

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 13 October 2010.

PRESENT: Councillors Brunton (Chair), Councillors Dryden, C Hobson, J Hobson, Kerr, Khan, Sanderson, J A Walker and Williams.

OFFICERS: J Bennington and P Clark.

****PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Mandy Foster, Project Manager, Highways Agency
Mark Foster, Highways Agency
Alan Hatfield, Station Manager, Cleveland Fire Brigade
Keith Polson, General Manager, A19 Autolink
Andrew Sinclair, Project Manager, Sir Robert McAlpine.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Ismail, Mawston and Purvis.

** DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Interest
Councillor Brunton	Personal/Non-Prejudicial	Agenda Item 4 – Winter Maintenance – Member of the Cleveland Combined Fire Authority.

**MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 23 September 2010 were submitted and approved as a correct record subject to the addition of 'to' on page three, last sentence of fourth paragraph after the word 'need'.

MATTERS ARISING – LOCAL NHS – NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS

A Member referred to enquiries which had been made of the local NHS which demonstrated that there had been an increase in the number of accidents and referrals to A & E at James Cook University Hospital during the last winter period with particular regard to Boxing Day 2009.

It was confirmed that such details and other information previously reported in this regard would be incorporated into the Final report.

NOTED

WINTER MAINTENANCE – INTRODUCTION

The Senior Scrutiny Officer submitted a report the purpose of which was to remind Members of the evidence received so far; the terms of reference of its current scrutiny review; and to introduce representatives from the Highways Agency and the Fire Authority to provide information from their experiences gained during the last winter.

It was reported that representatives of the Probation Service and Erimus Housing had confirmed their attendance for the meeting of the Board to be held on 3 November 2010

The Chair welcomed all representatives and gave an indication of the specific areas upon which the Board was examining one of which was increasing the ways in which agencies worked together.

NOTED

WINTER MAINTENANCE – FIRE AUTHORITY

Alan Hatfield, Station Manager confirmed that the Fire Authority had several winter policies and procedures including the cold winter strategy. One of the main aspects of such a strategy was the need to maintain the required level of salt stocks.

During adverse winter weather conditions it was reported that in general terms there tended to be an increase in the number of road traffic accidents. As a result of the unprecedented winter conditions of 2009/2010 the Fire Authority had agreed to the purchase of snow chains to be used on vehicles on a trial basis should the need arise. During the last winter most major roads had remained open but compacted ice on other roads together with abandoned vehicles had caused some difficulties in gaining access.

An indication was given of close working relationships with other agencies such as the Highway Authority, Council and Safer Middlesbrough Partnership. Reference was made to the winter warm campaign and to ways in which the Fire Authority had provided assistance to the most vulnerable in certain cases during the last period of adverse winter weather by providing blankets, emergency lighting and heating supplies. Despite the increased demand for such equipment the Board was advised that the service had coped well in such circumstances. Members referred to a number of incidences and acknowledged the excellent service provided by the Fire Brigade in assisting vulnerable people in difficult circumstances.

It was recognised that lessons were learnt from the adverse winter weather conditions hence the provision of snow chains for vehicles as previously indicated. Members sought clarification as to how the public were aware of additional services in such circumstances. In response reference was made to various means including publicity material; raising awareness with partner agencies; schools; GP Practices; and the Cleveland Fire Brigade website. Members were mindful of the overall economic situation and that the Fire service did not receive funding for the additional assistance provided to the elderly and vulnerable in extreme circumstances. It was acknowledged that all areas were under review and that every endeavour would be made to maintain all services.

The Board discussed the main issues in relation to the last adverse winter weather conditions as far as the Fire Authority was concerned which mainly related to the lack of salt supplies and access difficulties in respect of side roads which had compacted ice for a significant period of time.

ORDERED that Mr Hatfield be thanked for the information provided which would be incorporated into the overall review.

WINTER MAINTENANCE– HIGHWAYS AGENCY- AUTOLINK

The representatives from the Highways Agency confirmed their statutory responsibility in terms of ensuring that safe passage along a highway was not endangered by snow or ice, so far as was reasonably practicable. It was confirmed that the winter weather service was reviewed each year and adjusted as necessary to continue to make improvements as circumstances changed.

In terms of the major roads it was noted that the A19 was maintained to a high standard and unlike many other roads throughout the UK had not experienced a significant increase in the number of large potholes after the last winter period.

In view of the prolonged periods of severe winter weather conditions during 2009/2010 it was acknowledged that the demands on salt supplies had been of national significance. Following such a period the Board was advised of research, which had been carried out, and precautionary measures undertaken resulting in a review of the guidelines in terms of reducing the amount of salt used when spreading. It was acknowledged that although salt supplies had not expended the opportunities to increase storage capacity were being examined.

Reference was made to the Department of Transport's role in relation to the 'Salt Cell' which provided advice to the salt companies on how to prioritise deliveries and facilitate mutual aid

agreements. It was acknowledged that there were difficulties in locating suitable additional storage facilities for salt and the costs involved of importing such supplies was also noted. The Board was advised that there were no specific issues during the severe weather conditions of the last winter, as the main roads had been kept open. It was acknowledged, however, that careful consideration had to be given to the national levels of salt.

In response to Members' questions it was noted that there was no apparent increase in the number of road traffic accidents during the last winter period. The Board was advised, however, of the publicity campaigns to encourage drivers only to make essential journeys during such severe weather conditions. It was acknowledged that there was a need to continue to try and get the message across to the general public both locally and nationally that even with salt there was a need for drivers to adapt accordingly to the conditions. Such information was included in leaflets distributed to such locations as libraries and petrol filling stations and it was also on the website. It was recognised that careful attention had to be given to the timing of such promotions in order for them to be most effective.

In terms of the overall consultation arrangements it was confirmed that there was regular liaison and a good working relationship with other local authorities (nine) and police authorities (four) although it was suggested that there might be scope for this to be more streamlined.

ORDERED that the representatives be thanked for the information provided which would be incorporated into the overall review.