

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13th April 2011

Gritting Short, Sharp Review – Final Report

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jinny Pearce, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration, Economic Development and Transport, and Councillor Brandon Clayton, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Local Environment and Health.
Relevant Head of Service	Guy Revans, Head of Environmental Services.
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report contains the final proposals of the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group. The Group is proposing 13 recommendations which are designed to help improve road gritting and winter service arrangements in Redditch during periods of inclement weather in future years.

Gritting and highways maintenance are Worcestershire County Council responsibilities rather than areas within the remit of Redditch Borough Council. The Group recognises that Worcestershire County Council works hard to ameliorate the impact of inclement weather on road conditions and worked hard during December 2010 to minimise the impact of unprecedented conditions on the highways in the county. The aim of this review was to help Worcestershire County Council to continue to improve winter service arrangements by contributing a local perspective about actions that could be taken to improve conditions in Redditch in future years.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

We RECOMMEND that

- 1) when monitoring the implementation of their recommendations Worcestershire County Council's Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel should observe that the following recommendations proposed in their report, *Gritting: Winter Service Policy*, were not fully implemented in Redditch during the inclement weather in December 2010: recommendations 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 15; (paragraphs 4.1 – 4.1.16)**

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- 2) the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather should be delegated to the district level; (paragraphs 4.2 – 4.2.3) and
 - a) responses should involve local stakeholders planning local solutions to local problems (paragraphs 4.3 – 4.3.1);
- 3) Redditch Borough Council should urge Worcestershire County Council to adopt this local approach to co-ordinating responses to inclement weather (paragraphs 4.4 – 4.4.1);
- 4) resources, suitable for local needs, should be available to access in Redditch when needed (paragraphs 4.5 – 4.5.2);
- 5) the precautionary gritting route map needs to be agreed with district Councils to make use of local knowledge (paragraphs 4.6 – 4.6.5);
- 6) Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should:
 - a) identify and use local private resources, including farmers' tractors, for snow clearance (paragraphs 4.8 – 4.8.2);
 - b) identify and use smaller, more suitable vehicles to clear snow on smaller urban roads (paragraphs 4.9 – 4.9.3); and
 - c) identify and develop a list of emergency additional labour forces that could be used to clear snow during inclement weather (paragraphs 4.10 – 4.10.2);
- 7) there should be a service available to deploy 24 hours a day 7 days a week locally in response to inclement weather (paragraphs 4.11 – 4.11.3);
- 8) Worcestershire County Council should meet with representatives of Redditch Borough Council to clarify the standards expected from each other in relation to snow clearance (paragraphs 4.12 – 4.12.2);
- 9) grit bins should be filled when requested. (However, we recognise that it may not be possible to fill grit bins immediately). Therefore:

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- a) members of the public who request that their grit bin be restocked should be clearly advised when this will take place (paragraphs 4.14 – 4.14.2); and
 - b) a schedule for restocking grit bins should be published for public consideration in a clearly accessible format (paragraphs 4.15 – 4.15.1);
 - c) if the snow is worse than expected one tonne tote bags should be distributed to roads where needed as an emergency measure (paragraphs 4.16 – 4.16.2);
- 10) **Worcestershire County Council ensure that following information on the Council’s website is presented in a more user friendly manner:**
- a) general information about gritting and snow clearance (paragraphs 4.18 – 4.18.4);
 - b) gritting routes (paragraphs 4.19 – 4.19.2);
 - c) snow ploughing routes together with clarification as to whether these routes are the same as the gritting routes (paragraphs 4.20 – 4.20.1);
 - d) grit bin locations (paragraphs 4.21 – 4.21.3);
 - e) when gritting, snow ploughing and the filling of grit bins will take place (paragraphs 4.22 – 4.22.4); and
- 11) **the successful approach that Worcestershire County Council has adopted to communicate road conditions to the schools should be extended to all stakeholders (paragraphs 4.23 – 4.23.2);**
- 12) **Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should ensure that clear information about both the road conditions and public transport is provided when communicating with the public during inclement weather (paragraphs 4.24 – 4.24.2);**
- 13) **Worcestershire County Council’s Highways Department should:**

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- a) **be available for all relevant bodies, particularly the emergency services, to contact directly and quickly and at all times (paragraphs 4.26 – 4.26.2); and**
- b) **be more responsive to residents (paragraphs 4.27 – 4.27.2).**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Gritting Short, Sharp Review was launched in February 2011. Four members were appointed to the review including Councillors Simon Chalk, Roger Hill, Robin King and former Councillor Graham Vickery, who was originally appointed to Chair the review. Following the resignation of Mr Vickery as a member of the Council in March 2011 Councillor Robin King was appointed to Chair the review. To ensure consistency in the review Mr Vickery was co-opted onto the Group.
- 3.2 The review was precipitated by observations by both Councillors and residents that the general condition of the roads in Redditch during the period of heavy snowfall in December 2010 was very poor. Widespread disruption occurred to the local transport system to the detriment of local businesses. At the local level this was considered to be particularly problematic because, as a new town, Redditch was designed to be negotiated by vehicle. Disruptions to the road network and hazardous road conditions are therefore of particular interest to the local community.
- 3.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee therefore felt it was appropriate to review the highways maintenance procedures undertaken in Redditch during December 2010. This was done to help identify where improvements could be made to ensure that future instances of heavy snowfall were adequately prepared for.
- 3.4 Highways maintenance in Worcestershire is the statutory responsibility of Worcestershire County Council. The Group set out to establish what had been done by the County Council to mitigate the affect of the heavy snowfall on the local road system in Redditch during December 2010. In particular the Group was tasked with considering the content of *Gritting: Winter Service Policy*, a scrutiny report on the subject of winter road maintenance that was published by Worcestershire County Council's Environment and Economic Scrutiny Panel in July 2010, and the response of the County Council's Cabinet in October 2010 to the report's recommendations, to gain an understanding of what was expected to have taken place. (A list of the County Council Scrutiny Panel's recommendations is provided in Appendix A to this report).

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- 3.5 The Group consulted a wide range of stakeholders in Redditch to substantiate the extent to which the agreed recommendations within *Gritting: Winter Service Policy* had been delivered. The list of stakeholders that had been invited to submit evidence to the review included: members of the public; emergency services; local schools; County Councillors; Borough Councillors; and local businesses. A public meeting was also held during March 2011 to enable members of the public to inform the Group about the condition of their local roads during the inclement weather. A number of recommendations based on the evidence collected were subsequently proposed. (A list of routes identified by residents as areas of concern is provided in Appendix B to this report).
- 3.6 As the Group identified a number of areas for improvement the list of recommendations focuses both on the implementation of the County Council's scrutiny recommendations as well as further actions that could be taken to improve winter maintenance arrangements in future years. Subject to receiving support from the Council's Executive Committee the Group is requesting that the evidence gathered and their recommendations be considered by Worcestershire County Council as part of the Council's preparations for road maintenance arrangements in the winter of 2011/12.
- 3.7 Throughout the review the Group was aware of the work that relevant staff at both Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council had undertaken to clear and grit the roads during the inclement weather. The Group appreciated this work and feel that the contributions made by all staff should be recognised.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 **Recommendation 1: We recommend that when monitoring the implementation of their recommendations Worcestershire County Council's Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel should observe that the following recommendations proposed in their report, *Gritting: Winter Service Policy*, were not fully implemented in Redditch during the inclement weather in December 2010: recommendations 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11 and 15.**
- 4.1.1 Worcestershire County Council published the *Gritting Winter Service Policy* final report in July 2010. This report outlined the findings of the Worcestershire Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel in a review of winter services which had been launched in response to the severe weather conditions during the winter 2009/10. In accordance with scrutiny processes at many local authorities it is anticipated that the Panel will monitor the implementation of their

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recommendations in 2011. The Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group believe that their report should be considered as part of this monitoring process.

- 4.1.2 Based on the feedback received from a variety of stakeholders the Group have concluded that nine of the Panel's recommendations were implemented in Redditch in December 2010. Specifically, based on evidence submitted by stakeholders consulted during the review the Group are satisfied that recommendations 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 16 were or will be implemented in Redditch. The Group would like to thank Worcestershire County Council for implementing these recommendations as this will have helped to reduce the number of problems experienced by residents and other local stakeholders during the inclement weather in December 2010 and in future years.
- 4.1.3 However, unfortunately, the Group have concluded that seven further recommendations were not or could not be implemented in Redditch in December 2010.
- 4.1.4 In relation to recommendation 2 of the Panel's report, evidence received from local residents indicated that many roads in Redditch located on steep gradients were not prioritised during the winter weather. In particular, consistent reports were received during the review about hazardous road conditions and a lack of snow clearance or gritting in the Central and Headless Cross and Oakenshaw wards, especially on Ivor Road, Parsons Road, the Mayfields and Coldfield Drive which are all based on steep gradients and currently form part of the precautionary network.
- 4.1.5 Similarly, reports were received that many of the roads leading to Car Park 7 in the Abbey ward, including Adelaide Road, Bates Hill and Church Road, which are located on the precautionary network, were not cleared and did not receive a gritting service during the winter period. This is unfortunate, as a number of doctor's surgeries and chemists are located in this area, including the Dow Surgery, St Stephen's Surgery and Elgar House Surgery. The lack of snow clearance clearly had implications for patient care as well as for core medical staff as the road conditions prevented a number of staff from reaching work.
- 4.1.6 In relation to recommendation 3, six local schools submitted evidence for the consideration of the Group during the review. The responses received from these schools were mixed. Whilst some reported that increased gritting had been observed on routes within the vicinity of the school other schools reported that this had not been the case and the school had been largely inaccessible. The Group recognises that many of these schools were closed as the snow coincided with the

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Christmas holiday period. However, other schools were required to remain closed at times when they were scheduled to be open, though the decision to close any school was never taken lightly.

- 4.1.7 Furthermore, the suggestions detailed in the County Cabinet Member's response to this recommendation, that arrangements would be explored for assistance from the Fire and Rescue Service and clear guidance for schools would be desirable, were assessed by many of the schools who provided evidence for the consideration of the Group. Two of the schools had received guidance but none of the schools reported that they were aware that assistance might be available from the Fire and Rescue service.
- 4.1.8 The Group was particularly concerned to receive reports from some schools that no assistance had been provided with snow clearance. Indeed, one school suggested that they would welcome volunteer groups to assist with on-site snow clearance but further clarification was required on the legal position of this potential action. Furthermore, many schools suggested that farmers and other local stakeholders should be invited to help clear snow at key locations such as schools. This would help to address any problems that might occur with accessing locations that had not been incorporated on to the precautionary and secondary gritting networks.
- 4.1.9 With regards to recommendation 5 in the Panel's report, which suggested that Worcestershire County Council should consult with local businesses and bus companies, the Group unfortunately did not obtain any feedback from the local bus companies. However, the Kingfisher Shopping Centre, the primary retail centre in Redditch town centre, did respond and unfortunately confirmed that the centre, where trade and staff access had been badly affected by the snowy weather, had not been consulted by Worcestershire County Council.
- 4.1.10 With regards to recommendation 7 during the course of the review the Group received many reports from residents about requests for the introduction of grit bins. On occasions, these requests had had to be repeated and emphasised by both local County Councillors and Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings. In particular concerns were expressed about: Clent Avenue and Jubilee Avenue; Bromfield Road, which is located between two roads that cover steep inclines; and many of the roads leading off Castleditch Lane which are again located on steep gradients.
- 4.1.11 A number of grit bins are situated close to these locations. However, residents have suggested that additional grit bins located in alternative locations could be introduced to reduce the hazardous road conditions in future years. In particular, residents have suggested that there

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should be at least one grit bin situated directly on Bromfield Road and one additional grit bin located close to the steep slope between Jubilee Avenue and Clent Avenue. Furthermore, in Feckenham evidence submitted by the Parish Council indicates that there remains a need to introduce further grit bins in the village. In particular, there is currently no grit bin situated on Turton Gardens which leads to a relatively new housing estate built 4 or 5 years ago. Whilst Turton Gardens is unadopted highway and therefore Worcestershire County Council is not obliged to maintain the road the Group believes that this represents a safety hazard for local residents and consideration should therefore be given to prioritising the installation of a grit bin at this location.

- 4.1.12 The Group had a number of concerns that recommendation 10 from the Panel, regarding Parish Councils nominating a farmer to assist with snow clearance, did not reflect the position of Redditch Borough. There are numerous rural areas within the Borough in locations such as Astwood Bank, Hunt End and Callow Hill but there is only one Parish Council which represents the village of Feckenham. The Group is therefore contending that further consideration should be given by Worcestershire County Council as to how to engage with farmers based within the Borough to ensure that the invaluable assistance that can be provided by farmers can be properly utilised in Redditch.
- 4.1.13 The Group are also concerned that recommendation 11 from the Panel, regarding consultation with the emergency services over core gritting routes, was not fully implemented in Redditch. Evidence submitted by the West Mercia Police Force indicates that Police Officers are familiar with conditions on the highways and especially difficult sections of certain roads which consistently cause hazardous driving conditions during periods of inclement weather. The Group is contending that to ensure the safety of driver the Police should be consulted directly, particularly during snowy weather conditions, and their suggestions should be taken into account by Worcestershire County Council.
- 4.1.14 With regards to recommendation 15, concerning improvements to the precautionary and secondary route gritting maps, the Group believes that further action needs to be taken. Whilst an interactive route of grit bins and the precautionary gritting route map are both displayed on Worcestershire County Council's website, the Group did not believe that these were clear. Indeed, some residents who had consulted the map appeared to be confused about whether the roads they referred to were included on the gritting route.
- 4.1.15 In particular, the gritting route map appeared to be confusing, in part because no particular roads are identified by name on the map, making it difficult to orientate. (Also see paragraphs 4.19 - 4.19.2 below).

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Furthermore, the grit bin map appears to only be accessible in a side menu of a large variety of maps on the website. Locating this map and using this system was considered to be confusing by both members of the Group and a number of residents who submitted evidence. Under these circumstances the Group believes that further changes need to be made to both clarify the content of the precautionary gritting route map and ensure the grit bins map becomes much more accessible for the public. (Also see paragraphs 4.21 - 4.21.3 below).

- 4.1.16 Finally, whilst it did not form a recommendation, in the report the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel explicitly welcomed the Cabinet Members' commitment to seek additional resources to increase the number of grit bins by about a third. (Gritting: Winter Service Policy, 2010, p 10). The Group recognises that this may have happened across the county as a whole. However, little evidence emerged during the course of the review to indicate that many of these grit bins had been introduced in the Borough of Redditch.
- 4.2 **Recommendation 2: We recommend that the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather should be delegated to the district level.**
- 4.2.1 The Group recognises that at the County Council level it is important for there to be a winter services road maintenance strategy which can be implemented across the county when required, particularly as such severe weather conditions often arise with limited prior notice. However, the Group believes that one unfortunate consequence of this application of a strategy across the whole of the county can be that variations in need and road conditions across such a diverse area may not be taken into account when responding to emergency weather conditions, largely because the County Council has to respond on an extensive scale.
- 4.2.2 Unfortunately, based on the evidence received during the course of the review, the Group has concluded that the roads in Redditch were disproportionately affected by the inclement weather due to a heavier snow fall than in other parts of the county. However, whilst this was observed by staff and residents living and working locally they believe that this was not necessarily recognised at a wider county level.
- 4.2.3 Consequently, the Group believes that the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather should be delegated to the district level. In these circumstances the Group recognises that Worcestershire County Council would retain ultimate authority over the maintenance of the highways in Redditch. However, district agencies would be able to identify, assess and respond directly to conditions within their areas

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and in a more timely fashion. The Group believes that this arrangement would be mutually beneficial for representatives at both the county and district levels and ultimately would lead to improved outcomes for local residents and businesses.

4.3 **Recommendation 2a: responses should involve local stakeholders planning local solutions to local problems.**

4.3.1 At the district level the local authority, local emergency services and other local stakeholders often have more immediate access to information about conditions within that district. Furthermore, local representatives at the district level will inevitably be familiar with the local geography and areas of concern during previous emergencies. Under these circumstances the Group believes that it is necessary for responses to inclement weather to involve local stakeholders planning local solutions to local problems.

4.4 **Recommendation 3: We recommend that Redditch Borough Council should urge Worcestershire County Council to adopt this local approach to co-ordinating responses to inclement weather.**

4.4.1 The Group recognises that if Worcestershire County Council does decide to delegate the co-ordination of responses to the district level district authorities would be required to assume a leading role. The Group understands that this may appear to be a daunting task. However, the Group believes that the existing foundations of co-operation between the two authorities could be developed further to ensure that this local co-ordination of responses to inclement weather could be implemented effectively. Furthermore, based on the issues outlined in relation to recommendations 2 and 2a above, Redditch Borough Council may be considered to have a moral duty to urge Worcestershire County Council to adopt this approach.

4.5 **Recommendation 4: We recommend that resources, suitable for local needs, should be available to access in Redditch when needed.**

4.5.1 There are numerous resources which ideally need to be accessible during periods of inclement weather. Salt stocks available for replenishing grit bins and for distribution through road gritters are currently stored in Alvechurch and Lydiate Ash. Whilst the Alvechurch base is close to the borders of Redditch Borough the Group believes it is important to ensure that an appropriate level of salt stocks can be made readily available for use in Redditch where required.

4.5.2 Similarly, the Group is aware that Worcestershire County Council uses a fleet of snow ploughs to clear snow and distribute salt during snowy

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weather conditions. The Group feels that vehicles, suitable for use on urban roads, should be available to help clear snow in Redditch during inclement weather. (See paragraphs 4.9 - 4.9.3 below). In addition, the Group believes that the vehicles which are used should be suitable for use on the many steep gradients that are situated within the town, particularly in the Central and Headless Cross and Oakenshaw wards. Ideally, these vehicles should be available to deploy as and when needed, including during weekends and outside working hours, to ensure that hazardous road conditions are minimised.

4.6 **Recommendation 5: We recommend that the precautionary gritting route map needs to be agreed with district Councils to make use of local knowledge.**

4.6.1 There are a number of key roads on the Worcestershire Highway which are considered priority routes for gritting during winter service operations. These are referred to as the precautionary network. The precautionary network comprises the principal road network, main distributor roads and secondary distributor roads, commuter routes, rural roads traversed by more than 2,000 vehicles per day, major bus routes, locally important roads, emergency service locations and areas no greater than 500 metres from a school. There is also a secondary network, comprising less important local village and distributor routes, minor bus routes and school transport routes operated by the County Council. (Winter Service Policy, 2009).

4.6.2 Based on numerous reports received during the review, Redditch was especially badly affected by the heavy snowfall during December 2010 compared to other parts of the County. In particular, the local road system in Redditch was often reported to have been in a very poor condition during the inclement weather. This could simply be attributed to Redditch experiencing more snowfall.

4.6.3 However, a significant feature of the town is a high ridge which runs through the centre of the town. The Group contends that the physical environment of Redditch, in particular the steep gradients of many of the roads leading off the ridge, was a leading factor in the Borough being one of the most affected areas in the County. Indeed, the poor condition of a road located on a very steep gradient can severely restrict the mobility of vehicles from its adjoining feeder roads.

4.6.4 Whilst hills are prevalent in Malvern district, the geography in Redditch is not comparable to other parts of the county. Unfortunately, evidence received during the review from emergency services suggested that Worcestershire County Council's response during the severe winter period was generally spread equally across the County.

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- 4.6.5 Under these circumstances the Group believes that the precautionary gritting route map needs to be agreed with district Councils to make use of local knowledge. Utilising a greater local knowledge base can help ensure that those areas of greatest need, including roads with steep gradients, are identified and prioritised for maintenance to improve the condition of the roads. For example, during the review as a result of the localised consultation the Group discovered that the current lack of inclusion of William Street, in Abbey ward, on either the precautionary or secondary network, was likely to disproportionately impact on patients and staff attempting to access the Dow Surgery which is located on that road.
- 4.7 **Recommendation 6: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should:**
- 4.8 a) **identify and use local private resources, including farmers' tractors, for snow clearance.**
- 4.8.1 Worcestershire County Council's *Gritting: Winter Service Policy* clearly identified the potential for farmer's vehicles to contribute to snow clearance, although references to inviting Parish Council's to nominate a suitable farmer with whom to work were not considered applicable to Redditch by the Group (please refer above to paragraph 4.1.12).
- 4.8.2 In addition to farm vehicles the Group believes that local private companies might be able and willing to provide assistance with clearing snow during inclement weather. This assistance might vary from providing vehicles suitable for clearing snow to providing assistance with communicating the condition of the roads. The Group believes that many private companies would be willing to provide assistance as this will help members of staff to access work and thereby enable businesses to continue to operate in challenging weather conditions.
- 4.9 b) **identify and use smaller, more suitable vehicles to clear snow on smaller urban roads.**
- 4.9.1 Currently a number of larger snow ploughing vehicles are utilised to clear snow from roads during inclement weather. These snow ploughs, and the farm equipment that is sometimes used to clear snow from rural areas, are suitable for use on main highways and rural roads as there is adequate space on the side of the roads to accommodate the snow which is moved to the side of the vehicle as it progresses.

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- 4.9.2 However, the Group is concerned that often these vehicles are not suitable for use on smaller urban roads. Unfortunately the Group received a number of reports that when snow ploughs were observed clearing snow on the precautionary and secondary network large piles of snow was cleared to the sides of the road, blocking cars parked on the sides of the roads as well as cars parked on driveways. Furthermore, many roads in the older parts of town, particularly in the Abbey and Central wards, are quite narrow and are difficult for large vehicles to access.
- 4.9.3 The Group believes that in smaller urban areas where there is a larger volume of cars consideration should be given to using smaller vehicles to clear the roads of snow. These vehicles might distribute some snow to the sides but it is unlikely that the volume of snow would be as great or as likely to cause disruption to parked vehicles as larger snow ploughs. Furthermore, smaller vehicles would be better placed to negotiate obstacles such as parked cars.
- 4.10 c) **identify and develop a list of emergency additional labour forces that could be used to clear snow during inclement weather.**
- 4.10.1 The snowfall in December 2010 was particularly heavy and snow clearance therefore proved to be difficult. The Group recognises that both Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council staff undertake snow clearance work. However, the Group believes that additional support, whether through manual labour clearance of snow or through use of volunteer support to operate snow clearance machinery, would help to improve road maintenance arrangements during periods of inclement weather in future years.
- 4.10.2 The additional labour forces might comprise volunteers from the local community or from other services based in the Town Hall. Consideration could also be given to working with local probation services to arrange for individuals undertaking community service to help clear snow.
- 4.11 **Recommendation 7: We recommend that there should be a service available to deploy 24 hours a day 7 days a week locally in response to inclement weather.**
- 4.11.1 The inclement weather in December 2010 began in the early hours of Saturday 18th December in Redditch. The snowfall on the Saturday was heavy and created hazardous road conditions. This impacted on

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local services, such as the Dial a Ride community transport system, which ceased to operate until Tuesday 21st December due to safety concerns.

- 4.11.2 The Group is aware that Worcestershire County Council operates gritting vehicles and undertakes snow clearance during working hours. Unfortunately, the Group had not received clarification as to what these working hours comprise prior to the publication of this report. However, the Group is keen to ensure that snow clearance and gritting arrangements during weekends and non-standard working hours can be implemented where required, to ensure that there is minimum disruption to local services.
- 4.11.3 Redditch Borough Council provides assistance with road clearance at certain locations in the Borough, particularly sheltered housing schemes. The Group is aware that Redditch Borough Council staff provide valuable assistance during the working week. However, the Group urges the Council to consider deploying emergency assistance when required during weekends to ensure that vulnerable residents, sheltered housing scheme wardens and the emergency services can access sheltered housing schemes during emergencies.
- 4.12 **Recommendation 8: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council should meet with representatives of Redditch Borough Council to clarify the standards expected from each other in relation to snow clearance.**
- 4.12.1 During the course of the review the Group interviewed the Council's lead Officers for snow clearance. Councillors were pleased to learn that Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council had worked closely together during the course of the inclement weather.
- 4.12.2 However, improvements can always be made, particularly to ensure that the problems identified by residents in December 2010 are not repeated in future years. There is the potential that through forward planning and a localised approach to organising winter maintenance arrangements the two Councils would need to work more closely together. In particular, it might be useful for representatives of the two Councils to meet prior to the winter to discuss mutual expectations with a view to identifying the different ways each Council could help to address problems at the local level.
- 4.13 **Recommendation 9: We recommend that grit bins should be filled when requested. (However, we recognise that it may not be possible to fill grit bins immediately). Therefore:**

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- 4.14 a) **Members of the public who request that their grit bin be restocked should be clearly advised when this will take place.**
- 4.14.1 In many parts of the Borough, due to the heavy snowfall, the salt stocks in grit bins were utilised relatively quickly by local residents. A number of residents who submitted evidence reported that they had contacted Worcestershire County Council to enquire about arrangements for refilling the grit bins. Unfortunately, many of the residents expressed frustration about the dearth of information available about arrangements for refilling the bins..
- 4.14.2 The Group recognises that Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department is busy and resources will be finite. This may mean that a representative of the department is unable to discuss the time when salt stocks will be replenished directly with a resident and may be unable to refill bins until resources become available. However, the Group believes that many residents' frustrations would be addressed if they received a simple notification of whether their request was successful and when the bin might be replenished.
- 4.15 b) **schedule for restocking grit bins should be published for public consideration in a clearly accessible format.**
- 4.15.1 Again, the Group believes that many of residents' frustrations could be addressed if a schedule for replenishing salt stocks was published for public consideration on Worcestershire County Council's website. This would help to clarify arrangements and would address residents' frustrations. Furthermore, the Group believes that it would be relatively easy to update an online schedule where required, for example if gritting stocks were depleted significantly.
- 4.16 c) **if the snow is worse than expected one tonne tote bags should be distributed to roads where needed as an emergency measure.**
- 4.16.1 During the course of the review a number of residents expressed frustration that they had been unable to take effective action to maintain the condition of their road when a response was being awaited from County Council to a request for either the provision of additional grit bins or for existing grit bins to be replenished. Indeed, a request submitted to the County Council to deposit grit at the end of the road which residents could then themselves distribute had been declined.

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- 4.16.2 The Group suggests that relatively cheap alternative measures could be introduced to help meet high demand for gritting salt during periods of inclement weather. As an emergency measure one tonne tote bags could be provided. This would represent a useful safety measure in the short-term for local residents who were willing and able to take action to maintain conditions on their own roads. Furthermore, this action would provide Worcestershire County Council with the time required to give due consideration to considering any requests to introduce additional grit bins.
- 4.17 **Recommendation 10: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council ensure that following information on the Council's website is presented in a more user friendly manner:**
- 4.18 a) **General information about gritting and snow clearance.**
- 4.18.1 Currently a number of pages are included on Worcestershire County Council's website which provide information about gritting and road clearance arrangements. These pages can be accessed in a section of the Council's website that is dedicated to 'Transport and Streets' and comprises web pages focusing on the following areas: general information about gritting; links to further sources of useful information; grit bin details, a link to the Worcestershire *Winter Service Policy*; and contact details. Links are also provided to maps of the precautionary and secondary gritting networks located in each district and visitors can access a map which identifies the location of grit bins within a local area.
- 4.18.2 During the course of the review the Group have considered the content of this section of Worcestershire County Council's website in some detail. Whilst the Group recognises that work may have been undertaken to update the content of these web pages unfortunately a number of residents consulted during the course of the review explained that the content of these web pages was confusing.
- 4.18.3 The Group believes that, in particular, further clarification about the Council's strategy for road maintenance arrangements could be provided on the web page providing information about the Worcestershire *Winter Service Policy*. At present this web page provides a link to a copy of the *Winter Service Policy*, though no further information is provided on the page. The Group believes that it would be useful to provide a summary of the key principles contained within this policy, in plain English,

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on the web page. This would help to clarify the content of the policy as well as the core points of the winter maintenance strategy in the county.

- 4.18.4 The Group also believes that it is important to ensure that the web pages providing general information about gritting, the precautionary and secondary route gritting map and the map of grit bins, appear in a prominent position on Worcestershire County Council's website during periods of inclement weather. This will enable residents and businesses to easily access appropriate information at a time when it is most needed.
- 4.19 **b) Gritting routes.**
- 4.19.1 The Group feels that the map currently used on Worcestershire County Council's website to illustrate the Council's precautionary and secondary gritting routes can lead to confusion. The absence of road names on this map in particular can make it difficult to distinguish between some shorter routes that are included on the gritting route and adjacent roads that are not included.
- 4.19.2 The Group therefore proposes that this information is presented in a more user friendly manner to enable website users to clearly determine whether a particular road is included on either the precautionary or the secondary gritting routes.
- 4.20 **c) snow ploughing routes together with clarification as to whether these routes are the same as the gritting routes.**
- 4.20.1 There is currently no clarification on the Worcestershire County Council website as to whether the snow ploughing routes are the same as the gritting routes. If the same routes are used, the Group suggests that this should be briefly stated on the relevant section of the website. However, if snow ploughing follows a different route, the Group proposes that this should be clearly presented on the website to illustrate how this differs from the gritting route. This information should help residents to clarify what type of winter maintenance service they can expect to receive during periods of inclement weather.
- 4.21 **c) Grit bin locations.**
- 4.21.1 Grit bins are positioned in various locations across the Borough. In many areas, particularly on roads which do not form part of either the precautionary or secondary network for gritting, grit bins are useful for residents as they provide a resource with

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which to improve road and footpath conditions. Residents can request from Worcestershire County Council that new grit bins be introduced both online and through the Worcestershire Hub. General information about the criteria used by Worcestershire County Council when assessing applications for grit bins is also provided on the website.

- 4.21.2 Visitors to the gritting web pages are advised that further information about gritting can be obtained by undertaking a search on a 'My Local Area' search function also available on the website. Whilst a map of grit bins can be accessed using this link the Group are concerned that the grit bin map is provided within a lengthy list of other map categories. As a consequence it is difficult to locate the map on the website.
- 4.21.3 The Group recognises that the many maps available in this category list will be of interest to different stakeholders. However, the Group feels that it would be appropriate to ensure that the gritting map secured a more prominent position on Worcestershire County Council's website, ideally through a direct link to the gritting pages in a similar fashion to the current link provided to the precautionary and secondary gritting route maps for each district.
- 4.22 d) **When gritting, snow ploughing and the filling of grit bins will take place.**
- 4.22.1 A number of local residents informed the Group that they had become increasingly frustrated that their requests for additional gritting resources during the period of heavy snowfall had either not received a response or had been declined.
- 4.22.2 The Group accepts that it was very difficult for Worcestershire County Council to satisfy all requests for additional salt stocks when these are finite, especially during a very sudden period of inclement weather. However, the Group feels that the County Council could help placate these frustrations by providing further information on when grit bins are expected to be replenished. The Group therefore proposes that clear and up to date information on the filling of grit bins should be provided and feature prominently on the website.
- 4.22.3 Similarly the Group is proposing that further information could be provided about when gritters and snow ploughs are scheduled to negotiate particular roads during periods of inclement weather. A simple schedule could be produced and published on the Council's website to minimise the amount of time that

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would need to be dedicated to the task. This schedule would reduce the number of enquiries about gritting and snow ploughing arrangements and would help to reassure the public that action was being taken.

4.22.4 The Group recognises that on occasions it might not be possible to follow schedules as a result of changing and difficult circumstances. In this context the Group believes that it would be relatively easy to provide brief updates on Worcestershire County Council's website to explain why changes need to be made to the schedule. In many cases this would help to address public concerns and the provision of information may help to reduce public frustrations when there is perceived to be a lack of action.

4.23 Recommendation 11: We recommend that the successful approach that Worcestershire County Council has adopted to communicate road conditions to the schools should be extended to all stakeholders.

4.23.1 The Group was informed by a local school that it had received very clear guidance and support from Worcestershire County Council regarding school closures and inclement weather. The County Council provided up to the minute weather reports and information about road conditions and local areas which enabled the head teacher to make informed decisions on whether or not to close the school.

4.23.2 The Group proposes that this round the clock service should be available to all other stakeholders within the County, including emergency services and local businesses.

4.24 Recommendation 12: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should ensure that clear information about both the road conditions and public transport is provided when communicating with the public during inclement weather.

4.24.1 The Group received evidence during the course of the review that it had been difficult to obtain information on public transport services during the period of heavy snowfall. This was particularly significant as the hazardous driving conditions in Redditch had led to a greater reliance on the public transport system. However, the Group was informed that no public information was made available at Redditch bus station regarding which services had been affected by the inclement weather. The Group suggests that Worcestershire County Council make reference to bus service changes, delays and road

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blockages on its own electronic information system during periods of inclement weather.

4.24.2 The Group acknowledges that information on public transport is widely available throughout the year on Worcestershire County Council's website. However, the Group proposes that information on road conditions and public transport should be updated on a very regular basis when they are badly affected by severe weather. The Group further proposes that this information should feature more prominently on the website during periods of severe weather to make the information more easily accessible.

4.25 **Recommendation 13: We recommend that Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department should:**

4.26 a) **be available for all relevant bodies, particularly the emergency services, to contact directly and quickly and at all times.**

4.26.1 During the course of the review evidence was submitted for the consideration of the Group which suggested that the emergency services had experienced difficulties when attempting to contact the Worcestershire Highways Department. The Group were particularly concerned to learn that the Police Force Control Room had experienced occasions when the contact number for the highways gritters had been unanswered for hours.

4.26.2 The Group accepts that during the course of a period of severe weather, such as that experienced during December 2010, the County Council's Highways Department will be busy and will not be able to speak to every person and organisation that may have concerns about hazardous driving conditions. However, the Group believes that in this type of situation the needs of the emergency services should be prioritised. Under these circumstances, the Group is proposing that a representative of the County Highways department should be available for the emergency services to contact directly and promptly during periods of inclement weather.

4.27 b) **be more responsive to residents.**

4.27.1 The Group received a number of reports from members of the public that the County Highways Department had been slow to respond to their concerns during the inclement weather. The Group was informed by a number of local residents that their repeated requests to the Highways Department to either re-fill

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existing grit bins or provide additional grit bins had met without response.

- 4.27.2 The Group acknowledges that it is very difficult during periods of severe winter weather to satisfy residents' requests for additional gritting resources when these are finite. However, the County must ensure that it swiftly responds to requests from members of the public, whether or not the request can be satisfied. The Group therefore recommends that the Highways Department consider its current practice for responding to requests from members of the public.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Group recognises that it may not be possible to obtain all the resources required from Worcestershire County Council, partly because resources are likely to be limited and the county council will need to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of resources across the county. Under these circumstances Redditch Borough Council may need to be prepared to invest in obtaining resources that will enable efficient snow clearance arrangements as and when required.
- 5.2 The level of financial expenditure that this would entail is difficult to determine as, in part, it would be affected by the degree to which Worcestershire County Council would be able to allocate resources specifically to Redditch. It is also not always possible to anticipate what resources would be required until a period of emergency weather occurs. However, the Group's proposal, in relation to recommendation 6a, to work with external private businesses and farmers could help to minimise the amount of financial expenditure that Redditch Borough Council would need to allocate to snow clearance arrangements if the function was delegated to the district level.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 In two-tier authority areas County Councils can and often do devolve powers to the district level. These arrangements are assessed on a case by case basis and are generally introduced as and when considered necessary.
- 6.2 With regards to the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather being delegated to the district level a decision would need to be taken by Worcestershire County Council to approve this proposal. Redditch Borough Council would enter into negotiations with Worcestershire County Council to assess the implications and arrangements for devolving functions and responsibilities.

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- 6.3 Redditch Borough Council would need to consider the potential liability implications that would arise from delegation of this function from the county to the district level. As part of this process the Council would also need to consider the potential insurance liability implications.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Group is proposing that co-ordination of road maintenance arrangements should be delegated to the district level during periods of inclement weather. Redditch Borough Council may need to review existing relevant policies, including the *Draft Gritting Procedure for Redditch Borough Council* and *Extreme Weather Continuity Plan for Waste Collection Services* if this recommendation is approved as these policies currently apply to areas where Redditch Borough Council has existing responsibility.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

One of Redditch Borough Council's key priorities is for Redditch to be safe. As part of this process the Group is contending that Redditch Borough Council should support their proposals as, if they are approved and implemented, these actions should lead to considerable improvements to road safety during inclement weather.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Snow and ice can create hazardous driving conditions. Gritting and snow clearance can help to alleviate these problems, though gritting becomes ineffective if over 40mm of snow has fallen. The Group believes that the actions they are proposing should help to alleviate some of the problems with road safety that occur during periods of inclement weather.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Gritting and road maintenance arrangements are in general of interest to local residents and businesses. Indeed, the review was precipitated by receipt of correspondence on the subject by local Borough Councillors from their constituents who were concerned about the condition of the roads and gritting service received during December 2010. The Group are anticipating that, if approved, the actions they are proposing will lead to improvements in winter maintenance arrangements in future years which will hopefully help to reassure the public.

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- 10.2 Gritting and road clearance arrangements also more directly have implications for the delivery of front line services by Redditch Borough Council, particularly waste and recycling collection services. The Group received largely positive reports about the performance of the waste collection and recycling services during December 2010. In some instances, due to hazardous driving conditions, it was unfortunately not possible for the waste collection and recycling vehicles to provide a service in particular streets on designated collection dates. The Group believes that the actions they are proposing will help to reduce the potential for this to happen again.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 During the course of the review the Group was advised that the condition of roads in the vicinity of a number of sheltered housing schemes were hazardous during the course of the inclement weather. In particular, the road conditions at Bentley Close, Foxlydiate Mews, Roxboro House and Terry Spring Court during the snowy conditions in December 2010 were reportedly dangerous. The Group was advised that the emergency services, wardens and family members had struggled to access elderly and vulnerable residents living in these sheltered housing schemes.
- 11.2 The Group are aware that, whilst Worcestershire County Council is responsible for the maintenance of the roads and footpaths, Redditch Borough Council has historically provided gritting assistance at sheltered housing schemes owned by the Council. (The Group recognises that Foxlydiate mews is not managed by Redditch Borough Council). The Group feels that Redditch Borough Council should be making every effort to prioritise these sheltered housing schemes when contributing to snow clearance arrangements to ensure that wardens and emergency services can access residents.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

There are no direct value for money, procurement or asset management implications.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

There are no direct climate change, carbon management or biodiversity implications.

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14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

14.1 The Group accepts that their proposal, in relation to recommendation 7, for gritting and snow clearance services to occur during weekends and outside working hours would potentially have implications for staff. Any requests for staff to work outside their contracted hours at Redditch Borough Council would require consultation with staff and with local union representatives.

14.2 The Group's proposal for an emergency labour force to provide assistance with snow clearance and gritting arrangements during periods of snowy weather would also have implications for both local authorities. Again, a process of consultation with existing staff and unions would be appropriate.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The Group's proposal for the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather to be delegated to the district level would have governance and performance management implications. Consideration would need to be given to the most appropriate way for monitoring the performance of local agencies and holding responsible bodies to account for actions taken to minimise the impact of inclement weather on road conditions within the Borough.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

There are no direct community safety implications.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications for health inequalities.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

18.1 The review has involved Councillors reviewing services delivered by another statutory body. This has presented a number of challenges for both Redditch Borough Council and Worcestershire County Council. It may be useful for relevant representatives of both authorities to review these challenges to ensure that the two Councils can both learn from the experience and, as a consequence, strengthen their working relationship in the future.

18.2 The Group was disappointed that a small number of residents attended the public meeting that they held on 17th March 2011 to discuss the subject of road gritting (see paragraphs 19.2-19.3 below). The Group

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believes that a greater number of responses would have been received if it had been possible for them to approach residents individually to invite them to complete a survey. Unfortunately, due to the limited timescales available during a Short, Sharp Review exercise, members of the Group did not feel that they could allocate the time required to undertake this type of face-to-face consultation effectively. However, the Group believes consideration should be given to this form of consultation by Councillors in future when undertaking a similar review of interest to the public as a Task and Finish Group exercise.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 19.1 Community and stakeholder engagement has formed a significant part of this review. Information about the review was advertised on Redditch Borough Council's website, on the Council's Facebook site, on the Council's Twitter profile and in the local newspapers. Residents were invited to submit evidence for the Group's consideration in writing, by phone or in person during a public meeting at Redditch Town Hall on 17th March 2011.
- 19.2 The public meeting was designed to provide residents with an opportunity to report their experiences in person for the consideration of the Group. The meeting was advertised on Redditch Borough Council's website and on the Redditch Advertiser's website and an article appeared in the edition of the Redditch Advertiser published on 16th March 2011. Residents were also informed about the meeting during a morning broadcast on Wyvern FM. Many Councillors also kindly provided assistance in person and by providing information about the public meeting and review for residents' consideration.
- 19.3 Unfortunately, however, only three members of the public attended the meeting, though the evidence provided by these residents was valuable and informed the Group's final conclusions. Furthermore, 16 residents contacted the Group independently to submit evidence. The Group wishes to thank each resident for taking the time to provide information.
- 19.2 Representatives of relevant local organisations were also invited to submit evidence in writing. In response the following bodies all submitted evidence for the consideration of the Group: the West Mercia Police Force; six local Schools; the Kingfisher Shopping Centre; two NHS doctors' surgeries; Feckenham Parish Council; and the Dial a Ride Service. Two County Councillors who represent Redditch divisions also kindly attended an interview to provide evidence.

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20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No.
Chief Executive	No.
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No.
Deputy Chief Executive/Executive Director – Leisure, Environment and Community Services	No.
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No.
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No.
Head of Environmental Services	Yes
Head of Resources	No.
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No.
Corporate Procurement Team	No.

21. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards.

22. APPENDICES

- Appendix A - List of recommendations published in the *Gritting: Winter Service Policy* scrutiny report.
Appendix B List of locations identified by residents.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Redditch Borough Council, 'Draft Gritting Procedure for Redditch Borough Council', (February 2011).

Redditch Borough Council, 'Extreme Weather Continuity Plan for Waste Collection Services', (February 2011).

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Redditch Borough Council, notes from meetings of the Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group, (2011).

Worcestershire County Council, 'Gritting: Winter Service Policy', Report to the Worcestershire Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel (July 2010).

Worcestershire County Council, 'Winter Service Policy', (November 2009).

Worcestershire County Council, Gritting pages on Worcestershire County Council's website,
<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/transport-and-streets/streets/gritting.aspx>

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