

By: Kim Hills, Head of Community Operations

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview Committee – 16 July 2009

Subject: Winter Service 2008/2009 End of Season Review

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report gives an end of year report on the County Council's approach to winter maintenance for the winter period 2008/09.

1. Introduction

1.1 On 5 September 2008 the Highways Advisory Board supported the Winter Service Policy Statement and Plan for 2008/9 and these were used as the basis for all winter service operations. This report gives information relating to the winter of 2008/09, sets out details of the KHS response and learning points, and gives recommendations for improving efficiency and effectiveness in the future. A further report detailing the weather reports and seeking approval for the policy and plan for 2009/10 will be presented to POC later on in the year.

2. The winter of 2008/9

2.2 The winter service policy requires precautionary salting on the 'A' and 'B' and other busy roads (as defined in the policy statement paragraph 2.1.2) where frost/ice is likely to form on road surfaces.

2.3 The winter of 2008/9 was the most severe for more than a decade and this presented a challenge to local authorities across the country. Due to the planning and proactive approach to responding to the weather conditions, KHS was able to provide a consistent service in line with policy. This led to recognition and praise from members of the public: and the media. Significant salting took place; well in excess of previous years. The table below details the numbers of runs per primary and secondary route and the percentage increases:

Winter service review			% difference on season 3 averages	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
2006/2007	32	8	62%	44%
2007/2008	40	9	77%	49%
2008/209	84	38	162%	207%
Average	52	18		
			% increase on previous season	
2006/2007	32	8		
2007/2008	40	9	125%	113%
2008/2009	84	38	210%	422%

3. Contract arrangements

3.1 The KHS winter service contractor for the winter of 2008/9 was Ringway Infrastructure Services (Ringway) within the Alliance partnership agreement formed by Kent Highway Services. Ringway will be the service provider for the winter of 2009/10.

4. Forecast service

4.1 For the first time this year Meteogroup provided the weather forecasting service for KHS. This was as a result of a tender process carried out last year. The service provided was comparable to that received by the Met Office and full details will be provided to this committee in September. Tenders for the forecast service for the next season will be issued shortly and consideration is being given to seeking a longer term contract.

5. Salt stocks and supplies

5.1 KHS keeps a supply of salt in strategic locations at depots around the county. Stocks are replenished as necessary at the end of and during the winter period. Due to preplanning there were sufficient stocks of salt to treat the primary and secondary routes at a time when many other counties across the country were running low. At present all salt stocks are at maximum capacity.

- (a) Pre-wet salt - during 2008/9 pre-wet salt was used for the first time in the County from both the Ashford and Haysden depot In Tonbridge. The initial response has been very positive with Ringway drivers reporting that there was a great deal less 'bouncing' of the salt when it hits the road and it appears to stay on the road better. This is likely because it contains additional brine water which sticks to the road and is less likely to be blown off. An early estimate is that on the routes where pre-wet was used savings of around 10% salt use was achieved. It is hoped that in future when the method has been perfected that savings in the region of 20-25% can be achieved.

Next season Ringway are planning to introduce pre-wet salt into the Preston depot, Faversham where they have already installed a salt saturator and they will be working toward getting it up and running before the start of the next season.

- (b) Salt bins - In line with County approved policy, there are over 1100 salt bins located across the county. Due to the severity of the weather numerous requests for new salt bins were received. Many of these requests were rejected as their positioning did not comply with policy. Additionally, some parishes questioned payment for salt bins. The current policy states that parishes pay for salt bins, but KHS pay for those in urban areas. This part of the policy has been queried by parishes and recommendations regarding this will be presented to members of this committee when the policy is presented in September.

6. Plans for improvement

6.1 Between October 2008 and April 2009, two review meetings were held with staff from across the Alliance involved in delivering the winter service. These

provided useful opportunities to assess the prevailing situation and identify where actions could be taken to improve the response in the future. The key areas where improvement action will be taken are listed below:

- Area action plans - district winter plans will be updated in line with a departmental template to ensure consistency of approach and appropriate local service delivery
- Media contact - this proved effective this season and improvements will be made to ensure safety messages as well as road conditions are broadcast
- Ringway to refine resource planning and timing of runs
- Improvements to contact centre messaging and information provided to parishes and Members
- Routes - the optimisation of primary routes was carried out recently. Work is now underway to optimise the secondary routes and ensure that they are on the GIS system. It is expected that these will be in place for the beginning of the 2009/10 winter season

7. Peer review

7.1 In January officers from KHS visited Lincolnshire County Council to share experiences and best practice. Ringway are also the contractors for Lincolnshire and officers were able to see the modern operation from one of their depots. The good practice observed there will, where appropriate, be adapted for use in Kent and ongoing working relationships will continue.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Policy Overview Committee is asked to receive the report noting:

- The proactive response to the recent winter conditions
- Proposals to increase use of pre-wet salt and associated savings
- Proposals to tender for the weather forecast service
- Actions for improvements to future winter service

Background Documents:

Winter Maintenance Report to the Highways Advisory Board – 5 September 2008

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