



ARTICLE NO: 1D

**CORPORATE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
24 November 2011**

**MEMBERS UPDATE 2011/12
ISSUE: 3 NOVEMBER 2011**

Article of: Assistant Director Community Services; Assistant Director Street Scene; Transformation Manager

Relevant Managing Director: People and Places / Transformation

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor I Grant

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SUBJECT: WINTER RESILIENCE ARRANGEMENTS

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

- 1.1 To advise Members on the improved arrangements for dealing with Severe Winter Weather conditions.
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3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 December 2010 saw the coldest weather in the UK for the past 100 years with unprecedented levels of snowfall. This caused major disruption to a number of Council services, in particular to the Refuse & Recycling service. This then resulted in a significant increase in the number of calls offered to the Contact Centre, which continued throughout January 2011. Consequently there was an adverse impact on performance, which resulted in some customers being unable to get through to the Council.
- 3.2 Last year's severe winter weather impacted upon front line services across the Country and caused major disruption to commuters and service providers alike. Officers across the Council did their utmost in trying to maintain service provision in very difficult times. Whilst refuse and recycling collection services were adversely affected, due to the commitment and endeavours of our collection staff these were kept to a minimum and subsequent catch back collections following suspension of services were also completed quickly.
- 3.3 The health and safety of staff is paramount and while every effort is always made to maintain service, the correct decisions were made regarding reduction and suspension of services as dictated by the conditions. West Lancashire performed well with regard to maintaining service and the speed with which

services were brought back on track when measured against other North West Authorities.

4.0 ISSUES

- 4.1 During times of severe winter weather, the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team meet regularly to agree necessary changes to service delivery. These changes are subsequently communicated to staff via e-mail or team briefings and updates are provided for customers via press releases, the website and the Contact Centre's welcome message. In addition, officers will inform customers who contact the Council of these changes either over the phone or face-to-face. Members are also updated daily by e-mail.
- 4.2 Further operational changes required throughout the day are communicated in a similar way. However, there can be some inevitable delays in getting this information to key officers, who are responsible for updating the website; the Contact Centre welcome message; and ultimately customers. This can cause confusion for members of the public, which generates further queries to the Contact Centre. The bad weather earlier this year saw 6,000 calls being offered over a period of 4 days to the Contact Centre, compared with an average of 2,500 over a similar period. Visits to the website also increased by 60% during this period.
- 4.3 A further concern during this period was that Council tenants often struggled to get through to the Contact Centre to report emergency housing repairs. This was due to the high volume of calls to the Council regarding Refuse & Recycling, "clogging" up the system. An Interactive Voice Response (IVR) was therefore successfully introduced earlier this year. Customers are now able to choose from the following options: "1" for Repairs, "2" for Refuse & Recycling or to hold for all other queries. Repairs calls now take priority over all other calls and the telephony system can now give a clear breakdown on call handling statistics for each option, as well as the changes introduced resulting in improved performance.

5.0 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 During the last course of severe winter weather, officers managed the situation on an hourly basis from day to day. However, in order to continually improve service delivery and at the request of Members, it was agreed to review, update and formalise procedures, to ensure that where possible in the future, service delivery is sustained and that any changes are communicated effectively and in a timely fashion to the residents of West Lancashire.

The following provides a commentary on the enhanced Winter Resilience arrangements.

- 5.2 **Execution.** In future, the Joint Managing Directors, (following updates from officers), will confirm that the Winter Resilience procedure will be put into force and will communicate this to Members and staff alike. This procedure will not replace the Business Continuity Plan, but instead will complement it. The Managing Directors, in liaison with the Assistant Director Community Services will make the decision as to whether the Business Continuity Plan is also launched.

The Human Resources policy “SEVERE WEATHER – WORKING ARRANGEMENTS” is currently being revised and this will be used in conjunction with this procedure in terms of detailed guidance and arrangements for staff.

5.3 Communication. Previously the main focus was to produce press releases to be sent out each day to the media. The press releases were then published on the website, and also provided information for the Contact Centre’s welcome message. As the weather conditions can change quite rapidly, which then affects service delivery; press releases can quickly become out of date and have therefore been known to cause confusion for some residents. The new approach will be to switch the emphasis to e-communication so that the website is the main source of information to Members, staff, customers and the media. The advantages of this are:

- Information is updated in a more timely fashion.
- All staff will have the ability to use the information on the website to update customers on service provision in a consistent manner.
- It will save valuable time for those staff that are responsible for making updates to the website and Contact Centre welcome message as all the information will be held in one place.

The Consultation & Communications section now has the ability to update the website by remote working from home and should severe weather prevent officers reaching the workplace during normal working hours, then this facility will be utilised as it will should the Business Continuity Plan be launched.

In Winter 2010/11, a dedicated “severe weather” information area was established on the website, which was clearly signposted from the home page and for the first time, brought together all relevant information regarding changes to service delivery. It is proposed that this is repeated during each period of severe winter weather.

The media will be advised to visit the website for updates about severe weather arrangements, and will be alerted when important updates are published. A press release can be issued to advise residents to visit the website for up-to-date information. In addition, further press releases could then be issued to focus attention on specific initiatives, if deemed appropriate.

Focusing the provision of information on the website will have clear advantages both for customers and Members, who will be able to visit the website for updates at any time. It is hoped that Members will promote this information and the website to their constituents.

“Twitter” will also be utilised (as last year) to enable customers to follow updates/changes to service delivery and to further promote and migrate traffic to the website. It is also proposed, if disruption continues for a lengthy period, that a “Severe Winter Weather” Facebook page be set up if appropriate.

The Assistant Director Street Scene will have twice daily weather updates from colleagues at the County Council; this will also include updates on priority and secondary gritting routes. It should also be noted that due to the introduction of “Zone” refuse and recycling collections, fortunately there will be no changes either this year or next to daily collections over the Christmas period. To avoid

any confusion to residents however, details of this will be updated on the website, the Contact Centre welcome message and within a press release/advert.

Refuse & Recycling calendars that are available to download via the website will have the following strap line inserted on them "Severe weather may affect the usual refuse & recycling collection schedule. Please visit our website www.westlancs.gov.uk for updates during severe weather conditions". Residents will then have prior warning that collections may change and this should hopefully reduce the level of calls made to the Contact Centre.

5.4 **Key Officers**

When the Winter Resilience procedure is put into operation, each Head of Service will identify key officers in each section, to take on the responsibility for proactively reporting updates/changes about their service area. The key officers will provide updates to the Consultation & Communications Manager and the Customer Services Manager at the start of each day and as appropriate during the day. This is essential in order to provide the information needed for the website and for Customer Services. The Consultation & Communications Manager and the Customer Services Manager will then liaise to ensure that information provided through Customer Services and the website is consistent.

5.5 **Operational improvements**

Street Scene. Street Scene services will utilise resources from within Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing to assist with refuse collections and the clearing of town centre hotspots wherever appropriate.

Should there be a period of severe winter weather that due to health and safety concerns dictate service collection changes, the approach adopted over the last two winters will be followed again. This involves prioritising the grey waste collection services and temporarily suspending the green and dry recycle collections. Members can be assured that any decisions will be made in full consultation with Managing Directors and other DSH members. These decisions will be communicated as detailed within this report.

Street Scene services will provide details of areas within the borough where collections are likely to be affected by severe weather and again this will be published on the website.

Annual leave will be restricted within the Street Scene Administration team following the Christmas period to assist with the potential increase in calls to Customer Services.

Customer Services. The Customer Services Manager will arrange training on the Contact Centre's telephony system for the staff within the Street Scene administration team. This will enable those staff to log onto the Contact Centre's telephony system from their own base and deal with the potential increase in enquiries regarding refuse and recycling.

As has been the policy since the formation of the Contact centre, annual leave will be restricted within Customer Services following the Christmas period to help cope with the additional service demand across the Council.

Again, as is normal custom and practice, the Customer Service Point in Skelmersdale will also be utilised as a remote Contact Centre for Customer Services staff that live closer to Skelmersdale. This will reduce the length of time Officers take to reach their usual base in Ormskirk and will potentially reduce the waiting time for many customers when trying to get through to the Council.

Town Centre(s)/Car Park Areas/Leisure Facilities. Ormskirk town centre is an adopted highway and is therefore the responsibility of Lancashire County Council as the highway authority to grit; however, the Council would look to provide assistance with the gritting/clearing of town centre areas dependant on the availability of resources and severity of the weather.

Town centre pay and display car parks will be gritted as normal by a specialist gritting contractor appointed by the Council.

There is a wide variety of leisure facilities available to the public across West Lancashire. Each site and facility will be considered individually and information in relation to access restrictions or closure will be updated on the Council's website. In relation to swimming pools and sports centres, information will also be available through the West Lancashire Community Leisure Trust website.

Staffing levels at leisure facilities will be reviewed during the severe weather period, operational safety and the requirement to restrict the services and facilities; will depend on accessibility for each site and on the availability of staff and supervision required to operate facilities.

Sheltered Housing Accommodation. Pedestrian access from the main highway to the main entrances of Category 2 sheltered accommodation will be checked daily by the caretaking team and cleared of snow and/or gritted as necessary, for the duration of the severe weather period.

Personnel Issues. Again Managers will be asked to refer to the revised "SEVERE WEATHER – WORKING ARRANGEMENTS" policy, which can be accessed via the "Human Resources Documents" section of the intranet.

Lancashire County Council (LCC). LCC have been reviewing their gritting routes and a small number of key routes in West Lancashire have been added and/or have been upgraded from a "Secondary Route" to a "Precautionary (or Primary) Route". Members were also invited by LCC to their "Winter Briefing for Members" on the 10th October. Senior Officers from the Council and LCC have continued to regularly liaise so as to ensure that the services provided are as 'seamless' as possible.

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Winter Resilience arrangements as detailed within this report, will provide clear guidance as to what measures will be put into place in order to deal with severe winter weather issues that may affect or compromise service delivery and to ensure that customers are kept informed in the most effective way.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

7.1 The arrangements contained within this article will help to ensure that the Council's services are, where practically possible, maintained during periods of severe adverse weather conditions.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 During previous periods of adverse weather conditions, additional funding has been drawn upon from reserves. If this requirement proves necessary in the future, it is envisaged that limited funding may again be utilised as agreed between the relevant Portfolio Holder(s) and Joint Managing Directors.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 This item is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment and no changes have been made to registers as a result of this report.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account when undertaking the actions detailed within this article.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment