

MEETING:	ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	22 MARCH 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	WINTER DAMAGE TO THE COUNTY'S ROADS
PORTFOLIO AREA:	HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

CLASSIFICATION:

Open

Wards Affected

Countywide

Purpose

To inform the Committee of the impact of the recent severe winter weather on the highway network and outline the strategy that is being adopted to returning the County's roads to an acceptable standard over the coming year.

Recommendation

THAT subject to any comments which Members may wish to make, the report be noted.

Key Considerations

Introduction

1. Members will be aware that the impact of, what we understand to be, the most severe winter for 30 years on the condition of the county's over 2000 miles of roads has been substantial.

The Response During the Severe Weather Period

2. Throughout the period of severe winter weather, Herefordshire Council through Amey Herefordshire has provided an effective winter maintenance response fully in accordance the winter service plan. Great efforts have been made to keep the county moving despite the severe conditions. This has placed a significant strain on resources, both financial and staff, but has been achieved through the continued commitment shown by all involved from Herefordshire Council, Amey Herefordshire and local sub-contractors. Twenty four hour shift patterns have been operated and the winter period has seen over 111 gritting runs take place. Severe weather

Further information on the subject of this report is available from

Clive Hall , Highway Network Manager 01432 260786

conditions started mid December and have carried through to the present day.

3. Through sound planning, effective stock management and Amey's procurement capability, sufficient salt supply has been available for treating the County's roads throughout. Amey was also able to divert 1000 tonnes for use in Herefordshire from other contracts elsewhere in the Country. As members will be aware, this is in stark contrast to other areas of the Country where some authorities have not been as successful in securing continued supply to meet their needs. Whilst salt supplies have been carefully managed and treatment only undertaken when necessary, to date 11,700 tonnes of salt have been used.
4. This response is anticipated to cost in the region of £2.1 million. The implications are outlined in the Revenue Budget report elsewhere on the agenda and includes the use of the corporate winter service reserve.
5. As was previously experienced during February 2009, the high demand on salt supply nationally led to shortages. To manage this nationally a 'salt cell' arrangement was put in place by central government to manage the distribution of salt to highway authorities.
6. Government also requested that highway authorities conserve salt supplies and consider reductions in usage of firstly 25% and then 50% of normal levels.
7. Mindful of both the forecast conditions and the fact that the winter is not yet over, the Council has:
 - Utilised alternative salt products and supply
 - Focused treatment on priority routes only
 - Adopted variable spread rates during gritting runs to conserve stocks
8. These actions enabled the continued effective treatment of all priority routes in Herefordshire and ensured sufficient resilience to continue this service through the ongoing winter season.
9. The salt cell arrangements remain in place and we continue to engage with this process through the Government Office West Midlands to ensure continued re-supply of salt. It is anticipated that the salt cell will continue to operate until such time as all highway authorities have 6 days resilience at 50% of normal usage levels.

Extent of damage to the network

10. The Council's Highway Network Manager working with Amey Herefordshire has undertaken detailed surveys over recent weeks to assess the level of damage and develop an action plan to bring the condition back to an acceptable standard.
11. Following the recent prolonged and extreme winter weather, there has indeed been a very significant increase in reported potholes. The number of potholes recorded on our highway inspection system during January 2010 was 3422, compared with 1211 in January 2009 and 1134 in January 2008.

12. Immediate action has been necessary to react to this increase and carry out safety repairs to fill potholes. Amey Herefordshire have deployed an additional two 'hot box' potholing gangs and a "jet-patcher" gang, this in addition to the usual four 'hot box' gangs. These resources have focussed primarily on the A and B roads where the risk presented to the travelling public by potholes is greatest. The prolonged poor weather has meant that potholes are continuing to occur and it is anticipated that this will continue to be the case for some time.
13. A certain level of pothole treatment forms part of the normal highway maintenance regime. However, these repairs are only intended to keep the roads in as safe a state as possible and the strategy being applied to address the impact of the recent winter weather is to rapidly move the focus of activity to delivering a significantly expanded programme of planned maintenance works across the County for the coming year to fix our roads in the longer term as outlined below.
14. The extent of the damage has been identified through detailed surveys which highlight a 31% increase in the defectiveness of our A roads and a 34% increase in the defectiveness of the rest of the highway network. The total cost of the works needed to address this has been assessed as £5 million. This comprises £600,000 to address damage to Principal Roads; £2.5 million to address damage to Non-Principal Classified Roads; and the remaining £1.9 million to address damage to the Unclassified Road network.

Outline of proposed response

15. Funding has been identified to deliver a significantly expanded highway maintenance programme over the coming year. Additional capital funding of £1million has been allocated as part of the budget setting process and will make a significant contribution to the programme of work necessary to fix the County's roads.
16. Capital funding already available to Highways during the current and next financial year will be reallocated to give priority to maintenance works. During the current financial year an additional £605,000 will be allocated to highway maintenance from the overall 2009/10 Local Transport Plan (LTP) capital budgets. A further additional £2.1million from the 2010/11 LTP capital budgets has been identified to allocate to expanding next year's programme of maintenance works. In total, therefore, additional capital funding totalling £3.7 million has now been identified to address the damage caused to the network over the winter. This will allow the Council to deliver a programme of capital highway maintenance during 2010/11 of £10.7million. In accordance with the Council's Highway Maintenance policies, priorities for investment will be based on need and be focused on firstly addressing the maintenance of Principal and Non-Principal Classified Roads.
17. Given the exceptional nature and extent of damage to the network, all possible sources of potential external funding are being considered and central government is being pressed to recognise the need to address the additional demands that have now been placed on local highway authorities and allocate specific additional funding. In addition, the Council intends to submit an application for funding to the Department for Transport for "Emergency capital highway maintenance" under the established procedures. If successful, such a bid will enable a further expansion of the programme.

18. The detailed programme of works for the coming year is currently being developed and local members will be informed of works planned in their area.

Conclusion

19. Ensuring the effective maintenance of the highway network is a priority and the standard of highway maintenance will continue to be a key target against which the delivery of Highway Services by Amey Herefordshire is monitored. The additional funding and through effective joint working, the programme of highway maintenance over the coming year will return the network to an acceptable standard.

Risk Management

The Council, as Highway Authority, has a duty to maintain highways within the County and the Highway Maintenance Plan sets out the approach taken to meeting this duty. Poor road condition, can have implications for road safety, the local economy and claims against the council for damage to property. Failure to effectively maintain the network could prevent the achievement of corporate and LAA targets for road condition. The additional funding and approach to delivering a significantly expanded highway maintenance programme over the coming year seeks to mitigate these risks and return the network to an acceptable standard.

Financial Implications

The implications for highway revenue and capital budgets of responding to the effects of the severe winter weather are outlined within the report.

Background Papers

Herefordshire Highway Maintenance Plan

Herefordshire Local Transport Plan

Herefordshire Winter Service Plan