

**EXTRACT FROM ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE 8 FEBRUARY 2010**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Morgan (Chairman); Davey, Davis, Drake, Rufus, Smart, Wells and Barnett

**Also present:** Councillor Duncan, Representative of Sussex Police Authority

**PART ONE**

**40. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

**40a Declarations of Substitutes**

Councillor Dawn Barnett was substituting for Councillor Tony Janio.

**40b Declarations of Interests**

There were none

**40c Declaration of Party Whip**

There were none.

**40d Exclusion of Press and Public**

In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

**RESOLVED:** That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

**43. PUBLIC QUESTIONS/LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS/NOTICES OF MOTION  
REFERRED FROM COUNCIL**

43.1 A public question from Dr Cant was tabled at the meeting as follows:

“My question relates to the relations between the Council and the local PCT in relation to falls occurring, particularly among the elderly, on un-gritted pavements during the recent period of snowy weather. Given the additional pressure that is placed on local health services as a result of snow-related falls and given that prevention of falls among the elderly is a key target in the NHS, this would seem to be an area for joint working between the council and the PCT. What plans does the council have for joint working with the PCT to prevent falls on the part of the elderly in the event of any future snowy weather?”

43.2 The question was referred on to the Scrutiny Panel to be established under item 46 later on this agenda

**45. BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL WINTER SERVICE PLAN; OPERATION AND REVIEW 2009-2010**

45.1 The Chairman Councillor Warren Morgan noted that he, Councillor Bill Randall and the Leader of the Council had all called for a review of the council’s response to the 19 December 2009 snowfall. Furthermore this was called for by the public.

45.2 Some Councillors claimed that a panel held in March would be premature but the Chairman pointed out that an early report back to the Environment & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee would allow for recommendations to be actioned before the coming winter.

45.3 Councillor Geoffrey Theobald agreed that an ad hoc panel would provide a good opportunity to discuss the experience of this winter’s severe weather and to look again at the council’s Winter Service Plan (WSP). He pointed out that the WSP was reviewed annually and that the current plan agreed at 5 November Environment CMM and took the February 2009 bad weather experience into account.

45.4 Councillor Theobald said it would be unrealistic and impractical to try to grit every road but the 40% gritting coverage of the road network exceeds the 24% target set by the Audit Commission target. He explained the WSP priorities within the city and how additional staff were called in to aid in carrying them out.

Councillor Theobald was in contact with officers throughout the Christmas period and was aware of the considerable amount of work they were doing around the clock. He reminded the committee that such weather had been unprecedented and the sub zero day time temperatures and low level of traffic on the roads had affected the effectiveness of the gritting process.

He thanked all staff involved and emphasised the importance of close working between the Council and emergency services partners.

45.5 The Committee Chairman formally thanked all staff from the wide range of service areas involved who had worked well beyond the call of duty and also provided a detailed report on its operation in December and January. Councillor Morgan said he wanted the Scrutiny Panel to take in constructive criticism including for example helping tackle local access difficulties such as steep hills and narrow streets.

45.6 It was noted that this was a countrywide challenge for all Councils although the ice before Christmas was more of a local problem which therefore generated more public disquiet than in January.

45.7 The Director of Environment said that the agreed WSP actions were carried out. There had been a high level of public concern and some of it had been hostile before Christmas but this reduced during the second spell of snow and ice. The early reaction may have been partly an issue of public expectation and communication, especially regarding the role of residents in helping to clear snow and ice, and what and how councils need to prioritise snow clearance. This communication had been improved for the post Christmas snow and the service had also been enhanced, particularly around pavement clearance.

45.8 The Head of Network Management confirmed the agreed Winter Service Plan had been put into action as planned. She gave background information to the WSP (Item 45; paragraphs 3.2 – 3.33) and told the Committee that unlike many other councils, Brighton & Hove City Council grits bus routes as well as major road networks, giving good coverage across the City.

45.9 Gritting routes for the 7 Council-owned gritting vehicles have to be time-limited to be viable and effective and this can limit the amount of the road network they can cover.

45.10 Pre-treating roads before snowfall always takes place but was noted as being less effective after an accumulation of snow at particularly low temperatures, as the salt tends to lie inert beneath the snow. Operations then resort to ploughing if the depth of snow permits this but this has the drawback of tending to open up a narrower carriageway. Ploughing plus a salt and grit mix or a pure grit mix on top of snow is the most effective post-treatment in giving traction and breaking down the snow to allow the pre-treatment salt to work. However, all spreading treatments also rely on substantial traffic to help them work. This means that busy city centre roads will respond better and more quickly to treatment than smaller, less-used roads. Gritters did not manage to open all the outlying bus routes despite continuing to treat these constantly throughout the snow periods. Roads with a lower volume of traffic, higher altitude and colder climate require more attention.

45.11 The Head of Network Management said pre-treating pavements is time consuming and labour intensive and the mixture can be quickly washed away after rainfall. It can also use a substantial amount of materials; however the Hollingdean Depot has a limited capacity to store salt. Like most councils, Brighton & Hove City Council's WSP states that we will only post-treat pavements after heavy and prolonged snow and ice conditions.

45.12 During the December snowfall, the council used the post-treatment method of spreading a salt and grit mix on pavements. The council donated some salt to the Primary Care Trust.

45.13 The WSP was activated in the week leading up to the snowfall on Thursday 17 December. Road gritting took place using salting pre-treatment in the evenings leading up to the predicted snowfall. Pavement clearance began on Friday 18 December 2009. However there was additional snowfall and freezing rain overnight which, combined with reduced traffic to help 'activate' or spread the salt, led to even more icy conditions on the roads and pavements. This was indeed an example of 'the different types of snow.'

45.14 Between December 2009 and January 2010 officers planned for further severe snowfall, for instance preparing additional resources and developing communications on the website and with residents.

45.15 More was done particularly with regard to pavement treatment and communications in response to the January snowfall compared with the December snowfall; and this was in excess of the provisions in the Winter Service Plan. Less icy conditions also helped operations in January.

45.16 Road gritting was repeated in the same way in January, with pre-treatments of salt being laid down every evening for several days before the snowfalls, followed by ploughing and salt/grit treatment after and during the snowfalls.

45.17 On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked all those involved in providing services in the severe conditions.

45.18 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from the Director and Head of Network Operations in italics.

1) Would like more grit bins, and advice for residents on how to use grit or ashes

2) Will grit be removed, to help clear gullies?

*There were over 400 requests for grit bins this winter. To keep 'clutter' to a minimum a more flexible arrangement such as dropping off sacks of grit at appropriate points in residential areas might be preferable.*

3) Could there be seasonal grit bins to help reduce vandalism? When would additional grit bins be provided?

*More work was needed before any roll-out of more bins. The current criteria agreed in the WSP for provision of grit bins are for areas on steep hills, especially near junctions, and not usually on a road-gritting route.*

4) The hourly updates were useful for keeping residents informed.

5) The grit bin request form on the website was helpful

6) Can the gritting machines have chains attached to their tyres to break up the ice and get up the steeper hills?

*Chains on vehicles tend to be costly, unreliable and can cause damage to highways.*

7) What are the Council's plans to buy additional 4x4 vehicles and grit machines including machines for dealing with pavements. Are there adaptations available for use by smaller vehicles where necessary?

*Almost certainly more 4x4 vehicles and smaller vehicles will be needed. Hand gritting machines are available and work well, but all of them would have a budgetary impact.*

*Financial implications are detailed at paragraph 10.*

8) Could additional gritting machine driver training be provided and what are the costs of drafting in additional operational staff over weekends/nights?

*Driver training would not be an issue as CityClean, City Parks, Sustainable Transport and City Enforcement Officers, in conjunction with the GMB, coordinate and work together well.*

*Assistance for Highway Winter Duty Officers during severe weather is being looked at due to the long working hours they experienced in December and January.*

9) What proportion of narrow streets in the city and how many could be kept open.

*Because there were repeated and often heavy snowfalls at various times over a period of a week in January, resources, including vehicles, drivers and supplies of grit had to be used to maintain the main routes and bus routes as agreed in the WSP. Consequently it would have been ineffective to divert stocks to side streets if it meant main routes became blocked. It would also have raised the issue of liability if only certain side streets were gritted and not others.*

10) How can the council improve communication with residents to help them help themselves? How can the Council empower residents and encourage a community approach, more noticeable in January, to severe weather? Communities could be given advice on how to become more self-sufficient, for instance in keeping extra food in store.

*More information was available in time for the second snowfall on how to clear pathways.*

*To help manage residents' expectations in future, the council could consider being clearer in advance about what can realistically be done by the local authority*

11) For shops outside the city centre, how are the pavements prioritised for post-treatment?

*Out of town shopping areas are prioritised, but only those with higher footfall, in order to make best use of limited resources. For best effectiveness the treatment needs to be spread by activity. The council responded to individual business' requests for gritting where possible.*

12) Councillor Ben Duncan, representative of the Sussex Police Authority asked what were the council's statutory obligations to the police and other authorities in the event of severe weather, and emergency services' obligations to the council (e.g. lending 4x4s). At what stage could an emergency be declared by the Council and its partners, and could national resources be called on?

*In line with existing protocols, there was a Major Incident meeting during the Christmas period between the health, police, fire and the local authority. It was agreed that transport was the key issue during the severe weather, and that the best response was to disseminate public information rather than declare an emergency. It was also agreed that the authorities would lease extra vehicles and share 4x4s.*

*A call to staff and residents for use of their 4x4s was made and the details of the volunteers were kept. Insurance cover is provided by the Council. A Transport Cell of four authorities also called each other to share 4x4s.*

*Council officers work closely with the Police and NHS, informing them of any road closures and gritting all highway roads around hospitals and fire stations and their forecourts. The Council aims to grit all its own premises and will try to help the bus company and other public authorities who have their own contingency plans in place.*

*The Council donated supplies to some of the other authorities.*

45.19 Further comments from Members included: the response to unusual weather needs to be proportionate; the Council should not buy expensive equipment that might not be needed again for many years; and if the council acted in excess of the Audit Commission Target for road network gritting, could some of the effort be diverted to pavements?

45.20 The Chairman referred to schools' policies on closure due to bad weather and the criteria for closures; teachers might be generally less able than pupils to make the journey to their school but might be able to undertake an emergency support role local to their homes.

45.21 Suggestions for proposed action and question about legal liability from Councillor Bill Randall were tabled at the meeting and these would be taken into account by the Panel.

45.22 The Head of Media Relations told the committee that further information could be put out earlier in future. Replying to a question he said messages on gritting around Churchill Square and other areas for which the council was not directly responsible, were passed on via the Business Forum and other organisations.

45.23 The Director said that after the January snowfall, to try to identify areas that may be especially problematic, people arriving at A&E with fall-related injuries were asked where they fell as well as their home address. This 'soft' data is included at Appendix 1 and could be collected and analysed more rigorously in future.

**45.24 RESOLVED** that having considered the report, that a one-day Scrutiny Panel be scoped in the following item on this agenda, item 46.

## **46. WINTER SERVICE PLAN; PROPOSED PANEL REMIT**

46.1 The Standards and Complaints Manager summarised the report on the proposed scope of the Scrutiny Panel on the Winter Service Plan and detailed the public reaction; comments complaints and suggestions; to the council's response to the snowfall. He encouraged people to make complaints about the Council via the Standards and Complaints Team and explained how to do this.

46.2 Members agreed that Councillor Morgan would Chair the Panel. He said the Panel cannot respond to individual complaints, this is the role of the Environment Cabinet Member. Complaints made about the council would be addressed in the usual way. The number of

speakers would need to be limited; only those with constructive ideas or particular expertise would be invited to speak in person to the Panel and this was agreed.

46.3 Councillor Duncan suggested the scope of the panel (reference paragraph 3.8 and 3.9) should also consider the joint working with other public authorities. It was agreed that the emergency services would be invited to give their information to the Panel.

46.4 Because so much useful information had been brought forward at this meeting it was suggested that the Panel Members be drawn from this committee. However the Groups would be asked to nominate one Member to serve on the Panel.

46.5 **RESOLVED** 1) That the Committee note the information in the report and agree, subject to the addition of other emergency services to the list of witnesses at 3.9, the remit of the Winter Service Plan Scrutiny panel,

(2) That Councillor Morgan Chair the Panel and other nominations be requested from the Groups to be forwarded to the scrutiny team

