

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 18 March 2010

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Review of Operational Services during the Period of Extreme Weather in December/January

Report by Director of Transport, Environmental and Community Services

SUMMARY

This report updates Members on the initial review of operational services following the period of extreme weather in December and January, and invites Members to approve that a detailed review of the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Procedures is undertaken and the outcomes reported back to a future Transport, Environmental and Community Services Committee to allow any agreed changes to be implemented for next winter.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A verbal update on the response from operational services over the period of extreme weather was given to the TECS Committee on 21 January, with a commitment to report back to the March Committee.
- 1.2 The period of extreme weather started on Saturday 19 December and continued in most areas until Friday 15 January, a period of 4 weeks.
- 1.3 The main Council offices, and Service Centre, closed at 5 pm on Wednesday 23 December and re-opened on Monday 4 January, a period of 11 days.
- 1.4 During this period weather conditions were extreme with prolonged freezing temperatures rarely rising above freezing. The lowest temperature recorded was minus 22 deg Celsius at Altnaharra, and temperatures of minus 10 degrees Celsius was typical for the period. There was heavy and repeated snowfalls, with a significant build up of snow across the highlands.
- 1.5 To put these weather conditions into context, the Met Office has reported that this has been the coldest winter since 1962/63.
- 1.6 The main service areas within TECS which were affected during the extreme weather were:-
 - Winter Maintenance
 - Refuse Collection
 - Burials

2. Winter Maintenance

- 2.1 These were exceptional weather conditions, perhaps the worst for 30 years, and there was significant pressure on the winter maintenance service during this period.

2.2 An initial review of the service has identified the following areas for a more detailed review:-

- a) route priorities (roads, footpaths and car parks)
- b) level of resources
- c) arrangements with external contractors
- d) arrangements with locals farmers
- e) use of voluntary organisations
- f) arrangements for procuring and storing salt (local/national issue)
- g) provision of grit bins
- h) trees overhanging the road
- i) standby arrangements over the Christmas/New Year holiday
- j) flexibility within the Council's workforce
- k) arrangements for care homes and sheltered housing
- l) arrangements for schools
- m) arrangements for internal housing footpaths
- n) arrangements with the Emergency Services
- o) arrangements with the Trunk Road Operating Companies
- p) how the public communicate with the Council during a holiday period
- q) how the Council communicates with the public
- r) use of the media to inform the public
- s) communications with Elected Members

2.3 The Council's Winter Maintenance Policy was last updated in October 2003, and it is proposed that a review of the policy and operational procedures is undertaken and the outcomes reported to a future TECS Committee, to allow any agreed changes to be implemented for next winter.

3. Refuse Collection

3.1 The refuse collection service was disrupted in a number of locations due to difficult access conditions caused by deep snow. There were also difficulties in moving wheeled bins across snow walls between the road and footpaths in residential areas.

3.2 One of the main areas identified for improvement was customer contact. Although residents appeared to accept missed collections, they wanted information on the alternative arrangements. This is covered in **Section 5** of the Report.

3.3 The main areas which affected refuse collection during the period will be covered through the reviews of the winter maintenance service and customer contact, and there is no requirement to carry out a specific review of the refuse collection service.

4. Burials

4.1 All planned burials went ahead, and this is a great credit to the staff involved.

4.2 A number of undertakers expressed concerns regarding the consistency of the burial administration service during the holiday period and it is proposed that the arrangements are reviewed to ensure consistency across the Highlands.

5. Contact with the Council

- 5.1 One of the areas identified for improvement related to customer contact with the Council during the Christmas/New Year holiday. The main Council offices and Service Centre closed at 5 pm on Wednesday 23 December and re-opened on Monday 4 January, a period of 11 days.
- 5.2 This issue affects a number of Council Services and will be reviewed separately by the Chief Executive.

6. Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 Members are invited to approve that a detailed review of the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy and Operational Procedures is undertaken and the outcomes reported to a future TECS Committee to allow any agreed changes to be implemented for next winter.
- 7.2 Members are invited to approve that a detailed review of the burial administration service during the holiday period is undertaken to ensure consistency across the Highlands, and the outcome reported to a future TECS Committee.
- 7.3 Members are invited to note that a review of the arrangements for customer contact during the Christmas/New Year period will be included in the overall review to be undertaken by the Chief Executive.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Transport, Environmental and Community Services

Date: 5 February 2010

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