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To: Cabinet – 18 May 2009

Subject: Frost Damage – January to March 2009 - Feedback

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper gives feedback to the Cabinet on the response by Kent Highway Services to the recent frost damage this winter.

For Information

1. Background

Cabinet will be aware that in April 2008 KHS held a “Pothole Blitz” following a previous wet summer and winter. This proved to be very successful in the quantity of work achieved by directing all 22 Network Operation Management Units to minor surface repairs.

Significant experience was gained (both positive and negative) during the blitz. One positive aspect was the need to be proactive and forward thinking to any response rather than late and reactive.

Whilst the pothole blitz tackled a large number of potholes it was not able to address larger scale patching necessary across the County. To respond to this situation a further £1.8m was provided allowing the funding of 18 major patching crews from late summer throughout the rest of 2008 / 09.

2. This Winter

We therefore approached the winter in a planned way, with a proactive method of response to poor weather and resulting damage, should it occur.

As we now know late 2008 and early 2009 has seen one of the wettest and coldest winters for over a decade. Significant salting took place throughout December and January, followed by a short belt of snow at the beginning of February.

Between the start of the Winter Service on 20th October 2008 and the end of February 2009 we salted our primary route 78 times and our secondary route 38 times. This is an increase on last year of 195% and 422% respectively

3. Our Response

We identified at the beginning of January that this long period of cold and icy weather would have implications for frost damage. At that time KHS made the decision to move £500,000 to fund an additional **15 crews** until the end of March. In response to the February snow a further **10 crews** were provided to tackle the additional potholes and carriageway patching required. In late February and through March a total of **66 crews** were working on minor and major surface repairs across the County.

At the peak we were repairing approx 3,000 potholes / patches a week.

Even at this level, for a number of weeks demand outstripped repairs, but this was to be expected following such a dramatic and prolonged winter event. However by keeping staff and crews fully focused on the task at hand completion times quickly improved.

It should be noted that a proactive response by KHS to tackling the snow emergency, (with crews working around the clock) saw positive responses from the public and media.

4. Longer Term

The above has shown that by providing the correct resource, at the correct time and targeting it to the areas of need, significant productivity can be achieved. In addition a good level of public response / satisfaction is possible. Even before the bad weather public satisfaction with roads in Kent had risen by 10%. However this is not a time to be complacent.

For 2009 / 10 the budget provision to the “front end” of this service has been increased further. We will be providing:

23 NOMU crews
18 minor repair crews
18 major repair crews
2 “Jetpatching” machines for 6 months
Minor resurfacing to the value of £1m
Major Resurfacing to the value of £15m

This allows us to plan a year round service but provides the flexibility to target crews responding to weather / climate related surface damage.

5. Conclusion:

Cabinet is asked to receive the report, noting:

- the learning and development achieved from the April Pothole Blitz
- the proactive response to the recent poor winter conditions.
- The redirecting of funds in 2008 / 09 to support the necessary response
- additional funding in 2009 / 10 to provide a planned and responsive “front end” service.

- related improvements achieved in customer response / communication.

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Background Documents:

None