



Environment Committee 11 September 2017

Title	Changes to Winter Gritting operations
Report of	Strategic Director Environment
Wards	All
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Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	None
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Summary

This report identifies the changes that have been made to the winter gritting operations which will be undertaken during the next winter season; October 2017 to March 2018.

The changes have been necessary in order to safeguard service delivery during periods of continuous snowfall, following the closure of Mill Hill depot and the relocating of the service to the London Borough of Harrow Depot site.

Recommendations

- 1. That Environment Committee notes the reasons for the changes in the winter gritting operation and how these changes will improve the Council's ability to meet the Winter Service in line with the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The winter service is managed by Re Highways who produce an annual Winter Service Operational Plan which is based on the key principles for delivering best value in highways maintenance as recommended in the Department of Transport document "Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure, Code of Practice for Highways Maintenance Management (CoP) published in October 2016. The Plan is also based on Council policies and practice that have been developed over several years. The gritting operation is delivered by the Highways Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) Service.
- 1.2 The Winter Service Operational Plan document is reviewed every year to take into account lessons learnt, any changing circumstances, and any recommendations by the Code of Practice and any national guidance issued by government or other professional bodies, such as the "National Winter Service Research Group (NWSRG).
- 1.3 The Winter Service and Operational Plan only applies to the Council's public highways, including footways. The plan does not include the Trunk Roads (A1, A41 and A406) and M1 motorway in the Borough, for which Transport for London (TfL) and Highways England are the respective highway authorities.
- 1.4 The Council's objective is to provide a Winter Service Operational Plan to ensure that as a highway authority it is discharging its statutory duty under Section 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980 to "to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along the highway is not endangered by snow or ice. So far as reasonably practicable, this plan will allow for pre-defined carriageways and footways to be treated in accordance with their priority on the highway network and the prevailing weather conditions with the aim to minimise:
 - a) the safety risk to the highway users, and
 - b) the non-availability of the highway network due to ice and snow.
- 1.5 All public roads in the Borough have been prioritised for salt gritting during adverse winter weather conditions. Three separate priorities have been identified: Priority one, two and three for gritting. Priority one roads are those that are key to vehicle movements as they are either A and B classified roads, other roads used as main commuter routes, bus routes and roads providing access to the emergency services and rail/underground stations.

- 1.6 The Priority one roads total approximately 240km, or 32% of the Borough's road network. They are pre-treated with salt/grit when snow or ice may form. Priority two and three roads are normally post-treated, subject to resources being available, to deal with snowfall or continued icy conditions.
- 1.7 At times of accumulated snow, Priority one roads will be treated first and until these routes are found to be safe and running, treatment of Priority two roads would not commence.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Depot Relocation and the requirement for an additional satellite depot site

- 2.1 When the service was delivered from the Mill Hill Depot the service was operated on the basis of seven Priority one gritting routes. The closure of the Mill Hill depot in 2016/17 meant that in the winter of 2016/17 the service was relocated to operate from the Harrow Council Depot. At the time the move took place a review was conducted to ascertain the impact the additional travelling time to and from Harrow would have on the service's ability to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice. This culminated in a revision to the Priority one routes and subsequently an increase from seven routes to ten routes. Despite this increase in routes the timescale to complete the routes has increased due to the additional travelling time.
- 2.2 The Code of Practice recommends that the service provision should be capable of conducting six passes of each of the routes within a 24 hour period and as such the maximum time taken to deploy a vehicle, complete the gritting route, return to the depot and reload the vehicle should be four hours.
- 2.3 It would only be necessary to carry out continuous gritting, as identified in 1.9 above, in times of continuous snow. Test runs of the turnaround times has identified that with the additional travelling time to and from Harrow Depot there is a considerable risk that it may not be possible to achieve the above requirement.
- 2.4 Having identified this issue, a risk assessment has been undertaken which has identified that this risk is too great to tolerate and as such officers have sought to identify alternative arrangements in order to mitigate the risk.
- 2.5 One of the mitigating actions has been to identify an alternative location to store salt supplies which are more accessible thereby reducing the travelling time and speeding up the completion of the routes, to provide additional confidence that the Code of Practice requirements will be met.
- 2.6 Work took place to identify a site within the borough to locate an additional salt barn, however a suitable site has thus far not been identified.

- 2.7 Enquires have also been made with neighbouring authorities, Highways England and winter gritting contractors and following ongoing discussions with Highways England a Mutual Aid agreement has been agreed.
- 2.8 This arrangement with Highways England will allow the Authority to deploy gritting vehicles from the Harrow depot for the initial route pass and on completion some of the vehicles covering the routes in the East of the borough (furthest from the Harrow base) will travel to the Highways England depot at the M1 Gateway Services to be reloaded. It is anticipated that access and egress into the Gateway Services will be obtained from the A1/A41 junction at Northway Circus.
- 2.9 There are a number of conditions attached to this arrangement which will require a further review and rationalisation of our gritting routes in order to reduce the routes to a maximum of nine routes, should there be a need to reload all gritter vehicles from the M1 Gateway Services location.
- 2.10 This review will be conducted by Re Highways (with the assistance of the Highways DLO) with test runs being deployed from both the Harrow and M1 Gateway Services locations. These test runs will confirm the most effective location to deploy the reloading operation from in order to provide the best opportunity to meet the required timescales for completing each route.
- 2.11 As this is likely to lead to the operation being split across two sites it will also be necessary, in times of snow, to partially relocate the supervision of the service from Harrow to the M1 Gateway Services including the operative who will be responsible for loading the vehicles. Highways England has agreed that the authority can store a loading vehicle at Gateway Services which reduces the risk of moving the loading vehicle between the two sites.
- 2.12 As part of the Mutual Aid Agreement, Highways England has requested a relaxation of the weigh restriction that exists at the Parson Street/A41 Junction to allow their gritting vehicle to turnaround quickly to return to their M1 route and hence improve the effectiveness of their operation. It has been identified that such a dispensation is not necessary as the Council's Traffic Management Orders states that the lorry restrictions do not apply in relation to any vehicle when it is being used in the service of an authority in pursuance of statutory powers or duties.
- 2.13 The proposed changes will be accommodated in an update of the Winter Service Plan which will be conducted by Re ahead of the start of the 2017/18 winter service commencing.
- 2.14 Officers will continue to explore the availability of an optimum site in the borough to locate a salt barn for future service delivery improvements and hence further safeguard future service delivery.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 That the service be operated exclusively from the Harrow depot with the risks of service failure at times of continuous snowfall being tolerated. This level of risk has been deemed unacceptable and so this alternative option is not recommended.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The actions highlighted in this report will be completed. In order to finalise the agreement with Highways England further detailed discussions will be required to agree practicalities of operating alongside the Highways England operation at the M1 Gateway Services, including the drafting of new operational procedures and risk assessments and the negotiation of a further agreement to allow access and egress via the emergency route which leads to Ellesmere Avenue.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2015 – 2020 states in its strategic objectives that it will work with partners to create the right environment to promote responsible growth, development and success across the borough. We want to ensure that the borough continues to be a place where people aspire to live.

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 There is no additional costs associated with the Mutual Aid agreement with Highways England as the agreement requires the authority to replenish all salt used.
- 5.2.2 It will be necessary to redeploy part of the supervision resources from Harrow to Gateway services after the first deployment from the Harrow Depot and also to provide an additional loading vehicle to be based at Gateway Services.

5.3 Social Value

- 5.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. This report does not relate to the procurement of services contracts.

5.4 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.4.1 The legal position relating to the winter service was modified on 31 October 2003 with the introduction of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003. This legislation added the following additional sub-clause 41(1A) of the Highways Act 1980:-

“(1A) In particular, a highway authority are under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.”

- 5.4.2 This amendment means that the Highway Authority does have a duty, subject to the limitation of “so far as is reasonably practicable”, to address snow and ice that accumulates on the highway. The definition of “highway” includes carriageways, footways and cycle ways within the highway boundary.
- 5.4.3 Section 150 of the Highways Act 1980 also imposes a duty upon authorities to remove any obstruction of the highway resulting from ‘accumulation of snow’.
- 5.4.4 In addition, the Traffic Management Act 2004 placed a network management duty on all local traffic authorities in England. It requires authorities to do all that is reasonably practicable to manage the network effectively to keep traffic moving.
- 5.4.5 The Council’s Constitution (Part 15, Responsibility for Functions, Annex A) gives the Environment Committee specific responsibilities for commissioning in relation to Street scene including pavements and all classes of roads, parking provision and enforcement, and transport and traffic management.

5.5 Risk Management

- 5.5.1 The reason for the proposed changes is to mitigate the identified risks associated with operating the winter gritting service exclusively from the Harrow depot and therefore the actions identified in this report are intended to manage a risk that cannot be tolerated.
- 5.5.2 It should be noted that these proposed changes are being deployed to reduce the currently highlighted risks associated with delivering the optimum service, however they will not remove the risk. Should there be a continuous spell of snow fall there are other factors that could hamper operations. For example, when the last severe weather event occurred it snowed so profusely that most workers chose to leave work early in an attempt to complete their travel home before the snow accumulated. This caused severe congestion on the road network and stopped the gritters from gaining access to the priority 1 routes.
- 5.5.3 It is also worth noting that there are increased risks associated with operating the service across two locations. These include moving resources between the sites and in the case of using the Harrow location to reload, there is an increased risk that the Harrow roads may not be gritted in a timely manner and hence to a satisfactory standard to allow the Barnet gritter vehicles to return to the Harrow depot to reload. In order to minimise this risk a further

contingency plan will be put in place which will look to redirect all the Barnet gritter vehicles to the M1 Gateway Services location for reloading if and when this proves to be necessary under a Mutual Aid agreement with Highways England. This is very much a precautionary action as we are not in a position to test this risk as we have not had a snow situation occur since relocating the service to Harrow.

5.5.4 Given the scale of financial and other resources involved in delivering the winter service, it is not considered reasonable either to:

- Provide the service on all parts of the Network; and
- Ensure carriageways, footways and cycle routes are kept free of ice or snow at all times, even on the treated parts of the network

5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 The Public sector equality duty under section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010, requires a public authority, in the exercise of its functions to, have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons, who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

5.6.2 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share relevant protected characteristics that are connected to those characteristics (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share relevant protected characteristics that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

5.6.3 The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

5.6.4 The winter service ensures safety for all road users, with priority given to gritting the primary road network and locations that assist the emergency services and those who use transport facilities.

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

5.7.1 Further engagement will be necessary with Highways England in order to ensure that all conditions attached to the Mutual Aid agreement are complied with.

5.7.2 Once the Winter Service Operational Plan has been updated with the changes it will be published on the Council's website and therefore be publically available.

5.8 Insight

- 5.8.1 Insight has been gained from operating the service partially from the Harrow depot and partially from the Mill Hill depot over the last winter season and also conducting test runs to verify timescales at different times of the day and night.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 6.1 Winter Service Plan 2017/18 Season