

Responses to all Staff Comments received during 13th June to 12th July 2016

Formal Consultation

1. 5 o'clock shouts relating to winter maintenance can occur, but staff finish at 3.30. Will they get paid to stay in the depot until 5 or do they have to travel over 20 mins home & then 20 mins back again, extending their working day?

Response

Many staff are already in this position. If there is a clear break between the end of the normal working day and the start of the call-out there will be no payment for the intermediate period. Staff can choose to stay in the depot and have use of the facilities there should they so wish. The weather conditions and forecast dictates the treatment times, but where there is some flexibility within the opportune window of treatment, consideration is given to the impact of timings on staff.

2. There would be interest if a Powys vehicle could be provided for all 6 staff to meet in Crickhowell and travel to Brecon together, with the disturbance payments being forfeited. (£18,000 in total disturbance payments over 4 years now, as 1 staff member has recently moved further away from Brecon)

Response

Such an arrangement could be considered if agreed by the staff affected and a proposal is submitted by staff in writing.

3. Could plant & vehicles be stored in the depot whilst it is retained by Powys in the interim period as a salt storage facility? Slow moving plant such as tractors & excavators were mentioned as examples.

Response

If the depot is closed as a working depot but retained for a period, it would be treated similarly to other storage sites currently in use around the county. Temporary storage of plant in various situations would be a matter for the local manager to consider being mindful of security, efficient working and consistent practises.

4. Would there be sufficient time to load the 2 additional gritters in Brecon and still meet the required treatment times? There would potentially be additional overtime payments because of the additional waiting time whilst trying to wash down 2 additional gritters in Brecon?

Response

All gritting routes are currently being studied as part of the route optimisation project. If additional routes are added into depots then such things as operational safety, duty times and costs will all have to be taken into account.

5. The staff say Nigel issued a letter stating 'there will be no financial or other changes to winter maintenance for 3 years' after last Autumns change to winter standby payments, but now you are proposing changes to routes & gritting depots ?

Response

The document issued to staff in October 2015 stated - 'Whilst it is noted that shifts may vary through consultation, it is intended that this proposal will remain extant for three years from the date of agreement.

The 'proposal' referred to the changes to standby payments and overtime. There were no changes proposed to shift patterns or any other terms and conditions. The current proposals associated with the depot review will not affect the previous agreement regarding standby and overtime payments connected to winter maintenance.

6. Gritting reaction times will deteriorate in general, as staff will take longer to reach their gritting depot. Some high routes may be too deep in snow to safely plough by the time the driver eventually gets there, so more roads will end up being closed during severe snow & ice events.

Response

Treatment periods will still be within our target completion times. Reaction to unplanned 'storm type conditions' may vary for better or worse depending on where the storm occurs. However, with more fleet and staff being deployed from strategic bases, the priorities are more likely to be dealt with effectively in general.

7. The general fine detail of operating winter maintenance activities from Brecon instead of Crickhowell need to be investigated & considered.

Response

All gritting routes are currently being studied as part of the route optimisation project. If additional routes are added into depots then such things as operational safety, duty times and costs will all have to be taken into account.

8. We realise that Crickhowell Depot is situated at the county boundary but there again so is the depot at Abercrave. The difference between these two yards are that, Crickhowell is not only providing a service to its community but also to between 16 - 18 miles of trunk road where as Abercrave does not. So why close Crickhowell? It has also been rumoured that the refuse and recycling are to be removed from Abercrave to Brecon. So, Abercrave is to be a Highways only yard.

Response

As previously discussed, the viability and suitability of all depots will be reviewed in due course. Llanfyllin, Llanbrynmair, Crickhowell and Presteigne have been initially included for review due to their location and staff numbers.

9. The two gritting lorries at crickhowell yard provide winter maintenance for nearly 100 kilometres of trunk road and also the B4560 and the C136 which in part, is the highest road in this part of Powys (higher than Storey Arms). These roads are being used a lot at the moment due to improvements being made to the A465 (Heads of the Valleys Road). Even when these improvements are completed that road could still be closed due to RTC's and fatalities leaving the B4560 and the C136 the only other route into the area. Abercrave does not support any trunk road gritting.

Response

The current winter maintenance routes are being reviewed. The trunk road element treated from Crickhowell links up to Brecon.

It should be noted however that resources will continue be targeted at the priorities in terms of network hierarchy and conditions.

10. The routes that presently run out of Crickhowell take approx. 2 hours and 5 minutes driving time and a total of 3hrs and 15min to complete if there are no problems. Will we be able to load 7 gritters, complete our gritting runs, unload left over salt as only one gritter can unload at a time in Brecon yard, two at a time in Crickhowell and wash down 7 seven gritters, one at a time within 3.5 hours? If not, this system can't work as a driver can only legally work an 11 hr. shift. 7.5hrs daily work, leaving 3.5 hrs for a gritting run.

Response

As mentioned previously all gritting routes are being reviewed as part of a route optimisation project. Although treated lengths will not vary, the exercise may result in fewer routes which will lessen the impact described. The points raised are valid and will form an important part of the gritting route review.

11. Apparently there is already a problem of overcrowding when loading 5 gritters in Brecon yard, especially when there are early evening gritting runs. Whilst carrying out these activities (loading 7 gritters) someone was to be injured, who would be to blame?

Response

Please refer to the response provided to point 10. Nothing will be implemented that is considered unsafe or which carries unacceptable risks to health and safety.

12. If a gritting run is to take place between 1 and 1.5 hours after the working day, what are drivers from Crickhowell supposed to do?
- a. There is not enough time to return home to get a hot meal after a day's work.
 - b. There is nowhere to rest or sleep for an hour comfortably without disturbance. The result is the driver cannot be on rest and he cannot remain working because 11hr.shift would be running away.

Response

Many staff are already in this position due to their daily commute distance. Staff can choose to stay in the depot and have use of the facilities there should they so wish.

The weather conditions and forecast dictates the treatment times, but where there is some flexibility within the opportune window of treatment, consideration is given to the impact of timings on staff.

- c. The British Domestic Driver rules states that a driver can drive 10 hours and work 11 hours with a 30 minute break. It is unclear to us whether it is permissible to have another elongated break during a shift anyway. I know that it is in European rules but could we be mixing the two.

Response

UK Domestic Driving rules are applicable to our highway maintenance activities. The arrangements for our winter maintenance rota and driving times comply with the regulations in terms of driving and working times and will continue to do so.

- d. If the driver becomes soaked through during the working day, do you expect him to remain wet driving a lorry for the next gritting shift? It could be 9 o'clock before he returns home since 7 o'clock that morning, a total of 14 hours. This could be pushing drivers to the danger zone.

Response

It would be unreasonable to accept or expect what is described above and normally sufficient opportunity would be provided for staff to change. It would be exceptional for staff to be working in soaking wet conditions leading directly into a treatment time.

13. Two areas for trunk road blockages due to snow are Bwlch on the A40 and Pengeffordd on the A479. When they become blocked, Crickhowell and its district is cut off from the rest of Powys leaving everyone stuck, including emergency services. What is the point of a barn full of salt in Crickhowell and no vehicles to put it on the roads.

Response

As staff numbers and equipment has reduced due to diminishing budgets, having staff and equipment based together in strategic depots over the county gives us generally better flexibility to deal with priorities efficiently.

It should also be noted that Crickhowell depot to Pengeffordd is a distance of 10 miles, whilst Brecon depot to Pengeffordd is a distance of 14 miles and Crickhowell depot to Bwlch is 7 miles, whilst Brecon depot to Bwlch is 10 miles. As such, the increase in travelling time to such areas would not be deemed significant.

14. During snow and icy conditions, the gritters need to re-load. It is easy to lose a road whilst returning to the depot to do this. If the gritter has to travel back to Brecon then a considerable amount of time will be lost due to the distance and the speed reduction required whilst traveling with a plough fitted.

Response

This is correct. Although every effort within reason is made to maintain safe access during the winter; depending on the particular conditions and circumstances, the benefit of attempting to keep a route open at all costs during such treacherous conditions has to be considered as opposed to dealing with it in a planned way once storm conditions have abated.

15. Traveling to this area to carry out daily work i.e ditching and patching etc. Would be a considerable cost to the county. Two persons would take approximately 1.5 hours to reach certain destinations within this area leaving a downtime of 3 hours per person daily by the time they returned to Brecon. A cost of £138 for two persons daily. There is also the cost of vehicles being run to these destinations which for a JCB cost between £30 - £40 and similar for a lorry. This would leave only 4.5 hours remaining in which to carry out work during the day. So, the price of hire or cost has now doubled due to the loss of work time over cost. This is now costing in the region of £300 per day for a two man team to work in certain parts of our area and approximately one third less for Crickhowell itself. There is then the disturbance payment for each individual to travel to Brecon. The costs are now significant.

Response

Again this is a valid consideration which has to be taken into account in the decision making process.

If all of the 6 staff currently based in Crickhowell were to travel back every day to the area to work from a new Brecon base, then there is likely to be little operational advantage in the proposed changes. However it is inevitable that staff will have to work over larger areas addressing the priorities e.g. the gulley sucker covering an area that extends to Builth Wells.

16. If the depot at Crickhowell for instance, were to close. Then that would leave nowhere for plant and machinery to be stored locally overnight. Different items of plant are left here quite often and again is done to reduce costs and downtime i.e when cutting trunk road grass and numerous other different tasks. The equipment would require transporting back to Brecon daily at a cost to the county.

Response

If the depot is closed as a working depot but retained for a period, it would be treated similarly to other storage sites currently in use around the county. Temporary storage of plant in various situations would be a matter for the local manager to consider being mindful of security, efficient working and consistent practises.

17. We have been told that the route optimisation project has not been completed yet, so how can you know which depots to close. It's not a degree in management but a military strategic operations officer needed to work that out given the different types of terrain we have here in Powys. As previously advised, the viability and suitability of all depots will be reviewed in due course. Llanfyllin, Llanbrynmair, Presteigne and Crickhowell have been initially included for review due to their location and staff numbers.

Response

Route optimisation for highways activities has not been completed but whatever approach is to be employed to consider the optimum locations for operating bases for highway maintenance throughout Powys, it is unlikely that locations on the extreme boundaries would be selected.

18. We would like to see a breakdown of the £133,000 to keep the yard safe and up to standard as this seems ridiculous for a yard that is better than a lot in the county. Also the £33,000 for a compliant drainage system, as we have spoken to staff involved with the interceptor tanks and have been assured that all regulations have been met and exceeded regarding readings for that system. The £8,000 a year you intend to save through plant hire, we assume must be for the machine to load the gritters, as any other plant would still be required for us to carry out our work wherever we are based. The cost of the machine for loading gritters could be halved if we hired them from John Howells. They would also be maintained and kept up to scratch. The one we have been forced to use from our own people costs twice as much and has been nothing but trouble since we've had it.

Response

The list of estimated capital expenditure included in the overall costs would not necessarily have to be carried out immediately in its entirety. Certain elements would need to be addressed without delay to allow current use to continue in a compliant manner. It is correct that drainage would require improving which would entail a direct foul connection or other treatment works requiring on going servicing. The breakdown of future capital works and their estimated cost and priority are shown below.

Install Compliant Drainage Tanks = £40,000 – Priority 1

General Compliance Works = £8,000 – Priority 1

New Security Gates & CCTV = £10,000 – Priority 1

New Welfare Unit = £30,000 – Priority 2

Vehicle Storage Shed Improvements = £20,000 – Priority 2

Yard Resurfacing = £20,000 – Priority 2

General Site Safety Items = £5,000 – Priority 3

Please note that Priority 1 = High, Priority 2 = Medium, Priority 3 = Low.

We have recently tendered a contract for hired plant and any supplier meeting the criteria and wishing to submit a bid is included in the framework. Any additional machines whether hired or owned are an additional expense.

19. Every employee in Powys can see we are financially in difficulty. In my previous employment a part of my duties were to train personnel and to facilitate projects to remove waste and non-value added activities from different processes. After pointing out a few issues to the workforce here at Crickhowell we believe that our depot should be a saving to Powys and not a cost. It looks to us that we are being made to look like a soft target.

Response

If there are any valid savings which have been identified then they should be brought forward for consideration.

20. It would have been nice for the Depot Review email address to have had an automatic reply set up on it so that we knew we were getting through to somebody. Is it even working?

Response

The Depot Review project email address (depotreview@powys.gov.uk) is fully functional and is monitored on a regular basis. All staff comments received via this email address have been analysed with all responses shown in this document. Having an automatic reply on the email address is a good point and one which will be considered in future.

21. Disturbance Payments – I have spoken to someone regarding travelling expenses. As you know, Powys are only offering us approximately 11p per mile to travel to Brecon. I was informed that it is 11p per mile for lease and company cars and that private vehicles should get about 45p per mile. If you look at the H.M Customs and Excise web site, they say that a fair price for a private vehicle is indeed 45p per mile. The 11p per mile doesn't even cover fuel let alone the wear and tear for that vehicle. The insurance company would certainly up the premium on my vehicle as the mileage would go up significantly over the period of a year, taking the amount of mileage over the amount I am allocated at the moment.

Response

The disturbance payment is not an excess mileage claim. The purpose of the payment is to provide a level of compensation for the inconvenience of relocating to a new base further from an individual's home. Any disturbance payment will be made in accordance with corporate policy.