

## Town & Parish Council Reference Group



14 January 2025

10-11am

**Apologies:** Cllr James Kennedy (Kenilworth Town Council), Cllr John Dinnie (Shipston Town Council), Cllr Tony Gillias (Rugby Town Council)

**Attendees (WCC):** Cllr Izzi Seccombe (OBE) (Council Leader), Cllr Heather Timms (Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture), Sarah Duxbury, Charles Barlow, Dominika Stockham, Jeff Morris, Simon Moseley

### 1. **Winter Services (County Highways), Simon Moseley (Highways Systems Technical Specialist)**

Simon delivered a presentation on gritting. This included WCC policy for gritting, what weather conditions constitute gritting, the size of the gritting fleet, high level figures relating to the service, and what town and parish councils can do to help the road conditions.

Main points to take away:

When the formation of ice or snow is predicted we will treat the following –

- All A roads
- Majority of B roads
- Some main strategic routes
- Access to major industrial estates and hospitals
- A single route to all villages

Footpaths or footways are not treated which is stipulated within WCC policy. This is due to the level of resource available.

WCC has its own weather forecasting. Met Office does not provide road weather forecasting for local authorities. There are six new weather stations across the county that provide regular monitoring to ensure that resources can be allocated effectively, and that gritting is completed early to prevent icy road conditions.

### Grit Bins

Grit bins are owned by district/borough, town and parish councils. If a grit bin is required, these can be applied for via the WCC highways webpage. This will be assessed against the following: 1. Is the place on a gritting route, 2. Is it on a gradient, 3. What's in the area? (a school/ a care home/ a community centre), 4. Is it near a speed limit/major junction, and 5. Is there anyone who would be able to go out there to grit. WCC is responsible for refilling these at

the beginning of season and mid-season, aligning with current weather. Salt in the bins should only be used on public highways, not on private driveways. Grit salt should be used sparingly. Approximately 10 grams (1 teaspoon) is enough to treat 1sq m.

### What can residents/town and parish councils do?

- Clearing snow early in the day helps as it is easier to move fresh, loose snow.
- Do not use water as this might refreeze and turn into black ice. Use salt where possible.
- Ash and/or sand can be used instead of salt as it can provide grit underfoot.
- Pay extra attention when clearing steps and steep pathways. Using more salt might help (up to 20 grams/sqm- approximately two teaspoons).
- To use gritting salt, use a handful and cast it like seeds. There is no need to use a shovel. PPE such as gloves should be used.

Further information available on [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/gritting](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/gritting) or on X via @WarksHighways

### Questions

#### **Could stickers be used on the inside of the grit bins to give information about how much should be used?**

This is a useful recommendation which will be considered.

#### **Do you treat cycle paths?**

No, cycle paths are not serviced. If the path is on the main road that is already being serviced, then it will likely be treated but not as a standalone route. WCC does not have a vehicle or resources to treat the cycle network at present.

#### **Can a video be provided to demonstrate how to grit paths?**

This is something to consider and we can discuss with our comms team.

#### **Can specific issues be addressed by a traffic sign in places that are challenging?**

In areas which are challenging, for example where there is a runoff of water that washes the salt away, this can be reviewed. Ice warning signs could be considered. Residents are encouraged to report issues via <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/reportroadfaults>. If there is a recurring drainage issue, this can be raised with the landowner.

### **Can spot-gritting be done occasionally?**

Spot grits are very challenging but if issues are reported and are critical, we will try to address them. The existing gritting routes will be prioritised.

### **What is the process for getting a grit bin?**

Highways should be contacted. One of our Highways Area Surveyors will go out to assess the location. If the location is suitable, the town and parish council will be informed. They can then purchase the bin. Once the bin is in place, this gets added to our assets list and will be filled and refilled according to the schedule.

### **Some information regarding gritting myth-busting might be useful on social media. Town and parish councils can re-share this to inform their residents.**

One of the common misconceptions is that residents don't think the roads have been gritted when they see snow on the road. This is a common misconception as the gritting would generally have been done in the early hours to provide a delamination layer to stop the snow sticking to the surface and for the vehicles to agitate the salt to turn it into slush. This can further be addressed by the team.

### **During flooding events, roads are sometimes closed after the flood incident has taken place. If there are weather stations that predict heavy rainfall, can roads be closed preventatively to stop residents driving through flood?**

A legal order is required within 24 hours of a road closure. Police have the power to close a road without the legal order. The difficulty with flooding is that it cannot always be predicted as well as winter events, such as icy conditions, which would allow preventative measures. There are occasions where a road closure is scheduled but by the time crew get to it, the flood water has gone down. Further training and information can be provided to raise awareness.

### **Do highways have the power to move a vehicle that obstructs traffic?**

No, this is a police matter, and Highways have no powers to do this.

## **2. Update on Local Government Reorganisation**

Cllr Seccombe provided an update on the English Devolution White Paper, published on 16 December 2024. The White Paper sets out plans to move away from the current system of District/Borough Councils and County Councils to single unitary councils with a population of 500,000 or more.

At the same time as publishing the White Paper, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all relevant councils signalling his intent to invite proposals for unitary local government and asking for "expressions of interest" on or before 10 January to be part of the early wave of areas to move forward. She confirmed that Government has made it clear that its intention is to move to unitarisation of the whole country by 2028.

A decision to submit an expression of interest for Warwickshire was reached on the balance of several factors including being able to help shape, with all councils, a model for a unitary council to get the best outcome for Warwickshire. She also commented on the level of certainty to all stakeholders including council staff that moving forward early would bring and, linked to this, helping to minimise the risk of losing the most talented staff to other councils who aren't going through the same process.

Cllr Seccombe added that another major driver for moving to unitary councils is the funding situation faced by all councils. The pressures around funding are considerable, especially around areas such as children's and adults' social care, SEND, home to school transport, and for the District/ Borough Councils and the pressures facing all councils continue to build.

The Leaders and Chief Executives of the five District and Borough Councils have been invited to engage. Warwickshire Association of Local Councils has been invited to engage with the conversation and we would want to continue that dialogue in a way which best suits Town and Parish Councils. Cllr Seccombe confirmed that there is no expectation that Town and Parish Councils will be required to take on more work. However, it was recognised that there are some Town and Parish Councils that would be keen to take on more powers and responsibilities that might arise from local government reorganisation and devolution, and we would be keen to work closely with these.

We should know if our expression of interest has been accepted by the end of January and this will be communicated through the usual channels.

### **Questions/Comments**

**Cllr Timms noted that references to mergers and takeovers are not helpful, as under a unitary arrangement, all 6 current councils would be replaced by a single new council.**

**Will the new unitary council have one housing team or will there be five teams managing five lots of housing stock?** All housing services will be led by the single new council. There will likely be some form of local housing governance, but it is too early to give any detail about this.

**If the elections in May 2025 do not go ahead and there is an election in May 2026 for the new shadow council, this means there will be no election in May 2027. For some Town and Parish Councils this will mean substantial additional election costs. Are there any plans for the County Council to support Town and Parish Councils with their elections in this respect?**

Cllr Seccombe noted this and agreed to raise it in discussions around the wider implications of moving to a single new council.

**Will the new unitary authority have fewer Councillors overall?**

Yes. There are currently around 255 Councillor positions across the District/ Borough Councils and the County Council, and the number will reduce. However, there are some “twin hatter” Councillors, holding both District/Borough Councillor positions and County Councillor positions, and so the starting point of Councillors is less than c255.

**What would be the estimated saving on Chief Executive salaries?**

It is too early to say, although clearly there would be a saving reducing from six to one, and there is no assumption that any one of the current Chief Executives will be the Chief Executive of the new council. There are several areas of Council activity that could be harmonised such as IT, Human Resources, Property, and Finance.

**Where does the South Warwickshire Local Plan sit within any new arrangement?**

The Local Plan needs to go forward. National demand often changes local plans, but this should not be affected by a move to a single new council.

**Considering the aborted plans to merge Warwick and Stratford Districts, what is the likelihood that unitarisation does not go ahead?**

The Government is clear that two-tier areas will move to single councils by 2028. The previous proposed merger by the two District Councils was voluntary, whereas with unitarisation, Government is requiring it to go forward. It is our collective and democratic responsibility to make this happen and get the very best arrangements for the residents and communities of Warwickshire.

**3. AOB**

Cllr Timms thanked everyone for their attendance and engagement. All were encouraged to think about any topics for the future meetings. If you would like to share any ideas, please contact Dominika Stockham at [dominikastockham@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:dominikastockham@warwickshire.gov.uk) or 07825856808.

**4. Date of next meeting**

13 March 2025, 10am.

**5. Meeting closed at 11.18**