

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 7<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2011

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>REVIEW OF WINTER WEATHER RESILIENCE</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DAVID GREEN – DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>CORPORATE RESOURCES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b> <i>(Defined in paragraph 13.3 of Article 13 'Decision Making' in the Council's Constitution.)</i>	<b>NO</b>

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is provided in response to the request of Cabinet (Minute 286, 13 January 2011) seeking further improvement in the Council's winter weather resilience and a report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 The report highlights the recent improvements that have been implemented as a direct result of the lessons learnt from the most recent severe weather that was experienced on Wirral throughout December and January 2010/11.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
- (a) Note the lessons learnt from the latest period of severe winter weather.
  - (b) Note the Council's performance to date in delivering the highways winter maintenance service in 2010/11.
  - (c) Note that further work continues to be undertaken to ensure a better awareness and understanding of the impact and consequences of severe winter weather.

### 3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 December 2010 and January 2011 respectively saw another period of prolonged freezing conditions. Wirral along with most of the Northwest was severely affected by this weather, with both freezing conditions further compounded by falling snow.
- 3.2 The weather brought with it a number of consequences including;

- Interruption of domestic refuse collection;
  - Concerns over school closures;
  - Concerns over the communication to residents, community groups and employers about the weather situation and service delivery;
  - Concerns regarding the service provision to the most vulnerable in our communities; and
  - Shortage of rock salt and grit especially for pedestrian and major shopping areas.
- 3.3 These events mirrored to a greater or lesser extent the severe weather conditions of February 2009 and January 2010
- 3.4 This report highlights the many improvements that have been, or are to be adopted which will add to the resilience of the council and Wirral.

## **4.0 FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

### **4.1 Interruption of domestic refuse collection**

- 4.1.1 A full review of the winter weather working arrangements is contained in a separate report for this Committee.

### **4.2 Concerns over School Closures**

- 4.2.1 Only one school closed during the period of the severe weather and this was as a direct result of the failure of its heating system.
- 4.2.2 Members of this Committee were informed in June 2010 that the majority of Wirral schools have been issued with a grit spreader and a small supply of grit/salt. This allows each school to provide a minimum safe route from car parks/school gates within their premises to their front doors.
- 4.2.3 Following on from this the CYPD has designed standard communication templates on school closures for parents, pupils, etc. There has also been an improvement in the use of local media – radio, papers, etc.

### **4.3 Grit / Salt Stock**

- 4.3.1 As discussed in previous reports one of the key indicators of performance in relation to a council's highway winter service is its confidence on any one day of being able to deliver its planned road gritting operations on subsequent days, otherwise known as its *winter resilience*. In order to improve the Council's winter resilience, the initial grit / salt stock retained by the council was 2500 tonnes, which is the maximum capacity the salt barn can hold.
- 4.3.2 As a further precaution a further stock of "white salt" was purchased from another supplier with the intention that this could be used for pedestrian areas and other non-traffic routes.
- 4.3.3. To date this winter, the council has maintained an average winter resilience of approximately 5 – 6 days (based upon 2 gritting operations per day at a

20g/m<sup>2</sup> spread rate). However, the minimum winter resilience was depleted to approximately 1 day for the first week of January 2011, despite the weather condition being comparable to that experienced in 2009/10.

- 4.3.4. A possible reason for this may be the effect that the introduction of the National Salt Reserve by the Department for Transport (DfT) has had on grit/salt stocks nationally. In mid December 2010, the Council was one of a limited number of councils, which were invited to purchase grit/salt from this reserve. The price of this grit/salt was some 3 times that usually paid to the council's normal suppliers. Following consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Portfolio Holder it was confirmed that the Council could purchase this grit/salt, if required to ensure winter resilience.
- 4.3.5 Following daily evaluations of the medium term weather forecast and the prospects of re-supply from normal suppliers a decision was taken to purchase 200 tonnes of the national reserve.
- 4.3.6 Whilst there is no clear evidence that the offer to purchase grit/salt from the National Salt Reserve had any effect on the re-supply arrangements provided by the Council's normal suppliers, it should be noted that the Council's minimum winter resilience (1 day – 2 gritting operations at a 20g/m<sup>2</sup> spread rate) fell below that which was maintained at the same period last year (approximately 2 days), despite the initial stockpile held being increased to the maximum. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that other councils continued to receive supplies at the same time that Wirral was purchasing from the National Salt Reserve.

#### **4.4 Road Gritting**

- 4.4.1 It should be noted that it was not possible to adopt every recommendation in relation to additional road gritting, due to amongst other things the budgetary constraints, limitations in terms of resources – equipment, operatives and grit/salt plus the practicalities in terms of the time taken to grit existing routes.
- 4.4.2 Priority was and always should be given to the gritting of the primary road network and the gritting routes are based on this. However over time these routes have been altered to add other roads for genuine reasons including – accident spot, access to hospitals and other health care establishments and access to major schools.
- 4.4.3 A number of suggestions for additions were fed into the Highways Division and a further review of these gritting routes will take place prior to this coming 2011/12 winter maintenance season.

#### **4.5 Footway Treatment**

- 4.5.1 Members should note that whilst there is no statutory requirement to grit or treat pedestrian areas it has been the practice of this council to treat major pedestrian areas such as shopping areas, and outside main transport hubs. This treatment has been undertaken via a combination of resources including shopping area's and traders themselves being given salt to spread outside

their frontage to the use of the Probation Services Community Payback scheme to work on particular areas guided by the winter maintenance managers following the daily meetings.

- 4.5.2 As per Cabinet request (Minute 268 – 13 Jan 2011) an assessment has been undertaken on all major shopping areas, in consultation with trader associations and a published programme of snow and ice clearance has been drawn-up for Wirral's busiest pedestrian and shopping areas.

#### **4.6 Community Grit Bins**

- 4.6.1 As per Cabinet's recommendation 110 extra grit bins were offered to Area forums and an exercise has been undertaken agreeing locations. These community grit bins will be filled when delivered to each location and a restocking programme will be designed to ensure that they are topped-up on at least a weekly basis.

#### **4.7 Communications**

- 4.7.1 Learning from previous periods of severe weather the Council has designed specific advice on its internet site offering a range of information for the public from safety advice for driving, locations of grit bins and gritting routes, latest advice regarding service delivery and advice on how residents and communities can assist by clearing pavements and pathways in front of their properties – without any risk of legal action or claim.
- 4.7.2 The Health, Safety and Resilience Manager distributed daily information notes for councillors, and officers including the daily weather reports offered by the regional Met Office weather advisor. A number of Members have again confirmed that they found this information useful. These notes were also distributed to external partner agencies – police, fire, health and also to voluntary and community organisations e.g. VCAW.
- 4.7.3 The Council's press office were in daily contact with the various media outlets – radio, press, etc offering latest information on services. This proved particularly useful in regards to the alternative refuse collection points across the Borough.

#### **5.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 Members will recall that in June 2010 a presentation was made to this Overview & Scrutiny Committee by the Health, Safety & Resilience Manager whereby a number of winter maintenance options were offered to Members to consider. These options included:

- An additional Salt Barn (Cost circa £300,000.)
- Brine sprayers for footway use (circa £4 - 5,000. Ea.)
- Extra Gritting wagon (circa £70,000)

- 5.2 It is unsure whether any of these additional resources will be true value for money when the weather we have experienced are being described as 1 in 30 year occurrences, albeit that we have had 2 of these in a 24 month period.

## **6.0 CONSULTATION**

6.1 Consultation during this review has taken place with a range of partner organisations and community groups. Some examples of these are:

- Merseyside Police
- Merseyside Fire & Rescue Services
- Wirral NHS
- Trader associations and individual traders

## **7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

7.1 There are opportunities to build on the work with community and faith groups and early consultation has taken place with VCAW in an attempt to use the groups and individuals on their database in response to severe weather. Some examples of the opportunities include – utilising the community groups in snow and ice clearance, in good neighbour and neighbourhood “buddy” schemes and to make use of some of the specialist skills and equipments that these groups may have such as 4x4 vehicles, boats, etc.

## **8.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report although Members are reminded that in these times of austerity the reduction in any winter maintenance budget could have dramatic repercussions in the response to severe winter weather.

## **9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Members should note that it is a legal responsibility for the council as a Highway Authority to maintain the road network in a safe condition.

## **10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The consequences of severe weather are felt by all members of the community but are especially pertinent to those more vulnerable members of society.

## **11.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are no specific carbon reduction implications resulting from this report.

## **12.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 There are no planning implications but the adoption of the lessons learnt across all council departments will increase community safety.

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## **APPENDICES**

None

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

LGA Weathering the Storm II – Improving UK Resilience to Severe Winter Weather  
APSE Evidence to Winter Maintenance Review July 2010  
DfT Are You Ready For Winter? Important Information for Councillors and Senior LA Officers  
UK Roads Liaison Group – Lessons Learnt from The Severe Weather Feb 2009

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet (Minute 286)</b>	<b>13 January 2011</b>
<b>Cabinet (Minute 262 (1))</b>	<b>9 December 2010</b>
<b>Sustainable Communities O&amp;S Committee</b>	<b>21 June 2010</b>
<b>Cabinet (Minute 250)</b>	<b>14 January 2010</b>