

Love it, hate it or just tolerate it, the snow and ice gets people talking.

Beautiful snowy scenes result in mayhem and misery in practical terms when it hits our roads and pavements. When the snow and ice came in with the New Year, Kirkham with most of the country could have come to a standstill.

However, massive efforts made by our public services and helpful individuals ensured we kept our communities ticking over. Our Community Beat Officers were literally pushing vehicles to keep roads open until the gritting vehicles arrived. All this was done with smiles and even tempers.

My colleague Councillor Liz Oades and I were very concerned about the treacherous pavements in Kirkham and the Rural Fylde. We are both well aware that County Councils have to prioritise the main roads which results in pavements and side roads being like ice rinks. We decided the quickest way to deal with the High Street, Sheltered Accommodation and Medical Centres was to make an SOS call to HMP Kirkham who responded with alacrity collecting and then spreading grit salt, paid for by Kirkham Town Council, in the requested areas.

Prisons and prisoners often come under fire for whatever reason, but events like this demonstrate how they are part of the community. It is perhaps not widely realised how much HMP Kirkham routinely contributes to our Borough; for example Kirkham in Bloom, Kirkham and Wesham Railway Station and planting 1000,s of bulbs in Lytham.

In this instance, the gritting of the requested areas, have made the walkways much safer and resulted in many openly grateful pedestrians. I was happy to “reward” the volunteers from HMP with decadent hot chocolate when they had run out of grit!

Obviously this big freeze is a rare occurrence but it highlights the need for contingency plans. I am sure many Councils at all levels will be formulating and enhancing existing plans for any future prolonged big freeze.

The emergency Services have worked incredibly hard during the freeze but are often taken for granted as are many supplementary services such as Meals on Wheels. Most of us have no reason to be aware of the vast range of support systems, such as a lady who spoke to me this week of her job co-ordinating the provision of oxygen cylinders to rural areas, currently inaccessible in some cases. There are so many un-sung individuals working to help others and times, such as this, should make us all appreciate what wonderful systems we have.

A silver-lining of the big freeze should be to make us all appreciate just how much many of us take for granted on a daily basis. We are all being asked to check on our elderly and vulnerable neighbours, but should it really take a big freeze to inspire such community spirit? Hopefully this tough start to 2010 will encourage us all to carry on pulling together in this way, usually only inspired by extreme conditions.

Happy New Year. Elaine Silverwood

