
WINTER GRITTING SCRUTINY PANEL

23 APRIL 2009

Present - Councillors Ayub, Critchley (Chairman), J Walsh and D Wilkinson

Mr P Molyneux - Assistant Director - Highways and Engineering

Mr D Houghton - Head of Highways and Engineering Delivery Services

Mr J Martin - Highways Work Manager

Ms D Cooper - Principal Consultation and Research Officer

Ms D Williams - Senior Officer - Special Projects and Systems

Mr G Neiles - Salt Union Representative

Mr M Dutton - Managing Director of Safecote Limited

Mrs S Wootton - Senior Scrutiny Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chadwick and Hornby

Councillor Critchley in the Chair

9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Winter Gritting Scrutiny Panel held on 26 March 2009 be signed as a correct record.

Attached Reports:

[Minutes of the Previous Meeting \(Enclosure A\)](#)

10 RESULTS OF STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE

Ms Doris Williams attended the meeting to provide Members with information that had been obtained through a questionnaire to staff who worked specifically within winter maintenance.

Members were informed that 70% of the workforce questioned responded, taking into account those on leave. Based on a multi-choice questionnaire, staff

maintained that the most serious problems resulted in streets being blocked by cars and rendering them impassable by gritting vehicles. There seemed to be a number of re-offending streets, therefore further information would be sought from operatives to identify those areas. 89% of those questioned felt that those streets that were persistent offenders should be taken off the gritting route. Operatives noted that if improvements were made for accessing roads, that gritting vehicles should be used as a test.

When operatives were questioned regarding the improvements in the salt now being used, they expressed a preference for it, stating that the retention on road surfaces was better. Wear and tear on vehicles was less evident, although there were three vehicles that broke down regularly, therefore further investigations were required as to why this was happening and what could be done to resolve the situation as the vehicles were needed to ensure routes were covered in the event of adverse weather.

Members were also informed that improvements were required for washing off the vehicles at the Mayor Street depot, following a period of gritting. Operatives concluded that when they had to grit during the night, particularly where time was of the essence, traffic light signalling became problematic as there were not enough vehicles on the road to detect them to activate the sensors. Ms Donna Cooper from the Communications and Marketing Department of Bolton Council attended the meeting to provide information to Members regarding the public consultation and the Winter Gritting Survey that was due to be despatched.

Members were informed that the survey would be published in the Bolton Scene within the month in order to obtain some results prior to the final report being written for this Scrutiny Panel.

Members concluded that the following changes should be made to the draft questionnaire;

- Question 1 should be re-written to read "currently grit 46% of the road network;
- Question 3 should be closely aligned with question 4 if printed as a paper copy as it currently ran onto the other side of the A4 questionnaire; and

- In the "Did you know" section, it should read "In Bolton, the Winter Maintenance budget, due to exceptional circumstances, was £1.3 million".

Members were advised that grit bins would left out this summer, rather than being collected as per previous years to see whether or not this would be more cost effective.

Resolved - (i) That Members noted the staff questionnaire and conveyed their thanks to those who took part

(ii) That Members requested that the public questionnaire be sent to Arriva and other bus companies, as well as other local companies that would potentially be affected by winter maintenance.

11 PRESENTATION BY THE SALT UNION

Mr Gary Neiles, from the Salt Union attended the meeting to inform Members of the Scrutiny Panel of the work undertaken by the Salt Union.

The Panel were given information in reference to the bad weather conditions that both the Salt Union and the Local Authority faced over the winter months in 2008 and 2009. It was confirmed that December 2008 provided the largest despatch of salt in the Salt Union's history, which equated to 184% above the 10 year average. Despite the media claiming that there was no salt left to despatch in February 2009, the Salt Union still managed to provide 150kte to those local authorities that needed it. The Salt Union maintained a close working relationship with the Government throughout this time highlighting the seriousness of the weather and of the supply of salt.

Following the adverse weather that was experienced in 2008 and 2009, some issues were identified and included:-

" 50% of London Boroughs ran out of salt within 24 hours of snowfall commencing and more than 75% of southern based Councils ran out of salt within 48 hours;

" Councils with good salt maintenance such as Bolton Council, suffered as a result of poorly managed Councils;

" The communication to Council's and the prioritisation of deliveries was not deemed to have been successful;

" The Salt Union telephone system became overloaded

with incoming calls, making it difficult for customers to understand what was happening; and

" There was no structure in place within the Local Authority sector to highlight the potential supply problem in February.

Much communication was made with between the Salt Union and the Met Office towards the end of January 2009, when it was predicted that there would be severe weather conditions. The Salt Union therefore contacted the Highways Agency to obtain advice regarding the best routes to take to ensure salt could be delivered to Local Authorities, who were running out of salt very quickly. Salt Cell, which was run by the Minister for Transport department, made contact with all Local Authorities to find out how much salt was left in their possession to determine how best to distribute the remaining salt. It was subsequently down to Salt Cell to control the allocation of salt to Local Authorities. This control had now been passed back to the local companies in March 2009.

Members were informed that Bolton's approach to the adverse weather was exemplary. This resulted from the fact that Bolton had a greater use of treated salt, which improved resilience and also, Bolton comprehensively used the Salt Union's web based stock management that reduced the demand on transport.

Resolved - (i) That Members noted the presentation
(ii) That Members requested that the Local Government Authority (LGA) be more involved and a letter be written informing them of this

(iii) That the information provided in the presentation regarding Bolton's commendation be emailed to all Members of the Council.

12 PRESENTATION BY SAFECOTE

Mr Mark Dutton, Managing Director of Safecote Limited, attended the meeting to provide the Panel with information regarding the type of salt used by Bolton Council.

Members were given a brief history of Safecote and how it had been commercially developed for use by Local Authorities. Safecote was a co-product of the agricultural industry. The product has been adapted to provide low freezing point depression, to control salt distribution,

increase pavement efficacy and excellent corrosion inhibition. The residual nature of the product allows it to be coated on salt and sticking to the road surface.

There had been positive feedback from various companies and tests had been carried out by car companies to test the effect of Safecote on their vehicles and its corrosive nature. The Volkswagen Group tested this theory and it transpired that Safecote did indeed provide less corrosiveness on its vehicles.

Members were informed of the advantages and disadvantages of using pre-wet salt and dry salting as a comparison with Safecote's coating for rock salt. Conclusions that were drawn from this were:-

" Dry salting works, however it was deemed to be very wasteful;

" Pre-wetting had advantages, including that it caused a faster de-icing effect and increased longevity on the road, however, it also provided high capital costs and reduced the life-expectancy of vehicles;

" Safecote salt offered all the benefits of pre-wet, and that all the disadvantages were turned into advantages; and

" Safecote offered up to 82% corrosion inhibition.

Resolved - (i) That Members noted the presentation

(ii) That Members requested Mr Dutton to return to the Panel for the final meeting to ensure all Panel Members observed the presentation.

(The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.55am)