

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee

DATE: 13th October 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Policy and Resources

SUBJECT: Winter Maintenance – Weather Forecasting and Data Collection

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report requests authorisation to enter contracts for weather forecasting and data collection, utilising joint collaborative arrangements with Cheshire East, Cheshire West & Chester and Warrington Councils.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the Sub-Committee agrees to subscribe to a 3 year (plus the option of a 1 year extension) contract, utilising joint collaborative arrangements, for weather forecasting until March 31st 2014; and**
- 2) the Sub-Committee agrees to subscribe to a 3 year (plus the option of a 1 year extension) contract, utilising joint collaborative arrangements, for data collection until March 31st 2014.**

3.0 BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The current winter maintenance contracts under collaborative arrangements between Cheshire East / Cheshire West & Chester / Warrington / Halton are as follows:

- Weather data collection / weather station maintenance – expired 31/03/11
- Weather forecasting – expired 31/03/11

3.1.2 Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester Councils have successfully let and awarded a contract for data collection, which has been won by Vaisala Ltd.

3.1.3 Cheshire East and Chester West & Chester Councils have also successfully let and awarded a contract for weather forecasting, which has been won by the Met Office.

3.2 Weather Forecasting & Data Collection

- 3.2.1 Halton undertakes a winter service that is effective in treating the network for snow and ice. The operational aspects of the service fully meet both the demands of the Highways Act 1980 and also the requirements and obligations of the Code of Practice for Highway Management.
- 3.2.2 Delivery of the service requires firstly an accurate and timely prediction of forthcoming road surface conditions and secondly the ability to spread road salt / grit to prevent and / or assist the dispersion of accumulated snow or ice.
- 3.2.3 The first requirement is met by means of a system of sensors embedded in the road surface at 2 locations within the Borough. Instruments mounted at the roadside at these locations then collect real time data relating to the weather conditions within Halton. The system is supplied and installed by Vaisala Ltd, a specialist company who collect and process the data before supplying it to the Met Office. This information allows for site specific forecasts to be prepared by the Met Office giving detailed guidance on the probable short term conditions in Halton. Call out staff have direct access to forecasters and can discuss the situation before making the decision whether to mobilise the gritting crews.
- 3.2.4 Based on the percentages used to calculate last year's figures for the cost of the two contracts, it is anticipated that the amount for 2011/12 will be approximately £15,000. This is a saving on last year of £10,000.
- 3.2.5 Warrington BC is also utilising the joint collaborative arrangements for weather forecasting and data collection with the Cheshire Councils and Halton BC, until 31st March 2014.
- 3.2.6 It is therefore proposed that the Council also continues to utilise the joint collaborative arrangements for weather forecasting and data collection with the Cheshire Council's and Warrington BC until 31st March 2014.
- 3.2.7 The contract with both of the Cheshire Councils, together with Warrington and Halton Borough Councils, is in keeping with the joint collaborative arrangements for Winter Maintenance highlighted during the Winter Resilience Reviews of 2008/09 and 2009/10.
- 3.3.8 The Council's Procurement Team have been involved throughout these negotiations are happy to support the collaborative arrangements.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has a duty to provide a properly planned and resourced Winter Maintenance service. Failure to provide such would breach this duty and place the Council liable to legal action.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource / Financial Implications

Not having the ability to accurately forecast and respond to severe weather in accordance with the Winter Maintenance Plan could leave the authority vulnerable to increased liabilities relating to insurance claims from road users.

5.2 Children and Young People in Halton

Winter Maintenance operations affect all service users alike. There are no specific issues applicable to children and young people.

5.3 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

An effective winter maintenance service can assist businesses in continuing to operate through adverse weather conditions by allowing access to employment centres and helping with vehicle movements / deliveries. Winter maintenance is vital in ensuring that business and places of learning are not restricted by the weather conditions.

5.4 A Safer Halton

Whilst the Council cannot undertake to protect all road users from risk, the procedures and measures in place show that careful planning can minimize risk.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Helping businesses and other employers to continue to function during times of adverse weather could reflect on the borough and assist in its continuing regeneration.

5.6 Sustainability

Extended gritting treatment of footways during the winter season will promote walked journeys and reduce reliance upon motor vehicles. Effective weather forecasting will minimize the number of treatments undertaken and thus reduce salt pollution of water courses and drainage systems.

5.7 Legal Implications

The development and application of the Winter Maintenance Plan ensures that Halton continues to meet its legal obligations.

5.8 Social Inclusion

Winter Maintenance operations affect all service users alike. Enhanced gritting of footways will benefit particularly those with limited access to motor vehicles by providing safe access to the public transportation systems.

5.9 Crime and Disorder

There are no specific implications.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 Failure to meet our legal obligations would expose the Council to considerable financial risk from litigation.

6.2 This operation ensures as far as practicable, the safety of the public and reduces potential damage to infrastructure and property.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no equality and diversity implications.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- Well Maintained Highways - The Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management 2005
- Halton Borough Council Highway Maintenance Strategy Document, 1998
- Halton Borough Council Winter Maintenance Plan 2008-2009
- Highways Act 1980
- Railways and Transport Act 2003

Place of Inspection: Rutland House

Contact Officer: Ian Munro