



**AGENDA ITEM: 4**

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**10 AUGUST 2010**

### **WINTER MAINTENANCE**

#### **BRIAN GLOVER - HEAD OF TRANSPORT AND DESIGN SERVICES**

#### **SUMMARY**

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board at their meeting of January 2010 determined that the Board would commence a scrutiny during 2010 into Winter Maintenance.
2. This report is to brief the Board on the management and operation of the Winter Maintenance service.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

3. Middlesbrough Council as Highway Authority has a duty to repair and maintain the highway (Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980). The Council has additional duties under the Highways Act 1980 (Section 41(a)) as amended by the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 in respect of snow and ice.
4. The duty is to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along the highway is not endangered by snow and ice, but it is not an absolute duty. "Reasonably practicable" and "endangered" are open to interpretation on the facts of each case, so in essence, the Council must show that reasonable steps have been taken to discharge the duty.
5. In addition, the Traffic Management Act of 2004 imposed a duty on local authorities to manage its Highway Network in order to minimise disruption to all road users including pedestrians and cyclists.
6. In practical terms, where a Highway Authority has a Winter Maintenance Plan in place and it is followed, this will generally be considered to have discharged the winter maintenance duty.

## EVIDENCE/DISCUSSION

### Middlesbrough Council's Winter Maintenance Plan

7. For a number of years, the Council has produced its Winter Maintenance Plan and published it on its website. The plan forms the basis of the winter maintenance service and the discharge of the duty under Section 41(a) of the Highways Act. The plan is reviewed annually to take into account changes in the highway network, operational management, materials & plant, and emerging best practice.
8. The plan is broadly based along the following principles:
  - The highway network is categorised into a hierarchy of relative importance and priority, and this links with other general highway maintenance principles and Codes of Practice.
  - Weather information from the Meteorological Office is the primary source of evidence informing the decision making process of when and where to invoke gritting/salting operations.
  - Priority is given towards ensuring that the identified carriageway network is maintained safe and passable.
  - Main/priority pedestrian routes are identified and scheduled in the plan for treatment when resources permit (ie are not otherwise committed to carriageway treatment).
  - The Council's scheduled road and footway salting/clearance is supplemented by the provision of salt bins for public use on roads and footways which are not included on scheduled gritting runs.
9. The decision to commence salting operations are made by the Duty Manager (Infrastructure Services – Cargo Fleet Depot) in response to weather bulletins from the Met Office and predictions from the Ice Prediction System.

### Winter Maintenance Facts and Figures:

- Boulby Mine daily production: 9000 Tonnes
- Cargo Fleet Salt Barn Capacity: 3000 Tonnes
- Salt Deliveries to the Council: 100 to 180 Tonnes/day as requested
- Gritting Wagons (Capacity 8 Tonnes) 5 + 1 held in reserve
- Labour: 3 shifts of 5 men on call out.
- Priority 1 Gritting Routes 5 No. (total 278 Km)
- Priority 2 Gritting Routes 3 No.
- Average tonnage of Salt used per route 40 Tonnes
- Salt Bins: (Highway related) 129 bins (start of winter 2009/10)
- Average tonnage of Salt per refill of all bins 70 Tonnes (2 days to complete)
- Winter Maintenance Budget £306,000

## Highway Statistics

	Kms	Miles
Roads:	503	311
Footways:	945	585
Cycleways:	31	19
Alleys:	35	22
Gritting Routes:	278	172

## Winter 2009/2010: Local and National Reaction to the Severe Weather

10. The standby/call out arrangements for winter maintenance commenced at the beginning of October 2009 and the duty officer rota was initiated.
11. Wednesday 16 December 2009 saw the start of what was to be the worst of the winter weather, lasting until 18 January 2010. During this period, most days saw 2 full gritting runs, where gritters were utilised for around 6 hours each and on the worst day, gritters were deployed for around 14 hours each. The operations continued well into February before the frequency reduced. During this period, salt stocks were put under severe strain and ran low on a number of occasions due to small but frequent deliveries as a result of national priorities being established.
12. The effect of the severe weather in Middlesbrough was very similar to that in other parts of the Country, as indicated in the local and national press and media, and consequently salt stocks were being used up. In recognition of this, the Government introduced meetings of the 'Salt Cell' which had some influence on the national distribution of salt during the prolonged severe weather. The Salt Cell concluded that due to the prolonged nature of the severe conditions, the country's salt supply was unable to meet demands during such events. In one 24 hour period, some 194,000 tonnes of salt was spread nationwide whereas the maximum daily production of salt within the UK is 12,000 tonnes. Government, then asked Councils to reduce usage by 40 to 50%.
13. The need for prudence regarding salt stocks resulted in a temporary suspension of refilling of the salt bins during the worst of the winter weather.
14. A review panel was established by the DfT and has produced a draft report on the resilience of our transport systems in the winter. The Secretary of State for Transport has now responded to the draft Review Panel Report and a final report is expected in the Autumn.

## Reacting locally to Public and Member Requests

15. During the period, the call centre received a high volume of calls, for snow clearance/gritting (over 350) and additional salt bins (around 400). In terms of snow

clearance, at times, the snow was so deep and ice was so compacted away from the Priority routes, that ploughs were ineffective and JCBs were deployed.

16. The requests for additional salt bins were judged in accordance with the assessment criteria given in the Winter Maintenance Plan; some being accepted but many being rejected. Salt bins can only ever be used for treatment of small, discrete areas and are unsustainable in extreme circumstances.
17. Manual snow clearing of footpaths is undertaken when operatives are prevented from carrying out normal duties by bad weather. Typically it is unusual for snow or ice to remain present for more than a few days, so normally very little manual snow clearance takes place. The conditions this year however were such that manual labour was deployed a number of times and at its peak, over 60 employees were employed in clearing footpaths and other priority pedestrian areas, and side roads which were not part of gritting runs.

### **LESSONS LEARNED:**

18. The conditions and severity between mid December and Mid January were recognised as being the worst for some 30 years, and the severe and prolonged conditions placed strain on the Council's ability to deliver its commitments detailed in the Winter Maintenance Plan.
19. Lessons can be learned from the Winter Maintenance operations of 2009/10 as a result of comments from operational staff, requests from members of the public, and comments from stakeholders. Some of these issues relate to escalation of response and clearer information for the public as to what the Council can and will provide.
20. Priority 1 routes and Bus routes were generally kept open which amounted to over half the road mileage within the town.
21. Emphasis was given to priority routes in accordance with the plan, and footpaths too were cleared in accordance with those scheduled, yet there was some concern that social issues may need more thought to ensure that priorities and schedules are not wholly driven by highway network priority. This must also introduce the concept of self help and "good neighbour" schemes.

### **PROPOSALS/ACTIONS IN HAND**

22. As a consequence of the national supplies being under sever pressure, the Salt Cell advised authorities that they should place orders during the summer season in order to build up supplies of salt that can be better controlled during the winter season. Orders for salt are already in place with Boulby.
23. Mechanisms for Escalation of response are being examined as a part of the 2010/11 redraft of the Winter Maintenance Plan.

24. Comments from the Town Centre Partnerships, members of the public, The Falls Group and other stakeholders, were expressed and are being considered as part of the annual redraft of the Winter Maintenance Plan.
25. The Criteria for allocating sites for salt bins is being revised.
26. There is the opportunity for Scrutiny to examine the revised Winter Maintenance Plan/leaflet but this must take place within the timescale for publication ie early October 2010.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Winter Maintenance Plan 2009/2010

Extract from minutes of Town Centre Partnership: February 2010

“Winter Services in west Lothian (leaflet)

“Are You Ready for Winter ?” (Leaflet: Department for Transport)

## **AUTHOR:**

**Ian Busby**

**Design & Infrastructure Services Manager**