

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee
DATE	29 August 2023
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Roads Winter Service Plan 2023-2024
REPORT NUMBER	RES/23/230
DIRECTOR	Steven Whyte
CHIEF OFFICER	Mark Reilly
REPORT AUTHOR	Neale Burrows, Paul Davies
TERMS OF REFERENCE	8

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 2023/2024” (Appendix 1); and
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Chief Officer - Operations and Protective Services, following consultation with the Chief Officer – Finance, to continue to deliver the Winter Maintenance Service.

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 2023/24.
- 3.2 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. In winter 2022/23 additional budget provision of £392,000 came from the contingency 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. As with several previous winters, significant geographical variations in simultaneous weather have been observed with heavy rainfall causing flooding concerns to the east of the city while snowfall persists in the west being an example of emerging patterns of weather behaviour. These competing demands present complex logistical challenges.

3.3.1 A pattern of weather behaviour seems to be establishing whereby temperatures rise during the day, often accompanied by precipitation, before falling rapidly through late afternoon and evening times. This has had an impact effect on winter 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 2023/24 the roads service will run slightly updated versions of the routes run in winter 2022/23. No roads will be removed from any of the routes, however alterations will be made in line with changes made to the adopted roads network; for instance the Haudagain bypass. 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). This stock will be topped up with regular programmed deliveries throughout winter. Salt usage in previous years is shown below.

Year	Salt Usage (tonnes)
2019/20	4,500
2020/21	11,760
2021/22	4,820
2022/23	18,642

3.5.1 During the winter 2022/23 season 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. This repeated running of routes coupled with a high number of winter treatment

days led to a high level of salt use. 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

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 typically seen fairly 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 receptacle’s, 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 may be useful to note that the roads adoption process does not include salt bins and the roads service do not adopt salt bins left by developers.

3.7 Community Salt Bags

3.7.1 There were 250 applications for bags before winter 2022/23 with 209 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 2023/24 winter season.

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 1st of October and the cut-off date for applications will be Tuesday the 31st of October 2023, 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. 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.

3.8 Service Provision – Gritter Drivers

Due to the changing weather patterns, the delivery model for drivers will remain under review and may be subject to change if weather patterns persist, however any changes will not impact the proposed delivery of the winter plan.3.9

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

3.10 Cycle Routes

When the winter service report for 2022/23 was presented to committee for approval, committee resolved to instruct the Chief Officer – Operations and Protective Services to engage, prior to the production of future years' Roads Winter Service Plans, with active travel groups including Aberdeen Cycle Forum and Grampian Cycling Partnership to confirm that the main cycling commuting routes agreed in 2013 and listed in appendix C section G are still the main routes used. The roads service held a meeting to which cycling groups in Aberdeen were invited. Feedback was received regarding the winter service. During the meeting the cycling groups raised issues with consistency of treatment and routes treated. Some routes identified as core routes do not form part of the adopted roads network and do not come under the remit of the Roads winter service plan which only covers winter treatment of areas where there exists a statutory obligation to treat.

3.11 Footway treatment remains unchanged from winter 2022/23.

3.11.1 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.

3.11.2 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.

3.11.3 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.

3.12 Public Information

3.12.1 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.

3.12.2 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.

3.13 Resilience

Whilst no resilience issues are foreseen, salt supply issues can potentially become possible. 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 Inflationary effects on resource costs will continue to reduce the effective spending power of the winter budget.

4.2 It should be noted that the expenditure for the previous three winters has been £1.971M in 2022/23, £1.37M in 2021/22 and £2.1M in 2020/21. 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 2023/24.

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 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
Compliance	The legal requirement and basis for a Roads Winter Service Plan has been in place for many years. What is	The winter service plan has been produced following the national guidance such as advice in the “Well managed Highway	L	Yes

	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.	Infrastructure” Code of Practice. Staff also attend national seminars and discuss requirements with neighbouring authorities to rationalise treatments across the region.		
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, 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.	L	Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	

<i>Delivering a Revised Local Transport Strategy</i>	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	Stage 1 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 2023-2024

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