

WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

AGENDA ITEM No. 11

MEETING: ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 13TH OCTOBER 2021

REPORTED BY: WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT MANAGER

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update members regarding discussions with officers from Durham County Council regarding the future of the Service Level Agreement for Winter Maintenance.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The initial Service Level Agreement (SLA) was established in 2005, when the Town Council, along with all other parish and town councils, was asked by Durham County Council to consider assisting with snow clearance to footpaths and to fill salt bins within their parish to free up DCC resources to be able to respond to emergency requests in such locations as doctor's surgery, care homes etc.

2.2 The original agreement was refreshed in 2012 and now forms the basis of the SLA between the two Councils.

2.3 A copy of the Agreement is attached to the report as Appendix 1.

2.4 As part of the agreement, equipment such as ploughs, and salt spreaders were supplied to the Council via a grant so that operatives could complete the work in a safe and efficient manner.

2.5 Unfortunately since this time due to the nature of the work and the fact that salt is used on metal equipment in wet and harsh conditions, all the original equipment is either broken or past its best.

2.6 The only compatible machine to operate the original equipment is a 25-year-old mini tractor. Its sole use is to be used on the work required of this SLA and is not used for any other Town Council business. It is in very poor condition and one substantial breakdown from being scrap value. On this basis it is not appropriate that Town Council funds should be used to replace this machine considering it is only used for the SLA.

2.7 At the Environment Committee meeting on the 24th February 2021, it was reported that Council Operatives had found it difficult to clear snow from all the agreed routes and meet the requirements of the SLA during recent prolonged heavy snowfall due to the lack of equipment and machinery available to staff as indicated in Clause 5 – Financial Arrangements, of the Agreement.

- 2.8 Following discussions at the meeting, officers were asked to undertake a review of the provision of the Winter Maintenance Service Level Agreement in place with Durham County Council, and report back to a future meeting of the Environment Committee, outlining the provision of suitable equipment and whether the Town Council can then continue to clear the footpaths as defined in the agreement, as well as filling 70+ salt bins, together with undertaking snow clearance on Town Council footpaths and facilities.

3.0 Current Situation and Progress

- 3.1 In May 2021 a constructive conversation took place with the Senior Highway engineer responsible for winter maintenance in relation to reviewing the service level agreement.
- 3.2 During the meeting it was pointed out that whilst the Town Council are willing to continue to assist the County Council to clear priority footpaths along Pease Way, Stephenson Way, St Cuthbert Way and Central Avenue, it is the responsibility of Durham County Council to supply the necessary resources such as salt, machinery, and training to complete the task effectively.
- 3.3 At the time it was stated that the County Council do not currently have a dedicated budget to facilitate this type of partnership work, but it was subsequently confirmed by the above Engineer that he had attended meetings with his management and was hopeful of some positive news regarding securing suitable funding.
- 3.4 At the time it was discussed that the most cost-effective solution would be to purchase a plough and salt spreader, potentially for both of the Council's Road going Kubota RTV's, so that existing machinery can then be utilised. The cost to purchase one plough and spreader is £5,500, and to provide equipment for both machines would be approximately £11,000.
- 3.5 Unfortunately this was in May and despite regular requests for updates the manager has been unable to confirm that suitable funding has been identified. During the last email correspondence, it was stated that the request was with a Strategic Manager or Corporate Director.
- 3.6 Due to time constraints, it is important to bring this issue to Members' attention currently, because winter is fast approaching. In addition, it is known that currently there can be significant time delays for the delivery of similar pieces of equipment and so it is important to note that ordering any equipment is time critical to ensure the effective delivery of the existing Winter Maintenance Service Level Agreement.

4.0 Impact on Great Aycliffe Town Council

- 4.1 Clearly, the Town Council would wish to continue to assist with snow clearance on major thoroughfares within the town, as well as filling salt bins for the benefit of its residents.
- 4.2 However, to do this and fulfil its own responsibilities on Town Council owned land and property, it is essential that suitable equipment to undertake snow clearance and gritting on long stretches of public footpath is made available from DCC, as per the SLA.

- 4.3 If equipment or funding for equipment is not forthcoming, the Council is unlikely to be able to fulfil the requirements of the SLA this winter.

5.0 Policy Implications

- 5.1 This report complies with the Council's Strategic Aims 1, 2 and 6:-

Aim No. 1. – to provide good quality governance and management of the Council.

Aim No. 2. -To Manage the Council's Finances and Assets in a Responsible Manner.

Aim No. 6: To help and encourage partnership working to improve the services and facilities for the residents of Great Aycliffe.

6.0 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 If the SLA is to be continued staff will continue clearing Durham County Council paths along Pease Way, Stephenson Way, St Cuthbert Way and Central Avenue.

- 6.2 If the SLA is discontinued staff will be redeployed to focus more attention on ensuring all Town Council owned footpaths are cleared, before dropping onto any other outstanding winter maintenance works.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Under the existing SLA, the County Council provide the Town Council with sufficient salt to fulfil the duties including clearing and salting the main pedestrian routes of the town and replenishing the numerous salt bins around the parish. In addition, a small amount of salt is spread on Town Council land to ensure safety.

- 7.2 If the SLA was to cease the Town Council would need to purchase additional salt to ensure Town Council land was cleared appropriately.

8.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

- 8.1 None

9.0 Equal Opportunity Implications

- 9.1 None

10.0 Environment and Climate Change Implications

- 10.1 There are no environmental Implications directly linked to the negotiations regarding the SLA continuation, however, there may be future environmental considerations regarding the continuing use of salt. This may include salt leeching into the soil and water courses and there is a further question regarding the use of salt as it is a natural finite resource.

11.0 Risk Assessment

11.1 It is not considered that the matters contained in this report poses a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.

12.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

12.1 Is any personal or sensitive data required for this proposal which may have any implications for GDPR? **NO**

13.0 Recommendations

13.1 It is recommended that:

- Members receive the report
- Members advise Officers on how to proceed on this matter.

Works and Environment Manager