

Agenda Item	<b>15</b>
Report No	<b>EDI/12/18</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Environment, Development and Infrastructure

**Date:** 1 February 2018

**Report Title:** Winter Maintenance

**Report By:** Director of Community Services

### **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides an up-date to Members on the challenges/issues faced by the service in delivering the winter maintenance service this year and the anticipated impact on the budget.

### **2 Recommendations**

2.1 Members are invited to:

- note the challenges faced by the service in delivering the winter maintenance service this year, and the pressure on the budget due to increased requirement for staff overtime and salt;
- note the outcomes of the meeting with community representatives and the proposed 'lessons learned' meeting with staff; and
- consider if a review of the Winter Maintenance Policy should be undertaken.

### **3 Background**

- 3.1 The Council's Winter Service Policy was approved by Community Services Committee in April 2016 and is attached as an **appendix** to this report.
- 3.2 Roads are treated in accordance to their classification of 'Primary', 'Secondary' or 'Other' routes. Primary routes are gritted Mondays to Saturdays 6am to 9pm and on Sundays and public holidays from 7am to 9pm. Secondary routes are gritted following the completion of Primary routes and are gritted Mondays to Saturdays from 6am to 6pm within available resources. Other routes are treated as resources permit.
- 3.3 Winter Maintenance Plans, and the priority roads lists, are agreed by Local Area Committees each Autumn.
- 3.4 Footpaths are also treated in accordance to their classification of Primary, Secondary or Other routes. Treatment times are between 6am and 6pm with routes being treated on a priority basis as resources permit.

### **4 Resources**

- 4.1 The Council's gritting fleet includes 105 Gritters, 42 footpath tractors and over 200 staff providing winter maintenance services. Our gritting fleet is the largest of any Council in the UK and has received significant investment over the last 5 years with 50 vehicles being renewed at a cost of over £6m. We now have 50% of the fleet with an age profile of 5 years or less utilising the latest winter technology.
- 4.2 At the start of each winter (1st Oct), the Council stockpiles approximately 40,000 tonnes of salt in its local depots. The cost of each tonne of salt is approximately £30.
- 4.3 In addition, considerable flexibility has been applied across the Service in utilising staff from Street Cleaning and Building Maintenance in particular to help out during the worst of the conditions. We will continue to apply this sort of flexibility in the workforce going forward

### **5 Community Resilience**

- 5.1 It is a fact that, with the resources the Council has at its disposal, it is just not possible to treat every road in Highland at the same time. Members of the public have a role to play and the Council encourages communities to come forward and apply for winter resilience assistance in the form of salt in grit bins or heaps and other equipment to take action in their local areas that are important to them.

### **6 Challenges / Issues this winter**

- 6.1 There have been very challenging conditions this winter for Community Services in keeping roads and footpaths clear of snow and ice. After six years of relatively mild winters, the weather during November 2017 was significantly colder compared to recent years with a significant number of night time frosts and also upland snow. This has had the major effect of reducing the road surface temperatures (RST) to below zero much earlier in the year than we have become accustomed to. When RST drops below freezing any moisture in the form of rain, sleet or snow will freeze on the road surface and form ice. There have been many occurrences this year so far where the air temp has been +3C and it has been raining, yet the RST is below zero so the rain turns to ice on contact with the road or footpath. This has been the biggest challenge

to the service this year – preventing the formation of ice or treating its aftermath. We have already experienced RST as low as -10 degrees centigrade in places.

- 6.2 We have also experienced prolonged periods of freeze/thaw conditions that have seen salt spread being washed away and then refreezing later. This has resulted in compacted ice forming which has been extremely difficult to treat often requiring further treatment that is not only costly but also deflects resource away from non-primary routes and indeed footpaths.
- 6.3 In times of severe weather, the Winter Service Policy provides that resources will be concentrated on keeping the 'Primary' network clear and as a result there may be a delay before it is possible to treat the 'Secondary' and 'Other' road network, including residential streets. This has been the case this winter. The conditions we have experienced has meant treatment times for primary routes across Highland have taken much longer, sometimes requiring continuous treatment, which has meant some secondary routes have not received treatment until late morning or later, and in some of the worst conditions 'other' routes not receiving treatment at all.
- 6.4 With regard to footpaths, resources have also needed to be concentrated on the primary and secondary paths. Repeated treatment on these was failing to break down some compacted ice, which meant that in some instances, there was no opportunity to treat the footpaths classed as 'other' which includes some residential housing estates.
- 6.5 There has been a lot of correspondence in recent weeks about the winter service provided. However it is the case that Community Services Staff have been working non-stop across the region within the Council's agreed policies and the resources available. As of 31 December 2017 the Council had spread circa 24,000 tonnes of salt on roads and footpaths. The Council has recently taken delivery of an additional 32,000 tonnes of salt to ensure sufficient supplies are available.

## **7 Effect on Budget**

- 7.1 A combination of the weather conditions experienced and the timing of the most severe episodes is having an effect on the Winter Maintenance Revenue Budget. Some of the worst weather conditions have fallen over week-ends and the Christmas bank holiday periods which has resulted in more overtime being authorised. In addition, as referred to above, we have seen increased usage of salt. As a result of these pressures, an overspend in the Winter Maintenance Revenue budget is being projected at the end of December 2017, and this is reported in the Revenue Monitoring Statement which is contained in a separate paper on the agenda. In addition the budget pressure may increase further if the difficult weather conditions continue into January/February.
- 7.2 Whilst Community Services will do everything possible to contain this overspend within its overall budget, it is anticipated that there will be increased pressure on roads maintenance generally when weather conditions improve due to the number of pot-holes and other carriageway repairs that have surfaced due to the effects of freeze and thaw conditions.

## **8 Going forward**

- 8.1 A number of issues, suggestions, comments and ideas have come forward recently from Community Representatives and other individuals about the Council's Winter Maintenance Service. Most have expressed a willingness to discuss these matters, and recognising our budgetary constraints, how we might do things differently and with

community support. This has been responded to positively and those who have contacted us were invited to attend a meeting on Tuesday 16 January to discuss and explore some of these ideas/suggestions. Some of the key themes to come from this meeting included:

- more promotion or a re-invigoration of the Community Resilience Scheme, and ensure Grit Bins are filled and available;
- to provide more information via the web-site in relation to non-adopted roads and estates which the Council has no responsibility for;
- to investigate the provision of 'real-time' information on the web-site in relation to Gritting activity, and to better publicise the Winter Maintenance Policy, in particular the hierarchy of treatment for roads and footpaths; and
- to provide advice to communities about their own personal responsibility and what measures they can take to keep safe e.g. drive according to conditions, use winter tyres and wear shoes with grips in icy conditions.

8.2 A 'lessons learned' meeting/workshop with the roads officers was convened for Friday 19 January to review with them the effectiveness of our winter service policy in terms of what went well, not so well, and ideas for improvement following the events of 'Storm Caroline' and the subsequent wintry conditions. This may identify improvements to operational procedures to improve the service which could be implemented easily but any proposals for specific changes to policy would be brought to Committee for consideration. An update will be given at committee on any new ideas that came from this

8.3 Some Members have queried the scope for flexibility in the winter maintenance service. The current policy is very prescribed in terms of priority routes, treatment times - it has to be to enable the Council to defend any legal claims - so there is little room for flexibility that our local foremen/roads managers can introduce without the policy itself being compromised. All of our current resources are targeted at the delivery of the service specified by the policy. Members may wish to consider whether they would wish to see a review of the Policy undertaken.

## **9 Implications**

9.1 Resource – The Winter Maintenance Revenue Budget is under pressure due to the challenging conditions faced this winter and an over spend is projected at the end of December 2017.

9.2 Legal – there are no legal implications.

9.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – Assistance is offered to communities who wish to take action in their own areas to help keep snow and ice from footpaths through the winter resilience scheme.

9.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – None.

9.5 Risk – None.

9.6 Gaelic - None

Designation: Director of Community Services  
Date: 17 January 2018  
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# The Highland Council

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Community Services

## Winter Service Policy

April 2016

# Winter Service Policy

## CONTENTS

- 1.0 BACKGROUND
- 2.0 GENERAL
- 3.0 TREATMENT OF ROADS.
- 4.0 TREATMENT OF FOOTWAYS.

# THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

## Community Services

### Winter Service Policy

#### 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, a Roads Authority shall take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.
- 1.2 This Winter Maintenance Policy relates to the Council's responsibilities as Roads Authority for adopted roads, cycle ways, footways and footpaths.
- 1.3 Cross Service Working arrangements exist between Services to ensure that Council properties receive an appropriate winter maintenance service. The appropriate Service Director will determine the appropriate level of winter maintenance service for footpaths, car parks and other areas that are the responsibility of the Council but are not on the list of public Roads.

#### 2.0 GENERAL

- 2.1 With the operational management devolved to the Areas it is essential that a common Winter Maintenance Policy is in place to ensure a consistent service for drivers passing between local Areas.
- 2.2 It is the aim of Highland Council in respect of its winter maintenance service to:-
- 2.2.1 Provide a winter gritting and snow clearing service which, as far as is reasonably practical, using the resources available, permits the safe movement of vehicles and pedestrians on the adopted road and footway network and seeks to minimise delays attributable to weather conditions.
- 2.2.2 Conduct operations having regard to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and EU and Domestic Driver Hours Regulations.
- 2.3 The Council as Roads Authority is not responsible for Winter Maintenance on unadopted roads and will not provide a Winter Maintenance service for unadopted roads. It will however make every effort to provide assistance for emergency and medical services during severe weather conditions where there is an urgent need for safe access.
- 2.4 The responsibility for Winter Maintenance on Trunk Roads lies with Transport Scotland.
- 2.5 The Council will source Winter Weather Forecasting Services from recognised Meteorological Service Providers during the period 14th October to 14th April.

### 3.0 TREATMENT OF ROADS

The Council will endeavour to provide the highest level of service possible within the resource available. During winter, especially during severe weather, it may not be possible to keep every road free from ice and snow at all times.

The treatment of roads will be carried out based on a hierarchical system dependant on route priority. The time taken to complete the treatment of routes will vary from day to day depending on actual weather conditions and can be expected to increase significantly during periods of snow due to having to plough both sides of the road.

### 3.1 NETWORK HIERARCHY

The following prioritised hierarchy will be used to determine the order of treatment of roads.

PRIMARY (Highest)	Strategic, Regional, Sub Regional and Link roads which serve the larger communities and permit the majority of road users to travel across the region. Main & Local distributor roads in the larger urban settlements. High frequency service bus routes operating at least 6 days a week and starting prior to 7am with identified hazards.
SECONDARY	Roads connecting smaller communities to the primary network. Link and Service roads within the larger urban settlements. Service bus routes not covered by the Primary network.
OTHER	Minor rural and local access roads. Residential roads in urban settlements.

Gritting may not be completed on all routes before buses start their journeys.

The priority network will be agreed by Local Area Committee. Leaflets with maps showing the Primary and Secondary network will be made available via the Council web site at the start of each winter period.

### 3.2 TREATMENT TIMES - MONDAY TO SATURDAY

The service will be provided between 6am and 9pm. Treatment after 6pm will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

### 3.3 TREATMENT TIMES – SUNDAYS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

#### 3.3.1 Sundays, 25<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> January

The service will be provided between 7am and 9pm and will be restricted to the Primary network only. During periods of sustained snow, or where significant snow conditions are forecast, the service may be extended to include difficult Secondary routes.

#### 3.3.2 26<sup>th</sup> December and 2<sup>nd</sup> January

The service will be provided between 7am and 9pm and treatment will be restricted to



the Primary and Secondary networks only. Where December 26th and January 2nd fall on a Sunday then a Sunday service will be provided.

### **3.4 PRECAUTIONARY TREATMENT**

Precautionary treatment carried out the previous evening, normally before 9pm, in advance of forecasted adverse weather, will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

### **3.5 TREATMENT DURING SNOW CONDITIONS**

In times of severe weather, resources will be concentrated on keeping the Primary network clear and as a result there may be a delay before it is possible to treat the Secondary and Other road network, including residential streets. In exceptional snow conditions external contractors will be deployed to assist with snow clearance.

### **3.6 SNOW GATES**

For safety reasons Snow Gates are located on routes where drifting snow can make the route impassable very quickly. The closure and subsequent opening of snow gates will only take place with the authority of the Police.

The roads controlled by snow gates within the Highland area are as follows:

- A939 Bridge of Brown
- A939 Grantown to Dava
- A939 Dava to Ferness
- A832 Braemore to Dundonnell
- B9007 Carrbridge to Ferness
- B9176 Struie Hill Road
- Cairngorm Ski Road
- Bealach na Ba

In severe snow conditions the Council may withdraw resources from these roads and allow the storm to abate. In such circumstances resources may be diverted to assist snow clearing operations on other parts of the network. Additional resources may be employed during such snow conditions.

### **3.7 TARGET TREATMENT TIMES**

The following are the target times for completion of routes during conditions of ice and light snow.

#### **3.7.1 Monday to Saturday**

PRIMARY ROUTES	8.30am.
SECONDARY ROUTES	9.00am.
OTHER	As resources and conditions permit.

#### **3.7.2 Sundays, 25<sup>th</sup> / 26<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> January**

PRIMARY ROUTES	9.30am.
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### 3.8 TREATMENT OF DIVERSION ROUTES.

Where a road, including a trunk road, is closed to traffic due to either planned works or an emergency situation then the agreed diversion route will be treated as follows.

#### **Trunk Road Closure.**

The agreed diversion route will be treated to Primary standard and signs erected at each end of the diversion and any other junctions with trunk roads, stating that there will be no overnight salting.

In an emergency situation and after Transport Scotland or its trunk road management and maintenance agents have notified the Council of the closure, every endeavour will be made to both treat the agreed diversion route appropriately and erect signs before the first overnight period.

#### **Council Road Closure.**

Any part of the agreed diversion route that is of a lower priority than the closed road will be treated to the same priority as the closed road.

### 4.0 TREATMENT OF FOOTWAYS, FOOTPATHS AND CYCLE WAYS.

Treatment for ice and light snow conditions on adopted footways, footpaths and cycle ways will be carried out as set out below. Each gritting route will take a significant length of time to complete. The length of time taken will vary from day to day depending on actual weather conditions.

### 4.1 NETWORK HIERARCHY

The following prioritised hierarchy will be used in determining the order of treatment of footways.

Priority	Description
PRIMARY	Main urban shopping centres. Primary cycleways.
SECONDARY	Footways serving main urban areas, schools, hospitals and minor shopping areas. Sheltered Housing and locations of special need with known identified hazards.
OTHER	Other footways as resources allow.

**4.2 TREATMENT TIMES - MONDAY TO SATURDAY**

The winter maintenance service will be provided between 6am and 6pm and routes will be treated on a priority basis as resources permit

**4.3 TREATMENT TIMES - SUNDAYS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

A service will be provided between 7am and Noon on Primary routes only.

There will be no service for footways on Christmas Day or New Years Day.

-- End of Policy Statement --