

Title of Report:	The Council's response to the severe weather of winter 2010/11
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Meeting:	1 March 2011

Purpose of Report: To review the Council's response to the severe weather experienced during the winter of 2010/11.

Recommended Action: To note the response and consider recommendations for improvement, if appropriate.

Key background documentation: OSMC report dated 02/11/10, the purpose of which was to:

1. Inform of the response to the Commission's recommendations following its review into the severe winter weather of 2009/10.
2. Provide an update on the activity undertaken since the review.
3. To highlight the preparations in place for the coming winter.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Brian Bedwell – Tel (0118) 9420196
E-mail Address:	bbedwell@westberks.gov.uk

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Stephen Chard
Job Title:	Policy Officer (Scrutiny Support)
Tel. No.:	01635 519462
E-mail Address:	schard@westberks.gov.uk

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 18 January 2011 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission approved terms of reference for a review into the Council's response to the severe weather of the winter of 2010/11, and specifically to:
- (1) compare and contrast the experience of the 2010/11 winter with previous severe winter weather events;
 - (2) assess the effectiveness of the recommendations arising from the previous OSMC review;
 - (3) identify further action for possible improvements; and
 - (4) report to the Executive with recommendations for further development.

2. Previous recommendations

- 2.1 The recommendations formed by the OSMC following the review of the 2009/10 winter weather were as follows:
- (1) The Civil Contingencies Manager should establish a policy and process to allow drivers of 4x4 vehicles to assist the Council when required in severe weather. Drivers of these vehicles might be private individuals, taxi operators or farmers. The mechanism should cover:
 - The arrangements to safeguard vulnerable people.
 - How help can be offered.
 - How help can be requested.
 - (2) The Civil Contingencies Manager should formulate a contingency plan specifically to respond to severe weather.
 - (3) The Civil Contingencies Manager should strongly encourage Parish and Town Councils to develop their own severe weather emergency plans.
 - (4) The Civil Contingencies Manager should articulate, develop and communicate the valuable community engagement role for district and town/parish councillors. If necessary training for those involved should be given.
 - (5) Working with the Head of Legal and Electoral Services, the Civil Contingencies Manager should seek clarification on the insurance and other legal liability of individuals and businesses clearing snow from their property or public areas. If a real risk of liability exists then steps should be taken through the national infrastructure to obtain its removal. If no risk exists then a plan to communicate this to the public should be developed and delivered.
 - (6) Working with her counterparts in other organisations, the Civil Contingencies Manager should establish a mechanism for the pooling of resources, such as vehicles or staff, available to local organisations

during severe weather. The arrangements should include procedures for the notification of both supply and demand to be made.

- (7) The Head of Highways and Transport should review the Winter Service Plan, specifically examining:
- The policy in place for the gritting of frequently used pavements, cycle ways and car parks.
 - The amount, type and location of roads to be treated, when and how. Factors to be taken into consideration might include gradient and access to key public services.
 - The appropriateness of contingency plans in place.
- When revised, Ward Members, Parish and Town Councils, other public sector service providers and private sector transport companies should be consulted and encouraged to give their views.
- (8) The Head of Highways and Transport should increase the Council's salt storage to 4,000-5,000 tonnes.
- (9) The Head of Highways and Transport should review the Council's grit bin policy. Consideration should be given to the views of Ward Members and Parish and Town Councils. The policy should address the number, size and location of the salt bins, the arrangements for replenishment and acceptable use of them by the public. The monitoring by Parish and Town Councils of the state and use of bins should also be considered.
- (10) The Head of Highways and Transport should develop and implement an appropriate communication strategy to advise members of the public on the use of salt provided in bins by the Council. Measures might include use of the website and labelling on the bins.
- (11) The Head of Highways and Transport should establish a mechanism to allow the engagement of local farmers to provide assistance in the clearance of roads, particularly in rural environments.
- (12) Working with the Civil Contingencies Manager, the Head of Highways and Transport should establish procedures to allow the redirection of staff from their normal duties to snow clearance in the event of severe winter weather. Staff should be drawn from waste collection teams and assistance may be available externally from Neighbourhood Wardens, the fire service and elsewhere.
- (13) The Head of Adult Social Care should establish a mechanism to allow the authority to provide assistance to vulnerable people not already in receipt of help from the Council. This might include:
- Identifying those in need, for example through Parish and Town Councils or GPs.
 - Advising them how to request help and when.
 - Identifying and recording the details of those in local communities able and willing to provide assistance.

- The measures that should be taken to ensure the safety of the vulnerable is maintained.

- (14) Building on the good work undertaken during the severe weather, the Head of Adult Social Care should examine the opportunities for further provision of mutual aid between the authority and private sector social care providers. A protocol governing the arrangements should be agreed and put in place.
- (15) The Head of Education should share with all schools the results of the consultation undertaken to identify what worked well in schools and what lessons could be learnt.
- (16) The Head of Education should examine the opportunities for schools to adopt a mutual aid scheme that would allow members of staff who are unable to reach their usual place of work in severe weather to report to their nearest school. Advice on the practical application of the scheme might be obtained from Thames Valley Police.
- (17) The Head of Education should encourage all schools to adopt a severe weather plan. The plans might include:
- A resource plan.
 - Mutual aid.
 - Communications with the public
- (18) The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission should write to the Secretary of State for Health to request that any financial penalties applied to the South Central Ambulance Service in respect of their failure to meet attendance time targets arising from the severe weather be dropped.
- (19) In order to avert gridlock caused by many organisations simultaneously sending home their employees early in the event of severe weather, Thames Valley Police should develop and when necessary implement procedures to ensure that the numbers of vehicles entering the road network are appropriately controlled.

2.2 The Commission's recommendations and the response to them were noted by the Executive and supported in their completion. Further detail was shared with the Commission at its meeting on 2 November 2010. This included the response from Thames Valley Police to recommendation 19. A response has since been received from the Department of Health to recommendation 18, this is attached at Appendix A for the Commission's information.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Council's Civil Contingencies Manager and Heads of Service, including Education, Highways & Transport and Property & Public Protection have been invited to the meeting to give evidence and answer questions, as have relevant Portfolio Holders.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Commission notes the response and considers recommendations for improvement, if appropriate.

Appendices

Appendix A – Response from the Department of Health to recommendation 18.
