

Appendix 1 - Detailed update on each of the recommendations made by the Gritting Short, Sharp Review in May 2011

Recommendations made by the RBC Gritting Short, Sharp Review Group in May 2011 are shown in shaded boxes, a response by Worcestershire County Council/Redditch Borough Council is shown underneath each one.

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;

Recommendation 2 - Whilst recognising that the Precautionary Network includes the principal road network, we recommend that other roads should be prioritised for treatment if they meet the following criteria: steep gradient, above a certain height, north facing, a route to shops, medical supplies, emergency and care services and businesses.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: An additional 2.2km had been added to existing gritting routes. The criteria used to determine which roads should receive treatment was an enhanced version based on national guidance used by all local authorities, such as traffic speed, gradient, the gradient of minor roads joining a main road, proximity to a secondary gritting route, whether more than 100 residents would benefit and consideration of the number of vulnerable residents. Worcestershire had increased the emphasis on the people who will benefit.

Another example of enhanced criteria was that most local authorities would not consider a grit bin for areas with less than 50 premises, compared to 20 in Worcestershire.

Members were advised to contact their local highway liaison officer to deal with particular issues about gritting and roads in their local areas.

Recommendation 3 - We believe that there is a special case for keeping routes to schools open and feel this should be a priority of the Council. We recommend the Council considers adding particular school routes to a secondary gritting route, where this would be sensible and cost effective, based on individual schools' circumstances.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: It was confirmed that main school routes were now all covered by secondary gritting routes. In addition, the principle of conference calls with the fire service during 'Silver' severe weather to discuss assistance in clearing school access where appropriate had been established. One such call was made last year.

Recommendation 5 - We recommend that the Council consults with businesses and bus companies on priority gritting routes.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: All public service bus routes were also now on secondary, if not primary, gritting routes. Principal business and retail locations have also been taken into account after engagement with the business community.

Recommendation 6 - Hertfordshire has a Closure Notification System, where head teachers text updates on school closures directly to the Council's website. This has been very successful and the Council is looking to extend it to other high use services. We recommend that the Council considers adopting a similar system. The System will eliminate the need for teachers to telephone or email their status to the Council. It should reduce the stress on school websites, and the Customer Service Centre.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: It had been recommended that this Council adopts a similar system to that of Hertfordshire, which has a closure notification system where head teachers text updates on school closures direct to the council's website. Members believed that texting directly from schools was happening and working well. The Head of Integrated Transport would seek an update on progress from Children's Services (within whose remit this issue fell) and advise the Panel in due course.

Recommendation 7 - The Panel noted that some roads (not on gritting routes) are particularly dangerous, such as where a steep downhill minor road joins a main road. Or, where a road is above a certain height, north facing and known to be a problem previously during bad weather. These roads would benefit from grit bins and we recommend that these are considered when the current criteria are evaluated during the annual winter service review.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: In response to a question about the number of requests for grit bins, Members were advised that last year 500 – 600 were made and of these, 150 requests were met. It was highlighted that grit bins were only supplied on roads and not on a gritting route.

Recommendation 10 - The Panel considers that twenty pre-accredited arrangements with farmers is comparatively few given the size of the county and that the number should be increased. Although the Council advertises for farmers to put themselves forward, we recommend that the Council asks Parishes to nominate a farmer in their area who might be willing to apply. We further recommend that the Council increases its efforts to advertise for farmers to help with gritting and road clearance.

Update September 2011 at meeting of WCC Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: It was good news that potentially 71 farmers could be contracted to help clear rural roads, although not all of those contracted by parishes had responded positively. A Member advised that last year a farmer had spent about a week clearing local rural roads around Bromsgrove and Redditch.

In response to a question about the difficulties experienced clearing snow from urban areas, particularly dual carriageways in Redditch, Members were advised that some new lower snow plough equipment (produced in Germany) had been purchased to trial this year.

The Cabinet Member with Responsibility advised that he, and County Council officers responsible for winter services had met with senior officers and leaders in Redditch Borough Council to explore and improve joint working during severe weather.

It was noted that there were good relationships with district councils, which provided invaluable extra resources. Cleansing and refuse crews not able to carry out normal duties during severe weather doubled the available staff for snow clearing.

Recommendation 11 - Currently, we understand there is a degree of consultation with the emergency services about core gritting routes, however we believe it is important to take into account the views of the emergency services and therefore recommend that the Council consults fully with these groups. [paragraph 65]

Update September 2011 at meeting of Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: It was good that the Council had fully consulted with the emergency services resulting in the identification of critical short links and better joint understanding of priorities and resource limitations.

Recommendation 15 - **Currently the Council's website shows a countywide salting route map and maps of the salting routes in the main towns in each of the six districts. However, the Panel found it was still sometimes difficult to tell whether a particular road was on the gritting route, particularly for the countywide map and towns such as Tenbury or Droitwich, which don't have dedicated maps. Some of the maps appear side ways. We therefore recommend that the Council improves the clarity of the precautionary and secondary gritting route maps on its website.**

Update September 2011 at meeting of Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel: The improvement in the winter service website was welcomed. However, some of the gritting route maps were still quite small and difficult to navigate and had technical glitches. The Panel was advised that improvements were being sought through further discussions with staff from Information and Business Systems (IBS).

- 2) the co-ordination of responses to inclement weather should be delegated to the district level; and**
a) responses should involve local stakeholders planning local solutions to local problems;

Discussions between the Leader and Chief Executive of Redditch Borough Council have established that WCC is unable to delegate co-ordination of responses to the district level. However, during bad weather events regular conference calls are held with operational teams to discuss both county wide and local issues and the Council's Chief Executive and Communications Manager are included in bad weather alert emails which WCC circulate. Additionally, with financial contribution from WCC, Redditch Borough Council has purchased snow clearing equipment which will be used to assist WCC where needed as well as clear locally identified priority routes.

- 3) Redditch Borough Council should urge Worcestershire County Council to adopt this local approach to co-ordinating responses to inclement weather;**

As per the response above, we can confirm that there is much improved partnership working between WCC and districts.

- 4) Resources, suitable for local needs, should be available to access in Redditch when needed;**

Redditch Borough Council has procured specialist snow clearing and gritting equipment and WCC have contributed £15k to the cost of this. Officers have discussed with WCC areas of the town that the Borough Council will help to clear and grit during snow events but it should be noted that there has to remain some flexibility to deal with issues on a case by case basis as needed and therefore the routes and schedules cannot be completely pre-planned.

- 5) The precautionary gritting route map needs to be agreed with district Councils to make use of local knowledge;**

The Winter Service web has been completely overhauled. It now includes much more detailed and clear maps of precautionary and secondary routes with explanations of their purpose and when these are triggered. In addition an interactive map of grit bins is being produced that will enable the public to report service requests for refilling, damage, etc. WCC is satisfied that the Precautionary Gritting Routes are best optimised. They are reviewed every year after the Winter Season and are adjusted slightly in light of any areas of concern or significant change in circumstance (e.g. road adoptions).

- 6) Worcestershire County Council and Redditch Borough Council should:**
a) identify and use local private resources, including farmers' tractors, for snow clearance;

WCC are able to contract with local farmers to clear snow in certain areas. WCC has provided RBC with details of the contract arrangements which are based around the type/make of plant available, availability on any one day and areas in which it could operate. Members can request further details if they would wish to pass this onto local farmers in their wards. See also the update to Recommendation 10 above.

WCC use a contractor farmer located in Tardebigge who is available to cover any area of Bromsgrove or Redditch and are always looking to add any other local contractors in the Redditch area are who would be able to assist at times of severe weather.

b) Identify and use smaller, more suitable vehicles to clear snow on smaller urban roads; and

WCC have invested in new equipment for gritting and snow clearance. Also as above, Redditch Borough Council has procured specialist snow clearing and gritting equipment and WCC have contributed £15k to the cost of this. As above, officers have discussed with WCC areas of the town that the Borough Council will help to clear and grit during snow events but it should be noted that there has to remain some flexibility to deal with issues on a case by case basis as needed and therefore the routes and schedules cannot be completely pre-planned.

c) identify and develop a list of emergency additional labour forces that could be used to clear snow during inclement weather;

During bad weather events regular conference calls are held with operational teams to discuss both county wide and local issues, including available resources at the local level.

7) There should be a service available to deploy 24 hours a day 7 days a week locally in response to inclement weather;

WCC's gritting service operates on a 24/7 basis as required during the winter period. Redditch Borough Council's access to resources is dependent upon weather conditions and unfortunately due to limited resources is limited to working hours.

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;

This has been done, the Leader and Chief Executive have met with WCC and officers at an operational level are holding regular meetings – this is reflected in the update provided at the meeting of Environment & Economy Overview & Scrutiny Panel, September 2011, as above.

**9) Grit bins should be filled when requested. (However, we recognise that it may not be possible to fill grit bins immediately). Therefore:
a) members of the public who request that their grit bin be restocked should be clearly advised when this will take place;**

An interactive map of grit bins has been produced that enables the public to report service requests for refilling, damage, etc. Whilst WCC will try and respond as fast as possible, due to the unpredictable nature of demand they are unable to give an exact timescale for the work to be completed. We have agreed that we will assist WCC in filling grit bins if this is needed during snow events, and this is arranged via the conference calls.

b) a schedule for restocking grit bins should be published for public consideration in a clearly accessible format; and

Unfortunately this cannot be done as this depends on demand and the use of a bin; however as indicated above, the information available via the WCC website in relation to grit bins is much improved and Redditch Borough Council will assist WCC in filling grit bins during periods of bad weather.

c) if the snow is worse than expected one tonne tote bags should be distributed to roads where needed as an emergency measure;

WCC have said that this is not something that they would wish to do as grit supplies have to be carefully managed.

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;
- b) gritting routes;
- c) snow ploughing routes together with clarification as to whether these routes are the same as the gritting routes;
- d) grit bin locations;
- e) and when gritting, snow ploughing and the filling of grit bins will take place;

As above, the Winter Service web has been completely overhauled. It now includes much more detailed and clear maps of precautionary and secondary routes with explanations of their purpose and when these are triggered. In addition an interactive map of grit bins is being produced that will enable the public to report service requests for refilling, damage, etc.

11) The successful approach that Worcestershire County Council has adopted to communicate road conditions to the schools should be extended to all stakeholders;

Prior to the winter season all WCC managed schools were contacted in regard of additional grit bin provision; this is no different to WCC's approach with all Worcestershire Parish & Town Councils.

A daily press release is issued during times of inclement weather detailing proposed winter maintenance action.

The decision regarding gritting activity is posted on Twitter and also published on the WCC website, and also communicated to stakeholders including Redditch Borough Council each day.

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;

As above, each day our decision regarding gritting activity is posted on Twitter and published on the WCC website. Stakeholders (nominated recipients) also receive an email to precisely detail WCC actions. This includes RBC and may be repeated throughout the night during times of extreme weather.

The RBC Chief Executive Officer and Press Officer are now included on the mailing list.

Redditch Borough Council has improved the information on its website following the adoption of the local policy relating to gritting and snow clearance in November 2011.

13) Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department should:

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

WCC is available for contact 24/7 by relevant bodies, particularly emergency services, all of whom have 24 hour out of office contact numbers.

The public may contact WCC via the Worcestershire Hub. During out of office hours, answer phones give details of emergency contact numbers. WCC has well documented and published service level agreements for response to public enquiries.

Actions taken following meeting in July 2011 between Leader and Chief Executive with WCC Leader and WCC officers

- 1. Both Kevin Dicks and Anne-Marie Darroch to be added to decision e-mail regarding winter maintenance activities, which is sent out every day and which details our actions for the day and/or night.**

Currently sent to David Kesterton and Redditch Contact Centre. If there are further additions to this then RBC to inform WCC.

Kevin and Anne-Marie now receive these emails.

- 2. Jon Fraser to contact Anne-Marie Darroch to discuss communication and publicity issues during winter activities.**

Jon Fraser and Anne-Marie Darroch have discussed communication and publicity during winter activities.

- 3. WCC to create PDF files of gritting route maps and email them to RBC.**

PDF files of gritting route maps have been produced and received.

- 4. RBC to consider salt storage capacity and advise WCC if additional salt required prior to winter season.**

RBC considered and felt that there was no need for additional salt to cover this winter. We stock around 90 tonnes of rock salt and we feel that this is a sensible amount and got us through the bad weather in 2010/11— however, this does depend on controlling the application of grit carefully. We do have capacity to store extra amounts but this has to be balanced against the risk of ordering salt which is not used – salt has to be managed carefully as if it is not stored correctly, it cannot be used.

- 5. RBC to consider requirement for Borough funded grit bins which WCC will supply at cost price, and salt at discounted rates. WCC currently writing to Parish Councils across Worcestershire with a similar offer.**

This was considered in the report to Executive in November 2011 where it was agreed that the Borough would not provide additional grit bins.

- 6. RBC to consider and discuss with us joint working arrangements when operatives are unable to work due to extreme conditions.**

RBC have discussed joint working arrangements and effective use of resources when operatives are unable to carry out their normal duties and priority areas/tasks are agreed on a case by case basis during the regular conference calls that take place during extreme weather events.

- 7. RBC to provide WCC detail of any farmers or other contacts who may be potential winter maintenance contractors – we will let you have our contract details and paperwork in this regard.**

WCC use a contractor farmer located in Tardebigge who is available to cover any area of Bromsgrove or Redditch and are always looking to add any other local contractors in the Redditch area are who would be able to

assist at times of severe weather. WCC has provided RBC with details of the contract arrangements which are based around the type/make of plant available, availability on any one day and areas in which it could operate. Members can request further details if they would wish to pass this onto local farmers in their wards.

- 8. RBC suggested that we could train some of our drivers on snow ploughs to provide cover (only at emergency times) – WCC to check with contractor / their insurance to ensure this would be okay.**

WCC have confirmed that they have adequate cover for snow plough operation and there would be insurance implications for our drivers to undertake this work; therefore this option will not need to be pursued.