

ANGUS COUNCIL

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE

25 AUGUST 2009

WINTER SERVICE POLICY
AND PROVISION FOR 2009/10

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

<p>ABSTRACT: This report outlines the winter road service provided over 2008/09 and sets out the council's proposed Winter Service Policy, details the proposed service provision for preventative salting and snow clearing during the winter period 2009/10, in conjunction with the operational issues detailed in the supplement placed in the members' lounge.</p>
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1 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes that the number of evenings and mornings treatments of the priority road network for the 2008/09 winter season was the highest in the thirteen year record of Angus Council as was auxiliary route treatments.
- (ii) notes that the net out-turn expenditure on winter maintenance for 2008/09 was £2,586,000 (compared to a budget of £1,975,000 for third party payments) resulting in an overspend of £611,000 (31%);
- (iii) notes that this excess expenditure on winter maintenance was contained within the overall Roads Revenue Budget for 2008/09;
- (iv) adopts the policy for the Winter Service during the forthcoming winter as stated in Appendix 3 of this report;
- (v) approves the proposed arrangements for the coming winter 2009/10 which are fundamentally the same as the arrangements for 2008/09 together with the adjustments as detailed in this report;
- (vi) notes the upgrades being made to weather stations;
- (vii) notes the trial of the effectiveness and efficiency of rock salt through the winter and the proposed continuation of that trial;
- (viii) notes the continued use of "red" diesel for agricultural tractors for gritting subject to continued approval by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the payment of the relevant duty;
- (ix) notes that winter service operations cannot easily be managed within the normal constraints of a cash limited budget due to the unpredictable and variable effects of weather and noting that the winter maintenance budget has been increased for the coming winter in comparison to previous years. Accordingly winter service expenditure will be closely monitored and any over - or under-spend projected out-turn will be reported to Committee as necessary along with any recommended corrective budget adjustment options.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Winter 2008/09

- 2.1.1 The winter of 2008/09 was quite sharp with treatment of the priority network being necessary in the lead up to the main period of winter cover (6 Nov 08 to 26 Mar 09) in October and various snow events throughout.
- 2.1.2 Sub-zero temperatures necessitating treatment were first experienced on 21 October 2008 before the main winter maintenance standby start date of 6 November 2008. The final such temperature for treatment was experienced on 24 March 2009 just before the main standby end date of 26 March 2008. The coldest temperature during the winter on the road network was recorded on 8 February at minus 8.8°C slightly colder than the previous winter's figure of minus 8.2°C.
- 2.1.3 The winter period 2008/09 saw the third highest number of days where the road surface temperature was below freezing since the formation of Angus Council. It was the fourth equal highest in terms of the number of days with fresh snow lying although there was no real lasting snow other than on the highest roads. The weather statistics are provided in Appendix 1 of this report, and the treatment figures are provided in Appendix 2. The number of priority and auxiliary treatments undertaken are the highest since Angus Council was formed.
- 2.1.4 16,011 tonnes of salt were used during the winter. Angus Council normally holds 14,000 tonnes of salt for an average winter. Due to severe weather throughout the UK there were problems securing salt with many areas having shortages. Stock management was crucial in maintaining supplies particularly in February/March 2009.
- 2.1.5 Despite a slightly increased budget this was still overspent confirming that if there was ever such a thing as an "average" winter, funding was insufficient to cover such. This has been recognised with an increase in the budget set for the 09/10 winter.
- 2.1.6 The net budget for winter maintenance was set for 2008/09 at £1,975,000. The Standing Charges of £968,847 incurred in 2008/09 for plant, standby arrangements, depot costs, etc (fixed costs) left a balance of £966,872 (49% of the budget) available for the day-to-day operational costs of salting/snow clearing activities, weather forecast costs, etc (variable costs) in 2008/09. The net out-turn expenditure on Winter Maintenance for 2008/09 was £2,586,000 (compared to a budget of £1,975,000 for third party payments) resulting in an overspend of £611,000 (31%). Since Angus was formed this is the highest variance between budget and out-turn. The 13 year average out turn expenditure is £1,597,534. The 3 year average is £2,001,073. From this it can be seen that the cost of providing for the "average winter" is largely notional with budget forecasting extremely difficult. The budget for 09/10 has currently been set at £2,195,000.
- 2.1.7 In recognition of the ongoing budget pressure in this area at the special budget meetings in February 2009 the revenue budget provision for 2009/10 was uplifted by £220,000, £100,000 of this sum was provided for 2009/10 on a one-off basis only. A total budget for 2009/10 of £2,195,000 is therefore available.
- 2.1.8 The A90 trunk road in Angus maintained by BEAR Scotland Ltd experienced the same weather conditions as the local roads but it was not necessary for the Council to assist with winter maintenance on the trunk road at any time and no requests for such assistance were received from BEAR Scotland Ltd.

2.2 Statutory Duty

- 2.2.1 The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 Section 34 places a duty on the local roads authority to take such steps as they consider reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads. It is therefore incumbent on Angus

Council to determine the measures which it deems appropriate for the Winter Service on its public roads taking into account its overall priorities and available resources.

- 2.2.2 In order to ensure that the Council can demonstrate that it is meeting its legal obligations and is doing so in a way which ensures that its resources are being deployed in the most economic, effective and efficient way an essential pre-requisite is a clear statement of policy endorsed by elected members. This policy statement then provides a framework for planning the preparatory arrangements and operational procedures to be implemented and allows clear guidelines to be given to all those involved in the delivery of the service.

2.3 Established Policy and Practice

- 2.3.1 The Infrastructure Services Committee of 26 August 2008 (Report No 811/08) approved the Winter Maintenance Policy for Angus Council (See Appendix 3). This policy has proved to be robust and effective and no change to the existing policy is therefore proposed.

- 2.3.2 In order to make best use of available resources it is necessary to operate a priority system for the treatment of carriageways and footways. Strategic routes including important bus routes, important commuter routes, roads serving hospitals, ambulance stations, fire stations, shopping centres, schools, and major industrial centres are classed as "priority routes" and, accordingly, are given a higher level of service and priority over other "non-priority" roads. In the same way footways are classed as priority or non-priority taking into account the normal level of pedestrian traffic.

- 2.3.3 Priority routes are:-

- given extended winter maintenance coverage
- treated before non-priority routes are dealt with
- kept open or opened up in preference to non-priority routes during prolonged snow conditions.

Auxiliary Routes:-

- are non-priority routes treated Monday to Friday in advance of the morning school bus on routes which are particularly prone to icing (generally Glen routes). For two winters auxiliary routes north of the A926/B957/A90 have been treated at the same time as priority routes on weekend mornings only and on public holidays. The C52 Westhills to Cockhill from the B9128 at Draffin to Redford on the B961 was added last winter.
- start later than priority routes but before other non priority routes.

Non-priority routes are:-

- given a lesser winter maintenance coverage than priority routes
- treated after priority routes
- only dealt with after priority routes have been satisfactorily cleared during prolonged snow conditions.

- 2.3.4 The operational procedures, performance standards, and level of service provision have however evolved during the thirteen winters since local government reorganisation in 1996. The background detail and current operational detail have been established during this time and are included in the Supplement to this report which has been placed in the members' lounge. It is proposed to continue operational practices in accordance with the established criteria, detailed in the Supplement which remains largely unchanged including authorising the Head of Roads to order a temporary increase in the level of service in heavy snow conditions and to react as required to genuine life and limb emergency situations or incidents involving serious damage to property in severe weather.

2.4 Budgetary Provision and Expenditure Control

- 2.4.1 The provision of a winter service must take into account the vagaries of Scottish winter weather which can vary widely from year to year in both the severity and the occurrence of wintry conditions (snow and ice) during the season. The unpredictable nature of the climate

requires a pragmatic and reactive approach to the provision of resources. It would clearly not be economical to gear up to provide a round-the-clock snow and ice-free road network in anticipation of the "worst winter on record" occurring every year. Nor would it be prudent to reduce the resources available to a minimum in response to a mild winter the previous year. In practice resources have to be allocated to allow a measured response to an "average winter" and contingency plans made to take account of particularly abnormal (mild or severe) winters.

2.4.2 The recommended approach is:

- (i) to differentiate between "fixed costs" and "variable costs";
- (ii) to adjust the level of service to contain fixed costs and variable costs for an average winter to keep within budget; and
- (iii) to have contingency arrangements to compensate for a projected overspend or underspend as a result of "abnormal" weather. These contingency plans must take account of the possibility of prolonged severe weather very late in the financial year while still working within an overall cash limited budget.

2.4.3 Fixed costs include plant and equipment, storage and handling charges for salt, grit bins, fixed costs of standby payments, training and costs of office, depot and garaging facilities. The majority of these items form part of the Standing Charges submitted by Tayside Contracts.

2.4.4 Variable costs include running costs of plant, salt used, driver costs and payments to outside contractors for assistance with snow clearing.

2.4.5 Whilst the fixed costs are independent of weather conditions and can be estimated with some confidence the variable costs are dependent on weather conditions.

2.4.6 In the event of a sustained period of severe winter weather and the likelihood of the budgetary provision being exceeded the Director of Infrastructure Services would report the situation to the Head of Finance/Director of Corporate Services and the Infrastructure Services Committee in accordance with Financial Regulations.

2.4.7 If the severity of the winter weather is such that other works cannot be carried out then it is sometimes possible to transfer the "underspend" from these works to Winter Service operations, thus assisting in containing the total expenditure within the overall Infrastructure Services Department revenue budget. Conversely, if all the indications are that expenditure on Winter Service operations will be less than the budget allocation the "underspend" can be transferred to other works.

2.4.8 In exceptional circumstances (for example in the event of heavy and prolonged snow conditions such as occurred in 2005/06) the flexibility offered by Roads and Transport Renewal and Repair Fund resources in conjunction with potential Revenue Budget virement provide options in dealing with what would otherwise be unmanageable burdens on the cash-limited Roads Revenue Budget.

3 DETAILS

3.1 The main operational aspects of the Winter Services Policy are detailed in the Supplement placed in the members' lounge. This Supplement includes details of the hours of service; prioritised routes; type of plant and equipment; type and quantity of salt. The Committee are asked to approve these operational issues which are substantially similar to the 2008/09 winter. Some minor operational adjustments have been made following experience gained over the winter past including to the decision making matrix which broadly aligns with "Well-maintained Highways Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance Management July 2005"; the standby arrangements for Tayside Contracts; clarifying decision making on when

treatment should be carried out; some minor routing alterations for vehicles; and clarification in terms of periods of cover for the provision of the winter service.

- 3.2 Refurbishment of five weather stations extending their life by 10 years, and a new solar powered ice station sited at Lochlair are to be installed by Vaisala, as part of updating the existing equipment. These works will be completed prior to the commencement of the winter season 2009/10.
- 3.3 Salt for road purposes varies depending on the source of supply. Particle shape; size; grading; uniformity; insolubles content; resistance to weathering; spreadability, etc all vary depending on the source. From experience and usage trials in the past Angus Council has specified 6mm marine salt which has a high purity although generally marginally more expensive than UK mined salt as it has provided better value for money.
- 3.4 Escalating shipping costs partly as a result of fuel prices together with a poor exchange rate in terms of the Euro led to the price of marine salt increasing dramatically in 2008/09 and therefore a trial of rock salt was carried out last winter. The trial was successful and rock salt provides the council with a viable option for sourcing salt which worked to the council's advantage when supplies were limited in February of this year.
- 3.5 Marine salt costs have now stabilised but it is proposed to continue a limited use of rock salt which maintains the options for salt supplies. Along with the stock remaining at the end of last year, a further 9,000 tonnes of marine salt and 1,500 tonnes of rock salt have been ordered to bring Angus's holding up to the 14,000 tonne pre-winter holding.
- 3.6 Members will be aware of the issues regarding Hydrocarbon Oil Duty as detailed in Report 811/08 (Winter Service Policy and Provision for 2008/09). Through extensive work with colleagues in the Finance division just prior to the start of winter, HM Revenues & Customs allowed "farmers" subcontracting to Tayside Contracts permission to use red diesel to carry out winter treatment operations provided the fuel duty difference between white and red diesel was paid retrospectively. It is intended that a similar situation will prevail for this winter again. As far as Angus Council is aware this is the only area in the UK where this has been agreed.

4 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The approved budget for Winter Service third party payments for 2009/10 is £2,195,000 an increase of £220,000 from the 2008/09 Final Budget Volume. This includes for increased costs arising from the Tayside Contracts projected pay inflation.
- 4.2 As in previous years the intention is to provide the best level of service possible within the available budget based on an "average winter". In reality of course there is no such thing as average winter conditions and Winter Service operations are dictated by the prevailing weather and the response required in accordance with the Council's policy and agreed level of service. Some costs (related primarily to ensuring a state of "being prepared") are fixed and will be predictable once the relevant charges and rates have been agreed with Tayside Contracts. Other costs are variable and are proportional to the severity of the winter and, as detailed above, a severe winter can greatly increase the expenditure required to maintain the approved level of service.
- 4.3 The Director of Infrastructure Services will monitor costs closely as the winter progresses, and if there are indications that the projected expenditure is likely to be at variance with the budget will, in conjunction with the Director of Corporate Services, report to Committee with proposals for any necessary budget virement adjustments.

5 **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no human rights implications arising from the proposals in this report.

6 **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The issues dealt with in this Report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective (as required by legislation). An [equalities impact assessment](#) is not required.

7 SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT

- 7.1 This report contributes to the following local outcome contained within the Single Outcome Agreement for Angus

- Communities in Angus are safe, secure and vibrant.

8 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The issues dealt with in this Report have been the subject of consideration from a strategic environmental impact assessment perspective as required of a policy. A pre-screening assessment has been carried out and a strategic environmental assessment determined not to be required.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The Chief Executive, the Director of Corporate Services, the Head of Finance, the Head of Law and Administration, the Director of Education, the Director of Neighbourhood Services, the Chief Constable and the Managing Director of Tayside Contracts have been consulted in the preparation of this Report.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Council has a statutory duty to take such steps as they consider reasonable to keep public roads safe during adverse winter weather. Notwithstanding the difficulty in predicting the duration, severity and geographical distribution of winter conditions it is necessary to have a clear policy and an agreed level of service to allow the planning and preparation necessary for the delivery of a Winter Service to proceed.
- 10.2 If during the course of the winter abnormal or particularly extreme weather conditions are experienced the Director of Infrastructure Services in conjunction with the Director of Corporate Services will report the position to the Committee and will recommend appropriate contingency arrangements and any necessary compensatory budgetary adjustments.
- 10.3 On the basis described therefore the proposed Winter Service arrangements for 2009/2010 will continue to provide value for money and a targeted level of service.

ERIC S LOWSON
DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

NOTE

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report:-

Report No. 811/08 – Winter Service Policy and Provision for 2008/09 – Infrastructure Services Committee 26 August 2008.

Roads/JG/DH .

WINTER MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE

2008/09 REVIEW

WEATHER STATISTICS

	Mth	1996/ 1997	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005	2005/ 2006	2006/ 2007	2007/ 2008	2008 / 2009	13 Yr Av	Last 3 Yr Avg.
No of days with road surface temperatures below zero	Oct	1	4	7	2	0	0	10	7	0	0	0	3	6	3	3
	Nov	19	4	16	9	7	12	10	11	13	18	15	12	18	13	15
	Dec	19	10	16	23	12	26	8	21	21	21	20	24	24	19	23
	Jan	21	12	18	14	17	23	21	26	23	22	23	24	27	21	25
	Feb	10	4	18	14	18	23	21	23	23	21	15	20	16	18	17
	Mar	7	12	11	10	15	14	11	14	13	21	14	25	15	14	18
	Apr	0	11	6	7	2	3	2	3	5	8	3	12	0	5	5
Total		77	57	92	79	71	101	83	105	98	111	90	120	106	93	106
No of days with fresh snow lying		8	16	22	21	33	22	13	25	26	27	14	29	26	22	23

APPENDIX 2

**WINTER MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE
2008/09 REVIEW**

OPERATIONAL SERVICE ACTIVITY STATISTICS

	1996 / 1997	1997 / 1998	1998 / 1999	1999 / 2000	2000 / 2001	2001 / 2002	2002 / 2003	2003 / 2004	2004 / 2005	2005 / 2006	2006 / 2007	2007 / 2008	2008 / 2009	13 Yr Avg	3 Year Avg.
No of days priority carriageway routes treated (a.m.)	67	53	73	75	76	71	54	75	69	77	53	78	81	69	71
No of days priority carriageway routes treated (p.m.)	32	20	36	36	44	35	28	52	48	53	53	51	57	42	54
No of days non-priority carriageway routes treated	57	39	62	46	67	51	36	55	48	62	40	47	46	50	44
No of days priority footway routes treated	32	21	33	27	37	20	20	24	16	33	16	17	21	24	18
No of days non-priority footway routes treated	14	21	33	27	37	16	15	24	16	23	20	7	20	21	17
No of days auxiliary routes treated	N/A	N/A	N/A	45	59	55	41	56	46	59	41	80	82	56	68

The above figures do not include the number of times priority and non priority footways and carriageways were treated at times out of policy hours.

ANGUS COUNCIL
WINTER SERVICE 2009/2010
POLICY

Angus Council will endeavour to use the resources available for winter maintenance in the most efficient, effective and economic way to prevent, as far as they consider reasonably possible, snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads and to minimise the inaccessibility of public roads and temporary disruption of traffic directly attributable to adverse weather conditions.

The Council will therefore operate a system of winter maintenance which gives priority to the more important and heavily trafficked sections of the public road network (both carriageways and footways).

The Council will encourage the use of self-help measures.

The Council will not provide winter maintenance on private roads or prospective public roads. The Council will however carry out winter maintenance on effectively adopted public roads (i.e. roads which have been constructed to the Council's standards and have been accepted for adoption at the end of the one year maintenance period but which have not yet been added to the List of Public Roads).