

Severe Weather – Preparation & Planning

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Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Members about the annual Planning & Preparation for Severe Weather.

Recommendation

(1) That member's note and comment on the report.

Background

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (the act) designated all Local Authorities as Category One responders. Under the Act, those in Category 1 are organisations at the core of the response to most emergencies (e.g. emergency services, local authorities, NHS bodies).

As category one responders under the act, district and county councils are required to carry out the following duties:

- Assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning;
- Put in place emergency plans;
- Put in place Business Continuity Management arrangements;
- Put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;
- Share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination;
- Co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency; and
- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (Local Authorities only).

Report

In recent years a number of areas in our District have suffered from the effects of severe weather.

The incidents have ranged from isolated flooding to prolonged incidents of severe flooding such as the Levels and Moors in 2013 & 2014. We have also experienced in recent years prolonged ice and snow events that have been challenging for all responders.

We do plan for these types of weather events and our severe weather plan is reviewed annually and after any incidents.

The District Council's response to these events is varied, but in short our operational response is to deliver sandbags to those residents in immediate danger of flooding and to assist the Highways teams in gritting paths and high risk areas in Ice & Snow.

Predicted Severe Weather events

The Met Office weather advisor provides Cat 1 responders with as much pre-warning as they are able to about predicted severe weather events. This is followed up by regular reports and forecasts to assist us. We also have access to a Met Office/environment agency system named Hazard Manager that allows us to monitor the weather online as well as being able to access more detailed forecasts. This allows the Civil Contingency Manager to be able to better inform Managers & Staff that have an emergency response role.

Flooding Response

The Severe weather plan acknowledges and puts into place a system around the delivery of sandbags to residents, who are in imminent danger of flooding, in a safe manner. We do have a duty of care to our staff and have recently provided Working in or near water training to staff that are normally involved in an emergency response role, and following that training we have amended our working practices, such as safely working at night and the use of safety equipment.

We have also trialled the use of gel filled flood sacks over the last few years and they seem to provide the same level of protection for properties and are much lighter leaving us better able to access some flooded areas in snorkel fitted landrovers with sufficient numbers of bags for residents.

Ice & Snow

The District Council role in responding to this sort of severe weather event is twofold. We employ a contractor to provide a gritting service for our high risk car parks and Council offices. The arrangement with the contractor, is managed by the Engineering team, and provides the gritting service to be instigated when the temperature goes down to a pre-arranged level.

Our secondary role is to provide support to the Highways team should a weather event be predicted to last for 3 days or longer. We have agreed with Highways sensible paved routes to salt such as routes from car parks as well as high risk pavements across the District. In order to prepare, if ice or snow is predicted, then teams from Streetscene will scout the area and identify where a response is required. For Yeovil Town Centre we do have a tractor that we can attach a snow plough blade to that will clear excessive snow fall. We have also invested in larger salt spreaders to make the operation much quicker for residents. As the duty lies with Somerset County Council highways to provide the salting operation then they provide us with the salt to assist us in providing support to them.

Annually we arrange a severe weather meeting where we can amend routes and discuss any changes that are required. Over the years that meeting has been the catalyst for the provision of additional grit/salt bins across the District and initiatives such as the Yeovil Town Centre scheme where we have provided snow shovels and additional grit bins to allow retailers to clear ice & snow in the Town Centre.

The Severe Weather plan and additional information will be available at the meeting for discussion.

Financial Implications

There is some investment in purchasing sandbags, flood sacks and sand. However our stock levels are good and no investment should be needed this year unless there is another major flooding event.

For a response to ice & snow, the Salt/Grit is provided by the Highways team and we have invested in previous years to improve our spreading equipment and that is serviced annually or following any incidents. So again no investment should be necessary this year unless there is a severe event lasting for a significant period.
