

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

Report to:	Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee
Date:	28 November 2016
Subject:	Winter Maintenance Update – November 2016

Summary:

This item invites the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee to consider a report providing an update on the current Winter Maintenance season 2016/17 and the ongoing recruitment process for new drivers.

Actions Required:

To consider the report and agree any additional comments or recommendations for consideration.

1. Background

- 1.1. Lincolnshire County Council has a statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980 (Section 41 (1A)) to maintain the Highway. "In particular, a highway authority are under a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice."
- 1.2. The Council currently has 43 precautionary salting routes, each assigned to a gritter. Following the recommendations of the Winter Maintenance Working Group with representatives from Kier, Essential Fleet Services and a selection of Councillors, a decision was taken to reduce the number of spare vehicles from 5 to 4. The impact of this reduction is being monitored throughout the season, however there has been no operational impact to date.
- 1.3. It was also agreed to cancel the leases on 7 of the 8 "Snow Ex" mountable gritters, which have previously been used to provide extra resilience in times of severe winter weather, for example treating estate roads not on the precautionary salting network. It is too early in the season to assess any impact from this reduction in plant, however it is worth noting that they have not seen widespread use even in the harsh winters of 2010/11 so it is not expected that there will be a significant impact on the winter service of this saving.

- 1.4. There is currently approximately 50,000 tonnes of salt available in the 8 highways depots around the County or on dockside at Immingham. Current policy is to have 35,000 tonnes available; however an opportunity arose in 2015 to procure salt in bulk at a reduced cost to the authority. This salt is either stored in barns or sheeted and so can be used for many years and does not deteriorate. The most salt used in a season since pre-wet precautionary salting began was 42,000 tonnes in 2012/13. This was not a particularly severe winter but was extended over many months and very wet.
- 1.5. The central winter maintenance team is engaged with optimising the current winter maintenance routes, as it is felt there are efficiencies in the way the routes are run which haven't yet been realised. A piece of software called "WebAspx", which is already used by Environmental Services, is being used to aid in this process. This software will also provide the ability to re-design the gritting routes in future should the network coverage need to be changed.
- 1.6. The weather forecasting contract went out to tender over the summer and the Met Office were the successful bidders. They will provide the forecast for the next 3 years with 3 potential annual extensions after this. This links to the contract for bureau service provision with Vaisala which is a 6 year contract from 2016 to provide and maintain weather stations and decision making software and tools. Route Based Forecasting is once again being employed following its success last season, meaning we are sending all 43 routes out less frequently than in the past and sometimes sending less than 10 vehicles out on any given night.
- 1.7. In the current season to date, there have been 174 individual gritting runs, across 7 days with operations (including the shakedown run). 824 tonnes of salt have been used. These figures are slightly below average for this time of year; however the seasonal outlook from the Met Office is fairly confident of lower than average temperatures in November and December with a completely different set up from the previous two mild winters. Whilst they are not forecasting any real severe weather at this point, they expect a cold winter with more gritting operations than we have had in recent years.
- 1.8. Following attempts to recruit additional winter maintenance drivers, Kier have employed a number of zero hour drivers across the county, eight were recruited last year and eight this year. Some fulfil full time roles on the Winter Service rotas whereas others will offer support during snow conditions and support rotas on an ad hoc basis to cover sickness and holiday leave.
- 1.9. Discussions with the fire service to provide additional drivers are ongoing:
 - The Fire fighters will offer support during snow conditions and support rotas on an ad hoc basis as and when required (and their shift patterns dictate).

- The Service has agreed to trial the proposal and is prepared to release 8 people to complete the training and provide availability for the gritter driver role. If this is judged to be a success and the arrangement doesn't impinge on service delivery, this may be extended next year.
- Selection criteria will include suitable availability; living within a 30 minute drive from the depots they require cover and availability to complete the training requirements within the agreed timeframe.
- 8 candidates have been shortlisted and will be invited for a one to one meeting to explain what is required, and to answer any questions they may have.
- It is anticipated that the 8 successful candidates will be fully trained by the middle of January 2017.

2. Conclusion

Following consideration of the report, the committee is requested to consider whether it wishes to make any additional comments.

3. Consultation

a) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

4. 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 Richard Fenwick, who can be contacted on 01522550452 or richard.fenwick@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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