

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 1 OCTOBER 2024

WINTER ROADS SERVICES POLICY AND PLAN FOR 2024/25

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

ABSTRACT

This report sets out the proposed Winter Roads Services Policy and details the proposed service provision for preventative treatment and snow clearing during the winter period 2024/25, together with contingency arrangements to cater for extreme conditions prevailing, in conjunction with the operational issues detailed in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25. This is as recommended by “Well Managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice”.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes the service delivery, weather severity and outturn expenditure on winter road maintenance for 2023/24;
- (ii) approves the Winter Roads Services Policy for the forthcoming winter 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 3;
- (iii) approves updates to the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 4;
- (iv) notes the arrangements proposed to meet the costs of the Winter Roads Services during 2024/25 as set out in the report; and
- (v) delegates authority to the Manager – Roads Assets to temporarily change the level of service as proposed in the report in extreme conditions to deviate from the road treatment contained in Operational Plan (see Appendix 4), and to introduce salt conservation techniques as proposed in the report if difficulties are experienced or anticipated in obtaining sufficient salt supplies.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN

This report is aligned with the following priorities contained within the Angus Council Plan 2023-2028:

Caring for our People:

- We will support children, young people and adults to access appropriate opportunities which allow them to progress in their learning.
- We work as a core partner of Angus Health and Social Care Partnership to meet the health and social care needs of our adults.

Caring for our Place:

- We will maintain our roads, pavements, lighting, and other infrastructure efficiently and will focus on our priority routes and infrastructure.
- We will deliver efficient waste services and encourage more recycling and cleaner streets.
- We will support Tayside Contracts to transform its business to ensure a sustainable service.
- We will engage with communities to support their ambitions to deliver on local aspirations.
- We will support the development of more active travel routes around Angus.

Angus Council is Efficient and Effective:

- We will deliver our change programme.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Statutory Duty

- 3.1.1 Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 places a duty on the Roads Authority to take such steps as it considers reasonable to prevent snow and ice endangering the safe passage of pedestrians and vehicles over public roads. It is therefore incumbent on the Council to determine the measures that it deems appropriate for the winter service on its public roads, which take into account the Council's overall priorities and available resources.
- 3.1.2 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 is considered reasonably practicable, 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 winter weather conditions.
- 3.1.3 The Council will therefore operate a system of winter maintenance that gives priority to the more important and heavily trafficked sections of the public road network (both roads (carriageways) and pavements (footways)).
- 3.1.4 The Council will encourage the use of self-help measures, including community-led provision of some local winter roads services.
- 3.1.5 The Council will not provide winter maintenance on private roads or prospective public roads. The Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 makes no provision to carry out winter maintenance operations on unadopted roads or footways. As the Council has insufficient resources to service the unadopted network, no provision will be made for treating roads and footpaths that are unadopted. 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).

3.2 Winter 2023/24

- 3.2.1 The winter road service delivery, weather severity and outturn expenditure on winter road maintenance for 2023/24 are set out as follows:
- 3.2.2 The full standby period for winter treatment was established as 5am on 6 November 2023 to 11pm on 31 March 2024 with lead-in and out periods and reduced resources available on standby of two weeks each side.
- 3.2.3 Winter 2023/24 was generally mild however we did experience considerably low temperatures on occasion. Many of our citizens are unaware of our treatment activities where freezing conditions require attention often in the early hours of the morning. Routes frequently require retreatment if rain washes off the salt after treatment. Although snow was not a predominant feature of this winter, ice was, and this presented difficulties to remove due to the consistent and prolonged low temperatures we experienced. Temperatures of minus 5 degrees and below dramatically reduce the effectiveness of our treatment methods.
- 3.2.4 The relevant weather statistics are provided in **Appendix 1** of this report, and the treatment figures are provided in **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2.5 The first road treatment of the season was undertaken on 6 November 2023. The lowest temperature on the network was recorded as minus -9.2°C on 17 January 2024 at the South Pearsie ice station.
- 3.2.6 Approximately 10,381 tonnes of salt were used during the winter of 2023/24 not including leachate losses. 16,169 tonnes of salt were in stock at the start of winter with additional 5,006

tonnes delivered in January 2024. At the end of the winter approximately 9,716 tonnes remained in our depots in Forfar and Arbroath.

- 3.2.7 The A90 trunk road (TR) in Angus, which is maintained by Amey Ltd on behalf of Transport Scotland, experienced generally the same weather conditions as the local roads and it was not necessary for the council to assist with winter maintenance on the trunk road at any time during 2023/24. The A92 between Claypotts in Dundee and Elliott in Arbroath, which is a Design, Build, Finance and Operate road for Dundee and Angus, is currently maintained by BEAR Scotland Ltd for Claymore. The Transport Scotland operating company contract to manage and maintain the A90 (TR) moved to Amey on 15 August 2022.

3.3 Winter Roads Services Policy

- 3.3.1 The Winter Roads Services Policy and Plan for 2023/2024 was confirmed at the Communities Committee of 26 September 2023 (reference Report No. 263/23) and was largely unchanged from previous years and has proved to be robust and effective. As is the case any proposed updates to the plan are included within Appendix 4 for consideration.
- 3.3.2 Winter roads services policies and priorities should in accordance with the “Well Managed Highway Infrastructure – A Code of Practice” (the Code), be formally approved and adopted by authorities taking account of strategic objectives and integrated transport thinking. In developing the policy consideration is given to resilience, public transport, road users, walking, cycling, etc., as well as availability of resources.
- 3.3.3 The overall winter period, the core period, the level of resilience and treatment networks is set as far as reasonably possible with stakeholders in mind and based on risk as detailed in the following sections of this report.
- 3.3.4 The Winter Roads Services Policy for 2024/25 is included in **Appendix 3**.

3.4 Prioritisation of treatment and snow clearance of roads and footways

- 3.4.1 The treatment and snow clearance routes and definitions are detailed in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 (see **Appendix 4**). A summary of the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 is provided in **Appendix 5** as a more accessible document.
- 3.4.2 Generally, in order to make best use of available resources, it is necessary to operate a priority system for the treatment and snow clearance of roads and pavements.

ROADS

- Category 1 Roads
Strategic routes including important bus routes; important commuter routes; and roads serving hospitals, ambulance stations, fire stations, shopping centres, most schools and major industrial centres are classed as "priority routes"
- Category 2 Roads
High land routes including bus routes to the Glens
- Category 3 Roads
Lower priority routes

PAVEMENTS

- Category 1 Pavements
Strategic routes including main bus routes; important commuter routes; and pavements serving hospitals, ambulance stations, fire stations, shopping centres, most schools and major industrial centres are classed as "priority routes".
- Category 2 Pavements
There are currently no routes in this category.
- Category 3 Pavements
Lower priority routes – snow clearance only

- 3.4.3 There are real benefits in dealing with snow as quickly as possible when it is more easily cleared by making maximum use of available resources while conditions persist. It is further recommended that authority is delegated to the Manager – Roads Assets to authorise the expenditure involved in providing a temporarily increased level of service (e.g. permitting

weekend, public holiday and evening work on Category 3 routes and mobilising additional physical resources).

- 3.4.4 Once the Category 1 & 2 Road and Category 1 Pavement routes are in an acceptable condition, noting that with further low temperatures or additional snow they may require re-treatment, in heavy snow conditions (as experienced in the winter of 2010/11) resources will be used to address Category 3 Roads and Category 2 & 3 Pavements, as set out in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 (see Appendix 4).

3.5 **Treatment Response Time**

- 3.5.1 The target treatment response time is 3 hours. The response time is defined as the time from leaving the depot and starting the route to completion. Where snow or extreme ice events occur the treatment time may be extended to deal with clearance or enable a reduced travelling speed on roads.

3.6 **Operating and core winter period**

- 3.6.1 As detailed in Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 (see **Appendix 5**), there is a two week lead in/out prior to/after core winter period. Core winter period starts at 5am on Monday 4 November 2024 and ends at 11pm on Sunday 30 March 2025. The two-week lead out of four gritters covering the rural high speed (over 40pmh) roads is extended if winter weather persists.

3.7 **Resilient Winter Roads Services**

- 3.7.1 Conservation measures in light of resource shortages that may occur recommend including use of 50/50 grit sand/salt mixes as may be appropriate or in some cases to broadcast grit sand only. Grit/sand mixes have been used in the past on rural routes for traction. It can also be of benefit where salt is less effective when temperatures are below minus 5 degrees. It may also be needed to enable additional treatments beyond policy, which may result in reduced future work such as gritting prior to snow. The network treated may just be priority routes only or a reduced core network as detailed in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 (see Appendix 2).

3.8 **Salt holding at start of winter and minimum holding at any one time.**

- 3.8.1 Starting salt holding based on previous winter usage is 14,084T, with additional 4,000T ordered for delivery in January based on worst recent winter; and 5,500T minimum holding amount based on that used in 18 days from 2009/10 without conservation measures.

3.9 **Coordination and collaboration**

- 3.9.1 This involves sharing to ensure resilience and saving to determine critical areas in conjunction with key public services. Tayside Contracts procures salt and plant jointly through Scotland Excel; Tayside Procurement Consortium has procured weather and ice station maintenance. Arrangements for cross boundary gritting are also in place. There is ongoing consultation with Police, Passenger Transport, NHS and neighbouring authorities.

3.10 **Winter Roads Services Planning**

- 3.10.1 Councils should consider the following:

- Communication – critical externally and internally, including self-help measures – as detailed in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25;
- Treatment Routes - prioritised and detailed in Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25; and
- Contingency Planning – taking account of exceptional conditions.

Angus Council notes treatment route types and communication needed as well as the level of resilience as set in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25.

3.11 Winter Roads Services Delivery

3.11.1 Councils should consider the following:

- Decisions and Management;
- Information Recording and Monitoring Resources;
- Training and Development;
- Route and Equipment;
- Plant and Vehicles;
- Precautionary treatments;
- Salt and De-icing Materials and management of; and
- Post Snow Inspection and Maintenance.

Angus Council approach is as follows:

- Priority gritters have GPS fitted;
- Drivers' hours considered by Tayside Contracts;
- Training and route familiarisation and keeping records carried out by Tayside Contracts;
- Council ensures training and competence of own winter staff and keeps records;
- Preparation and maintenance of plant by Tayside Contracts including calibration start and mid-season;
- Salt procured and stored by Tayside Contracts as above;
- 14,084 tonnes of salt held at start of season based on experience of maximum historical use;
- Number of stockpiles of salt as sufficient is held within region at start of winter and can be procured if needed combined resilience measures in place;
- Rock and marine salt and Pre wet techniques used for roads;
- Farmers/Agricultural contractors used for ploughing and gritting; and
- Farmers used for self-help ploughing.

3.12 Review

3.12.1 Councils should undertake an annual review. A post-winter wash-up meeting is held with Tayside Contracts and actions identified for addressing ahead of subsequent winter along with statistical information recorded for consideration – see section 3.2 of this report, which details costs, salt stock usage and experience from winter 2023/24.

3.13 Budgetary Provision and Expenditure Control

3.13.1 The provision of a winter roads service must take into account the vagaries of local winter weather, which can vary widely from year to year in both the severity and the frequency of occurrence of wintry conditions (snow and ice). The unpredictable nature of the climate requires a pragmatic, responsive and reactive approach to the provision of resources. In practice, resources should be available to allow a measured response to an "average winter" with contingency plans made to take account of particularly abnormal (mild or severe) winters.

3.13.2 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 in place to deal with a projected overspend or underspend as a result of abnormal weather. These contingency plans must take account of the possibility of prolonged severe weather, particularly very late in the financial year, while still working within the budgetary provision.

3.13.3 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 paid to Tayside Contracts.

3.13.4 Variable costs include running costs of plant, salt used, driver costs and payments to outside contractors for assistance with snow clearing. Variable costs will also include breakdown costs of plant during the winter period.

- 3.13.5 Whilst the fixed costs are broadly independent of the number of treatment activities occasioned by the weather conditions and can be estimated with some confidence, the variable costs are mostly dependent on the prevailing weather conditions and the subsequent responses.
- 3.13.6 In the event of a sustained period of severe winter weather and the likelihood of the budgetary provision being exceeded, this would be reported to the Director of Finance and the appropriate committee in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.
- 3.13.7 If the severity of the winter weather is such that other planned and programmed road works cannot be carried out, then it is sometimes possible to transfer the "underspend" from these works to Winter Roads Services operations, thus assisting in containing the total expenditure within the overall revenue budget. This would however lead to a shortfall in revenue budgets remaining to undertake the required road works that were delayed by winter weather. Additionally, severe winter weather can exacerbate the deterioration of the road network, which introduces an additional burden on the budgets for both revenue and capital roads maintenance works. However, if all the indications are that expenditure on Winter Roads Service operations will be less than the budget allocation any "underspend" on winter can be transferred to fund other roads maintenance revenue works.
- 3.13.8 A working group involving Tayside Contracts, Angus, Dundee and Perth and Kinross Councils is continuing to review standing charges to maximise efficiencies and savings.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The main proposals of the winter roads service includes details of the hours of service; prioritised routes; type of plant and equipment; and type and quantity of salt used in treatment. These broadly harmonise across Tayside local authorities (Angus, Dundee and Perth and Kinross Councils). For 2024/25 these largely remain the same as those approved as part of last year's plan at Communities Committee of 26 September 2023 (reference Report No. 263/23). The proposed amendments for 2024/25 are captured separately for approval (Appendix 4).
- 4.2 The Council welcomes community groups, existing and new, particularly in villages, taking direct action in gritting and snow clearance. This theme was identified in the review of winter roads services (report No. 351/21) and is supported by the Council where possible by means of advice towards encouraging more delivery of non-core winter roads services by communities. Our current Policy which is proposed for approval for 2024/25 welcomes engagement with community groups or representatives towards the identification of resources towards increasing resilience where communities wish to participate in gritting and snow clearance.
- 4.3 Extreme weather conditions as previously experienced in the area can create salt shortages. It is therefore recommended that the Manager – Roads Assets be delegated the authority to apply salt conservation measures if future weather conditions merit such measures. This entails varying the road treatments in the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25 (see Appendix 4) to allow the use of 50/50 grit sand/salt mixes as may be appropriate or in some cases to broadcast grit sand only (see paragraph 3.7.1 of this report).
- 4.4 Angus Council has undertaken collaborative procurement previously, through Tayside Procurement Consortium, with Highland, Perth & Kinross, Dundee City, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils for winter weather forecasting and similarly with some of these authorities for weather bureau services and ice station maintenance. The Council continues to extend these arrangements to obtain best value.
- 4.5 The council has placed a heavy reliance on the use of marine salt in the past primarily due to its purity and weather resistant qualities. However, in recent years escalating shipping costs together with a fluctuating exchange rate has led to a disproportionate increase in marine salt costs compared to rock salt. This combined, with improvements in the quality of mined UK (rock) salt, and the lower price of rock salt in comparison to marine salt along with evidenced effectiveness by neighbouring councils, led to the introduction an increased reliance on rock salt in Angus during winter 2023/24, whilst continuing to hold stock of both marine and rock salt. The performance and savings of an increased proportion of rock salt use were monitored across the 2023/24 winter period. No significant concerns were raised and significant saving were

generated. Noting the generally mild conditions of last winter the difference in salt used was untested under harsher elements, monitoring will therefore continue into the 2024/25 winter.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The net budget for winter maintenance was set for 2023/24 at £2,964.357. This paid for standing charges which included plant, standby arrangements, depot costs, preparation and unscheduled vehicle maintenance and also preparation costs for the day-to-day operational costs, which includes salting/snow clearing activities and weather forecast costs.
- 5.2 The unaudited outturn expenditure figures for the 2023/24 winter service indicate a total cost of £2,929,807 with a £34,550 underspend on the revenue budget allocation for winter maintenance of £2,964.357. The completion of the 2023/24 annual accounts process is currently ongoing. Any alteration to this position will be reported at a later date to the council as part of the finalisation of the 2023/24 annual accounts process.
- 5.3 The approved budget for Winter Roads Services third party payments for 2024/25 has been established at a sum of £2,923.357.
- 5.4 As in previous years, the intention is to provide the best level of service possible within the available budget prioritising treatment of Category 1 & 2 Roads and Category 1 Pavements. In practice, winter roads service operations are dictated by the prevailing weather and the responses required in accordance with the council's policy and agreed level of service, which is set by the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25, which is Appendix 5 of this report, along with a summary of changes for this year presented in Appendix 4.
- 5.5 Some costs (related primarily to ensuring a state of "being prepared") are fixed and will be predictable once the relevant standing charges and rates have been agreed with Tayside Contracts.
- 5.6 Other costs are variable and are proportional to the treatment activity required in consequence of the severity of the winter and as detailed above, a severe winter can greatly increase the expenditure required to provide the approved level of service.
- 5.7 The costs for the winter roads services will be monitored closely as winter 2024/25 progresses, and where there are indications that the projected expenditure is likely to be at variance with the budget, this shall be reported through the corporate revenue monitoring Policy & Resources committee reports with proposals for any necessary budget adjustments for the consideration of the appropriate committee.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

There are no direct risk management implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

An Equality Impact Assessment has previously been carried out and is unchanged with no significant changes to policy, operations or implications regarding the rights of the child.

9. CONSULTATION

Angus Council Directors and Tayside Contracts have been consulted with in the preparation of this report.

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

- Report No. 2 6 3 /23 – Winter Roads Service Policy and Plan for 2023/2024 – Communities Committee – 26 September 2023.

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 –Winter Maintenance Expenditure 2023/2024 Review - Weather Statistics

Appendix 2 – Winter Maintenance Expenditure 2023/2024 Review - Operational Activity Statistics

Appendix 3 – Winter Roads Services Policy 2024/25

Appendix 4 – Winter Roads Services Plan updates for 2024/25

Appendix 5 - Summary of the Winter Roads Services Plan for 2024/25