

ANGUS COUNCIL

ROADS COMMITTEE

8 MARCH 2001

WINTER MAINTENANCE EXPENDITURE

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF ROADS

ABSTRACT

This report informs the Committee of the projected expenditure on winter maintenance for 2000/01 taking into account the severity of the winter maintenance season and in particular the heavy snow events at Christmas/New Year, 3 – 6 February 2001, and 25 – 27 February 2001.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee agree:-

- (i) to note the projected expenditure for Winter Maintenance of £1,660,000 for 2000/01 (compared to the Budget of £1,280,000) for third party payments;
- (ii) that the Director of Roads and the Director of Finance have taken steps to manage the effects of this projected overspend and contain it within the Roads Department's overall Revenue Budget and the Roads and Transport Renewal and Repair Fund.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The winter maintenance budget for third party payments (ie payments to Tayside Contracts, outside contractors, farmers, grit bin suppliers etc) is £1,280,000 for the current financial year. This budget has been established over the years on the basis of an "average winter". The Director of Roads determines the level of service which can be provided within this budget for approval by the Committee prior to the start of the winter maintenance period and resources are then allocated to deliver this service. The resources and Service Provision for 2000/01 were approved by the Roads Committee of 24 August 2000 (Report No 909/00).
- 2.2 In reality of course there is no such thing as an "average winter" and winter maintenance operations are dictated by prevailing weather conditions and the response required in accordance with the Council's policy. Some costs (related primarily to ensuring a state of "being prepared" are fixed and predictable once the relevant charges and rates have been agreed with Tayside Contracts (eg provision and preparation of plant, standby payments, depot charges, etc). Other costs are variable and are proportional to the severity of the winter (eg plant operating costs, labour costs, salt usage, etc).
- 2.3 The costs of dealing with snow incidents can be particularly high due to the concentrated effort and sustained use of resources necessary to clear affected roads as quickly as possible, not only in order to minimise disruption to traffic and the effects on the local economy, but also to minimise costs by clearing snow while it is freshly fallen before it becomes hard-packed or banked up.
- 2.4 The winter of 2000/01 has been particularly severe with respect to major snow events and, taking into account the amount of snow clearing and gritting carried out up to the end of February 2001, the Director of Roads has calculated that the full year projected estimated out-turn expenditure for Winter Maintenance third party payments will be £1,660,000 (ie £380,000 over the allocated budget of £1,280,000).

3 DETAILS

- 3.1 The winter maintenance period for 2000/01 commenced on 19 October 2000 and will continue through to 29 March 2001. Compared to recent years this period has suffered a higher than average number of days/nights where road surface temperatures have fallen below 0°C and where gritting and salting has therefore been necessary. Again compared to previous years, it has also included (up to the end of February 2001) three periods where there have been heavy and prolonged snowfalls which have resulted in substantial accumulations of snow and an increase in resources over and above those normally expected to deal with the situations.
- 3.2 These snow events have been dealt with as efficiently and effectively as possible with the resources available, including the use of farmers' snow ploughs on a contract-hire basis over and above the normal self-help arrangements, and the assistance of private contractors.
- 3.3 The need to deal with snow as quickly as possible while it is fresh involves overtime working with associated premium payments. Heavy falls combined with drifting requires the use of specialist plant (heavy ploughs and snow-blowers) which have high operating costs. The amount of salt required to treat snow covered roads is more than double the amount required for precautionary salting in icy conditions (40g/m² compared to 15g/m²) and successive salting will be required if the snow is continuing to fall or becomes hard-packed on the road. In short the costs of snow clearing are much greater than the cost of normal gritting and the unusually high incidence of snow events in the current winter maintenance period has resulted in additional expenditure compared to the "average winter" scenario.
- 3.4 Taking into account the three major snow events which have occurred up to the end of February 2001 (24 December 2000 – 1 January 2001, 3 – 6 February 2001, and 25 – 27 February 2001) plus the aftermath of snow clearing operations following on from these periods of snow fall, and allowing for the anticipated costs for March 2001 (again calculated on the basis of an average winter), the Director of Roads has calculated that the estimated out-turn expenditure on winter maintenance (projected through to the end of the financial year) will be £1,660,000 compared to the allocated budget of £1,280,000.
- 3.5 This projected overspend of £380,000 will be compensated to a certain extent by slippage in programmed structural and cyclic maintenance works which have of necessity been interrupted or delayed due to the severe weather in February. This slippage in programmed work is estimated at some £80,000. The schemes affected will be carried over/completed in 2001/02 with a corresponding impact on next year's overall budget.
- 3.6 The Council has already prudently made provision in the Roads and Transport Renewal and Repair Fund for unforeseen contingencies. There is currently an uncommitted balance of £120,000 in the Fund which when combined with the 'top-up' of £800,000 for renewal and repair work in the 2000/01 financial year agreed by Angus Council on 14 February 2001 will allow the balance of £300,000 of projected overspend on winter maintenance activities to be managed within the overall cash limited budget. This will involve a transfer of some £300,000 of revenue funded projects to Roads and Transport Renewal and Repair Fund in 2000/01.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As detailed above the projected overspend on winter maintenance in 2000/01 is £380,000. Some £80,000 of this can be managed within the revenue budget through slippage associated with anticipated weather-related impact on planned programmes. The balance of £300,000 can be accommodated by drawing on the available balance in the Roads and Transport Renewal and Repair Fund by the transfer of some £300,000 of revenue funded projects to Renewal and Repair Fund in 2000/01.
- 4.2 These actions will ensure the Roads overall 2000/01 spend remains within the cash limited budget.
- 4.3 Cognisance of this unexpected but unavoidable call of £380,000 primarily on the Roads and Transport Renewal and Repairs Fund will require to be considered in any future allocations to Renewal and Repairs Funds.

5 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

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

6 CONSULTATION

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The abnormally severe weather (compared to an “average winter”), particularly three major snow events over the 2000/01 winter maintenance period, has resulted in a projected overspend of £380,000 on the Winter Maintenance Budget.
- 7.2 Actions have been taken to ensure that the unavoidable overspend situation will be managed within the overall Roads budget for 2000/01.
- 7.3 Cognisance of this unexpected £380,000 additional spend will need to be considered in any future Renewal and Repair Funds allocations.

Dr Bob McLellan
DIRECTOR OF ROADS

NOTE

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this Report:-

Report No 909/00 – Winter Maintenance Policy and Service Provision for 2000/01 – Roads Committee – 24 August 2000.

RWM/JSG
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REPORTS/wint.maint.expend