

# Report

Report to:	<b>Enterprise Resources Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>20 January 2010</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Extreme Weather Conditions - Winter Maintenance Response</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ advise Committee of the Council's winter maintenance response during the recent extreme conditions
- ♦ advise Committee of the issues which have arisen and the actions proposed in response

## 2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the Council's winter maintenance response is noted
- (2) that the Committee notes the actions proposed in response

## 3. Background

3.1. The Council, as Roads Authority, is obliged to take such steps as we consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.

3.2. The Council's policy in this regard is set out in the Council's "Winter Maintenance Procedures and Resources 2009/10".

3.3. The Council's policy is one of the most ambitious in Scotland aiming to treat 70% of the network on a planned basis. The key features of the policy are:-

- Gritting of "**Precautionary**" **Routes** which comprise 60% of the road network, which are treated on receipt of an adverse forecast, commencing at 4.30am. Precautionary routes are:-
  - (a) Class A and B roads
  - (b) District and Local Distributor roads
  - (c) Major public service bus routes not included above
  - (d) Access routes to hospitals, at least one vehicular access to schools, ambulance depots, fire stations
  - (e) At least one access to isolated villages
  - (f) Main residential access roads and roads with significant access problems

These are typically gritted both early morning and late afternoon.

- Gritting of **“Daytime” Routes**, comprising a further 10% of the network, during normal working hours. Daytime routes are:-

- (a) Roads which serve a substantial number of dwellings
- (b) Residential roads with access difficulties
- (c) C class or unclassified rural roads with access difficulties

Daytime routes are only gritted when the temperature is not expected to rise above zero by noon.

- **Extreme Weather Routes**, the remainder of the network, is gritted when extreme weather takes hold, as far as resources permit.
- Main pedestrian routes within town centres are gritted daily on a precautionary basis.
- Less well used “accessibility” footpaths will be treated during extreme weather as far as resources permit. Accessibility footpaths are those linking residential and commercial areas.
- The remainder of the footpath network will only be treated as far as resources permit.

- 3.4. To underpin the winter maintenance strategy the Council has in place a salt supply contract with Salt Union Ltd. They are Britain’s largest supplier of natural rock salt and operators of the UK’s largest rock salt mine at Winsford in Cheshire. Prior to the start of winter our covered salt storage facilities were full with 13,779 tonnes of rock salt. The supply contract obliges the supplier to:-

- Maintain stock levels above a minimum level of 6,900 tonnes
- Replenish salt stock to 12,500 tonnes by 24 December annually

- 3.5 Over the full winter period the Council has in place a formal rota arrangement to manage winter maintenance operations. This involves Duty Managers and Duty Senior Managers on formal weekly rotas. The duty manager is an experienced officer who has responsibility for checking weather forecasts three times daily and deciding upon the Council’s specific winter maintenance response. The Duty Manager is supported by a Senior Duty Manager who is a member of the Roads Management Team and is available to assist at all times during the week in which they are on duty. This approach is intended to ensure that both a robust winter maintenance service is provided and that appropriate senior Councillors, Senior Officers, and the Council’s call centre staff are updated on an ongoing basis.

#### **4. Recent Events**

- 4.1. An extended period of extremely cold conditions began on 10 December, and continued through the festive season, with the first significant snowfall on 16 December. Since 10 December temperatures have dropped below zero on every day and as low as -15.7 degrees on the night of 7/8 January at Lesmahagow. Regular snowfall falls have been experienced and these have been particularly heavy in the Clydesdale area.

- 4.2. Similar conditions were experienced throughout Scotland over this period and, more recently, cold conditions spread to the rest of the UK.
- 4.3. As a result UK salt supplies have come under extreme pressure and our salt supplier has defaulted on their contractual obligation to maintain a minimum salt stock level and to replenish salt stocks.
- 4.4. On 24 December it became apparent that salt stocks were running low and the decision was taken to:-

- Use a salt/sand mix on precautionary gritting routes
- Cease Daytime Routes, footways and refilling of grit bins

This approach is consistent with advice being received from the Scottish Government Resilience Room (SGORR) and the County Surveyors Society.

- 4.5. Salt suppliers across the UK are now being directed by “Salt Cell” which has been established by the UK Government to divert supplies to those areas of greatest need, setting aside any contractual arrangements. This authority, and all other Scottish authorities are supplying daily returns of salt stock, salt supplies received, and salt usage to SGORR for forwarding to Salt Cell. A clearing house has also been established at Perth and Kinross Council to receive all requests for salt supplies from Scottish authorities.
- 4.6. Appropriate Council staff are continuing to meet on a daily basis to review prevailing conditions and resources and to agree the actions required.
- 4.7. The current winter maintenance response from the Council comprises:-
- Continued gritting of all Precautionary Routes, typically twice daily but with reduced salt concentrations
  - Sanding of all Daytime Routes, although this was temporarily suspended as a result of sand freezing in gritters during the particularly cold conditions of 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> January.
  - Sanding of extreme routes as far as gritting resources permit
  - With the assistance of Community Resources and Housing and Technical Resources, the sanding of precautionary footpath routes, accessibility footpath routes and housing areas as far as resources permit.
  - Partial replenishment of grit bins using a sand/salt mix
- 4.8. Maintenance of the gritting fleet has also presented challenges. Fuel admixtures have been used to protect against diesel freezing, and in East Kilbride, additional garaging facilities have been utilised during extremely cold weather.
- 4.9. The workforce has also demonstrated considerable commitment and resilience with many yet to enjoy the usual relaxation of the festive season. Some 150 Roads operatives are involved in winter maintenance on a one week on, one week off basis. We had 44 operatives working on Christmas day and 46 operatives working on New Years day. A further 75 operatives from Housing and Technical Resources and 90 operatives from Community Resources have been involved since 6 January.

- 4.10. So far this year we have used some 24,000 tonnes of salt for gritting operations. This figure is not high relative to the total usage last winter of 42,169 tonnes. The reasons for this are the relatively wet and mild conditions experienced during most of November and restricting gritting operations, as a result of the lack of salt.

## **5. Actions Required**

- 5.1. After a series of relatively mild winters we have now experienced two successive winters where salt supplies across the UK have reached critical levels.
- 5.2. It seems clear that despite being willing to enter into contractual supply commitments, suppliers are unable to deliver during extended periods of adverse weather.
- 5.3. It is consequently proposed to explore options to facilitate covered salt storage capacity of around 40,000 tonnes which is at the top end of likely total winter usage.
- 5.4. In the meantime we will continue to carry out winter maintenance duties in accordance with the adopted Council policies.

## **6. Employee Implications**

- 6.1. None

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. Confirmed costs for the current period of extreme weather will not be known for a few weeks. However, preliminary assessments suggest that the winter maintenance costs to date, based on tonnages of winter material used, will be approximately £2.4m relative to the current annual budget of £3.0m.

## **8. Other Implications**

- 8.1. None

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

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

**Colin McDowall**  
**Executive Director (Enterprise Resources)**

13 January 2010

## **Link(s) to Council Objectives**

- Efficient and effective use of resources
- Improve community safety
- Improve the road network

## **Previous References**

None.

**List of Background Papers**

None.

**Contact for Further Information**

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

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