

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE – 18 DECEMBER 2001

WINTER MAINTENANCE REVIEW

Report By Director of Development Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1** To inform the Committee of the results of a customer questionnaire and improvements made in the winter maintenance service, and to seek approval of the principles of a heavy snow response plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The Committee were advised at the Meeting of 28 August that a review of winter maintenance operations was being undertaken in view of the following:
- i) Loss of the trunk road management and maintenance contracts for the A76 and A77.
 - ii) Experience of the response to the heavy snowfalls on two occasions last winter.
 - iii) The requirement of the Scottish Executive's Best Value Regime that customers are consulted on the quality of service they receive and the need to show continuous improvement.

3. WINTER MAINTENANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

- 3.1** In order to comply with the Scottish Executive's Best Value Regime, a customer questionnaire was issued to 2000 householders within East Ayrshire.
- 3.2** A representative sample from all parts of East Ayrshire was taken from the Valuation Roll, taking householders at random on an area basis. In total, 413 questionnaires were returned. The use by the respondents of different modes of transport broadly reflects the pattern of transport use within the area. To this extent the response is considered to be a valid representation of the views of the wider population, with the qualification that a high proportion of those responding may have had specific difficulties during the last winter.
- 3.3** A brief summary of the outcome is as follows (figures in brackets represent scores with 1=poor, and 5 = excellent):

| | | |
|----|--|--|
| | main roads | more than satisfactory (3.5) |
| | rural side roads | poor to satisfactory (2.1) |
| | residential and scheme roads | poor (1.5) |
| | town/village centre pavements | poor to satisfactory (1.9) |
| | other pavements | poor (1.6) |
| Q3 | The provision of grit bins | poor to satisfactory (1.8) |
| Q4 | The time taken to deal with enquiries Response received (84% of consultees had no comment to make on this question) | poor to satisfactory (2.0) poor (1.5) |
| Q5 | 43% of consultees thought a greater proportion of the Council's budget should be spent on winter maintenance, bearing in mind other services would get less. 32% disagreed, while 25% did not respond. | |
| Q6 | When asked what order of priority any additional resources should be used: 32% suggested treatment of additional side roads 40% suggested pavements 28% did not comment on this question | |

3.3 Conclusions can be drawn from the outcome as follows:

- gritting and snowclearing of main roads is better than side roads and pavements

Comment: This reflects the resources available and current priorities

- snowclearing performance was generally rated higher than gritting (this is not set out in the summary statistics above)
- the distribution of grit bins was not considered to be adequate

- consideration needs to be given to handling enquiries

Comment: Many enquiries relate to the expected time to grit or clear snow from lower priority roads. Given the current arrangements for control over gritting it is difficult for staff responding to requests to indicate a response time.

- More thought that a greater proportion of the Council's budget should be spent on winter maintenance than did not
- Marginally more people would give a higher priority to additional gritting and snowclearing of pavements than to side roads, if more resources were available

4. IMPROVEMENTS INTRODUCED LAST YEAR

4.1 The review of winter maintenance is an ongoing process. Over the last year the following improvements have been made:

- Annual vehicle and plant replacement programmes have reduced the age of the fleet. This has resulted in improved reliability and state of the art equipment that more precisely distributes salt reducing costs and damage to the environment.
- The leasing of two salt barns ensures dry salt which also reduces salt usage.
- Weather forecasting has become more accurate with the advance of technology, backed up by ice prediction stations. These were installed by the Scottish Executive and other sites can be accessed through arrangements with neighbouring councils.
- A tracker system has been installed in vehicles involved in winter maintenance which records their movements. This information can be used to back up other records when contesting insurance claims.
- The recording of information has been reviewed and is audited to ensure completion.
- Routes are reviewed on an annual basis, changes being made as appropriate.
- Full one man operation of gritting vehicles was introduced last winter, and has proved successful, both operationally and in reducing costs.
- Drivers hours legislation is fully observed resulting in reduced working hours, improving driver's Health and Safety.
- An improved financial control system has been introduced

5. IMPROVEMENTS INTRODUCED THIS YEAR

5.1 The loss of the trunk road contract required a reassessment of gritting routes: In the North, there have been minor adjustments only, as the A77 was covered by one dedicated vehicle. In the South, however, the A76 was treated as part of two separate routes. All routes were reviewed to accommodate the necessary changes. A net reduction of two gritting units has thus been possible, achieved by scrapping older demountable gritters which are no longer serviceable.

5.2 Discussions have taken place between the Department, Scottish Executive and Amey Highways regarding the treatment at interfaces between the trunk road and council roads, to ensure total coverage. It was made clear by the Scottish Executive that they did not wish the Council to treat trunk roads at any time. In cases of life threatening emergency, however, the Police may contact the Duty Winter Controller for assistance. Taking account of all factors, he will decide on the appropriate action to be taken. A protocol has been drawn up for use by gritter drivers, should they encounter adverse conditions on trunk roads, when travelling to or from Council routes.

5.3 The procedures for engaging local contractors to supplement our own winter maintenance resources have been tightened up. An advertisement was placed in the local newspaper requesting suitable farmers/contractors to come forward.

A check is carried out to confirm insurance is in order, and basic safety rules for use during snowclearing are forwarded to them, together with a formal letter of acceptance.

- 5.4** Publicity in the form of an advertisement and leaflet have been drafted, to advise the travelling public of the council's policy and procedures for winter maintenance. A copy is appended as an Appendix to this report.

6. HEAVY SNOW RESPONSE

- 6.1** In conditions of heavy snow it is not always possible to keep clear of ice and snow all the roads covered by normal winter maintenance routes (see summary leaflet at Appendix). In addition a higher priority may need to be given to certain areas including the principal access to larger communities located away from the highest priority routes, and heavily used footpaths. It is proposed to adapt the implementation of the normal response plan on the following principles:

- The modified plan will come into effect when a fall or falls of snow have caused disruption to vehicles and/or pedestrian traffic
- Precautionary action will be taken to prepare vehicles following a weather warning predicted of at least 25mm of snow
- If conditions require concentration of resources on the highest priority routes, action will be taken in addition at the earliest opportunity to clear a route to the following communities not on Priority 1 routes – Sorn, Catrine, Rankinston, Drongan, Dalrymple, Logan, Bellsbank, Fenwick, Crosshouse and Knockentiber. No other deviations will be made from normal priorities.
- Consideration will be given to closing certain Priority 3 routes if resources require to be concentrated on Priorities 1 and 2 and securing access to the communities listed above
- Cleansing and Ground Maintenance operatives will be called out to clear footpaths in accordance with pre-determined priorities
- Additional resources will be called up, as required, from the list of contractors established by the Division
- If justified by the conditions (deep compacted snow) grit will be mixed with salt for spreading on roads

In extreme conditions the Chief Executive may invoke the Council's Emergency Procedures

7. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ISSUES

- 7.1** Gritting equipment to run on footways is being purchased for the coming winter to be matched to Grounds Maintenance tractors. If successful, and subject to budget constraints, further equipment may be sought for next winter. This will result in an increased capacity to grit and clear snow from footways.

- 7.2** Two new small gritters have been purchased which will enable the unit to treat minor rural and housing estate roads more efficiently.

7.3 The number of grit bins has been increased since last winter. Further requests for bins will be assessed against current criteria.

7.4 Training will be undertaken for frontline staff responding to enquiries from the public. Consideration will be given to improving communication between the depots and staff fielding enquiries to provide clearer information.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Any enhancement in the level of service introduced as a result of the customer questionnaire will require enhanced revenue funding. Otherwise, any other changes to winter maintenance arrangements will be contained within existing budgets.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Council's statutory obligations are defined in Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 as to take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i) Note the outcome of the Winter Maintenance Questionnaire.
- ii) Agree the principles of a heavy snow response plan as set out in section 6

Stephen Chorley
Director of Development Services

AW/YK
3 December 2001

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

For further information please contact Alastair Wyper on 01563 576310
Implementation Officer: Alastair Wyper

**Keeping East Ayrshire's roads open
Winter 2001/2002**

East Ayrshire Council has statutory responsibilities to take such steps as it considers reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of vehicles and pedestrians over public roads for which it is responsible.

The Council has no responsibility for the treatment of the A76 and A77 Trunk roads. The Scottish Executive has contracted Amey Highways Ltd. to provide a maintenance service (including winter) for all Trunk roads in the South of Scotland. Their contact telephone number is: 0800 085 7136.

This leaflet explains the priorities that the council has set for its winter 2001/2002 road treatment programme

How we do it:

East Ayrshire Council operates a fleet of 22 vehicles fitted with gritters and/or snowploughs. 15 are manned by drivers on standby every hour of every day between 2 November and 16 April to grit routes to set routes. Outwith this period the Council has reduced standby arrangements, but this may be enhanced if required by weather conditions.

The Council receives twice daily weather forecasts from the Met Office and staff can also access weather information from several weather stations within and outwith East Ayrshire to help with the decision making process.

Whenever possible, priority routes are gritted with salt before ice is likely to form, or snow is expected. Pre-gritting, when required, is normally carried out in the evening, and may be followed by further action dependant on the weather forecast and actual conditions encountered. There is no guarantee that a previously gritted road will remain free from ice or snow.

Last winter 12,500 tonnes of salt were spread on Council roads, and gritting crews were operating on 132 days of the 186 days of the official winter period.

The council has invested heavily in new equipment and facilities in recent years. Our Roads Depots each have a salt barn to keep salt stocks dry and one has a weighbridge installed. This helps us to reduce wastage. The barns also protect the environment by reducing contamination of watercourses. Modern gritters dispense salt more precisely than previously, particularly when using dry salt.

This winter four new gritters will be available. These are smaller units which can be matched to small lorries and tractors, better suited to treating footpaths and housing estate roads.

To help treat priority footways Roads staff are joined by staff from the Street Cleansing Service. During heavy snow conditions the Council may call in extra resources from Grounds Maintenance Service and private contractors.

Priorities for roads:

Priorities for gritting and snowclearing are set at the start of each winter. They are currently:

Priority 1: Council strategic routes:

A70 (Ayr/Cumnock/Muirkirk/Glenbuck)
A71 (Irvine/Kilmarnock/Darvel/Priestland)
A713 (Ayr/Dalmellington/Carsphairn)
A735 (Kilmarnock/Stewarton/Lugton)
A736 (Irvine/Lugton/Caldwell)
A759 (Kilmarnock/Troon)
A719 (Ayr/Galston/Waterside/A77)
B764 (Eaglesham Moor Road)

Priority 2 Access to main hospitals, police and fire stations as well as main bus routes where considered appropriate in consultation with Strathclyde Passenger Transport. One access route to the main gate of primary and secondary schools during term time.

Priority 3: 'A' and 'B' class roads not included above.

Priority 4: Local concentrations of employment, such as industrial estates.

Priority 5: Access to isolated villages.

Priority 6: Other 'C' class and unclassified roads.

Gritting routes are pre-planned to ensure that during "routine" winter conditions priorities 1 to 3, plus some of priorities 4 to 6, will be treated. However, under more extreme conditions (heavy snow falls or freeze/rain/freeze cycles) gritters may have to concentrate on the higher priority roads until attention can be safely transferred to other roads. In very heavy snow a higher priority may be given to securing an access to larger villages without direct access to a Priority 1 route.

Gritting routes are drawn up to minimise wasteful mileage. As a result, some roads in a lower category may be treated out of sequence.

The lowest category (minor rural or residential roads) will be treated using available gritters if adverse conditions persist and all other routes are being attended to. However, resources might not allow the treatment of all priority 6 roads.

Footpath priorities:

Due to the limited resources available footways and footpaths can only be treated when considered absolutely necessary. As resources allow, they will be treated in the following priority:

Priority 1: Urban shopping areas and precincts

Priority 2: Other areas of high pedestrian concentration (e.g. major hospitals and factories with large numbers of employees who walk to work)

Priority 3: Steep hills in housing areas and in the vicinity of Old People's Homes

Grit bins and salt supplies for members of the public:

The Council will provide grit bins at locations where considered necessary by the Head of Roads and Transportation.

It will also provide small quantities of salt for use by East Ayrshire residents. The salt can be collected from Gauchalland Roads Depot, Ayr Road, Galston or Underwood Roads Depot, Auchinleck Road, Cumnock. The salt should normally be taken from the grit bins located outwith the depot gates, using your own container and transport.

How to contact us:

During working hours, enquiries can be made as follows:

For the Kilmarnock and Loudoun area: 01563 576310

For the Cumnock and Doon Valley area: 01563 555337

Outwith office hours, you can call the Roads and Lighting Faults (RALF) freephone number 0800 37 36 35 or the Council's Helpline 0845 724 00 00.

Enquiries should not be made directly to depots.

TAKE EXTRA CARE AT ALL TIMES DURING THE WINTER AND AVOID NON-ESSENTIAL JOURNEYS DURING SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS.

AGENDA