

**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS**

<b>1.</b>	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>REGENERATION SCRUTINY PANEL</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>12 January, 2011</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Title:</b>	<b>RESPONSE TO SNOW EVENTS IN NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2010</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Programme Area:</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES</b>

**5. Summary**

To report on the actions taken in response to early snow falls that occurred at the end of November and into December 2010.

**6. Recommendations**

- a) That the report be noted.
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## 7. Proposals and Details

### Background

The arrival of the cold snap coincided with the commencement of winter standby arrangements in mid-November. Regular action has been taken on a weekly basis from the start and the frequency of the actions has been quite challenging for the winter drivers especially as a third of them are new or returning to the role this year.

The first snows arrived on Friday 26 November which generated increased action over the following weekend and at the start of week commencing 29 November 2010.

There was a major snow fall of between 300 – 450mm in depth starting at 17:00 on Tuesday 29 November and continuing through much of the following day. The forecasts received by the council on 30 November gave no indication of the severity of the snow or an indication of the accumulations to be expected.

The Met Office forecast the protracted period of cold and snowy weather to extend into the new year with December being the coldest since 1910.

### Actions in dealing with the event

From the afternoon of Tuesday 30 November 2010 all of the available resources within Streetpride were employed on salting and snow clearance and continued to be so throughout both that week and the following week commencing 6 December.

Overnight on 30 November and throughout 1 December the Rotherham area was the worst affected by snow fall in the Yorkshire area with between 300mm and 450mm of snow falling. With this intensity of snow fall it was extremely difficult to keep even major roads clear. It takes 4 hours to treat all of our precautionary routes and this resulted in roads recovering in snow between treatments especially as other traffic was light. Salt also becomes less effective below -8°C and these extremely low temperatures were experienced quite regularly.

During 1 – 3 December action by the salters was concentrated on these priority routes and in assisting South Yorkshire Police in clearing the A57 which had become impassable with over 100 lorries stuck due to the conditions. The problems on the A57 and the congestion that caused on the surrounding network made clearance of roads in this general area much more difficult.

The reason that it is the Council's policy to concentrate the action of the salt spreaders on the main routes is that they are essential for the operation of public transport and during periods when the use of private transport is difficult helping maintain public transport provides residents with an alternative means of travel.

From 2 December drivers for the winter fleet were organised into 3 shifts to facilitate the continued 24 hour operation. Even so some roads, even on the priority routes, did prove difficult to clear and some rural were closed for a period.

Additional clearance teams were limited in number on 1 December because of the travel difficulties reducing the staff managing to attend for work but from 2 December the dedicated salting vehicles were supplemented by over 30 teams undertaking hand clearance and salting and in refilling the salt bins distributed across the

borough. An extensive list of priority sites was put together over the summer and the snow clearance and salting was concentrated principally at these sites where there are known to be more vulnerable users; schools, doctors surgeries, care centres and residential areas with high numbers of elderly residents. A number of teams were also employed in the early clearance of pedestrian routes in Rotherham town centre and other local shopping centres.

Many hundreds of requests were received asking for roads to be cleared and these were all checked to identify whether there were any particular risks to peoples well being and given appropriate priority. Urgent requests for assistance were responded to and over the weekend 4/5 December when not required on the priority routes the gritters were used to respond to requests from residents for clearance.

The general action to clear snow off the main roads with the gritters was not possible until Monday 6 December. By this time traffic and the extremely low temperatures had resulted in the compaction of the snow into thick ice on many roads. JCBs were brought in and deployed with each of the 10 salting vehicles to break up and clear the ice prior to salting. This proved to be a slow process.

Although we have had teams refilling our 320 salt bins at regular intervals throughout the period we have had numerous reports of them being emptied almost immediately by people who are taking the salt away in cars or for personal use. We have also had some reports of full salt bins being stolen. Where we had details of the vehicles concerned these incidents were reported to the police.

We were fortunate to escape the further snow falls that effected many parts of the country from 16 December although we did need to deal with a prolonged period of very low overnight temperatures down to -12°C.

### Salt

In mid-November we had 6,500t in stock, 4000t in the new salt barn at Hellaby and 2,500t at Greasbrough Road. Limited restocking from Salt union commenced from 16 December with 300t delivered over a four day period.

Stock levels at 20 December were 2,100t. A bid was made to purchase 500t of salt from the national strategic reserve held by the Highways Agency for delivery over the holiday period due to uncertainties in the weather to be expected over that period.

Authorities continue to be exhorted to use their remaining salt more frugally if a national shortage is to be avoided.

### Network Damage

Initial indications would seem to be that the damage experienced through December is not of the same scale as that occurring last winter but there is some time for further severe weather. Highway inspections are being targeted towards the identification of areas needing urgent repair.

Last winter the government did provide an additional £100m nationally as a contribution to the repair of the damage but this is unlikely to be repeated. Some of the damage from last winter has not yet been permanently repaired and these areas are the greatest risk of wide spread surface failure.

The recent LTP Maintenance allocation has seen Capital funds for 2011/12 increase by £500,000 from the current year due to the removal of the damping of increases we should have received in earlier years. It is not yet clear what proportion of the increase is in the highways element of the allocation

## **8. Finance**

During the 2009/10 winter the cost of delivering the service was £1.019m and would have been considerably more if restrictions on the delivery of services had not been forced on us by a shortage of rock salt. The overspend beyond the contingency fund was contained within the overall EDS budget.

Current estimates indicate that a similar level of expenditure is likely to be incurred over the 2010/11 winter even if weather patterns return to more normal conditions in the new year.

The current allocation for winter services in the Streetpride Revenue account is £565,554 and this is only sufficient for a reasonably mild winter. There is also a contingency reserve of £132,714 available. This highlights an obvious gap between the current budget and the levels of expenditure in this and the past two winters. The resulting budgetary pressures do need to be addressed and will be the subject of a future report.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

The ability of the Council to respond to customer requests for action during periods of adverse weather is dependant on the resources available and appropriate prioritisation of action. The public's expectations for the service far exceed our ability to respond during particularly adverse conditions and this does lead to some criticism of the Council.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

Rotherham Safe – Highway Authorities are under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. In judging whether the actions of an authority satisfied this duty consideration would be taken of the resources available to it.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

None

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