

Committee: **ENVIRONMENTAL
SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Date: **1 DECEMBER 2010**

Report of: **WINTER GRITTING
SCRUTINY PANEL**

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TITLE OF THE REPORT

Winter Gritting Scrutiny Panel – addendum report

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration in the absence of the Press or Members of the public.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To advise and seek the approval of the Members of the Scrutiny Committee for the further investigation of, and recommendations made by, the Winter Gritting Scrutiny Panel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to approve:

- (i) The recommendations made to the Executive Member for Environmental Services
- (ii) That the Executive Member for Environmental Services be asked to prepare a report setting out their response to the recommendations contained in this report. That these responses be presented back to the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee within three months; and
- (iii) That a copy of the Panel's report be deposited in each of the Members' Rooms.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Following a meeting of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee on 30 June 2010, it was agreed to reform the Winter Gritting Scrutiny Panel as a result of the bad weather Bolton, as well as the rest of the country experienced in December 2009 and January 2010.

The Panel was subsequently appointed by full Council and comprised:-

1. Councillor Norman Critchley
2. Councillor Guy Harkin
3. Councillor Kevan Jones
4. Councillor James Lord
5. Councillor John Walsh
6. Councillor David Wilkinson

At its first meeting, the Panel appointed Councillor Critchley to the Chairmanship.

The Panel was supported through its investigations by the following officers:-

Peter Molyneux - Assistant Director – Highways and Engineering

David Houghton - Head of Highways and Engineering Delivery Services

John Martin - Highways Works Manager

Sean Croudace - Principal Officer - Projects

Doris Williams - Senior Officer, Special Projects and Systems

Sabeena Wootton - Senior Scrutiny Officer

1.2 Reasons for Review

It was decided that following the severe winter weather experienced in Bolton, there was a need to re-examine the report that had previously been submitted to the Executive Member, to see whether or not improvements could be made to the service.

1.3 Process and Evidence

The Panel met on two occasions and during the course of its considerations, the Panel received a report from officers which allowed for discussions to take place and for recommendations to be made.

Members were provided with a report entitled “Weathering the Storm II, Improving UK resilience to severe winter weather, which was in response to a report of the same title which had been produced by the Local Government Association. This

report detailed recommendations that the Department for Transport had asked highways authorities to take on board. "Many of those recommendations have already been taken on board by councils and all remain valid and relevant as we look to future winters... In doing so, we have drawn on the numerous lessons learned and processes that Councils across the country have been engaged with."¹

Seemingly, Bolton Council's approach to the winter maintenance programme was deemed to be better than those within the Greater Manchester arena. However, Members still raised queries regarding the following issues:-

- The potential use of snow ploughs on the front of refuse collection trucks

Response – Some Council's had fitted other service vehicles with ploughs to increase the capacity of available vehicles for snow removal. The cost of fitting a plough was estimated at £5500 per vehicle

- Providing further focus on resilience and how Bolton Council could help the regional stock levels, therefore better managing the salt levels

Response – Bolton Council was co-operating at a regional level on capacity building, collaborative working and resilience issues

- The Local Government Association (LGA) had produced a briefing report detailing the issues encountered by various Council's across the country and Members thought it would be useful to compare how Bolton Council fared against other Councils

Response – Members were supplied with information in the form of a table which outlined Bolton Council's responses to the recommendations that had been listed within the LGA report. Bolton Council's winter maintenance programme had been updated following the previous Winter Gritting Scrutiny Panel and were therefore able to provide a consistent gritting programme across the borough.

- How were grit bins, which had been requested through Area Forums going to be funded?

Response – The Winter Maintenance service had been approached to place grit bins for Area Forums from the funded forum allocations. It was proposed that this would only be carried out, where the bin qualified under the scoring matrix and forum agrees to the ongoing costs of replenishing and maintaining the bin.

- Consideration needed to be given to use of Section 106 monies where grit bins were needed on new developments

Response – The officers responsible for estate development had advised that, Highways Section 106 Agreements were put in place to make provisions for improved traffic management in the area, or to provide capital for essential improvement works necessary as a result of the development. These provisions did not allow for the placement and funding of grit bins.

- Concerns had been raised from the bus companies, as they thought not enough gritting had taken place and not all routes had been covered. Members discussed the possibility of bus companies contributing financially to gritting service

Response – The Greater Manchester Public Transport Executive (GMPTE) responded to this query and in terms of funding, this came from the Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) and as the GMITA funded the GMPTE, it seemed inappropriate to ask the GMITA for funding towards the gritting programme and to then hand it back. In relation to the moving of commercial bus services to match district requirements, the GMPTE did not control the commercial bus network, which had evolved based on passenger requirements and accessibility. Therefore, as these routes fulfil passenger demand, relocating these routes which districts considered appropriate may not be convenient for the travelling public.

- It would be useful to householders if they knew where grit was available from, in the event of the grit bins being empty and not replenished. It was thought that this could be done through an advert in the Scene

Response – The Council was undertaking an awareness campaign so that householders knew where they could purchase grit from, rather than use grit bins for private use.

2.0 Investigation and Recommendations

During the initial scoping of its review, the Panel identified that this Scrutiny Panel would look at how improvements to the service could be made, therefore the following recommendation were made in addition to the ones previously made, where the Panel felt improvements could be made.

Recommendation 1. That where new estates are built in the borough, grit bins are added to the developer's plans. Members of the Panel felt that consideration should be given, that where appropriate on new estates for adoption, and developers should be required to construct purpose made containers to retain grit for use on the adopted highway. Under the proposal, these containers would form part of the agreement for adoption and therefore be maintained and filled by the Council.

Recommendation 2. The Code of Practice for Winter Maintenance be updated, to help deliver a continued, progressive service. Discussions took place regarding the current Code of Practice and as a result of the changes in the way Bolton Council approached winter in 2009/2010 and following the previous Panel on Winter Gritting, it was decided that the Code of Practice would be updated to provide a better service to the general public.

Recommendation 3. Consideration be given to amend the existing routes to include additional roads. It was decided that following various requests from the public, Councillors and the GMPTE alike, consideration should be given to additional grit bins, as outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

Recommendation 4. The Panel recommends that advice be made available to the public, regarding additional grit. The Panel understood that not all grit bins could be replenished with grit at all times, therefore, the Panel requested that information stickers be placed on all grit bins to inform the public of the appropriate use of grit. Also, through publication through the Scene, further information would be provided to advise the public where they could buy grit in the event of their grit bins not being filled.

Recommendation 5. That further support be given to schools. The Panel raised their concerns over the amount of help the schools were given to prepare them for the winter months. In respect of the efforts carried out by the Council, Members requested that the Executive Member considered the amount of help that should be provided to local schools. Each year, the Highways Delivery department contacted schools, with a total of 105 schools being contacted in September 2010. Of the 105 only, 38 had bought any grit, a 36% uptake and had purchased a total of 1263 bags. Whilst this was a considerable increase in the volume of grit sold, the percentage uptake still needed some work being carried out.

3.0 Conclusion

The Panel acknowledges that the scope of the review is in addition to the previous Scrutiny Panel on Winter Gritting in 2009, which provided a good foundation for the Scrutiny Panel in 2010 to be built on in order to further establish what was already in place. The Panel were very keen to ensure that what had been recommended in the Scrutiny Panel of 2009 should continue as it allowed the Council to provide a successful, winter maintenance programme, at a time when Bolton experienced heavy snowfall and plunging temperatures.

Overall, the Panel felt it received evidence enabling it to examine what Bolton Council had been doing in order to respond to the increased amount of gritting needed on the roads to ensure traffic flowed freely during times of adverse weather and that the public were kept well informed of how grit should be used and where grit could be purchased from if and when necessary.

Panel Members are aware that a small number of its recommendations may have on-going costs. However, it is not for the Panel to accurately cost and assess the budgetary implications of its recommendations. It is anticipated that any such costings may well be contained in the Executive Member's response to the Panel's recommendations. Accordingly, the Panel requests that the Executive Member for Environmental Services present their response to a meeting of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee within three months.