

From: Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways,
Transport and Waste

Andrew Loosemore, Interim Director, Highways, Transport and Waste

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 15 May 2018

Subject: Winter Service Update for the 2017-2018 season

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Summary:

The report updates Cabinet Committee members on the winter service actions taken with a focus on the two snow emergencies declared in the 2017/8 winter season and outlines the lessons learned and continuous improvement initiatives to be implemented for the 2018/19 winter season.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to discuss and comment on the report and the proposed work plan to implement lessons learned from the recent snow emergencies.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The highways winter service for 2017/18 began on 26 October 2017 and ended on 26 April 2018 and has been carried out in line with the Winter Service Policy 2017/18 approved at the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on 21 September 2017.
- 1.2 This winter has been cold with December and late January seeing very low temperatures. 72 gritting runs were carried out between November and February which compares to the 62 runs that were budgeted for in that period. However, the 'Beast from the East' arrived in Kent on 26 February and lasted for a week and was characterised by heavy snow and very low temperatures. More bad weather followed during the weekend of the 16 to 18 March although this was not as severe as the previous event. On both occasions Kent Highways declared a snow emergency. This report sets out the key elements of decision making in winter and the effectiveness of actions that were taken in relation to these snow emergencies. It also discusses lessons learnt and provides detail on current and future actions which will contribute towards the continuing improvement of the winter service.

- 1.3 There are 57 primary salting routes covering 30% of the network. Throughout the winter season, 101 runs have been carried out. Our contractor utilises 112 drivers, 12 loaders and 10 duty officers. Nearly 100 Highways staff were involved in the winter service during the snow emergencies including our out of hours officers and staff from across the service who assisted.

2. Snow emergency

- 2.1 A countywide snow emergency is declared when significant snow fall (50mm or over) is expected across the county. If the snow is confined to specific areas, then the emergency will be limited to that area. All available resources are deployed to grit roads, remove snow, and farmers go out to clear snow in their allocated part of the county. Local winter plans are activated and partnership work with the district and borough councils is put into operation. For this season a winter service communication campaign had been developed and key messages were put out to the media, the KCC website and on social media, including our 'GritterTwitter' and Facebook accounts.
- 2.2 The winter service is well planned, and routes are reviewed annually and amended as necessary. The partnership work with districts that has been in place for several years proved to be highly effective and was of great benefit in the clearance of town centres during the snow emergencies. The gritter drivers are trained and run their routes prior to the winter to ensure they are familiar with them and able to grit effectively during the season.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 The allocated budget for winter service for 2017/18 is £3,328,600. The cost of both winter emergencies was approximately an additional £1,141,000.

4. Beast from the East 26th February to 5th March

- 4.1 All resources were deployed to deal with the snow during the period 6 February to 5 March. Conference calls took place before and during the event to ensure that actions were communicated to all relevant parties including the Kent Resilience Team. Highways staff were also involved in the Strategic and Tactical calls arranged by Kent Police. Parish councils who had requested them had received one tonne bags of a salt/sand mix to use in their local communities and district and borough councils had been provided with a salt sand mix. Throughout the week as the local plans were activated, and with the assistance of district and borough council colleagues snow clearance extended to include areas outside of the primary route network such as doctor's surgeries, care homes etc.
- 4.2 Throughout the week, 26 gritting runs were done. This compares to the February average of 16 runs for the whole month. 5,000 tonnes of salt were used. Freezing rain is an unusual phenomenon in the UK and this occurred on Friday 2 March. This led to over 50 crashes along the M20 within half an hour. Accidents also occurred on the Kent network as road surfaces froze on impact from the freezing rain.

5. Mini Beast 16-18 March

- 5.1 As with the previous event, plans were put in place to deal with the expected weather. There was less snow than had been forecast however there were icy roads and snow mainly in the west and north of the county. 7 gritting runs were carried out during the three days and this compares to the average of 6 runs that are usually carried out for the whole of March.

6. Farmers

- 6.1 There are 106 farmers contracted to clear 117 routes across the county. The farmers all have pre-arranged routes which they clear when over 50mm of snow falls using snow ploughs provided and maintained by the County Council. All farmers were utilised during the snow events and many worked round the clock to keep rural areas as clear as possible. Snow drifting was a problem during the first snow emergency and many farmers assisted in clearing these. The work they did was invaluable and greatly appreciated by the local communities affected.

7. Communications

- 7.1 Communicating to our customers and road users is critical during snow events and information was provided on our website and via social media. During the week of the 26 February there were 211,900 views of the twitter messages put out by the Press Office. This compares with 12,200 in the previous week. Our Facebook account was also well used and the kent.gov winter service page received 59% of all visits to the website during the snow events. (Appendix A). Media outlets were interested in the winter activity in Kent with most of the major TV and radio channels making contact and interviews were given as appropriate. All this activity helped to ensure that residents knew that action was being taken by KCC to deal with the weather conditions.
- 7.2 Daily written briefings were provided to Members and KCC Senior Management. Additionally, the Highway Management Centre put out regular messages on road closures and twice daily information provided by District Managers to a wider group of stakeholders.

8. Lessons learned and future activity

- 8.1 Over the past few years several improvements have been made to the winter service which has resulted in a more effective and efficient service. These have included the provision of salt/sand bags to parish councils, new contracts with farmers, formal partnership arrangement with district and borough councils and improved communications and messages for the public. From these two snow emergencies lessons have been learnt and these will that will be looked at to make improvements for the future as outlined below:
- 8.2 **Secondary routes** – during the recent snow events no secondary routes were treated. In the main this was due to all available resources concentrating on keeping the primary routes open and keeping Kent moving. A review of secondary routes will be carried out in the summer to determine which parts of that network could be prioritised during a snow event and the impact that

would have on budget and resource requirements. Consideration will be given to hilly areas and bus routes and other strategic areas.

- 8.3 **Mutual aid** – prior to the winter season a meeting was held with neighbouring authorities to agree mutual aid if it was needed. This worked very well and salt sharing agreements with Highways England Area 4 were effective and will be continued.
- 8.4 **Partnership working** – explore extending the use of farmers and district and borough councils to include assistance on redesigned secondary routes at key times in strategic areas. Also conduct a trial providing some farmers with gritting equipment as well as snow ploughs
- 8.5 **Local district plans** – these will be reviewed and updated in line with the activity carried out during the snow emergencies and joint working with the district council

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 This season's winter service has been challenging but the service has been delivered successfully in line with the Winter Service Policy. This has been due to the hard work and goodwill of all highways teams involved who stepped up to the demands of this challenge and demonstrated their ability to manage severe weather events. The two winter emergencies were managed well though it is acknowledged that there are lessons to be learned as outlined in this report and steps are being taken to review these and some of the initiatives being considered during the summer will contribute towards improvements that could be applied to a similar situation in the future. The result of this work will be reported to this Cabinet Committee later in the year.

10. Recommendations

The Cabinet Committee is asked to discuss and comment on the report and the proposed work plan to implement lessons learned from the recent snow emergencies.

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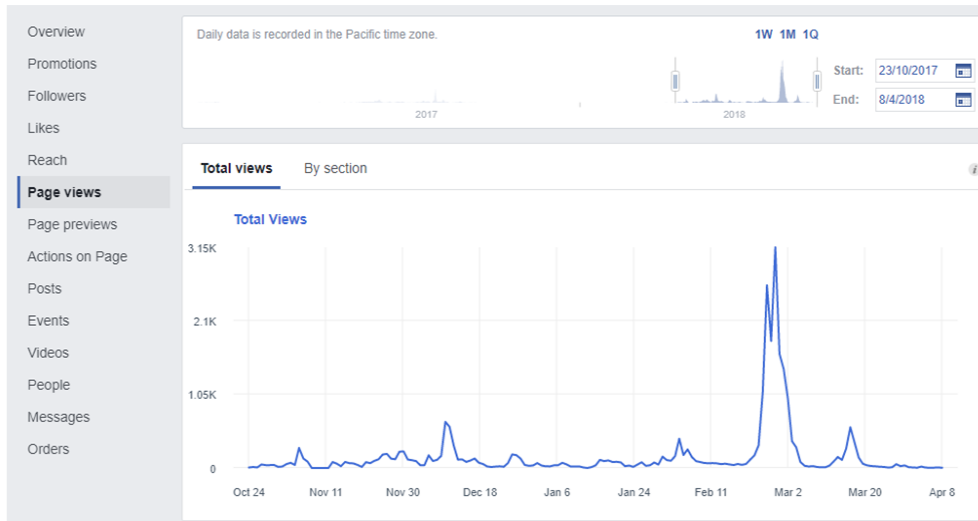
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Appendix A

GrittingKent Facebook – Page views



GrittingKent Facebook - Actions

