

# Report

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Report to:	<b>Enterprise Resources Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>15 June 2011</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Winter Service</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ Advise Committee of the experiences of last winter
- ◆ Advise Committee of further actions proposed for next winter

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the contents of this report are noted and the proposed actions approved

## 3. Background

3.1. Another severe winter has been experienced with conditions particularly challenging from late November through to early January. Indeed, December is recognised as the coldest since records began. We have now experienced three successive severe winters with significant economic impacts being experienced nationally.

3.2. The new winter service arrangements put in place following the work of the Winter Service Member/Officer group were severely tested and generally performed well. However, as would be expected, a number of issues arose, some within the control of the Council, others outwith our control. This applied in particular to difficulties experienced on the trunk road network adjacent to Hamilton and East Kilbride.

3.3. The Council has held a cross – Resource Winter Debrief event, which included invitations being extended to the emergency services. This provided an opportunity to share views and experiences as to what went well, areas where challenges were experienced, and areas where service could be further improved. This report draws on the outputs from the Winter Debrief.

## 4. Performance assessment?

### 4.1. Priority Routes

Generally, all our main roads remained open although the need to continually treat these routes during periods of severe weather stretched our resources. Conditions were particularly difficult on Monday 6 December when blizzard conditions struck across central Scotland.

4.2. Committed Workforce

We benefited from a committed workforce who accommodated a shift to 12 hour working patterns to facilitate 24/7 gritting cover over an extended period.

4.3 Pre-Winter Stockholdings

High pre-winter salt stock levels allowed us to respond well to the extended period of severe weather. While many Councils were reaching critically low levels, two or three weeks into the event, our stock levels remained relatively high. We therefore benefited from considerably improved resilience.

4.4. Hardship Criteria

The introduction of “hardship” criteria worked well with the consequence that we were seen to be pro-active, responsive and flexible. We attended to a variety of critical medical situations, worked closely with the NHS to get renal dialysis patients to and from their homes and we assisted with bereavement situations.

4.5. New Grit Bins

Self help has been encouraged with well over 100 new grit bins being provided.

4.6. Cross Resource Working

Cross Resource Working was good. In particular, typically 200 operatives from Community Resources assisted for extended periods initially clearing our second tier “accessibility” footways and then moving onto the wider footway network.

4.7. Council Website Information

Web content was significantly enhanced with gritting routes and grit bin locations available on-line. Significantly greater explanation was also available as to the level of service which might be expected and links were provided to weather forecasts and planned gritting information.

4.8. Resilience Planning

The pre-determined resilience thresholds, whereby service levels dropped as salt stocks dropped, worked well albeit some minor adjustments are proposed for future years.

4.9. Community Service Offenders

Arrangements for Community Service Offenders to assist with snow clearing also worked well.

4.10. Fleet Performance

The winter maintenance fleet proved reliable and performed well. We benefited from an ongoing programme of fleet upgrading and excellent support from colleagues in fleet services.

**5. What issues remain?**

5.1 Gritting of Residential Areas

The limited extent to which gritting efforts penetrated into residential areas was a recurring complaint. In particular, there were concerns about elderly residents effectively being trapped in their houses for extended periods with icy pavements an issue.

Comment: It is simply not practical to grit all roads and footways in areas where elderly residents stay. This would obviously comprise a very large percentage of our road and footway network. Instead it is intended to liaise with colleagues in other Council Services, particularly Social Work, to ensure that adequate arrangements are put in place to safeguard the most vulnerable in our communities.

## 5.2 Budget

Again we have experienced a substantial overspend with year end costs reaching £6.25M. Salt prices have risen significantly and these are a contributory factor. However, given we have now experienced three successive challenging winters it is clear that the level of base budget (£3m) does not match the cost of the service. This situation, and press coverage of “overspends” contributes to a view that we have failed to react to, and learn from, previous severe winters.

Comment: Discussions are ongoing with colleagues in central finance to secure a more realistic level of base budget. It is anticipated that the budget for 2011/12 will include a base budget of £3M together with a reserve of £2M to provide total funding of £5M.

## 5.3 Salt Stocks

Low salt stocks again became an issue. Despite pre-winter salt stocks being substantially increased from 12,500T to over 21,000T, stock levels reached a low point of about 3,000T in early January following about 5 weeks of severe weather. In part the activation of the Scottish Salt Group contributed to this situation. This group directed suppliers to those Councils with the lowest levels of salt and because we were well prepared, and continued to have relatively high stock levels, we were effectively starved of replenishment stocks. However, notwithstanding this issue, it is clear that domestic (UK and Irish) salt miners simply cannot match salt demand during prolonged cold conditions. While a strategic salt supply had been secured for emergency use in Scotland this had started at relatively low levels and quickly became stretched.

Comment: It is proposed to expand the capacity of our salt barns to accommodate a further 5,000T of pre-winter salt stocks. In addition, further covered outdoor salt stocks are planned. We anticipate starting next winter with well over 30,000T of salt in stock.

## 5.4 HGV Driver Resources

At one depot (Canderside) difficulties were experienced in securing enough gritter drivers when 12 hour shift working was introduced. This situation was temporarily managed by redeploying drivers from other depots and utilising trained HGV drivers from elsewhere in the service.

Comment: Driver training is being accelerated to provide an increased pool of HGV/Gritter drivers for next winter.

## 5.5 Cross Resource Working.

The support provided by Community and Housing and Technical Resources operatives considerably enhanced the overall winter maintenance efforts. Planning was based on these operatives being used to grit our second tier “accessibility” footways, with the expectation being that this would be completed over a two day period. In many areas, this work was completed much quicker with the consequence that this resource was then available to assist in other areas. Laterally, Inspectors from the Roads Service were deployed to manage the snow clearing/gritting

activities of Community Resources but this arrangement would better be put in place from the outset.

Comment: We will formalise arrangements such that a Roads Inspector in each area is deployed in parallel with the Community Resources operatives to manage their gritting operations.

#### 5.6. Self Help

The self help message was promoted via a number of Council publications as well as the Council website. In some areas people responded well and they should be complimented for their efforts. However, overall the response was patchy at best.

Comments: We will continue to promote a self help ethos as public relations opportunities arise. This will again have a concerted public relations initiative ahead of the winter period.

#### 5.7. Public Expectation

Public expectation in some areas remains unrealistically high relative to the level of service which can be delivered during an extended period of severe weather with the currently available resources. This, however, was balanced to some extent by a significant number of letters of thanks and messages which complimented our efforts relative to other authorities and trunk road operators.

Comments: The scope of the winter service is primarily influenced by the extent of treatment required by our winter policy. An increased winter service will require significantly increased funding which it is acknowledged will be difficult to achieve in the current financial climate. Consequently, our response will be to continue to use public relations opportunities to highlight the extent of service which can, and which cannot, be expected. It should also be noted that a recent Audit Scotland Report (Maintaining Scotland's Roads – follow up report) highlighted this Council as one of only five in Scotland who invested over £5m in winter maintenance during the winter of 2009/10.

#### 5.8. School Transport

School transport issues generated significant negative publicity particularly in the rural area.

Comments: It is proposed to review a limited number of sensitive routes to determine whether current arrangements represent best value for the public purse. This recognises the potential for additional costs in special school transport arrangements to outweigh the cost of gritting a specific road. If appropriate, a small number of roads may be added to existing precautionary gritting routes.

#### 5.9. On-street Grit Bins

While these are crucial to supporting the self help message, there was much anecdotal evidence of excessive quantities of salt being removed. This included allegations in one area that local businesses were emptying grit bins to obtain salt to clear their business premises. In other areas, there were reports of "contractors" emptying grit bins and using the salt for a path/driveway clearing service being offered to local residents.

Comments: It is proposed that mechanisms are in place to convey the message that salt in on-street grit bins should only be used on public roads and footways, and that to do otherwise is effectively theft. This would seek to address what is currently a "grey area".

#### 5.10 Depot Grit Bins

Generally salt is made available to members of the public from large grit bins located outside depots. The amount of salt taken is supposed to be limited to a bucketful but there is widespread misuse of this arrangement. Commercial operators will seek to fill pickups and consequential confrontation with roads operatives can become problematic. The extent of misuse this winter was such that these grit bins were relocated to within the depot, an arrangement which worked considerably better.

Comments: An alternative of large “community” grit bins deployed at strategic locations will be investigated in the short/medium term.

#### 5.11 Vehicle Preparation

A number of options are now available to allow drivers to better prepare their vehicles for winter driving. These include winter tyres, snow chains and snow socks. The costs, or perceived cost, of these items appears to be a barrier to take up with most drivers continuing to rely on the Council to grit roads rather than prepare their vehicle for driving in snow conditions.

Comment: We will upgrade the web content to highlight the availability and likely cost of these options.

#### 5.12. Standby Rotas - Supervisors

Standby arrangements cover working outwith normal hours. Traditionally depot supervision standby rotas have operated on the basis that a specified individual goes on standby for a full week. This winter it was necessary to introduce shift working to provide 24 hour gritting cover. At weekends, in particular, this theoretically means that the designated standby supervisor is supposed to be working 24 hour days over both Saturday and Sunday. Clearly this arrangement is not practical.

Comment: Standby arrangements will be reviewed and more practical arrangements introduced. This is likely to involve modest additional cost and additional training.

#### 5.13. Alternative Gritting Materials

Following the snowstorm of 6 December significant deposits of hard packed snow and ice remained on our roads, including many main roads for a number of days. The nature of this material was such that normal gritting arrangements had limited impact.

Comment: The Roads Service will consider alternative de-icing treatment suitable for limited use in such situations.

### **6. Employee Implications**

6.1. There are no significant employee implications.

### **7. Financial Implications**

7.1. There are no significant financial implications other than those highlighted at 5.2.

### **8. Other Implications**

8.1. There would be significant safety risks for road users if the Council had no winter service plans.

## **9. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

- 9.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 9.2. There is also no requirement to undertake any consultation in terms of the information contained in the report.

**Colin McDowall**

**Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)**

6 June 2011

### **Link(s) to Council Objectives/Improvement Themes/Values**

- Efficient and effective use of resources
- Improve community safety
- Self aware and improving

### **Previous References**

- Executive Committee, 22 September 2010 – Winter Service

### **List of Background Papers**

Fleet – continuously review

### **Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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