

## Agenda Item 6

For decision - The town's response to snow, ice and wintry conditions

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### Summary

We had snow and wintry conditions in Frome in February and March 2018 and again in February this year (2019).

This sort of weather can have an immediate impact on the town and we received a variety of queries following the snowy and icy conditions this year. Various people were asking questions of who's responsible for what. Some asked why the town wasn't better prepared to act more quickly to make things like roads and pavements safer and more accessible.

As such, this report identifies some of the key responsibilities at the present time. It also puts forward some ideas that could be developed and explored if there's agreement that the town could or should be better prepared for wintry conditions.

The report also outlines the context for this discussion highlighting existing constraints and challenges, for instance. Lastly, the report suggests some questions that could lead and inform the discussion at the meeting.

### Who's responsible for what and what happens in response to wintry conditions?

In the same way that a number of people and organisations are involved in keeping Frome clean, there are various organisations that react in wintry conditions:

#### Somerset County Council (SCC)

##### Responsibilities

- SCC is responsible for its own land
- In conjunction with partner organisations, it also has various responsibilities for services like schools, libraries, health care and social care
- SCC is responsible for the town's adopted roads (excluding the A36\*)
- SCC is also responsible for all the pavements that run along adopted roads
- SCC is responsible for maintaining and updating the county's Emergency Plan and coordinating an emergency response when required. This could include delegating tasks to other organisations, including Mendip District Council and Frome Town Council

\*Although the A36 doesn't run through the town it's mentioned here because it's the major road into and out of Frome. As a trunk road, **Highways England** not Somerset County Council is responsible for the A36.

### Actions (What happens)

- SCC provides up to date information and advice on its website
- Where and when it's safe to do so and resources allow, SCC grits roads to a prescribed (councillor-agreed) gritting route in advance of wintry weather. Last winter's route is shown in [Appendix 6.1](#)
- Where and when it's safe to do so and resources allow, SCC grits roads reactively during and after wintry weather
- And helps with clearing snow and treating ice on a priority basis

### Constraints

- Finite resources (including budgets) which necessarily must stretch across the county
- Safe travel – it must be safe for SCC staff and contractors to go out in order for them to work
- Pavements and public footpaths are **not** gritted alongside the adopted roads
- Historically, SCC filled grit bins around the town and made grit available free of charge to all the parish councils across the county but this was set to end last winter, a reflection of limited budgets
- However, SCC is now planning to review its winter service ahead of next winter and this is an opportunity for the town (via FTC) to contribute its views and ideas

### Useful links

- <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/emergencies/snow-and-ice/>
- <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/getting-ready-for-winter/>
- <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-transport/problems-on-the-road/report-snow-or-ice-on-the-road/>

## Mendip District Council

### Responsibilities

- MDC is responsible for its own land
- This includes most of the smaller play areas and green spaces within the residential parts of the town e.g. those around the Stonebridge residential area
- MDC is also responsible for the public Pay & Display car parks in Frome  
**NB.** The car parks next to Marks & Spencer and Iceland are privately owned and run

### Actions (What happens)

- Where and when it's safe to do so and resources allow, MDC can direct its staff and contractors to help in clearing snow and treating ice on a priority basis

## Constraints

Similar to SCC:

- Finite resources (including budgets) which necessarily must stretch across the district
- Safe travel – it must be safe for MDC staff and contractors to go out in order for them to work
- Proximity to Frome – MDC has limited resources in the town at any given time and doesn't have a significant base in Frome

## Frome Town Council (FTC)

### Responsibilities

- We manage and look after most of the town's parks and green spaces
- We're also responsible for the Town Hall

### Resources

- We directly employ four full-time Rangers and one part-time Ranger
- We also have a staff body based in Frome - up to 31 people (including Support Stewards)
- And councillors living in the town
- We have three vehicles
- And a variety of tools and equipment, including snow shovels and grit spreaders
- The town has 47 grit bins available for anyone to use (see [Appendix 6.3](#))
- And we have the Town Hall – as a base and a community building

### Actions (What we aim to do)

- Provide information and advice on our website and on social media
- Where and when it's safe to do so, we clear snow and ice on the land that we look after to an agreed schedule
- This includes working so that the Town Hall is open as much as possible
- In conjunction with partners, we run Zero Nights sessions at the Town Hall when the temperature is forecast to be below freezing
- We look after the town's public grit bins, checking them each autumn and filling (and re-filling) them as necessary and as budgets allow

## Constraints

- Finite resources (including budgets)
- Safe travel – it must be safe for FTC staff to go out in order for them to work
- Limited (lesser) resources
- Although we have some dedicated equipment for dealing with wintry conditions, our fleet of vehicles isn't set up for extreme conditions (or extended periods of snow and ice)
- Current working hours and patterns - FTC's staff body works Monday to Friday

## Privately-owned land

Elsewhere in the town, there are multiple private landowners, from businesses to homeowners and they will be responsible for their own land.

## Questions for discussion

Naturally, the situation is more complex than this overview but by highlighting some of these key points we can start to consider some important questions:

- a. Does the current approach work for the town? Are the priorities the right ones?
- b. Should the Rangers focus on the town's parks and green spaces? Or the town centre?
- c. What information do people expect to have available and where and how should this information be communicated?
- d. Should we allocate more resources to something that doesn't happen all that often?
- e. What are the important points to contribute to SCC's review of its winter service?

## Looking ahead: Opportunities

Within the current approach, there are some ideas and opportunities that could be developed further.

### Winter Warriors (or Snow Wardens)

- A new scheme for the town
- Although it's early on, the Litter Warriors scheme is working well
- This could be adapted for snowy and icy conditions, with local champions being supplied with basic tools and then leading on looking after bite-size parts of the town, for instance individual streets and cul-de-sacs
- A similar idea is already being explored by SCC as well and a draft proposal for a Snow Warden is included at [Appendix 6.2](#)

### Grit bins

- A strategic review of the grit bins provided across the town
- There are currently 47 grit bins accessible to the public within the Frome parish
- There are likely to be some privately-kept grit bins in other places too e.g. in schools, churchyards and in commercial & industrial units
- Are the existing grit bins in the right places? Do we need more and if so, where?
- Would people be willing to store grit in their garages as part of a Winter Warriors or Snow Warden scheme?

### Notes

- Re-filling the 47 grit bins incurs a cost of over £2,300 each time the full set of bins is re-filled (£5 per bag of grit x an average of 10 bags per bin)
- New grit bins cost around £120 supplied

## A Parish Ranger

- This would be a take on the old-fashioned 'Lengthsman' role
- Historically, a Lengthsman would work the length (and breadth) of a defined area, typically the parish completing a variety of jobs
- A Parish Ranger could therefore provide extra support for the town; and could be used to provide a working presence over weekends, too
- The role could be a permanent one or a seasonal one
- There would be a cost to a part-time or full-time role, obviously
- And additional costs if extra tools and equipment were required specifically for winter work
- This could be looked at in conjunction with a Winter Warriors or Snow Warden scheme (there are some natural overlaps)

## Somerset County Council's service review

- An opportunity to contribute to SCC's review of its winter service
- Including their outline proposal for a Snow Warden scheme (which could be a joint SCC & FTC initiative in Frome)
- The opportunity to overlap with a strategic review of Frome's grit bins

## Recommendations

1. Agree a maximum sum of £3,500 (funded from the existing Community Open Spaces budget) for re-stocking grit bins and buying new grit bins during the current financial year
2. Allocate FTC staff time to contribute to SCC's review of its winter service, including allocating FTC Staff time to drawing up a more detailed map of the town, cross-referencing the locations of the town's grit bins with essential travel infrastructure (roads, footpaths, cycle routes etc.)
3. Develop the Winter Warriors or Snow Warden scheme, delegating responsibility to the Environment Manager to prepare a follow-up report on this, including a costed feasibility study
4. In conjunction with Recommendation 4, look at the (wider) opportunity of a Parish Ranger, detailing how and where this role could provide extra support in wintry conditions