

**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND
FINANCE SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 12 September 2012

Subject: Snow Clearance Update

Responsible Officer: John Edwards
Interim Corporate Director,
Environmental Services

**Scrutiny Lead
Member area:** Cllr Stephen Wright
Policy Lead Member, Environment and
Enterprise &
Cllr Sue Anderson, Performance Lead
Member, Environment and Enterprise

Exempt: No

Enclosures: Appendix A – List of recommendations
from Challenge Panel and
comments/actions.

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the recommendations and actions arising from the Snow Clearance Challenge Panel Report

Recommendations:

Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub – Committee is requested to accept the recommendations and actions arising from the Challenge Panel report

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

Overview and Scrutiny committee commissioned the Snow Clearance Challenge Panel to consider the council's snow clearance policy and to address whether more could be done to improve the way in which the borough deals with the clearance of heavy snow. The challenge Panel met with Officers responsible for the delivery of the Winter Service.

Financial Implications

As detailed in the report, some of the recommendations of the Challenge Panel may require additional resources.

Performance Issues

The recommendations of the review and their implementation are aimed at securing better snow clearance arrangements across the Harrow Community and a better understanding and hence perception of the Council's service by residents. This report does not, however, affect any existing performance indicators

Environmental Impact

There is the potential to have an impact on environmental issues in the Borough if the recommendations are taken up. Additional vehicle movements and additional salt being spread will have a negative impact

Risk Management Implications

There are none specific to this report

Equalities implications

A full Equality Impact Assessment was not undertaken. If the recommendations are accepted individual EqIA's may need to be carried out on some of the recommendations as snow fall and it's clearance have implications on everyone in the borough but some sections of the community more than others.

Corporate Priorities

The Winter Service and the recommendations of the Challenge Panel will contribute to the delivery of the following corporate priorities

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.
- Supporting our town centre, our local shopping centres and businesses.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: ...Kanta Hirani	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 4 September 2012		
Name: John Edwards	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 3 September 2012		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Dave Masters – Engineering Services Manager, ext 2580

Background Papers:

Appendix A – List of recommendations from Challenge Panel and comments/actions.

Appendix A

Snow Clearance Challenge Panel Response

Recomendations	Comment	Actions	Update August 2012
<p>Recommendation 1: Neighbourhood Champions and residents associations should be amongst the people who are notified of severe weather conditions in order that they can support their communities should people look to them for support.</p> <p>Members were keen to know whether there was any scope for further investment to support more community involvement and were pleased to note that bids were currently being put forward for this type of work though there were no specifics at present. These bids should be supported.</p>	<p>The Met office supplies regular weather forecasts, which we will disseminate to Neighbourhood Champions in the event of a bad forecast</p>	<p>An effective way to learn of a snow event is to watch or listen to the weather forecasts on the Radio, TV or Web. Communities should be advised to watch the forecasts for updates during times of severe weather.</p> <p>Data has been collected from other Boroughs who have engaged with their communities over snow clearance and officers are investigation ways of supporting the Harrow Community to do the same</p>	<p>Updating NC's during the working day throughout the winter period is now in place for any severe winter weather event by notifying the NC coordinator Lynda Anousis. The call to Lynda is triggered by Harrows Winter service Duty Manager.</p> <p>No practical way of notifying NC's outside normal working hours has been identified</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: The Sustainable Development and Enterprise Scrutiny lead members and/ or Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny lead members should consider the developments and outcomes of bids as they</p>	<p>The current Highways contract ends in March 2012 and the new contract is currently being assessed. It is expected that the cost of provision of the Winter Service will rise substantially due to the recent poor</p>		<p>An agreement is being sought to include snow clearance in this project</p>

<p>go forward and ensure that any of the outcomes are followed through in the six month update of the review.</p> <p>In the drive to aid and encourage community involvement, councillors also touched on the importance of their role as community leaders.</p>	<p>winters and changes to legislation (London LEZ) and updated recommendations from DfT. This increase in cost will need to be balanced with cost savings elsewhere.</p> <p>The Divisional Director – Partnership Development and Performance, is working on communities’ involvement across a range of activities and the snow issue could be included.</p>	<p>Officers will support councillors in their role as community leaders to encourage community involvement.</p> <p>Work with the DD ensuring Snow Clearance is included within this project.</p>	
<p>Recommendation 3: A clear and concise booklet and guidance should be developed and provided to all councillors in order that they can be responsive and well equipped in their role as community leaders should any queries and issues be raised with them by constituents during times of heavy snowfall. Members should be armed with information to help the public understand what is required in the operation to clear the borough of snow.</p>		<p>Officers will prepare an electronic guidance booklet in pdf format on the Winter Service for circulation to all councillors by the end of December 2011. It will detail the service and also address community self help and the Governments statement concerning liabilities arising out of clearing the highway of snow and ice. (Good Samaritan Law). When available it will be updated to include the decision on the Snow Clearance Bill 2010-11: (http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/snowclearance.html)</p>	<p>Guidance booklet was produced and circulated to Councilors last year explaining Harrows Winter Service.</p> <p>A revised booklet is currently being developed addressing the changes to the service proposed for this winter and it will be circulated prior to the start of the winter season.</p>

<p>Recommendation 4: The panel recommends that along with publicity through literature and on the council's website, councillors, Neighbourhood Champions, residents associations and other key local representatives should be fully briefed on the facts related to liability in order that they can in turn brief their community should the issue be brought up with them.</p>		<p>The booklet mentioned above can be made available on Harrow's website and also made available to Neighbourhood Champions, residents associations and other key local representatives early in the New Year.</p>	<p>Guidance Booklet will be published on Harrows website with the help of the web team before the start of the Winter season and also made available to NC's and others as required.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: In support of this and to encourage people and mitigate any risks, a clear guidance of the best way of clearing snow should also be developed e.g. explaining that snow should be shovelled away (and not onto roads) before salt is put on, hot water should not be poured on to snow etc. The clear benefits for the common good of the whole community should also be highlighted. Bin hangers for all residents could be an effective way of spreading the message.</p> <p><u>Local Partners and schools</u></p>	<p>A Guidance booklet could be prepared along the lines suggested, highlighting the common good of the whole community.</p> <p>Bin hangers are not considered an effective way of disseminating information. They are costly and take resources to deliver. Harrow's website is considered an more effective medium.</p> <p>The salt stock currently held at the Central Depot is for</p>	<p>The guidance booklet will be expanded to include a section on best practice in clearing snow and giving recommendations promoting community spirit.</p> <p>The booklet will be circulated to Local partners and schools inviting them to engage in joint working.</p> <p>It will be made clear that partner organisations should make their own arrangements for snow events but it would be possible with prior notice to jointly buy salt to make best advantage of</p>	<p>Booklet will be circulated before the 1st November.</p>

<p>The panel considered what arrangements were in place for local partners. The panel enquired with officers over what their relationship with the PCT, polyclinics and GP surgeries was like, to which they learnt that there wasn't a relationship. It was reported that a number of partner agencies are fully aware of their responsibilities and duty of care in respect of management of snow clearance and severe weather conditions but these requirements and responsibilities are not always adhered to.</p> <p>In line with the '<i>Community Budgeting</i>' agenda and '<i>the Big Society</i>', communication and discussions with key partners in terms of their preparedness and possible joint working to aid the access to key services in the borough should take place as soon as possible. Closer links need to be developed in order to establish who the relevant person to talk to is. A member of the panel highlighted that a</p>	<p>gritting of the Public Highway and it should be made clear that it is not a free stockpile for use by others.</p> <p>Identifying the appropriate contact within local partners has been highlighted as an issue. All Harrow staff across all directorates with relevant contacts with local partners would need to be involved.</p> <p>Engagement with schools over the provision of salt already takes place each year but the take up from schools is currently very low. So far in the lead up to the 2011/12 winter season only 4 schools have responded to the letter sent out asking if they would like salt delivered.</p>	<p>the bulk price Harrow pay.</p> <p>Funding for this and any resultant action would need to be identified and consideration of the amount of salt usage and resources to deliver it would need to be considered.</p> <p>Build a contacts list as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Little success in this area as identifying "owners" who are prepared to engage over this has been difficult.</p> <p>Schools will be contacted as usual prior to the start of winter re salt deliveries</p>
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<p>number of medical services were actually provided at children's centres so some thought needs to be given to how some children's centres may also be covered.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 6: The Adult Health and Social Care scrutiny leads members/ Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub Committee to explore who the relevant person is to consider supporting colleagues to in developing a relationship with the relevant officers at NHS Harrow.</p>	<p>See note above.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 7: Contingency planning for snow clearance and keeping services accessible during severe weather conditions should be put on the agenda of Harrow Chief Executive's to facilitate discussions with key partners, this would include prioritising sites that would need to be kept open.</p> <p>Along with the gritting of medical facilities, members also considered the issues</p>	<p>See note above.</p> <p>Preparation of revised gritting routes to ensure that at least one road serving every school is part of the main gritting routes has been made and included in the 2011/12 winter season operational procedures.</p> <p>Footway gritting in front of schools is not possible with the resources available within Public Realm whose</p>	<p>A joint letter from Brendon Hills and Catherine Doran to all head teachers and Chairs of Governors was sent out on 4th October 2011. Response to this letter has been very low.</p>	<p>Schools will be contacted as usual prior to the start of winter re salt deliveries</p>

<p>surrounding the gritting of schools. The panel recognised that whilst the gritting and clearance of snow can help schools to remain operational there are a number of factors which need to be considered when it comes to whether to keep schools open or closed. Consideration should be given to whether the roads leading up to schools are clear, whether footways surrounding schools will be gritted to support safe access, will the actual internal school grounds be cleared etc. The panel highlighted that all the above make a difference to whether schools are cleared and stay open or they are left closed. In some circumstances, schools may choose to remain closed as they feel this may actually be safer.</p> <p>The panel were made aware of the lack of response from schools in the past in terms of trying to develop contingency plans with the support of Public Realm Infrastructure and spent some time considering how to go forward,</p>	<p>priorities in times of snow are to keep the town centres and transport hubs open. Consideration should be taken to engaging with school staff to clear footways immediately in front of school entrances.</p>		
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<p>especially given that the schools in the borough were becoming academies. Officers explained that something could be done to manage the situation were the schools to engage. It also became apparent during the discussions that school governors were not contacted regarding the need to develop snow plans.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 8: Head teachers should be contacted again with a similar letter as that which was sent out the year before.</p>	<p>See note above. Letter was sent on 4th October</p>		<p>Schools will be contacted as usual prior to the start of winter re salt deliveries</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: School governors should also be written to asking for the snow plans to be considered at school governors meetings to ensure that schools take the issue seriously and have sufficient plans in place.</p>	<p>See note above. Letter was sent to Heads and Chairs of Governors on 4th October.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 10: Clear information on the gritting criteria as well as the roads that are gritted should be given to councillors in a simple format so that they can in turn</p>	<p>Information is already available on the Harrow website and will shortly be updated with the revised gritting routes that incorporate roads serving</p>	<p>Councillors will be alerted to updates around this service on Harrow's web site before they happen.</p>	<p>Summer review of gritting routes is underway and any proposed changes will be put to the PH for agreement prior</p>

help members of the public and residents understand that not all roads are gritted.	schools. There is already a facility on the website to type in a Harrow road name to see if it is on the gritting route.		implementation
Recommendation 11: In order to aid the understanding and the enormity of the task in clearing snow, a basic facts and figures article on the council website and also in Harrow People with information on for example the amount of salt spread, the number of roads that salt is spread on may go some way to help the public understand.		An article will be prepared for Harrow People giving the requested details and the information added to that already available on the website. The next edition is early December, failing to meet that the article will go into the February 12 edition.	Article prepared and could be re run before the next winter (Draft attached below)
Recommendation 12: Access Harrow should be provided with clear guidance and information on the facts and figures so that they can pass the information on to residents should they phone up.	Information already provided to Access Harrow.	Completed.	Completed
Recommendation 13: The panel wish to highlight that any further reduction to this budget is likely to have an impact on the clearance of footpaths as the service is already stretched as it is due to a recent reduction of resources.		A revised draft Footway Gritting Policy is being developed by teams in Environment Services for discussion to address the reduction in the ability to deliver the service through the reduction in resources. Draft proposals should be ready in the New Year.	Very limited progress on this. Uncertainty over the future of PRS and their limited resources has made it difficult to engage over what resources PRS can supply to provide a

<p>Recommendation 14: To avoid some of the mis-use of grit bins, information relating to what they are for and how they can be used should be publicised, perhaps with stickers on the actual bins. The panel should be provided with feedback on the outcomes of the review of grit bins. The council should also investigate whether they can be secured so that only a residents' association or Neighbourhood Champion are able to access the grit bins.</p>		<p>A revised policy for the replacement of grit bins and provision of any new bins is being prepared for discussion with the Portfolio Holder. A number of options are being evaluated and recommendations will be made to the PH in due course.</p>	<p>footway service. Agreed revised policy attached below and included in the guidance booklet</p>
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Gritting routes and grit bins

Notes of meeting with Cllr O'Dell Monday 24th Oct 2011

Cllr Phil O'Dell - PO'D
John Greenfield - JG
Rodney Mason - RM

1	<p>JG explained the history of the proposal and referred to the letter recently sent to all schools. A plan was tabled showing the proposed new gritting routes that are proposed to be introduced into the 2011-12 winter season. JG advised that Enterprisemouchel (EM) had confirmed that the additional cost to deliver the enhanced service would be £841.96 as a single addition to the annual lump sum.</p>	
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	<p>Whilst it was accepted that this was an additional cost it could be more than offset but not having to make payment for gritting of secondary routes through the winter period.</p> <p>PO'D confirmed that we should introduce the new routes into the 2011-12 season</p>	PO'D / JG
2	<p>Harrow website should be updated to include the new routes map and the list of roads that are gritted amended to match.</p>	RM
3	<p>Proposed grit bin policy was discussed PO'D asked what the implications would be if all roads that complied with the policy actually requested bins. JG / RM to provide this info to PO'D .</p>	JG / RM
4	<p>PO'D suggested that the draft policy should be amended to include a requirement that an "Owner" be identified for any new grit bin location. The grit bin should be lockable and the "Owner" takes responsibility for the distribution of salt. RM to amend the policy document.</p> <p>Post meeting note - See attached amended policy</p>	RM
5	<p>PO'D suggested that instructions should be prepared detailing how salt should be spread including practical information on rates of spread. It should be made clear that "Owners" who waste salt will not be provided with additional quantities.</p>	RM
6	<p>Applications for grit bins via NIS money should be refused where there are additional revenue implications and where the provision of the bin does not meet the agreed policy</p>	JG / RM

Circulation

Cllr Phil O'Dell
 John Greenfield
 Rodney Mason
 Bob Henson
 Dave Masters
 John Edwards

Policy for replacing or installing grit bins on the highway

History

(Note: Although traditional parlance is to refer to grit, gritting and grit bins, grit is no longer used and has been replaced by road salt. In this document the words grit and salt are interchangeable.)

Gritting to carriageways is carried out by vehicles loaded with salt from the Council's central salt barn located at the Depot. Gritting to footways, although carried out manually, again uses salt brought from the salt barn on each occasion.

Nevertheless the Council still has over 100 grit bins sited across the borough. Unfortunately over the years several bins have been stolen along with their contents. Elsewhere the contents of the bins have been stolen or the bins emptied by residents who in many instances have spread the contents on their own properties and regrettably very little salt contained within the bins has been deposited on the highway.

In the light of these occurrences and the move away from Council operatives using grit bin contents to grit the highway the need for grit bins on the Highway is being reviewed.

Most of the grit bins are old with quite a large proportion damaged or defective in some way. It is unclear what policy, if any, has been used in the past to determine where grit bins should be sited but the change in the method of spreading salt as described above has left many bins in locations where they have no highway use and to continue to maintain these bins is an unnecessary drain on council resources. That being said there are still some locations where it may be appropriate to retain/replace existing bins or site new ones.

Proposal

The following criteria are suggested to be used in determining if a damaged bin should be replaced or removed. They would also serve as criteria to be used if at any time in the future Harrow decided to consider placing any new grit bins on the Highway.

Grit bin locations would have to meet criteria 1 and in addition either criteria 2 or 3.

1. Not sited on a gritting route.
2. Serving a road with a gradient of more than 1:20
3. Road has bends with a high risk of skidding accidents
4. Link roads to schools

Additionally before a new bin is sited a dedicated "Owner" is to be identified. The "Owner" could be an individual or a group of residents. The "Owner" is to take responsibility for the distribution of salt. Instructions/advice would be provided detailing how salt should be spread including practical information on rates of spread. The grit bin would be lockable and it would be made clear to "Owners" that wastage of salt or the use of salt for other than highway purposes could result in such bins not being refilled.

Draft for inclusion in Harrow People

As the winter period approaches the Council is putting its winter plan into operation. During snow and freezing weather the Council's gritting priority is to ensure that the primary routes (i.e. main traffic and bus routes etc.) are kept free of snow and ice. This year the Council has increased the number of roads included in its primary gritting routes, particularly in the vicinity of schools.

Where possible, generally during periods of snowfall the Council will seek to grit footways in areas of high pedestrian activity, shopping centres, train stations, etc.

Of course in times of very severe weather the Council would welcome residents' assistance.

The Government has published the following advice

"There's no law stopping you from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside your home or from public spaces. It is unlikely you'll be sued or held legally responsible for any injuries on the path if you have cleared it carefully. Follow the snow code when clearing snow and ice safely."

The snow code - tips on clearing snow and ice from pavements or public spaces

Prevent slips

Pay extra attention to clear snow and ice from steps and steep pathways - you might need to use more salt on these areas.

If you clear snow and ice yourself, be careful - don't make the pathways more dangerous by causing them to refreeze. But don't be put off clearing paths because you're afraid someone will get injured.

Remember, people walking on snow and ice have responsibility to be careful themselves. Follow the advice below to make sure you clear the pathway safely and effectively.

Clear the snow or ice early in the day

It's easier to move fresh, loose snow rather than hard snow that has packed together from people walking on it. So if possible, start removing the snow and ice in the morning. If you remove the top layer of snow in the morning, any sunshine during the day will help melt any ice beneath. You can then cover the path with salt before nightfall to stop it refreezing overnight.

Use salt or sand - not water

If you use water to melt the snow, it may refreeze and turn to black ice. Black ice increases the risk of injuries as it is invisible and very slippery. You can prevent black ice by spreading some salt on the area you have cleared. You can use ordinary table or dishwasher salt - a tablespoon for each square metre you clear should work. Don't use the salt found in salting bins - this will be needed to keep the roads clear.

Be careful not to spread salt on plants or grass as it may cause them damage.

If you don't have enough salt, you can also use sand or ash. These won't stop the path icing over as well as salt, but will provide good grip under foot.

Take care where you move the snow

When you're shoveling snow, take care where you put it so it doesn't block people's paths or drains. Make sure you make a path down the middle of the area to be cleared first, so you have a clear surface to walk on. Then shovel the snow from the centre of the path to the sides.

Offer to clear your neighbour's paths

If your neighbour will have difficulty getting in and out of their home, offer to clear snow and ice around their property as well. Check that any elderly or disabled neighbors are alright in the cold weather. If you're worried about them, contact your local council."