

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board Sub Committee

**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2010

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Environment & Economy

**SUBJECT:** Winter Maintenance – weather forecasting and supply of road salt

**WARDS:** All

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This report requests authorisation for a 1 year extension to the current weather forecasting joint arrangements with Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester and Warrington Councils. The report also provides information on how the existing arrangements for road salt supply are being administered.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION:**

- 2.1.1 **That the Sub-Committee approves a 1 year extension to the current joint collaborative arrangements for weather forecasting and data collection until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011.**
- 2.1.2 **That the circumstances associated with the current joint collaborative arrangements for salt supply are noted.**

## **3.0 BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **3.1 Introduction**

- 3.1.1 The current winter maintenance contracts in place under collaborative arrangements between Cheshire East / Cheshire West & Chester / Warrington / Halton are as follows:
- Weather data collection / weather station maintenance – expired 31/03/10
  - Weather forecasting – expires 31/03/11
  - Salt Procurement – expires 31/03/13
- 3.1.2 The newly formed Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester Councils have sought, and received approval for, a 1 year extension to the Vaisala contract (Data Collection).

## **3.2 Weather Forecasting & Data Collection**

- 3.2.1 Halton undertakes a winter service that is innovative and effective in treating the network for snow and ice. The operational aspects of the service fully meet both the demands of the Highways Act 1980 and also the requirements and obligations of the Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management.
- 3.2.2 Delivery of the service requires firstly an accurate and timely prediction of forthcoming road surface conditions and secondly the ability to spread road salt / grit to prevent and / or assist the dispersion of accumulated snow or ice.
- 3.2.3 The first requirement is met by means of a system of sensors embedded in the road surface at 2 locations within the Borough. Instruments mounted at the roadside at these locations then collect real time data relating to the weather conditions within Halton. The system is supplied and installed by Vaisala Ltd, a specialist company who collect and process the data before supplying it to the Met Office. This information allows for site specific forecasts to be prepared by the Met Office giving detailed guidance on the probable short term conditions in Halton. Call out staff have direct access to forecasters and can discuss the situation before making the decision whether to mobilise the gritting crews.
- 3.2.4 Vaisala Ltd is one of only two specialist companies who supply and maintain this type of sensor system. Changing to the alternative supplier (at a cost of between £30k to £40k) is not an economic option at present, as it would require the total replacement of the hardware embedded in the road surface, together with the replacement of the roadside instrumentation. The time scales involved in replacing the existing system (approximately 2–3 months after award of contract) would leave us vulnerable to not having any system in place at all for the 2010 / 2011 winter season.
- 3.2.5 The costs associated with the weather forecasting and data collection are £24,954.32 for 2010/11. This is a saving on last year of £5000.
- 3.2.6 As technology is continually changing, during the period up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011, it is proposed to carry out a comprehensive review of our weather data capture process, so as to ensure we are still utilising the most cost effective and accurate system.
- 3.2.7 Warrington BC is seeking approval to continue the joint collaborative arrangements for weather forecasting and data collection with the Cheshire Councils and Halton BC, until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011
- 3.2.8 It is therefore proposed that Halton BC also continue with the joint collaborative arrangements for weather forecasting and data collection with the Cheshire Council's and Warrington BC until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

### **3.3 Salt Procurement**

- 3.3.1 Halton currently has collaborative arrangements with Cheshire & Warrington Council's for the supply of salt, under a contract awarded by Cheshire County Council in 2004. Salt Union is a major supplier to both Cheshire and Warrington Councils. However, when the contract was awarded, Peacock Salt had submitted the most economically advantageous tender to supply Halton and they have been Halton's sole supplier for the last six years. The contract that Cheshire / Warrington have with Salt Union, also includes rates for supply of salt to Halton, and is therefore available for us to procure.
- 3.3.2 Peacock Salt are salt merchants rather than producers and can import salt sourced commercially from Europe. Peacocks have in previous years been a very reliable supplier. Last season however, the snow and icy conditions which affected much of mainland Europe, placed extraordinary demands on salt production and consequently, the reliability of supplies from Peacocks.
- 3.3.3 Last season, the Government established the "Salt Cell" and directed UK produced supplies to those highway authorities in most need, having regard for current stocks and forecast conditions. The fact that Peacocks are a salt merchant rather than a main producer, meant that Halton were not initially included within the "Salt Cell" salt distribution lists. The current arrangements with Peacocks ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010.
- 3.3.4 From preliminary discussion with salt suppliers, including Salt Union, indications are that orders for salt for the forthcoming season need to be submitted as early as possible to ensure delivery of stocks in good time.
- 3.3.5 The cost of procuring our salt via the Cheshire Contract for 2010/11 would be £37.36 per tonne. Last year's rate via Peacocks was £37.50 per tonne. Based on an average Number of grits per year of 40 - 45, Halton would require approximately 1125 tonnes of salt. In addition to this, there is the need to fill grit bins and grit footpaths, bringing our requirement to approximately 1500 tonnes. We currently have approximately 750 tonnes in stock, leaving a balance required of 750 tonnes, with an associated cost of approximately £28,000. These figures are for salt procured before 31<sup>st</sup> October. The cost of salt procured from 1<sup>st</sup> November will be £39.36 per tonne.
- 3.3.6 As with weather forecasting Warrington BC is seeking approval to continue the joint collaborative arrangements for salt procurement with the Cheshire Councils and Halton BC, until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.
- 3.3.7 It is therefore proposed that Halton BC also continue with the joint collaborative arrangements for salt procurement with the Cheshire Council's and Warrington BC until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013. As a consequence

for this coming winter it is intended that Halton's salt will be sourced from Salt Union rather than Peacocks.

- 3.3.8 The extension to the contract with both of the Cheshire Councils, together with Warrington and Halton Borough Councils, is in keeping with the joint collaborative arrangements for Winter Maintenance highlighted during the Winter Resilience Reviews of 2008/09 and 2009/10.

## **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council has a duty to provide a properly planned and resourced Winter Maintenance service. Failure to provide such would breach this duty and place the Council liable to legal action.

## **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Resource / Financial Implications**

Not having the ability to accurately forecast and respond to severe weather in accordance with the Winter Maintenance Plan could leave the authority vulnerable to increased liabilities relating to insurance claims from road users.

### **5.2 Children and Young People in Halton**

Winter Maintenance operations affect all service users alike. There are no specific issues applicable to children and young people.

### **5.3 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

An effective winter maintenance service can assist businesses in continuing to operate through adverse weather conditions by allowing access to employment centres and helping with vehicle movements / deliveries. Winter maintenance is vital in ensuring that business and places of learning are not restricted by the weather conditions.

### **5.4 A Safer Halton**

Whilst the Council cannot undertake to protect all road users from risk the procedures and measures in place show that careful planning can minimize risk.

### **5.4 Halton's Urban Renewal**

Helping businesses and other employers to continue to function during times of adverse weather could reflect on the borough and assist in its continuing regeneration.

## **5.5 Sustainability**

Extended gritting treatment of footways during the winter season will promote walked journeys and reduce reliance upon motor vehicles. Effective weather forecasting will minimize the number of treatments undertaken and thus reduce salt pollution of water courses and drainage systems.

## **5.6 Legal Implications**

The development and application of the Winter Maintenance Plan ensures that Halton continues to meet its legal obligations.

## **5.8 Social Inclusion**

Winter Maintenance operations affect all service users alike. Enhanced gritting of footways will benefit particularly those with limited access to motor vehicles by providing safe access to the public transportation systems.

## **5.9 Crime and Disorder**

There are no specific implications.

## **6.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 Failure to meet our legal obligations would expose the Council to considerable financial risk from litigation.

6.2 This operation ensures as far as practicable, the safety of the public and reduces potential damage to infrastructure and property.

## **7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

There are no equality and diversity implications.

## **8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Well Maintained Highways - The Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management 2005

Halton Borough Council Highway Maintenance Strategy Document, 1998

Halton Borough Council Winter Maintenance Plan 2008-2009

Highways Act 1980

Railways and Transport Act 2003

Place of Inspection: Rutland House

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