

Report to	Scrutiny Committee for Economy, Transport and Environment
Date	14 March 2012
Report By	Director of Economy, Transport and Environment
Title of Report	2011/12 Winter Maintenance Service in East Sussex
Purpose of Report	To inform the Committee of the performance of the Winter Maintenance service.

RECOMMENDATION: The Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the contents of the report on the Winter Maintenance Service in East Sussex.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The 2011/12 winter maintenance service budget is £1.59m, of which approximately 60% of the budget is spent on fixed costs, such as the leasing and maintenance of the gritting vehicles, while the remaining 40% is used to fund the gritting operations, i.e. salt and staff salaries.

1.2 The winter of 2011/12 has been exceptionally mild, with the primary gritting network treated only 15 times up till the end of January 2012, and no treatment of our secondary routes. The weather in the first week of February 2012 deteriorated, culminating in a heavy countywide snowfall overnight on the 4 February. From the 1 February to the 8 February the primary gritting network was treated 12 times and the secondary network on a further 8 occasions. However, this is still considerably lower than the 49 combined primary and secondary treatments that would be anticipated during an average winter (Appendix 1).

1.3 Because of the predominantly mild winter, it is currently anticipated that the 2011/12 winter maintenance budget will be underspent by £0.2m. This money has therefore been transferred to the preventative maintenance budget and a programme of patching works implemented to assist in alleviating further the damage caused to the road network during the 2010/11 winter.

1.4 When setting the winter maintenance budget we ensure that there are funds available in the winter maintenance reserve to deal with an average winter. This ensures that there is no adverse impact on other highway maintenance budgets, by removing the possibility of a need to transfer funds and disrupt work programmes. It is intended to continue with this practice for the 2012/13 winter as this is considered the most prudent action in the light of the recent experience. The winter maintenance reserve currently stands at £500,000.

2. Additional Information

2.1 The Scrutiny Meeting of the 14 September 2011 highlighted a few outstanding actions, and progress of the actions is reported in Appendix 2.

2.2 The County Council was prepared for the winter having learned lessons from the previous two winters and having put in place a number of measures to improve communication and readiness, including:-

- we increased the level of salt stocks at the start of the season to 10,000 tonnes, compared with the stock level at the start of the previous winter of 8,000 tonnes. (5,500 tonnes of salt have been used to date with a further 750 tonnes currently on order.);
- Secondary gritting routes had been revised to include all bus routes, and of particular note is the access to the bus depot in Hastings;
- A 'dry run' of the primary and secondary salting routes was completed to ensure that the drivers were thoroughly familiar with any route changes;
- The County's 600 grit bins and over 120 grit tubes (pipes in the hedge) were filled in readiness;
- Over 240 private or local council grit bins were also filled;

- All forms of communications had been reviewed, with the web site updated with the latest information along with changes incorporated to the gritting web map;
- All salting activity is now published on the ESCC website; and
- A Twitter feed, @ESCCroads, has been introduced to try and ensure that the public were better informed of the action the County was proposing or had taken.

2.3 In addition to the above we are constantly working on improvements to our public communications the latest of which has been the posting of our intended winter gritting action on our ESCC website and introduction of our ‘ Gritter Twitter’. Our [@escicroads](#) twitter feed or “Gritter Twitter” really came into it’s own during the snowfall on 5th February and the subsequent freeze. Not only were we able to tell local people what was happening on the roads, but we were also able to respond immediately to people getting in touch with queries and problems. This new service goes from strength to strength and we have had over 1000 followers since its inception.

2.4 The recent snowfall was widely forecast and as such we were able to treat both the primary and secondary routes before hand, thereby ensuring there were adequate levels of salt on the roads. With the implementation of the Control Hub there was improved communications and management of our salting operations. Through the Hub we were aware of the location of gritters and they were able to respond to urgent requests and police calls. The roads were cleared in a short time enabling us to target problematic areas, while borough and district councils worked well to clear pedestrian areas and high streets. There have been positive comments from Councillors, the public and bus companies on the effectiveness of the response. However, we did receive requests from Head Teachers and Councillors asking for school roads to be added to the gritting schedule, and as part of the thermal modelling and route optimization exercise described below we will investigate the number of schools in this position.

2.5 A thermal modelling and route optimization tender has recently been award to Vaisala to introduce further improvements to the winter maintenance service. Road surface temperatures will vary considerably across the county depending upon the construction of the road and its location, leading to differences in the surface temperature throughout the road network. Over the course of the winter the road network is being thermally mapped which will allow the distribution of night time surface temperature differences across the road network to be determined. This information will then be used to optimise our gritting routes and enable us to ensure roads are subsequently treated based on both traffic volume and likelihood to freezing.

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

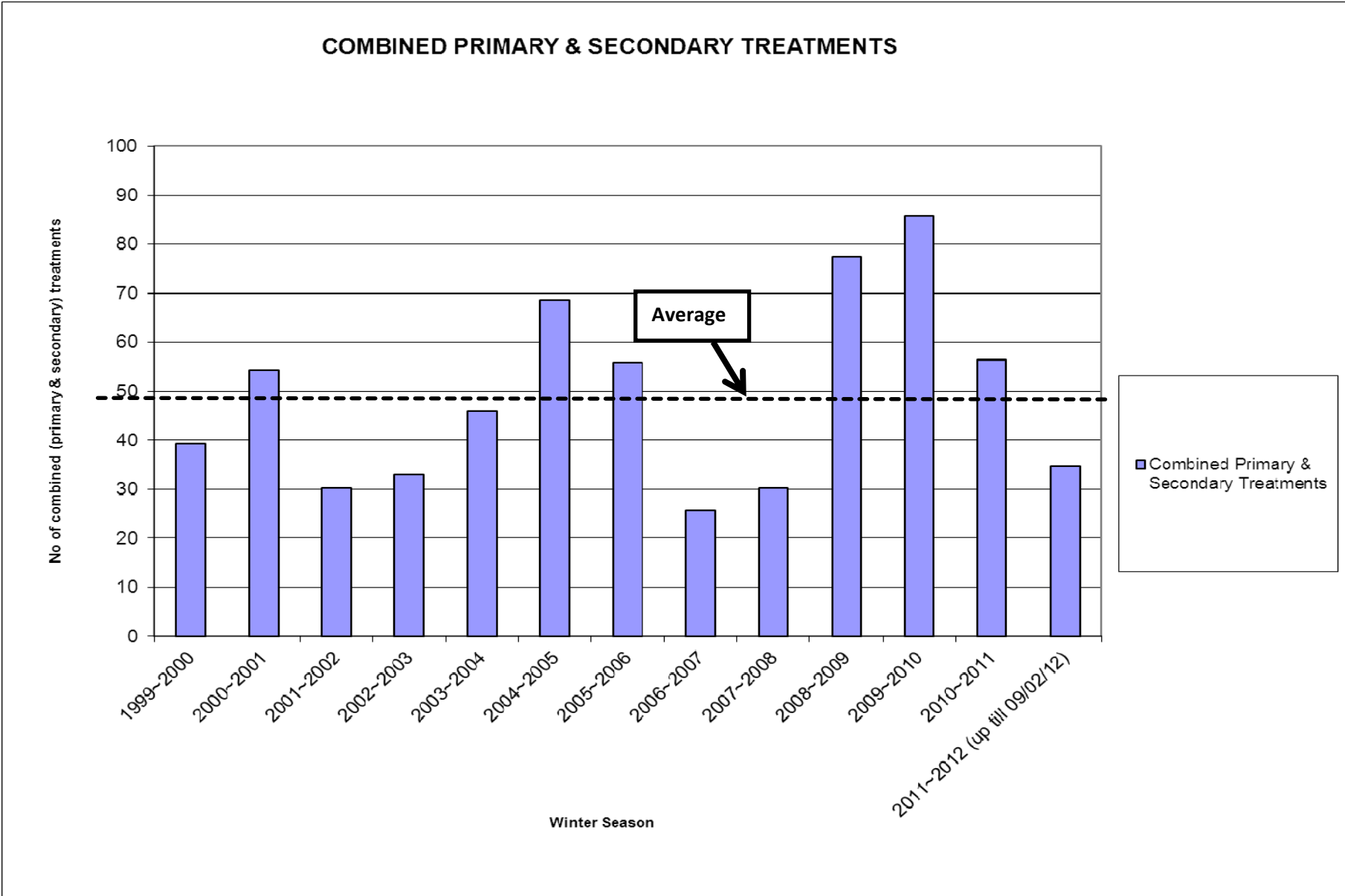
3.1 It is recommended that Scrutiny note the good performance of the winter maintenance service this winter.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Transport & Environment Scrutiny Review of Winter Service in East Sussex – final report dated 15 September 2010 Agenda Item 6
- Report by Director Transport and Environment to Cabinet on Scrutiny Review of Winter Service in East Sussex dated 12 October 2010 Agenda Item 9b
- Report to Scrutiny Committee for Transport & Environment on Scrutiny Review of Winter Service in East Sussex (Six Month monitoring Report) dated 9 March 2011 Agenda Item 6
- Report to Scrutiny Committee for Transport & Environment on Scrutiny Review of Winter Service in East Sussex (Twelve Month monitoring Report) dated 14 September 2011 Agenda Item 8



SCRUTINY MEETING OF THE 14 SEPTEMBER 2011 - OUTSTANDING POINTS & ACTIONS

Outstanding Point	Action / Comment
<p>Ongoing high profile communications and information dissemination is likely to be required to ensure that the <i>community self help</i> message continues to make an impact.</p>	<p>Communications were reviewed and issued with greater emphasis placed on the community self-help message. Regrettably there is little evidence that people in the County are prepared to take action to clear snow and ice from pavements outside their homes and businesses. Town and parish councils also need to be encouraged to be pro-active; they may wish to consider investing in salt spreaders as they are relatively inexpensive and far more effective at spreading salt than a shovel.</p>
<p>Officers are requested to approach May Gurney to assess whether there is any scope to reduce snow plough blade heights safely to reduce the amount of snow left after ploughing; this is primarily a problem on secondary routes.</p>	<p>The contractor was approached and the snow plough blades are set to the manufacturer's approved specification with a clearance of the blade above the road of 40mm though this can be exceeded as it is dependent upon the camber of the road. There is no scope to lower the blades without the potential of causing damage to the road or the gritter vehicle.</p>
<p>The Committee requested a map showing the Council's published gritting routes overlaid with farmers' and contractors' snowplough equipment locations to enable better visualisation of any gaps in winter service provision.</p>	<p>The map has been produced and is contained in Appendix 2, it is considered that we have sufficient farm coverage.</p>
<p>Officers undertook to investigate the feasibility and benefits of contacting farmers and independent contractors who are prepared to use their own equipment voluntarily to help their communities during periods of heavy snow.</p>	<p>Were a farmer or independent contractor to volunteer to deploy their equipment upon the highway, then they would be required to provide the necessary public liability insurance of £10m, whereas farmers who are in the snowplough scheme have been given a partial exemption and currently only need to provide £5m of cover. An appropriate snowplough for use on the highway would cost in the order of £3,500 to purchase and fit to a tractor, there are also annual servicing and repair costs which will depend upon the severity of the winter. The farmer or independent contractor would also have to fund the cost of fuel and labour while undertaking the work. It is therefore considered that volunteer farmers and independent contractors would be severely financially disadvantaged by having to meet the insurance indemnity, the investment in appropriate equipment and operating costs. The practice of providing farmers with snowploughs is seen as the most equitable solution, because the County provides indemnity, covers the cost of equipment and operating costs which ensures that the farmer is not financially disadvantaged.</p>

