

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	<b>5</b>
Report No	<b>SCC/19/23</b>

**Committee:** Sutherland County

**Date:** 31 October 2023

**Report Title:** Review of Winter Gritting Route Priorities in Lochinver Area

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides information on the implications on resources of re-prioritising a section of the road network from the category “Other” to “Secondary”, as defined in The Highland Council Community Services Winter Service Policy August 2018, paragraph 3.1, Network Hierarchy.

## 2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the impact of increasing “Secondary” route priorities for the delivery of the winter service to “Other” routes and pre-treatment routes;
- ii. **Note** the additional plant and labour resource required to deliver the increase in Secondary routes as detailed in Section 9 of this report;
- iii. **Note** that following extensive review of winter maintenance operations, it is not possible to re-prioritise the classification of a section of the C1003 Lochinver to Inverkirkaig road to secondary route status, in view of the impacts on other routes, and the resource implications as highlighted in this report; and
- iv. **Agree** the reprioritisation of the U1053 Achmelvich Road from “Secondary” to “Other” in order to comply with the Winter Service Policy.

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - The winter service has to be provided in line with the relevant budget and resources (plant, materials and labour) available.
- 3.2 **Legal** - Under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, The Highland Council has a duty to keep roads reasonably free of snow and ice.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** - No implications.

- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** - All Roads activities use resources; however, routes are planned to provide efficient working practices and operatives have been trained in efficient driving practices.
- 3.5 **Risk** - If a Winter Service is not provided then there is the potential risk to life. There are no particular risks associated with this report.
- 3.6 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – Any risks are mitigated through training.
- 3.7 **Gaelic** - This report has no impact on Gaelic considerations.

## 4 Background

- 4.1 At the Sutherland County Committee on 8 October 2023 Members approved the Sutherland Area Winter Service Plan for 2023/24 (Report No SCC/14/23) with an amendment that the road from Lochinver Primary School, south to Inverkirkaig Bridge, a distance of approximately 2.5miles/4km, be re-prioritised from the category “Other” to “Secondary”, as defined in The Highland Council Community Services Winter Service Policy August 2018, paragraph 3.1, Network Hierarchy.

This was on the basis that this was a school bus route for primary and high school pupils and currently 16 young people depended on the route to access their education.

## 5 Existing Service Provision

- 5.1 The current winter maintenance service in Sutherland is delivered from 10 Depots strategically located around the county with the Lochinver Depot serving the Assynt community area.
- 5.2 Lochinver Depot staff establishment is 1 Assistant Foreperson and 3 Roads Operatives. Currently there is 1 Operative vacancy.
- 5.3 Fleet levels at the Depot are 2 frontline gritters. One gritter is deployed on the “Primary” route and the other gritter covers the “Secondary” and “Other” routes. Once “Primary” and “Secondary” routes have been treated attention is then turned to treating the “Other” routes.

## 6 Target Treatment Times

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

	Monday to Friday	Saturday and Sunday
Primary Routes	8:30am	9:00 am
Secondary Routes	9:00 am	As resources and conditions permit
Other	As resources and conditions permit	As resources and conditions permit

## **7 Re-prioritisation of the C1003 Lochinver-Inverkirkaig- Inverpolly-Badnagyle Road from “Other” to “Secondary” Priority**

7.1 Secondary Routes are defined as:-

- Roads connecting smaller communities to the primary network;
- Link and Service roads within the larger urban settlements; and
- Service bus routes not covered by the “Primary” network.

7.2 Currently the C1003 is designated an “Other” route. The route starts at its junction with the A837 at Culag Bridge and for operational purposes terminates at a turning area south of the Inverkirkaig Bridge.

Lochinver Depot covers 42.3km of “Primary” and 38.6km of “Secondary”. Re-prioritising the C1003 would add an additional 5.43km to the “Secondary” routes.

7.3 Treating the C1003 would have an impact on the treatment of the existing “Secondary” routes and delay their treatment times by up to 1.25 hours.

This would result in completed treatment of all the “Secondary” routes in the Assynt area being outside the Policy time of 9:00am. The expected completion time would be 9:05am.

7.4 In reviewing the reprioritisation of the C1003 consideration of the “Secondary” network was undertaken and the U1053 Achmelvich Road, under the criteria, could be re-prioritised from a “Secondary” to “Other” and this would bring treatment target times back within Policy by 5 minutes.

## **8.0 Treatment of Other routes**

8.1 Delivery of the winter service to all “Other” routes in the Assynt area would be impacted by the reprioritisation of the C1003.

8.2 The delay of 1.25 hours in completing the “Secondary” routes will be compounded by the requirement to comply with driving regulations, which dictates compulsory break times and the number of hours the drivers can work.

8.3 For operational reasons, the “Other” routes off the C1003 would be treated at the same time.

8.4 All “Other” routes off the B869 Lochinver - Stoer - Drumbeg – Kylesku Road would be impacted and in some cases where previously they would be treated by 10:45am this could be as late as 12:15pm. Where conditions are anything more than frost some “Other” routes may not be treated in any 24-hour period.

8.5 The gritter treating the “Primary” routes is not suitable for treating the majority of the “Other” routes which include the village streets.

## **9 Pre-Treatment**

9.1 Current practice is to pre-treat the B869 with an afternoon treatment if weather conditions dictate. This is a weekday service only.

- 9.2 By increasing the “Secondary” routes treated in the morning this afternoon service could not be delivered for the same reasons highlighted in paragraph 8.2.

## **10 Resource Implications**

- 10.1 Plant – the 2 gritters based in Lochinver could not accommodate the increase in “Secondary” routes. The smaller gritter is required for the “Secondary” and “Other” network and, as this would place a burden on the gritter that treats the “Other” routes, this would result in no downtime for this vehicle.

Additionally this is the gritter that carries out the pre-treatment on the B869 and so it could not be in two places at once.

- 10.2 Materials – increasing the amount of “Secondary” routes being treated out of Lochinver Depot will result in a minor increase in salt usage.

Public Holiday treatment is for Primary and Secondary routes only.

- 10.3 Labour – the labour resource providing the winter service must comply with various rules and regulations. This has an impact on how many hours each operative can drive/work in any given period.

Highland Council also have their own policies and procedures on Health, Safety and Wellbeing for the staff.

Route risk assessments require the B869 to be double manned.

The increase in service level cannot be delivered with the existing staff levels, even if the current vacancy was filled. In order to comply with legislation i.e. duty time, compulsory breaks and rest periods, the establishment staff levels in Lochinver Depot would require to be increased by 1 operative for the winter maintenance period - October to April. This can be considered as a seasonal post and would equate to 0.6 of a fulltime post.

Recruitment to Lochinver Depot for permanent fulltime and seasonal posts has proved challenging in the past.

## **11 Conclusion**

- 11.1 The reprioritisation of the C1003 from “Other” to “Secondary” cannot be delivered in addition to the existing “Secondary” routes within Policy target times. The timing is marginal but nonetheless is still outwith Policy.

To bring “Secondary” treatment times back within Policy, the U1053 Achmelvich Road would require to be reprioritised from “Secondary” to “Other”.

- 11.2 To treat “Secondary” and “Other” routes and provide an afternoon pre-treatment is not possible for one vehicle. A third vehicle with gritting capabilities would require to be based in Lochinver for the winter maintenance period.

To hire a gritter for the winter period would require funding of £26k with additional funding for fuel. The alternative would be to request a quote for an additional gritter from Highland Council Fleet Service.

11.3 Without an additional labour resource of a minimum of a 0.6FTE seasonal road Operative to comply with legislation, regulations and HC HR Policies, the increase in “Secondary” routes cannot be delivered without impacting on the delivery of service to the “Other” routes and the afternoon pre-treatment of the B869.

This option would require funding of £20k with an additional consideration for standby and overtime.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment & Economy

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: None