



Policy and Scrutiny

Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills, Executive Director for Environment & Economy

Report to:	Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Date:	18 April 2016
Subject:	Winter Maintenance - End of Year Report

Summary:

This report gives Members an opportunity to review the 2015/2016 winter maintenance activities. Members are also invited to discuss potential changes for inclusion in an updated Winter Maintenance Plan.

Actions Required:

Members of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider and comment on the report and support a review of the Winter Maintenance Plan.

1. Background

General Weather Trends

Lincolnshire since 2014 has been involved with Department for Transport (Dft) and the Met Office on a Euporias funded project to develop a seasonal "Winter forecasting for UK Transport". This project concluded this winter with monthly seasonal briefings for the stakeholders group which included the provision of "Seasonal Briefings", "Seasonal Prediction" and "Civil Contingency Planners Outlook" all for the following three months. Members have benefited from this national work with a summary of the following three month weather outlook being reported at HT&T Scrutiny Committee meetings. The project predicted in October 2015 that the winter would start with warmer than average temperatures but that February and March had the potential to be colder than average which proved to be the case and is supported by Lincolnshire's own statistical figures which are included as Appendix A. Included as Appendices B & C are the charts detailing Precautionary Salting Turnouts and Salt Usage Figures since the winter of 1985/86.

It is hoped that this national work will continue and develop but is subject to national funding pressures.

Weather Forecasting Service

Traditionally Lincolnshire has received its winter weather forecast service, OpenRoad, from the Met Office as the national provider of this service within the UK. However over a few years several new providers have entered this specialist market and are now providing this service to the UK market. Lincolnshire during the winters of 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 trialled the services of the two main competitors to the Met Office – MeteoGroup and MetDesk – both of whom provided professional operations. Therefore the winter weather forecast service will be going out to open tender for the provision of the service for a period of three years with the option to extend for another three on yearly extensions. This will commence with the winter of 2016/2017.

Route Based Forecasting

For the winter of 2015/2016 Lincolnshire fully utilised the new style of road weather forecast, Route Based Forecast (RBF), which we had been phasing in over several years. With this system as opposed to previous Domain Based Forecast (six forecasts covering the county) each gritting route has its own individual weather forecast and graph so 43 weather forecasts are in effect provided. This has allowed Duty Officers to make more targeted treatment decisions especially on marginal weather nights across the county. This has resulted in salt usage savings as demonstrated in the table below which compares the winter of 2015/16 against similar mild winters.

Marginal/Mild Winter Comparison						
Winter	Operations Type	Treated kms	Turnouts	Salt Usage Tonnes	Tonnes per Turnout	Tonnes per km
1997/98	Dry Salting with Domain Forecast	2361	47	12800	272	5.4
2006/07	Pre-Wet salting with Domain Forecasts	2982	52	11700	225	3.9
2015/016	Pre-wet salting with Route Based Forecasts	3008	51	9395	184	3.1

(As of 30th March 2016)

So as a comparison there has been a reduction in salt usage of around 2,400 tonnes between the mild winters of 2006/07 and 2015/16 for similar operations. Therefore taking into account salt savings as well as other ancillary costs the RBF system has contributed to a direct reduction in costs this winter of around £130,000.

It should be noted that the Met Office, MeteoGroup and MetDesk all include Route Based Forecasts within their forecast packages.

Budget Allocation 2015/2016

For this winter the budget allocation, based upon the requirements of the Winter Maintenance Plan, was £4,870,263. This is broken down into the following main budget area sections:

Budget area	Budget allocation	Operations covered
Network North operational costs	£328,803	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HWTC Contractors charges to carry out salting runs including diesel & manpower
Network South operational costs	£274,775	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grit bin & footway clearing • LCC owned depot costs including utility payments • 3rd party snow event operations
External depot lease costs	£290,491	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent, rates and utility costs
Centrally controlled operational costs	£300,449	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather forecasting operations • Weather station system & maintenance • Vehicle tracking & monitoring system • Depot CCTV security system • Weighbridge system • Vehicle wash-down equipment • Salt stock monitoring & testing
Salt costs	£1,420,605	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salt used in gritting operations • Brine making & equipment maintenance • Salt heaping & movement
Vehicles	£2,022,929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gritter fleet lease, maintenance & repair costs • Insurance • Additional diesel costs (Euro 5 & 6) • Severe weather fleet including snow blower
Contract preliminary & compensation event costs	£232,211	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central HWTC contract charges
Total budget allocation	£4,870,263	

Drivers

Due to the reduction in highway construction works going through the Highways Alliance to Kiers they struggled to provide the requisite numbers of Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) licensed drivers at the start of the winter season. The Executive Member together with the Lincolnshire Communications Team were involved in a media campaign to encourage suitable LGV drivers to join Kiers on zero hours contracts. This campaign resulted in seven suitable applicants being engaged by Kier.

However this could again become a serious factor leading up to the winter of 2016/2017. Due to the continuing financial challenges facing the highways service there will be a reduction in the amount of work and hence drivers required for highway construction.

Winter Maintenance Plan

In light of the budgetary constraints facing the authority it is proposed that prior to the winter of 2016/2017 officers carry out a review of the July 2013 Highway Maintenance Plan. It is hoped that this review could highlight areas of saving, particularly around the equipment available for Severe Weather Events, which the authority is now struggling to resource with the available manpower.

2. Conclusion

Members are invited endorse the report and approve a review of the Winter Maintenance Plan.

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Average Monthly Precautionary Salting Turnouts
Appendix B	Precautionary Salting Turnouts 1985/86 to 2015/16
Appendix C	Salt Usage 1985/86 to 2015/16

5. Background Papers

The following background papers as defined in the Local Government Act 1972 were relied upon in the writing of this report.

Document title	Where the document can be viewed
Winter Maintenance Plan Issued July 2013	Lincolnshire County Council Website

This report was written by David Davies, who can be contacted on 01522 553080 or davidj.davies@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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