

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

**ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AD HOC
PANEL - WINTER SERVICE PLAN REVIEW**

10.00am 17 MARCH 2010

COMMITTEE ROOM 1, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor

Also in attendance: Councillor Janio, Morgan, Rufus and Watkins

Other Members present: Councillors

PART ONE

1. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1.1 Councillor Warren Morgan welcomed the panel, officers, witnesses and members of the public to the one day ad hoc Scrutiny Panel set up to review the Winter Service Plan. He explained that the Environment & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee had already looked at the council's response to the severe weather in depth and that the purpose of the day was to look at constructive ideas that could improve the Winter Service Plan in the future. He stressed the aim was not to assign blame or field individual complaints.

2. CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

2.1 There were none.

3. TO NOTE EXISTING INFORMATION

3.1 Noted.

4. EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FROM COUNCILLORS

Councillor Geoffrey Theobald, Cabinet Member for Environment.

4.1 Councillor Geoffrey Theobald said that the Winter Service Plan was put on the website in December 2009 and before it was approved at the Environment CMM on 5 November 2009, both the Labour and Green Group were briefed by officers and no one raised concerns at the meeting.

4.2 The weather was unusual, especially in the hills around Brighton & Hove. Residents in Ditchling Road claimed it was the worst they had experienced. The duration of the weather and the freezing daytime temperatures were the main reasons for the unprecedented snow and ice.

4.3 The Winter Service Plan calls for gritting all A, B and C roads and the bus network. This meant that residential roads were only gritted if they were on the bus network, although most dwellings are near to bus stops.

4.4 There are 3880 roads and streets in Brighton & Hove, enough to stretch to Inverness; therefore it is not possible to grit them all. If roads were gritted on an individual basis there would be an issue of liability.

4.5 The key to successful gritting is to compact the grit and salt once it has been laid. Buses are heavy vehicles and are suited to such a role. Therefore the Brighton & Hove Bus Company is a key partner as their fleet helps to keep the roads clear and get people to work.

4.6 Residents of Carden and Mackey Avenue were unclear why buses were unable to service their roads even though they were flat. This was because Brighton & Hove Bus Company health and safety protocol dictates what roads their buses can go down. If a bus is unable to safely turn around on a road, they have to terminate before they reach it. The council was working with the bus company to enable them to turn around on alternate routes and to ensure bus stops were gritted.

4.7 Brighton & Hove has a large number of hills and it is difficult for heavy vehicles to run on them. In spite of this all partners worked extremely well in executing the Winter Service Plan.

4.8 Councillor Theobald stated that at the last Budget Council (25 February 2010) the Conservatives alone voted for an additional £100 000 per year for the Winter Service Plan and a one off £204 000 payment.

4.9 Councillor Theobald placed on record his gratitude, admiration and thanks to staff who were on standby or who worked through the night or who went beyond their contracted duties (such as Cityparks and Cityclean workers) to help the community with jobs such as clearing pavements.

4.10 Councillor Theobald noted that community groups such as the Hollingbury LAT had commented on the real community spirit of people who helped during the snow.

4.11 There needs to be greater clarity regarding the liability and responsibility of people clearing the pavements in front of their house. There needs to be a clear message that people will not be liable for injuries and the LGA is working on this.

4.12 Overall, communications were better during the second snowfall in January.

4.13 The council is fortunate to have a good relationship with its city partners and it is important to have provisions within future plans to keep the schools, police stations, hospitals and bus stops gritted.

Panel Questions

4.14 Councillor Morgan noted how he wished for party politics to be left out of the panel.

4.15 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Councillor Geoffrey Theobald in italics.

1) Councillor Morgan: Is the extra money for the Winter Service Plan already budgeted or could it be used for other recommendations?

The additional £100 000 is an ongoing amount in the revenue budget for the Winter Service Plan.

2) Councillor Morgan: Within that money is there scope for any other recommendations made during this panel? E.g. additional vehicles.

Vehicles come out of capital, e.g. the £204 000 one-off payment or from borrowing. Ideas such as more suitable locations for buses to turn around may cost no extra. I look forward to hearing suggestions from the public and panel on how to use the extra resources as long as they are realistically achievable within the hills and road network of the city.

3) Councillor Morgan: The aim of this panel is to come forward with ideas that are proportionate to risks and to create a sliding scale of recommendations from no additional costs to a snowplough for every street.

Snowploughs would be too wide to clear narrow roads.

4) Councillor Morgan: There are vehicles that can be adapted or specialist vehicles which can clear narrow roads, we can look at the possibility of using them.

5) Councillor Rufus: No one raised issue with the WSP because no one foresaw the weather in December and January. Was the targeting of the resources available the best use of the money? E.g. targeting roads over pavements, even though everyone uses pavements but not everyone has cars.

With hindsight were all outlying areas given enough attention? The targeting of the centre of the city would be wasteful if no one in outlying areas could reach it.

The potential for further discussions with the bus company sounds promising, how could you prioritise pedestrians and public transport?

Brighton & Hove is hilly so buses are essential for two reasons:

- *They transport people (including essential workers) throughout the city.*
- *They are heavy and so impact the grit and help it to work.*

If the routes of buses could be extended it would be very helpful but we may never be able to reach people at the very top of hills. Although we cannot directly grit roads on non-bus routes, most people are still within walking distance of a bus stop.

Prioritising main roads and bus routes is still the most effective use of resources although we will respond to suggestions from the police.

Where we could improve our service is to allocate some of the additional revenue to grit bus stops more thoroughly to ensure people are able to use the buses during severe winter weather. We have a very good relationship with the Brighton & Hove Bus Company and are in constant contact with them during severe weather events.

6) Councillor Rufus: Agenda Item 3a (3.2) says the council treats 40% of its highway network, is it the right 40%?

We will look to see if it is the right 40%. We can always look at instances like this in hindsight and learn lessons; officers will go through the plan and make sure it was the right 40% and I will ask them for their response. We need to have a plan and we need to be clear to the public what roads we treat and why.

7) Councillor Watkins: The WSP has been more than adequate for the conditions of the last 20 years; however it should be seen as a "Phase 1". Is there a "Phase 2 & 3" for more severe weather? Staff in December seemed caught out; whereas staff in January showed that they can perform well if they are lead in the right direction. So next winter, will there be a "Phase 2"?

In December nobody predicted freezing daytime weather, which began on the Friday and lasted over the weekend, when staff numbers were lowest. In addition, transferring staff from one job to another required cooperation. Next year, having had the experience of severe weather on a Friday we will look to have staff from other departments on stand by over the weekend to quickly transfer to their snow duties, as they had been by Monday 21 December.

8) Councillor Watkins: When we ask staff to change their duties to help with the WSP it should be in a controlled environment and we should build flexibility into their work so they can carry out both duties.

9) Councillor Janio: We were caught out the first time and changes were made so that the response to the second snowfall in January was a lot better. This is the nature of plans; you cannot know what will happen until it is fully tested and we can always learn from our experiences afterwards. A number of residents have made suggestions about changing gritting routes and the location of grit bins, how are these fed into the system?

We have to have a plan and it has to be one that officers will have thoroughly looked at. We would not necessarily change gritting routes as the current routes are meaningful and rely on heavy traffic or buses to compact grit and salt.

10) Councillor Janio: It is good that there has been no knee jerk reaction. The routes have been scientifically planned but they have not had the input of personal experiences, which we now have. These could be used to feed into future route planning. How do you explain the gritting routes to residents?

When it is explained to residents why we gritted certain routes they almost always accept the reasons as people tend to understand the situation when it is explained to them what is and is not possible. We should work on how to brief LAT, Older Peoples' Council and other community groups to explain the reasons how and why the council grit the highway network as they do. Communications are an important factor and were far better in January than

December. Giving out information is also very useful, e.g. advising residents to buy provisions in anticipation of severe weather.

11) Councillor Morgan: During the snow events people expected to be dug from their homes by the council. There is an expectation that if snow persists the council will do its best to help residents. The remit of this panel is to see if there are other ways of advising people on how to cope.

City News is a valuable tool and information on how to deal with snow could be published in the Nov/Dec issue.

5. EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FROM OFFICERS

Thurstan Crockett, Head of Sustainability and Environmental Policy.

5.1 Thurstan Crockett explained that he was to give evidence to the panel under the remit listed in 3.8 of Agenda Item 3b, “the predicted regularity of severe winter weather” he made the point that it was both difficult and dangerous to predict weather beyond the very short term.

5.2 He explained that observed trends have shown that the planet’s climate has increased by 0.8 degrees Celsius since the late 19th Century. Furthermore, the International Panel for Climate Change put the probability of this increase being due to man-made emissions at >90%. Based on sound science, climate projections by Oxford University suggest at least another 1 degree Celsius of warming by 2050.

5.3 He referred to 3.11 of Agenda Item 3a which explains that winter weather in the South East of England is particularly hard to predict due to the prominence of “marginal nights” where it is unclear if the temperature will drop below zero.

5.4 Winters are usually mild in the UK due to the prevailing South-Westerly wind. During December and January this was blocked by Arctic airflow which caused the freezing temperatures. Consequently this tells us nothing of climate change, only the variability of weather.

5.5 The Met Office is no longer producing long term weather forecasts for the reason that weather is so unpredictable in the long term (as was shown over the winter, which was predicted to be mild) and even in the short term it is unpredictable and based on local variables.

5.6 Climate should be seen as average, long term weather and the impacts of climate change are highly uncertain. UKCP09 creates the most widely used projections of climate in the UK and it advises there will be, “a reduction in frost days and snow cover”. However the UKCP09 only makes projections for the catch-all, “precipitation” rather than snowfall specifically as they cannot reliably predict snowfall.

5.7 UKCP09's low emissions projections for winters in the South East of England during the 2020s suggest a high probability of an increase of 1.3 degree Celsius in average temperature and a 7% increase in precipitation, in other words: warmer and wetter winters. Under the medium and high emission scenarios, this effect is expected to be more pronounced.

5.8 As a council, we need to do more work to try to analyse projections for the frequency and severity of all extreme weather incidents locally, including snowfall. The ad hoc Climate Change Panel is nearing a conclusion and funding has been acquired for the council to carry out a Local Climate Impacts Profile (LCLIP). A LCLIP should help improve the city's understanding of a range of climate change impact risks, including freezing temperatures and potentially heavy snowfall and help us plan more effectively for them, improving local resilience.

5.9 In summary, climate change is happening and the scale and impact is difficult to predict but the projections from the LCLIP should help us to plan more effectively.

Panel Questions

5.10 Councillor Morgan reminded the panel that its remit was not to look at the wider issue of climate change.

5.11 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Thurstan Crockett in italics.

1) Councillor Sven Rufus: The issues faced by climate change are clear. The scrutiny panel should consider how the council can be more flexible when responding to severe weather rather than planning ahead if climate projections suggest fewer instances of severe snow events but the possibility they could still happen.

2) Councillor Morgan: Does Brighton has a micro climate due to the proximity of the South Downs and the English Channel? If so, did that explain why the weather in December was exceptional whereas in January it was similar to the rest of the country?

A meteorologist or weather expert would need to answer that question.

3) Councillor Tony Janio: If climate projections show that the frequency of severe snow events is not going to increase, the severe snow event over the winter may have been a special circumstance and it may be unwise to invest too heavily in planning for future events.

One of the impacts of climate change is the disruption of weather patterns, making extreme weather events more frequent. However, it is uncertain whether this would manifest itself in more frequent extreme snow events such as those during the winter. The probability is that it will not, although it would not be safe to assume so.

4) Councillor Janio: Is it true that if higher precipitation is projected but temperatures rise, it is more likely that winter precipitation will fall as rain?

There is expected to be a steady, slight increase in warm and wet weather during the winter. Projections point to there being a noticeable increase from the 2020s.

5) Councillor Morgan: Is there anything in the projections to suggest a future increase in Arctic air flow disrupting the prevailing weather patterns?

There are no such projections.

6) Councillor David Watkins: Do the UCKP09 projections point to severe weather being more severe?

The projections point to more severe weather more often.

7) Councillor Watkins: When we plan for more severe conditions, it may be for more than the usual amount of snow?

Future weather projections do not predict more snow.

**Mark Prior, Assistant Director, Sustainable Transport.
Christina Liassides, Head of Network Management.
Gillian Marston, Assistant Director, Cityclean & Cityparks.**

5.12 Putting the council's experience over December and January in perspective, Mark Prior quoted the Met Office, who had announced the winter of 2009/10 to have been the coldest for over 30 years.

5.13 In spite of this, due to the procedure, training and staff, Brighton & Hove City Council was ready for the snow in December and mobilised their resources in accordance with the Winter Service Plan (WSP). Before the snow fell on Thursday 17 December 2009, the road network was gritted at 2:00pm, 4:00pm and 8:00pm and treated continuously throughout the night into Friday 18 December. However the freezing daytime temperatures meant that the process was not very effective.

5.14 Staff worked 24/7 gritting the highway network and staff from Cityclean, Cityparks, and parking contractors helped the operation. The WSP had been tested before and resources were used extensively.

5.15 Important lessons were learned:

- Close working and hourly communications with Brighton & Hove Bus Company were essential.
- The bus network provided a vital service by getting people to work and providing heavy vehicles to help with the gritting process.
- Working with media outlets – radio, television and the BHCC website provided timely updates to residents and officers.
- Residents voiced the opinion that they wanted more of the highway network gritted. However 40% coverage is higher than adjacent authorities and the steep roads in many areas of Brighton & Hove make further gritting impractical.

5.16 Innovation and good practice was also observed:

- Council officers used new media tools to disseminate information e.g. YouTube.

- Close work with the bus company led to certain buses having snow chains attached to help break up the ice and the bus company advised the council which routes were most suitable for their fleet.
- The government told local authorities to ration the use of salt; BHCC diluted its salt supplies with grit and other materials which extended the stock.
- BHCC opened up its Traffic Control Centre to the bus company so they could keep their bus drivers regularly informed of any impassable roads.

5.17 Mark Prior hoped the panel would recognise some of the examples of good practice and emphasised the key point that the WSP was fit for purpose and staff did their utmost to keep it fully operational.

5.18 Councillor Morgan went on record thanking all staff for their involvement.

5.19 Christina Liassides explained that her team coordinated the WSP and pointed to the information in Item 5 of the agenda for how they operate road gritting, pavement gritting and grit bin refilling.

5.20 The cost of grit bins increases exponentially. The more grit bins there are the more staff are required to fill them and the more grit is needed to fill them. The same applies to gritting the highway network; extra fuel, drivers and machines are needed to keep more routes open.

5.21 There also needs to be a sensible window of opportunity to do things; road routes need to be of a certain length to be successful and it takes 10-12 days to refill all 350 grit bins.

5.22 Highways and City Services tried their best to keep grit bins filled over Christmas and the New Year but may have missed the occasional bin. If more were to be put in place there would need to be more resources to fill them over a similar time frame.

5.23 The annual budget for the WSP is £227 000. Usually the WSP allows for money to be put into a contingency fund for future events. This contingency is only used for severe winters and was used this year.

5.24 There are annual fixed costs of £75 000 - £85 000 which include weather forecasting, vehicles servicing and weather station maintenance that are required even during mild winters. The rest is spent on running costs, which includes supplies such as grit and salt and the fuelling and maintenance of vehicles.

5.25 The two snow events are estimated to have cost £312 000 (on pavement clearance and salt supplies etc.) so the contingency fund is low and is due to be topped up by funds voted at Budget Council and left unless needed in the future.

5.26 The WSP was forwarded to other authorities such as the NHS, police and fire service and it was made clear through dialogue that there would be disruption in the event of heavy snowfall.

5.27 The need to clear pavements has not traditionally been a major issue as usually snow and ice melts after a short period of time. The treatment of pavements is not specified by the audit commission or in previous government guidelines; therefore it has been a learning curve dealing with a new issue. Pavements are traditionally less affected as they are closer to

buildings and are therefore warmer. Grit bins in the past have usually only been requested for roads and roads are considered a priority because of the danger of out-of-control vehicles.

5.28 Cristina Liassides went on record to say that her team did not forget pavements in spite of also concentrating on the road network. Under difficult conditions at the Hollingdean Depot and out on the road network, the Highways team performed to its highest capacity all day for the duration of both snow events. As a result of the repeat snowfall they could only cover the main roads and bus routes. Ms Liassides went on record saying that gritting as a method of treating snow does not always work, so if a road appeared to have been left ungritted, it may in fact have received gritting treatment.

5.29 Gillian Marston explained that pavement gritting had been done in February 2009 but on a smaller scale as there was only one day of snow. Weather such as that during December and January had not been seen before, nor had extra staff been drafted in before.

5.30 A lot of Cityclean staff could not get to work on Friday 18 December. By the afternoon only half of the 50 street sweepers were able to get to the city centre. Over the weekend there were only 20-30 street sweepers and with such limited resources only the city centre could be cleared. In addition as Cityclean has no 4x4 vehicles they could not get staff to anywhere in the city other than the centre. As there were no stand by arrangements, they could not call upon other staff until Monday 21 December.

5.31 During the second snowfall all staff were called in and machines commandeered, including Cityparks who had 4 tractors that could get up the hills. Over 100 staff from throughout the council were on overtime over the weekend of the 9-10 January to deal with the gritting of pavements, 250 tonnes of grit were used between Saturday lunchtime and 3:00pm Sunday.

5.32 GMB were very supportive as many of the staff involved did not have gritting duties in their contract.

5.33 After the event, staff had to clear a large backlog of refuse. Managers were out gritting too, therefore we did use all the staff we could.

Panel Questions

5.34 Councillor Morgan said he appreciated the heroic efforts of all involved.

5.35 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Mark Prior, Christina Liassides and Gillian Marston in italics.

1) Councillor Janio: What is the mechanism used to get changes made to the WSP?

A lot of information from letters, emails and residents' groups have been received and will be taken into account. But it is too early to say what the impact will be and how it will change the WSP.

We need to look at fine tuning areas where the best effort could be made e.g. bus turn-arounds and allowing buses to run longer. We should initially look at fine tuning what we already have in place and then look at how extra revenue can best be used, taking ideas from this panel.

2) Councillor Janio: We would not want to see a repetition of the difficulties staff encountered over the 2 snow events. Therefore there needs to be a formal plan and not just aspirations.

3) Councillor Morgan: A formal plan is the aim of today. Grit bins have been taken away at the request of conservation groups, is there a strategic plan that has been affected by these removals?

We are on hold regarding action on grit bins until seeing the recommendations of this panel.

Future plans should also be about resilience, not just money e.g. better communications about road closures, members of the Highways Team being the eyes and ears for staff and dedicated staff on tasks such as shovel loading and other tasks to ease the workload.

Changing gritting routes could not be done solely in house and would be extremely complex and a serious project, extra money would be needed for this.

We have a criteria for where we site grit bins, typically they are placed on roads that are not on the gritting routes as demand has traditionally been for use on roads. Preferences are given to junctions and steep hills and most bins are located in the North, North East and North West of the city where it is colder. The strategic plan is essentially to put them where they are needed, balanced against the practicality of doing so.

4) Is it practical to use seasonal grit bins?

A hiab vehicle (truck-mounted crane) would be needed to deliver grit and if any grit was dropped off in future it would need to be in builders bags. The council only has 1 hiab vehicle and does not plan on buying additional units. It may be possible to use smaller bags but we would need to look at manual handling issues for staff.

5) Does the council work with the farming community to use their vehicles?

No we do not use farming vehicles and we don't know if they would be any available. There is a problem throughout the city of a lack of 4x4 vehicles. Cityclean only has 1, Cityparks has 4 and the police do not have any. Highways has 1.

Paul Martin, General Manager, Adult Social Care.

5.36 Paul Martin explained that due to the nature of the services provided by Adult Social Care (ASC) they were geared up to respond to severe weather. Their Business Continuity Plan ensures they are able to meet the needs of people at home and those at hospital who need to be discharged.

5.37 The situation during December was exceptional as we had been coping with the swine flu pandemic, which was affecting staff as well as patients, leading to shortages. The severe weather also struck at a time when we were trying to discharge people from hospital due to staff having time off over Christmas. Elective surgery was cancelled to make way for people with broken limbs.

5.38 In the community there was a struggle to reach the most vulnerable users of ASC due to a combination of staff not being able to make it into work and the difficulty for them in reaching patients.

5.39 ASC provides support to 4000 vulnerable adults, 2000 are higher need, 2000 are lower need and 800 are given payments to provide their own care from the independent care sector. Across the city there are 2000 beds for the vulnerable, 1300 are for the elderly. In spite of the pressures, ASC continued to provide services throughout the December snowfall maintaining a 'business as usual' stance.

5.40 However, during the January snowfall there was a build up of pressures which made the situation more difficult to deal with:

- The swine flu pandemic.
- Continued care for people who were injured during the December snowfall.
- A natural increase in demand after Christmas.
- A difficulty in reaching the community.

5.41 As a result we had to put a call out to other services for help, which had an impressive response. E.g. An early notice was sent out to the council about gritting The Nuffield Hospital and the council responded with 2 gritting runs in 1 day. This was an example of partners working together.

Panel Questions

5.42 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Paul Martin in italics.

1) Public Question from Dr Cant referred from Environment and Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 8 February 2010: What plans does the council have for joint working with the PCT to prevent falls on the part of the elderly in the event of any future snowy weather?

Preventing falls is partly a gritting issue. We realised that there is room for getting information out to the public and the highways team on what were falls blackspots, these could then be gritted more intensely.

It is also an issue of common sense and personal responsibility in so much as if a pavement is icy then there is an increase in the likelihood of slipping if you use it. It is not a question of blaming those who got injured but we need to emphasis personal responsibility. People should also make sure in advance of severe weather that they get enough food in stock.

There is also a community responsibility of getting neighbours to keep an eye out for those in need. The PCT was keen to mobilise volunteers to clear snow and ice from pavements and the council should take a bigger lead in encouraging people to do this. It seems that people nowadays feel they need permission to clear snow and ice from the pavement in front of their property, when this has never traditionally been the case.

2) Councillor Janio: All departments need to put out the message that people need to help each other and that vulnerable people can seek help from their neighbours. It does not help that there has been misinformation about the question of liability for the clearance of snow and

ice and that Brighton & Hove rarely gets snow. Do you have a database of priority vulnerable people?

Yes we do prioritise the vulnerable either through direct service provision or by commissioning independent sector home care agencies, who BHCC ensure duplicate our own services.

We deploy our own staff according to need and have a 'buddy' system for the independent sector home care agencies so they can link up with us if they cannot offer support. Similar protocols are in place for nursing homes.

South Downs Health Trust and ASC have a number of clients in common. We have a protocol where just one agency can deal with a particular person.

We put out calls in the media for people to check up on elderly neighbours and we recruited volunteers from ASC who were prepared to visit people who were not, 'top priority', to check up on them. The issue of vulnerability means that we cannot widen this policy too far due to the necessity of background police checks.

6. EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FROM OTHER WITNESSES

Sally Howard, Director of Operations, Brighton & Sussex University Hospitals Trust

Juliet Warburton, Head of Primary and Community care, PCT

6.1 Sally Howard said that for the health service, the snow events in December and January were unprecedented. The impact could be seen as the trauma equivalent of a swine flu pandemic at its height.

6.2 The response to the trauma went well. The Royal Sussex County Hospital has an Urgent Care Centre and Accident & Emergency Service co-located. The services worked well together and the hospital was able to mobilise additional staff to help with the influx of patients who had slipped on the ice.

6.3 There was a stunning commitment from staff who worked for 2 to 3-day shifts. 4x4 drivers helped to transport staff and patients which allowed the emergency care centre to continue running.

6.4 Continued bad weather meant there was a second wave of casualties with respiratory problems.

6.5 Between 18 December 2009 and the end of January 2010 NHS Brighton and Hove (PCT), Brighton & Sussex University Hospitals Trust (BSUH), South Coast Ambulance Services, South Downs NHS Trust (SDH), South East Health and Adult Social Care were conducting

several conference calls daily to co-ordinate care. E.g. there was a huge response from ASC, who helped to keep hospital beds clear for people who needed surgery. This strategy meant that the health service knew who to call to get answers and by working together they were able to keep hospitals running.

6.6 Typically, at the Royal Sussex County Hospital 250 patients pass through A&E on a Saturday. On Saturday 20 December there were 349, 117 of whom had slipped on the ice. On Sunday 21 December there were 399 patients, 173 of whom had been injured due to the snow event; largely upper body injuries. On Monday 22 December the BSUH declared a Business Continuity Incident to cope with the influx of patients. Patients who had slipped on ice continued to attend thereafter.

6.7 Juliet Warburton referred to the Health Organisation handout provided by her colleagues to the panel. Referring to the section, 'Suggestions for the Future', she suggested a 'lessons learnt' review across all agencies and mentioned that NHS Brighton and Hove will be hosting a review session in April to look at better managing capacity and demand throughout the year. In addition she mentioned the idea of a 'transport hub' to create a more formal way of sharing 4x4 vehicles and allocating agencies to purchase additional 4x4s.

6.8 The NHS were not kept up to date on road closures and it was difficult to get patients home, which interfered with discharging people from hospital. Many patients could not be transferred to community health facilities or The Princes Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath. If they had been given a comprehensive snow clearing plan, it would have helped with this issue.

6.9 There would also be benefit to be had from a joint 'communications hub' where agencies could feed back proactive messages to residents, hospitals and other resources that severe weather is coming.

6.10 These are ideas which need to be built into business continuity plan and will be picked up at the Brighton and Hove Winter planning review seminar.

Panel Questions

6.11 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Sally Howard, Juliet Warburton and Christina Liassides in italics.

1) Public Question from Dr Cant referred from Environment and Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee, 8 February 2010: What plans does the council have for joint working with the PCT to prevent falls on the part of the elderly in the event of any future snowy weather?

Christina Liassides: the council has a pavement clearance program which starts in areas of highest footfall as we have to concentrate resources against benefits. Pre-treating areas with low footfall would not be of much use as the salt would not mix with the ice and snow. Post-treatment with grit is effective but labour intensive and has sustainability implications.

BHCC did send the Winter Service Plan and gritting routes to the PCT and hospitals in advance, showing which areas were to be prioritised, including hospital routes. Just because a road was not free from snow does not mean it was not gritted. The council gritted the Accident & Emergency ramp and the main routes to the hospitals and donated supplies to hospital staff.

It should be noted that Durham PCT gave the local council £1 million to help with severe snow events.

Juliet Warburton: It would be helpful to include BHCC in the winter review workshop and get their input. There was communication but there is always room for improvement.

Sally Howard: We fully understand the council did what it could but we really need to do much more to ensure we can minimise the number of slips on ice. 117 people who slipped on ice attended the Royal Sussex County hospital on Saturday 19 December and 173 on Sunday 20 December – more followed. We worked very closely with adult social care to ensure that the only patients in our hospital beds were those who really needed to be in hospital. That in turn enabled us to ensure that we could safely care for patients who had slipped, gone on to need surgery and then rehabilitation before they could be discharged.

2) Councillor Morgan: Were the locations of slips and falls recorded? If so, could they be used to assess where most injuries occur and improve responses in the future?

Sally Howard: There is no record of where people fell. During conference calls we took a lot of information from frontline staff who pointed out where falls had occurred and these areas were gritted but there was no retrospective record made.

Juliet Warburton: Public health teams worked with BHCC to identify where people fell to inform snow clearing. Going forward, we can work with ambulance crews to help compile this information proactively for future winters.

3) Sven Rufus: A 'transport hub' is an interesting idea, especially as agencies were competing for 4x4s. How do you vet volunteer drivers if they are to transport vulnerable people? How did vulnerable people cope generally? What was the impact of the snow event on your resources?

Juliet Warburton: Volunteers were coordinated via BHCC and were there to transport staff rather than patients. They were called in towards the end of the snow event. We need to evaluate how effective they were and learn lessons for next winter.

Adult Social Care and community health services worked together and prioritised the most vulnerable and all were seen and supported. People were prioritised based on need. The less vulnerable were contacted and where possible cancelled. All were seen when their needs required them to be so and as the snow cleared.

The cost to the health services has not been calculated yet but it was significant. E.g. an additional 100 extra beds were used on the hospital due to the increased demands.

Sally Howard: We used the Red Cross for extra transport and as private ambulance crews due to the stretched resources of the existing crews. E.g. we needed to treble the size of the fracture clinic which meant we were still catching up to business as usual 4 weeks later.

Christina Liassides: Within the council, the Civil Contingencies team will have more time to look at resource sharing (such as 4x4s). We did a lot right ad-hoc but we need to formalise our plans.

4) Councillor Janio: The health service is one more priority on a list of priorities for the council's resources. If there was to be a more formal mechanism, would you be willing to provide funding for the council's services?

Juliet Warburton: We need to look at this issue from both financial and health impacts. We need to look at joint resources and how to use them more effectively.

5) Councillor Janio: We all have to prioritise as we are all providing services which save lives. If we are talking about helping the vulnerable, then money is needed to do that.

Sally Howard: Our funding comes from the PCT and there would be an appetite to look at how best to arrange this.

6) Councillor Watkins: Conference facilities seem important, could the Network Management teams and the police take part in them?

Sally Howard: We only used a telephone line. A telephone is an adequate way of setting actions in place and it was not restricted.

Juliet Warburton: The BHCC called a Gold Command (Major Incident Control Room), a formal meeting of the police and other partners. Up until then conference calls had worked fine. ASC had been participants of the conference calls throughout.

7) Councillor Watkins: If Gold Command was called at a later date, what do you denote an emergency? Are there different levels of emergency?

Sally Howard: During the severe weather we called a Business Continuity Incident, whereby there was more work to do than resources allowed and internally people were diverted to do other tasks. We used this resource twice and used an escalation colour code system to show the risk criteria the BSUH faced. The highest colour was purple and the hospital remained on it most of the time.

8) Councillor Watkins: Is the system replicated within the council to enable us to work together?

Juliet Warburton: There is a joint escalation so we know what level each participating organisation is on, e.g. the ASC or the BSUH. We shared information during conference calls.

Sally Howard: As a hospital we were in contact daily with others from the East, West and North. We did this to ensure that if one hospital was in difficulty, then we did all we could to ensure that others supported them but on this occasion all hospitals were at full stretch.

Christina Liassides: Our civil contingencies officer was co-coordinating and channelling information out to other agencies, e.g. the East Sussex Resilience Forum.

Mike Best, Operations Director, Brighton & Hove Buses Company Ltd (BHBC).

6.12 Mike Best claimed that the Brighton & Hove Bus Company was under no illusion at the difficulty the council faced during the snow events. The BHBC appreciated the council's help and was not sure the negative letters in the Argus were a fair representation of the facts.

6.13 The commitment of the council to grit bus routes was very much appreciated.

6.14 Communications from the council were very good. The BHBC received daily emails between 1 November and March informing them of which roads were being gritted.

6.15 We were able to communicate with Mark Prior at 4am; it was really useful to have someone at his level on the phone at all hours. The JourneyOn team were also in constant contact with our controllers and supervisors.

6.16 The ability to put someone in the CCTV control room enabled us to see whether routes were being cleared. This was an extra layer of help which we first used in January.

6.17 We felt fully involved in our communications with the council and it was noticeable from our point of view how BHCC managed events compared to neighbouring authorities.

6.18 Mike Best put on record his thanks to BHCC.

6.19 Mike Best explained that negative points were on a detail level. He referred to Item 6, 2.1-2.4 (p71) regarding the problem of key roads being impassable and their effect on the overall service. He also referred to the issue of abandoned vehicles outlined in 2.6.

6.20 There were complaints from the public that there was a lack of grit on pavements, preventing them from getting onto buses.

6.21 In January the police told the BHBC to take the buses off the road network, they complied but thought it was a bad idea because they are often peoples' only form of transport and they aid the gritting process. When the police asked a second time they treated it as advice rather than an order. It would be useful to clarify the situation with the police.

6.22 Funds have been invested for more snow chains in the future. As snow chains can only work on snow, when snow thaws in certain areas and not others it can become a problem. We are negotiating with the trade unions to enable bus drivers to fit the chains themselves at certain points along their routes.

Panel Questions

6.23 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Mike Best in italics.

1) Councillor Morgan: Are single-decker buses more suited to having snow chains fitted? What is the ratio of single to double-decker buses? Did you use the Realtime bus signs to update people during the snow event?

There is no difference between single and double-decker buses in terms of effectiveness with snow chains. Most buses are double-deckers and it is not possible to test their effectiveness with snow chains attached until it snows. We did not utilise Realtime signs as well as we should have done, instead we focussed on the website, which we updated every few minutes.

2) Councillor Janio: Hangleton felt a sense of abandonment, your explanation of why buses could not reach certain areas has cleared the matter up. How do you get your message out so that more people do not feel abandoned?

We have learnt that it is important to tell people why we cannot service certain areas however at this time we cannot just change the Realtime signs to reflect a shortened bus route. This will change when the software is update later in the year.

3) Councillor Rufus: Who was responsible for the abandoned cars – the council, the owners or the BHBC? Do you feel it is BHBC's obligation to keep its stops open or just the job of the council?

Car removal was a bit ad hoc but Carol Rogers, Contracts Manager, was quick to react to calls for cars to be removed. We have learned the lesson that it is important to look for problem areas before we are told by the public.

In regards to bus stops, we were given grit by Network Management which we used on our own depots to keep them clear. Our main role is to get out onto the highway network as much as possible, using snow chains to churn up the salt and snow. We are thinking of using the buses for early runs, getting them out to estates by 4:00-5:00am to help the gritting process work.

Lynne Henshaw, GMB Representative.

6.24 Lynne Henshaw explained that Cityclean staff worked very hard to take control of the situation but rarely have conditions persisted as long as they did.

6.25 Nevertheless there were some problems with the service:

- There was only one 4x4 gritting machine and it was clear more were needed to respond to the persistent bad weather.
- There was exceptional pressure on call centre staff and there is only so much that they can do within reason.

6.26 There needs to be more stringent policy and procedure in place for staff. Many accidents occurred on smaller roads that were not given priority and not cleared until late in the week, therefore there should be more grit bins in these areas. Staff from Cityclean did risk their lives getting to these areas.

6.27 At a health and safety meeting there was discussion about having specialised studded soles attached to the bottom of Cityclean staff's boots to help them walk on ice. These could be rolled out to other staff in departments such as Adult Social Care.

6.28 The Adverse Weather Policy meant that the response to the weather was not determined until the day it struck. The decision needed to get out to staff in advance.

Panel Questions

6.29 Councillor Morgan reiterated the panel's support and appreciation to all staff involved. Councillor Watkins echoed Councillor Morgan and assured Lynne Henshaw that negative comments were only coming from the public.

6.30 Questions and suggestions from Members were as follows with replies from Lynne Henshaw and Christina Liassides in italics.

1) Councillor Watkins: Do we use snow chains on our vehicles?

Christina Liassides: We have 3 4x4 gritters not 1, although the fleet is 10 years old. None of the vehicles have snow chains as most pre-treat the roads and the chains would require a certain depth of snow to be effective.

2) Councillor Rufus: Does anything more than footwear need to be provided e.g. warm clothes? What was the commitment of staff to people's well-being?

Lynne Henshaw: Clothing was adequate; there were no complaints from staff. There needed to be policy clarity on what was expected of staff during the weather, e.g. being able to make it into work, school closures were detrimental for staff. There should also be more thought on specific policies, e.g. a list of vulnerable people who could be telephoned to check if they were ok and reached by staff using the specialised footwear.

3) Councillor Janio: If any recommendations are made would you be able to come back and say if GMB thinks they can be implemented?

Lynne Henshaw: Yes.

Members of the Public

6.31 Councillor Morgan referred to the press release issued for this panel that stressed public input was to be constructive and suggest innovative ideas, not to address individual complaints.

Richard Forrest, Goldstone Valley Residents Association

6.32 Richard Forrest explained that he represents over 800 households in the Goldstone area and was a Civil, Highway and Municipal Engineer and had been involved in winter maintenance for over 30 years. He said he had been invited by Councillor Vanessa Brown on behalf of the Goldstone Valley Residents Association.

6.33 He explained that the GVRA was not happy with the response from Brighton & Hove City Council to the weather during February 2009, December 2009 and January 2010 and felt lessons were not learned from the snowfall in February 2009.

6.34 In the Goldstone area there were no buses for 3 days, there was no clearance of snow and no ploughing. People felt isolated.

6.35 On the website the only guidance offered to members of public was the, 'Gritting Roads-Winter Maintenance Services' press release.

6.36 Councillor Morgan pointed out that the full plan could be downloaded from the site but recognised that it was not easy to find.

6.37 Mr Forrest said he was surprised there were only 4 vehicles equipped with snowploughs and recommended that all vehicles were fitted with them. He pointed out that all seven of the gritting vehicles were supplied with snowploughs when delivered as new. He also stated that in his experience that when it snows; it usually snows over the whole City requiring snowploughs on all gritting vehicles. Snowploughs require very little maintenance to remain serviceable units.

6.38 Section 25, 13.3 of the Government's Winter Service Guidance makes reference to the importance of clearing pavements.

6.39 Councillor Morgan explained that the use of snowploughs would be discussed later and asked Mr Forrest if, in his 30 years of experience, the snow and ice in December was something he had experienced before.

6.40 Mr Forrest replied that the weather was unusual only in as much as it occurred twice in two months. He went on to explain that snow typically fell in December, often between the 3rd or 4th and up to Christmas, and at any time during February. Although less frequent, January should never be regarded as a snow free month.

6.41 Councillor Morgan pointed out that the freezing daytime temperatures in December made it difficult to clear the snow and ice. He explained that the scrutiny panel can only make recommendations and that they would be based on the likelihood of severe weather in the future and restrictions in the council's budget. Therefore costs would be proportionate to the risk.

6.42 Christina Liassides clarified that until the recent Code of Practice, there were no government guidelines for clearance of footways, and the audit commission set no targets for this. During the national salt supply crisis the government Salt Cell only looked at authority's requirements for road treatment. However, there is a provision for footway clearance in the Winter Service Plan during severe and prolonged snowfall.

6.43 The council operates 5 snowploughs and 6 gritting machines for the 6 gritting routes across the city. If they were to be replaced or enhanced with additional vehicles we would need to look at the budgetary impact. Ms Liassides said she was not managing the service until 2006 but did look at past records when reviewing the WSP. In 2001 the council was asked why not all bus routes were gritted. The answer was that the effectiveness of the salt that is placed down is determined by the weather. When it is very cold, generally, the treatment is not always effective. Ms Liassides stated that she did not recall 2001 being a particularly severe winter but clearly even then the Highways team had problems clearing all bus routes.

6.44 Mr Forrest held the opposite view to Mike Best regarding BHCC response to the snow compared to neighbouring authorities; there was only 1 day in the area of West Sussex where he works, Southwick, Shoreham and Lancing, when transport for the vulnerable was disrupted.

6.45 Councillor Morgan said that the panel had received some comparative data from other authorities and if they had more time, the panel would have liked to have obtained additional information. However it was important to note that it was hard to compare the situations faced by unitary and county councils.

Dick Page.

6.46 Mr Page explained he has been a resident of Brighton & Hove for 30 years and was only representing himself at the panel. He explained he had an interest in the WSP as he had fractured his hip as a cyclist during the December period of cold weather on an ungritted, busy road where there was invisible ice.

6.47 He explained he had not been able to find any detail on what the 40% of the highway network that is gritted consisted of and found the figure difficult to believe.

6.48 The snowfall in December had been forecast and was exceptional, causing a greater number of problems than in January. It was surprising that it was not deemed necessary to declare an emergency as it may have led to access to greater resources and involved more senior managers.

6.49 It was the pavements that were not gritted that seemed to have caused the highest percentage of accidents and it seemed that the majority of those accidents were suffered by people trying to get to work rather than the elderly and vulnerable.

6.50 The police advice to not walk on highways was not helpful as they were often the only safe place to walk. It would have been preferable if they had been shared by pedestrians and motorists.

6.51 Having additional staff on standby would be helpful in cases where the ice did not melt after 12 hours.

6.52 Extra resources are to be made available to the WSP budget of £227 000, however the Highways budget is £33.7 million. This means that the additional percentage spent of the Highways budget spent on the WSP is 0.67%

6.53 Councillor Morgan explained that a lot of the resources used during the severe weather came from other departments and that only a small percentage came from the WSP budget. He pointed out that the panel will make a series of recommendations on a sliding scale of budget suggestions, it is up to the Environment Cabinet Member at which point on the scale they want to choose.

6.54 Mr Page said that Councillor G Theobald highlighted in the press that the amount of available resources was dependent on the level of council tax.

6.55 Councillor Morgan explained that the panel does not have tax or budget setting powers. He concurred that the age profiles of those injured during the snowfall in December were of younger people out either working or playing and that in the future more work with the PCT should be carried out to address this.

6.56 Mr Page asked what the cost to the economy was from people being unable to get to work.

6.57 Christina Liassides explained that the council does not publish the gritting route map on the website (showing which 40% of the highways network is covered) because of various complications about how best to do this and it would also need to be accompanied by a

disclaimer that not all roads on the routes could be guaranteed clear of snow or ice. She said that the council does need to look at how to publicise this information.

6.58 She explained that the budget has been mostly sufficient and most years there has been enough of a surplus to be able to contribute to the contingency fund. The main area of expenditure will be any vehicle hire or purchase and it would be most helpful to know if funds would be made available for this purpose.

6.59 Mr Page let the panel know that he had been told that legally, if the WSP had been followed to the extent it set out, then the council had done its duty. However he felt that the plan needs to be put into operation straight away and be resilient enough to cope with the severe weather.

Phillip Silkstone, resident of Hollingdean

6.60 Mr Silkstone went through the points he had made in Item 6, p76 of the agenda. He recalled how he and his neighbours shovelled the roads and pavements clear of ice on Friday 18 December, however they simply refroze over night. Had they had access to grit this would not have been a problem. They rang the council's dedicated number but the only response was an answer phone message and no additional grit was sent. He later phoned the police who claimed they had had the same problem.

6.61 He suggested that if bags of grit were dropped off at strategic hilly locations across the city, people would show responsibility for distributing it. He suggested it would not cost much and it could be dropped off by 4x4s.

6.62 Whilst the Hollingdean depot was heavily gritted, beyond it the rest of Hollingdean was not and all grit bins were empty. People had to resort to buying rock salt from local shops.

6.63 It is important that people be able to speak to someone on the phone. If council workers are unable to get into work during the severe weather, could they not have phone lines in their own home and calls be redirected to them?

6.64 Although the weather had been forecast before hand, it felt like the council was hoping it would not strike that close to Christmas. Despite doing what they could, the council were caught out. On the second occasion they appeared to be throwing grit where it could be seen, rather than where it was needed.

6.65 In response to Mr Silkstone's recommendations, Councillor Morgan explained that builder bags of grit had been recommended as a suggestion and that they needed to work out how to deliver them.

6.66 The pressure on call centres had been addressed in the previous meeting on 8 February and would be put into the recommendations for this panel.

6.67 The Children & Young Peoples' Trust had been spoken to about the advice given to head teachers regarding school closures and the Local Government Agency was looking at best practice elsewhere. During the snow events staff could not get in to work so it was not simply the case that the schools were not gritted (In answer to Point 3, p.76).

6.68 Canada and Eastern Europe have much more snow than South East England, we have to be proportionate and will make scaled recommendations accordingly (In answer to Point 4, p.76).

6.69 Christina Liassides explained that all grit bins were filled at the start of the WSP period of operation and that the process takes 10-12 days, after then the grit bins are not monitored until they are filled en masse again or in response to requests. On some occasions people do take the entire contents of the bins.

6.70 The Highways team did its best to co-ordinate the requests to refill bins; however there was a limited number of staff and suitable vehicles.

6.71 Mr Silkstone claimed that Brighton & Hove was a hilly city and yet no special provisions were made for the hilly areas. He claimed grit bins are useless as they are often empty and vehicles do not replenish the ones situated on hills. Over the two snow events the local bin was refilled only once and depleted within minutes.

6.72 Councillor Morgan reminded the panel that many grit bins were removed at the request of local groups.

7. OTHER INFORMATION RECEIVED

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 Councillor Morgan thanked everyone who contributed to the panel and explained that the recommendations and report would be sent to the Environment CMM and Full Council in due course.

8.2 He moved the meeting to Part 2 to discuss the recommendations.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of