

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

CABINET EXECUTIVE

28 March 2023

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Jackie Charlton
Cabinet Member for a Greener Powys

REPORT TITLE: Winter Service Review Phase 2

REPORT FOR: Decision

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report outlines Phase 2 of the Winter Service review and proposing updating the criteria used to determine our winter gritting routes and associated measures that are in-line with the latest guidance and legislative requirements (**Appendix 1**).
- 1.2 The winter route hierarchy currently in use has not had a major review for 20 years, during which time changes have taken place to the location of amenities, transport links, essential services, and best practice.
- 1.3 This report only focuses on gritting routes that will be used to treat county roads and not Trunk Roads as that is a matter for Welsh Government as the Highway Authority. It should be noted that extreme weather contingencies, and ad hoc provision are all within the scope of the Authorities Winter Plan.
- 1.4 This report sets out the criteria and categorisation of the proposed Winter Service hierarchy and a public engagement exercise is proposed to help the service shape this model. Once this exercise has been concluded updated routes will be prepared and issued for consultation.
- 1.5 The scope of this report is set out in **Appendix 1**.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Winter Service Review Phase 1 paper was approved on the 8th October 2019. This paper included the recommendation to review the existing treatment network and return to Cabinet to agree any proposed amendments.
- 2.2 Minutes of the Cabinet meeting recorded that liaison was required with local members, Town / Community Councils and residents before any route hierarchy amendments were to be approved by Cabinet.
- 2.3 The review has been approached in line with the National Winter Service Research Group [NWSRG] Practical Guidance for Winter Service. It has:
 - Categorised the network within a hierarchy using a risk and evidence-based process tailored to the circumstances of this Authority.
 - Identified the risk-based criteria to be adopted by the Authority and the

categorisation.

- 2.4 Powys contains circa 5,500 km of surfaced road comprising 431 km of trunk road, 243 km of County A roads, 2,708 km of category B and C roads and 2,128 km of minor roads. Trunk roads are the responsibility of Welsh Government with service standards being set by them.
- 2.5 The current precautionary salt network for county roads (excluding trunk roads) extends to circa 1,005 km, which equates to 20% of the county road network.
- 2.6 All winter service is provided within financial constraints, and it is recognised that authorities cannot always be reasonably expected to protect against ice and snow on all parts of the network. The responsibility for the authority is to determine a policy that is reasonable and meets their statutory duties in respect of the risks to road users posed by snow and ice.
- 2.7 Powys declared a Climate Change Emergency (20th Sept 2020) with an ambition to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero in line with the Welsh public sector target by 2030.
- 2.8 Powys also declared a Nature Emergency (13th Oct 2022) giving a commitment to protecting and rejuvenating Powys' natural environment for its inherent value, for the role nature plays in achieving a vibrant and viable economy and for the benefits nature provides to the wellbeing of our county's residents.

3 Advice

- 3.1 It would not be reasonable or practical for any local authority to maintain the same level of service across their entire road network. The call on resources must be assigned on a priority basis, with an agreed network of gritting routes.
- 3.2 Maintaining the present practices does not represent a robust position as the rationale and reasoning for the existing network is not in line with current guidance. It has also noted that there appear to be inconsistencies across the existing network. Retaining existing service provision without review would not be in line with current national best-practice.
- 3.3 **Appendix 1** to this report provides detail on the methodology used to identify groupings and priorities together with recommendations for Route Criteria and Categorisation. This recommends a five group or "Tier" approach to produce a hierarchy that ensures equitable service delivery having regard to a range of factors.
- 3.4 **Appendix 2** to this report provides a matrix of the proposed hierarchical group or "Tier" structure using the process set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.5 The Service believes the methodology of assessment and the proposed level of service aligns with current best practice guidance and the current interpretation of "reasonably practicable" but will continue to keep service provision under review.
- 3.6 There is currently little combined research into the environmental effects of gritting on UK roads. Studies have been carried out into individual elements such as rock salt and vehicle emissions. These have identified impacts, and each will need to be considered at the relevant stage to ensure appropriate mitigation e.g. policy on when and how to treat, purchase of vehicles and salt

4 Resource Implications

- 4.1 This review centres around the Authority demonstrating that it has a reasonably practicable approach to delivering the service and that this assessment has been made in accordance with current good practice.
- 4.2 In dialogue with the Section 151 officer, it has been agreed that the financial impact of the new operating model will be included in the second report once the maps of the new routes have been developed.
- 4.3 The Deputy Head of Finance acknowledges the report and its content, and that the financial impact will be considered in the next report once new route maps are available, although regard should be given to remaining within the current budget envelope.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Whilst there are legislative duties relating to winter service provision, there are no legally defined service standards. Legal Service and the service department monitor to see if any changes to policy should be considered in the light of recent court decisions.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal Services and the Monitoring Officer has commented as follows: "I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report".

6 Data Protection

- 6.1 The proposal does not involve the processing of personal data.

7 Comment from local member(s)

- 7.1 Local Members will be consulted following the decision on this report. Their comments will be considered by the Portfolio Holder and reported to Cabinet as required.

8 Impact Assessment

- 8.1 An impact assessment is not required at this stage of the Phase 2 Winter Review.

9 Recommendation

- 9.1 Recommendation 1 - to note the proposed updated Winter Service Hierarchy in accordance with best practice as set out in Appendix 1 and 2.
- 9.2 Recommendation 2 – to undertake a public engagement exercise on the groupings and Tiers as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 to this report.

- 9.3 Recommendation 3 – to consider the findings of the public engagement and return to cabinet confirming the route criteria and categorisation, with options for route assignment, treatment levels of each Tier and the financial implications of the proposals.

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