

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

Report to:	Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Date:	12 September 2016
Subject:	Winter Maintenance Working Group 2016 Outcome & Recommendations

Summary:

In April 2016 the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee approved the formation of a Winter Maintenance Working Group to consider the Highway Maintenance Plan and highlight areas of future savings. It was agreed that the working group would make recommendations on the following topics:

- Areas of possible savings, with particular focus on the equipment available for Severe Weather Events;
- Identifying any changes to be considered for inclusion in an updated Winter Maintenance Plan;
- Consider and review options for continued publicity to encourage suitable LGV licensed drivers to join Kier leading up to the 2016/2017 winter period.

Actions Required:

The Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee is invited to:

- 1) Consider the outcomes and recommendations of the Winter Maintenance Working Group and highlight any additional comments for consideration.
- 2) Support a review of the Winter Maintenance Plan, taking into account the outcomes and recommendations from the working group, for consideration by the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and I.T.

1. Background

The Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee approved the formation of a Winter Maintenance Working Group in April 2016 to highlight areas of possible savings, with particular focus on the equipment available for Severe Weather Events. The Group also looked to identify any changes to be considered for inclusion in an updated Winter Maintenance Plan and reviewed options for continued publicity to encourage suitable LGV licensed drivers to join Kier leading up to the 2016/2017 winter period.

The membership of the Working Group included Councillors; M Brookes, D Brailsford, A G Hagues, R Renshaw and A H Turner MBE JP.

Lead Officers from the service area involved in the Working Group included David Davies, Principal Maintenance Engineer and Dean Myhill, Area Highways Manager on behalf of Lincolnshire County Council (LCC); and Martin Thurnell, Business Manager and Lauren Brown, Reactive Agent for Kier Group as part of the Highways Alliance.

Additional support to the Working Group was provided by Daniel Steel, Scrutiny Officer, Ethan Thorpe, Strategic Communications and Mark Smith, Fleet Technical Advisor.

The Working Group held three meetings and, for simplicity of reporting, the key areas of discussion, outcomes and recommendations are included below. The Working Group explored a number of different issues and options. These included:-

- A lack of Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) drivers to resource frontline and Severe Weather operations
- Possible options to reduce core driver & drivers mate numbers
- Review of the current Severe Weather equipment
- Possible additional budget saving options & ongoing budget saving work
- Options for continued publicity for the 2016/2017 winter period

1.1. Sourcing LGV drivers to resource frontline operations

With the introduction of the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence from September 2014 over 20% of LGV drivers have left the industry. Lincolnshire has a large number of local haulage firms employing LGV drivers all year round. The better paid haulage industry in Lincolnshire has resulted in a retention issue of LGV drivers for winter maintenance working. As part of the Council's contract Kier staff are required, where possible to obtain an LGV license, however this process can take up to a year.

Sub-contractors working for Kier have only a limited ability to supply drivers as they also have their own contracts outside of the Highways Alliance to fulfil as well as driver hours and stand down issues to consider.

Kier has investigated or tried alternative resource options which includes the Army Reserves within the county. Unfortunately, it is understood that the Army Reserves have stopped training drivers to LGV standards due to retention issues and so drive under Crown Rules. Agency Drivers have also been used in the past but this has proven not to be effective due to unreliability and the need for regular work by the drivers.

At the initial meeting of the Working Group on the 09 May 2016 members of the Working Group were asked to consider the options to promote the recruitment of seasonal drivers into the service. Officers also highlighted an alternative future option would be to consider the possibility of training LCC staff to drive gritters and

it was noted that some retired drivers find zero hour contracts flexible and suit their needs.

Also at the initial meeting on the 09 May 2016 officers highlighted the possibility of having a presence at the Lincolnshire Show as a good opportunity for networking with other local organisations. This recommendation was explored following the initial meeting, however, owing to planning and time constraints a presence on the County Council stand at the Lincolnshire Show wasn't achievable for 2016. However, the supplier of four new gritters (Mercedes Intercounty Truck & Van) to LCC did have a presence at the show which included one of the new gritters.

Recommendations

- Members recommended that consideration be given to the use of retained firefighters as back-up drivers for severe weather events.
- Members highlighted the possibility of building relationships with the RAF and other armed services in Lincolnshire to see if this was also a possibility for severe weather events.
- The use of Refuse Truck drivers was also suggested as a possible area for consideration.
- Members highlighted the possibility of promoting LGV training to part time staff, those on flexible retirement or those who have considered voluntary redundancy.
- Members recommended the need to consider closer mutual working with local Food Producers situated near highways depots as access to the road network is an essential part of their business.
- Members supported the involvement of the Communications Team as early as possible to work towards a PR campaign on Radio and TV, similar to the campaign completed in 2015. Members also highlighted the need for any media campaign to be clear on what is expected and the level of commitment needed to undertake Winter Maintenance driving.

1.2. Possible options to reduce core 'driver' and 'driver's mate' numbers

Due to Health & Safety issues during snow events when ploughing operations are ongoing the gritters need to be double manned. This therefore reduces the manpower available for other operations. One possible option would be to utilise LCC staff as driver's mates at these times.

The County Council currently uses the front line gritter fleet to treat severe weather routes during prolonged icy periods or prior to snow events. As part of the Working Group consideration was given to reduce the number of severe weather routes. Officers highlighted the need to ensure sufficient staff numbers to cover the current number of routes. There is a current identified need to have 3 shifts and a 120-person workforce. By reducing the number of severe weather routes this would reduce the issue of driver downtime and allow operations to be concentrated on the main gritting network.

It is recognised that any reduction in the number of severe weather routes could result in an increase in the number of self-service grit bins & one tonne salt sacks required on the untreated network.

Recommendations

- Members suggested consideration should be given to using LCC staff as drivers mates as a more effective solution than training LCC staff as drivers due to the lower cost/time requirements.
- Members confirmed that there was a need to review the current routes for efficiencies as part of a wider review of the Highway Maintenance Plan but supported the retention of the current number of severe weather routes.
- Members accepted that there was a greater need for self-service due to the continued budget pressures and highlighted the need for greater cooperation with local parish councils to promote the self-service options.

1.3. Review of Severe Weather equipment

The County Council currently makes use of a number of second line severe weather equipment such as the SnowEx and Trailer gritters operated by Highways Alliance operatives. However, in severe weather all manpower is deployed on resourcing mainline gritter operations. All 8 SnowEx bodies are leased and Kier have recently replaced the existing Canter vehicles with new DAF vehicles. The new DAF vehicles will require modification to enable to the SnowEx bodies to operate. This conversion work will result in a one off cost of £21,000.



New DAF vehicles



SnowEx attachment

One SnowEx is required to remain as a spare vehicle at Manby in case of breakdown of the small mainline vehicle which covers a route containing bridge restrictions. Kier has committed to retain one of the older Canter vehicles for use with the 'Snow Ex' on the route which covers Aby Rail Bridge. This should resolve the concern for the 2016/17 year, however there will need to be a review of the current situation in time for the 2017/18 winter.

A number of trailer gritters are also LCC owned but utilise Kier 18 tonne vehicles to tow. There is a reduced requirement for these vehicles within the current contract as in severe weather drivers are operating frontline gritters.



Existing trailer gritter

The County Council also currently has use of a Snow-blower attachment which is stored, maintained and operated by a local agricultural firm in Horncastle. This snow-blower can be attached to a modern tractor for operation and has an annual storage and maintenance cost of £1,399. It was proposed that the Working Group consider the future of the LCC Snow-blower attachment as part of this review.



Current snow-blower attachment



The former dedicated snow-blower in operation on Caistor High Street during the winter of 1990/91.

The County Council also currently has access to an LCC owned dedicated footway salting attachments for Lincoln City area. This equipment is current stored and operated by a Kier subcontractor for use on the steep footways such as on Monks Road and the historic area within the uphill area of Lincoln. The total annual cost of the equipment is £13,750.

At the initial meeting on the 09 May 2016 members were asked to review Severe Weather equipment and highlight areas for future consideration.

Recommendations

- Members supported the removal of all but 1 SnowEx and trailer gritters as a way to aid in reducing costs. The one remaining unit would continue to operate for the 2016/17 winter with an existing DAF vehicle from the Manby depot.
- Members confirmed that given the reduced requirement for the trailer gritter attachments these should not be retained. However, members highlighted the possibility of utilising contacts with local farmers who may want to take up the trailer gritters for future local use.
- Members supported the retention of the snow blower attachment as the £1,400 cost was reasonable for possible future use of the equipment which has also been well maintained.
- Members highlighted the need to retain the dedicated footway salting attachments for Lincoln City area but recommended that this be reviewed further and possible closer partnership working with City of Lincoln Council considered.

1.4. Possible additional and ongoing budget saving options

A number of additional options for budget savings were considered, including reducing the number of reserve gritters from 5 to 4 which could result in a saving of £36,275. This is now a more feasible option as newer gritters are more reliable.

The replacement gritter programme will also add 4 new 8x6 vehicles, replacing the existing 6x6 gritters for the Wolds area and will join the fleet for the 2016/17 winter. The savings for the 4 new vehicles is £16,600 per annum which over the 10 year lease period equates to £166,000. The newer gritters may also be able to carry more salt due to larger chassis which could aid route efficiencies.



4 new 8x6 vehicles to replace existing 6x6 gritters for the Wolds

The success of route based forecasting system, which during the 2015/16 winter reduced operational costs by £130,000 has also had a positive impact. The introduction of route design and optimisation software known as WebAspx is also planned to review the design of current routes and to see if they can be made more efficient, which combined with greater capacity to carry more salt could lead to a reduction in the number of frontline gritters required.

Recommendations:

- Members supported the reduction of spare gritters from 5 to 4 (to save £36k) given that the newer generation of gritters are more reliable and repairs / maintenance are usually completed on the same day.
- Members supported the need to continue to review ongoing vehicle contract costs to achieve value for money over the coming years.
- Members supported a review of current routes with software to increase future operational efficiency and allow possible savings to be realised.

1.5. Options for continued publicity for the 2016/2017 winter period

At the Working Group meeting on 13 June 2016 it was confirmed that work was being undertaken to have a presence at the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue (LFR) open day taking place at South Park on 29 July. Officers highlighted that consideration was also being given to holding a number of open days at Ancaster and Manby depots in August to promote driver recruitment. It was also confirmed that a County News article would cover the usual preparations for winter in the October/November/December issue.

Members highlighted that use of local district news sheets could be useful to promote the need for more LGV drivers. The use of Boston Bulletin, Bourne Local, Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils (LALC) and other parish magazines were given as possible options.

Members highlighted the possibility of working with local transport museums or vehicle societies as another source of LGV drivers.

Members highlighted support for Councillor R G Davies, Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and I.T. to repeat the campaign undertaken in 2015 on local media, TV and Radio to promote winter maintenance driver recruitment.

1.6. Other Areas for Consideration

- It was suggested that closer working with Fire and Rescue could allow for LFR to take up some tasks when there is a heavy winter maintenance workload. This could include tasks such as clearing certain routes and footpaths to free up drivers for the primary routes.
- Members highlighted the possibility of work being undertaken with the Care Leavers Apprenticeship Scheme to see if any opportunities can be given to

young people leaving care within Kiers operations as part of the Lincolnshire Highways Alliance.

- Members highlighted the useful parish liaison meetings which used to take place between the Chairman and Clerk of Parish Councils with divisional highways managers to highlight upcoming work and listen to concerns. Members were appreciative of the current levels of vacancies within highways teams but highlighted these liaison meetings as a proactive way of communicating with a wide range of parishes. It was agreed that Martin Thurnell, Kier Business Manager will take up the possibility of parish liaison meetings with Satish Shah, Network Manager South as part of the work being undertaken to improve effective communications and customer satisfaction.

2. Recommendations & Conclusion

A full list of the recommendations highlighted by the working group are included at Appendix A and includes potential savings, current progress and desired outcomes. This report, the recommendations and any additional comments from the Scrutiny Committee will be forwarded on to the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and I.T for further consideration.

The Committee is also asked to support a review of the Winter Maintenance Plan, taking into account the outcomes and recommendations from the working group for consideration by the Executive Councillor for Highways, Transport and I.T.

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	Winter Maintenance Working Group Recommendations

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Daniel Steel, Scrutiny Officer on behalf of the Winter Maintenance Working Group. The lead officer for this work area is David Davies, Principal Maintenance Engineer who can be contacted on 01522 553080 or davidj.davies@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation(s)	Detail	Outcome/Impact
R1	Consideration to be given for the use of retained firefighters as back-up drivers during severe weather events.	It is currently anticipated that drivers could be sourced through co-operative working with LFR. 50 fire fighters have shown interest in being involved in winter gritting. Further meetings will continue to progress this help.
R2	Consideration to be given for the Communications Team to work towards an early as possible PR campaign on Radio and TV.	Similar to the campaign completed in 2015 to highlight the need for LGV drivers.
R3	<p>The Working Group supported a presence at the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue (LFR) open day taking place at South Park on 29 July.</p> <p>The Working Group supported that two training and recruitment days be arranged at Ancaster and Manby in August 2016.</p>	<p>Following the success of the gritter being present at the Fire & Rescue open day members may wish to consider a similar presence at the 150th Heckington Show next year.</p> <p>Two training and recruitment days arranged at the Manby depot on Tuesday 9 August and the Ancaster depot on Thursday 11 August.</p> <p>Kier and officers feel that a presence at this more local agricultural show to the Lincolnshire show may engender more driver interest.</p> <p>On the two Recruitment Days there were 8 interested parties all of whom were suitable and so Kier are discussing zero hour contracts with them.</p>
R4	<p>Consideration to be given for LCC staff to be trained as drivers mates for support during severe weather.</p> <p>This would primarily include Highways staff, with LFR and other staff in Environment and Economy as appropriate.</p>	<p>LCC staff to be offered the ability to put their names forward as drivers mates for use during severe weather.</p> <p>This would be within normal operating hours where possible, with volunteers outside normal office hours.</p>
R5	Undertake and review the current severe weather routes with WebAspx software to increase future operational efficiency and allow possible savings to be realised.	<p>Severe Weather routes to be reviewed (whilst retaining the current number) for efficiencies as part of a wider review of the Highway Maintenance Plan.</p> <p>Review to be considered for Winter 2017/18.</p>
R6	Officers to explore possible solutions for greater cooperation with local parish councils to promote the self-service options available.	<p>A greater focus is recommended on promoting self-service through the grit bins & one tonne salt sacks with parish councils.</p> <p>Martin Thurnell, Business Manager to liaise with Satish Shah, Network Manager South.</p>

Recommendation(s)		Detail	Outcome/Impact
R7	The Working Group supported the removal of all but one SnowEx and trailers to reduce costs.	The one remaining SnowEx would continue to operate for the 2016/17 winter with an existing CANTER vehicle from the Manby depot.	It is expected to make a £24,000 saving from not undertaking the eight conversions to DAF vehicles.
R8	The Working Group supported the removal of the LCC trailer gritter attachments given the reduce usefulness.	Consider the possibility of utilising contacts with local farmers who may want to take up the trailer gritters for future local use.	It is expected to make a £800 saving annually from the removal of the LCC trailer gritter attachments.
R9	The Working Group supported the retention of the LCC snow blower attachment for possible future use.	Retention of the attachment which has been well maintained.	The continued £1,400 annual maintenance cost was considered a reasonable amount to retain this equipment.
R10	The Working Group supported the retention of the dedicated footway salting attachments for Lincoln City area.	Maintain current provision but review closer partnership working with City of Lincoln Council.	£13,750 continued costs by retaining the footway attachment.
R11	The Working Group supported the reduction of reserve gritters from five to four.	The newer generation of gritters are now more reliable and repairs / maintenance are usually completed on the same day.	£36,275 saving by reducing from five to four reserve gritters across the county.
R12	The Working Group supported the need to continue to review ongoing vehicle contract costs.	To achieve value for money over the coming years, vehicle contract costs should be reviewed as appropriate.	