

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

02 February 2010

### Report of the Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### Matters for Information

#### 1 ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS - THE IMPACT UPON BOROUGH COUNCIL SERVICES

##### Summary

**A report to highlight issues that arose during the two bouts of recent heavy snowfall.**

- 1.1.1 The two recent bouts of heavy snowfall prior to Christmas and in January created severe problems at a national, regional and local level. This brief report highlights for Cabinet Members the issues that arose locally and affected the Borough Council.
- 1.1.2 Whilst the two events were similar in intensity, there were clear differences largely as a result of lessons learned from the pre-Christmas event. It is therefore appropriate to focus on each separately.
- 1.1.3 The pre-Christmas event involved heavy snowfall across the south east region and West Kent suffered severe traffic disruption. The County Council prioritised its gritting efforts on key primary routes meaning that side roads and lesser routes were untreated and for many became impassable. Very little if any treatment of footways was undertaken and offers by this Council to provide resources to assist in treating footways were not taken up. This resulted in numerous complaints and the PCT has advised that there was a significant increase in fractures and other injuries resulting from falls on untreated surfaces.
- 1.1.4 The main problems this Council initially faced was the inability of the vast bulk of its staff to reach their place of work. There was some uncertainty amongst staff as to whether they should be attempting to drive in the conditions given the police warnings to travel only if the journey was essential.
- 1.1.5 Nevertheless, a sufficient number of staff reached the Kings Hill offices to enable a skeleton service to be delivered under the direction of 2 Directors who were on-site. The Tonbridge Gateway was manned and three leisure facilities were able to open. There were some issues connected to our ability to receive telephone calls as a result of experienced customer services staff not being

present and the consequential inability of those staff present to retrieve the system from its out of hours service mode.

- 1.1.6 It was necessary to suspend refuse and street cleansing services and this clearly had implications because of the ensuing Christmas holiday period.
- 1.1.7 A major issue was the fact that we had no salt supplies or effective plans in place to treat the car parks across the Borough. This resulted in a number of complaints being received and was a consequence of an oversight following the ending of the Highways Agency in 2005 for which I apologise.
- 1.1.8 Once I was able to assemble all Directors and Chief Officers I held a review meeting to learn lessons from the pre-Christmas event and established more robust contingency plans, which stood us in good stead for the second serious fall of snow that began on the night of 5 January.
- 1.1.9 The key actions that were installed were:-
- § A secure part of our website was established that staff could access to receive guidance from senior management on our expectations of them in the light of the prevailing weather conditions.
  - § A text messaging service was set up to enable similar messages to be sent to staff who signed up. Currently we have over 250 staff who receive these messages in adverse weather conditions.
  - § Staff who live in reasonable proximity to Kings Hill were identified and approached and with their agreement trained to operate the main switchboard.
  - § Staff were encouraged to pre-plan home working where weather forecasts indicated there might be disruption to travel.
  - § An urgent review of how to deal with heavy snow in our car parks was commissioned.
- 1.1.10 In consequence of these actions we were better prepared for the second event. The offices were opened on time and the switchboard manned throughout. Staff were given advice on whether to travel to the offices or not on a daily basis through the secure area of the website and text messages. Staff have been very positive about this and have heeded the advice given.
- 1.1.11 KCC for this event sought assistance from the Council and refuse, street cleansing and ground maintenance operatives were put at KCC's disposal to assist with salting, gritting and clearing. The result was a far better outcome in respect of footway clearance and we were also able to do a far better job in the majority of our car parks.

- 1.1.12 Refuse operations were especially problematic and had to be suspended for a number of days. Every effort was made to keep residents and Members informed of our plans for catching up on missed properties by providing regular updates via our website and local media. All things considered, these worked well and comparatively few complaints were received.
- 1.1.13 As was well reported, a major civil emergency was declared in Kent which enabled military assistance to be sought for the Fire and Rescue Service and in support of delivery of meals to vulnerable people in isolated locations. This Council was linked in to the Gold Command chaired by an Assistant Chief Constable but no significant issues arose for us.
- 1.1.14 At all times, I and the designated Duty Director were in communication with fellow Directors and Chief Officers and the Council's response to the situation was, in my view, well and effectively co-ordinated. Further reviews have been held and our business continuity plans are being updated to reflect lessons learned.
- 1.1.15. Clearly, the overall most serious issue was treatment of the highway network and footways and KCC is holding a review to learn lessons for the future. Districts will be involved with this review and I am sure better plans will be in place to deal with future heavy snowfalls.
- 1.1.16 Further reports will be put to the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board on the car parks issue and the Local Environmental Advisory Board on the refuse, recycling and street cleansing issues that arose.
- 1.1.17 Members will be aware that it was deemed necessary by me, in consultation with the Leader, to cancel some meetings and these have been rearranged. There has been some impact upon a number of Services where backlogs have arisen as a result of staff being unable to attend work but this has been contained through home working arrangements wherever possible.
- 1.1.18 Finally, I must pay tribute to the Council's staff who did everything possible to provide services to the community in very challenging circumstances. A significant number made exceptional contributions that reflected the highest ethos of public service. I would also like to pay tribute to my fellow Directors and Chief Officers who provided leadership of the highest order in difficult circumstances. The support of Members was also exceptional and for that my colleagues and I are extremely grateful.

## **2.1 Policy Considerations**

A review of business continuity plans is needed in the light of lessons learned.

## **3.1 Legal Implications**

None

#### **4.1 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

The weather has affected income streams at leisure centres, the golf course and in car parks. This will need to be addressed in our financial planning.

#### **5.1 Risk Assessment**

A review of our business continuity plans and risk register is needed otherwise service failures could arise from future extreme weather events.

Background papers:

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Nil

David Hughes  
Chief Executive