

Policy & Resources Select Committee**Review of the Severe Winter Weather experienced in Hampshire in 2009/10****Summary of Key Points from responses received to Member Questions:**

All County Council Members were written to in February 2010, inviting their feedback regarding experiences in the area they represent during the severe weather of December 2009 and January 2010. 30% of Members responded, and the following summarises the key themes that emerged from the comments received.

1) Issues raised by members of the public relating to the wintry conditions experienced in December 2009 and January 2010

- 1.1 The concern raised most frequently was that side roads were not gritted, which made it difficult for people to get from their homes to the main roads that were gritted. This was of particular concern in some areas where hilly ungritted roads were impassable. Rural residents accepted minor rural roads couldn't be gritted, though the length of the cold spell caused concern that if it had lasted any longer their reserves might have run out. It was mentioned that the elderly were often afraid to venture out.
- 1.2 Some residents took to parking on cleared roads in order to have greater likelihood of getting to work, but it transpired this caused obstruction for the gritting lorries trying to get through. Another issue raised was that an unadopted road did not get gritted, and the management company responsible declined to provide a service when requested by residents.
- 1.3 The lack of gritting of pavements in some areas made access to schools or shops on foot difficult. Several commentators supported clearing school sites and pavements leading to school sites as a higher priority, and similarly access roads and pavements to health centres. The need for gritting of shopping areas and bus routes was also highlighted, as well as car parks.
- 1.4 There was strong support for action that enabled residents to help themselves – more grit bins were welcomed, though this may be difficult to organise in areas that don't have a Parish Council. The process for replenishing grit bins was also raised as an issue. Guidance was requested regarding residents clearing footways outside their properties, and putting down salt to prevent ice re-forming. If guidance were provided, this would enable residents to grit footways with 'no risk and real benefit for local communities'. There was some evidence of people clearing their driveways but piling up the snow on pavements instead.
- 1.5 Parish Councils were keen to do what they could do to help, e.g. enlisting local farmers to help clear minor roads. Specific feedback stated 'farmers could only operate snow ploughs on the highways with the knowledge and agreement of the local Highways Area Office', and indicated the Parish Council would be interested in more farmers being recruited. An example was given of a 4x4 vehicle owner who was willing to offer assistance but didn't know who to contact to do so. It was also mentioned that waste and recycling collections were cancelled due to residential roads and pavements being untreated. It was suggested by one respondent that all levels of local authorities should co-operate and supply workers to spread grit.

- 1.6 Some comments were made regarding the aftermath of the severe weather, with concerns expressed regarding the increase in potholes in roads, and the issue of the coarse grit used on pavements not being cleared once the snow melted.

2) Response provided

- 2.1 Queries were generally passed on to Highways Officers where relevant. The priority gritting routes were explained, along with the strenuous efforts being undertaken to keep those clear. Daily updates provided to Members by the Director of Environment were appreciated, and useful for Members to pass on information. Members were also able to indicate that the County plans to increase its salt stocks ready for next winter. In regard to potholes, residents were referred to the reporting system, and in relation to grit bins, Parishes were encouraged to make requests through the Leaders Office. An example was given where the Member was able to find out which farmers operated in a certain area to pass on to a Parish Council.

3) Local solutions that worked well

- Chain of 4 families planning to move during the snow, Member contacted Highways who said a lorry was due to go through the area, and arranged for the road in question to be gritted, which meant all 4 moves took place: 'four families were delighted with the rapid response from Hampshire Highways'
- Large landowners assisted residents. A number expressed interest in doing more, but need supplies of grit and legal indemnity
- Local shops had essential food in stock and were a source of information about vulnerable people who may need help. One used a sledge to deliver goods.
- Village halls/churches opened to provide shelter for stranded motorists
- Farmers snowploughed country roads
- People in rural areas 'getting on with it' for themselves
- Good response to replenishment of grit bins
- Concerns answered quickly by Highways Officers
- Radio stations and school websites providing details of school closures
- Working parties of governors and parents clearing school sites and access. Could equipment to help with this be shared among schools in an area?
- Some residents found alternative parking sites e.g. park and ride or industrial areas just off gritted routes, to use instead of residential roads which were not gritted
- Refuse and horticultural staff undertaking snow clearance in town centre
- Residents digging snow and pushing cars up a hilly road, residents clearing road entrances between main roads and minor roads

- Strategically placed grit bins provided by the Parish Council
- Excellent partnership working, main network well gritted meaning 'most people felt that the bus services on main routes could have restarted several days before they actually did'
- Coordination between Borough and County was very good, but in some cases could be better organised e.g. the Borough Council was asked to grit a shopping precinct but not the subway leading to it, then the County Council did the subway the next day. The Borough could have done both at once
- Community spirit was good 'people are happy to help each other but they need the tools to do so'
- Residents knocking on doors of elderly to offer help with shopping

4) Oral Evidence Session

Members were invited to indicate if they would be interested in attending an oral evidence session, to discuss these issues further with the Review Panel. Members attending have been advised that the panel will wish to explore with them the following areas:

- What were the most common issues raised with you by your constituents during the severe weather?
- Did people in your area find innovative ways to help themselves?
- In terms of improving how resilient Hampshire is during severe winter weather, what would be your priority?