

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Operational Delivery Committee
DATE	31 st August 2022
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Roads Winter Service Plan 2022-2023
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/22/163
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Mark Reilly
REPORT AUTHOR	Paul Davies
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.1.1

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

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

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:-

- 2.1 Approve the “Roads Winter Service Plan 2022/2023” (Appendix 1)
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Chief Officer - Operations and Protective Services to, following consultation with the Chief Officer – Finance, continue to deliver the Winter Maintenance Service; and
- 2.3 Instruct the Chief Officer – Operations and Protective Services to hold an induction meeting on a date to be arranged, for new and existing 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 years’ Roads Winter Service Plan is an evolution of the service plan for 2021/22.
- 3.2 Winter maintenance during the previous two years has taken place with various levels of pandemic related restrictions in place. The roads operations team successfully managed to deliver winter service during these times by having in place robust resilience plans for service delivery, and whilst it is hoped that no such measures will be required during winter 2022/23, officers would like to

assure members that the service would be prepared were pandemic restrictions to be reintroduced.

3.3 The winter maintenance budget (unchanged since 2019) has only been sufficient to provide a basic level of winter maintenance during a mild to average winter, 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 from contingency budget. This coming winter will see a significant increase in costs with salt prices up around 25% and fuel prices increased, coupled with the loss of ability to run the gritting fleet on red diesel, as previously (white diesel is currently just under 30% more expensive). These cost rises mean that the roads service forecast an ability to deliver a service level which will equate to what officers believe to be a minimum level to meet statutory obligation.

3.4 Changes in winter weather behaviour which have presented new challenges have been observed over recent years. During the last three winters there have been occasions where the service has been dealing with flooding in the east of the city whilst tackling snowfall to the west. This is a phenomenon which had not previously been observed and which has been logistically challenging to tackle. Freeze-thaw patterns also appear to be changing. It has become commonplace to have a repeating cycle of rain during daylight hours followed by overnight freezing. This effectively limits how much of the city can be gritted as the daytime rain washes off salt spread during morning grits, therefore requiring these routes to be re-run, where continuously low temperatures would allow the service to move onto lower priority routes.

3.4 Route changes

3.4.1 For winter 2021/22 the roads service reverted to the routes which had been in place prior to the *spaces for people* alterations made to the network in response to the pandemic. For winter 2022/23, no roads will see a change in priority level and changes to routes will be minor to accommodate changes to the road network; for example, the realignment of various roads as part of the recently opened Haudagain improvement scheme.

3.5 Salt Usage and Stocks

Salt stock levels have been taken back up to around 11,500 tonnes (full capacity) - this stock is to be topped up with regular programmed deliveries throughout winter.

Year	Starting Tonnage	Usage
19/20	11,911	4,500
20/21	11,750	11,760
21/22	11,500	4,820

3.6 Salt Bins

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. It is proposed to continue the policy of not issuing any additional salt bins this winter, but to continue to promote the 1 tonne salt bag scheme for community use. Twenty large capacity grit bins, introduced in late 2018, from which the public can collect salt remain in place. These “community bins” have been poorly utilised and it is the intention to further promote them in a bid to encourage customers to collect salt for their location. With these bins being easier and more efficient to fill, there is a service benefit to their use.

3.7 Community Salt Bags

3.7.1 This scheme has been run a decade now and has proven popular and effective. The media team will help promote the scheme and the benefits it provides to the public.

3.7.2 There were 285 applications for bags before winter 2021/22 with 200 bags being delivered. The main reasons for applications being rejected was a lack of suitable location for the bag and proximity to another applicant. No alterations to the scheme are being proposed for the 2022/23 winter season.

3.7.3 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.

3.7.4 The cut-off date for applications is Monday the 31st of October 2022, 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 will make the public aware of this well in advance of winter. Whilst the scheme will run until the end of October, we would encourage applications as soon as possible as this helps to ensure the scheme runs as efficiently as possible.

3.7.5 In previous years, a considerable staff resource has been required to fill the salt bags. This year, as a spend-to-save, the service intends to procure a digger attachment which will allow for one man filling of the salt bags, and at a much quicker rate. It is expected this will cost around £3,500-5,000 and the return on investment will be under two years.

3.8 Service provision over the 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
Sat 17 Dec	Normal Day	Standby + Response
Sun 18 Dec	Normal Day	Standby + Response
Mon 19 Dec	Normal Day	Full Service
Tues 20 Dec	Normal Day	Full Service
Wed 21 Dec	Normal Day	Full Service
Thur 22 Dec	Normal Day	Full Service
Fri 23 Dec	Normal Day	Full Service
Sat 24 Dec	Normal Day	Standby+ Response
Sun 25 Dec	Public Holiday	Standby+ Response
Mon 26 Dec	Public Holiday	Standby+Early Morning+ Response
Tues 27 Dec	Normal Day	Standby+Early Morning+ Response
Wed 28 Dec	Normal Day	Standby+Early Morning+ Response
Thurs 29 Dec	Normal Day	Standby + Response
Fri 30 Dec	Public Holiday	Standby + Response
Sat 31 Dec	Public Holiday	Standby + Response
Sun 1 Jan	Normal Day	Standby + Response
Mon 2 Jan	Normal Day	Standby + Response

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.

Standby + Response consists of sufficient staff to operate the 6 Priority 1 Silver carriageway routes and 2 city centre priority footpath gritter routes.

Early Morning operations, if necessary, provides a treatment of the 6 Priority 1 Silver carriageway routes and 2 city centre priority footpath gritter routes. These will commence at 04:45 and this shift will continue working until 15:45 at the end of the normal working day.

3.9 Footways and Cycle Path Operations

Treatment of footways and cycle routes remain as per winter 2021/22.

- 3.9.1 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 footways early mornings so that they may be completed prior to the footways becoming busy with pedestrians. Treatment is not safe or practical once footways become busy.

3.9.2 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.

3.9.3 Once the priority 1 footways are treated, further treatment is extended into the lower priority 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.

3.10 Public Information

3.10.1 An information section for Winter Operations is included on the Council's web site and this provides information on gritter routes and live information on operations on the main routes, including gritter tracking showing where operations have been completed. The webpage will continue to be developed further as necessary.

3.10.2 In recent years the Roads Service has worked closely with the ACC media team to put more 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.

3.11 Consultation

In past years, ACC have extended an invite to the following organisations to consult on the content of the Roads Winter Service Plan: Aberdeenshire Council, Aberdeen Roads Limited, Bear Scotland, Bon Accord Care, NHS Scotland, Aberdeen City Council – Education, and Housing Services, Police Scotland, The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. In the last three years, there has been very limited response from these organisations, and no amendments have been made to the service plan as a result of the consultation exercise. Therefore, roads do not intend to invite these organisations to consultation prior to winter 2022/23, however roads will continue to issue a copy of the winter service plan to these organisations for reference.

3.12 Resilience

3.12.1 While hopefully low, there is a residual risk that the restrictions in some form could return to manage the potential future developments to the pandemic, such as a new strain or similar. Were this to be the case the roads service would return to the working model used to cover the two previous winters.

3.12.2 Salt supply issues are potentially possible with ongoing world events and it has been noted that getting deliveries of salt can be a little more challenging than in pre-pandemic times. 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.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The ongoing increase in cost for salt and fuel, coupled with the necessity to use only white diesel for winter operations will add significant cost strain to service delivery.
- 4.2 It should be noted that the expenditure for the previous three winters has been £1.37M in 2021/22, £2.1M in 2020/21 and £1.339M in 2019/20. The outturn expenditure is heavily dependent on conditions experienced during the winter. It would therefore be prudent to note that authorisation may be required for continued expenditure beyond the budget should the weather be worse than anticipated.

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 they consider 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 plan is due for replacement before the commencement of winter 2022/23.

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?
Strategic Risk	Failure to complete adequate winter maintenance	The service plan has been designed to ensure that primary roads will	L	Yes

	operations could compromise travel and transport across the strategic Aberdeen road network.	remain treated at all times.		
Compliance	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
Financial	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
Reputational	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.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	The risk to plants, trees, watercourses,	There is a potential risk of overtreating the network with	L	Yes

	bridges and other structures from overtreating the networks.	salt this is mitigated by training the duty officers on the required level of treatment.		
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8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><i>3. Refresh the Local Transport Strategy, ensuring it includes the results of a city centre parking review, promotes cycle and pedestrian routes, and considers support for public transport.</i></p>	Continue to work to facilitate safe transport for customers during winter weather events.
<u>Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
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	IIA Completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not Required

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

11. APPENDICES

11.1 Roads Winter Service Plan 2022-2023

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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