

Committee	Dated:
Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	16 April 2018
Subject: Severe Weather Briefing	Public
Report of: Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Sonia Marquis, Area Manager, City & Fringes	

Summary

This report briefs Members on how our Estate Management Teams responded to the recent severe weather in London. Heavy snow and ice settled on the housing estates and the teams deployed cleaning staff and estate officers to implement the Snow and Ice Clearance Procedure.

The report shows that Teams generally coped well with the snow clearance operation. They were able to keep main priority routes through the estates clear and safe for residents and the public. The estates were well stocked with salt and grit. Some officers were able to check on the wellbeing of vulnerable residents. There were no reported accidents or injuries as a result of the snow and ice.

The report identifies that there is no provision for emergency clearance of snow and ice at weekends and during public holidays. Officers will explore the feasibility of acquiring additional resources to cover those occasions. Officers will also update the Snow and Ice Clearance Procedure and publicise this to residents.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the report.

Main Report

Background

London and the south east experienced a severe cold snap at the end of February and beginning of March 2018 and a second later in March. These brought several days of sub-zero temperatures and snowfall to the region resulting in significant disruption in some sectors. City of London estates were affected by settling snow and ice. The Estate Management Teams follow a Snow and Ice Clearance Procedure to make the estates as safe as possible for residents, staff and the public.

Whilst it would be ideal to ensure that the entire external surfaces of the estates were cleared of snow, this is not generally, practical or affordable. In the event of heavy snowfall, we aim to have main routes cleared and gritted so that residents have some means of getting to and from their homes. The teams use the latest weather information from the Meteorological Office to determine the likelihood of snowfall and to plan ahead as far as is practicable. The estate teams also assess the risk of slipping on ice or snow and the injuries this could cause. Consideration is also given to vulnerable residents and those with mobility aids. Priority routes have been established on this basis to give residents, staff and the public safe access across the estates.

All cleaners are redirected to the clearance of snow and ice unless an emergency of greater magnitude has arisen on an estate. Should this occur, additional staff resources are brought in to assist if possible.

However, our staff are not employed to work evenings and weekends and we do not have the resources to routinely use agency staff to provide extra cover. Therefore, in the event of heavy snowfall overnight, at the weekend or public holiday, priority routes/paths may not be cleared until the next working day.

The estate teams are not responsible for clearing or gritting pavements outside the boundaries of the estates – these are the responsibility of the local authority. In general, Highways Departments focus on roads, and it is uncommon to find that pavements are cleared or gritted.

Estates Management

We are pleased to say that estate teams coped very well with the recent cold snaps. In accordance with the Procedure, most cleaning operatives and estate officers were redirected towards the clearance of snow. The estates had sufficient stocks of grit and salt and some estates had invested in specialist equipment to clear the snow such as blowers.

There were no reported falls or injuries from any of the estates. The Estate Management Team at Avondale Square confirmed that all sheltered residents were well stocked with essential supplies and were kept warm. All the usual deliveries were made, and medical staff were able to gain access to residents without difficulties. Any heating issues were resolved very quickly by Property Services. There are 9 porter cleaners at Avondale Square and they were efficiently mobilised to create paths to the blocks as well as across the main Green.

Golden Lane Estate reported that they were fully staffed and were able to clear their paths, they used a snow blower in some areas and lay grit where necessary. Contact was also made with some vulnerable residents to check on their wellbeing and offer assistance if necessary. It was noted that the City's Highways Team were diligent in gritting the pavements surrounding the Estate.

The Fringe Estates, Isleden House, Windsor House and Dron House also Holloway and York Way Estates similarly, reported no issues or difficulties and no concerns were raised by residents.

Some officers in the Estate Team at Middlesex Street had to attend emergencies on the estate the morning after the last snowfall. One porter cleaner worked diligently to clear the paths and create safe access in high priority areas, but this meant the clearance operation was slower than we would have hoped. One resident expressed concern about this.

The Estate Team at Southwark Estates and Sydenham Hill coped admirably with the snow clearance, although some challenges arose due the geographical spread of Estates. This meant that at times the estate officer or porter was working alone until he could be joined by a colleague from another estate. Therefore, the clearance operation was slower than we would have hoped.

Property Services and Contractors

The heavy snow did impact on staff in the Property Services Team, some of whom simply could not get into work as the transport links were unable to cope with the unprecedented conditions. However, as a combination of staff who did make it into work and, those who could not, working from home, services were generally well maintained with little impact on residents.

With specific regard to our contractors, the ongoing work on our estates and the services delivered to our tenants, the weather inevitably did have an impact as summarised below:

Day-today response repairs

Our contractor, Wates, operated a 'skeleton' service for the four days, which meant that only works of an urgent or emergency nature were dealt with during that period. Residents with appointments for non-urgent works were contacted to explain the situation and alternative appointments made. Residents were generally very appreciative of our efforts and the way we communicated with them. Although Wates had some issues with staff getting in to work, by using operatives from its other contracts nearby, it was able to ensure that all urgent and emergency works were attended to and, at least, made safe during the cold period.

Heating repairs

It is fair to say that our heating contractor, TSG, bore the brunt of the severe weather receiving over 5,000 breakdown calls over the 4-day period when the snow came down. Of those, 5,000 calls, 250 were from tenants of the City Corporation, with the majority of those being a loss of heating and hot water due to frozen pipes. TSG also suffered from staff and operatives being either unable to get into work or being unable to get to the addresses to deal with the breakdowns. That said, TSG dealt swiftly (and within the provisions of the Contract) with the vast majority of the breakdown calls from our tenants and we had very few complaints. There was one particular incident brought to our attention where an elderly resident suffered a loss

of heating that TSG did not manage to attend as quickly as we would have wanted. As soon as the Estate staff was made aware of this, portable heaters were delivered to the resident as an interim measure until our contractor was able to deal with the problem.

As a result of this one, relatively isolated, incident, we have been working with our contractor, TSG, to review our processes and procedures to ensure that there is better information available to them to enable them to prioritise their work in the event that such severe weather conditions occur again. However, to put the situation into perspective, other similar service providers sent out emails, messages and bulletins to their customers advising that, as a result of the unprecedented weather conditions, they simply could not, and would not, be taking calls for breakdowns for up to 2 weeks after the severe weather had hit.

Major Works Programmes

In general terms, for the period of the particularly bad weather, our contractors suspended all works on our various improvements programmes due to a lack of staff, dangerous road conditions, access problems etc. There was no long term adverse effect on any of the improvement programmes as all works and properties are left safe at the end of each working day.

Potential improvements

The existing Snow and Ice Clearance Procedure does not make provision for inclement weather at weekends and public holidays. The procedure will be reviewed as part of the Estates Management Review that is currently taking place. There could be financial implications if additional resources are required to cover the estates at weekends and public holidays. This will need to be balanced with the reduction in the risk of injury which would occur if additional resources were made available on these occasions.

Additional resources to provide estate cover for snow clearance could come from a standby list of porter cleaners or estate officers who would be willing to attend the estates at the weekend or during holiday periods. These staff members would be paid on an overtime basis. The financial implications of this would have to be considered carefully. Another option could be to outsource the snow clearance operation to external contractors. However, we must also take into account that all services and agencies will be stretched to capacity at such times and staff may have difficulty themselves in getting to work, so it may not be easy to get additional support.

A revised Snow and Ice Clearance Procedure will be publicised to residents so that they are aware of the service levels they can expect when there is heavy snowfall on the estate.

Implications

The financial implications of obtaining additional estate resources for weekend and public holidays in inclement weather would have to be considered carefully and consulted on. There could be human resources implications if existing officers are required to work weekends and public holidays in addition to their normal working hours.

Health Implications

Because staff resources are diverted to snow and ice clearance, this reduces the staff available who might be able to check on elderly and vulnerable residents. Our Community Builders Programme is developing teams of volunteers on our estates, and these might, in due course, be able to help to bridge this gap.

Appendices

- Snow & Ice Clearance Procedure

Sonia Marquis

Acting Area Manager Community and Children's Services

T: 020 7332 1916]

E: Sonia.marquis@cityoflondon.gov.uk