

WINTER SERVICE REPORT BY PRINCIPAL OFFICER ASSET MANAGEMENT ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

2009/10 Service delivery

Following last winters severe weather, the Highways Winter Service team went to Scrutiny Panel to review the service which was provided. An action plan was produced and raised three key learning points: stock management, better communication and improved working relationships with partners.

1. Stock Management

To improve ECC stock control a transfer was made to ABP salt; rock salt covered with molasses, which sticks the product to the road and provides a more effective cover. The benefits are two-fold, in that there is less waste and the spread rate is reduced. Without increasing the storage capacity, resilience will increase by approximately 20%.

Salt bins

Salt bins are important to the local community, but there have been increasing trends, evident in the previous year, for the salt to be stolen, or for people to use the salt on their own personal driveways, not on the highway. It is therefore important to look at options, as how to best ensure that the salt is available to local communities for their need, but also ensure that it is not misused. Whilst options are being considered, the Authority has made a formal decision not to install any new salt bins across the County this year. All existing salt bins will remain and they will be filled in preparation for the start of the season.

The only change to procedures for salt bins is a formalisation of last winter's delivery. The policy now confirms that salt bins will only be re-filled when there are sufficient resources (i.e. staff, machinery and stock), available to do so without risk to the precautionary network.

This year, if a Parish has requested a salt bin, they have been refused and instead will be offered the chance to take part in a trial which is running across the County for this season only. It is based on experience from other Authorities and enables ECC to test the practicalities within the County. Each Parish will be offered a one tonne bag of salt and responsibility will lie with them to identify areas of need and for distributing the salt. The letter, which was sent to the Parishes that had requested a salt bin, is attached for information. If a Parish has not expressed a need for a salt bin, their community will be unaffected by the pilot and therefore have not been directly informed of it. General information has been sent out to all Parish and Town Councils about the pilot, via ECC's monthly publication produced by Angie Balcombe.

With winter now upon the County, the application process has closed and the pilot is currently underway.

2. Communication

Communication was identified as a key learning point and as a result, a review has been undertaken of the ECC web pages. Work has been carried out to making the information clearer and easier to use. The site now also includes the gritting routes. Please visit: www.essex.gov.uk/winter

3. Partnership working

Together District and Borough colleagues, ECC are also producing a common statement which sets out guidelines, guidance and procedures for future joint working. ECC is producing a communication pack for distribution to all Districts and Boroughs. This will provide District and Borough staff with a 'Question and Answers' for common concerns by the public, it will also supply additional contact points. This, it is hoped, will help improve the service provided to the public.

Partnership working has also been a key issue and from learning from last year where it was not possible to clear high streets effectively, a memorandum of understanding has been formulated with each District and Borough, which sets out who and how, ECC can call on the Council to help in periods of heavy snow fall.