

Decision Maker: Environment Portfolio Holder

**For Pre-decision Scrutiny by the Environment PDS
Committee on**

Date: 15th November 2011

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: REVIEW OF WINTER SERVICE POLICY

Contact Officer: Garry Warner, Head of Highway Network Management & Traffic Manager
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Chief Officer: Nigel Davies - Director of Environmental Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 This report considers changes to the winter service policy following the extreme weather conditions encountered during the winter of 2010/11, to achieve an efficient, effective and proportionate response to winter conditions.
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2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Environment Portfolio Holder approves the following proposed changes to the winter service policy and plan;

- (i) Establish a tertiary carriageway network for snow clearance,
- (ii) During a snow event, carriageway snow clearance is restricted to the primary, secondary and tertiary routes
- (ii) During a snow event footway snow clearance is restricted to the three main areas of priority (e.g. main retail centres, approaches to transport interchanges and outside schools)
- (iii) All existing salt bins are retained, but no additional salt bins be installed

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Safer Bromley.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £385k revenue budget for 2011/12 winter maintenance and £170k capital funding for gritter replacement 2012/13
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost.
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Highways
 4. Total current budget for this head: £385k for 2011/12 winter maintenance
 5. Source of funding: 2011/12 revenue budget for winter maintenance and capital budget for gritter replacements
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 8
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory requirement. Highways Act 1980
 2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Borough wide
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: n/a

3. COMMENTARY

Background

- 3.1 Under the Highways Act 1980 highway authorities are under a statutory duty to maintain the highway, including a duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. Bromley have a Winter Service Policy & Plan in place to address these responsibilities which is reviewed annually to reflect changes to the highway network, road hierarchy and methods of working.
- 3.2 This report considers Member's views and national guidance in proposing changes to the winter service policy for the coming season.

The Winter Service

- 3.3 The winter service consists of three elements;
- (a) Precautionary salting –When carriageway or footway surfaces are forecast to remain wet and temperatures forecast to drop below freezing, salt is spread on the primary carriageway routes and priority footways to prevent the formation of ice. This service runs throughout the winter season, November to April, and forms part of the Minor Highway Works Contract.
 - (b) Clearance of snow – During a snow event carriageways and footways are cleared in accordance with their priority status. The resources used for these will depend on the severity of the snowfall, and can include all the Councils highways and environmental contractors.
 - (c) Salt bins – Salt bins have been provided at 496 locations across the borough to allow local residents to assist in the winter service by spreading salt on carriageways and footways affected by snow and ice.
- 3.4 The Council provides dedicated salting vehicles and plant to the minor highways works and street cleansing contractors to undertake the winter service. Snow ploughs are also provided for local farmers to use in the event of heavy snowfalls,
- 3.5 The Council maintains the largest borough salt stock in London for the winter service; 2,000T in the salt barn at Central Depot and around 8,000T at Green Street Green depot in Shire Lane.

Issues Identified During Last Winter's Snow Emergency

Carriageway Treatments

- 3.6 Priority carriageway treatment routes cover 196 miles (315km) or 40% of the borough's road network, including all main bus routes, and roads leading to transport interchanges, bus garages / depots together with ambulance and fire stations; the A21 and parts of the A232 that run through the Borough are maintained by TfL.
- 3.7 The winter of 2010/11 began with heavy snow falls in November, and again during December, which stretched our usual resources. The current policy indicates that once all primary and secondary routes have been effectively treated, efforts will then be made to clear other non-priority roads. Last year additional contractors plant, JCB's etc were employed to work during the day and night in an effort to clear as many side roads as possible by removing compacted ice and snow, although the prolonged sub-zero temperatures encountered resulted in limited results.

- 3.8 Our duty under the Highways Act to provide a Winter Service is moderated by the term 'as far as reasonably practical'. It is therefore proposed that once the primary and secondary routes are clear of snow and ice, the carriageway snow clearance policy is changed to focus resources on a limited tertiary network, consisting of other steep hills in residential areas. Where possible gritters and snow ploughs will be used, however it may be necessary to employ other contractors plant, JCB's etc to clear the roads. Although this would result in other residential areas not being cleared at all during a snow event, this has often been the case following heavy snow in the past. These proposals would result in manageable treatment networks, reduced salt usage, reduced damage to road surfaces and improved value for money.

Footway Treatments

- 3.9 The borough's footpath and footway network comprises of 875 miles (1400km) including footways on both sides of the carriageway. In periods of hard frost, the Council pre-treats pavements within main retail centres, approaches to transport interchanges and outside schools during the period of normal working hours. This aligns with the boroughs LTP objectives encouraging modal shift towards walking, cycling and public transport use. The pre-treatment involves redeploying resources from the street cleansing contractor by suspending routine street sweeping. There is no additional financial cost to redeploy street cleansing operatives to winter service operations during normal working hours; there will however be reduced functions due to the nature of the snow event with certain duties continuing e.g. litter bin emptying
- 3.10 This level of operation amounts to pre-salting approximately 50 miles (80 km) or 6% of the footpath and footway network. During a snow event the council supplements this workforce with resources from other highway maintenance contracts operating only during daylight hours, normally between 7am to 4pm. Due to budgetary constraints the contract arrangements for street cleansing and routine highway maintenance do not make provision for 24-hour standby for this level of service and footway operations are only carried out as a reactive measure during a snow event when routine services are suspended.
- 3.11 There have been practical difficulties and financial implications in providing comprehensive treatment of all parts of the borough's diverse footway network. This level of operation can involve deploying up to 150 additional operatives with associated transport and machinery from highway related contracts resulting in additional financial costs to the revenue budget. It is therefore proposed that future footway snow clearance operations are restricted to the treatment of the footway priority route network including the three main areas of priority (e.g. main retail centres, approaches to transport interchanges and outside schools). When the priority pavements have been treated resources would only then be deployed onto specific urgent requests for a footway to be cleared. This approach would not apply to general requests for clearing pavements within residential areas and other non-priority locations
- 3.12 The council's method of salting and snow clearance of the footway and footpath network involves a number of techniques and resources following extensive evaluation of the wide range of mechanical and manual machinery on the market. If snow or ice becomes compacted mechanical plant will have difficulties ploughing pavements and this will require a labour-intensive approach involving operatives breaking the ice with hand tools. This problem was experienced during last winter's event reinforcing the necessity to pre-salt pavements whenever possible to assist with snow-melt.

Snow Friends

- 3.13 Part of our preparations for this winter has included expanding last years very successful Snow Friends programme. Working closely with local community groups, schools and residents we have been helping Bromley residents to help themselves, by providing support and guidance to residents to work together with other like-minded residents, to clear snow from footways and

carriageways for the benefit of their local community. The amount of interest has been phenomenal, with over 1500 local residents joining together to create localised communities of Snow Friends. To date, there are over 100 co-ordinated Snow Friends groups within the Borough.

Salt Bins

- 3.14 Salt bins have been provided at various locations across the borough to allow residents to treat roads and footway areas that are not on the priority routes. During recent years evidence suggests that salt from many of the salt bins has been used to treat private driveways, and in some cases has been taken away by third parties and sold. Following a recommendation from Members, it is proposed that all existing salt bins are maintained, although no additional salt bins are to be installed.
- 3.15 As part of the Snow Friends programme, residents who live in the vicinity of a salt bin are also being asked to assist with salt bin maintenance throughout the winter period. By asking the local community to be vigilant, residents can help monitor the use of the salt and report misuse or when levels of salt are low. We are also considering the provision of bagged salt, to be stored on a resident's premises, to enable neighbours to replenish the salt bins themselves during times of bad weather, or if the circumstances permit, for the salt bin to be located on private properties. This will ensure that salt is always available, which may be more beneficial to residents rather than the existing system in place where residents have to wait for bins to be replenished by the contractor.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Winter Service Policy & Plan is reviewed annually to reflect changes to the highway network, road hierarchy and methods of working. The proposals identified in this report will be incorporated into the Policy and Plan

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Expenditure on winter service during 2010/11 totalled £1,118k. The 2010/11 revenue budget for the winter service was £377k, an overspend of £741k.
- 5.2 The proposed changes to the winter service policy detailed in this report will be funded from the 2011/12 revenue budget, however, if the severe conditions are repeated it may not be possible to contain the costs within budget.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 highway authorities are under a statutory duty to maintain the highway. In October 2003 a new clause, section 41.1A, was inserted into the Highways Act introducing a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice, which included footways.
- 6.2 The responsibility for salting the "highway" is not limited just to the area for vehicular traffic but would also cover areas open to the public for foot passage including pavements and cycleways. In order for the Council to comply with its statutory obligations and provide a special defence in action against the authority for damages it is necessary to demonstrate that it simply was not practicable to do more. Bromley have a Winter Service Policy and Plan in place to address these responsibilities which is reviewed annually to reflect changes to the highway network, road and footway hierarchy and methods of working.

Non-Applicable Sections:	PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Highways Act 1980 LB Bromley Winter Service Policy & Plan