

1 WINTER MAINTENANCE SERVICES DURING RECENT BIG FREEZE (AN27-2010)

The extreme weather conditions experienced from 21st December, 2009 to 11th January, 2010 were unprecedented nationally and locally in at least the last 30 years; 22 consecutive days of temperatures well below freezing combined with ongoing snow showers created very prolonged and unusual conditions on Dundee's roads and footways.

The Council's Winter Maintenance Service is determined by its Winter Maintenance Policy which is renewed annually. The policy was most recently approved unanimously by Committee on 28th September 2009 when it was reported that the same policy and level of service was approved in 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.

The approved Policy states that adopted carriageways and footways are categorised into high priority and low priority routes and are covered for winter maintenance from late October to late March. In adverse conditions, high priority carriageways and footways are treated before low priority routes are dealt with and are kept open in preference to low priority routes during prolonged snow conditions. Low priority routes are only dealt with after high priority routes have been satisfactorily cleared. Like carriageways, footways are also categorised as high priority and low priority. The high priority routes cover main thoroughfares throughout the city, and in snow or ice conditions these are treated and, if necessary, re-treated before moving to low priority footways.

There are 550km of adopted roads and 900km of adopted footways throughout Dundee. It is not possible to clear all the roads and footways instantaneously, particularly in snow conditions when the gritters and ploughs have to treat the same sections of roads and footways more than once. Therefore, over 650 grit bins are provided at eligible locations such as steep gradients, bends, steps and those adjacent to sheltered housing. The bins are replenished with grit/salt, whenever staff resources allow, for use by the public on a self help basis, but should not be used for treating private property.

Prior to the big freeze, the Council had enough salt stocks to cover 29 days of normal, below freezing winter conditions; this was well within national guidelines and more than sufficient to cover the period until further stocks were programmed for delivery to Dundee docks on 5th January, 2010. As the extreme weather continued, the Scottish Government decided to take control of salt stocks at a national level to ensure resources were targeted to the areas of greatest need, also issuing guidance on what should be done to conserve salt stocks. Dundee participated in this arrangement but did not require assistance from Scottish Government. At no time did the Council stocks run out.

During the period from 21st December, 2009 to 11th January, 2010, City Development Department staff, and those of Tayside Contracts assisted by Dundee Contract Services, implemented the Council's Winter Maintenance Policy strictly according to the priorities which Committee had previously agreed. The High Priority Routes (both carriageways and footways) were treated on a virtually continuous basis to ensure they were kept clear and open during ongoing sub-zero temperatures and numerous fresh falls of snow. As a result of the need to devote these resources towards the repeated treatment of the High Priority Routes, it was not possible to be in a position to make significant progress clearing the Low Priority carriageways or footways. From 5th January, 2010 measures were introduced to utilise additional staff from other departments who were unable to work normally due to the weather and to redeploy them to assist in treating non-priority footways and carriageways. Areas around schools, social work facilities, sheltered housing, etc were targeted. From 5th January, 2010, the High Priority Routes did not require the same level of repeated re-treatment and, therefore, the Council's gritters and mini-ploughs were able to move onto the Lower Priority Routes in order to clear these carriageways and footways.

The financial impact of the Big Freeze for the City Development Department is twofold. Firstly, the necessary additional Winter Maintenance treatment of the network in the affected period is likely to result in an additional expenditure of approximately £0.5 million. (The current projection of outturn cost for Winter Maintenance is £1.44m against a Revenue Budget allowance of £0.94 million). Secondly, the freezing conditions will have caused additional damage to the road network which will result in an increase in the number of local repairs required; the full extent of these repairs will only be known once the whole network has been fully inspected and assessed. However, since the thaw, pothole crews have been actively operating on a find and fix basis as well as actioning reported potholes.

As in previous years, the City Development Department will be undertaking an internal review of its Winter Maintenance performance over the whole of the Winter period including the Big Freeze, in

particular this will consider the order of priority in which Low Priority Routes should be treated once the High Priority Routes are cleared and remain clear in periods of prolonged severe weather. It will also include a review of grit bins.

The Committee is asked to note the above position and to commend its frontline Winter Maintenance staff, and those of Tayside Contracts and Dundee Contract Services for keeping Dundee's High Priority Carriageway and Footways open during some of the most extreme weather conditions in recent memory.