

From: Nick Chard, Cabinet Member – Environment, Highways & Waste

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25 March 2010

Subject: **Kent Winter Service Review – December to February 2010**

Classification: Unrestricted

1. Introduction

The past winter was the worst in the UK for over 30 years. This impacted on services and agencies across the country as well as in our region. This report sets out how key operators in Kent fared during the severe weather and the lessons learnt that will be used to improve services in the future. Opportunities for further debate will be detailed by the Cabinet Member for EH&W at the committee meeting.

2. Kent Highway Services

2.1 KHS has a Winter Service Policy and Plan which last year was approved by the EH&W Policy Overview Committee in September. These set out how KHS deals with keeping the highway network free from snow and ice.

3. Snow emergencies

3.1 The Winter Service Policy 2009/10 states:

'During prolonged periods of severe and persistent icing, or significant snow fall, delegated officers may declare an ice or snow emergency covering all or part of the County. In this event Community Delivery Managers will implement a course of action to manage the situation in either of these events'

3.2 Between December and February snow emergencies were called on three occasions. In addition, during this period there were many nights when road surface temperatures fell to below zero thereby necessitating the need to treat the primary and secondary routes. Details of the actions taken for each snow emergency are attached as Appendix 1

3.3 Specific actions were taken during the snow emergencies to ensure key routes were kept open. This included deploying a salting truck to both Bluebell Hill (A229) and Detling Hill (A249) and constantly patrolling these roads to keep them clear.

3. Salt bins

3.1 Salt bins are an important community resource and there are currently 1835 in place across the county. KHS currently pay for salt bins and place them safely in places that suit assessment criteria. There are local concerns about access to salt during bad weather and therefore a decision was made in January by the Cabinet Member that Members could use their Member

Highway Fund to pay for salt bins in their local areas. Proposals will be brought to a future meeting of this committee in respect of making further provisions for communities to access salt supplies during snow and ice conditions.

4. District council assistance

4.1 During the snow emergency in December problems were experienced in the clearance of town centre footways. This was addressed during the subsequent snow emergencies and contact was made with district councils and KCC Commercial Services requesting assistance. This proved to be very successful and resulted in many town centres being kept reasonably clear. Additionally Community Delivery Team Leaders in KHS used local district winter service plans to prioritise areas for action.

5. Salt

5.1 At the beginning of the winter season KHS had 20,000 tonnes of salt in stock which is the maximum that can be accommodated at the depots. In an average year we would expect to use about 13,000 tonnes so were well stocked. Orders were in place to automatically restock once the salt is used. Due to the national nature of the severe weather, problems with salt distribution became apparent early in the New Year. A national salt cell was set up by the Department for Transport to monitor the distribution of salt across the country. Additionally a Kent salt cell was set up for a few weeks in January with KHS, Medway Council and the Highways Agency. Salt usage is shown at Appendix 2.

5.2 Salt supplies from our main supplier, Salt Union, were limited. However other arrangements were in place for receiving salt from abroad and during January and February stock was received from abroad, along with limited supplies from Salt Union.

5.3 In order to conserve salt and to cope better with icy conditions, a decision was made in January to mix salt with sharp sand in a 50/50 mix and to use sand in salt bins. It was also decided that only sand would be used to treat footways in town centres. KHS did not run out of salt at any time and always had adequate supplies. The national salt cell issued weekly guidance on the conservation of salt and general guidance for highway authorities which were followed when appropriate.

6. Media

Many requests were received from the media for television, radio and newspaper interviews and this enabled us to get key items of interest to members of the public

7. Customer contact

Over 5000 enquires were received in our contact centre during December and January. Throughout the severe weather KHS had regular meetings and provided briefing notes to the contact centre to ensure that members of the public could be provided with up to date accurate information. Additionally the Traffic Management Centre was kept informed of actions being taken to clear the snow and ice and this information was put out hourly by the TMC.

8. Staffing

KHS staff were fully utilised during the winter emergencies as follows:

- Ringway staff put on 24 hour duty – 12 hour shifts
- KHS staff put on rota to work weekends
- All depots open and staffed 24 hours for duration of snow emergency

9. Future development of the winter service

9.1 KHS and the Cabinet Member for EH&W have received many comments from various stakeholders during the past few months. In addition to learning lessons from the past winter, KHS is keen to take on board any suggestions that could further improve the winter service. To this end a consultation process will be taking place commencing April 2010 (details at Appendix 3). The results of the consultation will be used to inform and improve the winter service policy and plan for 2010/11. Also the district Winter plans will be made available on line to county and district Members.

10. Southeastern

10.1 Snow disrupted rail services between 18 and 22 December, 6-9 January and 13 January due to severe snowy and icy conditions

10.2 Southeastern, along with other operators on the third-rail network is always susceptible to unreliability during very cold weather due to:

- icing on the conductor rail impeding acceleration
- points freezing
- need to reduce speeds and braking distances.
- batteries failure often with no heating or lighting and limited communication.

10.3 Performance on the High Speed Line for domestic trains was not affected severely due to power being delivered by overhead wires.

10.4 During this period of disruption, ice on the conductor rail caused some 100 instances where passenger trains were significantly delayed. The mean delay was 1 hour 20 minutes – the longest in Swanley seven hours. Problems were compounded by late running of trains causing displacement of crew and rolling stock

10.5 Network Rail and Southeastern do attempt to reduce problems by:

- use of conductor rail and points heaters
- Track spraying with de-icing fluid
- Running ghost trains before start of passenger services
- Adjusting the software of newer trains to reduce sensitivity to icing

10.6 During 6-8 January, Southeastern ran a reduced service – some 440 Mainline services compared to the normal number of some 870. This was directed by Network Rail in anticipation of adverse forecast of weather and

experience of the problems experienced on 18 December when multiple train failures left passengers stranded for long periods on freezing trains. The reduced service was to:

- Reduce the risk of passengers trapped in trains
- Enable following trains to stop in stations if service ahead has problems
- Provide a more reliable timetable
- Limit the number of points and junctions used
- Provide for the fewer passengers that want or need to travel

10.7 During this period, the delay minutes experienced in Kent on Southeastern were significantly less than those in Sussex and Wessex (operated by Southern and South West Trains). The worst affected Southeastern lines over this period were the Maidstone East and Hastings lines, with replacement buses on the Medway Valley Line used for part of 7 January

10.8 Network Rail and Southeastern are reviewing local performance during this time and there is a national review also taking place. These are likely to concentrate on the need to improve information to passengers in advance and during problem periods; the performance of the reduced timetable (robustness and overcrowding) and the need for more conductor rail heaters.

11. Eurostar

11.1 During the night from 18 and 19 December, five Eurostar trains failed in the Channel Tunnel. This caused the closure of the Tunnel to other traffic in both directions – freight and passenger shuttles and railfreight, with knock-on effects on the M20 and access to Dover. Eurostar services were suspended until a limited service was introduced on 22 December. The cause was ingress of snow into the trains which caused power failures

11.2 The cancellations of Eurostar trains over three days and the subsequent limited service afterwards caused severe delays and inconvenience to passengers and illustrated how unprepared Eurostar were to deal with the problem. Alternative travel arrangements (including coaches and ferries) took too long to organise and passengers were forced to stay in Eurostar terminals and Dover Docks Travel Centre whilst the backlog was dealt with. The numbers of foot passengers processed by DHB was around 20 times normal levels

11.3 An independent review made 21 recommendations to Eurostar to improve train reliability, improve arrangements for evacuation and rescue, and managing disruption and improving communication. The recommendations included:

- fitting improved snow filters to the trains
- covering sensitive electronic control systems and inductors to prevent condensation and pollution affecting signalling and data systems

- better communication (video links) between Eurostar and Eurotunnel Rail Control Centre
- better briefing of passengers when evacuation necessary onto Eurotunnel shuttle trains
- review need for more rescue locomotives to drag Eurostars to Ashford or Calais
- review need for Eurostar have longer battery life to maintain air conditioning
- review method of handling delayed and evacuated passengers at Ashford and St. Pancras with Network Rail and with SNCF and SNCB in France and Belgium
- Eurostar should improve communication with passengers at stations, on the internet (Facebook and Twitter) and to other operators and stations.

12. Eurotunnel

Problems started at Eurotunnel on 18 December before the Eurostar failures and the terminal was closed for an hour in the evening and was running a disrupted service until midnight, with freight only from 22.30. After the Eurostar failures, a limited shuttle car service did not start until 11am. The closure of the Tunnel stranded some 1,000 cars at Cheriton and 300 at Coquelles and caused cars and lorries to divert to Dover. Problems with shuttle services lasted until 21 December with rolling stock failures and crew difficulties.

13. Port of Dover

13.1 The Port of Calais was closed between 00.35 hours and 07.25 on 19 December for car traffic and until Sunday morning for freight. This, coupled with the complete closure of Eurotunnel, and the relatively high volume of traffic attempting to go back to the continent for Christmas caused very long queues on the A20 into Dover.

13.2 Traffic on Friday 18th reached back to the Cheriton interchange (Junction 12) in the evening but the Police did not invoke Operation Stack as they were concerned with safety. In the early morning of the 19th December, traffic stretched back to Ashford and Phase 2 Stack was finally put in place at 7.50am. Due to the high amount of tourist traffic attempting to cross the Channel, traffic on the A20 in Dover often stretched back right through the town, even though Stack was in place. Stack was stood down in the early morning of 21st December after over 40 hours.

13.3 These incidents have highlighted the need for a new contingency plan for when not only lorries but large numbers of passenger cars are caught up in Operation Stack.

13.4 KCC is to set up a high-level meeting with the Police, Highways Agency, Dover District Council, Eurotunnel, Dover Harbour Board and the ferry

operators to initiate an investigation on how such problems can be ameliorated in the future.

Contact Officers

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Appendix 1

Snow emergency 1

During the week commencing 14th December 2009 the weather forecast indicated that there would be severe snow conditions in Kent. In line with our policy it was decided that a snow emergency be declared in West Kent where the worst of the weather was expected to be.

To manage the situation the following actions were taken:

Salt

- The winter service policy was put into action and primary and secondary routes were salted
- Ploughs were fitted to gritter lorries to deal with deep snow
- Ringway deployed a full resource of drivers and vehicles
- KHS team leaders followed their own local district plans and instructed local action as necessary
- Salt was already on order for 400 tonnes for each of our seven depots
- Salt bins filled

Strategic Gold Command

- Problems were being experienced across the county with Operation Stack in place and a broken down train in the tunnel
- The Police set up a Strategic Co-ordination Meeting chaired by a Chief Superintendent
- KHS were represented on that group
- KHS led on a Bronze group to remove abandoned cars on Bluebell and Detling Hills on 18.12.09
- 19th December KHS staff assisted in providing welfare to people stuck in Operation Stack –under the direction of the Highways Agency

Staffing

- KHS staff detailed to work over the weekend to instruct local action to Ringway staff who were also working the weekend

Farmers

- Farmers contacted to plough their routes

Customer contact

- Contact centre short staffed on Friday 18th December due to difficulties getting to work
- Few calls on the Friday
- Most calls later on related to footway clearance and some specific areas that had not been salted including town centres

3. Snow emergency no 2

Severe winter conditions again hit the county in the week commencing 4th January and continued until 14th January. A snow emergency was called for the whole county on Monday 4th January. The key actions taken are outlined below:

Salt

- On 4.01.10 KHS had 7000 tonnes of salt in stock
- Due to the national nature of the weather it was decided by the Community Delivery Manager with responsibility for winter service (the Strategic Manager) that daily winter strategic meetings would be held for the duration of the snow emergency
- A decision was taken by the group to immediately take steps to conserve our salt supplies – by mixing salt with sharp sand in a 50/50 mix for use in salt bins a saving could be made
- During the week decisions were taken to:
 - Only use sand in salt bins
 - Use a 50/50 salt and sand mix on the primary and secondary routes (pure salt to be used in hazardous surfaces on key arterial roads such as A229, A249)
- Salt was on order with Salt Union and a foreign supplier
- Decision was taken not to give salt to other authorities – however as the situation worsened we supplied mutual aid to Medway Council and Sheerness Docks with the approval of the Interim Director of KHS
- 10th January decision taken to prioritise treatment in vicinity of
- secondary schools so that public exams could go ahead

Snow emergency no. 3

The third snow emergency was confined mainly to East Kent .At the start of week commencing 8th Feb following forecasts of significant snow fall pre-sanding of priority footways was instructed. Liaison with the district councils took place and 12 - 3 man district crews were used for priority footway treatment and clearing in Thanet. As snow started to accumulate all farmers with agreements in place were instructed to plough and keep clear their designated routes. They also assisted in areas off their routes as required. As and when primary and secondary routes were clear local action to problem areas was instructed such as steep gradients and areas where life and death situations arose such as the need for one resident to be visited with essential medical care and medication etc.

Regional Resilience Group

This was established on Tuesday 5th January and virtual meetings were held with local authorities across the region. Additionally the Police set up a Strategic Co-ordination Group in the same vein as the one in December. The Strategic Winter Service Manager represented KHS at both meetings

- Salt returns were made twice weekly to the resilience group and this will continue until further notice
- Government set up a national Salt Cell to monitor salt supplies across the country and to ensure that supplies were distributed in areas of greatest need
- Kent County Council were seen as being one of the better off authorities due to actions we had taken to conserve our salt supplies (we had reduced our usage by 50% a week and a half before being requested to do so by Government)

- A Kent salt cell chaired by KHS was set up as a Bronze group of the Strategic Co-ordination Group and this convened by audio conference on three occasions

Appendix 2
Salt usage

Based on the usage from previous years it is likely that we could use 35,000t of salt by the end of this season.

Salt Usage		
Year	End Dec	Season
2005/2006	4,171.36	12,296.88
2006/2007	1,147.04	9,197.88
2007/2008	9,058.35	17,752.07
2008/2009	7,874.68	24,289.21
2009/2010	13,689.84	

Average previous 4 seasons	5,562.86	15,884.01
2009/2010 above average	8,126.98	

Appendix 3

- Chief Executives of district councils
 - Structured interviews will be undertaken by Mori with Chief Executives or their nominated representatives
- Elected members – telephone interviews by Community Liaison Team Leaders and Officers
- District Members – on line survey
- Parish councils – on line survey
- Joint Transportation Boards- Winter service will be an item on the agenda and JTB members will have the opportunity to discuss and make recommendations to the EH&W Policy Overview Committee
- All responses will be collated and presented to the POSC in May and July

The independent polling organisation MORI will be commissioned to conduct the in depth interviews with Chief Executives and assess the results of the on line surveys.