

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

To: Environment, Highways and Waste Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 25 May 2010

Subject: Winter Service Consultation 2009/10

Classification: Unrestricted

1. Background

At the EH&W POSC on 23 March 2010, it was reported that a consultation process on the winter service for 2009/10 would be taking place commencing April 2010. The results of the consultation will be used to inform and improve the winter service policy and plan for 2010/11. District winter plans will be made available on line to county and district Members. The consultation involves the following:

- Chief Executives of district councils
 - Structured interviews will be undertaken by IPSOS 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

1.1. The independent polling organisation IPSOS MORI has been commissioned to conduct the in depth interviews with Chief Executives and assess the results of the on line surveys.

2. Findings to date

As at 17 May 2010 IPSOS Mori had completed telephone interviews with 10 of the 12 district council chief executives or their nominated representatives. 148 on line survey responses had been received. 13 County Members had been interviewed. An interim summary of the results from the district councils is presented at Appendix A. Some of the key findings are:

- Different experience across the districts
- Most main roads were cleared and treated adequately
- During the first phase of the bad weather KHS was thought to be badly prepared but the second phase showed that learning had clearly taken place
- There is a need for local district plans
- Inconsistent communication
- Contact centre needs to respond better to residents
- The Winter Service Policy is considered to be a reference document
- District and KHS should come together for discussions on key priority areas
- Good pre winter meeting need to identify local priorities

3. Joint Transportation Boards

A report will be submitted to the next round of Joint Transportation Boards and the discussions that take place there will be included in the final report to this committee.

4. Final report

The online fieldwork will be closed on 1 June and IPSOS Mori will submit their final report by 16th June. The final consultation report and an initial draft Winter Service Policy will be presented to the July POSC meeting.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that Members of this committee

- i. Note the contents of this report
- ii. Discuss the Winter Service Policy 2009/10 and the overall response to the winter service provided last year. The results of these discussions will be incorporated into the report that will be presented to this committee in July

Contact: Carol Valentine, Community Delivery Manager: Tel 01233 648348

**Kent Winter Service policy review
Interim summary of qualitative interviews with district councils in Kent
– based on interviews with ten districts
13 May 2010**

Clearing and salting roads and footpaths Winter 2009/2010

- Different experience across the districts.
- Most agreed that main roads were cleared and treated adequately.
- B roads and more local routes were not cleared and treated, some understood that a lack of resources led to this decision, but some felt more dialogue with districts would have led to targeting of important B roads, to help keep residents moving. And some clearance was just too late, making the effort wasted.
- Most acknowledge that many authorities across the country were caught off-guard by the bad weather.
- The response from KHS was thought to be different at different points in the Winter;
 - In the first phase of bad weather KHS was thought to be poorly prepared, without adequate plans in place. Staff were not available and communication was poor for most districts, although not all.
 - In the second phase learning had clearly taken place, offers of staff from some districts was accepted – though not all and districts were better informed of the action planned by KHS.

Issues of concern

- Inconsistent communication across the county for staff and residents.
- Customer contact centre at KHS did not respond to residents as residents hoped, leading to complaints to districts.
- Poor local knowledge of important priority routes in some areas.
- Lack of involvement of some districts in the prioritisation of key local routes.
- Clearing of footpaths was a key issue and one which the districts are keen to support KHS on in the future.
- Lack of preparedness to use district street cleaning staff from KHS.
- Poor communication with residents, leading to complaints targeted at districts.
- Possibility that the county-wide depots are difficult for staff to reach in bad weather, and too far from the districts they service. Although it is acknowledged that efficient use of resources is essential.
- It was suggested that because KHS is based around function not area that the service is disjointed.

Feedback on the Winter Service Policy Statement

- Considered to be a reference document.
- Not read by many.
- Those who have read the document consider it to be written in an accessible way, but without the detail they seek.
- Some would like district specific versions that provide more detail on KHS plans for their area or at least districts plans attached. However, it was acknowledged that this did not require details to be provided on every street and footpath that would be cleared, as this would be too much detail. It was hoped that a useful document would come from discussions between the district and KHS.

- More important that districts and KHS come together for discussion of key priority areas, mixed feelings on the level of formality that agreements require. Formal agreements do not necessarily mean inflexibility but reassure that everyone knows what they are doing (especially members) and helps with advance planning. Those districts with very good relationships with key members of KHS staff are less keen that formal agreements be prepared, as they fear that this might damage those good relationships. However, those without the good relationships are keen for greater dialogue and a formal agreement setting out responsibility.
- Need to involve more consultation with districts, and include more information about district priority areas. Going forward technical officers group might be most appropriate vehicle.

Communication

- Those districts who still had good links with staff at KHS who had been working at their district five years ago, when districts had more involvement in treating and clearing roads during Winter, were happy with the levels of information they had access too.
- Those who had lost those staff links were very critical about the lack of local knowledge, about the time taken for KHS to react to local problems, and about the areas selected as priorities.
- There is desire for good pre-Winter meetings to identify local priorities, whether this forms part of the development of the Winter Service Policy Statement or not.
- Some felt that the dialogue with residents was poor, that the KCC call-centre was ill-prepared, and that the districts consequently fielded complaints from residents.

Prioritisation of road maintenance after Winter 2009/2010

- Again, this was mixed. Some felt they had had opportunities for dialogue and members and officers had been adequately involved.
- Others felt that they did not know what progress KHS were making in their area.
- Again districts desire to be involved in discussions over local priorities.