

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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<b>COMMITTEE</b>	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
<b>DATE</b>	9 September 2025
<b>EXEMPT</b>	No
<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>	No
<b>REPORT TITLE</b>	Roads Winter Service Plan 2025-2026
<b>REPORT NUMBER</b>	CR&E/25/201
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Gale Beattie
<b>CHIEF OFFICER</b>	Mark Reilly
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	Claire Royce, Paul Davies
<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE</b>	8

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is intended to present Members with the Roads Winter Service Plan for the coming winter for approval and to highlight any significant changes.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approve the “Roads Winter Service Plan 2025/2026” (Appendix 1);
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Chief Officer - Operations, following consultation with the Chief Officer – Finance, to continue to deliver the Winter Maintenance Service; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer – Operations to hold an induction meeting on a date to be arranged, for elected members on the winter service process.

### 3. CURRENT SITUATION

- 3.1 Aberdeen City Council’s Roads Winter Service Plan has evolved over many years and is reviewed and amended annually to reflect both national and local requirements, changes in resource and guidance. This year’s Roads Winter Service Plan is an evolution of the service plan for 2024/25 with updates to reflect organisational change.
- 3.2 The winter maintenance budget (unchanged since 2019) is only sufficient to provide a basic level of winter maintenance during a mild to average winter. This is around the level which the service believes to be only slightly above the minimum level required to fulfil statutory obligation. More severe winters, such as winter 2020/21, have seen significant extra spend which was funded from the Council’s contingencies. Whilst winter 2024/25 was relatively mild, additional budget provision of £33,000 was also provided from the Council’s Contingencies budget. With inflationary effects on material costs and uplifts in labour rates and fuel costs, the service again forecast that current budgets are

only sufficient to deliver a service in line with minimum statutory obligation over a mild to average winter.

3.3 The effects of climate change continue to present challenges to the winter service. During recent winters, significant geographical variations in simultaneous weather behaviours have been observed. Officers have had to deal with instances of heavy rainfall causing flooding concerns to the east of the city whilst simultaneously snowfall persists in the west. These competing demands present complex logistical challenges to service delivery but are becoming more regular and expected by the service.

3.3.1 A pattern of weather behaviour whereby temperatures rise during the day, often accompanied by precipitation, before falling rapidly through late afternoon and evening times continue to pose a challenge to treatment. Historically, an early morning grit was often sufficient to treat routes for a 24 hour period, however the recent weather patterns have seen regular requirements for routes to be treated multiple times through the day as wash off and freeze thaw removes residual salt. A lesser requirement for morning grits, and greater for later grits has been observed. The effect of this has been the requirement for greater numbers of gritter runs to treat the primary route network, increasing labour, salt and fuel costs.

3.3.2 A secondary impact of the changed weather patterns effect on gritting has been to lessen the extent of secondary and tertiary network which can be treated on days of continued action. Precipitation throughout the day effectively acts as a reset on gritting, requiring the service to revert back to treatment of priority one routes.

### 3.4 Route Changes

For winter 2025/26 the roads service will run lightly amended versions of the routes run in winter 2024/25. No roads will be removed from any of the routes, however minor alterations will be made in line with changes made to the adopted roads network; for instance where road layouts have changed as a result of development works. Other minor changes will reflect feedback from drivers. These include changes to make the routes easier to drive in the gritting vehicles.

### 3.5 Salt Usage and Stocks

Salt stock levels will be taken back up to around 11,500 tonnes (full capacity) for the beginning of the winter season, and to maximise service resilience. This stock will be topped up with regular programmed deliveries throughout winter. Salt usage in previous years is shown below.

Year	Salt Usage (tonnes)
2020/21	11,760
2021/22	4,820
2022/23	18,642
2023/24	14,697
2024/25	11,597

3.5.1 During the winter 2024/25 season, and as with the winter previous, there were a significant number of winter treatment days where daytime rainfall washed off salt spread during early morning grits. With temperatures dropping through late afternoon and into the evenings, there was a requirement to re-treat routes covered earlier in the day. In contrast, during dry conditions a route may only require to be gritted once per day, and sometimes one treatment may last multiple days where there is no wash off.

### 3.6 Salt Bins

3.6.1 There are more than 900 salt bins throughout the city. Every year there are demands for further bins at new locations. Maintaining the salt bins is a labour-intensive operation and to continually increase the numbers would only add to the current restocking problems. The policy of not issuing new bins will be maintained and any requests for new bins will be rejected.

3.6.2 During extended periods of winter weather, salt bins may become depleted and there may be significant delay to them being refilled. The reason for these delays is that the staff who drive gritting vehicles and complete gritting activities are the same staff as carry out grit bin replenishment. The treatment of priority routes is prioritised over salt bin replenishment. During recent years the list of bins requiring replenishment has regularly been in the hundreds. Bins will be refilled as soon as resources permit, however residents should expect the possibility of a significant delay between reporting an empty bin and it being refilled.

3.6.3 Twenty large capacity grit bins, introduced in late 2018, from which the public can collect salt remain in place. These “community bins” have continued to see low utilisation and it is the intention to further promote them in a bid to encourage residents to collect salt for their location. Residents can fill buckets, or similar suitable receptacles, which they can store at their property for use on the adopted footways and carriageways around their properties when the need arises. With these bins being easier and more efficient to fill, there is a service benefit to their use. It is hoped that residents can be encouraged to make use of this resource.

3.6.4 It should be noted that the roads adoption process does not include salt bins and the roads service do not adopt salt bins left by developers when adopting new roads. ACC may request that developers remove these prior to roads being adopted.

### 3.7 Community Salt Bags

3.7.1 There were 358 applications for bags before winter 2024/25 with 253 bags being delivered. The primary reasons for applications being rejected were a lack of suitable location for the bag, or proximity to another applicant. No alterations to the scheme are being proposed for the 2025/26 winter season. A further 48 salt bags were delivered to Aberdeen schools.

3.7.2 The guidelines for the scheme are found within the winter service plan and will be published on the Council webpage.

- Salt is issued to community groups.
- The bags are to be in a secure place, such as a resident's driveway as they are susceptible to theft and vandalism.
- The locations need to be accessible to a large delivery lorry.
- Salt will not be left on or near private grassed or garden areas until the owner/tenant accepts responsibility for the possible long-term damage that could occur from salt contamination of the ground.

3.7.3 Applications will open on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September and the cut-off date for applications will be Sunday the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2025, after which applications will not be processed due to the additional demand this places on the service at this busy time of year. The media team advertise the scheme in advance. Whilst the scheme will run until late October, we would encourage applications as soon as possible as this helps to ensure the scheme runs as efficiently as possible.

### 3.8 Service Provision – Festive Period

Service provision over the festive period will remain at the same level as in previous years. The specific details are shown below.

Day	Status	Service Available
Mon 22 <sup>nd</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Normal Service
Tues 23 <sup>rd</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Normal Service
Wed 24 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Normal Service
Thurs 25 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Public Holiday	Standby & Response only
Fri 26 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Public Holiday	Standby & Response only
Sat 27 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Standby & Response only
Sun 28 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Standby & Response only
Mon 29 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Standby & Response only
Tues 30 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Normal Day	Standby & Response only
Wed 31 <sup>st</sup> Dec	Public Holiday	Standby & Response only
Thurs 1 <sup>st</sup> Jan	Public Holiday	Standby & Response only
Fri 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan	Public Holiday	Standby & Response only
Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> Jan	Normal Day	Normal Service
Sun 4 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Normal Day	Normal Service
Mon 5 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Normal Day	Normal Service

The Response team consists of up to 6 roadworkers providing 24 hours of cover per day, 7 days per week. This team is available to respond to the required treatment on the 4 Priority 1 Gold Routes.

### 3.9 Cycle Routes

Cycle route provision remains the same as winter 2024/25.

3.10 Footway treatments remain unchanged for winter 2024/25. The city centre priority 1 footways remain unchanged and all other footways will continue to be treated as priority 2. Appendix C of the winter service plan shows the footways which we will try to prioritise once treatment of the priority 2 footways commences.

3.10.1 The city centre priority 1 footways as set out in the Roads Winter Services Plan are the only routes to be covered as part of the early morning operations. The priority 1 routes are concentrated on the city centre, shopping areas and footways with a steep gradient. Treatment should begin on these footways early in the morning so that they may be completed prior to the footways becoming busy with pedestrians. Treatment is not safe or practical once footways become busy.

3.10.2 Footway and cycleway treatment operations are completed in conjunction with the Grounds Service who support the Roads Service during winter operations and without whom we would be unable to provide the current levels of service.

3.10.3 Once the priority 1 footways are treated, further treatment is extended into the priority 2 footways and cycleways. The treatment that lower priority footways and cycleways receive is dependent on the resources available and so there is no timescale placed on when these will be completed. Where conditions mandate the re-treatment of priority 1 routes, this will limit the number of priority 2 footways which can be treated.

### 3.11 Public Information

3.11.1 An information section for Winter Operations is included on the Council's web site and this provides information on gritter routes and the winter service plan. The webpage will continue to be developed further as necessary. Information on winter conditions and treatments is shared on ACC's social media pages.

3.11.2 The Roads Service work closely with the ACC media team to put winter information into the public domain. This has helped reduce enquiries and complaints from the public and is something that the service will continue to grow for the coming winter. The media team will continue to issue a daily winter service update (Mon-Fri) to elected members to keep them abreast of operations.

### 3.12 Resilience

Whilst no resilience issues are foreseen, to ensure salt supply risk is minimised, salt levels will be kept high with top ups throughout the winter as necessary to ensure good stock.

### 3.13 Partner Organisations

3.13.1 Aberdeen City Council roads team may help facilitate winter maintenance operations and initiatives carried out by other public sector organisations and third-party partner groups, such as community councils. Unfortunately, the

service is unable to support these initiatives financially within current budget allocations.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The winter maintenance budget remains unchanged from 2024/25, however inflationary effects on resource costs will continue to reduce the effective spending power of the winter budget.
- 4.2 It is extremely difficult to predict the actual cost of any winter maintenance season in advance, and this is even more challenging when faced with the impact of climate change and highly localised winter weather patterns experienced within the City. It should be noted that expenditure for four of the previous five winters have produced overspends of between £33,000 and £530,000 which have been funded from Council Contingencies. Officers from Roads Services will be in regular contact with Finance throughout the winter season, so any pressure on existing budgets is identified well in advance.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Failure to provide a robust and justifiable “Roads Winter Service Plan” would leave the Council vulnerable to legal challenges and 3rd party insurance claims.
- 5.2 The Council is obligated under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 to take such steps as it considers reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over a public road.

#### **6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Gritting operations are carried out using salt as the primary de-icing treatment. It is inevitable that as part of these operations, salt will be washed into water courses. The service have considered the environmental implications of the use of salt and have concluded that the environmental risk posed is low, and that at present no practical alternative exists.
- 6.2 Further environmental consequence comes from the burning of diesel in the fleet of gritting vehicles. Alternative fuels with a lower carbon footprint are being investigated for the replacement of the existing fleet once they reach the end of their working lives, although no plant is due for replacement before the commencement of winter 2025/26.

## 7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H)  *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
<b>Strategic Risk</b>	Failure to complete adequate winter maintenance operations could compromise travel and transport across the strategic Aberdeen road network.	The service plan has been designed to ensure that primary roads will remain treated at all times.	L	Yes
<b>Compliance</b>	The legal requirement and basis for a Roads Winter Service Plan has been in place for many years. What is considered an adequate Winter Service Plan changes in line with national guidance. There is a risk that not following national guidance may open the council up to litigation.	The winter service plan has been produced following the national guidance such as advice in the "Well managed Highway Infrastructure" Code of Practice. Staff also attend national seminars and discuss requirements with neighbouring authorities to rationalise treatments across the region.	L	Yes
<b>Financial</b>	Allocated Budget will only cover costs of a mild winter, overspend at times of prolonged or worse than average winter weather will require the allocation of additional budget.	Make provision within the overall budgets for the possibility of additional expenditure being required if the winter is more than averagely severe.	H	Yes

	35 hour working arrangements may necessitate greater use of overtime.	There are no mitigations available for this risk.	<b>H</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Reputational</b>	Winter maintenance activities are highly visible and residents may form negative views of operations if they believe winter maintenance to be inadequate.	The winter service plan outlines how winter maintenance will be completed and provides an explanation of this to residents.  Social media posts will be used to keep customers updated with the actions being taken.	<b>L</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Environment / Climate</b>	The risk to plants, trees, watercourses, bridges and other structures from overtreating the networks.	There is a potential risk of overtreating the network with salt this is mitigated by training the duty officers on the required level of treatment.	<b>L</b>	<b>Yes</b>

## 8. OUTCOMES

<b><u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u></b>	
	<b>Impact of Report</b>
<b>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</b>	
<i>Delivering a Revised Local Transport Strategy</i>	Continue to work to facilitate safe transport for customers during winter weather events.
<b><u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u></b>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	The provision of an effective winter maintenance service that keeps the transport network working effectively is important to support the economy of Aberdeen during adverse winter conditions
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	The Council is committed to providing a winter maintenance service that will help to enhance Aberdeen as a place to invest, live and visit. An effective winter maintenance service will also make the city safer for all road and transport users.



## 9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not Required

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Code of Practice for Roads – *Well Managed Highway Infrastructure*

10.2 Roads (Scotland) Act 1984

## 11. APPENDICES

11.1 Roads Winter Service Plan 2025-2026

## 12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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