

**Report of the Scrutiny Review of the
Severe Winter Weather Experienced in
Hampshire in 2009/10**

Policy & Resources Select Committee

September 2010



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Published September 2010

For further details of the 'Review of the Severe Winter Weather Experienced in Hampshire in 2009/10' undertaken by the Policy & Resources Select Committee, please visit the scrutiny website:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/scrutiny/scrutiny-committees/policy-resources/winter-resilience.htm>

An electronic copy of this report can be downloaded from the website, and any responses to the recommendations will be provided on this website when available.

Cover photo provided by the Chairman of South Warnborough Parish Council when giving oral evidence.

Foreword

The winter weather in December 2009 and January 2010 was unusual in terms of its severity and duration. All public services were stretched to their limit and many have used the last few months to assess their effectiveness at responding to the situation, and learn from the experience to improve how they work in future. The members of the Policy & Resources Select Committee wished to review how Hampshire County Council and key partners responded.



Panel members were pleased to discover that overall, Hampshire responded well, and the findings of this review highlight examples of good practice that were reported by stakeholders. However, there is always room for improvement, and those that contributed to the review provided some excellent ideas for steps that could be taken to improve experiences on the ground should there be a similar occurrence in the future.

Members were particularly impressed by the commitment of staff providing public services to support vulnerable people, the enthusiasm of farmers to help clear roads, the willingness of communities to help themselves, and the opportunities afforded by the voluntary organisation Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 response.

The panel are making a range of recommendations based on the evidence provided by stakeholders. We endorse the direction of travel already initiated following departmental reviews, highlight further actions the County Council can take, and additional steps that could be taken in conjunction with partners such as the NHS, District Councils, Parish Councils and the Voluntary Sector.

The actions recommended aim to support public services to work together to maintain access to key services during extended periods of severe winter weather. I would like to thank all those who provided evidence to the review, my colleagues on the panel, and the officers who supported the panel in our work, for their contribution to this improvement focused report.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Chapman". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Cllr Keith Chapman,
Chairman of the Policy & Resources Select Committee

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Introduction

1. Hampshire, like much of the UK, experienced the most severe winter for thirty years in 2009/10. The County Council managed its salt stocks effectively - it did not run out of salt, kept priority 1 routes clear, was able to provide 'mutual aid' to neighbouring authorities and the health service, and support to the vulnerable was maintained. However the icy conditions and duration of the cold weather tested public services to the limit. Such extended severe weather has been rare in Hampshire in recent years, and the Policy & Resources Select Committee were keen to investigate whether the County Council and partners could learn from this winter in order to better prepare for such conditions in future.
2. A variety of reviews and debriefs have taken place over the past six months, as the agencies involved in responding to the severe weather or those providing key services both at local and national level have sought to learn lessons. Some of these have run concurrently with the work of the Review Panel. The findings presented in this report add to the emerging picture. Evidence has been provided by a broad range of stakeholders including key County Council services, emergency services, health services, voluntary sector, farmers and businesses. The Review Panel have also sought to gauge the views of the Hampshire public through feedback from County Councillors, and complaints and compliments received by service providers. The report therefore draws together experiences of different public sector partners, to establish an overall picture of the impact of the severe weather on the people of Hampshire.
3. The findings of the Review Panel are presented under three headings: access, coordination and communication, and community resilience and represent an informed lay perspective of potential areas for improvement, based on evidence provided by stakeholders.

Access

4. The Review Panel finds that while the County Council did well in terms of keeping its 'Priority 1' network clear, the extent of the freezing conditions meant that roads that were not treated created some access problems. This was particularly problematic in relation to key community locations that were not included in the priority 1 network such as GP surgeries, schools (smaller than 500 pupils) or local shops. The findings of the Review Panel support the move already initiated by the Environment Department to respond to this issue through the creation of 'community' salting routes.
5. The Review Panel also considered the way the County Council works with local farmers to enlist their help in clearing more minor roads. Evidence from the farmer representatives highlighted that they were keen to do more, although Members learned that a possible barrier to utilising their capacity to grit exists in the form of regulations regarding the type of diesel used in agricultural vehicles.

6. While not the focus of the review, the Review Panel briefly looked at salt supply issues. Members endorse the approach now being taken to look into sourcing salt for delivery by sea, and suggest taking an approach to procurement of salt that would approve more than one supplier to provide greater flexibility for sourcing salt during the winter season.
7. Evidence provided suggests that staff providing key public services went to great lengths to ensure services were maintained and help reached the vulnerable. However, more could be done to support staff, for example physical access to key office locations could be improved.

Co-ordination and Communication

8. While emergency planning procedures for cross agency working generally worked well, the Review Panel received evidence that suggests further planning would improve partnership working. Sharing resources such as 4x4 vehicles was key, and the Review Panel support the view of one partner agency that a 'memorandum of understanding' would be beneficial to establish in advance what different agencies have to offer and principles for lending capacity between partners.
9. The Review Panel learned that the severe weather had a particular impact on health services, with non-urgent appointments cancelled, increased falls and fractures, and difficulty accessing clients in their own home for days after partnership emergency arrangements had been stood down. The Review Panel considered an example of another County where the Primary Care Trust has contributed to the County Council's gritting budget to support additional gritting routes including footways, on the basis that this preventative measure could cost less than treating additional falls and dealing with a backlog of missed appointments. Consideration could be given to the opportunity to explore such an approach in Hampshire.
10. Many stakeholders made reference to using 4x4 vehicles as a method to reach people or places when minor roads were untreated and snow and ice remained over an extended period. The Review Panel took evidence from a voluntary sector group called 'Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 Response', who provide training and insurance to members of the public who own 4x4 vehicles, who can then offer assistance to public sector agencies. The Review Panel are suggesting that the County Council and partners could make more use of the capacity this represents.
11. Feedback provided demonstrated the importance of communication both during a severe weather event and in preparation beforehand, between partner agencies, public sector leaders and their staff, with businesses and the public. This includes communication of priority grit routes, and guidance to the public regarding what they can do to help themselves.
12. Clearance of car parks and footways was a particular issue this winter as the snow and ice were so persistent. The Review Panel suggests the County Council make clear to partner agencies that car parks and on site footways are

their responsibility (including train stations, schools and hospitals) and where possible they be encouraged to make appropriate plans for clearance.

Community Resilience

13. The Review Panel heard various examples of communities helping themselves and ways in which the County Council could support such efforts. Widespread appreciation was received for the decision by Cabinet to invest in extra grit bins.
14. The Volunteer Bureau set up by the County Council worked well, connecting staff who volunteered their time with people in the community who needed help. Adults Services reported receiving praise from beneficiaries for the assistance provided. A Council of Voluntary Service reported that members of the public contacted them offering help. The Review Panel suggests that consideration could be given to developing a mechanism through which such voluntary action could be co-ordinated in future.
15. Parish Councils who provided evidence to the review highlighted the local knowledge they can offer, and the importance of responses that are tailored to local situations. A way to harness this knowledge and the willingness of communities to help themselves would be through local emergency plans. The Review Panel suggest the County Council's Emergency Planning section provide assistance to Parish Councils (or other community groups in areas without a Parish or Town Council) to prepare local emergency plans.

Conclusions

16. The Review Panel consider that Hampshire was generally well prepared for winter weather, however the severity of the winter of 09/10 highlighted areas where winter resilience planning could be strengthened. If the Review Panel's recommendations are adopted, this has the potential to increase Hampshire's resilience in the event of future periods of prolonged severe winter weather.
17. The Review Panel have been mindful of the current context in relation to local government funding, and sought to avoid recommendations that imply additional spending. The recommendations that have been made focus on benefits that could be achieved through communications and partnership working, supporting better use of the resources we have, and planning in advance contingency arrangements and priorities.

Summary of Recommendations

18. The Review Panel are making the following recommendations, based on their findings. As work is already in hand across a number of departments to apply the lessons learned from the severe weather the recommendations of the Review Panel are presented in three sections: those that support the current direction of travel, additional action the County Council itself can consider, and

areas where the County Council can consider additional work with partner agencies.

The following recommendations endorse and reinforce work already initiated within the County Council:

1) Recommend that the Environment Department consider reviewing the network covered as priority 1, to ensure current traffic volume and identified community priorities are taken into account, including clusters of schools that collectively serve over 500 pupils. NHS Hampshire and other key partners will be invited to inform this work.

2) Recommend that the Environment Department include in 'community' gritting routes, access to:

- smaller schools
- residential areas with high numbers of elderly residents
- large industrial estates (beyond those covered as priority 1)
- locally significant health centres
- 'community hubs' (e.g. parade of local shops)
- access to key bus depots and train stations
- black spots including steep gradients, informed by local knowledge

3) Recommend that the Environment Department explore the feasibility of putting in place a framework contract for salt procurement, and consider suppliers that can deliver to the ports of Southampton or Portsmouth.

4) Recommend that Human Resources encourage departments to identify 'non essential' staff in advance and let them know that they should not attempt to get to work when conditions are bad (particularly where passport can be used to work from home), to alleviate pressure on transport systems.

5) Recommend that Human Resources explore the possibility of providing crèche facilities at large office sites to enable staff to get to work when schools are closed (for essential services)

6) Recommend that Human Resources ensure messages are clear regarding the potential for staff to work from other locations (including small offices within walking distance of residential areas).

7) Recommend that Emergency Planning work with Parish/Town Councils (or other community groups such as residents associations in areas that are not covered by a Parish or Town Council) to develop community emergency plans

8) Recommend that Children's Services reinforce guidance to schools regarding the need to have their own 'snow plan'.

The second group of recommendations relate to additional action the County Council can take in relation to services which the County Council is responsible for:

9) Recommend that once grit routes have been confirmed following review the Environment Department highlight this information to key partners including head teachers and business representatives.

10) Recommend that the Environment Department write to the appropriate Secretary of State to request a change in fuel exemption regulations to enable farmers to spread grit using agricultural vehicles. If regulations do not change, the County Council consider the feasibility of reimbursing farmers for the VAT on fuel used.

11) Recommend that the Environment Department review with retained farmers and other contractors as appropriate (once every two years, commencing in Autumn 2010) arrangements for responding to severe winter weather. This will provide an opportunity to up date farmers on any changes to policies and procedures as well as a forum for discussion. The equipment provided and routes allocated to farmers should be included in this review.

12) Recommend that the Environment Department work with Corporate Communications regarding provision of guidance to the public. This should include advice regarding parking and abandoned vehicles, encouraging people to stagger journeys home to avoid congestion, updated advice regarding liability in relation to clearing pavements, and guidance regarding appropriate use of grit in gritbins.

13) Recommend that the Environment Department reinforce to partner agencies that car parks (and on site footways) are their owners responsibility (including in particular schools, health services and train stations), and that individual sites should be encouraged to make appropriate preparations.

14) Recommend that Emergency Planning identify which of the County Council's office buildings it is most important for staff to be able to access in order to provide essential services. Arrangements then be made such that at times of persistent snow and ice Facilities Management have plans in place to grit key car parks and access footways, to support provision of services.

15) Recommend that Emergency Planning assess any practical measures that can be taken to support town centre evacuation at times of severe weather. Options for communicating information to help with staggering journeys and identifying priority areas for traffic management should be included as part of this work.

16) Recommend that the Leader of the County Council write to the Coalition Government to support the position of the Local Government Association that the issue of liability when clearing pavements requires clarity, through legislation if necessary. The scope for the County Council to provide advice to local people about their liability when clearing snow and ice should be assessed by legal services and include consideration of the cost to the County Council of providing liability cover.

The third set of recommendations relate to working with partners and highlight areas for improvement that rely on joint working:

17) Recommend that the Environment Department work with District/Borough Council's regarding priority areas the district's could grit in severe weather situations, giving particular consideration to car parks and pavements in town centres, and links to public transport

18) Recommend that the Environment Department work with Local Resilience Forum partners on a Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure responses to winter weather are coordinated and prioritised, clarifying each organisations responsibilities and how they will work together.

19) Recommend that consideration be given to the advantages of managing grit bins through Parish/Town Councils (or other suitable community groups such as residents associations in areas that don't have Parish or Town Councils). This could include locking bins to prevent mis-use, and the County Council accepting liability on behalf of named volunteers allocated to spread the grit. If grit bins remain unlocked, wording regarding what the grit should be used for could be added to the lid of the bins

20) Recommend that the Environment Department consider providing grit bins to NHS sites, industrial estates, parades of shops and schools, in return for a 'rental' and replenishment payment, in order to promote self help.

21) Recommend that NHS Hampshire quantify the costs to the NHS associated with the severe weather and consider contributing towards pavement gritting and 'community route' gritting, as an 'invest to save' measure.

22) Recommend that South Central Ambulance Service be encouraged to work with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service with regard to major incident and business continuity planning, particularly in relation to severe winter weather scenarios.

23) Recommend that Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service be invited to lead on coordination of 4x4 vehicles for use in emergencies, in conjunction with the other members of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum, taking account of opportunities to work with Hampshire & Berkshire 4x4 Response.

24) Recommend that Hampshire Councils of Voluntary Service be alerted to the contact details for Hampshire & Berkshire 4x4 response, and be encouraged to direct members of the public wishing to offer 4x4 capacity to them in future.

25) Recommend that the County Council work with Community Action Hampshire on the feasibility of co-ordination of spontaneous volunteering in relation to severe weather situations.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Hampshire experienced the most severe winter for over thirty years in 2009/10, with 26 continuous days of snow or ice during December and January. Hampshire County Council, along with many Local Authorities across the country, found that 'existing plans and procedures were tested to their limit'¹. As a result, this review was initiated to consider if there is anything more we could be doing, with our partners, to improve our resilience to such extended wintry periods in future.
- 1.2 This review, while taking into account issues relating to the gritting of the road network, has focused on the ability of the County Council and partners to maintain access to key public services during severe weather. Therefore this review has looked more broadly than just at grit and salt, looking at what worked well, and how we can operate flexibly and share resources with public sector partners, to ensure the vulnerable are looked after, and that we give communities the tools to help themselves.
- 1.3 A Review Panel was established in February 2010 to undertake this review, comprising the following Members of the Policy & Resources Select Committee:
- Cllr Keith Chapman (Chairman)
Cllr Keith Evans (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Adrian Collett
Cllr Bruce Tennent
Cllr Pat West
Cllr Sharyn Wheale
- 1.4 The agreed scope of the review is attached at Appendix 1. The Review Panel were briefed on the County Council's current winter maintenance policies, as well as the national context, to support them in their scrutiny of this topic.
- 1.5 The Review Panel were aware of the findings of the UK Roads Liaison Group, who reviewed winter maintenance following the heavy snow experienced across the country in February 2009, and their updated guidance to Local Authorities (published in December 2009). The Review Panel also noted the Local Government Association had published 'Weathering the Storm' in October 2009, giving their assessment of areas for improvement in order to support continuity in times of severe weather.
- 1.6 In order to better understand the impact of the severe weather on Hampshire services and businesses, the Review Panel invited a broad range of stakeholders to provide a written response to key questions. In addition, all County Councillors were written to, inviting feedback regarding experiences in the area they represented (see appendix 2 for details of stakeholders who responded).
- 1.7 The Review Panel held an Oral Evidence Session specifically for Members on 7 June 2010, to explore in more detail the observations of Members regarding

¹ Cabinet report on Winter Maintenance, 26 July 2010, reference 1768

the severe winter weather. Two further Oral Evidence Sessions were held on 17 and 21 June, at which stakeholders from Hampshire County Council Departments and relevant partner organisations, were questioned regarding the experiences of their service (see appendix 2 for details of who attended these sessions).

- 1.8 The Review Panel have considered the evidence received, and present their findings and associated recommendations in this report. Throughout this process, the Review Panel have been mindful of reviews being undertaken by others. The Environment Department at the County Council has been reviewing its processes internally, and the Cabinet took early steps to increase the County Council's salt stocks and purchase additional grit bin capacity².
- 1.9 The Review Panel are also aware that many of Hampshire's district and borough councils have undertaken their own review's of the impact on the services they are responsible for. At a national level, the Review Panel has monitored the progress of the Independent Review commissioned by the Department for Transport, which published an interim report in July 2010, and the Local Government Association's 'Weathering the Storm II'.
- 1.10 The findings of this Review Panel are consistent with these other reviews. This review contributes to the picture, as it has taken evidence from Hampshire local authorities, health services, emergency services, the voluntary sector, business representatives and farmers representatives. This report is therefore able to comment on the impact of the weather on Hampshire as a whole, bring in new perspectives, and consider how we can work better with our public sector partners, to improve the experience for the people of Hampshire.
- 1.11 The findings of the Review Panel are collated under three themes: Access, Coordination and Communication, and Community Resilience. The first section covers issues in relation to the treated network, the assistance provided by farmers, and the salt supply chain. This section also makes reference to support to County Council staff, particularly the contact centre, due to their importance in relation to maintaining key services. The second section highlights the importance of effective communications with partner agencies, the public and businesses. It also covers issues in relation to coordination among public sector agencies, with particular focus on use of 4x4 vehicles. The third section deals with ways in which the County Council can support communities to help themselves, covering grit bins, liability for pavement clearance and local emergency planning.
- 1.12 The Review Panel are mindful of the current economic climate, which has changed considerably since this review was initiated. The Review Panel note that the Local Government Association Survey (undertaken 15-17th January 2010) suggests that 45% of the public do not want other services to receive less money to pay for larger salt stocks, and 57% agree that Britain rarely sees winters as severe as 09/10 and it would be inappropriate to spend more money preparing³. Therefore the Review Panel have sought to avoid making recommendations that could not be accommodated within existing resources.

² See Cabinet report on 'Review of Winter Arrangements 2009-10', 25 January 2010, reference 1250

³ Local Government Association 'Weathering the storm II – Improving UK resilience to severe winter weather' (July 2010)

1.13 The Review Panel found that Hampshire County Council responded well during the severe weather, and this was acknowledged by a variety of stakeholders. The County Council has demonstrated prudent salt stock management, and commitment to supporting the vulnerable, for example setting up the Volunteer Bureau among staff. However, the Review Panel has identified areas where the County Council could learn from the experiences of stakeholders, to improve our resilience. The Review Panel's findings are presented below.

Findings

- 2.0 The evidence received by the Review Panel confirmed that services provided by the County Council and other key stakeholders were able to respond effectively to the recent severe winter weather in Hampshire and key services were maintained. This was backed up by compliments received from the public expressing their gratitude for the efforts of staff to maintain services and provide support to vulnerable people in the community. Parish Councils also acknowledged the 'speed and efficiency of Hampshire County Council and District officers in responding to the emergency'⁴. Feedback to the Review Panel from stakeholders highlighted a number of areas where further action could be taken to improve Hampshire's resilience to severe winter weather in future.

2 Access

- *The Treated Network*

- 2.1 Hampshire County Council currently treat 26% of Hampshire's road network as Priority 1. These routes are gritted as a precautionary measure in advance of any predicted ice or snow. This includes all 'A' roads, busy bus routes (25 per day rural, 50 per day urban), schools and employment centres exceeding 500 people, large hospitals and large emergency facilities. The percentage of the road network Hampshire County Council treat as priority 1 is lower than some neighbouring authorities, for example West Sussex treat 41%, West Berkshire 37% and Surrey 37%⁵. According to the Local Government Association report published in July 2010, 'on average, councils treat about 45% of their network under normal conditions'.⁶
- 2.2 Hampshire County Council treat 30% of the total network as Priority 2. These routes are gritted following sustained periods of sub-zero temperatures when snow or ice may be present. This category includes single access routes to villages, roads near schools, less busy bus routes, smaller hospitals and ambulance stations, roads through shopping centres and priority footways. Priority 2 routes are only treated when Priority 1 routes are considered secure and safe. The winter of 2009/10 was so severe that the County Councils' resources were focused on keeping Priority 1 routes clear and this limited the capacity available to treat Priority 2 routes (Priority 1 routes were treated 78 times, Priority 2 routes 12 times).
- 2.3 Evidence from stakeholders suggested that in the winter of 09/10 access from people's homes to places of work, schools, or essential services was difficult because residential roads were not gritted. In the very icy conditions this meant that people were unable to access the parts of the network that were gritted. Additionally as pavements were often icy for sustained periods travelling on foot was also difficult. Other areas that were not gritted were reported as being

⁴ Quote from East Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils written evidence

⁵ Figures published on Local Authorities Websites, April 2010

⁶ Local Government Association 'Weathering the storm II - Improving UK resilience to severe winter weather' (July 2010)

particularly hazardous by some stakeholders, for example access routes to villages that include steep inclines.

- 2.4 Evidence to the Review Panel confirmed that the County Council planned its use of resources effectively in terms of keeping the strategic road network clear and did not run out of salt as some other authorities and public sector agencies did. It was able to provide aid to some neighbouring authorities and NHS Hampshire and help clear key areas when they had run out of salt. The Review Panel learned that the County Council had already taken the prudent decision to reduce the network covered to preserve salt stocks (when there were issues with re-supply), prior to the recommendation to do so from the national 'Salt Cell'⁷.
- 2.5 Since the winter the Environment Department have been considering lessons learned and initiated some additional measures to further improve capacity and responsiveness in time for next winter. These include reviewing the priority gritting routes to ensure any anomalies that should have been covered are included, and drawing up proposals for 'Community' gritting routes.⁸ The Review Panel strongly supports this action.
- 2.6 Stakeholders highlighted the importance of access to schools. If this is maintained, and schools have plans in place to ensure the safety of their sites, this in turn supports the ability of parents to get to work and keep businesses and public services running. Members of the Panel noted that while schools with over 500 pupils would be covered by the Priority 1 grit routes, in some cases several smaller schools located close together collectively covered over 500 pupils but access roads to these were not covered.
- 2.7 Business representatives reported that the County Council responded well given the speed with which the weather deteriorated. It was noted that the severe weather had a significant impact on some businesses with some reporting a 15% drop in trade that was not recovered when the weather improved. The Federation of Small Businesses reported that some businesses saw an upturn in trade as people shopped locally, although there were some difficulties in getting supplies.
- 2.8 Evidence received from GP practices indicated concern that access roads to surgeries were not always gritted under current arrangements. While accepting that not all GP practices could be included in the Priority network the Review Panel did consider that there was scope for NHS Hampshire to work more closely with the County Council to improve business continuity planning and access to key sites. For example, the Review Panel heard that a medical centre that had been allocated as a local hub for GP services, which would stay open when others closed, was not on a priority gritting route.
- 2.9 The evidence received by the Review Panel supports the proposal to extend gritting routes that cover key community locations such as medical centres. However, for the benefits of these 'community' routes to be maximised, it will be important for the capacity to exist for these routes to be cleared concurrently to

⁷ The 'Salt Cell' comprised representatives from the Cabinet Civil Contingencies Secretariat, Department for Transport, Highways Agency, Local Government Association and Communities and Local Government.

⁸ See Winter Maintenance report to Cabinet 26 July 2010, reference 1768

the priority 1 routes. This would then enable access to key community locations to be maintained in future periods of extended severe weather.

- 2.10 Evidence to the Review Panel highlighted the importance of local knowledge and local priorities as part of the review of gritting routes. Parish Councils for example are a good source of information regarding local blackspots or hazards that would benefit from being gritted. Local knowledge would also help identify areas where there are particularly vulnerable people or families.
- 2.11 The Review Panel consider that the coverage of the priority road network would benefit from reviewing, to ensure it is based on current road usage and community priorities, rather than simply road type. For example a number of stakeholders suggested that some 'B' Roads carry greater volumes of traffic than some 'A' roads but are not gritted as priority 1. This may result in a slightly higher % of the network being included as priority 1 but when taken in conjunction with the planned increase in salt stocks held by the County (see 2.16 below) this would not reduce overall resilience and capacity to respond flexibly to the needs of different communities across Hampshire.
- 2.12 Several stakeholders also referred to the importance of supporting public transport during severe weather to ensure a safe route to travel was available where parts of the road network were untreated. The Review Panel therefore consider it important that gritting routes include access to train stations and bus depots as far as possible. It would then be important for train and bus companies to ensure their car parks and pedestrian areas are cleared.

Recommendations

- The Environment Department consider reviewing the network covered as priority 1, to ensure current traffic volume and identified community priorities are taken into account, including clusters of schools that collectively serve over 500 pupils. NHS Hampshire and other key partners will be invited to inform this work..
- The Environment Department include in 'community' gritting routes, access to:
 - smaller schools
 - residential areas with high numbers of elderly residents
 - large industrial estates (beyond those covered as priority 1)
 - locally significant health centres
 - 'community hubs' (e.g. parade of local shops)
 - access to key bus depots and train stations
 - black spots including steep gradients, informed by local knowledge

- Use of Farmers

- 2.13 The Review Panel heard that the County Council works with approximately 100 farmers who have been supplied with snow plough blades and allocated designated routes to clear when lying snow reaches an inch. Given that the County Council's highways contractor is limited in the number of routes they can run concurrently due to the number of gritting vehicles available, it was suggested by some stakeholders that the County Council could explore making

further use of farmers as an extra resource for gritting the more minor roads as well as clearing snow. The farmer representatives who provided evidence to the review suggested farmers would be willing to do more.

- 2.14 However, the Review Panel learned that while farmers have exemption in law to use 'red diesel' (fuel with lower excise duty charges, used in agricultural vehicles) when snow ploughing on the public highway, vehicles used to grit the road only qualify if they are 'constructed or adapted, and used, solely for the conveyance of machinery for spreading material on roads to deal with frost ice or snow'. Therefore it is anticipated that a change in the law would be required in order to enable farmers to spread grit on the public highway on behalf of the County Council. (as farmers would be adding gritting equipment to a vehicle not solely used for gritting purposes)⁹. However, the Review Panel welcome that the Environment Department are exploring options to increase 'utilisation of support from local farmers during severe weather events'¹⁰.
- 2.15 The Review Panel heard from farmer representatives that due to a succession of mild winters, their services had not been called upon for some years. It would be beneficial to hold a biennial briefing for farmers to provide them with an up date on policies and procedures, and to review the routes they are allocated following the creation of 'community' gritting routes. Additionally evidence from farmer representatives suggested the equipment provided to farmers for snow ploughing was up to 20 years old and getting replacement parts could be difficult. The panel therefore suggest that the equipment allocated to farmers be reviewed.
- 2.16 Farmers suggested they may be able to provide other assistance such as 4x4 vehicles, removing piled up snow using trailers, or towing stuck vehicles blocking roads. Insurance would be required to cover farmers in these situations. The National Farmers Union South East also suggested the County Council could consider setting up a network of farmer coordinators who could link with Hampshire Highways, and refer on tasks to individual farmers according to local resources.

Recommendations

- The Environment Department write to the appropriate Secretary of State to request a change in fuel exemption regulations to enable farmers to spread grit using agricultural vehicles. If regulations do not change, the County Council consider the feasibility of reimbursing farmers for the VAT on fuel used.
- The Environment Department review with retained farmers and other contractors as appropriate (once every two years, commencing in Autumn 2010) arrangements for responding to severe winter weather. This will provide an opportunity to up date farmers on any changes to policies and procedures as well as a forum for discussion. The equipment provided and routes allocated to farmers should be included in this review..

⁹ See HMRC 'fuel for road vehicles' notice 75 (August 2009)

¹⁰ See Cabinet Report on Winter Maintenance, 26 July 2010, reference 1768

- Salt Supply

- 2.17 The Review Panel were mindful that Hampshire County Council had taken the decision in late January 2010 to increase salt stocks to 18,000 tonnes ready for next winter (previous total capacity was 12,000). Supply arrangements have also been strengthened to ensure that stock levels are 100% at the start of the winter season, and that re-supply is now triggered at 85% (previously 75%)¹¹. The Highways Agency indicated in their evidence that it is their intention to use all their capacity when re-stocking with salt this summer, and that they would be considering out of UK salt supply sources in order to increase resilience to severe weather.
- 2.18 The Review Panel were appraised of the national situation in relation to the salt supply chain, and are aware that the recent Interim Report of the Independent Review commissioned by the Department for Transport considers ‘that the salt supply chain as currently configured is fundamentally vulnerable and lacks resilience’¹². Re-supply during the winter of 09/10 became difficult across the country because demand for salt was significantly higher than normal. The national ‘Salt Cell’ gave advice to salt suppliers regarding how to allocate the available salt among local authorities, however this allocation was not reliable. The Review Panel heard that Hampshire County Council only received 10% of the amount of salt allocated to it by the Salt Cell¹³.
- 2.19 The Review Panel are aware that Devon County Council was identified as an example of good practice in the UK Roads Liaison Group Review of the February 2009 snow¹⁴ in relation to salt supply. The Review Panel heard from Devon that they have a framework contract for salt procurement, which approves 3 suppliers with prices re-competed annually, and that ‘this has proven helpful in certain seasons of high levels of urgent demand’¹⁵. This was a joint tender with neighbouring authorities. Devon County Council receive salt in bulk at local ports, which minimises transportation costs. In addition, the contract with the supplier specifies the quality of salt required. The salt is tested by their Scientific Service, and if the salt delivered is lower quality, the County Council can claim rebates on the costs paid to the supplier.
- 2.20 The Review Panel understands that re-supply can be a problem due to the salt needing to travel long distances by road. As Hampshire benefits from access to two major ports, resilience in salt supply may be improved by considering delivery of salt by sea. Members noted that steps have already been taken to source a shipment of salt for the coming winter¹⁶.

Recommendation

- The Environment Department explore the feasibility of putting in place a framework contract for salt procurement, and consider suppliers that can deliver to the ports of Southampton or Portsmouth.

¹¹ Agreed in principle at Cabinet in January 2010, details confirmed at Cabinet in July 2010

¹² ‘The Resilience of England’s Transport Systems in Winter’ An Independent Review commissioned by the Department for Transport (Interim Report published July 2010)

¹³ Reported in Emergency Planning oral evidence

¹⁴ ‘Lessons from the Severe Weather February 2009’ – UK Roads Liaison Group (published July 2009)

¹⁵ Quote from written evidence provided by Devon County Council

¹⁶ See Cabinet Report on Winter Maintenance, 26 July 2010, reference 1768

- Information about Services

- 2.21 Hantsdirect is the key route through which the public can contact the County Council. This was a particularly important service during the severe weather as it provided a means through which people were able to contact the County Council to ask for help and access information about services. The demand for this service was demonstrated by the increase in calls Hantsdirect received in December 2009 and January 2010 compared to the previous year. (e.g. in the 3 days prior to Christmas in December 2008 522 calls were logged regarding roads and transport, compared to 3983 in the same period December 2009).
- 2.22 The Review Panel heard that Hantsdirect staff made considerable efforts to get to work and were assisted by the provision of supervised child care at the office. The call answering system was also able to relay service specific messages to callers before their call was answered, giving the current position and alternative ways to access information such as the website.
- 2.23 Although at times staffing levels were down between 20% and 70%, staff worked flexibly but opening hours were reduced. Calls were prioritised (e.g. those relating to Adults Services) and generally the public was understanding, with no complaints received during this period.
- 2.24 However, it was noted that access to the Hantsdirect site for staff had been difficult, and the car park had not been cleared. Staff that were able to get to work had to clear the car park, before being able to open Hantsdirect and start taking calls. The Review Panel is of the view that as Hantsdirect is the first point of contact for the public, as such priority should be given to supporting the continuity of this service in times of severe weather.

Recommendation

- Emergency Planning identify which of the County Council's office buildings it is most important for staff to be able to access in order to provide essential services. Arrangements then be made such that at times of persistent snow and ice Facilities Management have plans in place to grit key car parks and access footways, to support provision of services.

- Staff Providing Public Services

- 2.25 The Review Panel were mindful that many of the vital services the County Council and partner agencies provide rely on front line staff. Evidence to the Review Panel demonstrated that many staff had 'gone an extra mile' in their efforts to get to work and keep services running. It is to the credit of these staff that those service users known to be vulnerable or with critical care needs were contacted and supported by staff and there were no critical incidents as a result of the severe weather.
- 2.26 The emergency response 'volunteer bureau' set up in liaison with Adults Services, Human Resources and Emergency Planning worked well with over 300 staff offering their services and support provided to 90 service users. This work has been recognised nationally as good practice. Other examples of good practice in relation to keeping key services running included:

- Scottish and Southern Energy drafted in extra staff from Scotland when snow was forecast, to provide extra capacity for line repairs and answering phone calls.
- The provision of overnight accommodation for key hospital and residential home staff was identified in advance to ensure services could be maintained.
- Clearing access to a caravan site which had a number of elderly residents

When schools or day centres had to close this was communicated well and some staff could be redeployed to support other services.

- 2.27 Many County Council staff who were not able to get into their normal place of work were able to work from home thanks to 'passport' technology which enables access to the IT network. Other stakeholders reported that staff were able to be redeployed to work bases that were closer to home, and where services were cancelled (e.g. waste collection) staff were moved to other tasks e.g. gritting pavements.
- 2.28 Opportunities to further strengthen support to staff in future have already been identified . The Human Resources department at the County Council reported for example that some small outlying offices were unprepared for accommodating extra staff working from them when they could not access their usual place of work. In addition, evidence suggested that accessing some of the County Council's offices was difficult due to car parks and footways not being cleared.
- 2.29 The Review Panel have suggested that a corporate approach is taken to prioritising and managing the County Council's office portfolio when it comes to winter maintenance. This will support the continuity of key services and ensure that facilities/premises management capacity is appropriately utilised, along with salt/grit supplies procured by the Environment Department. Office base priority can then be included in business continuity planning by departments. This approach would be consistent with the move towards flexible working, 'hot desking', and consolidating the County Council's office locations.
- 2.30 It was also noted that some staff may need to look after their children if schools are closed. One option may be to provide child care facilities at large offices, to enable key staff to work. The Review Panel heard that these issues are under consideration by Human Resources, and support this approach.

Recommendations

- Departments identify 'non essential' staff in advance and let them know that they should not attempt to get to work when conditions are bad (particularly where passport can be used to work from home), to alleviate pressure on transport systems.
- Human Resources explore the possibility of providing crèche facilities at large office sites to enable staff to get to work when schools are closed (for essential services)

- Human Resources ensure messages are clear regarding the potential for staff to work from other locations (including small offices within walking distance of residential areas).

3 Co-ordination and Communication

- 3.1 Feedback from stakeholders indicated that there was generally good partnership working in coordinating the response to the severe winter weather across public sector organisations, with good examples including 4x4 vehicles being lent from one public sector partner to another. However, there was evidence that co-ordination could be developed further. For example, the Highways Agency gave examples of times where the motorway was gritted (their responsibility), but roads linking to the motorway were not (County Council responsibility), leading to congestion.
- 3.2 The speed with which different agencies were able to respond to the severe weather was also a factor in maximising opportunities for co-ordinating assistance across Hampshire . Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) for example was able to move quickly to establish a major incident room and offer assistance to other service providers (for example the ambulance services) in the form of 4x4 vehicles and drivers. The importance of agreed priorities for co-ordinating assistance across partner agencies was stressed by HFRS, and that there would be a benefit to a ‘memorandum of understanding’ being agreed now so that all were prepared should the severe weather reoccur.
- 3.3 Scottish and Southern Energy also indicated they are keen to co-ordinate with local authorities in the area they cover to ensure ‘a consistency of approach and optimum use of resources’.

Recommendation

- The Environment Department work with Local Resilience Forum partners on a Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure responses to winter weather are coordinated and prioritised, clarifying each organisations responsibilities and how they will work together.

- Cooperation with the Health Service

- 3.4 Evidence received from NHS Hampshire suggested that agencies did not work together as effectively as they could have done as a coordinating group. Adults Services also commented that liaison between themselves and the NHS could be improved, in relation to accessing priority clients. Coordinated use of 4x4 vehicles could help with this in future (see 3.17 below).
- 3.5 NHS Hampshire reported that health services experienced significant disruption for up to 10 days after the main snowfall, as the snow and ice took time to thaw, meaning that access to vulnerable patients in their own home remained a problem. While planned health appointments were brought forward when snow was forecast, some non urgent face to face appointments were cancelled, and telephone support was provided instead. In some cases hospital appointments were cancelled, particularly if travel to the hospital was considered dangerous.

3.6 The Review Panel is aware that in County Durham, the Primary Care Trust has contributed £1 million over three years (09/10 to 11/12) to cover the revenue costs and capital costs of treating additional routes¹⁷. The reasoning being that paying to grit more pavements and minor roads will save the NHS money in relation to treating falls and fractures and dealing with a backlog of missed appointments. Both NHS Hampshire and Fleet Medical Centre reported that they incurred extra costs as a result of the severe winter in 09/10, through needing agency staff to manage the backlog of appointments, and dealing with a higher than average number of falls and fractures (though this had not been quantified). National figures suggest the increase in falls involving ice and snow was significant – around 18,000 recorded for 2009/10 compared to 2,000 or less in 05/06, 06/07 and 07/08¹⁸. Therefore there may be a case for NHS Hampshire quantifying the cost to the NHS of the severe weather and contributing to gritting routes as a preventative measure.

Recommendation

- NHS Hampshire quantify the costs to the NHS associated with the severe weather and consider contributing towards pavement gritting and ‘community route’ gritting, as an ‘invest to save’ measure.

- Pavements

- 3.7 The Review Panel learned that pavements are not a priority for gritting by the County Council unless they are in heavily used community areas. This was particularly problematic last winter as the temperature remained low for so long in much of Hampshire that a large proportion of pavements were icy for extended periods.
- 3.8 While it is accepted it is unusual for ice to remain on pavements for so long, the Review Panel is of the view that experiences last winter suggest that better planning in relation to gritting of pavements would be beneficial. An example was given where a District Council gritted pedestrian areas in a town centre, and then the County Council gritted the subways leading to the town centre the following day. This could have been simplified if one organisation did both at the same time or through better communications about plans for treating pedestrian areas.
- 3.9 There was evidence of good partnership working between the County and District/Borough Councils, as waste collection and street cleaning staff who could not undertake their ‘day job’ were re-deployed to grit. District Councils reported that they gritted the paths near their offices, sheltered housing and shopping centres, and in some cases pedestrian access from train stations to key areas. However, this action could be backed up by more formal agreement

¹⁷ See follow up to a review of winter maintenance undertaken by a scrutiny committee at Durham County Council, PCT contribution indicated in report available here: <http://www.durham.gov.uk/MINAGENDASPDF/Overview%20and%20Scrutiny/Environment%20and%20Sustainable%20Communities/140610-ENV-Item-No5-WM-Report.pdf>

¹⁸ Figures from Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS Information Centre, published in the Independent Review Interim Report.

in relation to identifying priority areas for gritting and agreeing in advance who will grit what.

Recommendation

- The Environment Department work with District/Borough Council's regarding priority areas the district's could grit in severe weather situations, giving particular consideration to car parks and pavements in town centres, and links to public transport

- Use of 4x4 Vehicles

- 3.10 Various stakeholders referred to using 4x4 vehicles this winter, to ensure untreated roads could be safely accessed. A District Council reported it had 3 4x4s in its fleet, and allocated them to key service areas e.g. sheltered housing support, to ensure people in need could be reached if necessary. The Fire & Rescue Service reported that they had provided 4x4s from their fleet to partners during the severe weather, including Hampshire Constabulary, the County Council, Scottish and Southern Energy and the South Central Ambulance Service. 4x4s were also used in some cases to discharge patients from hospital, and by a GP practice to pick up staff and collect essential supplies.
- 3.11 The Review Panel took evidence from Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 Response, a voluntary organisation of members of the public who own 4x4 vehicles, who on joining the organisation are provided with training for driving in severe weather conditions and insured to provide assistance to public sector agencies. The Review Panel heard that 4x4 response have access to vehicles which can tow HGV's that have jackknifed and are insured to do so.
- 3.12 It was reported that Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 Response worked closely with Wokingham Borough Council during the winter of 09/10, for example transporting care workers to visit vulnerable clients or taking a patient to hospital. When members of the public with 4x4 vehicles offered their services during the period, Wokingham Borough Council referred them to 4x4 Response who were able to train them straight away and deploy them within days.
- 3.13 A Council of Voluntary Service reported that they had been contacted by members of the public who owned 4x4s offering assistance, and that where possible they had matched people to opportunities e.g. delivering Meals on Wheels. However, it was noted that in future they could refer people to Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 response, as they would then have access to appropriate training and insurance.

Recommendation

- Hampshire Councils of Voluntary Service be alerted to the contact details for Hampshire & Berkshire 4x4 response, and be encouraged to direct members of the public wishing to offer 4x4 capacity to them in future.
- 3.14 The 4x4 response representative indicated that their numbers had increased since last winter, with membership at 110 as of June 2010. The Review Panel considers that this represents a significant resource, which public sector

agencies in Hampshire could draw on in future to improve our ability to respond during periods of extreme weather.

- 3.15 The Review Panel is aware that in emergency situations, Gold Command is triggered; a strategic coordinating group which brings together leads from the emergency services, local authorities, health and government agencies. The Review Panel suggests that the agencies that come together in Gold Command review sources of 4x4 vehicles and suitably trained drivers, and agree priority service areas where this Hampshire wide pool of 4x4s could be deployed. This could include getting personnel to vulnerable clients, and getting key staff to work bases. Sources of 4x4s could include vehicles owned by farmers, local authorities and partner organisations, as well as public sector staff's private vehicles and those owned by members of the public (via 4x4 response).
- 3.16 Evidence provided by Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service (HFRS) suggested HFRS are well prepared for major incidents. The Review Panel heard that HFRS have a number of 4x4's within their fleet, strategically placed across their network of stations, and that their major role during the severe weather was lending this capacity to partner agencies.
- 3.17 The Review Panel accepts that it is not possible to clear all roads, therefore in times of prolonged winter weather, use of 4x4 vehicles can assist with reaching the vulnerable. The Review Panel considers that the deployment of 4x4s would benefit from better strategic planning as use of 4x4 vehicles is a key mechanism for ensuring continuity of service provision during severe weather.

Recommendation

- Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service be invited to lead on coordination of 4x4 vehicles for use in emergencies, in conjunction with the other members of the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Local Resilience Forum, taking account of opportunities to work with Hampshire & Berkshire 4x4 Response.
- 3.18 HFRS reported a significant increase in calls on fire service personnel trained as co-responders to provide assistance to the Ambulance Service, and provision of 4x4 vehicle capacity to the Ambulance Service. HFRS suggested that these resources 'were not always used as effectively as possible'¹⁹, and indicated that one of their priorities for improvement was to work with South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) on how they co-operate in a severe weather emergency. The Review Panel consider that ambulances being able to respond effectively and reach patients is vital. The Review Panel was concerned to learn that SCAS does not currently have any 4x4 capacity within its fleet²⁰.

Recommendation

- South Central Ambulance Service be encouraged to work with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service with regard to major incident and business continuity planning, particularly in relation to severe winter weather scenarios.

¹⁹ Quote from HFRS written evidence

²⁰ Referred to in Emergency Planning oral evidence

- Communications Between Partners

- 3.19 Communications with partner agencies are important during a severe weather event, to ensure a joined up approach. For example, the Review Panel heard that the Meals on Wheels service in Hart benefited from provision of 4x4 vehicles from partner agencies and the general public, which enabled them to maintain their service. This was important to ensure vulnerable people had access to a hot meal in the cold weather. It was also recognised that those delivering meals on wheels could act as 'eyes and ears' to look out for signs that their customers may need help from other public services.
- 3.20 However, it was reported that in one area, meals on wheels could not operate because they sourced the meals from a local school which was closed. It is likely that a similar arrangement exists in other parts of Hampshire. The Review Panel suggests it should be possible for access to be provided to the school kitchens for use by meals on wheels, even when the rest of the school is closed.

- Communications with Staff and Businesses

- 3.21 The Review Panel received evidence to suggest that head teachers were not always aware of how to access information in relation to which routes would be gritted as a priority. This knowledge is important for them to take into account when making school closure decisions, in relation to likelihood of parents and teachers being able to reach the school. The Review Panel therefore suggest that once gritting routes have been reviewed this information is circulated to head teachers. Awareness of grit routes may also be of benefit to businesses so they can develop business continuity plans appropriately. This information will also be relevant to bus companies, who may need to consider running alternative services along gritted roads if parts of their usual routes are untreated.

Recommendation

- Once grit routes have been confirmed following review the Environment Department highlight this information to key partners including head teachers and business representatives.
- 3.22 Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council reported that Basingstoke experienced particular difficulties one day, as snow fell fast in the afternoon, and people working there or shopping there rushed to leave at the same time. This caused severe congestion and resulted in lengthy journeys home. It was suggested that while not altogether avoidable, this type of scenario may be assisted in future if local authority staff and businesses were encouraged to stagger journeys home.
- 3.23 The Review Panel considered whether key agencies could do more to assist town centre evacuation in severe winter weather situations. Members noted that mechanisms for swift communications with employers and the public would be helpful, along with contingency arrangements to support traffic flow e.g. police management of key intersections. The Panel accept that the feasibility of this approach would require further investigation.

Recommendation

- That Emergency Planning assess any practical measures that can be taken to support town centre evacuation at times of severe weather. Options for communicating information to help with staggering journeys and identifying priority areas for traffic management should be included as part of this work.

- Communications with the Public

- 3.24 Communications with the public are important to ensure people are aware of service availability and what Local Authorities are doing to improve the situation. The Review Panel heard a number of examples of good practice in relation to organisations communicating with the public, for example Scottish and Southern Energy reported that they maintain a register of Priority Customers (people on dialysis, visually impaired, disabled etc) and call them during emergency situations to offer reassurance and support.
- 3.25 Hampshire's District and Borough Councils reported that the majority of calls they received from the public were in relation to waste collection services. As many residential roads and pavements were icy for extended periods, household waste collection services were largely suspended. However, the staff usually working on waste collection (as well as other services such as street cleaning) were re-deployed to help clear snow and grit priority areas. The Review Panel is of the view that the public's frustration in relation to waste collection may be alleviated if it were made clearer that these staff were out gritting instead. Any changes to waste collection timetables when services resume will also need to be well publicised.
- 3.26 It was also commented by some stakeholders that people parking inappropriately or abandoning their cars when conditions became too difficult caused some problems. For example, people parking on gritted routes instead of residential roads that were not gritted could hamper the passage of gritting lorries on repeat journeys, and cars abandoned during the worst of the weather could make access difficult for other vehicles. The Review Panel suggests that messages to the public regarding winter weather include guidance regarding parking, and who to contact when they have abandoned their vehicle to facilitate moving them when possible.

Recommendation

- The Environment Department work with Corporate Communications regarding provision of guidance to the public. This should include advice regarding parking and abandoned vehicles, encouraging people to stagger journeys home to avoid congestion, updated advice regarding liability in relation to clearing pavements, and guidance regarding appropriate use of grit in gritbins.

- Car Parks

- 3.27 An issue raised by several stakeholders was the clearance of snow and ice from car parks. This was of particular concern at health centres which

endeavoured to remain open but were concerned that their car parks were dangerous and had to pay contractors to clear them. Car parks at train stations, schools and in towns could also be problematic. Comments received indicated some confusion about where the responsibility for clearing these car parks rests.

- 3.28 The Review Panel learned that schools and health centres are responsible for their own car parks and footways on site, however there was evidence they were not always aware of their responsibilities and were expecting the County Council to provide assistance. Because not all these facilities were prepared there were examples of salt purchased during the severe weather at a price far higher than it would have been if the salt had been purchased before the winter²¹.
- 3.29 The health service indicated in their evidence that they will be seeking additional grit stocks in future to assist with clearance of their sites and car parks. The Review Panel appreciate that re-stocking during the winter may have been difficult for the NHS, as the Independent Review reported that when national salt stocks were under pressure, deliveries to local highway authorities were prioritised and 'virtually all' other clients including hospitals 'were unable to obtain salt from UK producers during this time'²².
- 3.30 It is important that when communicating with partner agencies the County Council is clear about what it will be gritting and what it will not, so partners can plan their own gritting regime accordingly. The Review Panel is aware that at least one District Council has already taken steps to address this issue, as Havant Borough Council's Cabinet agreed a new Winter Maintenance Policy in July to clear and grit certain car parks as a priority in severe conditions²³. While the Review Group understands GP surgeries operate as individual businesses, it is suggested that the NHS take steps to advise all health sites of the need to plan accordingly for their own premises. Similarly while schools are self governing, the County Council could provide guidance in relation to school site clearance. The County Council could consider supporting such site clearance through provision of grit bins (see 4.4 below).

Recommendation

- The Environment Department reinforce to partner agencies that car parks (and on site footways) are their owners responsibility (including in particular schools, health services and train stations), and that individual sites should be encouraged to make appropriate preparations.

4 Community Resilience

- 4.0 The Review Panel heard many examples of communities helping themselves during the severe weather, from large landowners clearing snow, neighbours helping clear each others driveways, and people with 4x4 vehicles doing food shopping on behalf of the housebound. The Review Panel agree with a

²¹ Evidence provided by Fleet Medical Centre

²² DfT Independent Review Interim Report (July 2010)

²³ See Havant Borough Council Cabinet Paper:

<http://www4.havant.gov.uk/orion1/reports/cab/2010/20100714009.pdf>

stakeholder who commented that local authorities should make the most of this community spirit and seek to support communities further.

- Grit Bins

- 4.1 The Review Panel strongly endorses the decision already taken by the Cabinet to purchase 1,000 additional grit bins²⁴. Considerable support for this approach was received from various stakeholders. Some stakeholders reported this grit could be mis-used for private purposes. To avoid this local arrangements for managing the bins could be introduced, for example through Parish Councils (or other suitable community groups in areas not covered by a Parish or Town Council such as residents associations). The Department for Transport's Independent Review indicates that in many areas grit bins are 'managed and used by Parish or Town councils to tackle ice and snow on local roads and footways'²⁵.
- 4.2 The Review Panel understands that Suffolk County Council operate this type of system, and that Parish/Town Councils are responsible for keeping a list of volunteers to spread the grit, and the named volunteers are insured through the County Council's insurance. If Parish/Town Council's managed grit bins, they could also link with the County Council in relation to re-stocking the grit during the winter. The Review Panel suggests the management of Hampshire's grit bins could be given further thought along these lines.

Recommendation

- Consideration be given to the advantages of managing grit bins through Parish/Town Councils (or other suitable community groups such as residents associations in areas that don't have Parish or Town Councils). This could include locking bins to prevent mis-use, and the County Council accepting liability on behalf of named volunteers allocated to spread the grit. If grit bins remain unlocked, wording regarding what the grit should be used for could be added to the lid of the bins
- 4.3 In addition, the Review Panel understand that the current policy states that grit bins cannot be placed on routes included in the priority 1 network. When this policy is reviewed this could be re-considered, as the pavements alongside priority 1 roads may be key pedestrian routes and careful siting of grit bins could assist access.
- 4.4 An option that could also be considered would be providing the facility for NHS, schools and other sites with responsibility for clearing footpaths to pay to have a grit bin on site, which the County Council could supply and replenish. This offer could also be extended to business parks and parades of shops. By accessing grit through the County Council, this would enable economies of scale in purchasing the grit. As the number of grit bins requested by Parish

²⁴ See July 2010 Cabinet report

²⁵ 'The Resilience of England's Transport Systems in Winter an Independent Review – Interim Report' (July 2010)

Councils fell short of the number Cabinet had budgeted for, such additional 'customers' for grit bins could be considered in future allocations²⁶.

Recommendation

- The Environment Department consider providing grit bins to NHS sites, industrial estates, parades of shops and schools, in return for a 'rental' and replenishment payment, in order to promote self help.

- Liability When Clearing Pavements

- 4.5 The Review Panel heard from several stakeholders that some people were put off from clearing pavements near their property due to concern, amplified in the media, that they may be open to litigation if people slipped on a cleared area. A Council of Voluntary Service received requests for help clearing driveways or paths, but was unsure about providing volunteers to help due to the liability issue.
- 4.6 The Local Government Association, among others, has called on the Coalition Government to take action to address this issue. The Review Panel note that the Minister for Transport, in response to the Independent Review undertaken nationally, has recently announced that the Department for Transport will be producing 'a brief guide to help the public understand this area of the law' by the end of October 2010²⁷. The Independent Review suggests that if such guidance was observed, this would provide a defence in the event of litigation. The Review Panel also note that a Private Members Bill²⁸ on this issue was introduced on 5 July 2010. This should be monitored in case this strengthens the legislative position. If this issue can be clarified, this would support communities to help themselves, and volunteers to help those less able to clear areas themselves.
- 4.7 The Review Panel considered that guidance could be provided to the public regarding appropriate methods to clear snow, and that where this guidance had been accessed and followed the County Council could accept liability. (link to recommendation under 3.26 regarding providing advice to the public, and recommendation under 4.2 regarding use of grit from grit bins). This approach would require further investigation and risk assessment.

Recommendation

- The Leader of the County Council write to the Coalition Government to support the position of the Local Government Association that the issue of liability when clearing pavements requires clarity, through legislation if necessary. The scope for the County Council to provide advice to local people about their liability when clearing snow and ice should be assessed by legal services and include consideration of the cost to the County Council of providing liability cover.

²⁶ The Cabinet report on Winter Maintenance from 26 July 2010 indicates current budgeting leaves 'an estimated £0.6m to fund further phases of salt bins and the second salt barn'

²⁷ Government response to the interim report on salt supply and use, written statement by the Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport, 26 July 2010.

²⁸ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/snowclearance.html>

- Volunteering

- 4.8 Hampshire County Council received national recognition²⁹ for setting up a Volunteer Bureau from among its staff. County Council staff were invited to volunteer to provide assistance such as checking on vulnerable members of the community and delivering food, and over 300 staff³⁰ offered their services. Staff registering with the volunteer bureau were asked if they had access to a 4x4 vehicle. Adults Services set up a helpline for people who were experiencing difficulties as a consequence of the bad weather which was publicised in local media. In response Volunteer Bureau staff were deployed to help and assistance was provided to over 90 people. It was reported that staff made follow up calls to ensure the people concerned had received the help they needed. Adults Services received a number of compliments from the public in relation to the helpline.
- 4.9 The Review Panel also heard that members of the public rang a Council of Voluntary Service to offer to help out in a similar fashion. Such members of the public therefore represent an additional resource, that could be tapped into to provide additional support to communities during severe weather events. The Review Panel suggests that the County Council works with Hampshire Councils of Voluntary Service, to establish how such spontaneous volunteering could be co-ordinated in future. There is evidence of considerable good will within communities, and the County Council and Voluntary Sector could work together to make the most of this, and ensure it is directed to best effect.

Recommendation

- The County Council work with Community Action Hampshire on the feasibility of co-ordination of spontaneous volunteering in relation to severe weather situations.

- Local Emergency Planning

- 4.10 Supporting community resilience has been on the agenda nationally in recent months, with a consultation on the subject by the Cabinet Office closing on 1 July 2010³¹. The Review Panel heard from a number of Parish Councils about the importance of the local knowledge Parish Councils had to offer and solutions that suited the geography of the area. While the Review Panel accepts that it is important in emergency situations to have a high level command and control structure, the Review Panel agrees that an awareness of different local circumstances is also important.
- 4.11 The Review Panel suggests that the County Council work with Parish Councils to support the development of community emergency plans. This would support 'local councils as first responders in building community resilience when outside services cannot get through'³². In areas that don't have Parish or Town Councils, consideration could be given to working with alternative community organisations such as residents associations.

²⁹ According to oral evidence received from the Director of Human Resources at Hampshire County Council

³⁰ According to oral evidence received from the Director of Human Resources at Hampshire County Council

³¹ See: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/communityresilience.aspx>

³² Hampshire Association of Local Councils written evidence

4.12 These community emergency plans could include details of useful resources within the community (e.g. location of grit bins, 4x4 vehicles etc), useful contacts (e.g. local highways area office), and where to access information regarding the priority gritting routes. This type of planning could also build in mechanisms to ensure vulnerable people are contacted, as a back up if services are not able to do so. For example, a Parish Council reported that they had in place a 'good neighbour' scheme linked to the existing neighbourhood watch, to keep an eye on vulnerable members of the community during such situations. Local Emergency Plans could empower communities to help themselves, and strengthen the existing action taken.

Recommendation

- Emergency Planning work with Parish/Town Councils (or other community groups such as residents associations in areas that are not covered by a Parish or Town Council) to develop community emergency plans

4.13 The Review Panel also recognised the importance of school closure decisions, as if schools are closed, parents may not be able to get to work, which impacts on businesses and provision of public services. Some examples of good practice by schools were received, for example the Review Panel heard that some schools have a 'snow plan', including relevant information such as a list of local taxi firms that have 4x4 vehicles, local snow plough contacts, salt and grit suppliers, and Criminal Records Bureau checked volunteers who could come in and help with supervision.

4.14 The Review Panel accept that schools make their own decisions, however the Review Panel consider it would be beneficial for all schools to be reminded of the benefits of good business continuity planning such as preparing a 'snow plan'. This could be informed by an understanding of the roads the County Council intends to grit (see recommendation under 3.21), and could establish the schools plans for clearance of footways and car parks on their site (see recommendations under 3.30 and 4.4), as well as options to keep the school open with reduced staffing levels.

Recommendation

- Children's Services reinforce guidance to schools regarding the need to have their own 'snow plan'.

Policy & Resources Select Committee**Review of the Severe Winter Weather experienced in Hampshire in 2009/10****Review Terms of Reference**

Aim: To review the County Council's winter resilience, in terms of our capacity to enable continuity of service, and access to service provision, to local people during a severe winter weather event, and to assess options and priorities for action to be considered by Cabinet when planning for next winter.

Scope: The Review will operate at a strategic level, and collate information that departments and other stakeholders will be expected to produce. The focus will be on the impact of the adverse weather on services provided to local people rather than the emergency response itself. The time frame covered will be 1 December 2009 to 31 January 2010.

Consideration will be given to issues raised by the public with departments and stakeholders. Feedback from organisations representing small business will also be invited. The Review Group will analyse the evidence provided, to identify priority areas for action to recommend to Cabinet. The Review Group will maintain a strategic overview, seeking evidence from those with expertise.

Review Strands:

- Impact on Service Delivery
- Public Perception and Expectations
- Impact on Small Businesses
- Consideration of the above in more detail by reference to Hart District Council area

Review Group:

Cllr Keith Chapman (Chairman)
Cllr Keith Evans (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Pat West
Cllr Sharyn Wheale
Cllr Bruce Tennent
Cllr Adrian Collett

Process:

Review Group will be briefed on current winter maintenance policies, the national context in winter maintenance and recent reviews of public sector responses to severe winter weather undertaken nationally. Written evidence will be invited from a range of relevant stakeholders, all County Councillors will be invited to provide comment on experiences in the area they represent and key stakeholders will be invited to oral evidence sessions where members of the review panel can ask follow up questions. The review group will then assess the evidence received and agree recommendations based on their findings.

Timescale:

- Oral Evidence sessions to take place on 7th, 17th and 21st June
- Update to Cabinet July 26th
- Final Report anticipated to be considered at Cabinet 27th September

Review of the Severe Winter Weather Experienced in Hampshire in 2009/10 Schedule of Stakeholders who supplied Written Evidence

Relevant stakeholders were written to and invited to respond to the following key questions:

- 1) What impact did the recent winter weather have on the services provided by your organisation?
- 2) What information was provided to the public about how to access your service during the winter weather and in what format?
- 3) Looking at the period 1 December 2009- 31 January 2010, what aspects of service delivery worked well for your organisation?
- 4) Have you made changes (or do you intend to make changes) to the way you plan for severe weather as a result of this experience, if so how?
- 5) Reflecting back on the period in question what would be your 3 priorities for action and how could these be implemented?
- 6) Please provide an analysis of the complaints, comments and feedback your organisation received from the public between 1st December 2009 and 31st January 2010, identifying the key issues raised.

The following stakeholders responded:

Internal

Children's Services Department, Hampshire County Council
Adults Services Department, Hampshire County Council

Partner Agencies

NHS Hampshire
Hampshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service
Hampshire Constabulary
Scottish and Southern Energy
Highways Agency
Fareham Borough Council
East Hampshire District Council
Havant Borough Council
New Forest District Council
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Devon County Council
National Farmers Union South East
Farmer, Kingsclere Estates
Hampshire Association of Local Councils
East Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Sherfield on Loddon Parish Council
Sherborne St John Parish Council

Hart Area

Hart Voluntary Action
 Women's Royal Voluntary Service
 Hook & Hartley Wintney Medical
 Partnership
 Fleet Medical Centre
 Frimley Park Hospital
 Oakwood Infant School

Calthorpe Park School
 South Warnborough Parish Council
 Hook Parish Council
 Crookham Village Parish Council
 Yateley Town Council
 Winchfield Parish Council
 Odiham Parish Council

All Hampshire County Councillors were written to and invited to provide feedback to the following questions:

- 1) What issues were raised with you by members of the public relating to the wintry conditions experienced in December 2009 and January 2010? (please give an indication of if the same issues were raised by more than one person)
- 2) How did you respond when these issues were raised with you? (e.g. direct them to where to find relevant information, pass their concern to an officer at the County Council etc)
- 3) Are you aware of examples from your area of solutions to the winter weather that worked well or were a result of local innovation, if so please describe?
- 4) Would you be interested in attending an oral evidence session on 7th June to discuss these issues in more depth with the review panel?

The following members responded:

Cllr Edward Heron
 Cllr Jenny Radley
 Cllr Peter Mason
 Cllr Mark Kemp-Gee
 Cllr Andrew Gibson
 Cllr Frederick Allgood
 Cllr Felicity Hindson
 Cllr Mel Kendal
 Cllr Keith Mans
 Cllr Sean Woodward
 Cllr Peter Chegwyn
 Cllr Vaughan Clarke
 Cllr Adrian Collett

Cllr Alan Dowden
 Cllr Peter Edgar
 Cllr Keith Evans
 Cllr Michael Geddes
 Cllr Cllr David Harrison
 Cllr David Kirk
 Cllr Alexis McEvoy
 Cllr Robin McIntosh
 Cllr Roger Price
 Cllr Elaine Still
 Cllr Marilyn Tucker
 Cllr Brian Dash

Schedule of Witnesses who Attended the Oral Evidence Sessions**Monday 7 June 2010** (County Councillor Specific Session)

Cllr M Kemp-Gee
 Cllr P Mason
 Cllr F Allgood
 Cllr E Heron
 Cllr J Radley

Thursday 17 June 2010

Human Resources (Gavin Wright, Director of HR, Hampshire County Council)

Children's Services (Felicity Roe, Assistant Director, Children's Services, Hampshire County Council)

Hantsdirect (Michelle Smith, Head of Resources, and Steve Hawker, Operations Manager Hantsdirect, Hampshire County Council)

Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service (Andy Bowers, Area Manager, Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service)

Environment Department (Chris Lait, Highways & Transport Area Director, Hampshire County Council)

Health Service (Richard Samuel, Director of Performance & Standards, NHS Hampshire, and James Perrin, Practice & Business Manager, Fleet Medical Centre)

Hampshire Economic Partnership (Paul Kinvig, Chief Executive, Hampshire Economic Partnership)

Monday 21 June 2010

Adults Services (Mamie Branthwaite, Head of Quality and Audit, Adults Services, Hampshire County Council)

Voluntary Sector (Caroline Winchurch, Hart Voluntary Action and Wendy Brown, Women's Royal Voluntary Service)

Emergency Planning (Ian Hoult, County Emergency Planning Officer, Hampshire County Council)

District Council (Karen Brimacombe, Corporate Director, Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council)

Farmers (William White, Regional Director, National Farmers Union South East and John Archer, Environment & Land Use Adviser, National Farmers Union South East)

Parish Council (Mr P J Humphrey, Chairman, South Warnborough Parish Council)

Hampshire and Berkshire 4x4 Response (TJ Nicolson, Chairman, Hampshire & Berkshire 4x4 Response)

Summaries of the written responses received from stakeholders and notes from the oral evidence meetings are published on the County Council's website, accessible from the webpage set up for this review:

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/scrutiny/scrutiny-committees/policy-resources/winter-resilience.htm>

