

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

17 MARCH 2011

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>HIGHWAYS WINTER MAINTENANCE COSTS</b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b>ALL</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES</b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR LESLEY RENNIE, STREETSCENE AND TRANSPORT SERVICES</b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b> <i>(Defined in paragraph 13.3 of Article 13 'Decision Making' in the Council's Constitution.)</i>	YES

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This Report is prepared in accordance with Minute 262 of the Cabinet meeting of 9 December 2010, and is intended to inform Cabinet of the expected adverse financial position resulting from the impact of the recent prolonged spell of severe winter weather on the highway winter maintenance services provided by the Council; comprising gritting operations, salt procurement and ice and snow clearance. The Report further confirms that repairs to the damage to the road surface (potholes) caused by the effects of the severe weather can be accommodated within approved budgets [Minute 262 (9), (10) and (11) refer].
- 1.2 The Report also provides assurance that highway winter maintenance services continue to be provided in accordance with the priorities established in the Council's policy, regardless of the adverse financial position which has resulted.
- 1.3 The Council has a statutory duty to keep highways clear of ice and snow.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

- 2.1 That the increased cost of winter maintenance in 2010/11 of £358, 000 be met from Balances.
- 2.2 That the Cabinet note, despite extensive pothole repairs to the highway network; caused by the effects of the severe weather, that such repairs as instructed to be carried out will be able to be met from the approved budget.

### 3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

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- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to keep highways free of ice and snow, and has adopted a policy to meet this duty. The particularly severe weather conditions have resulted in a need for increased operations to meet this duty through the purchase of additional salt stocks and continued gritting operations; the likelihood of which was recognised by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 December 2010 [minute 262 refers].
- 3.2 At that meeting, Cabinet also recognised the damage which was likely to result to the highway network as a result of the weather and the continued application of salt to the road surfaces, and instructed the Director of Technical Services to repair the resulting potholes and report back should the costs of doing so exceed the available budget provision.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

##### **4.1 Severe winter weather conditions**

Icy weather conditions initially arrived in the Borough on 9 November 2010, with the first full gritting run being required on 15 November. Members will recall that prior to their meeting on 9 December approximately 60% of salt stock levels had been used, with representations being made to the Secretary of State for Transport requesting that the national salt cell be activated to enable the Council to replenish its depleted salt supplies. The weather prevailing at the time of the Cabinet meeting of 9 December 2010 continued; albeit with a short thaw during the second full week in December; with freezing temperatures, frost, occasional snow and freezing road surfaces until 27 December 2010.

##### **4.2 Winter gritting and snow clearing operations**

Gritting of the primary routes has been required on 36 of the 77 days between 14 November 2010 and the most recent gritting run on 29 January 2011, including two gritting operations on 17 December due to the considerable snowfall on that day.

To date, since winter weather commenced in November, more than 2,800 tonnes of rock salt have been spread on the highway network. A further 175 tonnes of this material was spread on the Borough's shopping areas between 17 and 24 December. Over 200 grit bins have been filled and re-filled over the period; using more than 400 tonnes of a salt/sand mixture.

##### **4.3 Damage to Highways (potholes)**

At its meeting on 9 December Cabinet resolved [Minute 262 (10) and (11) refer] that the Director of Technical Services be instructed to take appropriate action to continue to maintain the safety of the Borough's roads and repair all resulting potholes and to report back to a future meeting should it not be possible to contain costs within Departmental budgets; and, that any such costs over and above those that cannot be contained from the existing budgets will be met from Council balances.

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Since the thaw which started on 27 December, highways inspectors and managers have been able to assess the damage to highways caused by the continuing road salt applications and the impact of continuous freeze and thaw processes. New potholes are continuing to become apparent to inspectors on a daily basis.

On 10 January 2011 a road surfacing team commenced repairs to road surfaces where a number of potholes have occurred. In some cases it is not practical to undertake individual pothole repairs in locations where there are multiple potholes and so this surfacing team will be taking out a larger area of road surface, encompassing the multiple potholes, and completely resurfacing the affected area.

To date, over 470 potholes have been repaired by the additional resources employed for this task. Whilst a large number of potholes have required attention, it is notable that the damage has been less than might have been envisaged; largely due to preventative maintenance carried out on the network which has prevented the ingress of water into the road construction in many cases.

#### **4.4 Ongoing highway resilience for the remaining winter season**

The Council presently holds 2470 tonnes of rock salt; a satisfactory stock level which is sufficient to carry out full treatment over 60 nights during a normal (non-snow) winter freeze. Despite the severity of the conditions across the country, the Council continued to receive periodic salt deliveries from its supplier and then, through January and February, the Council has recovered its stock levels to close to those held at the beginning of winter; and has essentially already secured the quantities of salt which would normally be acquired in the summer of 2011.

### **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

The continued provision of the highway winter maintenance service allows the Council to meet its duty to maintain safe passage on the highway during periods of ice and snow.

The financial projection for the total cost of the winter service for 2010/11 is based on a number of assumptions about weather events during the second half of February and through March.

The costs already expended from 2010/11 budgets includes the purchase of salt as described in paragraph 4.4 above. Accordingly, the risk of not being able to secure sufficient salt stock in advance of the 2011/12 winter is significantly reduced.

The presence of potholes presents hazards to road users and also allows the entry of water into the road construction layers, accelerating the further deterioration of the road.

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## **6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

6.1 None. Keeping the highway safe during ice and snow is a statutory service provided in accordance with Council policies. Repairs to the potholes which have arisen due to the effects of severe weather have been carried out in accordance with instructions from Cabinet.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

7.1 None.

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

8.1 This Report has no direct impact on such groups.

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

9.1 Financial: the duration and severity of the recent severe weather has impacted significantly on the winter gritting service. The approved Highway Winter Service Plan refers to the financial impact of an extreme winter and the potential for exceeding existing budgets [Minute 179 refers]. The severity of the winter has had a detrimental impact on the condition of the road network. Cabinet considered these aspects at their meeting of 9 December 2010 and resolved to meet pothole repair and gritting costs that cannot be contained within existing budgets from Council balances [Minute 262 refers], as reported in paragraph 4.3 above.

9.2 The total projected costs for carrying out salt purchase and all aspects of gritting operations throughout the winter of 2010/11 are £627,660. This is £357,660 in excess of the amount contained in the approved budget. It is proposed, as agreed by Cabinet on 9 December 2010, that this additional cost be met from Council Reserves.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 The Council has a duty as the Highway Authority for Wirral to maintain the highway under the Highways Act 1980. Section 111 of the Railways and Transport Safety Act 2003 imposes an additional duty to ensure that, where reasonably practicable, safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 There are none.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

(a) Is an EIA required? No

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## 12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no carbon reduction implications within this Report.

## 13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no planning implications arising directly from this report.

13.2 The safety of all users of Council services is a Council priority and the highway maintenance arrangements applied during severe weather ensure that available resources are applied in the most safe and effective way.

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## APPENDICES

There are no appendices to this report.

## REFERENCE MATERIAL

There is no reference material used in the preparation of this report.

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cabinet	13 January 2011
Cabinet	9 December 2010
Cabinet	14 October 2010
Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny	21 June 2010