

## Report for Information

**Report to** Norwich Highways Agency Committee  
23 September 2010

**Report of** Head of Transportation

**Subject** Review of Norwich Winter Maintenance Service

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### Purpose

This report looks back at the 2009/10 winter maintenance season and highlights improvements and efficiencies that have been made for the 2010/11 season.

### Recommendations

Members are requested to note the content of this report

### Financial Consequences

Optimisation of the routes taken by gritting vehicles in Norwich has meant that one less gritting vehicle will be used during this coming season (5 vehicles instead of 6, plus the brine sprayer). In addition, if a replacement gritting vehicle is required due to breakdown etc., the City gritting fleet will be temporarily supplemented using Norfolk County Council plant rather than maintaining another spare vehicle in Norwich.

### Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "Safe and healthy neighbourhoods – working in partnership with residents to create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities" and the service plan priority.

### Contact Officers

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### Background Documents

None

# Report

## Winter Maintenance in Norwich 2009/10

1. Following an early season calm (only one gritting action before 10 December 2009), last winter proved to be of about a 1 in 30 year severity. This followed the previous winter which was of 1 in 20 year severity. Of particular difficulty were the days when road surface temperatures didn't rise above freezing after snow which lead to icy condition off the treated network.
2. CityCare and their staff, in their last season of winter service provision for Norwich, performed with credit. Over 99% of the 1033 routes treated were completed within the 3 hour target despite particularly testing conditions. Generally, the treated network was kept open and passable with care throughout the winter. Only in the heaviest snowfall did the treated inclines such as Grapes Hill, Farrow Road and Ketts Hill become briefly impassable until further treatment was carried out and the salt took effect.
3. CityCare also kept the grit bins of Norwich topped up, completing all refills by the end of the following working day from a refill request being made. Grit bins had a lesser role in the provision of winter service before last season. However, they played an important part in keeping Norwich moving as safely as possible last winter. The severe weather conditions experienced are also reflected in the 88 requests for new grit bins compared with the usual figure around 10. Consideration of these requests is covered later in this report.
4. In addition to grit bin requests, the council also received requests to add roads to the treated network. During the severe weather just before and after Christmas, the third priority (P3) network was treated on 4 occasions. However, when government restrictions on the use of salt were brought in during January, treatment of P3 roads had to cease. This gave some residents living on P3 roads concern during the difficult road conditions in early February.
5. Although salt stocks in Norwich (and Norfolk) were severely tested last winter, contingencies to treat a more limited network of main roads did not have to be implemented. One important reason for this was the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract between Norfolk County Council and Salt Union which helped to guarantee salt stocks.

## Winter Maintenance in Norwich 2010/11

6. The winter maintenance service in Norwich for the coming season will be provided by May Gurney, through the Norfolk County Council Highway Strategic Partnership. Some of the CityCare staff involved in winter maintenance last season have transferred across to May Gurney and will continue to be involved in providing the service.

## City Routes

7. With only two exceptions, it is proposed to treat the same network of roads this winter as last. The only road to be moved from the second priority (P2) network to the P3 network is Violet Road. This is because on 21 occasions (24%) last

winter, gritting vehicles were unable to pass through Violet Road due to parked vehicles on the bend. This caused significant disruption to gritting operations. A grit bin will be located on the steepest part of Violet Road near the bend as an alternative.

8. Southwell Road will be added to the P2 network (from the P3 network). It is an important bus link and with route optimisation it is now located on one of the routes.
9. County and City gritting operations will continue to cross boundaries where it is efficient and practical to do so.
10. Detailed work has been carried out to optimise the treated route network in Norwich. In previous seasons, CityCare operated 6 gritting vehicles and held one spare gritting vehicle in case of breakdowns and accidents. By treating the top priority P1 and P2 roads together in as efficient a way as possible, it has been possible to reduce the number of gritting vehicles required to 5. In addition, the spare gritting vehicle will be provided by the Norfolk Strategic Partnership pool as part of the Norfolk wide provision rather than as a specific Norwich provision. The reduction of two gritting vehicles will translate into a financial saving in the region of £40,000 this season.
11. The use of the brine sprayer for City centre footways will continue.
12. There is a higher risk with the reduced number of gritting vehicles that more actions may take over the 3 hour target time to complete. This will be monitored throughout the coming winter and route adjustments made if necessary.

### **Grit Bins**

13. The City Council maintained 219 grit bins around Norwich last winter. Norfolk County Council through the PFI contract and Highway Agency agreement supplied the salt and sand that filled the grit bins. The material left at the end of last winter has been retained to refill bins this coming season.
14. During the salt shortage last season, the grit bins around Norwich were refilled with sand. Sand assists with providing some grip on ice and helps break up the ice when worked in by vehicular traffic. However, the sand does not thaw the ice and was ineffective during the severe freezing temperatures of February this year. This meant that CityCare had to be called out to spread salt on shaded steep slopes. As sand proved ineffective throughout Norfolk, it was decided at the Norfolk County Council Winter review to fill all grit bins with a salt/sand mix throughout the coming winter season.
15. As previously mentioned, there were 88 requests to the council for additional grit bins this coming season. Grit bins are usually provided where there is a clear risk of ice causing a significant hazard such as a steep slope or bend. Many requests are for roads that have neither a slope nor a bend. A process of assessing all requests is on-going and a list of proposed grit bin locations for Norwich will be available at the committee meeting.

### **Snow Clearance by Resident's**

16. Following reports last winter that residents might risk being held liable for their

actions in clearing the footway outside their address should someone slip on that section of footway, clarification will be published in both County and City publications such as Citizen. In addition, both County and City websites will communicate clear advice on this matter. The message will be that all reasonable actions to clear snow from highway footpaths near a resident's property can be taken and will be appreciated, without the risk of prosecution.

### **Salt Stocks**

17. May Gurney will run winter maintenance operations around Norwich from the Mile Cross Depot for the 2010/11 season.
18. Salt Union have completed initial deliveries for the coming season and there are now over 2800 tonnes of rock salt at Mile Cross Depot. Nominally 1500 tonnes are for use in Norwich with the remaining salt, part of Norfolk County Council's strategic stockpile. About 1700 tonnes was used throughout last winter season in Norwich. Salt Union will make additional deliveries during the season as required.

### **Winter Services Disability Impact Assessment for Norwich**

19. A disability impact assessment (DIA) has been completed for winter maintenance provision in Norwich. The main outcome from this was to prioritise service provision for footways near where vulnerable groups are likely to use the highway.

### **Winter Maintenance provision in Norwich from 2011/12**

20. Winter maintenance provision in Norwich will be considered as part of the review of the Norwich Highway Agency agreement. The conclusions of this consideration will be reported to the January meeting of this committee.
21. There is an intention by the City Council to sell the Mile Cross Depot. Work is underway to identify a new site within Norwich to accommodate salt storage and winter maintenance operations beyond the forthcoming season. It is considered that the County depot at Ketteringham does not have sufficient capacity to service the City area. The County depot at Aylsham would give logistical problems in servicing the City area.