

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee
5 July 2011

By: John Burr, Director of Kent Highway Services
Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member, Environment, Highways & Waste

Title: Winter Service 2010/11 review

Subject: A review of Kent Highway Services response to the winter weather experienced at the end of 2010 and proposals for the coming winter season

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report details the actions taken by staff in Kent Highway services last winter. It covers the new initiatives that were piloted including the use of district council labour, issuing some parishes with jumbo salt bags and the increased use of the media including the KCC website to keep the public informed. The report also asks Members to consider and decide on the options for the future supply of salt bins to parishes and communities and sets out the expenditure for winter service including the cost of snow emergencies experienced during December 2010.

1. Introduction

On 14 September 2010 the Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview Committee supported the Winter Service Policy Statement and Plan for 2009/10 and these were used as the basis for all winter service operations. This report will cover the actions taken due to the severe weather experienced at the end of 2010 and other actions taken by Kent Highway Services to manage the winter service.

It is generally accepted that the winter service during 10/11 was a significant improvement on the previous year. And it is vital that year on year learning and improvements continue to be built into the winter plan.

2. Financial implications

The allocated budget for winter service for 2010/11 was £2,490,581. There were two snow emergencies on 1st to 5th and 18th to 24th December 2010 the respective cost of which were £718,010 and £925,922. Apart from these the total expenditure on winter service for 2010/11 was £1,643,932.

3. Consultation and communication

Last year a consultation exercise was carried out of the winter service delivered by Kent Highway Services. The final consultation report was produced by Ipsos MORI on 12 June 2010. Additionally the views of Members

of the Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny committee and Joint Transportation Boards were sought and the results thereof were added to the consultation report to produce a revised draft Winter Service Policy 2010/11. As a result of the consultation a number of specific actions were taken and these are outlined below:

3.1 Joint working with district councils – District council chief executives expressed through the consultation that they were keen for their staff to be involved in the winter service during snow emergencies. Arrangements were therefore put in place with all district councils in the county whereby their staff were deployed to carry out pre-determined snow clearance, mainly in town centres. This proved to be successful with staff being deployed as needed in most cases. It is planned that this arrangement will be put in place again this year and a meeting with district council staff will be held in the next few months.

3.2 Salt bags – in order to provide parish councils with a resource that they could manage and utilise during snow, 1 tonne salt/sand mix bags were distributed to over 100 parishes around the county. Some difficulties were encountered as the decision had been made to deliver the bags once KHS were informed by our weather forecast provider that snow was on the way. This led to a delay in some of the bags being delivered. Therefore for the coming winter, it is proposed that the bags be delivered at the end of October/beginning of November and parishes can store these and use them during the winter season as necessary.

3.3 Media and communications – the consultation made it clear that residents want to know as much as possible about the actions that KHS take during winter and especially during snow emergencies. The decision was therefore taken to improve the KCC website and provide details of routes and localised district information on the location of salt bins. Short film clips were also provided explaining the service and how to distribute the salt from salt bins. We were also very proactive with the media in particular TV and radio and a number of interviews were given to both the BBC and Meridian and daily radio updates were provided on snow days. The Contact Centre was kept informed of actions being taken by daily reports from KHS staff around the county.

4. Farmers

Over 180 farmers assist in clearing snow in rural areas on snow days. Last year the decision was taken to renew the existing contracts and replace them with new three year contracts. The majority of the farmers renewed and a few new ones were taken on.

5. Salt bins – options

There are currently over 2000 salt bins located around the county. The 2010/11 winter service policy states that salt bins are purchased by KHS after they have been assessed by an engineer. A set budget is allocated and salt bins are provided according to the score up to the budget limit. KHS then fills and maintains the bins. Additionally Members can use their Member Highway

Fund to purchase salt bins on behalf of parishes (this will be allowed even if the proposed site does not meet the required score).

Some parishes and community groups have expressed a desire to purchase and maintain their own salt bins and therefore Members of this committee are asked to consider the two options presented below and make a recommendation on which option should be included in this year's Winter Service Policy:

Option 1 – Status Quo - as stated above.

Advantages - salt bins are limited and managed by KHS and this limits the proliferation of salt bins around the county. Costs can be managed for future maintenance and filling

Disadvantage –does not meet the wishes/needs of all parishes and community groups

Option 2 – Parishes and community groups purchase their own salt bins

Advantages

(i) Parishes take control of what is bought for their own area

(ii) They take responsibility for future maintenance and filling

Disadvantages

(i) Increase in salt bins across the county, potentially with some that are not necessary in areas where KHS already provide winter service gritting

(ii) From previous experience it is likely that in time these may become the responsibility of KHS in respect of maintenance, replacement and filling

6. Salt/sand mix

Due to the limited effect of rock salt on snow, it is proposed that salt bags and bin and fill with a mixture of salt/sand. This not only provides increased traction in heavy ice/snow conditions but also provides increased visibility of the treatment applied. In extreme snow conditions a salt/sand mix will also be applied to carriageways for the reasons quoted above as well as reducing the call on constrained national salt availability.

7. Equality impact assessment

An initial screening has been carried out on the winter service policy and work is in progress for a full impact assessment to be made and the results of this will be reported to a future meeting of this committee.

8. Conclusion

Last winter was reportedly the worst for many years and this led to two snow emergencies being declared across the whole of Kent. Lessons had been learnt from previous years and the results of a consultation exercise were included in the winter service policy and plan. Closer working with district councils, parishes and the media led to a more effective service. Farmers'

contracts were renewed and they contributed to the service provided in rural areas. Salt bins still continue to be an area of concern for parishes and two options have been set out in this report for Members to discuss and make a decision.

8. Recommendations

This committee is asked to decide on which option should be adopted for the provision of salt bins for the 2011/12 winter period. The rest of the report is to be noted.

Background documents:

Kent Highway Services Winter Service Policy 2010/11

Ipsos MORI consultation report into Kent Highway Services Winter Service
June 2010

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