



Cabinet Highways Report

Report of: Simon Green – Executive Director, Place

Report to: Cabinet Highways Committee

Date: 8 October 2015

Subject: Streets Ahead - Winter Service Review

Author of Report: Steve Robinson – 0114 273 5553

Key Decision: YES

Reason Key Decision: Expenditure/savings over £500,000
-and-
Affects 2 or more wards

Summary:

This report seeks approval to implement the recommendations set out in section 14 following a review of the Council's winter maintenance service 2014/15. The review assessed the outcome of the decision by the Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014 to approve changes to the winter maintenance service.

The report also details the options considered by councillors and officers prior to reinstating previously removed Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes in December 2014 during a period of adverse weather in response to a small number of reported driving incidents in parts of the city.

Reasons for Recommendations:

The safety of residents within the city is of great importance to the Council. Reports in December 2014 showed that the public were either not aware of the changes to the gritting network, or not driving in accordance with the prevailing conditions on those roads which were previously gritted. Whilst the Council understands that there remains a risk of accidents on those roads that have been gritted, there is an increased risk on roads which have not received any gritting treatment.

The recommendations proposed meet the expectations of stakeholders for an extensive city wide winter maintenance service.

Recommendations:

That the relocation of 158 grit bins from reinstated Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes to ungritted routes in accordance with the grit bin criteria is implemented.

Further snow shovels are made available to the public upon request. The public shall be informed of the collection process through the winter maintenance service information portal on the Council's website.

The Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes reinstated in December 2014 continue to form part of the winter maintenance precautionary gritting service with any additional requests for precautionary gritting assessed against the precautionary gritting route criteria approved by Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014.

That the financial implications are noted and the expenditure is approved.

Background Papers: Cabinet Highways Committee: 29 August 2014 and minutes of Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held 30 September 2015

Category of Report: OPEN

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES Cleared by: Paul Schofield
Legal Implications
NO Cleared by: Sarah Bennett
Equality of Opportunity Implications
NO Cleared by: Ian Oldershaw
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO Cleared by:
Human Rights Implications
NO
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO
Economic Impact
NO
Community Safety Implications
NO
Human Resources Implications
NO
Property Implications
NO
Area(s) Affected
Majority of the city
Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Lead
Terry Fox
Relevant Scrutiny Committee
Economic and Environmental Wellbeing
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press Release
YES

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PLACE

CABINET HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE: 8 OCTOBER 2015

STREETS AHEAD WINTER MAINTENANCE REVIEW

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to implement the recommendations set out in section 14 following a review of the Council's winter maintenance service 2014/15. The review assessed the outcome of the decision by the Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014 to approve changes to the winter maintenance service.
- 1.2 The report also details the options considered by councillors and officers prior to reinstating previously removed Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes in December 2014 during a period of adverse weather in response to a small number of reported driving incidents in parts of the city.

2.0 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SHEFFIELD PEOPLE

- 2.1 The prime concern for the people of Sheffield should be to ensure their own safety in adverse weather. The reinstatement of previously removed Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes and the inclusion of additional routes identified following the public consultation exercise should help to reduce the risk of accidents such as those which occurred in December 2014.
- 2.2 Drivers are advised to read the winter maintenance bulletins on the Council's website and attend winter weather safety events in order to familiarise themselves with the extent of the winter maintenance service and plan their routes carefully, driving in accordance with the prevailing conditions.

3.0 OUTCOME AND SUSTAINABILITY

- 3.1 Although the percentage of road length precautionary gritted in Sheffield is the highest in the UK and the number of grit bins is 5 times more than in Manchester and Nottingham combined. It is stakeholders express wish that this level of service is maintained therefore it is proposed that the budget associated with this service be retained at its current level.
- 3.2 It is also proposed that the winter maintenance service continues to be reviewed annually with any future changes to the service for example; requests for additional routes being subject to the proposed routes meeting the precautionary gritting route criteria or grit bin criteria as approved by Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Following a public consultation exercise, and the subsequent analysis of the comments received as part of this process, the Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014 approved a set of criteria which introduced an objective methodology for the Council to assess the eligibility of roads to be included in the Priority 2 precautionary gritting network. The intention was that the criteria would also be used in the future to assess whether roads should be added in or removed from the gritting network to take account of changes to the City's Highway Network and the way it is used.
- 4.2 These criteria when applied to the City's existing Highway network resulted in a number of roads being removed from the former Priority 2 Precautionary gritting network but also some additional roads being included for the 2014/15 winter maintenance season. Overall, the application of the criteria resulted in the removal of 144.3km, and the inclusion of 17.6km of roads not previously gritted but identified as fulfilling the criteria. This meant a net reduction of 126.7km from the Priority 2 Network, which would realise a contract saving of approximately £2.3m over the life of the Streets Ahead contract to contribute to the Council's budget pressures.
- 4.3 As a means of driver education, a number of public sessions were held in high profile locations. In addition, the Council's highways team developed and published an interactive searchable map of all gritting routes to enable residents to make informed decisions about their travel plans.
- 4.4 As a result of the changes to gritting routes, a number of grit bins were relocated to the routes removed from the precautionary gritting service to enable residents to grit their access and egress out of these routes in adverse weather.
- 4.5 During December 2014 it became clear from reports that the public were either not aware of the changes to the gritting network, or not driving in accordance with the prevailing conditions on those roads that were previously gritted. Members and officers were also in receipt of many complaints about the removal of the precautionary gritting service where roads did not meet the published criteria developed as a result of the public consultation process earlier in the year.
- 4.6 Media coverage of a gritting vehicle overturning on icy conditions led to a review of the removal of some Priority 2 precautionary gritting by members and officers with the decision being taken to grit the roads. A decision now needs to be taken regarding the long term approach given the issues experienced in December.

- 4.7 Note, all of the options below assumed that the roads not previously gritted but now added to the precautionary route network by meeting the published criteria would remain in place.
- 4.8 Reinstating some or all of the routes will result in the full budget saving not being achieved. Furthermore, doing this part way through the season was not a cost effective way of procuring the additional resources required.

5.0 WINTER SERVICE REVIEW

On an annual basis, at the end of each winter maintenance period, the Council and its highway maintenance service provider undertake a performance review of the winter maintenance service..

Further to the 2014/15 winter maintenance period and in view of the service changes approved by the Cabinet Highways Committee in August 2014, the following aspects of the winter maintenance service were specifically reviewed in detail with the associated recommendations set out below.

5.1 Grit Bins

Following the reinstatement of all of the Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes in December 2014 and the inclusion of additional Priority 2 routes late in 2014, it is proposed to remove the previously relocated 158 grit bins from the reinstated routes and re-locate them to areas of the city which do not form part of the precautionary gritting network and meet the approved grit bin criteria (ref: Appendix A).

The relocation of these grit bins will incur a cost of approximately £10k to be funded by the Highway Maintenance Division. Any future requests for additional grit bins will be assessed against the grit bin criteria and a decision made accordingly.

5.2 Community Snow Wardens

In order to respond to requests from members of the public for the Council to continue to provide snow warden equipment, it is recommended that a supply of snow shovels will be made available. The Council will publish details of how the public can collect a snow shovel as part of the winter maintenance information portal on its website.

The Council is also seeking ways to mobilise the community and volunteers to support the main winter service by clearing snow from pavements and helping vulnerable neighbours but that is not part of this report.

5.3 Priority 2 Precautionary Gritting Routes

The reinstatement of all of the previously removed Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes in December 2014 along with the decision to incorporate some additional routes was determined through an assessment of various options. Each of these options is set out in

section 6.0 of this report.

It is recommended that the reinstated routes continue to be precautionary gritted as part of the winter maintenance service. However, any requests received in the future for the inclusion of additional routes will be assessed against the precautionary gritting route criteria approved by Cabinet Highways Committee in August 2014 and a decision made accordingly.

Note that during the winter of 2014/15 and after gritting routes were revised the Council received no requests to add any further routes.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED - PRIORITY 2 GRITTING ROUTES

6.1 Option 1 – Do Nothing

6.1.1 In order to preserve:

- the integrity and application of the eligibility criteria approved by the Cabinet Highways Committee;
- minimise the potential for insurance risk transfer relating to third party claims; and
- ensure the Council has control over the number and extent of winter maintenance routes across the city thereby controlling costs;

6.1.2 The Council could do nothing in response to the complaints regarding previously gritted roads which had now been removed from the gritting network.

6.1.3 The main risks associated with this option include; potentially increasing the number of driving incidents occurring during adverse weather and rising stakeholder pressure on councillors and the Streets Ahead client team to reinstate Priority 2 routes in particular, those in rural areas of the city.

6.2 Option 2 – Do Minimum - Erect Warning Signs

6.2.1 In order to alert motorists to routes where precautionary gritting is no longer being undertaken, signs indicating that the road is no longer gritted or 'Ice Warning' signs could be erected. This would cater for commuters travelling into Sheffield who are not aware of the public consultation event and/or the decision made by the Cabinet Highway Committee to reduce Priority 2 routes.

6.2.2 This option is unlikely to reduce the number of stakeholder complaints however, it should result in motorists driving more cautiously on ungritted routes or choosing alternative routes which are part of the Precautionary Gritting Network, mitigating the risk of incidents on the highway.

6.3 Option 3 – Partial reinstatement of Priority 2 roads where driving incidents have been reported

- 6.3.1 There is no logic for limiting the reinstatement of roads to those where incidents have been reported. The incidents in December 2014 occurred on roads which were previously gritted in differing areas of the city. Driving incidents could occur in any part of the city during adverse weather which in the future, could result in the Council subsequently reinstating Priority 2 roads incrementally following each adverse weather event.
- 6.3.2 If the decision to use the criteria for determining eligibility for the winter maintenance service is to be revoked then there is no basis for only partial reinstatement of the Priority 2 roads.
- 6.3.3 A further consideration is that partial reinstatement of Priority 2 roads could also result in an increased number of complaints on the grounds of inequality from stakeholders whose roads have not been reinstated

6.4 Option 4 - Reinstatement of those Priority 2 roads 200m or more above sea level

- 6.4.1 This option essentially reinstates all Priority 2 routes in rural areas in the West of the city previously precautionary gritted by farmers. The majority of reported driving incidents occurred in this area of the city in particular, Midhopestones, Bradfield and Fulwood.
- 6.4.2 This would result in very lightly trafficked rural roads being gritted frequently with no significant benefit to the City as only around 0.45% of Sheffield's overall population live within areas affected.

6.5 Option 5 – Reinstatement limited to Mortimer Road

- 6.5.1 A number of driving incidents were reported as occurring on Mortimer Road in Midhopestones in the West of the city. This option proposes to only reinstate this road as into the Priority 2 Network.
- 6.5.2 The dis-benefits of this option are that it does not address the concerns of stakeholders in Bradfield and Fulwood and could potentially lead to inequality complaints.

6.6 Option 6 – Reinstatement all of the Priority 2 routes

- 6.6.1 This option would satisfy stakeholders across the city whilst also being the most costly including not enabling any savings to be made from the service.
- 6.6.2 Given the requirement to retain routes identified for addition as part of the public consultation exercise, the resulting gritting network would exceed that previously gritted, meaning an increase in costs as opposed to a

cost saving

- 6.6.3 Sheffield would have the largest precautionary gritting network percentage of any UK Local Authority.
- 6.6.4 The benefits of this option are associated with mitigating the occurrence of driving incidents in the city during adverse weather and meeting stakeholder expectations in relation to delivering the extensive winter maintenance service as experienced previously by Sheffield residents and visitors to the city prior to the 2014/15 winter maintenance period.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The reinstatement of the Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes and the inclusion of additional routes resulted in a one-off cost of £100,000. The cost includes inter alia, two route optimisation exercises; short term leasing of additional gritting vehicles; and additional driver route familiarisation training.
- 7.2 The 2014/15 Budget included a proposal to reduce winter gritting routes which would save £100k per annum as a contribution to the Council meeting its budgetary targets. The inclusion of additional Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes will incur an additional cost of £17,435 per annum (indexed). The change in policy will create a pressure in the Highways Budget for which the service has yet to identify mitigation and this is creating a pressure going forward in future years.
- 7.3 The relocation of 158 grit bins will incur a one-off cost of approximately £10k. The maintenance and refilling of these existing grit bins is already accounted for as part of the Streets Ahead contract.
- 7.4 The purchase of 100 snow shovels for the general public to utilise will cost c. £1,000 per annum.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 states that:

(1) The authority who are for the time being the highway authority for a highway maintainable at the public expense are under a duty... to maintain the highway.

(1A) In particular, a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice.

- 8.2 There are no statutory defences available to a highway authority faced with a claim that the statutory duty imposed by Section 41(1A) has been breached. However, the duty under Section 41(1A) is not an absolute duty given the qualification of 'reasonable practicability'. In the event of a claim the highway authority must demonstrate that it acted within the

bounds of 'reasonable practicability'. Highway authorities will be expected to be guided by the Well Maintained Highways - Code of Practice for Highways Maintenance Management and implement a plan in accordance with best practice which is sufficient to address foreseeable risks.

8.3 The recommendations set out in section 14 of this report are consistent with the Highways Act 1980 obligations.

8.4 The changes detailed in this report can be achieved through existing contractual change mechanisms and do not amount to be a material change to the Streets Ahead contract.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 S149 Equality Act 2010 ("The Public Sector Equality Duty" PSED) requires that:

(1) A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act; .

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; .

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

9.2 Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

(a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

(b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it; .

(c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

9.3 The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

9.4 The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out for the August 2014 report has been revisited and demonstrates that the reinstatement of the Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes impacts positively on protected characteristic groups. Additionally, the proposal to re-locate grit bins from Priority 2 precautionary gritted routes to ungritted routes and the provision of snow shovels for community volunteers will increase the number of accessible routes in the city during adverse weather events.

10.0 TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Cabinet Highways Committee should note that the EIAs prepared for the August 2014 report have been revisited to ensure that the recommendations in section 14 of this report do sufficiently address tackling health inequalities implications.

The application of road salt to the highway can have a detrimental effect on the environment through leaching into watercourses. Depending on the configuration of highway drainage and watercourses, there can be particular areas where concentrations of salt are higher. The greatest degree of mitigation is through correct decision making about when to grit and deciding on appropriate grit spread rates.

11.0 ECONOMIC IMPACT

In terms of the reinstatement of Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes and the relocation of grit bins having a detrimental impact on the economy of Sheffield, the additional precautionary gritting will ensure that there are more accessible routes into the city during periods of adverse weather.

12.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

This report recommends that the Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes are reinstated and that 158 grit bins are relocated to roads not on precautionary gritting routes which will increase community safety in times of adverse weather.

13.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1 The safety of residents within the city is of great importance to the Council. Reports in December 2014 showed that the public were either not aware of the changes to the gritting network, or not driving in accordance with the prevailing conditions on those roads which were previously gritted. Whilst the Council understands that there remains a risk of accidents on those roads that have been gritted, there is an increased risk on roads which have not received any gritting treatment.

13.2 The recommendations proposed meet the expectations of stakeholders for an extensive city wide winter maintenance service.

14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 That the relocation of 158 grit bins from reinstated Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes to ungritted routes in accordance with the grit bin criteria is implemented.

14.2 Further snow shovels are made available to the public upon request. The public shall be informed of the collection process through the winter

maintenance service information portal on the Council's website.

14.3 The Priority 2 precautionary gritting routes reinstated in December 2014 continue to form part of the winter maintenance precautionary gritting service with any additional requests for precautionary gritting assessed against the precautionary gritting route criteria approved by Cabinet Highways Committee on 29 August 2014.

14.4 That the financial implications are noted and the expenditure is approved.

Author – Steve Robinson

Job Title – Head of Highway Maintenance

Date – 29 September 2015

APPENDIX A

The grit bin criteria approved by Cabinet Highways Committee in August 2014 requires all requests for grit bins to meet two of the criteria set out below.

- On a road that has a drainage problem
- On a road that has a steep gradient of 1 in 10 (10%)
- On a bad bend that has a radius of less than 50 metres
- On a junction
- On a road that has a main entrance to sheltered housing
- On a road that has a main entrance to a school
- In an isolated area
- Near traffic signals (within 20m)
- Near a roundabout (within 20m)

In addition, the requested location for a grit bin cannot be within 200 metres of an existing grit bin.

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