

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member - Environment
Date:	29 June 2010
Title:	Winter Maintenance
Reference:	1767
Report From:	Director of Environment

Contact name: Chris Lait/Tim Lawton

Tel: 01329 824485
02380 663311

Email: chris.lait@hants.gov.uk
tim.lawton@hants.gov.uk

1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to provide an up date on the ongoing review of the Council's Winter Service and to seek authority for key actions to enable an increase in the Authority's resilience for this coming Winter:

- The construction of a new 4,000 tonne salt storage barn at Micheldever highway depot to increase the county-wide salt stocking capacity.
- An increase in the salt procured through the THC contract to 18,000 tonnes to improve the levels of salt held and restocking trigger points.
- The investigation of a suitable site in the south east of Hampshire for a second new barn.
- The provision of 1,000 extra 'Hampshire County Council' liveried salt bins, as a first phase in response to requests received.
- The development of a number of new mini-salting routes to serve Hampshire schools and other community facilities during severe weather events or extended freezing conditions. These new routes will be developed to run separately or concurrently with the existing primary and secondary salt routes.

2. Contextual information

2.1. In 2009 and 2010 Hampshire experienced its worst winter weather events for 30 years. These two, extended, snow events put Council resources under tremendous strain at times and this, combined with a nationwide

shortage of de-icing salt, meant that existing plans and procedures were tested to their limit. Fortunately the Council's Winter Maintenance and Severe Weather Response Plan was resilient enough to ensure that the Highways Winter Service was not compromised and salt stocks were carefully managed to ensure they lasted until replenishment took place and the snow events subsided. However, both weather events did highlight several areas for potential improvements in the current processes and for this reason a critical review of the Winter Service was commissioned to identify and investigate ways of increasing the Council's resilience.

- 2.2. The County Council, as Highway Authority, has a statutory obligation under the Highways Act 1980, Section 150 41(1)(A), to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice. In order to meet this duty, in part, de-icing salt is necessary and given the previous two severe Winters where salt has been in short supply nationally it is important that the Council's salt stock resilience is maintained at a level where it can sustain itself should there be another nationwide shortage.
- 2.3. Following the report to Cabinet in January 2010 approval was given for the provision of two new salt barns and for the provision of additional roadside salt bins.
- 2.4. Hampshire's current salt stockholding is 12,000 tonnes, which already exceeds the resilience levels suggested within recently revised national guidelines. Increasing the Countywide stockholding to 18000 tonnes, as agreed by the Cabinet in January, will reinforce Hampshire's resilience and provide between 15 and 18 days supply of salt for sustained Winter operations.

3. Finance

- 3.1. Funding has already been agreed for two new salt barns; £500,000 is held in the capital programme and a further £500,000 is to be found from the Environment Department's allocated share of the local public services agreement reward grant. Exact costings are still to be established for the proposed new barn at Micheldever. However, it is expected to cost in the region of £350,000. Costings for the second barn are not possible until a site has been selected. It is expected that the cost of both barns will not exceed the £1 million previously identified.
- 3.2. A first phase of 1,000 new salt bins will be procured through a tender process. It is anticipated that the new 'Hampshire County Council' liveried bins, which will be dark blue in colour, will cost approximately £145,000. There will be additional contractual costs for servicing the bins and the most effective way of doing this is still being explored. The most viable options are either working with the District Councils through a formal agreement or an extension to the existing term highways contract with

Amey, who already undertake this role for existing grit bins. The additional maintenance cost will be met from the Winter maintenance budget.

- 3.3. The proposed school/community routes are expected to cost up to an additional £250,000 per annum in a worst case scenario. Costs will vary depending on the timing and severity of the conditions and are most appropriately funded through the Winter maintenance budget. At this stage no decisions are envisaged on this additional service and therefore this is not yet a budget commitment.
- 3.4. The additional salt stock requirements have been instructed through the Term Highways Contract and costs are also being met within the Winter maintenance budget.
- 3.5. Funding for the Winter Maintenance service is based on a rolling 4 year average of previous Winters. Whilst the effect of the 2009/10 increase and expenditure on the Winter Service delivered this Winter will not affect the highway maintenance budget for 2010/11, there will be a financial implication of £640,000 for the 2011/12 highway maintenance budget.

4. Performance

- 4.1 With the new barn, salt bins and school/community routes in place Hampshire will be in a better position to meet its statutory obligations, maintain traffic flows on major routes, maintain access to key community areas and critical infrastructure and also meet the aspirations and expectations of Hampshire residents.

5. Other key issues/further background information

- 5.1. Following the severe winter weather of 2009/10, as well as the Policy and Resources Select Committee review and a number of structured de-briefs, an internal critical review of the Highways Winter Maintenance and Severe Weather Emergency Response Plan is being undertaken.
- 5.2. Elements captured within the highways review include:
 - salt barns;
 - salt capacity;
 - salt bins;
 - salt routes;
 - alternative treatments;
 - partnership working; and

- communications.

The following sections provide an update on each of these key issues.

Salt Barns

- 5.3. Hampshire already has six operational salt barns located at Ower, Weyhill, Dummer, Hook, Petersfield and Bishops Waltham. The current capacity of these barns is 12,000 tonnes but this will be temporarily increased to 14,000 tonnes for the coming Winter.
- 5.4. Planning permission was applied for in April 2010 for a new 4,000 tonne barn at Micheldever. No objections were received. However, as expected the Environment Agency (EA) has requested further information relating to the historical use of the site, its main concern being the potential for ground contamination. The Environment Department's Engineering Consultancy has been commissioned to produce the necessary report and this has been submitted to the EA for its consideration and approval. As of the date of writing this paper the EA is still considering the report although verbally it has been positive about the project. For the previous two new salt barns in Hampshire, Weyhill being the last one built in 2000, the EA has required similar levels of site detail.
- 5.5. In order to keep the project within budget the barn will be a prefabricated unit and is likely to be made and installed by a specialist UK supplier. The prefabricated barn is essentially a steel framed unit with reinforced concrete side walls and a heavy duty plastic sheet roof. The consultancy division of Amey has been commissioned to undertake the detailed design and contract documentation. Subject to approval, this will then be let through a single supplier tender. The construction of the new barn should take 10-12 weeks and it is anticipated at this stage that the new facility will be operational by 1 December 2010.
- 5.6. The new salt barn will be situated in the part of the depot that is currently let to Amey as part of the Term Highway Contract. The lease provides for the surrender of part of the site if required for operational purposes. Action will need to be taken as a matter of urgency to enable the required land to be made available for the development of the new salt barn. The costs of finalising the surrender of Amey's lease are covered by the finance made available for the scheme.
- 5.7. There is a desire and operational need for a second new salt barn/highway depot in the south of the County and a number of potential sites are currently being explored.

Salt Capacity

- 5.8. Current term highways contract arrangements require salt stocks to be at 75% capacity at the beginning of the season, with a requirement to reorder when stock levels fall below 75% throughout the season. In addition,

stocks are required to be increased to 100% at the start of the Christmas break to provide additional resilience over the holiday period, when restocking is more difficult. These figures have been reviewed and adjusted in the contract in accordance with the Cabinet commitment to increase the resilience of salt supplies. The contract will now require that stocks are at 100% at the beginning of the season, with reordering required when stocks fall below 85% capacity throughout the season. In addition, the 100% restock requirement at the start of the Christmas break remains.

- 5.9. It was evident during the prolonged extreme weather of Winter 2010 that the supply chain did not have sufficient resilience to ensure total service delivery. This supply chain is currently being fully mapped to identify areas of risk and recommend mitigating actions to ensure that risks are minimised for future events.
- 5.10. Further work is also ongoing to identify if there are opportunities to source independent salt supplies direct to the County. For the UK there are only three primary suppliers of salt: Salt Union, Cleveland Potash and Irish Salt Sales. Other sources of salt are available within the EU or further afield and these come into the UK by ship. An initial shipment is already being arranged for supply for this Winter and future provisions being explored.
- 5.11. Opportunities may exist to share salt stock facilities with the Highways Agency and other adjoining highway authorities, many of whom are also currently reviewing their Winter policies. Similarly, other large primary agencies, such as the Health Service and District Councils, will also be looking at their ability to ensure sufficient salt stocks are available locally. Discussions with all these bodies are ongoing.

Salt bins

- 5.12. All parish councils, district councils and relevant community associations were contacted post Winter 2010 to request suggested locations for additional salt/grit bins. Following this request, a further 1,000 locations have been identified and these are being surveyed to establish the appropriateness of the sites. As a first phase to meet these requests, authority is sought to follow appropriate procurement processes to purchase 1,000 additional bins to ensure these are in place for the coming Winter.

Salt Routes

- 5.13. During normal winter weather operations the current route policy has served the County well, but it is recognised that during extreme weather conditions there is a need to be able to escalate the areas treated and provide more flexibility across the network.

5.14. Current Priority 1 routes serve:

- main traffic routes ('A' class roads);
- main access routes to important industrial and large educational establishments (500+ pupils);
- main access routes to major accident and emergency hospitals and to important emergency service locations;
- roads used as major bus routes (50 per day urban, 25 per day rural);
- roads passing through major shopping centres; and
- other routes busy during peak traffic periods.

5.15. In addition to these, emergency rest centres and access to transport hubs have been added for Priority 1 pre-treatment.

5.16. These routes are being reviewed to ensure they capture all of these criteria, with a view to maximising the community and network benefit. This will marginally increase the extent of the Priority 1 network treated.

5.17. Current Priority 2 routes serve:

- single access routes to villages;
- roads near other schools;
- roads used as other bus routes;
- roads to other hospitals;
- roads to minor fire and ambulance establishments;
- roads passing through other shopping centres; and
- roads with gradients that make driving hazardous.

5.18. All routes are being reviewed, together with public transport facilities (including some key private areas).

5.19. In order to cover all schools and other key local community facilities, it is proposed to introduce further routes using mini-salt spreaders. These smaller vehicles will be able to access most of these facilities which are often sited in locations difficult to reach with larger gritting lorries. These routes would pick up the remainder of the small schools, health centres, cemeteries (active) and smaller community facilities. The advantage of keeping these routes separate and independently resourced from the Priority 1 and 2 routes is that it will not detract from the core service in extreme weather conditions. They will be able to be mobilised when

appropriate, for example they may not be needed in school holiday times, and will provide additional vehicles to provide treatment to the Priority 2 network if the primary fleet is still engaged on the Priority 1 network. Initial estimates indicate this could be nine extra routes and would cost in the order of an additional £250,000 a year in a worst case scenario of extreme weather. Details of these routes and approval for their inclusion in the Winter Maintenance and Emergency Policy will be brought to the Executive Member for consideration when the details are finalised.

Alternative Treatments

- 5.20. Research has been undertaken on possible alternatives to rock salt for treating the network. All have different limitations, including reduced effectiveness or higher corrosive properties, or are very expensive. The conclusion is that rock salt in normal winter weather is the most cost-effective treatment. However, in extreme cold conditions, when rock salt is of limited benefit, the use of calcium chloride may be more effective. However, this needs further research as to costings and the ability to use existing plant and storage etc.

Partnership Working

- 5.21. A number of opportunities exist for partnership working to assist during extreme weather conditions. The primary opportunities are with district, parish or town councils, when their workforce are limited or unable to carry out their normal tasks. Formal arrangements and implementation plans need to be agreed to ensure a planned response is available when required. Other opportunities with the Highways Agency or larger facility management organisations are also being explored.

Communications

- 5.22. A success story from the most recent Winter event was the increased levels of internal and external communications, keeping Members, the public and the media up-to-date with progress on a regular basis. A revised communications plan will be incorporated into the Severe Weather Response Plan to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide a high level of information in the most appropriate form to all relevant stakeholders.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1. That approval be given for:
- (i) the construction of the first salt storage barn at Micheldever highways depot, including the necessary actions under the lease to secure the site;
 - (ii) the procurement, placing and maintenance of a first phase of 1000 extra salt bins on the highway network; and

- (iii) the development of new 'school and community' salt routes to supplement the existing priority 1 and 2 routes, to be approved at a future meeting when details are finalised.

6.2. That progress on the Winter Service review be noted.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	Yes
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Maximising well-being:	No
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	
Enhancing our quality of place:	No
Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate):	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

1.1. None.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. None.

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

N/A.

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

Proposals will increase resilience to extreme winter weather events.