of the extreme weather event. In a repeat of the situation experienced in December 2010, the Cabinet Member and Spokes Persons (Transportation) will be invited to attend meetings of EWET

Poor Communication

The public response, both at the time of the extreme weather and during the consultation, was the poor quality of information available from the Council so they could understand both what was going on and what the Council's response was. In the coming winter, more frequent updates will be posted in a prominent position on the Council's web site to advise of gritting operations with the potential for weekend updates if required by EWET.

The Council will also use Twitter to post messages as necessary. The most efficient way to keep Councillors informed would be to sign them up to Twitter to access the most up to date information. The press will also be updated. Wherever possible, information will also be displayed on Variable Message Signs across the borough. The processes for these initiatives are currently being explored.

Emergency Response

There is a need to ensure that officers have the opportunity and authorisation to respond with flexibility should any extreme weather event occur again. The Director of Built Environment, Head of Highways and Infrastructure and Network Manager will need to be available in another extreme weather event, whenever that may occur.

Further authorisation is required to allow these officers to agree with Cabinet Member and Spokespersons if there is a need on justifiable and reasonable grounds to deviate from policy. This would be a positive response to the accusation that the Council was too rigid in its deployment and delivery of its' winter service policy.

C Options

Option	Description	Comments	Indicative Cost
1	Purchase additional grit bins	Cost to purchase and locate and fill once Cost to fill 20 times This approach is not recommended	£38,000 £113,000

Winter Service Review Options Paper

Option	Description	Comments	Indicative Cost
2	Stock bagged grit for targeted use	See 6 below	
3	Purchase snow shovels	Assume 300	£1500
4	Utilise existing footway gritters with plough attachments for additional footway snow clearance	All 3 footway gritters per day	Approx £2000 per occasion
5	Implement new ploughing routes	3 routes per occasion. Still under development	TBC
6	Purchase additional grit stocks for additional ploughing routes, replenishment of grit bins, bagged grit, additional footway operations and extreme weather events	Purchase an additional stock of 500 Tonnes to be stored separately from the usual stock for use solely in these situations	Approx £22,000
7	Authorise the Director of Built Environment to approve any additional expenditure due to the need for additional snow clearance and gritting	Use of internal resources will not incur additional cost. Use of external resources in extreme conditions. Costs to be monitored daily	Call out charges provided by local contractors
8	Consider inclusion of Cabinet Member and Spokespersons in EWET meetings	Facilitates Member involvement in approach to Sefton's response	
9	Purchase additional GPS services to monitor gritting and snow plough blade deployment	To be fitted to 8 gritters	£3000

Winter Service Review Options Paper

Option	Description	Comments	Indicative Cost
10	Authorise the use of Twitter and electronic communications to Elected members and the press regarding notification of gritting operations (in extreme weather events) and Council press statements and other relevant information		Minimal
11	Authorise the Director of Built Environment, Head of Highways and Infrastructure and Network Manager to agree with Cabinet Member and Spokespersons if there is a need on justifiable and reasonable grounds to deviate from policy.	Additional costs subject to decisions made	Minimal