

Agenda Item	<b>21</b>
Report No	<b>EDI/57/18</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Environment, Development and Infrastructure

**Date:** 16 August 2018

**Report Title:** Winter Service Review 2018

**Report By:** Director of Community Services

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

1.1 This report outlines the outcome of the policy review and operational practices following the winter of 2017/18.

### **2 Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is invited to:

- i. note the actions being taken to improve the winter service;
- ii. note the outcomes of the survey with Community Councils (**Appendix 1**);
- iii. agree to extend the winter survey to include the general public; and
- iv. agree to adjust the weekend service as per section 8 in the report; and
- v. agree to amend the Winter Service Policy as detailed in **Appendix 2** of this report.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 The winter of 2017/18, although not extreme in an overall context, was longer in duration than that experienced over recent years. As well as periods of persistent frost, there were two main weather events which caused disruption to both motorists and pedestrians - the severe icing during mid December 2017 and the storm named "The Beast from the East" during late February 2018.
- 3.2 The performance of Community Services came under scrutiny during those events and this report looks at the issues raised by Members and what actions are to be put in place to prevent, as much as is reasonably possible, any reoccurrence.

### **4 Consultation**

- 4.1 A workshop was organised for 21 June 2018 to seek the views of Members on the winter service. This provided an open discussion on aspects of the service that Members considered needed improving.
- 4.2 As a supplementary consultation, a questionnaire was sent out to all Community Councils seeking their views on key aspects of the winter service.

### **5 Previous Winter Review – Actions Update**

#### **5.1 Salt Storage**

- 5.1.1 The Community Services Committee of 28 April 2016 approved the proposal to invest in salt storage facilities throughout the Highlands. The first depot to be considered was Strontian. However, planning issues with respect to the size of the structure have delayed that particular project.
- 5.1.2 To ensure progression of this long term project was maintained, an alternative location at Lochinver Harbour was brought forward and this facility is now in place ready for winter 2018/19. Solutions for other west coast depots (Strontian, Lochcarron and Sconser) are being evaluated before planning permission is sought. All future salt storage facilities will be considered within the budgets available at the time.

#### **5.2 Brine Trial**

- 5.2.1 It had been the intention to commence a Brine trial for treatment of snow and ice in Badenoch and Strathspey last winter. Unfortunately, the vehicle allocated to us was involved in a traffic collision which delayed its arrival. This was further compounded by reduced driver resources at our Kingussie depot which resulted in the trial being cancelled.
- 5.2.2 For winter 2018/19, a trial involving two vehicles is planned. We have agreement in principle with the Trunk Road Operator (BEAR) to utilise their Brine tanks at Kingussie and Inverness. This will give a good comparison between a rural route in Badenoch and Strathspey and a more urbanised route in and around Inverness. Members will be kept informed of the outcome of these trials at a future committee.

#### **5.3 Early Start Time**

The option to start a limited number of routes at 5am was implemented by some Areas. There is a careful balance to be made to ensure that Drivers Hours are not exceeded but feedback has been positive where this option had been taken up. The service will continue to use and appraise the operation through the coming winter.

#### **5.4 Gritting Routes**

- 5.4.1 There still remains some ambiguity as to the role of the Local Area Committee in

setting the prioritisation of local roads. For clarity, the Local Committee, working within the constraints of the resources available to it, can change the status of a road so long as the overall length of road being treated, within that prioritisation category, remains the same.

- 5.4.2 The sequencing of roads and how and when they are treated is an operational matter and should in the first instance be discussed locally with the respective Road Operations Manager. However, reaching some of the more remote locations before the commencement of bus or school transport journeys is just not possible when geographic and depot locations are taken into account.

## **6 Response to main items raised at Members' Workshop**

### **6.1 Press Release on Winter Safety**

A publicity campaign will be started in September with emphasis on driver safety, preparation for winter and community resilience.

### **6.2 Winter Resilience Programme**

- 6.2.1 A consultation exercise with all Community Councils commenced in early July 2018. The aim was to establish where this programme had been successfully employed and learn from those areas where it was less successful or not undertaken at all.

- 6.2.2 In particular, comments were requested on:

- Suitability of equipment supplied - Would push-along spreaders be useful as well as shovels and wheelbarrows?
- Storage location for equipment - Was there a suitable store for the equipment and was it readily accessible to all the volunteers?
- Location of grit bins/salt piles - Was there enough, were they in the best locations, did they have problems with unauthorised use of the salt, were the bins being refilled as quickly as they would like?
- Was there anything else the Council could be doing to encourage communities to sign up to this programme?

- 6.2.3 As the consultation period extends beyond the cut off date for this report, the findings will be reported to a future Committee, once collated.

### **6.3 Live Tracking of Gritters**

Discussions are ongoing with our vehicle tracking supplier to provide a link from their system onto the Council's web site. This will enable the public to see real time positions of our winter fleet. The Service is working to have this live for November and Members will be advised when the system comes on line.

### **6.4 Performance of the Fleet**

- 6.4.1 For winter 2017/18, the Council had 105 front-line vehicles available for gritting and snow clearing. A report presented to the Community Services Committee on 28 April 2016 benchmarked this resource against other Councils and showed Highland to be mid-table with regard to fleet resource when comparing vehicle numbers to the length of road network treated.

- 6.4.2 Performance of the fleet in general was considered satisfactory. However it was noted that some issues were being experienced with new vehicles fitted with the latest Euro 6 spec engines going into a 'limp home' mode whilst carrying out routine gritting operations. This is an industry problem and is caused by lack of regeneration in the exhaust system due to the vehicle being driven at a slow speed when gritting. This is being addressed through improved driver education and is expected to reduce

significantly next winter.

- 6.4.3 Heavy goods vehicles require a statutory safety inspection every 8 weeks along with an annual MOT test. There is very little leeway with the inspection interval so if a vehicle is due an inspection at the same time as we experience inclement weather, then the inspection will take precedence. The knock on effect of this is that the operation loses the use of that vehicle for a significant part of a day.
- 6.4.4 Often the fact that a vehicle is reported as being 'in the garage' is overstated and taken to mean that it has a fault or is broken down. This, as explained previously, is not always the case and it is important that the right message is conveyed to both the public and media during such events.
- 6.4.5 Currently, there are 3 spare vehicles in the entire winter fleet. It is inescapable that with such a low number of spares when a breakdown does occur, there will be a knock on effect on the service.
- 6.4.6 The reduction of the fleet to current levels was as a consequence of revenue pressures during the 2013 to 2015 period. We are continually assessing the vehicle resources available to our operational teams. It is envisaged that through prudent purchasing of nearly new vehicles, and refurbishment of existing stock, we can increase the number of spare vehicles available. This will be a gradual process and will necessitate careful financial planning while working within the resources available. Over the longer term, the increase in spare vehicles will help to provide a more consistent service during times of need.

## 6.5 **Footways**

- 6.5.1 By far the largest amount of complaints received over the past winter centered on footpaths. The volume of complaints was at its highest during the mid December period when we experienced a phenomenon known as freezing rain.
- 6.5.2 Freezing rain occurs when the air temperature is slightly above zero and any precipitation falls as rain however road surfaces temperatures, including footways, are below zero. The rain freezes immediately upon contact with the frozen surface and forms an impenetrable ice layer which can make conditions for motorists and pedestrians difficult.
- 6.5.3 There were no existing procedures in place during 2017/18 to monitor the sustained period of freezing rain in the area.
- 6.5.4 For winter 2018/19, a formal escalation procedure will be adopted when such conditions exist or where there is a high confidence in the weather forecast that freezing rain is likely to occur. This will include the immediate mobilisation of all available manual staff across Community Services to assist in the treatment of footways.

## 7 **Survey to Community Councils**

- 7.1 In addition to the consultation exercise mentioned in item 6.2 of this report, a questionnaire (via Survey Monkey) was sent out by email to all Community Councils. This sought their responses to a number of questions relating to Winter service operations and resilience schemes.
- 7.2 In total, 125 invitations to participate in the survey were sent of which 28 were returned. Even though the response was low, the outcome will be of interest to Members.

7.3 The results of the survey are shown in **Appendix 1**.

7.4 Headlines from the survey results show:

- the preferred priority treatment of the road network was in line with that delivered under the current winter policy (**Appendix 2**), however most Community Councils (CC's) felt that footways serving local shops and community centres should be treated before the busiest streets in towns and the city centre;
- there were no CC's in favour of reducing the winter budget. The majority wanted it to remain at current levels with the remainder looking to increase it;
- the majority of CC's did not want to see a reduction in service levels to the lowest category 'Other' roads;
- the majority of CC's were in favour of increasing the Sunday service level on the basis that the Saturday service would be reduced to offset the costs;
- there was a slight majority against the proposal to restrict access to grit bins; and
- of the 28 CC's to respond, only 2 had a resilience scheme in place.

7.5 The sample from the Survey Monkey questionnaire is small and may not be representative of what the wider population's view is. Members may wish to consider whether a wider survey should be carried out to get a more representative poll from the general public.

## **8 Weekend Service**

8.1 Under the current Policy, the service level provided on a Saturday is the same as that delivered during the Monday to Friday period. The significance of the weekday service is that it includes the treatment of school routes which have a target treatment time of 9am.

8.2 As schools are generally closed on a Saturday, this raises the question as to whether it is really necessary to continue to treat school routes by 9am and does this provide the best use of our resources.

8.3 The service provided on a Sunday is generally for treating Primary routes only. Commercial trends have changed significantly over the years with increased journeys being undertaken at weekends, including a Sunday. The demand for travel on a Sunday would justify an increased service level.

8.4 To offset the additional costs of providing an increased service on a Sunday, it is proposed that the Saturday service be reduced and that a standard weekend service be introduced, with the same service level being provided on both days.

8.5 At present, 100% of roads may be treated on a Saturday with approx 33% treated on a Sunday. It is proposed therefore that a new strategic service be applied where up to 65% of the network may be treated on both a Saturday and Sunday.

8.6 There are clear benefits to amending the weekend service level:

- the public should have a clearer understanding as there would be two distinct service levels - weekday and weekend;
- the additional service on a Sunday will aid Monday morning travel through having an expanded treated network with a residual salt layer. This is particularly relevant where snow falls during the early hours of Monday morning;
- clearer defined resource requirements for the workforce at the weekend; and
- to align with the Saturday service, Sunday working will also commence at 6am

making for a standard start time for all winter operations.

## **9 Policy Change**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the changes to the weekend service be adopted and that the Winter Policy (**Appendix 2**) be amended to take account of this change. For clarification, the current service being provided Monday to Friday will remain unchanged.

## **10 Implications**

- 10.1 Resource – as detailed in this report.
- 10.2 Legal – No implications.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – Any rural implications are detailed in the report.
- 10.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – No implications.
- 10.5 Risk – managed under Section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.
- 10.6 Gaelic – No implications.

Designation: Director of Community Services

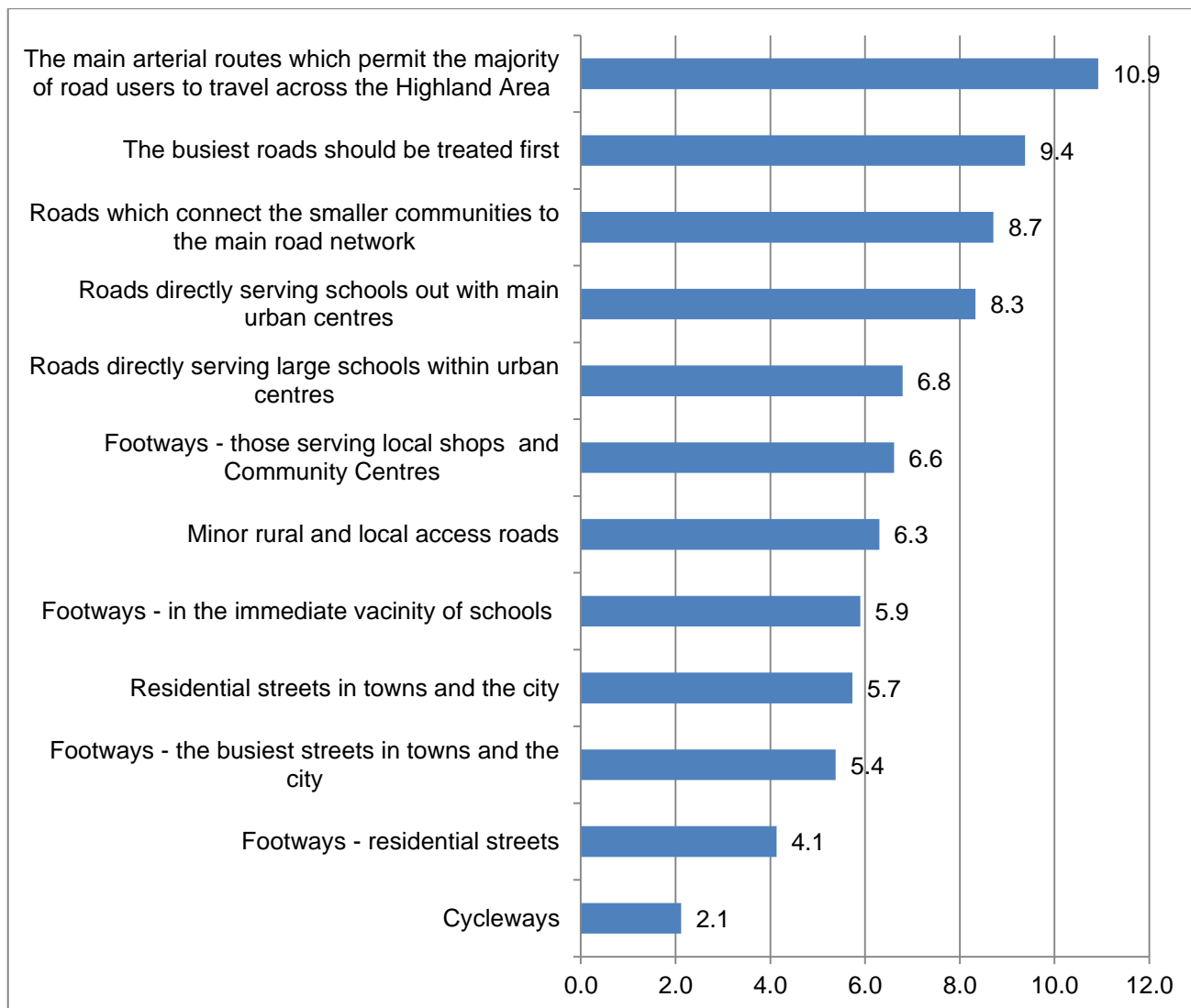
Date: 26 July 2018

Author: John MacLennan, Senior Service Support Officer

## Winter Survey

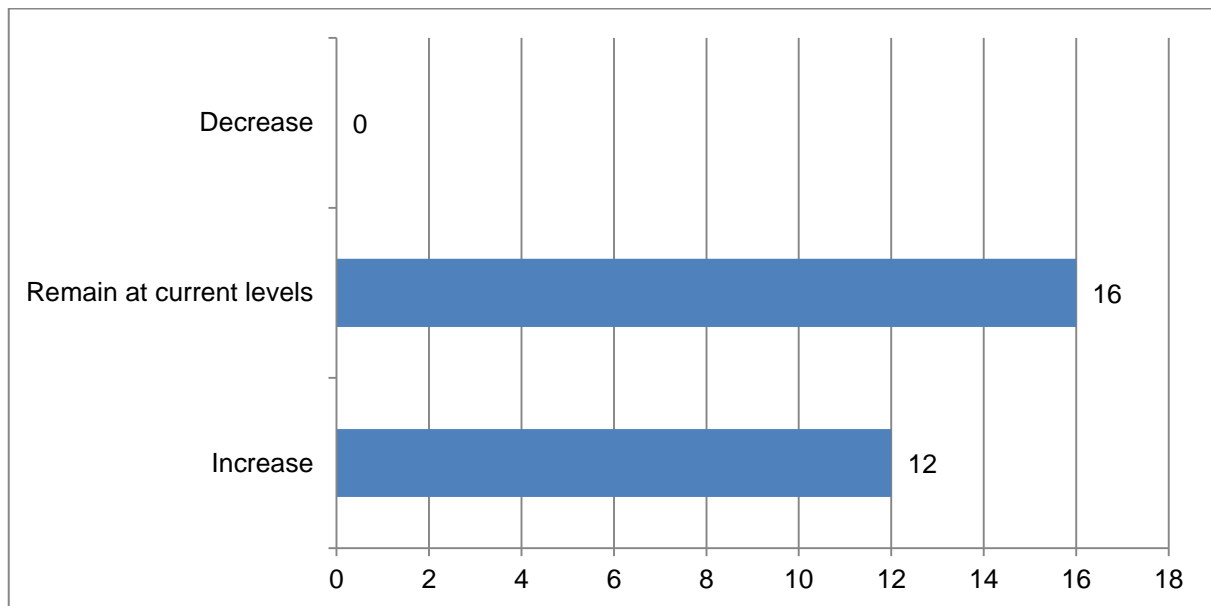
### Question 1

It is not possible to treat all our roads at the same time. How would you prioritise snow and ice treatment on roads and footways within Highland



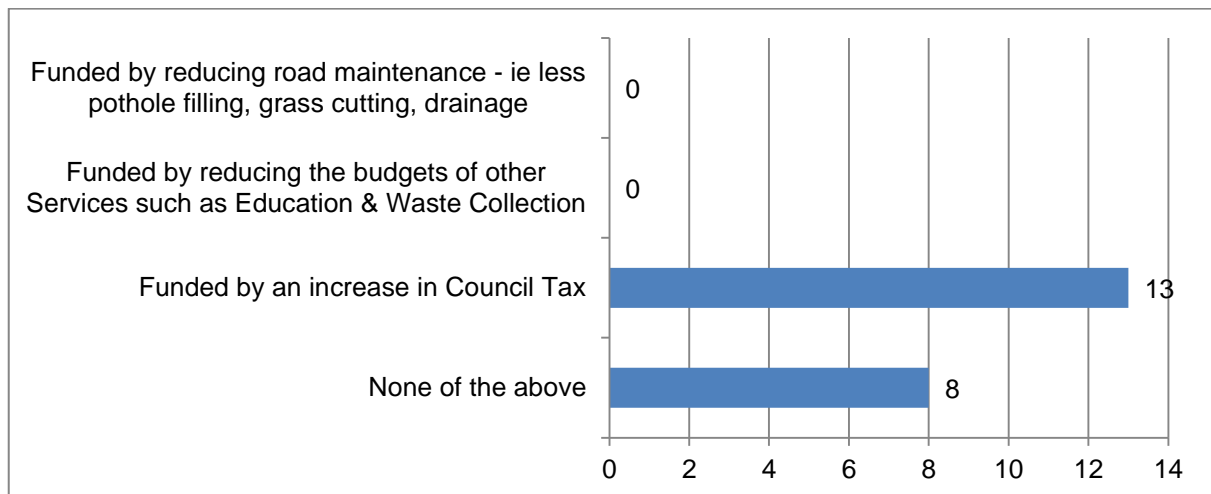
## Question 2

The Council currently allocates £5 million per year to pay for the winter service. Any increase in service level would have to be funded from existing resources. Do you consider that funding for the winter service should:-



## Question 3

If you consider that the winter budget should be increased where should the funding come from:





#### Question 4

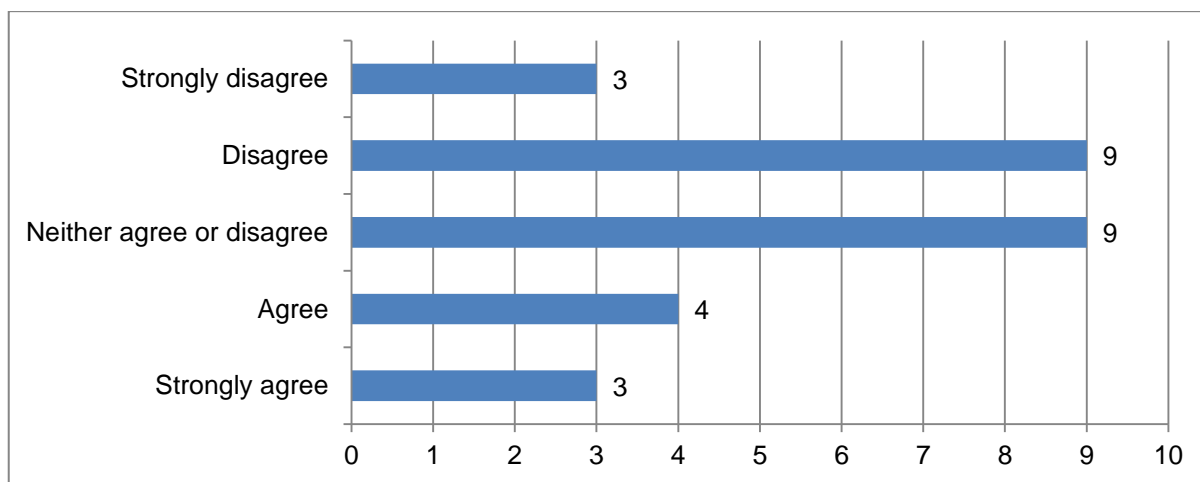
If you answered "None of the above" to question 3 please describe below where the additional funding should come from:-

Responses received :

From money spent on unnecessary things such as fireworks displays.
Finding savings within departments
Reduce number of Desk-bound managers and run departments like a proper business
Cost savings from increased efficiency and less waste at council offices and departments. Councillors' free meals allowance, for instance.
Cut the salaries and Expenses paid to Councillors

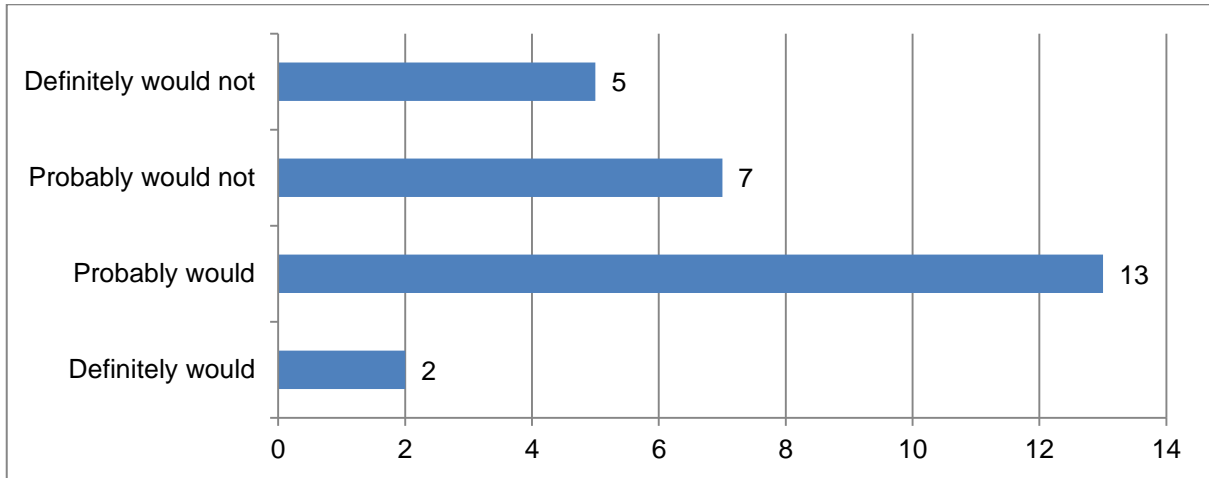
#### Question 5

The Council cannot treat every road at the same time so operates a priority system. Primary roads are the highest category and treated first, Secondary roads are next with the lowest category Other roads treated as resources permit. Should the Council consider reducing the length of road it routinely treats in favour of providing a higher level of service on the Primary and Secondary network at the expense of the lowest category "Other" roads.



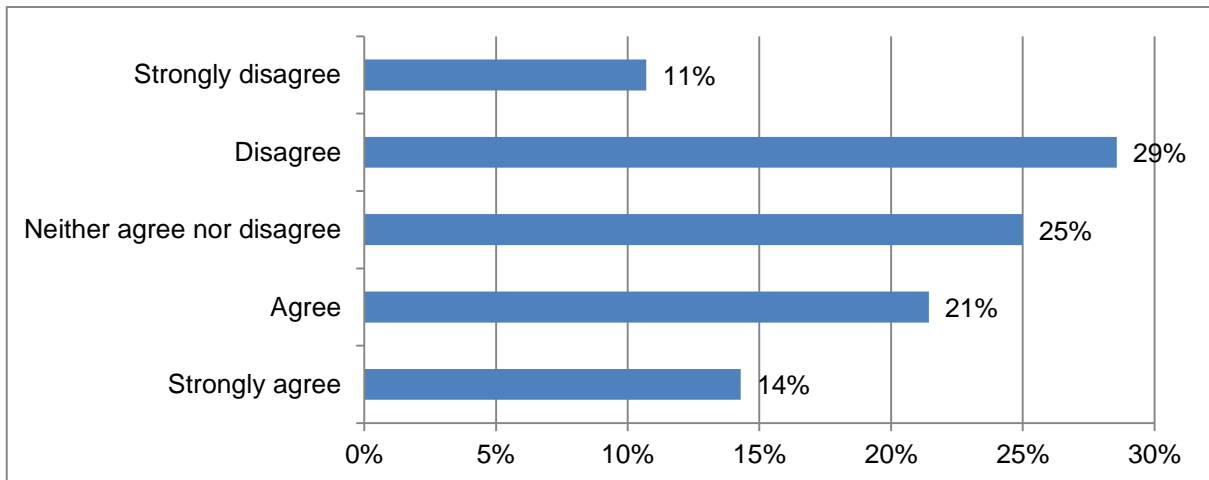
### Question 6

The Council operates a reduced service level on a Sunday. Commercial trends have changed significantly over the years with increased journeys being undertaken at weekends, including a Sunday. If the Council were to increase the Sunday service would you accept a reduced service on a Saturday to offset the additional costs ? (Weekday service levels would not change)



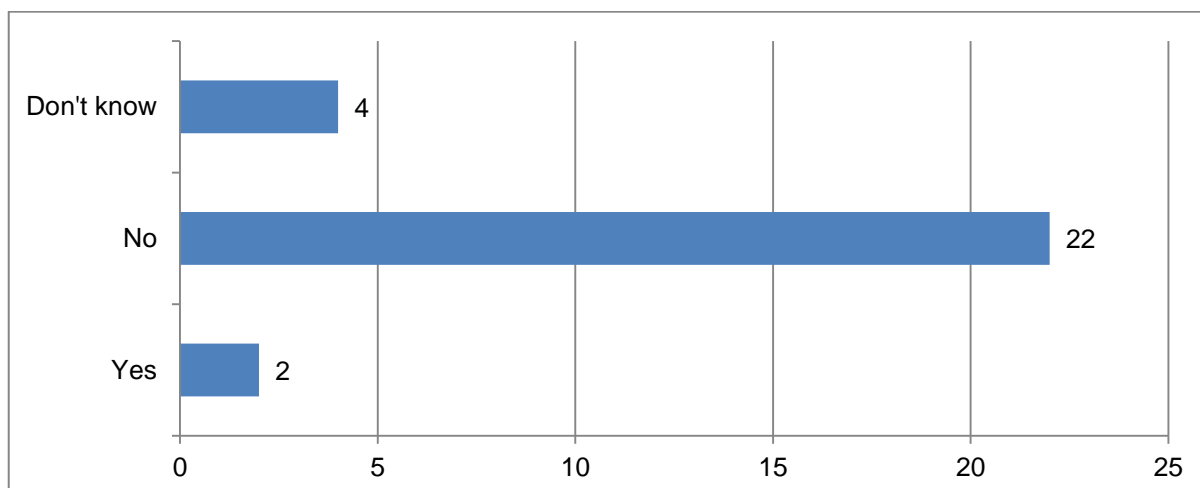
### Question 7

The Council provides Grit Bins in many locations throughout the Highlands. Inappropriate use has resulted in bins being emptied shortly after they are refilled. Should the local Community have control of access to local Grit Bins (eg through a padlock and key)



### Question 8

Do you have any Community Resilience schemes currently operating in your Area (community resilience referring to where the Council has provided shovels, high visibility vests and salt)



### Question 9

If you have any additional comments you would like to make regarding the treatment of roads and footways during winter please enter them below.

Comments received :

The present system appears to be working well, due to the commitment of the staff concerned. Communities are consulted about placing of grit bins, but there will always be those that abuse the system, but it is important not to penalise the many for the actions of a few

It cannot be stressed enough how important roads treatment is to rural and remote communities who would otherwise be cut-off. Larger roads and in urban areas treatment is less necessary due to increased traffic levels clearing snow naturally.

The Highland Council employees try as hard as they can to keep roads clear

During the winter of 2017/2018 the service was inadequate in minor roads and footpaths leading to many serious accidents

Community resilience schemes should be extended as the public, by and large, are keen to help their local communities.

Just get on and provide the services we need, public toilets, road maintenance, gritting and refuse collection and recycling. Increase the council tax to pay for it.

I think the men who are out on the roads do a very good job in often difficult conditions

Must prioritise access to school in remote areas. No point in gritting priority A first if bus is on priority B route and can't reach it. Should reduce red tape about providing equipment for local communities to clear pavements. They could do it, but can't take time of work for ridiculous-length training course.

Q6 Sunday gritting - the current policy of no Sunday gritting is well understood - thorough gritting one day, Saturday, ensures that folks can be sure to get out and do shopping etc on that day so no need to extend to Sunday especially as this splits resources and/or will cost more. If started it would only be a matter of time before "limited" gritting would bring in complaints! Don't go there! Q7 inappropriate use of grit in grit bins. I've no idea what this is about but rather than implement a padlock system (which would just inconvenience the helpful) chase down those who abuse the grit bins and deal with them. It may be that people need the grit somewhere else! There may be a fund raiser here for THC - for a price - supply a grit bin and refill for a fee. Answering on behalf of a rural CC so reflects the priorities of a remote rural area.



# The Highland Council

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Community Services

Winter Service Policy

~~April 2016~~ August 2018

# Winter Service Policy

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# 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 OF ROADS

#### MONDAY TO SATURDAY FRIDAY

The service will be provided to the full road network, when required ~~The service will be provided~~ between 6am and 9pm. Treatment after 6pm will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

#### SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

A strategic service will be provided at the weekend which covers Primary, strategic Secondary and difficult Other routes between 6am and 9pm. Treatment after 6pm will in general be restricted to Primary routes only.

### 3.2.3 TREATMENT TIMES – SUNDAYS AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

#### 3.2.3.1 ~~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.

### 3.2.23.3.2 **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 Saturday or Sunday then a standard weekend Sunday service will be provided.

### 3.33.4 **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.

### 3.43.5 **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.

### 3.53.6 **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.

### 3.63.7 **TARGET TREATMENT TIMES**

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

#### 3.6.13.7.1 **Monday to Saturday Friday**

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

#### **3.7.2 Saturday and Sunday**

PRIMARY ROUTES 8.30am.  
SECONDARY and OTHER Routes as resources and conditions permit.

**3.6.23.7.3** **Sundays, 25<sup>th</sup> / 26<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> January**  
**PRIMARY ROUTES** 9.30am.  
SECONDARY ROUTES as resources and conditions permit.

**3.73.8 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 FOOTWAY TREATMENT TIMES - MONDAY TO SATURDAYFRIDAY**

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

**4.3 FOOTWAY TREATMENT TIMES – SATURDAY, SUNDAY AND PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

The service will be provided between 7.6am and Noon on Primary ~~routes and strategic~~  
~~secondary footways as resources permit. only.~~

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

-- End of Policy Statement --